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MANAGEMENT OF DISASTERS IN UGANDA:
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

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MANAGEMENT OF DISASTERS IN UGANDA:
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Disaster preparedness and response remain a challenge for the Government of Uganda. Sprawling chunks of the population across the country continue to suffer the debilitating effects of calamities despite numerous interventions to increase the level of awareness and equip emergency response teams.

The Government has kitted the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees with technical staff and resources to minimise disastrous incidents and respond to them appropriately immediately they happen.

Programs have also been set up to support and aid the recovery of populations affected by disasters from time to time.

However, catastrophes are manifesting themselves differently in recent times. They are shifting from predictable to unpredictable patterns, and this has presented a fresh challenge to the established prevention and mitigation system.

The use of disaster-prone physical features is fast-changing to include social activities like cultivation, sport and entertainment, which attract large numbers of people, depress the environment's holding capacity and stretch the natural protective mechanisms to the limit.

The rising frequency of disasters in the country calls for regular policy reviews to take into account evolving circumstances. More resources should also be set aside to prevent and manage all forms of disasters.

> ' **The rising frequency of disasters in the country calls for regular policy reviews to take into account evolving circumstances.**

Two research studies

The Uganda Policy Development and Management Forum supported by Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and African Leadership Institute (AFLI) commissioned two research studies to provide scientific input to support a review of the existing disaster management policy.

The studies titled "Disaster Risk Reduction in Uganda, and Disaster Preparedness in Uganda" collected data through document review, questionnaires and interview guides administered on residents of disaster-prone areas.

Key informants in the disaster management sector and political leaders were also sampled. The findings were reviewed and validated by renowned scholars and technocrats at a public policy dialogue held at UMI on November 29, 2018.

Dr. Sylvester Kugonza Kamanyire, Dean, School of Civil Service, Public Administration and Governance at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), presents a paper during a forum to discuss the country's policy on management of disasters, preparedness and response. The workshop, organised by UMI and Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI), was held at the former's Kampala main campus

Responsive to emerging issues

Research papers presented at the forum recommended a regularly review of the disaster-preparedness and management policy to make it responsive to emerging issues, trends and circumstances.

It was collectively recommended that;

1) Parliament reviews disaster management legislation.

2) Funding should be made readily available for research on risk-mapping and design of tools for disaster preparedness.

3) Evacuation of vulnerable populations should become mandatory.

4) Contingency plans for critical facilities should be designed by all stakeholders through inclusive and participatory processes.

5) Public awareness campaigns should be carried out on a regular basis.

6) Rescue and evacuation teams should be trained and equipped with the right tools.

7) Community-level response mechanisms should be devised and supported to enable vulnerable populations to act appropriately in the intervening period before experts intervene.

8) Provide alternative sources of income to vulnerable communities engaging in life-sustaining activities that fuel disaster.

BACKGROUND

This policy brief consolidates ideas from two research papers and the contributions made during a validation forum that brought together academicians, technocrats, top leadership from the line ministry, the media and members of the public.

The views and contributions were gathered on November 29, 2018, during a public policy symposium at UMI's main campus in Kampala.

Vulnerable populations

Although some vulnerable populations in various parts of the world believe that disasters are mysteriously controlled by nature, and that nothing can be done about their occurrence (Quarantelli, 2001), scientific paradigms have changed human perception of disasters (Furedi, 2007).

Consequently, States worldwide have established whole departments in their governments, complete with technical personnel and equipment, to prevent and respond to disasters.

Uganda is a signatory to the Hyogo Framework for Action and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction that recommends focus on reducing natural and man-made risks.

Studies indicate that a large proportion of the Ugandan population is threatened by disasters (Osuret et al, 2016). Calamities have been linked to deep-seated poverty, cultural beliefs, and scanty knowledge about misfortunes, leading to appalling levels of preparedness.

