# DISASTER MANAGEMENT: PLANNING AND COMMUNICATION APPROACHES USED ORGANIZATIONS IN KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to investigate how disasters are managed in organizations in Kenya. The study objectives were: to examine the planning approaches used in disaster management and to establish the communication approaches used in disaster management. A multiple case study of five organizations was used. The sample size was twenty managers in the sampled organizations. Interview guides and document analysis were used as instruments for data collection. The study revealed that managers in the sampled institutions did not use a proactive approach in disaster management. They lack knowledge about integrating disaster management into strategic planning processes. They also lack knowledge about a proactive approach to communication in disaster management. The researcher recommends that: Training and workshops in disaster management should be provided to managers and other employees. Organizational members should be exposed to disaster management simulations.*

**Keywords:** Disaster, Management, Planning, Communication, Language use, Education, Proactive approach, Reactive approach.

## Contribution/ Originality

The paper's primary contribution is finding that disaster planning and communication ought to be integrated with an organizations' strategic planning, hence using the proactive approach which is effective unlike the reactive approach. To acquire knowledge and skills about disaster planning, education can be used as a vehicle.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Disaster management is the effort of communities or organizations to plan for and coordinate all personal and materials required to either mitigate the effects of, or recover from, natural or man-made disasters. Disaster planning should aim to prevent disaster from occurring, and failing that, should develop a good action plan to mitigate or lessen the effects of any disaster. In order to avoid, or reduce significant losses to a business, disaster managers should work to identify and anticipate potential risks, hopefully reducing their probability of occurring. In the event that an emergency does occur, managers should have a plan prepared to mitigate the effects of that emergency, as well as to ensure Business Continuity of critical operations post-incident (Coombs, 2007).

Disaster management plans and procedures should include the identification of appropriately trained staff members responsible for decision-making when a disaster occurs. Training plans should state the nature and frequency of training and testing. Testing of a plan's effectiveness should be carried out regularly. In instances where several organizations occupy the same space, joint disaster plans, formally agreed to by all parties, should be

put into place. In Kenya, disasters are experienced in organizations while some natural disasters such as floods affect certain geographical regions.

## 1.1. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the planning approaches used in disaster management.
- To establish the communication approaches used in disaster management.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Phases of Disasters Management

Disaster management consists of five phases: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Prevention focuses on preventing the human hazard, primarily from potential natural disasters or terrorist attacks. Preventive measures are taken on both the domestic and international levels, designed to provide permanent protection from disasters. Not all disasters, particularly natural disasters, can be prevented, but the risk of loss of life and injury can be mitigated with good evacuation plans, environmental planning and design standards.

### 2.2. Mitigation

Personal mitigation is important to preparedness. Individuals should be trained to avoid unnecessary risks. This includes an assessment of possible risks to personal health and to personal property, and steps taken to minimize the effects of a disaster, or take procure insurance to protect them against effects of a disaster. Preventive or mitigation measures take different forms for different types of disasters. In earthquake prone areas, these preventive measures might include structural changes such as the installation of an Earthquake Valve to instantly shut off the natural gas supply, seismic retrofits of property, and the securing of items inside a building. In flood prone areas, houses can be built on poles or stilts.

### 2.3. Preparedness

Disaster preparedness aims at minimizing the adverse effects of a hazard - Through effective precautionary actions. Ensure timely, appropriate and efficient organization and delivery of emergency response following the impact of a disaster. It focuses on preparing equipment and procedures for use *when* a disaster occurs. Preparedness measures can take many forms, including:

- implementation of a  disaster communication system,
- installation of warning devices
- creation of back-up life-line services
- and rehearsing evacuation plans
- deciding which language to  be used

Planning for all different types of events and all magnitudes is of utmost importance, so that when a disaster does occur responders know exactly what their role is.

### 2.4. Response

The response phase of an emergency may commence with *Search and Rescue* but in all cases the focus will quickly turn to accomplish the basic humanitarian needs of the affected population. This assistance may be provided by national or international agencies and organizations. Effective coordination of disaster assistance is often critical.

### 2.5. Recovery

The recovery phase starts after the threat to human life has subsided. The immediate aim is to bring the affected area back to normalcy as quickly as possible.

