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Background Paper

TYPES OF CRISIS, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESPONSES AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This paper contends that although each crisis is a singular event there are general policies and strategies that public administration institutions can follow in order to ensure better resolution to crises. In particular it highlights the importance of the synergies that result from public agencies partnering with civil society in managing such situations; and, suggests that the recovery and rehabilitation phase provides an opportunity to promote sustainable development and further the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Alternative institutional arrangements to enable government civil society collaboration are mentioned. It concludes that the policies and strategies suggested are, in essence, the same that characterize good governance under any circumstance. But in times of intense difficulty, instability and danger that define crisis situations the practice of good governance is all the more important.

The nature of crisis situations:

By definition crises are times of intense difficulty, instability and danger. In the case of nations, these are characterized by acute changes that produce major strains on the social and economic fabric. These strains place extraordinary demands on the institutions that must confront the challenges posed in order to restore normality. In times of crisis, not only are public service institutions confronted by and must respond to unusual and extreme situations, but must do so under unfavorable conditions. Success in dealing with crises depends, to a large degree, on the ability of public service institutions to adapt to altered circumstances and discharge responsibilities often outside their usual realm of activity. Even in instances where countries have well-established and strong public service institutions that are capable of handling large-scale complex tasks of a routine nature, these same institutions may fall short when confronted with a particular catastrophic event.

Crises can be brought about by a number of factors. Some are of natural origin, such as seismic events, severe storms, and droughts; others are precipitated by human actions or activities, such as armed conflicts, environmental degradation, and technological failures. Any of these factors can precipitate a crisis when it impacts, in a major way, on the lives and wellbeing of the population. It is precisely because they impact on society that crises become the concern of government; and, consequently the management of the recovery process becomes the charge of public service institutions.

The subject of post-crisis management has been elaborated in a recently released publication on reconstructing public administration after conflict, prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic Affairs (UN-DESA, 2010). Since it covers the issues dealing with crises generated by civil disorders and armed conflict quite thoroughly, this paper will concentrate on the management of crises precipitated by natural and technological disasters.
There are general commonalities in the situations created by crises regardless of whether a particular crisis is the result of human or natural causes. To varying degrees, all crises result in substantial human suffering and hardship, leaving a legacy of damaged social and economic institutions as well as shattered physical infrastructure, including shelter, education and health facilities, and communication networks. For this reason, many of the issues concerning the restoration of normality are similar regardless of what precipitated the crisis. Regardless of the cause, government must address the immediate requirements of the affected population in terms of shelter, food and water supplies, security, and health services. At the same time, it must undertake the restoration of priority infrastructure and communication networks, as well as the reactivation of commerce and schooling activities and social services.

Although there are some commonalities between conflict-generated crises and those provoked by natural, technological and environmental disasters, there are also some important differences. Perhaps the most significant difference is that of the time span over which the crisis develops and evolves. Although the onset of hostilities in the case of armed conflict and civil disorders may be relatively abrupt, the negative effects accumulate in the course of the hostilities, which can span a considerable length of time. In such instances, public service institutions must deal with the situation as it evolves and managing the ongoing crisis becomes part of on-going operations.

Unlike crises generated by conflict, the onset of most natural and technological disasters is sudden and unexpected. Public service institutions are faced with the full dimensions of the crisis with little or no warning: search and rescue operations must be mobilized immediately and lifelines to tend to the casualties and the logistics for feeding and sheltering survivors must be made operational within hours. At the same time, social order and security must be re-established and maintained, the population must be protected from secondary dangers emanating from the devastation, and in some instances evacuated. In sudden onset crises time is compressed, as the situation must be stabilized as quickly as possible in order to save lives and protect property.

Another significant distinction is that in the case of crises generated by civil strife and armed conflict there always are antagonistic sides confronting each other over political, ethnic, religious or economic issues. More than likely, it was this animosity that provoked the discord in the first place, and it can be reasonably expected that these animosities were further exacerbated during the course of the conflict. Resolving the antagonism that provoked the conflict is fundamental to bringing society out of the crisis. In some instances these issues may have deep historical roots, as was the case with the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the long civil war in Sri Lanka, or the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. These are difficult and complex to disentangle, and yet, as is pointed out in the UN report “Reconstructing Public Administration After Conflict”, their resolution is requisite for the stabilization of society after the conflict (UN-DESA, 2010).

In the case of crises caused by natural or technological disasters social issues may, in some instances, surface during the relief and reconstruction period, particularly if they were already present. This appears to have been the case in the post-Katrina flooding of
New Orleans in 2005. Such issues will complicate matters, and public institutions must address them if and when they surface in order to avert worsening of the already strained social situation. But since such issues were not the problem that precipitated the crisis, their resolution, although sometimes quite important, is not fundamental to the efforts of returning the society back to normality. In fact, unlike post-conflict situations, sudden on-set disasters seem to bring people together—to increase solidarity—at least during the immediate rescue operations. If social and ethnic issues are to come up, it is more than likely that this will be later on as the crisis moves into the reconstruction phase.

