Developing A Model Of Community Participation In Disaster Management In Mauritius

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Abstract—Disasters are common in small island developing states (SIDS) and Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean, is no exception to such problems. During the summer season, there are cyclones and floods affecting the country causing certain casualties namely refugees leaving their destroyed homes looking for security in shelters. There is already a committee working at the national level on it and monitoring activities related to disaster risk reduction. This is a centralised task where central government monitors the risk. Given that risks are impending during the summer season; it would be useful to develop capacity at the community level. Currently, to be able to develop capacity, there must be people coming from the community and different spheres of life. Educators will be helpful in morally and mentally accompanying the vulnerable people and children, psychologists or mentors could be useful in the same endeavour, the police force to ensure security, nurses could be effective in counselling women in such difficult times while at the reconstruction level, capacity might be built from volunteers coming from NGOs having shown an evidence of good social involvement.

Keywords—community engagement, disasters, capacity building, Mauritius

I. INTRODUCTION

Firstly, capacity building will be assessed in terms of resources to be used followed by how such capacity is getting effectively prepared to face the impending challenge of natural disasters in Mauritius and also better respond to this major concern.

To build capacity, one needs to consider the importance of competences. Capacity building is defined as the process by which individuals and organisations obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge and other resources needed to do their jobs competently or to a greater capacity [1].

Community capacity building is a conceptual approach to social, behavioural change and leads to infrastructure development. It simultaneously focuses on understanding the obstacles that inhibit people, governments, international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (NGOs) from realising their development goals and enhancing the abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results.

The term community capacity building emerged in the lexicon of international development during the 1990s. Today, "community capacity building" is included in the programs of most international organisations that work in development, such as the United Nations, World Bank and non-governmental organisations like "Médecins Sans Frontières" [2]. Community capacity building often refers to strengthening the skills, competencies and abilities of people and communities at local grassroots movements so they can achieve their goals and potentially overcome the causes of their exclusion and suffering. Organisational capacity building is used by NGOs & Governments to guide their internal development and activities.

II. POTENTIAL MEMBERS INVOLVED IN CAPACITY BUILDING IN MAURITIUS

Below, an illustrative example of capacity building is provided through the potential people that could be involved at the community level and their capabilities.

Table 1: Community level members prospected in disaster risk management in Mauritius

Potential members	Profile
Educator	Educated up to School Certificate or High School level or above. Displaying a desire to work with the community and shown evidence of effective assignments with government organisations in Mauritius like working for elections or census surveys.
Police force	Members should be educated up to High School and shown good track record of social work. Must preferably be an individual who works directly with the community and who has a sound knowledge of the institutions which he can work.

Student	Educated up to a diploma or undergraduate level. Is capable of showing keen interest in social work and is also enthusiastic to upgrade his curriculum vitae through engaged community work like disaster reduction. Must show evidence of resilience.
Social Worker	This person should be a voluntary worker able to display excellent behaviour and contribution to social work and disaster risk reduction. Must have some prior knowledge of disaster risk management and shown enthusiasm in dealing with casualties.
Psychologist	Must be an individual apt to deal with casualties and disaster struck people. Must show a high level of patience and resilience at work. Must have a professional qualification in Psychology and be educated up to undergraduate or post-graduate level.
Nurse	Educated up to High School and qualified professionally as a nurse. Should be effective at working with casualties and shown high level of motivation and dedication at work. Must have some hands-on experience of casualty management in Mauritius.
Volunteer	Generally, a resource person from the community who has shown excellent potential on dealing with community issues and participated earlier in disaster risk management. Such a person must also be an opinion leader capable of influencing people in distress.

III. COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO BE INVOLVED IN DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

The illustration below provides a mind map of how the local team through capacity building will enact the different actions that will be much needed from them. Though the actions are not exhaustive, they clearly depict how effective capacity building will play a positive role in managing disasters at the community level in Mauritius.

Educator

The educator is an influential person in providing pedagogical awareness of disasters and their risks on the population. Being widely educated, the educator can act as a mentor to refugees and vulnerable people [3]. Precaution regarding health and safety can be passed onto refugees. Educators also provide effective mentoring to school children who in turn influence the family. The role of a teacher in educating and empowering the children, who are agents of change, is undeniable and must not be understated. With teachers being empowered, local authorities are sure that they are well on our way to building a culture of safety and resilience.

