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Mr. Carlo Presenti is Head of the Department for National Technical Services, which is part of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The Department for National Technical Services coordinates forecasting, prevention, monitoring and evaluation activities related to geology, hydrology, earthquakes and dams.

He formerly headed the Office for Environment, Land and Public Works of the Legal Affairs Department, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Presenti is a member of several environmental committees (on water, thermal power plants and evaluation of environmental protection and rehabilitation projects) for the Italian government. He previously served as an environmental expert for the Central Division for Economic Affairs for the Confindustria, the Italian Industry Confederation.

Mr. Presenti is a chemical engineer by training.

Technical Services and Research in Emergency Management: the Italian Experience

Reliable technical and scientific information should be the cornerstone upon which emergency management decisions are built. Technicians and scientists provide data which form the rationale for legislation, regulations and planning measures. But technical disaster prevention services may be inefficient, and research may falter, if governments do not take the leadership in defining the proper roles of government, universities and research institutes, private companies, and NGOs.

Prevention and handling of natural disasters requires organizations and structures designed to be operational. I would like to highlight the importance of an efficient structure for technical services, specialized in forecasting and prevention operations

In Italy, technical services (geological, seismic, hydrographic and dams) have existed for years, but the personnel and funding policies concerning them have been completely deficient. Today they cannot adequately face all of their institutional tasks, such as the production of thematic maps and the management of updated information systems and networks.

Italian governments customarily have coped with earthquakes and emergencies and done reconstruction work in areas struck by earthquakes, landslides and floods. Since 1968, it has spent more than US\$ 90 billion on disaster relief and recovery.

Very little, on the contrary, has been done in concrete terms for forecasting and prevention. In 1966, a major flood devastated the city of Florence, including hundreds of priceless Renaissance art treasures. If a major flood were to strike Florence today, the same destruction would occur again.

One of the root causes for this state of affairs — which is closely connected with the theme of this book — is that relations between technical services, research, private companies and NGOs have not been correctly established.

■ Complementary roles

First, it should be clear that technical services and research for disaster prevention and preparedness do different tasks and have different goals. Technical services should be conducted by governments. The role of technical services is to observe, monitor and process information covering the entire country, and to do so in an ongoing and systematic way by using the most advanced, yet tested, methodologies for data collection

The role of research, on the other hand, is to design, develop and test new observation, monitoring and data processing techniques. Unlike those who provide technical services, researchers conduct experiments only in circumscribed portions of a country's territory.

Because of their different roles, researchers and technicians move in different circles.

Because researchers and technical service providers have such different goals and activities, they need different types of organizations and professional expertise. This precludes any exchange of roles.

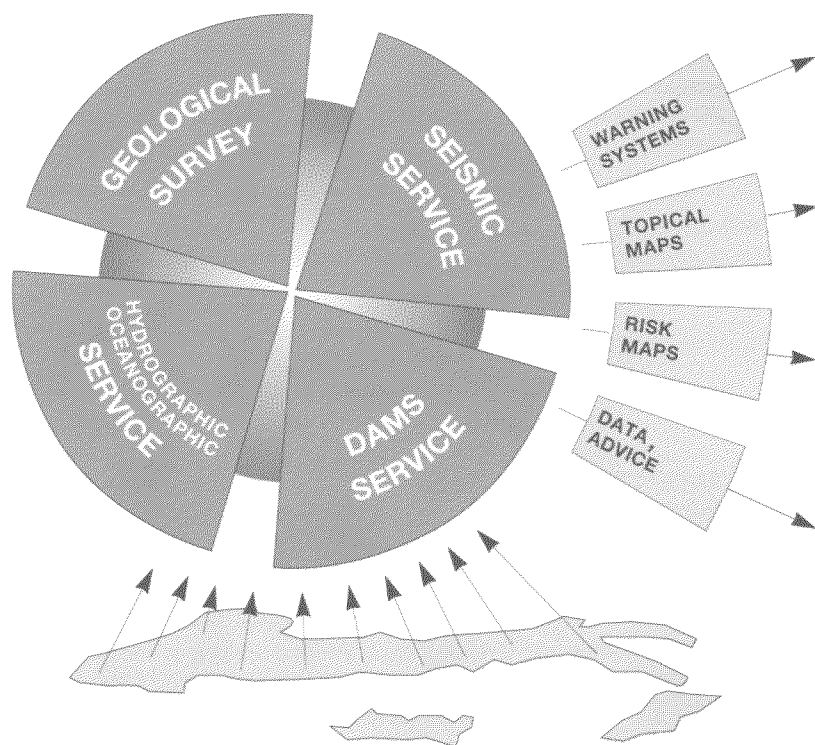
In Italy, however, government has always considered it more opportune - in terms of immediate political returns - to count on a few research institutes and universities to conduct service activities. As a result, researchers have assumed a role in disaster management that is neither cost-efficient nor effective.

Because they are highly educated, researchers receive higher salaries than technical staff in the government, and therefore the services which they perform are more expensive. Yet many of these services are routine and simple (many monitoring and evaluation tasks fall into this category), and do not require the services of highly skilled and educated researchers. In addition, when researchers undertake commitments to perform technical services, they inevitably curtail the time they spend on research.

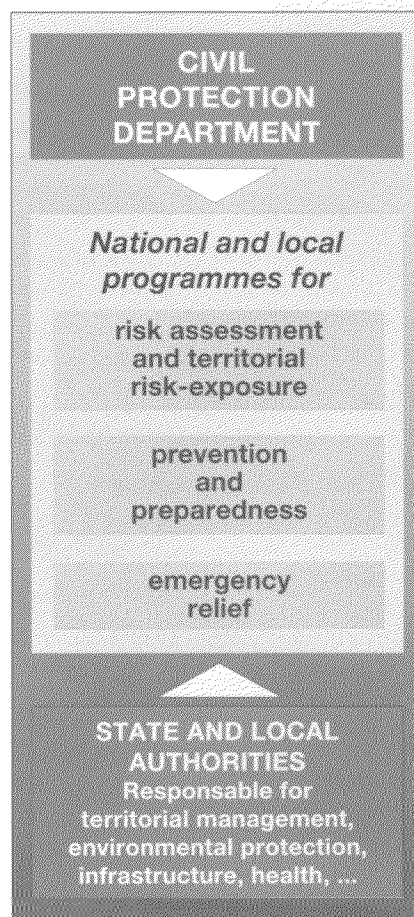
Close cooperation between researchers and technical service providers is vital. Regular exchanges between these

National Technical Services in Italy

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS



One model for organization of technical services for disaster prevention and emergency preparedness.



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