It can be said that, by-and-large, in post-conflict situations social rehabilitation will be of greater concern while the emphasis on crises brought by natural or technological disasters the emphasis will probably be on physical reconstruction.

Although there are some commonalities to all crises in general, each situation is also quite unique. This singularity is the consequence of the broad range of circumstances that contribute to determining the nature, scope and complexion of a particular crisis. On the one hand we have the context, or theater, in which an event occurs; countries differ as to their geography, history, culture, size and population distribution patterns, as well as levels of economic, social, and physical development. Understandably, repercussions of a particular event will differ depending on the particular context in which it takes place. On the other hand, we have the response capacity of governments since there are also wide variations in forms of governance, leadership capacities and structures, and the strength of public service institutions from one country to another. The particular combination of these variables makes each crisis situation an event that must be addressed on its own particular terms. Consequently each becomes a special set of challenges to which the government must respond.

**Why difference in response:**

The fact that every crisis is a unique event may explain in good part why there is such an uneven record in responding to crises between countries and even within the same country. In addition to the fact that each event is unique there are other factors that appear to contribute to the success or failure of emerging from crises. These have to do with the ability of public administration institutions to react and manage situations that are unusual. To the extent that crises situations are outside the “normal,” institutionalized norms and procedures, as well as their expertise, lose relevance in the changed environment. As a consequence, public service institutions have difficulty responding and delivering the required services. This point is supported by an extensive study by Saundra K. Schneider on government response to various disasters within the United States (Schneider, 1995). He argues that, beyond the differences in the nature and scope of a crisis, the key factor in determining the level of success of the response is the gap between administration norms and bureaucratic practices and how they fit with the needs and expectations of the affected population in the particular instance. In addition, if we look at crisis response in different countries, it is evident that the level of economic and social development is also a determining factor of how quickly and successfully the government will respond to the crisis and restore normality.
The recent earthquakes in Haiti and Chile illustrate this point. Both countries suffered major earthquakes earlier this year that affected large areas of the country, including major cities. Yet, in large part because of the differences in the context in which each occurred and the strength of the pre-existing public administration institutions, the dimensions of the crisis and level of human suffering differed considerably. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. The 2007 UNDP Human Development Index ranking places it in position 149 out of 182 countries (UNDP, 2009). Furthermore, weak and inefficient public service institutions characterized governance prior to the disaster. To make matters worst, although the country is subject to frequent hurricanes, it does not experience strong earth tremors often and was therefore not prepared for this type of event. By contrast, Chile ranks 44 in the same Human Development index and its GDP per capita is over twelve times that of Haiti; it has strong public service institutions and community organizations. Located in a highly seismic region, it also has considerable experience in managing these events. For these reason, although material losses were significant in both cases, the humanitarian crisis was much greater in Haiti’s case.

This example illustrates how differences in crisis management among different countries may be explained, at least in part, in terms of differences in the strength of the pre-existing public service apparatus, and level of development and wealth.

But if we look at crisis response within the same country we can also see great variations in the effectiveness of response to different disasters. To illustrate this point, we can look at two natural disasters that struck within the same country a few years apart. A major earthquake shook the San Francisco Bay area in 1989. This event, known as the Loma Prieta earthquake, caused extensive damage. Within the affected area, thousands of structures suffered damage including collapse, and there was considerable damage to roads, bridges and other infrastructure. However, the humanitarian impact was not dramatic since the relief and recovery operations, although at times contentious, were effective. By contrast, in August 2005 about 80% of the City of New Orleans was flooded when the levee system that protects the city catastrophically failed about 24 hours after Hurricane Katrina passed over the area. In this instance, the humanitarian crisis was of major proportions. Not only were there over 1,800 deaths, the attempts to evacuate the stranded population were chaotic, and conditions in shelters, such as the city’s stadium, were grim. Evacuation plans were either non-existent or simply failed and relief and recovery proceeded slowly and in a haphazard manner.

Analyzing the rather successful relief and recovery efforts of the Loma Prieta earthquake, Philip R. Berke and his coauthors conclude that previous disaster experiences had induced the local government to forge partnerships with citizen associations (Berke, et al, 1993). The primary objective of the partnerships was to organize citizen self-help relief and recovery efforts in future disasters. These partnerships formed a network of small private voluntary community-based organizations in the area. As the crisis unfolded, the network was activated to assess needs and distribute assistance. The partnerships between government and civil society made for a more effective response. But lessons learned in one part of the country fifteen years earlier had not been heeded in another part of the
same country. The response to the Katrina disaster demonstrated a total disconnect between the civil society and government institutions.

It should not be surprising that differences in responses to crises are in part a function of the strength of public service institutions and the level of socio-economic development of the country. However, when we look cases within the same country, it would appear that the ability of local-level institutions to measure up to the circumstances and to work with civil society is key to successfully restoring normality after a crisis.