Police Force

Traditional police responsibilities have expanded tremendously recently while highlighting the need for officials and nationwide to enhance preparedness and coordination efforts, but also emphasised the need for local police to broaden their roles during a crisis [4]. During a disaster, police officers not only have to continue to keep the community safe from possible looting, destruction of property, and theft that may occur, they also have to be prepared to evacuate citizens, render advanced life saving techniques, and keep points of dispensing sites secure. Additional duties also include the delivery of food, water, and blankets to those who have been displaced by the disaster.

Student

Students can also build leadership skills by participating in community partnerships, projects to promote healthy lifestyle changes such as health fairs, and service learning [5]. Group projects integrated throughout a course provide opportunities for multiple students to lead portions of the project and allow practice exploration and implementation of personal leadership styles.

Students can become volunteers in helping people in times of disaster. This can be an experience that they can gain vocationally and that can add to their competences that can address their leadership accountability.

Social Worker

Social workers can play a potentially key role in disaster recovery by facilitating community development, restoring livelihoods, providing psychosocial support, and building capacity in local communities [6]. There is also a need to build capacity in the social work profession for the integration of social, economic and environmental dimensions in policy and practice, and to develop curricula to better prepare social workers for the challenges ahead.

Social workers are highly needed in times of natural disasters. They can address both problems of a physical or psychological nature. Being close to the community, social workers can be a first-hand resource to people in difficulty and be quite effective in handling immediate problems.

Nurse

Nurses serve a vital role in maximizing the health and health care experiences of pregnant women, new mothers, and infants. This role extends to addressing the needs of women and infants in disasters. Nurses often facilitate communication and coordinate care among members of the health care team, patients, and their families during a disaster. Clear communication is an essential element of disaster planning and response. This includes formal and informal communication (verbal and written) and electronic and paper documentation [7].

Nurses and other health care providers should collaborate with officials involved at all levels of disaster preparedness. They should also work to educate women and families about how to plan for and stay safe during disasters.

Psychologist

Psychologists may be providing a variety of important support services, such as directing people to food and shelter, but they also offer crucial emotional support after a disaster. Because psychologists are uniquely trained in helping people cope with stress and strong emotions, they are able to help disaster survivors, volunteers and disaster relief operation workers understand their emotions, such as anger, distress and grief.

Although psychologists do not offer therapy at disaster sites, they can help people build upon their own internal strengths to begin the process of recovering from the disaster. Psychologists help those in disastrous circumstances to build their skills of resilience to move from feeling hopeless to having a more long-term, realistic perspective. This process can include taking small steps toward concrete goals and connecting with others as they learn to cope with a disaster's logistical and emotional challenges [8].

Volunteer

A volunteer is any individual accepted to perform services when the individual performs such activities without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation for the services performed [9]. Volunteers might constitute the most important aspect in the capacity building exercise. These can come either from social workers or any citizen willing to provide a helping hand. They could be first-aiders, helpers or any opinion leader in the community who is willing to immediately respond and address the needs of the vulnerable people.

IV. DEFINITION OF CAPACITY BUILT AROUND MONITORING AND SCREENING INCLUDING THE IMPORTANCE OF SYNERGY

From the profiles presented, it is important to see that there is proper definition, monitoring and screening of the capacity built around including the importance of synergy.

Defining capacity

Capacity building at the community level must be well defined. Too easily, everybody can fit in the group but the selection of the right people and the right profile matters to ensure that their contribution is meaningful.

Monitoring and screening capacity

It is necessary to see how each selected member fits in the group and how the role is effectively played. Each role should be well defined to avoid duplication and redundancy. Each contributor must know what is expected of him.

Synergy

Synergy is expected because all members forming the capacity must collaborate fully and play a useful role in bringing the desired outcomes in times of disasters. Quite often it is feared that a lack of collaboration and group cohesiveness can be counter effective to capacity building.

