THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND PROFESSIONALS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines holistically the roles of government and professionals in the management of disaster problems in Nigeria. The paper takes its cue from the fact that various disasters have engulfed the nation of recent. Many households have been displaced and properties worth millions of naira have been lost to the menace of disasters. The paper concludes by highlighting various steps professionals and government alike can take in addressing disaster problems in Nigeria.

Keywords: Disaster Management, Environmental Determinism, Environmental Possiblism, Environmental Probabilism, Climate Change.

INTRODUCTION

Disasters have been define and categorized in diverse ways by various scholar. See for instance Bates (2002), Keane (2004), Hugo (2009) and Naik (2009). Disasters which may occur from natural or man-made processes often involve large scale alterations of the areas they occur and the suffering of a sizeable number of persons. Human responses to disaster vary according to the nature of the disaster. Advances in science and technology have aided the human race to stop the event, to predict the event, and move out of the ways of such disasters or discover ways of recovery after the events had taken place. However, some notable disasters which when they occur, deaths and loss of property usually result include: oil spills, gas escapes, forest fires, chemical spilt, earth quakes, coastal floods and floods generally, droughts, volcanic eruptions, and land slides. Land slides cause death, loss of property and population displacement when they occur in densely-settled areas of the world. Within Nigeria, landslides occur as follow-ups from deep sully incisions (Mozie, 2010).

At times whenever there is a disaster, the communities help out victims of the menace to recover from, and cope with any losses incurred from a disastrous incident. The community does help victims to rebuild houses, mainly through the supply of free human labour. Community also helps through donation of relief materials and money to the victims. The people were always left to battle the menace practically on their own with little government assistance.

The disaster situation in Nigeria seem to agree with the postulation noted in Hunters (2005) cited in Bilsborrow (2009) about the disposition of most poor rural settlement which experience disasters in any of the ways listed below.

- They are not aware of the hazard.
- They are aware, but do not expect a disaster.

- They expect a disaster, but not anticipate loss.
- They expect a loss, but not a serious one.
- They expect a serious loss and have taken, or are planning to take, action to mitigate such loss.
- They expect a loss, but have accepted it as the price they pay for locational benefits.

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Fussel and Klein (2006); Learn *et al.,* (2007); and Agrawal (2008) findings revealed that adaptation to hazards is a function of the local knowledge of the people about the hazard in question and their relationship in their environments. Biermann (2009) in line with earlier writers advocates that adaptation strategies are successful when they are democratic or as stated in their exact views "bottom-up and community-based" (Fabricius *et al.,* 2007; Huq and Ried 2007: and Thomalla *et al.,* 2005).

Adaro and Mozie (2011) argue with conviction that hazard and disasters have no meaning or value, except in the context of damages and injuries suffered by man whether they occur by natural processes or by the deliberate acts or omission of man (Ziervogel *et al.,* 2006).

The advance in the science and technology have however caused a remarkable shift in disaster response paradigm, to being pro-active and anticipatory from the proactive anticipatory paradigm, we have moved to a new frontier of the installation and assurance of adaptive capacity in vulnerable groups (Fusel and Klein 2006). Mozie (2010) argue that the governments within any political unit have the primary and major capacity and resources whether by way of legislative or coercion to shape the adaptive capacity and capacity for resilience in any political system.

Thus hazard and disaster management has a direct relationship to the performance and philosophy of the governments of the groups at the international, national and sub-national level.

MAN – ENVIRONMENT RELATIONSHIP

Issues in Man – Environment Relations

Human – environment Relations have two sides to them. The first side relates to the influence of the environment on human activity. This viewpoint is expressed in the concept of environmental determinism. The second side relates to the effect of human activity on a given environment. This expresses the view that the environment is passive while man is active. The view is termed environmental possiblism. Perhaps the third viewpoint: that the effect of man on environment or the effect of environment on people is a check – and – egg viewpoint.

Environmental Determinism

The extent to which the physical environment influences the way in which man lives and how he makes a living has been the subject of controversy over a long time. This is described as *determinism.* Environmental determinism emphasizes the view that the environment directs controls and determines the course of human action. It was the belief of the scholars in this school of thought that the physical environment,

especially the climate and the terrain constitute the active forces in shaping human cultures and attitudes. The food he eats, the clothes he wears and his religion are said to be conditioned by nature.

Furthermore it was said that man was the product of his environment and that he could be moulded like clay in a potter's hand by nature. The shortcoming of this school of thought, lay not in the issue they raise the issue of the way the physical environment affects man) but in the sweeping generalization which they often draw from scattered and sometimes incorrect data. Rather than objectively examine the facts, they often concentrated on unproven doctrine.