The political quintessence of crises:

It is a truism to say that crisis situations magnify the role of government thereby exposing any deficiencies in meeting its responsibilities. This phenomenon of increased exposure is why John W. Kingdon has referred to crises as “focusing events”. In his view, such events tend to converge public expectations and needs, transforming them into public discontent, political activism and agenda setting (Kingdon, 1984). Other researchers have found a positive relationship between the severity of a disaster and the extent of subsequent political turmoil (Olson and Drury, 1997). It has even been suggested that in some cases community activism born of a disaster can become a threat to the very legitimacy of the state in the precarious post disaster period (Robinson et al, 1986). Yet other studies have found correlations between regime type, quality of governance – accountability and transparency - and public response to disasters (Davis and Seitz, 1982).

Studies also suggest that political activism rises very quickly, as impacted communities organize to meet their own needs in the period immediately following the disaster and before outside assistance arrives. Consequently, the longer this period of time is the greater the level of political activism that the government will likely encounter in their efforts to manage the emergency. As the society returns to normality, political activism may subside, but reverberations of a crisis may have longer-term effects reflected in later elections (Robinson, 1986). For this reason, crisis situations instantly become part of the national political process, and consequently fall in the ambit of the agenda of public institutions.

The experience after the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City is a case in point (Dynes et al, 1990). Immediately after the catastrophe, the population spontaneously formed search and rescue teams, while the government was slower to respond. Within a couple of weeks, these spontaneous groups had become sufficiently organized to mobilize and demand concrete government actions. As a World Bank report on this disaster noted, the victims, “made their presence felt and their plight visible” to the authorities through massive protest marches (World Bank, 1993, p.4). When the relief activities moved into the reconstruction phase the recently formed community groups remained vigilant and active, ensuring some success in the reconstruction of destroyed housing.

The role of public service in crisis management
Although crisis management is very much a political and governance concern, by and large, public administration as a discipline has not generally considered crisis management as an integral part of its regular functions. At best, crisis management has been considered part of the work of emergency units and law enforcement, with support from public health and civil defense organizations, and in extreme cases the military. From this perspective, the approach of public agencies has generally been fragmented and reactive, instead of coordinated and proactive (Petak, 1985).

Fortunately, this is changing as we become more concerned with the human and economic impact of disasters in an increasingly vulnerable world. Governments are coming to understand that their responsibility is all encompassing; that they must protect the safety and welfare of the population, shield the economy as far as possible, safeguard the environment, and lead the response and recovery efforts. As a consequence crisis management is becoming more integrated with the functions of public administration at all levels of government. What is more there is a growing awareness that in order to be truly effective government agencies must work together; that a common approach is not only more successful, it is more cost-effective, avoids duplication of personnel and resources, and it facilitates the standardization of crisis-oriented training and educational efforts.

Although the efforts of government are far more visible at the height of a crisis, the public administration apparatus of the state has a central role that spans the four stages of crisis management. These stages being: mitigation, pre-disaster preparedness, response, and recovery and rehabilitation. In each phase of this continuum it is essential that public service institutions collaborate and work closely with each other. They must also collaborate with civil society organizations, the private sector, and international agencies when appropriate. Crisis management must be in essence a government-civil society multi-phased effort, with the nature and scope of collaboration differing according to the character of each partner and varying from one phase to the next. We will briefly look at the role of public institutions through the four phases.
- Mitigation:

Reducing risk is a complex technical, political, and public administration issue. It is a technical issue because it is scientists, engineers, economists, and other professionals that can assess levels of risk and propose the ways of reducing those risks and provide estimates as to the costs associated with attaining different levels of protection (Armillas, 1996). It is a political issue because it is through the political process that a society should determine the levels of risk with which it is willing to live. From this process emanate the statutes, regulations and ordinances that are promulgated at different levels of government to protect the health, safety, and welfare of society. Finally, it is a public administration issue because the implementation and enforcement of risk reduction control mechanisms, public protection, and building of public awareness fall within the purview of the public services apparatus.

- Pre-disaster preparedness:

Prior to a crisis, the role of public agencies is to prepare civil protection and evacuation plans, raise public awareness and educate the population at large. It must also ensure that there are sufficient trained emergency personnel and stockpile emergency supplies and equipment for contingencies. It is the administrative apparatus that must implement such measures in an efficient manner in order for them to be effective when disaster strikes. Moreover, planning for emergencies must involve all levels of government and civil society, clearly delineating the areas of responsibility for each level and the specific vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms among them. This is important since inevitably all levels of government and civil society will be, or should be, drawn into the emergency and recovery process after a disaster. Tangible benefits of multi-level pre-disaster planning include enhanced inter-organizational coordination, improved participation by civil society, better coordination and decision-making, and the more efficient distribution and utilization of disaster assistance (Smith and Wenger, 2006).

- Response and relief:

Without a doubt the most challenging stage in crisis management is the response phase. This phase invariably starts with search and rescue operations, tasks often initiated by the victims themselves since they are on-site. The government must mobilize resources in terms of personnel, equipment and emergency supplies to the affected areas without delay. Practically every entity within the public administration apparatus of the government will be involved in the response to the emergency. The simultaneous mobilization of disparate government agencies will require activating networks at the national level and coordination with local government, international aid agencies, and the affected communities. The establishment of an effective coordinating mechanism is a necessity in cases where such a mechanism does not already exist.