Uganda Parliament's Head of the Monitoring and Evaluation Division Josephine Watera makes her contribution during a policy examination meeting at Africa Leadership Institute's Bugolobi offices. The forum, organised jointly with the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), brought together delegates from the civil society, the academia, political leadership, public policy research and the media to discuss study findings about the country's state of disaster management, preparedness and response.

Human management of nature

World Bank (2013) points out that disasters affect 200,000 Ugandans annually. Over the years, the myth that tragedies are natural and therefore inevitable has been gradually replaced by the general consensus that disasters result from human management of nature (Quarantelli, 2001).

As a consequence, therefore, the blame for natural mishaps in current times falls on human behaviour (Furedi, 2007). The challenge to governments and technical teams assigned to manage disasters remains in the policies addressing oversight of the resources earmarked for the detection, prevention and management of disasters.

Like most East African countries, Uganda's disaster risks are related to both natural hazards, such as drought, floods, landslides, earthquakes, epidemics, pests and diseases.

Man-made catalysts like conflicts, road accidents, industrial waste disposal and noxious smoke have also been cited.

Uganda has a national policy for disaster preparedness and management that is in agreement with sectoral laws and policies addressing cross-cutting disaster risk-reduction and management issues (UNDP, 2015).

However, nature and social factors have conspired to frustrate the plan's implementation. Worse, still, there has been perennial absence of resources to monitor and conduct regular research with a view to subjecting the guidelines to timely, continual reviews.

MV Templar tragedy

With the prevailing scenario, the policy has been rendered literally ineffective. Holes have routinely been picked in the document every time a disaster strikes. Applying the standard regulations to real-time situations has often been a major challenge, as there always have been numerous loopholes to contend with.

An outstanding example of the emerging, hitherto unperceived disaster risks, is the recent capsising of MV Templar, a luxury cruise boat, on Lake Victoria. Many lives were lost in the accident.

A participant makes her contribution during a forum to discuss the country's policy on management of disasters, preparedness and response. The workshop, organised by the Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI), was held at the former's Kampala main campus.

Boat cruise is a new fad in the entertainment industry, yet it has come with new, peculiar risks in water travel. Such hazards were not comprehensively documented until the Templar disaster in November, 2018.

Failure to conduct research on disaster risks has habitually been blamed on the Government, with minimal attention being paid to other integral factors highlighted in the UMI-AFLI research papers.

This policy brief highlights suggestions from scholarly research validated by technocrats from the relevant sectors, Civil Society Oganisations (CSOs) and the public.

Leading stakeholders

The leading stakeholders in this sector include; International humanitarian agencies (The Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, World Food Programme and UN High Commissioner for Refugees, among others).

Others are the media, utility organisations (electricity, water and telephone), the police and military (fire brigade, law and order; search and rescue, conflict management); research and training institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations/Community-based organisations (Relief and self-help groups) and local communities (clans, associations).

APPROACH

Researchers and discussants were selected from among scholars specialising in disaster at UMI, CSOs and technocrats from the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees. The Commissioner of Disaster Preparedness was a pivotal source of information, as well.

Team members collectively recommended improvement of the existing policy for disaster preparedness and management. The scholars reviewed documents and conducted pointed interviews with key informers.

Secondary data was also analysed to establish a scholarly perspective. The findings were disseminated during a public policy dialogue presided over by the Minister of State for Disaster Preparedness, Mr Musa Ecweru, at the UMI Kampala main campus.

Mr. Jude Rwemisisi, Senior Research Fellow at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), makes the keynote presentation during a policy examination meeting at Africa Leadership Institute's Bugolobi offices. The forum, organised jointly with the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), brought together delegates from the civil society, the academia, political leadership, public policy research and the media to discuss study findings about the country's state of disaster management, preparedness and response.

The media at work during a forum to discuss the country's policy on management of disasters, preparedness and response. The workshop, jointly organised by the Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI), was held at the former's Kampala main campus. The event, presided over by Mr. Musa Ecweru, Minsiter of State for Disaster Preparedness, was covered widely in the media across the country.

