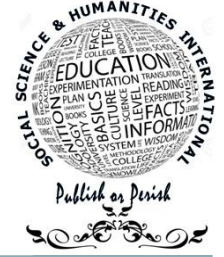


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### Community-based approach in a catastrophic situation in developing nations: The way forward

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#### ABSTRACT

The present study demonstrated the importance of community-based approach in education and public awareness programs in a catastrophic management and the role of stakeholders. Community members are the possible victims, and their experiences in the region are best examples, including its terrain, risks and vulnerabilities. Community members must be called for planning and implementation phases of these awareness programs as it is going to help them in managing the extreme situations. The present study also talks about various methods which communities can use to actively implement community based action plans to reduce catastrophic dangers as well as to identify and compare the benefits and demerits of a community-based approach to education and public awareness. It finally explores new information on characteristics indicating disasters which may arise in future.

## **Introduction:**

### **Public awareness**

The process of transmitting information to the general public to increase their level of consciousness about catastrophic risks so that they can prepare appropriately to cope with a catastrophe.

### **Community-based approach**

A method of education and public awareness in catastrophic management in which community members participate in the planning and implementation of the awareness programs. The word catastrophe means a fast overcoming an unpredicted event. At the household level, a catastrophe leads to illness, death and a significant economic crisis. At the community level, it can be a flood, a fire, a destruction of building in earthquakes. The unhealthy condition of livelihoods, an epidemic or shifting places (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

Every country is at risk of exposure to some type of catastrophe whether natural or man-made. In order for each country to prepare for any kind of catastrophe, it should inform its citizens about the different types of

catastrophe. The local residents must be aware of how they can effectively participate in catastrophic situations like preparedness, mitigating possible effects of a catastrophe and the recovery process after a catastrophe. One of the most effective techniques for a country to prepare for a catastrophe is by educating and organizing public awareness programs at the local community levels. Public awareness in catastrophe management is a process of educating and endowing the population through sharing knowledge and information about various types of catastrophes and their possible risks as widely as possible so that people act appropriately when a catastrophe does occur (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **Fundamental reasons for a community-based approach**

All states are responsible for protecting their citizens and supporting the 2005 Hyogo Declaration which states that “strengthening community level capacity to reduce catastrophic risk at the local level is specially needed, considering that appropriate catastrophe reduction measures

at that level enable the community and individuals to reduce considerably their exposure to risks (UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2005). Members of a community are the direct victims of side effects of a catastrophe. They have the best knowledge about their local environment in terms of the most catastrophe-prone areas, the demography of their community and their social and traditional organization. It is important that they have capacity to meet the effect of a catastrophe and are involved in the development of a catastrophic management activities right to initial planning stages. Community participation can also make each other confident in their capacities to act during a catastrophic event resulting in a self-reliant community (Newport & Jawahar, 2003).

Every community has members who can be ignorant of events around them especially when these events do not impact them directly or more frequently. This type of behavior can be changed by involving members of the local community in decision-making process such as planning national management plans or even designing awareness programs. This bottom-up, democratic approach can make community members more receptive of new

knowledge and skills presented to them. Local occupants who speak or understand their native language only may hesitate to accept non-native people conducting education and awareness programs for their community (Newport & Jawahar, 2003).

### **National and local catastrophe managers**

Catastrophe managers are the catastrophe professionals and technician people in the national state, who have the tasks to implement the catastrophic management initiatives of the state. Since the community is the crucial part of the state, these catastrophe professionals and managers must be aware that the key view of community-based catastrophe initiative is its sustainability. Therefore, it is the trainers, local managers and/central managers who has to take the roles and responsibilities to train people in the community to understand the basic community-based catastrophe mitigation practices. While people in the community must own the problems, consequences, challenges of catastrophe mitigations and preparedness initiatives, it is still necessary for the trainers, local catastrophe managers and /central catastrophe managers to consider people's

participation further by training them to be aware of catastrophe policy and strategy.

One of their tasks is to empower all involved partners through awareness training to involve them in decision making. They work together with central government on the development of strategies to ensure that the sustainability of catastrophe initiative is always in place at the individual and community levels. They are responsible for the implementation of local catastrophe management initiatives (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **Trainers**

Trainers provide training to the community leaders and agents. Through the assistance process, the trainers render awareness training. They have to develop and deliver proposals about possible awareness activities aimed at promoting the evaluation capacity and diminishing the exposure rate of the community (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **Methods of delivering messages to the community on catastrophe readiness and response**

The main aim of this study is to report the importance of a community-based approach

in education and public awareness programs in catastrophic situation management. Community members are the possible victims, and their experience in the region including its terrain, risks and vulnerabilities are the best parameters to keep into consideration while designing the strategies for the management. The methods of diffusion that can be used in community-based approach are varied and depend solely on the participation of the community and available resources on hand. The use of audio-visual aids is one of methods of creating awareness and education at community-based levels. Audio-visual aids generally used in developing countries are print based because of the unavailability of advanced computer based mediums of communication in remote rural areas. The use of community theatre or drama is another method of delivering messages to the community on catastrophe readiness and response (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **The simple risk maps**

The common visual aid used in community based approach is the simple risk maps. It is an essential map of the local community which points out safe escape routes and safe

refuges as a guide to where people can run and where they can gather if there is a catastrophe.

