



Disaster Capacity Development Strategies as Coping Mechanism for Sustainable Disaster Risk Reduction in Vulnerable Rural Areas in Imo State- Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The frequency of disaster occurrence of all types have become alarming all over the world especially Nigeria in the present times. Efforts are being made by nations to formulate strategies to reduce their prevalence and mitigation. This paper views capacity development as a potent mitigation measure in reducing its threat because it is a process of skill building and training of an individual or groups on the capacity to handle or resolve environmental challenges or situations requiring urgent attention which otherwise can lead to disastrous consequences. The situations or challenges may be potential risks or hazards which may lead to disaster.. The main drive of this paper is the fact that there is a lagging behind of the public sector especially the rural dwellers awareness on capacity building techniques generally and on risks, hazards or disasters in meeting most development goals (MDGs) and the realization that building capacity development is one of the key challenges facing low income societies, communities and countries and their external partners which is fundamental to resolve societal challenges in recent times. It is viewed important in this paper because, a capable and accountable state or society or individuals supported by an effective civil society with the engagement of private sector is indispensable for the sustainable reduction of challenges and events such as disasters and risk especially in rural societies.

Keywords: *Disaster Capacity Development, Strategies, Coping Mechanism, Sustainable Disaster Risk Reduction, Vulnerable Rural Areas.*

INTRODUCTION

A disaster can be defined as any event, typically occurring suddenly which cause damage of all kind such as ecological disruption, loss of human life, deterioration of health and health services such that may exceed the capacity of the affected communities on a scale necessary to require external assistance (Landsman 2001). It is due to the emergency of such severity and magnitude of such occurrence that the resultant combination of deaths, injuries, illness and property destruction or damage cannot be effectively managed with available routine procedures or resources. Disasters are events which can cause a society or communities to undergo deprivation of resources in terms of food and other necessities of life due to the calamities to such an extent that the normal function of society or community is mostly disrupted to the extent that it cannot subsist without external assistance.

Disasters are generally, a consequence of the way societies or nations structure themselves economically and socially, the way they interact with their environments and how policies by the decision makers are sustained before their occurrence. For instance, it can be caused from the fact that certain communities or groups are forced to settle in areas susceptible to the impacts of a raging river or volcanoes. The magnitude of each disaster



event in terms of deaths, property damage or costs for a given community or society increases with the increase in population of people in the area. This is because often times as population increases in an area, the best land areas be it rural or Urban is used up for urban expansion and those deprived and seeking lands for farming or housing are forced to accept vulnerable land areas. These offer consequence which may arise due to the intervention between human's hazards and the eventual vulnerable conditions. This is viewed in terms of expected losses in lives, persons injured, and damage to property and on the environment. The conditions may equally lead to livelihood lost, disruption in economic activities and other social systems (ISDR, 2002).

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2005) explained capacity development as a kind of locally driven, society-wide transformation which recognizes the fact that capable individuals, organizations and societies can play an indispensable role in the successful reduction and management of possible effects of environmental challenges or situations particularly of risks or disasters on the environmental setting. Capacity development strategies discussed here are similar to the strategies formulated and approved by the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) at the world conference for Disaster Reduction in Kobe-Japan in 2005. Capacity development is indeed the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain their capacities to set and achieve their own development objectives overtime (UNDP, 2005). This can be through self-help or co-operate efforts. The background here is that if capacity is the means to plan and achieve then Capacity development describes the way to those means needed to resolve a challenge. Hence its important place in equipping individual/groups with potentials in handling tasks and events be they personal or environmental in nature. It is the process that is driven from the inside and comes out from existing capacity assets. It can be referred to a process that supports only the initial stages of building or creating capacities often by outsiders and is based on the assumption that there are no existing capacities from which to start.

Developing capacities especially in risk and disaster reduction capacities at all levels (national or local levels) are influenced by the assumptions that, -locally generated, owned and sustained capacity are essential to the success of any disaster risk reduction exercise or enterprise.

-Disaster risk reduction capacity development is often the concern of the entire society rather than of any single agency, professional discipline or stakeholder group. Development of technical capacities is mostly associated with professional discipline or functions such as environmental management or land use management at any level. This is combined with other types of capacity development that will enhance or promote leadership and other capacity and, performance enhancing measures which creates an enabling environment. That is, a strong political ownership and commitment at the highest levels of authority, an extensive participation, transparency and a clear public accountability which is essential for translating capacity into performance, (UNDP 2005).