As critical as the search and rescue operations are, they quickly overlap with the need to attend to the basic humanitarian needs of the afflicted population. At the same time initial
assessments of the extent and severity of damage must be undertaken in order to determine the type and volume of emergency assistance required. In addition, there may be extensive need for personnel to assist in rescue operations, transport, clearing debris, administering medical aid, and erecting tents or temporary shelters. Yet, information is partial at best and often conflicting. Moreover, the volume of demand or the diminished capacity of organizations involved to deliver due to the disaster itself often exceeds response capacity. Lifelines and communications networks are often damaged and emergency ones need to be set up. Meanwhile evacuations may interfere with those rushing in to lend assistance and deliver supplies. Invariably, the delivery systems become clogged with necessary and unnecessary supplies.

It is during this phase that the effectiveness of government is most visible. The time delay between the disaster and first government and humanitarian assistance response is not only critical in terms of saving lives, but in preventing the formation of a breach between the needs and expectations of the affected population and their government, as was discussed earlier. For this reason, the effective response of public service agencies in this phase is critical in stabilizing the emergency and making an early transition to recovery and rehabilitation.

An example of how a rapid and robust response by the government is essential in mitigating the impact and consequent complications after a disaster is the recent case of Chile. The destructive impact of the earthquake that struck last February was nothing short of catastrophic. The days following the tremors were particularly trying since the heavy damage to the transportation and communications networks made it difficult for aid to reach the affected areas. As a result, discontent started to brew. However, the government mobilized and quickly patched up roads and put the army in charge of the logistics of distributing aid. These makeshift repairs soon enabled aid convoys to make the eight-hour journey south from the capital to the most damaged areas; over 12,000 tons of relief supplies were delivered within the first ten days (www.cleveland.com, 2010). As soon as the government and aid agencies were able to establish their presence and address the needs of the victims, matters calmed down. Despite the initial complaints that aid was not reaching the hungry and homeless, Chile's response to one of history's most powerful earthquakes turned into a model for crisis management. The period of uncertainty and misery was reduced and recovery activities could be initiated sooner.

- Recovery and rehabilitation

The most urgent task in recovery efforts is to initiate clean-up operations in order to ensure a sanitary environment and reduce the potential of additional casualties due to secondary damage. Vital life support systems and communication networks must be restored to at least minimum operational levels. Equally important is the temporary replacement of essential facilities that may have been destroyed, such as schools and hospitals, as well as those necessary for aid storage and distribution. Field experience has shown that the restoration of school activities is a high priority for impacted communities. Reinitiating regular school activities helps to give children a sense of normality in the midst of the unsettled environment, making it a little easier for families
to cope with the hardships they face. In most instances, communities tend to take the lead in starting some of these tasks and government should at least be supportive of such efforts if not proactive in leading them. Setting up government offices and community meeting halls within the affected areas that are easily accessible by the public will facilitate government-community interaction during this period.

The rebuilding of damaged and destroyed facilities should also be initiated as early as possible, although it may extend over some time. Such initiatives will reassure the communities of government’s commitment to reconstruction and also provide much needed economic inputs (Mitchell, 1996). Other measures that should be carried out during the early part of this phase include providing financial resources and technical assistance to individual families and small commercial establishments to start bringing back the economic life of the community.

Unfortunately, time and again, crises seem to hold the public interest for a relatively short time-span. That is, the public beyond those directly affected by the crisis. This is not only true of the public at large but it is also true of public service institutions. Once the immediate emergency fades government institutions return to business as usual, undermining recovery and rehabilitation efforts. This is nemesis to recovery and rehabilitation efforts.

An example of this “fifteen minutes of fame” phenomenon is last year’s earthquake near the small historical town of L’Aquila in central Italy. The 5.8 Richter tremors occurred on 6 April and caused major devastation. Over 300 people died, making it the deadliest earthquake in Italy since the Irpinia earthquake of 1980. The government and indeed the world community mobilized in sympathy. The venue for the July 2009 G-8 Summit, which had been scheduled to be held elsewhere in the country, was moved to L’Aquila as a show of support for the rehabilitation of the town. In early July of that year the journal *Spiegel On Line* under the headline: “Little Real Progress Expected in L’Aquila” gave the following assessment: “The summit is aimed at aiding the reconstruction of the town and the world financial system -- but the prospect of progress on either is slim.” (www.spiegel.de, 2009). A year after the earthquake, news reports appeared to the effect that, in fact, little progress had been made in removing debris, while the central part of L’Aquila was still blocked off and for all practical purposes a ghost town. About one third of the displaced population was living in new houses outside of town, about a sixth was still living in hotels or temporary shelters and the balance had found their own housing solutions, including moving in with relatives (www.rtv.es, 2010). L’Aquila had had its “fifteen minutes of fame”.