Simple risk maps in general map out areas of risks and lead to action to reduce risks in those areas. It enables people to take the correct escape routes and gather at safe places when catastrophe occurs. It helps to save many lives, homes and belongings which would differently be lost in a catastrophe (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **Community theatre (Drama)**

A different but exciting method used in delivering the information that you may have listened is community theatres. The adore of theatre groups to adopt catastrophe management awareness message is a medium that is very powerful. During the awareness meeting a mobile travelling theatre group or a local group can foreground the even with crucial content. This is also a highly effective means of creating awareness in developing countries as the majority of people often have no access to newspapers and television. Local theatre groups therefore provide entertainment for the local community to which they belong and at the same time

present consequences that immediately affect the people as subjects for their drama (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **Informal training**

The community based approach to education and awareness in catastrophe management also uses informal training as an efficient tool to prepare communities for catastrophic strikes. This training takes place not only outside of the formal curriculum but often even outside the setting of a formal education or training organization.

Informal training is funded by the state, NGOs or other sponsor organizations. It focuses on community leaders and covers significant skills for people in catastrophe prone communities. The existing state and the local structure should form the basis for the aid and enforcement of the awareness training program, process and progress. It is compulsory that a whole process of awareness is integrated throughout sectors. The integration and participation of catastrophe management is everyone's occupation but the important target must be within the communities. There must be a gradual change from catastrophe response to catastrophe management. The awareness

training based in the communities is equipped for defending them to understand and manage their risks to reduce and mitigate their risks. The duties must only lean on the communities as such but that the public and private sectors must collaborate and be members to discourage risk leading activities and factors (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **Workshops**

Workshops are excellent examples of informal training provided to the community. A week long workshop facilitated by experts in catastrophe management for community leaders covers sufficient information, examples, activities and discussion to adequately prepare them for the events when catastrophe strikes. The state officers who include education staff in the divisions form teams to coordinate the workshops to the communities. This is done by calling all the members of the community at a common meeting venue (e.g. a community hall, church). (The Johns Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **Merits and demerits of the community-based approach**

As with any other approach, the community-based approach has its advantages and disadvantages. The following are some of them that we must be aware of:

#### **Merits**

- a) **Ownership and sustainability:** The community based approach involves people and provide them a feel of possession of the materials created or methods integrated in education and public awareness.
- b) **Cover the direct needs of the communities:** The community-based approach is focused specifically for own communities and it covers their direct needs. Members of the community are well aware of the immediate needs.
- c) **Provides knowledge and skills:** This approach empowers or equips people with the required knowledge and skills to serve themselves in the first seventy-two (72) hours of a catastrophe. This is the most important time at the beginning of a catastrophe when outside aids are still on its way
- d) Use favorable information that people can easily understand or relate to, for example, the use of the language that

people in a community are most familiar makes it easier to understand the situation and the expressions.

### **Demerits**

- a) Some of the communities fear to be exposed over risks to outsiders. They fear of losing important investors in their communities, e.g. tourists.
- b) Lack of funds for such events at the community based level is an issue.
- c) Deceptive information when public awareness and education is not done properly at the community level. This can contribute to an unsystematic situation and finally loss of lives at the beginning of a catastrophe.
- d) Lack of specific training for fostering skills.
- e) Gender bias is again an issue. Last but not the least, there is a tendency in many developing countries not to involve women and young people in the creation of tools of the community based approach because of religious and cultural influences. Observation proves that too often those participated in public awareness and education at the community based level were males (middle aged and older). The Johns

Hopkins and Red Cross Red Crescent, 2008).

### **Methodology:**

The study was conducted by involving 30 elder persons; 14 women and 16 men were enrolled in the discussion with the researchers. All these participants live near the Rwanda National Volcanic Park. The researchers went door to door of the participants to discuss about the methods that were used in the community during volcanism. Information was gathered about the signs they use foresee natural catastrophes is nearly to happen. The elders were selected because they have experienced volcanic activities in Rwanda. They have information and observational skills on characteristics indicating the approaching of a natural catastrophe. Present study provides an important insight towards the management of healthcare needs by these residents during such calamities.

### **Results and Discussion:**

Among the participants enrolled in present study; most of them reported that they learned from their parents about catastrophe preparedness and some unusual natural signs that indicate the period of catastrophe. The

community education about catastrophe management is no longer strengthened. This activity was ignored unless the studied population approached Nyiragongo volcano which is at the boundary of Rwanda and Congo. Nyiragongo volcano is active and there was an eruption in year 2000. It destroyed the cities of Goma in Congo and Rubavu in Rwanda and affected the residents of these cities which led them to flee towards safer areas.

What we learned from all the participants of the present study is that all risky people were informed on the activities of volcanoes during the past periods. They were informed about different situations that could take place during volcanic activities such as earthquakes and eruptions. Moreover, posters having the color indicating the activity of a volcano were used and the information from the radio was helpful. The signs locals were aware of before volcanic eruption are that they would see a convoy of birds flying and circulating together in sky or a group of brown ants running on a line crossing the path begin to be frequently observed. In addition they would observe wild animals fleeing.

### **Conclusion:**

Although the community which is prone to natural calamities must be aware of catastrophe management but every community should be well educated and skilled to tackle such situations. For example, during seism most of the members of a specific community may be in church praying. They must be aware of different approaches to be adopted instantly to save maximum lives. In seismic prone area, the commons masses must be aware of the design of constructions beforehand. Nonetheless every community must pay a special attention to train the locals by employing different methods like the use of sign boards, audio-visual aids, drama and workshops.

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