Strategies for Disaster Risk Reduction:

According to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA: 2005), one of the strategies in achieving disaster risk reduction generally is ensuring that disaster risk reduction is a national and local issue and priority. Firstly, there should be a perception that any disaster risk is a concern of both national and local people which requires strong institutional implementation policies to reduce the risk. There is therefore the need for concerted effort to evolve and involve appropriate institutional arrangements by both local and national authorities to reduce the risk. These should be through a well articulated policies, systems commitment and processes to recognize and manage the disaster or risk. This is possible through

- A. Facilitating reform strategies, policy dialogue and consultation processes with the stakeholders, (ii) creation of local monitoring centers or offices, (iii) development and revision of existing legislations, iv) decentralize support initiatives, (v) introducing measures for organizational effectiveness etc.
- B. Create awareness to identify, assess and monitor disaster and risks and ensure early warnings. This strategy ensures effective targeted and a sustainable prevention and mitigation of any risk. This can be through i) orientation workshops on methodologies of disaster risk reduction and systematic disaster loss inventories for operators, policy staff and disaster risk managers. (ii) Training national counterparts in hazard/risk modeling, (iii) support development for early warning protocols and (iv) integrate early warning systems into decision making processes/management system and (v) provision of hard, software and relevant technical equipment for disaster risk reduction units of local levels.
- C. Use indigenous knowledge, innovation and education for building a culture of safety and resilience at all levels of society. There should be public awareness and knowledge transfer between the national and local levels. This can be through (i) the development of awareness and communication strategies and the private sector. li) Organize seminars with all the stakeholders from national, state and local/community levels on methods of making local disaster management agencies fully operational in rural areas. (iii) Establish a mechanism to integrate regular training sessions on disaster risk reduction iv) integrate disaster risk reduction knowledge in the existing primary and secondary education programmes of vulnerable communities or areas as well as courses at the tertiary education levels.
- C. Reduce the underlying Risk Factors: All underlying risk factors in all the relevant sectors must be considered when building resilient communities vulnerable to disasters. Here, every risk standard and measures should be made an integral part of the planning process and delivery of the major development services and processes. These should include (i) sensitization and advocacy related activities and organizing sectoral workshops and consultations to identify specific opportunities for inclusion of disaster risk reduction concerns in all development planning. ii) Decentralized infrastructure-building activities such that training can be conducted downstream to the district and village level emergency management committees and develop community basic contingency planning mechanisms etc.
- D. Strengthen disaster preparedness strategies and equipment for effective response at all levels. There should be prompt support for vulnerable areas in strengthening disaster



preparedness planning capacities. This can be through (i) training on post disaster needs assessment and analysis and support the development of inter agency plans at local levels and reconcile them with national development efforts.

Risk reduction measures are most successful when the affected persons are directly involved in the disaster planning and decision making processes at all levels. Strong participation in preventive actions and remedial programmes are also important. Moreso, the following coping mechanisms should be adopted where available;

- Identify and stockpile necessary resources for relief as alternatives to ameliorate adverse situations.
- Identify and select appropriate action for mitigation control or adaptation and to stem the occurrence.
- Establish coping mechanisms in cases of adverse effects on lives of humans and property.
- Where there exist no risk or early warning signals, before disaster occurred, such areas should be abandoned through migration to new locations. The affected people should be supported with welfare palliatives from governments and non-governmental agencies.
- Appropriate and environment related training (education) of individuals and locals as well as organs and institutions on ways of handling disaster situations and victims be organized at regular intervals especially during envisaged periods of occurrence.
- There should be consistent information especially during hazard or disaster trigger periods through radio jingles, sensitization visits, posters etc.
- Since most disasters occur in rural areas, local leaders should be involved and drawn from the political, social and economic sectors to take primary roles or responsibilities for the protection of their own communities. Besides, promoting education and capacity building on how to manage and reduce risk from disasters should be made crucial, peoples understanding of the issues and their ability to mobilize professional skills are imperative and also important components of any risk reduction strategy.

Also, enabling communities concerns by investing in human resources and building individual capacities through regular information dissemination mechanism across the generations will be a long lasting value than any specific investment in technology to reduce risks. Another safety strategy that can be adopted is to; make sure that all risk, hazards and disaster events in some cases should be promptly and properly managed. Here, people especially in vulnerable communities should be educated frequently on these occurrences. By this, they will be more careful and conscious to exterminate ignorance. Managing risks, hazards or disasters for example, means reducing the chances for them to occur. The most important stage here is the risk stage. This can be done through identification, elimination and isolation or compensation for it. To achieve this means, being proactive in identifying and correcting the unsafe area, condition or acts without procrastination. Preparedness can be made effective through the acronym 'SIPDE' according to Njoku(2015) which means scan or search actively for the appropriate information about the source of the risk, hazard or disaster to be aware. Identify the potential risk, hazard or disaster, predict or foresee the changes therein that is, consider



the remote and immediate ways the consequences of those changes can be hazardous. Decide on the best strategy to avoid or deal with the potential hazard and how to put the strategy into effect and lastly, Execute the decision or put into effect the decision once it has been made to avoid the saying 'Delay is Dangerous'. (Njoku, G U. 2015).

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