Environmental Possibilism

Environmental possibilism supports the view that there are no necessities but only possibilities and man as a master of these possibilities is the judge of their use: and that the environment is never more than an adviser. In other words, the viewpoint known as possibilism is held by those who argue that although the environment offer possible course of action, man himself determine his own way of life.

Environmental Probabilism

Spate (1952) postulated the viewpoint that although the environment offer man many possibilities, there are some that are more probable than others within the limits imposed by nature. This viewpoint is called probabilism is mid-way between determinism and possibilism. Probabilism has been restated as the situation "whereby the physical conditions determine probable course of action, but the ultimate decisions is left with man's own will (Iloeje 1980). The degree of man's freedom and control on the environment relative to that of nature vary from place to place depending or prevailing physical, technological, cultural and political circumstances. There are situations in which the influence of man is quite substantial exemplified by the developed nation of the world and conversely, situations when nature still exerts powerful influence on man. The example of the latter are found in the less developed nations in such places where people still subsist basically on primary activities (food gathering, hunting and fishing).

The viewpoint can be further explained by the fact that man is likely to rank the possibilities open to him by assigning to each a degree of probability or order of preference. However, man does not necessarily follow or adapt a line of action which normally has the highest probability because man is not an absolute optimizer. Rather, he is a satisfier who chooses a course of action which is satisfactory enough but not necessary the best available or the most logical or rational. The choices he makes will depend more on what he perceives the environment to be than on the actual character of the environment.

The satisfier within his perceptual bound chooses a course of action which is good enough and not necessary the best in economically rational terms. To be the optimizer requires a more deterministic world, more information and decision processes at levels higher than we normally operate. This position in a way represents a modification of environmental possibilism.

DISASTER RISK AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN NIGERIA

Disaster risk and climate change are two of the greatest challenges currently facing human-kind-adversely reinforce each other. In the coming decade climate change is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of natural disasters such as drought and floods. Climate change is also likely to increase people's vulnerability to already existing hazards in Nigeria.

This is largely due to:

(1) Socio-economic stresses
(2) Ageing and inadequate physical infrastructure
(3) Weak education and preparedness for disasters
(4) Insufficient financial resources to carefully implement the preparedness, response, mitigation and recovery component of integrated management.

In Nigeria, climatic change – and the likely increase in related hazardous event-threatens to block people's effort to escape poverty in Africa. Any increase in the number and scale of the disasters will threaten development gains and hinder effort to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

CHALLENGES FOR NIGERIA

For Nigeria as a country, climatic-related risks come not only from direct exposure to natural hazard such as floods or drought, but also from the vulnerability of social and economic system to the effects of these hazards. Climatic change is expected to intensify existing problem and create new combination of risk. Giving the existing widespread poverty and dependence on the natural environment, areas of particular concern include communities with vulnerable livelihoods; food and environmental insecurity; HIV and AIDS; gender inequalities; week security and governance; the lack of infrastructure and education; and lack of access to appropriate resources and capacities to deal with disasters.

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

Disaster risk management requires urgent action to reduce the impacts of extreme events before during and after they occur. A holistic management approach must include technical preventive measures, especially in the areas of the infrastructure development and aspects of socio-economic development design to reduce human vulnerability to hazards, such as increased income and the diversification of livelihoods. It should also take into account indigenous knowledge at the same time, the management of climate change impacts must consider how to reduce human vulnerability to changing levels of disaster risk.

Adaptation efforts must be prioritized in communities with the highest vulnerability and the greatest need for safety and resilience built.

Capacity building and capacity development are among the most urgent requirements for addressing climate risk, particularly at local levels. Developing the ability of communities to understand climate risk issues, effectively use available information, develop the necessary institutions and networks, and plan and build

appropriate adaptation. Community must also evaluate, and monitor these to learn from experience.

Education is Crucial: Reducing risk and vulnerability to disasters requires people to understand how they can best protect themselves, their property and their livelihoods. Education provides a way for Nigerians to communicate with each other about risks and climate change, to motivate each other to adapt and respond, and to engage others in their efforts. Awareness of risks and learning about risks and dangers need to start in early education, continuing through to adult education programmes about disasters and climate change.

MANAGING VULNERABILITY IN URBAN NIGERIA

Climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of disasters in many parts of Nigeria, and urban areas are often badly affected. The scale of devastation to urban populations and economies highlights to their particular vulnerability to climate change.

Climate change in Nigeria is causing greater variability in rainfall and temperatures. The country is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change on many levels due to its geography, climate, vegetation, soil economic structure, population, energy demands and agricultural activities. The situation is worsened by the degradation of the country's environment and natural resources.

Urban vulnerability in Nigeria is caused by humans and their actions. The country's urban population has grown between 2 and 5 percent per years since the 1990s. This growth is adding several thousand people each year to cities and towns. The environmental problem associated with uncontrolled expansion and poor management has increased the vulnerability of these cities to major disasters.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In response to the upsurge in national disaster, the Federal Government of Nigeria took the following actions.