1 After this paper was drafted a note appeared in the press reporting that three years after the Pisco Earthquake in Peru the city looks very much as it did in the days following the disaster. Rubble is still piled up everywhere and partially demolished structures line the streets. Although emergency aid poured in initially and the national government and international community promised assistance no clean up and reconstruction has taken place. Source: http://us.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/05/12/peru.pisco.quake.aftermath/index.html
This example is typical of what follows almost every single crisis situation anywhere in the world. The focus on the recovery and rehabilitation efforts quickly fades as the attention of the world and the nation turn to other matters. The community is left alone to wrestle with the aftermath and the opportunities to transform relief into development are lost. Only in those cases where civil society has succeeded in developing strong local organizations will there be any chance of long-term follow-up. For this reason, it is incumbent upon public administration agencies to set favorable conditions for the continued progress towards rehabilitation and development once the spotlight has faded.

**Policies for crisis management:**

As has been stated, each crisis situation is an idiosyncratic event and therefore there is no single formula that can be successfully replicated across-the-board. That said, some researchers in the field of post-disaster reconstruction have concluded that the lessons learned about the recovery process in those instances they have studied indicate that there are basic considerations that do cut across cultural, economic and geographical boundaries and can contribute to a more successful management response (Quarentelli et al, 1992 and Bolin and Bolton 1983 among others). These basic considerations relate to operational policies and objectives.

As the recently released United Nations Publication on post-conflict reconstruction has pointed out, the highest priority in post-conflict situations is that of rebuilding the shattered governance apparatus, or to build new institutions where earlier ones were decimated or did not exist—the objective being to build public service agencies that function in an efficient, fair and transparent manner (UN-DESA, 2010). This is particularly important in instances were the conflict was caused by poor or inequitable governance practices in the past, as was the case in *apartheid* South Africa; or, in cases were the basic government apparatus has been decimated by a long conflict, as is the case in Somalia today; or, government institutions were simply nonexistent prior to the crisis, as was the case at the time Timor-Leste finally gained its sovereignty in 2002.

In the case of most sudden onset crises, it is not a question of setting up new institutions, adopting new rules and procedures and training new staff to manage the crisis’ aftermath, but it is one of getting the government apparatus to respond adequately to the emergency. Although the efficacy of public service institutions will likely have been affected to some degree by the disaster, the apparatus, norms and procedures, and bureaucrats, remain. What is vital is for the governance apparatus to adapt, at least for the duration of the emergency, to the altered reality so that its institutions can assist the affected population under the prevailing conditions and guide the affected communities back to normality (Armillas et al, 1994). In order for the public service agencies accomplish this there are four policy aspects to consider:

1. **Flexibility** –

Although the need for flexibility and innovation in crisis management has been discussed in the literature for some time, it is still quite elusive in practice (Kartez, 1984).
Habitually, the initial response of public service agencies is to stick to their mandates, norms and procedures as they attempt to guide the society back to normality. However, needs and expectations change drastically during disasters. What may be appropriate during periods of normality typically becomes less relevant during a crisis. In crises, new behaviors and structures should emerge in order to cope with the multiplicity of contingencies that cannot be managed by routine service delivery. In fact, the greater the crisis, the more improvisation will be required. Public service agencies must be prepared to function in areas not normally under their purview and make their expertise and assets available when and where required; they must be prepared to do “business as un-usual”.

Flexibility is indeed the key to addressing what Saundra K. Schneider (1995) has called the “gap” which surfaces in times of crisis between needs and expectations and the bureaucratic norms and operations. He cites two examples that illustrate the consequences of the lack of flexibility. One is the earthquake that struck the city of Kobe in Japan January 1995; the other was the extensive flood that affected the Netherlands in the same year. In both instances the governments of these countries had well-formulated and comprehensive pre-disaster management plans and effective administrative mechanisms for managing the types of disasters that commonly affect their respective countries. Japan has a long history of dealing effectively with seismic events and the Netherlands routinely confronts flooding situations. Yet, on these two occasions citizens of the respective countries viewed the response by public service institutions as unsatisfactory, there was a “gap”. In the case of Japan, the public in general and even government officials were critical of the speed and effectiveness of the institutional response, at least in the initial periods of the crisis. Similarly, the floods in the Netherlands were so massive and widespread that the government’s response mechanisms simply could not cope and were subject to criticism by the public and the press.

Ironically the fact that both countries had detailed disaster management plans and well-organized administrative apparatus for confronting such situations may have acted in detriment of the purpose in this instance. In both of these cases the government activated the pre-existing emergency plans and rigidly tried to follow them in detail without making allowances for the idiosyncratic nature of the particular event. Put simply, the emergency preparedness plans, as good as they may have been, lacked flexibility and when the events fell outside the model the procedures they had established to deal with emergencies failed.

In terms of flexibility, the key is for institutions to be able to identify and understand the limitations of bureaucratic arrangements in place and to be able to adapt procedures to the evolving situation. Success in such endeavors comes from systems capable of recognizing errors and shortcomings, learning the lessons, and adjusting institutional capacity and actions (May, 1991). The basic challenge is to develop crisis management structures that foster real time learning and capable of adapting to circumstances as events unfold.

