

POLITICS AND DISASTER RESPONSE

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The Political Economy of Disasters

How political economy landscape impact on disaster response and the economy of the country

- DRM is an area of public policy with a humanitarian focus but it differs from other sectoral area as it focuses on developmental and emergency services.
- In practical terms, decision-making is often driven by crisis and requires high level of multi-stakeholder coordination public and private entities.
- The level of government preparedness & response, the speed of its decision-making, **or lack thereof**, will influence the extent to which populations are affected by disasters – this means that disasters always happen in a political context.
- In weak democratic systems, governments can use disasters to redistribute power through the **political effect**, favouring disaster spending in regions that are politically aligned with the party in power.

How political economy landscape impact on disaster response and the economy of the country

- The primary responsibility for DRM in South Africa rests with the government. In terms of the Constitution of South Africa, all spheres of government are required to ***“secure the well-being of the people of the Republic”***.
- DRM is listed as a functional area of the Constitution - that both the national and provincial spheres of government are competent to develop and execute laws within this area and have powers and responsibilities in relation to DRM.



Flooding in Johannesburg, South Africa



Drought in South Africa and Cape Town water crisis

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- The Act further emphasises integrated development planning and uniform approach to disaster management within the district and the local municipalities.
- In this regard, it is expected of the spheres of government to implement long term strategies, plans and frameworks to reduce existing risks, prevent new and future risks, hence the proactive approach that is echoed by the Act.
- More emphasis is on **preparedness and mitigation of risk.**
- However, from the lessons learned, it is clear that longer term strategies to reduce future losses are rarely a priority.



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- SA has moved away from disaster response to **DRR and resilience building**, however this require multi sectoral efforts.
- Response and Recovery grant funding have been established whilst all relevant organs of state are required to institutionalise and mainstream DRR within their programmes and projects.
- It has however been realised that there are challenges within organs of state in mainstreaming DRR as more resources are spent on response which is once-off.
- Non investment in DRR leads to the creation of moral hazard problem that national government will continue to bail out all responsible organs of state with funded mandates to perform their DRM function.
- In that case, funding for response and recovery may end up being used for unintended purposes

Are politicians informed about their role in DRM

- It is important to note that politicians are the ones making policies aligned to their party's programme of action.
- They are responsible for decision making before, during and after disasters.
- Provision of political support and political will, that will ensure that legal and governance frameworks are fully operational
- Various studies that consider a relationship between Investment in DRM and disasters reported losses across countries with other variables such as type of political regime levels of corruption and other governance indicators (Wilkinson, 2012).

From the lessons learnt in various disaster events, what needs to be done to ensure that they are able to make well informed decisions to invest in DRM

- Clarity on roles and responsibilities among political leadership especially in relation to District Municipality Mayor and Local Municipality Mayor, i.e. Knysna LM and Garden Route DM.
- Duplication of institutional structures coordinating the same incident.
- Creation of confusion especially with regard to sponsors as to where support should be marshalled.
- Given the fact that disasters happen within the Local Municipality space, it is important to have a concerted effort towards one goal that is providing relief to the affected community.
- Assurance with regard to accountability through well coordinated, integrated response planning.

From the lessons learnt in various disaster events, what needs to be done to ensure that they are able to make well informed decisions to invest in DRM

- Politically, the government has a leading role for the overall rule and system design, including legislation, decision-making processes and policy implementation mechanisms.
- Strengthen resource assurance, including coordinating development and disaster risk reduction and providing support for disaster reduction activities.
- Increase risk awareness through disaster reduction education, training and practice of emergency response skills, disaster risk research and technical development.
- Contingency planning with emphasis on preparedness and integrated response.

From the lessons learnt in various disaster events, what needs to be done to ensure that they are able to make well informed decisions to invest in DRM

- Government should take full responsibility and accountability for disaster response without abdicating that to relief agencies/ Non Governmental Organisations;
- Coordination of relief aid organisations must be well monitored, establish a database of all relief provided and account for each rand spent; and
- Relief must be provided directly to the affected to reduce political interferences.



Firefighter 'holding the line' - Knysna Fire, 2017



Donations flooding in from all over SA for Knysna fire victims

Recommendations

- Encourage political development and reward non-disaster scenarios.
- Invest in Preparedness and DRR: Good practice guides that decisions and investments on preparedness should be made on a no-regrets basis – that is, investments should be made whether the disaster occurs or not as the net benefits outweigh the costs. This will provide resilience and therefore reduce the vulnerabilities of populations exposed to such disasters.
- The “natural” side of disasters is tragic enough that national policies and the actions of civil society should be designed to mitigate, rather than exacerbate the wrath of nature.
- Disaster relief to benefit all communities irrespective of political affiliation.
- Leverage on private sector investment through partnerships.

Concluding Remarks

- Disaster Risk Management is Everybody's Business and **must be dealt with as a service delivery and sustainable development concern.**
- Investment in DRR is critical to ensure resilience of communities and infrastructure.
- Building Back Better after disasters will reduce new and prevent future risks.
- Political buy in is critical in both policy development and implementation.

Thank You!

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