### 2.6. Types of Disasters

*Natural Disasters*, They are caused by natural factors such as hurricanes, earthquakes and floods.

*Technological Disasters*, With the introduction of computers and computerizing operations in organizations, when technology fails, it has catastrophic consequences. It can affect all records in the organization, cause accidents, distort information about workers, cause death in health institutions such as hospitals, specifically in cardiac care units, intensive care units and nurseries for premature babies.

Disasters *of Malevolence*, are caused by the malicious or wicked actions of people such as terrorist attacks.

Disasters *of Management Failure*, are as a result of managers failing to perform their formal responsibilities (Argenti, 2003).

In *smoldering crisis* problems or issues that start out small and could be fixed or averted if someone was paying attention or recognized the potential for trouble.

In Kenya, strikes are frequently experienced in institutions of higher learning. Students destroy property and cause death (Mayaka *et al.*, 2009).

### 2.7. Disaster Management Approach

Successfully diffusing a crisis requires an understanding of how to handle a crisis before it occurs. As managers take significant time strategising on how to achieve business or academic objectives according to the organization's vision and mission, the same vigour ought to be used in planning for crises. They should not wait to use a reactive approach. They ought to integrate crises management into strategic planning processes and statements of corporate excellence. The way teams are vital in performing varied organizational tasks, strategic planners should come up with various crises management teams with clearly defined team tasks, should a crisis occur. Training and workshops in crises management should be provided. All organizational members should be involved in crises simulations. This can transform the organization from being crisis prone to being crisis prepared.

### 2.8. Disaster Planning and Communication

A Disaster Management Plan should be composed of:

- A senior management, multidisciplinary Disaster committee. It should include legal public relations, technical and other experts needed for the anticipated catastrophes. They should provide a broad range of professional skills, centralize all sources of information and make appropriate decisions. A disaster management committee should have the authority to make major decisions. There should be other teams assigned to handle different disaster should they occur.

- A centralized approach to communication should be planned for. There should be a Disaster management, communication centre. All information during the crisis should go through the communications centre for consistency.

- A competent spokesperson selected by the management is given significant authority to perform the expected communication responsibilities. The spokesperson ensures that information flow continuously during the Disaster, reduces the likelihood of the organization contradicting itself and media relations and updates are well handled ie breaking news. It is a moment when the organization needs the media so much to show the credibility of the management in handling the Disaster and protect the organization's corporate image.

- Communication Objectives should be outlined in the plan. There should be a list of whom to notify during a crisis. Direct communication tools are used for audiences considered very important to the organization. it may include employees directly affected by the crisis, their family members, top managers not on the crisis committee, managers at all other levels, union representatives, medical and security personnel. Other stakeholders such as local, county and national authorities should be contacted directly. There should be

organized direct communication systems including hot lines conforming to the diverse mobile providers such as safaricom, airtel, orange, yu and a landline.  Personal visits. Could also be used.

- Stakeholders should be informed continuously. They include government officials, clients, community leaders, and public interest groups (Argenti, 2003). The role of the media or its mission should be well understood by the management. All media houses will want to get the story first with victims, villains and visuals. Therefore, communicating to the media houses should consider the approach of providing such information.

## 2.9. Communicating and Assessing Incidents

Communication is one of the key issues during any disaster. Pre-planning of communications is critical. Miscommunication can easily result in events escalating unnecessarily. Once a disaster  has been identified a comprehensive assessment evaluating the level of impact and its financial implications should be undertaken. Following assessment, the appropriate plan or response to be activated will depend on specific pre-set criteria within the disaster plan. The steps necessary should be prioritized to ensure critical functions are operational as soon as possible.

The senior most communications manager should report directly to the CEO. The credibility and reputation of an organization is heavily influenced by the extent of its active and consistent responses during Disasters. There must be open and consistent communication throughout the hierarchy to contribute to a successful Disaster communication process (Ian, 2005).  The management should create a consistent emergency alert format to reach geographically and linguistically diverse audiences through both audio and visual mediums (Hellsloot, 2007).