(1) A national disaster response plan serves as the policy guideline for managing disasters in Nigeria.
(2) A public sector agency, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), was created in 1999 to coordinate emergency management.
(3) The Nigeria sat-1 satellite is used to gather data on environmental condition and natural resources.

The government also established disaster response units, a Nigerian mission control center(Cospas-sarsat), Emergency Response Teams, and an early warning unit that uses a geographic information system, a remote sensing laboratory and a data bank to predict climate events.

THE ROLES OF GOVERNMENT IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

According to the UNDP, governance can be seen as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institution through which citizen and groups articulate their obligation and mediate their differences.

It is pertinent to state that government especially in the third world countries has a major role to play in order to minimize the impact of disasters on the populace sustainable development; social cohesion and environmental management are dependent on governances and efficient public sector management. Some of the areas government can particulate are discussed below;

Controlling Vegetation Change in the Tropics: One of the ways to preserve the vegetation cover of the tropics is the establishment of reserves where all forms of vegetation exploitation are prohibited. Nigeria, like many other developing countries has put premium on this approach. The main problem with this approach is that of management. In many Nigeria reserves, intensive farming activities go on because of bad management. The forests also suffer from illegal timber felling and dry season fires. Consequently the reserves are not really filling the gap that they are supposed to fill. What is needed is a more determined stand on the part of governments to provide funds needed for the management of the reserves. The governments should also encourage strict applications of the legal provisions for the protection of forest resources in the country.

However, many of the countries of the tropics require more than the establishment of forest reserves to conserve their vegetation resources. The farmers who interact directly with the forests and woodlands have quite a lot to contribute. This could be in terms of using appropriate farming techniques and developing village wood lots in areas with marginal soils. There is also the need for continuing environmental education. To a large extent in some countries today, many farmers are already aware that their actions in various ways degrade the environment. The other thing they need to be aware of is that they are not completely helpless. They can help the situation by judiciously using the environmental resources and applying appropriate conservation strategies. The agricultural extension workers therefore need to reach out to the farmers to demonstrate to them how to use conservatory agricultural techniques and encourage them to apply them.

Besides, Nigeria government should develop a long term vision towards prosperity for all citizens. Part of the vision should aim to establish functional, efficient and effective risk reduction systems against the various threats that have increase due to the ever – changing climate. But disasters defy simple approaches. A government ministry cannot deals with disasters alone. Top down approach to disaster managements may not be the best because it will not address local need, ignore the potential of indigenous resources and capacity, and increase people's vulnerability. The best way to reduce of disaster is from the bottom up.

ROLES OF PROFESSIONAL IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Disaster management is essentially a planning activity. As planning itself **is** much – disciplinary in nature, the inputs of allied professional in the built environment and social science are important for effective planning and implementation of Disaster management programmes. These professional include planners, civil engineers, architects, sociologists, land surveyors, estate values and surveyors among others relevant to different aspect of disaster management.

As prime consultant of a typical urban renewal project which is a form of disaster management technique, the town planner is charged with different categories of responsibilities ranging from initiation of ideas through identification of goals and objectives, plan preparation and evaluation, to adoption and implementation of the best alternatives. All these could be achieved through the support of services of other profession supplied at appropriate stages of project development. Specifically, however the roles of town planners include:

(1) Research into the existing situation of housing/neighborhood environment to establish the extent of deterioration as well as help designate the extent of area to be declared urban renewal area.

(2) Preparation of existing and proposed land – use, layout and other relevant types of plans that may be necessary, depending on the degree of deterioration and/or scale of urban renewal or strategy to be adopted;

(3) Partaking in civic survey and other public participation process to ensure co-operation and support of the public.

(4) Co-ordination of the inputs of other professionals and stakeholder towards the achievement of the objective of the disaster management programme and

(5) Playing active role in relocation exercise (when there is a disaster) by acting as a link or arbitrator between different categories of stakeholders.

Furthermore, while the role of estate valuers and surveyors in determination of the worth of landed properties that may be acquired by the power of 'eminent domain; rent property taxation, maintenance, repair and management, generally, among others, is inevitable, that of the architect in building or design and supervision of work can not be ignored. The role of the civil engineer in the structural designs, construction and upgrading of buildings and roads, and other civil engineering work, is of much importance in most disaster management programmes implementation. The service of the land –surveyor, on the other hand, is equally inevitable in disaster management programmes.

As regards the problem of integrating the socio-cultural values of the affected community, the sociologist helps in identifying such values, norms and other as aspects of the culture of the urban renewal area that demand consideration. Note that the list of professionals is not exhaustive, and may not be restricted to those itemized above; it all depends on the scale of the renewal programme.

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