2. Decentralize, delegate –
In physical or geographical terms, natural and technological disasters are very much a local phenomenon with national repercussions. In most instances even widespread floods, hurricanes or cyclones and major earthquakes concentrate destruction in only a part or parts of a country, although the economic and social repercussions are often felt nationwide. This was the case with the large-scale and devastating 2004 Asian tsunami that affected countries around the Indian Ocean. The damage was limited to coastal areas, leaving the interior relatively untouched, but the social and economic impact was felt throughout the affected countries. For this reason it is incumbent on central governments to act, moreover it is this level of government that can more effectively mobilize the national and international financial resources and expertise required.

Because central governments have the upper hand in terms of resources when there is a crisis, there is a tendency to reinforce the centralized management structure. This is particularly true in cases where there are strong central institutions and weak local ones, or the vertical linkages between them are not well established. Yet, in a time of crisis the number of actors multiplies rapidly leading to pluralistic decision-making in tasks ranging from rescue to relief operations to the provision of emergency services and evacuation procedures (Quarantelli, 1996). The linkages in this multifaceted management scenario must extend from the government to civil society organizations; and from the national to the local levels. In such a complex environment, institutional arrangements can become obstructive in responding to local needs, identifying opportunities and utilizing local capacities in the recovery process. This proliferation of actors requires vertical organizational coordination as well as horizontal collaboration between local authorities and community groups. This process can be incentivized through effective decentralization and the delegation of appropriate authority to the local level.

The benefits of decentralized management and delegation of authority to the local level is supported by the work of researchers and practitioners in this field (United Nations, 2005). An example of this is the work of researchers Mader and Blair-Tyler (1991) and Rubin et al (1985). Their work suggests that success in recovery is usually based on a bottom-up approach. They emphasize the importance of local government participation and initiative in the process by which viable policies and collaborative institutional arrangements are developed. They caution that this collaboration must go beyond seeking local compliance with, and subordination to, national level public administration institutions. In their view, such limited forms of collaboration not only do not produce the best results but may be dysfunctional as well.

International organizations and donors also share this view as reflected in the proceedings of the 2005 UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (United Nations, 2005). This gathering of government officials, experts, practitioners, academics, and community leaders recognized the resilience of local communities and the necessity of adopting decentralized crisis management structures. Multilateral donors such as the World Bank have also accepted decentralization as a critical element in crisis management strategies. In a workshop on “The Role of Local Governments in Reducing the Risk of Disasters” sponsored by the World Bank, the importance of local government in this regard was
fully recognized (Demeter, et. al, 2006). Similarly, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center in Bangkok advocates strengthening local government as a means for better crisis management (ADPC, 2007)

3. Cooperation with civil society –

As has been mentioned, crises tend to mobilize communities and coalesce groups to meet the urgent needs not being met by government and aid agencies. This activism can be of much benefit if public service institutions are willing to work with civil society and channel their energies towards meeting the challenges posed by the crisis. Unfortunately, the prevailing approach is to regard the local population as helpless victims and community organizations as a hindrance.

In reality, the local population represents human capital available and willing to undertake search and rescue activities, clean up, and relief operations. Local associations can assist with the distribution of food, water and other supplies, and set up and manage temporary camps. In short, civil society can perform a multiplicity of essential tasks in the aftermath of a crisis. Moreover, community organizations can be effective intermediaries between public service agencies and the local population articulating the concerns of the victims and bringing critical issues to the attention of government and aid agencies. They can do this more effectively than outside organizations since they are accustomed to working in the area and are therefore better acquainted with local conditions and are closer to the people; indeed, they are the local people.

The collaboration between government agencies and civil society can bring about a synergetic effect, maximizing the utilization of resources and benefits to the communities. Peter Evans argues for the desirability of “state - society synergy;” in his words:

“Creative action by government organizations can foster social capital and linking mobilized citizens to public agencies can enhance the efficacy of government. The combination of strong public institutions and organized communities is a powerful tool for development.” (Evans, 1995).

What is required to bring about the cooperation between civil society and government is the willingness of central government to devolve resources and power to the local level as has been discussed earlier. What is more, government should take the care to develop linkages and strengthen civil society’s organizational capacity before a crisis strikes, as local institutions are not only essential during the response period but throughout the four stages of crisis management. Local organizations are indispensable in promoting pre-disaster preparedness and mitigation programs, and will also facilitate economic, social and physical recovery and rehabilitation efforts after outside agencies and donors are gone.

An illustration of how the tribulations and complexities of government-civil society relations during the response and relief phase can lead to missed opportunities in
successive recovery efforts is provided by the events in the aftermath of the 1999 Marmara earthquake in Turkey. The 7.4 Richter temblors devastated a large area in the central part of the country and resulted in over 17,000 deaths. The event created a complex disaster management crisis, as confirmed by the World Bank’s Turkey Country Office (World Bank, 1999). In the process of managing this crisis, the relative importance of state institutions and those of civil society involved in the relief efforts underwent a dramatic turnaround (World Bank, 1999). In the initial weeks following the disaster, public service institutions proved to be totally unprepared and inept in handling the emergency. There were considerable delays in getting relief personnel to work on the search-and-rescue operations and there were major logjams in getting relief supplies and medical assistance to the affected areas.