KEY FINDINGS

The Disaster Preparedness and Management Policy is inadequate in the absence of a deliberate strategy to detect emerging issues and trends bringing with them new vulnerabilities.

Disaster preparedness and response is multi-sectoral in nature, and decisions that affect the sector's performance are typically consultative.

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) is domiciled in the Office of the Prime Minister, with the strategic objective of giving it greater leverage to coordinate and integrate inputs from various Government agencies and other stakeholders.

Mr. Musa Ecweru, Minister of State for Disaster Preparedness, during a forum to discuss the country's policy on management of disasters, preparedness and response. The workshop, organised by the Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI), was held at the former's Kampala main campus.

Deaths in Bududa landslide

The multi-sectoral approach was, however, reported to be slowing down the speed of decision-making, as well as hampering resource allocation.

For example, some discussants blamed the recent deaths in a landslide in Bududa to delays in the release of funds to support risk-reduction programs.

Presenters and discussants from the line ministry indicated that the relocation of the vulnerable population was planned well before the disaster, but the Finance Ministry had not released money by the time the landslide occurred despite the ministry having made a requisition.

The institutional arrangement for management of disasters is robust from the grassroots level. As such, the District Disaster Management Committees at the district level are supported by the national coordination structure.

Nonetheless, the elaborate coordination framework is haunted by inadequate funding for sustenance and training, which erodes its capacity to respond to disasters.

Moreover, there is a weak linkage between the technical capacity to sound the disaster warning and the public's capacity to effectively respond to the alarm.

The Government has a functional disaster preparedness strategy, as well as equipment, but there has been little effort in educating grassroots populations on basic skills in prevention, rescue or survival.

Communication networks and systems, transport system, search and rescue equipment for evacuation and first aid are in place, but are still not enough to cover all the "hotspots".

CONCLUSIONS

The country has made impressive strides in disaster preparedness, considering the existence of policy, legal, institutional and coordination framework; public awareness and education, and early warning mechanisms.

However, more funding is required, as is regular updating of laws related to disaster preparedness and response.

Finally, social research should be conducted to catalogue emerging social issues and trends that could introduce new vulnerabilities.

A participant makes his point at the forum to discuss the country's policy on management of disasters, preparedness and response. The workshop, organised by the Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI), was held at the former's Kampala main campus.

Mr. Tobias Onweng Angura, one of the researchers on Uganda's disaster management, preparedness and response, expresses his views during a policy examination meeting at Africa Leadership Institute's Bugolobi offices. The forum, organised jointly with the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), brought together delegates from the civil society, the academia, political leadership, public policy research and the media to discuss study findings about the country's state of disaster management, preparedness and response.

Dr. Gerald Werikhe, Africa Leadership Institute's Head of Civic Engagement and Research, makes opening remarks during a policy examination meeting at Africa Leadership Institute's Bugolobi offices. The forum, organised jointly with the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), brought together delegates from the civil society, the academia, political leadership, public policy research and the media to discuss study findings about the country's state of disaster management, preparedness and response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parliament should regularly review the disaster preparedness and management laws to align them to emerging vulnerabilities caused by social and environmental trends.

2. Government and development partners should fundraise to conduct risk mapping research and design appropriate tools and strategies for disaster preparedness and response.

3. Government should implement mandatory evacuation of communities likely to be affected by natural disasters, and introduce technology for detection and warning.

4. Government and civil society should create an inventory of communities and facilitate households and individuals to evacuate disaster-prone zones.

5. The line ministry should make contingency plans for fundamental facilities to enable operational continuity after disaster.

6. Public awareness and education on disasters should be carried out on a continual basis.

7. Rescue and evacuation teams in disaster-prone areas should be adequately trained on response and rescue.

8. Government and implementing partners should fund local communities to develop and implement preparedness programs and response tactics.

9. Alternative sources of income should be provided to vulnerable communities involved in activities that fuel disaster, such as charcoal burning, wanton tree-felling and stone quarrying.

10. Government and implementing partners should introduce income-generating activities to reduce poverty among vulnerable communities.

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