V. WORKING CLOSELY WITH ITS LOCAL COMMUNITY IN DISASTER RISK ANALYSIS AND VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

Once capacity is built among members of the local community, there will be the need to work closely with the community in disaster risk and vulnerability assessment. Disaster risk would come from an assessment of potential risks in areas that are the most likely to be affected. In Mauritius, coastal areas are places at risk namely Poste de Flacq or Baie du Tombeau. These have been identified as tsunami risk areas. Similarly, localities edging rivers and terraces in Mauritius are also important in the assessment. Possibilities of landslide exist in the inhabited urban rea like La Butte [10]. In such circumstances, the local community must be informed of the risk. Some simulation exercises are done at regular intervals and these are bound to have a positive effect on the community provided that effective collaboration is obtained.

Preparing and implementing, in accordance with any guidelines laid down by the national council, the local plan to be approved by the national centre.

It is essential to have the plan implemented at the national level. Capacity built with the local community will be empowered to work out and implement the guidelines. For instance, there could be actions initiated like awareness campaigns, risk alert through communiqués, welcoming the refugees and displaced persons in shelters and properly accommodated places. It could also be lifesaving activities and similar precaution measures likely to be taken by the actors involved in the national team. Further, the recording of data, communication with different parties involved as well as interaction with higher authorities like the central committee, the police force and the national security forces could well be initiated by the team at the community level.

Promoting and implementing disaster risk reduction and management education and public awareness programmes

The local community team has to be effective in promoting disaster risk reduction, management education and public awareness programmes. Campaigns through local radio and posters which are fairly cheap and within budget parameters could be very effective in building public awareness of disasters while developing greater knowledge from people. It has been told that the Mauritian community is well aware of precautions during the cyclonic season and the low risks of accidents and deaths evidence this. Little has been so far said of other disasters where the public is informed through the traditional media because their impact has not been felt that strongly. A simulation exercise on landslide or tsunami might look simple yet its importance must be emphasised among the public.

Building capacity, acquire resources and coordinate disaster risk reduction and management activities

The coordination of disaster risk and management is very important. Too often many problems crop up all of a sudden in such situations and it becomes difficult to coordinate them effectively. Think of Ebola disease management or the Haiti Earthquake in 2010. In easily cut-off areas it was imperative to build local capacity to respond. Local residents can be empowered with early-warning systems, evacuation plans, and training to identify and mitigate hazards before the emergency strikes [11]. Coordination by the local team should be done both with the community, the national council for disaster including international instances like the Red Cross or external NGOs willing to assist a community. For example, access to a location affected by a disaster might be quite difficult. To some extent, the local team could be of great help by quickly liaising with the partners concerned, offering facilities to the third parties as well as managing activities locally like supplies of medicine, food and amenities much required at the right time. Definitely, transparency and accountability should be enforced in such critical times.

Conducting training, drills and simulation exercises

For the local team to be effective, it is important to implement a training programme. This comprises short but tailor-made training programmes that particularly address a disaster situation. Through tailor-made training programmes for humanitarian actors, in-country technical support and a global network of practitioners, there is effective building capacity to integrate environmental considerations within humanitarian and early recovery operations [12]. First-aid training looks to be a must in such a condition. Similarly, team building and team management programmes could be helpful where the local team needs to be well managed. From the practical side, drills and simulation exercises are quite helpful in that they train the local community members to be in line with the real needs in a situation of crisis.

VI. Conclusion

This research paper discussed the relevance of capacity building at the community level in Mauritius. It is accepted that the National Disaster Risk Reduction committee in the country has set up a committee at the local level but the functions and roles have not been explicitly defined. Taking into consideration that hazards have increased in the country since late creating more disasters and risks, it is necessary that capacity building must be developed at the local level.

By identifying the actors like the educator, the police force member, the student, the volunteer, the nurse, the social worker and the psychologist among others, the author confirms that this model is likely to help in creating capacity among the community, it is seen that there will be better actions initiated at the local level depending upon the implementation of the desires policies. It is expected that a high level of synergy is provided to the local team and it must be encouraged through training, motivation and management.

Being close to the community in question, capacity building at the community level provides first-hand assistance to the local community, develops quick and effective relationships with the vulnerable groups while addressing directly the immediate needs and concerns of people in distress. At the same time, this small picture sensibly contributes to the bigger picture of capacity building that impacts people under distress during disasters.

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