For all practical purposes the state seems to have been paralyzed in the immediate period following the disaster. The search-and-rescue operations were undertaken by the victims themselves assisted by spontaneously formed volunteer groups from elsewhere in the country as well as abroad. NGO’s, university students, and local political parties typically formed the volunteer teams. Not only were the public service institutions not able to cope, they were also incapable of coordinating the flood of assistance being provided. Gradually, in the weeks that followed, the performance of government institutions improved. The distribution of temporary shelters, food, health services, and money to the victims became a more efficient operation. But, ironically, as the performance of government agencies improved the attitude of the authorities towards civil society organizations became more adversarial. Consequently, as the recovery efforts progressed the government increasingly and systematically pushed NGO’s and other civil society organizations aside (Jalali, 2002). As a result, any and all opportunities for civil society - government synergies that could be of benefit in reconstruction were lost.

4. Promote sustainable recovery and the MDGs

In the medium and long term, the objectives of post-conflict and post-disaster recovery are the restoration of the social and economic fabric of the communities, but in rebuilding after a conflict or a disaster there is also the potential for building a better future for the affected communities. This idea is embodied in the concept of “sustainable relief” whereby reconstruction initiatives are conceived in a manner as to enable economic, social and physical development to continue beyond the immediate crisis. This concept is advanced by international agencies such as UN-Habitat in the conviction that a development-oriented approach will bring multiple benefits beyond the recovery (UN-Habitat, 2010). Under this approach the influx of financial and other resources is directed as much as possible towards sustainable development initiatives with long-term economic and social benefits rather than simply replacing what has been lost.

Expanding on this concept, the recovery period offers not only the prospect to promote development objectives but equally important it offers the opportunity to strengthen the government’s commitment to furthering the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It can do this by ensuring that the sustainable relief initiatives are consistent with and in fact support the attainment of these goals. This should be the case
whatever the nature of the crisis and whether the main challenges are the rebuilding of the social, economic or physical fabric of the country. Public service agencies must assess every recovery and rehabilitation program and project for its potential contribution to meeting the MDGs and look for opportunities for recovery efforts to contribute to these goals.

**Beyond the immediate crisis – the road to normality:**

The road back after a crisis is usually a long process; in most cases it takes many years to restore normality. In moving beyond the immediate crisis period governments must make allowances for this fact and be prepared to develop medium and long-term rehabilitation programs and to make the institutional and financial arrangements to implement them. These programs will make additional and unusual demands of the public service agencies in terms of expertise, resources, and management personnel as well as the institutional structures required for their execution. These conditions may last for some time, but they will not be of a permanent nature; thus, public service institutions must find alternative, and in some instances innovative, ways and means to provisionally expand their capacities to implement the rehabilitation programs. In so doing agencies must be prepared to seek partners beyond government institutions. Fortunately there is no shortage of potential partners. Partnerships can be formed with private sector institutions, civil society organizations – local, national and international, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, and universities among others.

Regardless of who the partners might be the formulation and implementation of rehabilitation programs must be based on an open and collaborative relationship with the community. The literature on crisis management as well as field experience confirms that such practices are more likely to result in long-term benefits to the society. This is because recovery and rehabilitation initiatives will have a better fit; they will be more relevant to the particular circumstances and needs of the particular communities. In order to achieve “good fit” the formulation of recovery and rehabilitation programs must take into consideration three broad dimensions:

- The needs of the communities;
- The operational context; and,
- The organizational capacity of both donor and recipient institutions and groups.

In addition to having a good fit, there are a number of fundamental characteristics that a well-designed reconstruction program must have. Most important among these are the following:

- A sharp focus on the problem being addressed;
- Unambiguous objectives and specific outputs that are verifiable and as far as possible quantifiable;
• A clearly stated time line and a firm completion date;
• A decision-making structure that fully integrates the beneficiary community into all phases of the program; and,
• Appropriate resources and funding mechanisms in place.

Equally important is the institutional framework for executing the rehabilitation programs. As was mentioned earlier, when faced with the task of developing and implementing crisis recovery programs public administration agencies often find that these programs place an additional, and perhaps unmanageable, overload on their regular operations. Recovery programs can also create interagency conflicts since they may overlap the mandate and expertise of several agencies. There are a variety of institutional mechanisms that can be used to avoid the problems of overload and conflicting mandates. One approach is the creation of a reconstruction authority entrusted with the oversight and coordination of rehabilitation activities. This was the case in Sri Lanka where an authority was set up under the direct supervision of the country’s president to manage all post-*tsunami* reconstruction and development programs.

A more focused approach may be the creation of “limited life” institutions to formulate and implement specific programs; these agencies are established for the sole purpose of delivering specific output in a predetermined period of time. These bodies can be totally independent, subordinate to an existing agency, or overseen by an interagency board.