## 2.10. Language Use in Disaster Management

A disaster is a catastrophe that may occur in any organization(Argenti, 2003). It not only affects employees, but also members of the general public. Both groups may have some individuals who may be deaf and dumb. The implication of linguistically diverse audiences in Kenya means that besides the official languages of English and Kiswahili, the language of the catchment area should also be used during disasters and sign language. The linguistically challenged are part of the community. The more we know about all people in our communities, the better we can meet our obligations for planning and communicating during disaster using inclusive languages.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in five organizations in Kenya. The target population was 20 managers. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the five organizations and census to select all top managers including the manager in charge of communications. The multiple cases of five organizations enabled the researcher to have smaller samples that facilitated in-depth investigations The design enabled the researcher to study in depth in order to gain insight into the other cases (Osio and Owen, 2005). Most case studies are based on the premise that a case can be located that is typical of many other cases (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). The researcher used interview schedules and document analysis as data collection instruments. Data was analyzed qualitatively and reported in narration according to emerging themes as per the study objectives.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1. Types of Disaster Anticipated by the Organization

Data from the interview schedule revealed that managers were of the opinion that the organizations can be affected by all types of disasters. The ones that can significantly affect the organizations according to their responses are terrorism, fire outbreaks and strikes as summarized in table 1.1.

**Table-1.1.**Types of Disasters Anticipated by the Organizations

| Type of Disaster | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Terrorism | 20 |
| Fire outbreak | 1 6 |
| Strikes | 20 |
| Technological crises | 1 2 |

**Source:** Collected Data

The above types of disasters were just mentioned but there were no documents with the information. The managers seemed to forget the natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes although the later is not common in Kenya. The omission is

## 4.2. Planning Approaches Used in Disaster Management

Managers were of the opinion that the strategies they would use for disaster planning were: to install fire extinguishers, avail contacts for emergency services such as fire and police departments as summarized in table 1.2

**Table-1.2.** Strategies for disaster planning

| Strategy | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Avail police hotline numbers | 18 |
| Avail fire department numbers | 16 |
| Install fire extinguishers | 11 |

**Source:** Collected Data

Data from document analysis revealed that the organizations did not have a disaster management plan. They did not have a list of whom to notify in case of a disaster, no disaster management committee and there was no training to employees about disaster management. The management was waiting to use a reactive approach as summarized in table 1.2. Disaster management consists of five phases: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery while disaster planning should aim to prevent disaster from occurring, failing that, should develop a good action plan to mitigate or lessen the effects of any disaster. The mentioned strategies only deal with a few response activities.

## 4.3. Communication Approaches Used in Disaster Planning

We communicate in a language. When asked which language should be used during a disaster, managers said: **English and Kiswahili.** Disasters affect linguistically diverse audiences in Kenya hence besides the official languages of English and Kiswahili, the language of the catchment area should also be used during disasters and sign language for those who may be deaf. A whole community approach to communication should be used. There were no documents showing the communication strategies to be used and no approach to media relations. The communication approach used was reactive. Miscommunication can easily result in events escalating unnecessarily.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Both planning and communication approaches used were reactive. Disaster Planning should aim to prevent disasters from occurring, and failing that, should develop a good action plan to mitigate or lessen the effects of any disaster. The reactive approach evident in organizations means that managers are ignorant about disaster planning and communication, they do not integrate it with the organizations' strategic planning. Lack of planning means there are no preventive measures for disaster and should a disaster occur, mitigation will be lacking.

## 6. IMPLICATION FOR POLICY

  i.   Strategic planning in all organizations should be integrated with disaster planning to
       Prevent disasters from occurring, or to develop a good action plan to lessen the effects of any disaster.

 ii.   To equip the entire community with knowledge and skills about disaster planning and communication, there is a need for the government to introduce a disaster management course at all levels of education.

iii.   The language question in disaster management should be well addressed for effective communication. Curriculum developers should include sign language in the curriculum at all levels of education. It can be used to warn and during rescue stages. Rescue teams and all victims irrespective of their linguistic background may be forced to use sign language, especially during disasters *of* Malevolence or terrorism. Communication should be mutual and the language used should be understood by both the sender and the receiver for it to be effective.

iv. Training and workshops in disaster management should be provided to strategic managers and public relations practitioners.

v. Organizational managers should be exposed to disaster management simulations.

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