
An Overview of Disaster Management

2nd Edition



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Cover Photograph: Building river defense walls, Chosica, Rimac Valley, Peru.
Photo by Andrew Maskrey

Foreword to the 2nd edition

The informal name for this text has been the “Foundation Module.” The information it includes is regarded as the foundation for much of the UNDP/UNDRO Disaster Management Training Programme (DMTP). This training module describes the components of disaster management and their context within the overall framework of United Nations agencies actively involved in disaster and emergency issues.

This training module has been produced for the UNDP/UNDRO Disaster Management Training Programme by the University of Wisconsin Disaster Management Center. The Technical Operational Partners for the DMTP provided valuable advice on the format and content. The principal sources for the content include the UNDP/UNDRO Disaster Manual and six complementary training modules prepared for the DMTP. Intertect Training Services has edited the material and prepared the educational components.

For those of you familiar with the first edition, you will see many changes in the second edition. It has been significantly reorganized. The chapters which focus on the UN have been moved adjacent to chapters on related topics—instead of being collected together in the former Part 4.

The chapter on Natural Hazards has been condensed. Each hazard type is described in a one-page summary. More extensive coverage is now available in the companion module, *Introduction to Hazards*.

A new chapter on Compound and Complex Emergencies has been added, highlighting this topic as an issue that has recently emerged into our collective consciousness. Many other chapters have been modified or rewritten with new exercises and illustrations added.

Introduction to this training module

Purpose and scope

An *Overview of Disaster Management* is designed to introduce the subject of disaster management to an audience of UN organization professionals who form disaster management teams, as well as to government counterpart agencies, NGOs, and donors. The training is designed to increase the audience's awareness of the nature and management of disasters. This should lead to better performance in disaster preparedness and response. By questioning the "inevitability" of disasters, we hope you can begin to see mitigation of disasters as a component of development, and disasters as opportunities to further development goals.

In this course we take a broad view of disasters. We will not try to separate out problems rooted in environmental degradation as a distinct set of responsibilities. It also includes emergencies which encompass the need to provide assistance to large populations displaced by the forces of civil conflict or other emergencies.

Much of the course's content is based on the UNDP/UNDRO Disaster Manual and follows its principles, procedures, and terminology.

Overall learning objectives

The overall objectives of this training module aim to

- create interest in disaster management
- stimulate motivation
- link the learning to your work activities
- relate the learning to your values and attitudes about disaster management

We hope this will be achieved through your reading of this text and completing the suggested exercises. Specifically, you should be able to do the following:

- describe the relationship among hazard, vulnerability and disasters
- describe the basic concepts, aims, and elements of disaster and emergency management
- describe the range of available preparedness/mitigation measures, consider their appropriateness, opportunities, limitations and modalities of implementation through development activities
- clarify the purpose, function and means of response of the UN agencies involved in the emergency scenario and particularly that of the UN Disaster Management Team.

Q. *Before you go on, write down two or three key reasons why you are studying this course on disaster management.*

A. _____

Compare your reasons
with those of others that
are on the following page



Importance of training for disaster management

Why are disasters and disaster management training of concern to country governments, to the UN and, in particular, to UNDP and UNDRO? How can governments and UNDP justify adding disaster management to their long lists of competing priorities? There are several answers to these questions.



- Governments are increasingly requesting UN agencies to in-country coordinate all UN post-disaster assistance and sometimes all international assistance. Therefore, governments and the UN need better communication about their mutual needs and capabilities.
- Disasters are a growing problem. They will become of increasing concern to governments and an increasing part of the UN's principal activities. In disaster-prone countries UNDP's country programmes are inevitably affected by disasters. Projects are set back or suffer delays as a country recovers from the consequences of a disaster.
- Disasters are non-routine events that require non-routine responses. Government and development agencies in general cannot rely on normal procedures to implement appropriate responses. They need to learn and practice special skills and attitudes.
- Disasters are closely linked with at least four other priorities for which UNDP has accepted either a direct or supportive role: displaced persons, refugees and returnees, women in development, and environmental protection. The issues of all these subjects overlap significantly. A training programme in one will support the professional development of UNDP staff in all.
- UNDRO has an established international mandate in this area. It is to coordinate activities promoting preparedness and mitigation as well as the response to disasters. UNDRO's interests are represented in the field by UNDP. It is incumbent upon both agencies to promote a marked increase of awareness and competence in disasters, and to involve other concerned UN agencies.
- In their role as Resident coordinators, UNDP Res Reps and field office staff need to train with their sister agencies in the procedures of implementing a coordinated and appropriate disaster response.
- The world community takes considerable interest in disasters. Governments and the UN system have high profiles in these events which are observed closely by the media. UN agencies and governments must prove their competence in order to project a positive image of providing appropriate support.

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Training methods

This module is intended for two audiences, the self-study learner and the participant in a training workshop. The following training methods are planned for use in workshops and are simulated in the written module. For the self-study learner the text is as close to a tutor as can be managed in print.

Workshop training methods include

- group discussions
- simulations/role plays
- supplementary handouts
- videos
- review sessions
- self-assessment exercises



You are invited to use this text as a workbook. In addition to note-taking in the margins, you will be given the opportunity to stop and examine your learning along the way through questions included in the text. Write down your answers to these questions before proceeding to ensure that you have captured key points of the text.

This text is divided into four parts. Part One describes what hazards are, why they become disasters, and how they affect development.

Part Two identifies the scope of disaster management, what your role may be in it, and focuses on preparedness aspects.

Part Three accepts that some disasters will occur and examines how to respond to them.

Part Four presents disaster mitigation as a set of activities that reduce the risk and impact of disasters.

This training module is complemented by two short videos, "The UN and disaster response," and "Disaster mitigation: how to lessen the damage through proper development." You would benefit from making arrangements to view these videos and from reviewing the accompanying discussion questions.