An example of a successful “limited life” institution set up to implement a post-crisis reconstruction effort was the Housing Rehabilitation Program (RHP) for it’s name in Spanish) put in place after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. The tremor caused considerable damage in the historic central district of the urban area, where old buildings had been turned into overcrowded tenements and were now inhabited by low-income families. Community groups that formed in the midst of the rescue operations pressed the government to act quickly and decisively on the issue of the thousands left homeless in this particular district. The government listened and less than a month after the disaster, expropriated damaged and collapsed properties in this area and established the RHP program for the specific purpose of re-housing the affected families (Ducci, 1986).

The RHP program had several features that are worth noting. First, it was focused having a single clearly defined objective: to re-house 40,000 families that had lost their homes in this district and on the same sites as their former tenements. Furthermore the new buildings had to be constructed on the same sites as the former dwellings. Second, the program was to be managed by an independent institution that was given a specific time period in which to do its work. Third, the institution was to be staffed by personnel seconded from other government departments. The staff was guaranteed return to their previous agency at the conclusion of the program.

The families in each tenement were organized into civil organizations. These organizations selected the architects and engineers that would design and build their new dwellings and worked with them from beginning to end. At the completion of construction ownership of the dwellings was transferred to the families who were given
long-term mortgages at low interest rates to enable them to become homeowners. RHP was dismantled on schedule after reaching its goals. This is one illustration of a successful administrative mechanism to manage the post crisis overload on public service institutions.

Another approach is for public service institutions to partner with community organizations whereby the government provides funding and technical advisors while the community organization manages the program and in most cases also provides the manpower under some form of self or mutual aid arrangement. In the absence of appropriate community organizations, community and self-help groups can be formed to carry out specific projects. This model is widely utilized and often leads to positive results, since it embodies the principles of government-civil society synergies. However, success with this model is subject to sustained funding and technical inputs and the continued resolve of government agencies, elements which tend to diminish with time. Consequently, the success of these partnerships is determined, in good part, by the ability of civil society to ensure the continued support of government agencies.

A variation of the above model is a tripartite arrangement between government, community, and donor. Under such arrangements the government’s role is usually limited to vetting programs to ensure that they meet national standards and development criteria, and providing general oversight during the implementation. In this instance the donor - a national or international NGO or aid agency - provides the funding and technical knowhow while the community provides labor and other in-kind inputs. This model is commonly employed throughout the world and was extensively utilized in reconstruction efforts across the eleven countries affected by the 2004 Asian tsunami. In this instance achieving the objectives of the program is more a function of the commitment of the donor and its relations with the community and its sustainability depends on the active involvement of the community.

Another partner, beyond government, the community and donors that can play a significant role in crisis management are universities and technical institutes. Of course, such institutions are already making a significant and essential contribution to this field in terms of theory through their research and publications. In fact, most crises management theory emanates from academic institutions. The publications cited in this paper are evidence of this fact; another is the number of participants from academia participating in this workshop. What is more, university students are typically among the many volunteers that mobilize and provide assistance immediately after a disaster and during the recovery period. Usually they join search and rescue operations and in some cases they get involved in community reconstruction efforts afterwards. But universities are also breaking out of their traditional mold of engaging mostly in academic and research pursuits and are increasingly getting more directly involved in public service.

The growing emphasis on getting involved directly in public service activities is opening up new modalities for working with both civil society organizations and government, not only in their home countries but abroad. These modalities make it possible to form faculty-student teams that bring together know how, experience, enthusiasm and
creativity, and to involve them in the formulation and implementation of post-crisis rehabilitation programs. As partners in crisis management activities universities and technical institutes can potentially make significant contributions beyond the traditional areas of theory and research, particularly in the pre-disaster preparedness and the recovery and rehabilitation phases. Following this talk three case studies of post-crisis rehabilitation and reconstruction projects undertaken by Cornell University will be presented. These presentations will serve as illustrations of university-civil society collaboration in post-conflict and disaster situations.

Conclusions:

In summary, crises represent acute changes in the usual state of affairs of a country, a situation that strains the social and economic fabric of the nation and often has devastating consequences on the physical and natural environment. Regardless of whether the events that provoked the particular crisis situation were brought about by human actions or the forces of nature the result is extensive human suffering, economic hardship, and physical destruction. How such events impact on a particular situation is very much the function of a complex of factors that include geography, level of socio-economic development, and governance practices. All of these various factors combine into making each crisis a singular event. Thus, Public administration agencies must adapt the response to the nature and scope of the particular crisis they are confronting.

Although each crisis is a singular event there are general policies and strategies that public administration institutions should follow in order to ensure a better resolution to a particular crisis. Policies and strategies that make for more successful crisis management include flexibility in operational norms, decentralization of authority, close collaboration with the affected communities, and the promotion of sustainable relief and the MDGs. In implementing recovery programs maximum advantage should be taken of the synergies that result from partnering with civil society including NGO’s, local organizations, donors and academic institutions; and, consideration should be given to the institutional arrangements necessary to carry out the work.

In essence, these policies and strategies are those that characterize good governance under any circumstances, but in times of intense difficulty, instability and danger that define crisis situations the practice of good governance is all the more important.
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