
Disaster Preparedness

1st Edition

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■ INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This training module, *Disaster Preparedness*, is designed to introduce one aspect of disaster management to an audience of UN organization professionals who form disaster management teams, as well as to government counterpart agencies, non-governmental organizations and donors. This module is designed to increase the audience's awareness of the nature and management of disasters, leading to better performance in disaster preparedness and response.

The content has been written by experts in the field of disaster management and in general follows the UNDP/UNDRO Disaster Management Manual and its principles, procedures, and terminology. However, terminology in this field is not standardized and authors from different institutions may use the same terms in slightly different ways.

Scope

The purpose of this module is to introduce you to basic concepts related to disaster preparedness. The first part of the module sets forth various categories to consider in planning for disaster preparedness: from assessing vulnerability to actually rehearsing the plan.

In the second part of the module, you will learn about international collaboration for preparedness with a focus on the UN system. You should come away with a heightened awareness of the roles and limitations of international agencies in coordinating disaster preparedness efforts.

The implementation of disaster preparedness plans is discussed in Part Three of this module: from promoting these plans to considering advice based on common pitfalls related to implementation.

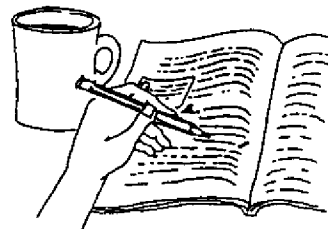
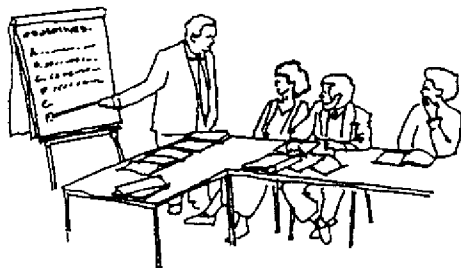
Training methods

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 accompanying “training guide.” 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

The self-study learner is 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 in the text.





OVERVIEW

This module is designed to help you:

- *learn a three-part definition of disaster preparedness*
- *identify nine categories of planning activities for disaster preparedness*
- *compare three UN roles in collaborating for preparedness*
- *understand four ways to avoid problems in implementing disaster preparedness plans*
- *consider fourteen areas of basic information to assess for preparedness*

Overview of the concept

Q. How would you define disaster preparedness?

A. _____



Disaster preparedness involves forecasting and taking precautionary measures prior to an imminent threat when advance warnings are possible. Preparedness planning improves the response to the effects of a disaster by organizing the delivery of timely and effective rescue, relief and assistance.

Preparedness involves the development and regular testing of warning systems (linked to forecasting systems) and plans for evacuation or other measures to be taken during a disaster alert period to minimize potential loss of life and physical damage. It also involves the education and training of officials and the population at risk, the training of intervention teams, and the establishment of policies, standards, organizational arrangements and operational plans to be applied following a disaster. Effective plans also consider securing resources, possibly including stockpiling supplies and earmarking funds. These plans must be supported by enabling legislation.

HAZARD

A rare or extreme event in the natural or human-made environment that adversely affects human life, property or activity to the extent of causing a disaster.

DISASTER

A serious disruption of the functions of a society, causing widespread human, material, or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected society to cope using only its own resources.

ASSISTANCE

The provision on a humanitarian basis of material aid and services necessary to enable people to meet their basic needs for shelter, clothing, water and food. Assistance is available for extended periods.

RELIEF

The provision on a humanitarian basis of material aid and emergency medical care necessary to save human lives. Relief supplies and services are provided in the period immediately following a sudden disaster.

Working definition

Disaster preparedness minimizes the adverse effects of a hazard through effective readiness measures to expedite emergency action, rehabilitation and recovery. It ensures the timely, appropriate and effective delivery of relief and assistance following a disaster.

This is a broad definition of disaster preparedness. Let's analyze some of the points made in this definition.

"minimizes the adverse effects of a hazard"

Long-term risk reduction measures are intended to minimize the adverse effects of a hazard by eliminating the vulnerabilities which hazards would otherwise expose. These measures directly reduce the potential impact of a hazard before it strikes. Disaster preparedness assumes that certain groups of people or property will nevertheless remain vulnerable, and that preparedness will have to address the consequences of a disaster's impact.

"through effective precautionary actions"

This module explains the components of effective precautionary actions and how they should be developed. Too often the end product of disaster preparedness is seen as a static plan to be devised and then filed until it is needed. Disaster preparedness must be seen as an active, on-going process. Preparedness plans are dynamic ventures, which should be reviewed, modified, updated and tested on a regular basis.

Some analysts distinguish between "active" and "passive" disaster preparedness measures. Passive aspects of disaster preparedness include the preparation of disaster manuals, stockpiling of relief goods and the development of computer lists of resources and personnel. "Active" disaster preparedness would include developing comprehensive response plans, monitoring hazard threats, training emergency personnel, and training members of the communities at risk.

"to ensure timely, appropriate and effective organization and delivery of relief"

Disaster management involves the response to or anticipation of a hazardous event. Disaster mitigation includes both disaster preparedness and prevention. One of the most difficult aspects of disaster management is that of timing. Timing is also critical to disaster preparedness. Speed and timeliness are often treated synonymously, causing serious problems in the relationship between relief inputs and their effects. There are certain basic needs in some types of disasters, such as shelter and clothing, that may be required immediately. In terms of alleviating immediate distress, speed will be essential. However, there are other forms of relief that, under certain circumstances, may be disruptive unless delayed. There is the obvious example of food. Rushing in excessive amounts of food aid before a clear assessment of local market conditions and agricultural prospects are known can create dependency and undermine local economies. Timeliness, not speed, should be the preparedness criterion.

ANSWER (from page 5)

Compare your answer with paragraph 1 under "Working Definition"

Appropriate assistance requires careful scrutiny. The list of inappropriate relief items that find their way to disaster affected communities is all too long. The issue goes beyond the standard stories of canned ham sent to non-pork eating communities and spiked-heeled women's shoes sent to flooded regions.

There is an important and natural link between disaster preparedness, recovery and rehabilitation. You must consider whether the provision of appropriate relief and assistance is designed merely to ensure the immediate survival of affected communities or to pave the way for recovery. Not only is the question essential to determine the boundaries of disaster preparedness itself, but it becomes a practical determinant in the type of measures and resources you commit to the implementation of a disaster preparedness plan.

You ignore the linkage between disaster preparedness and recovery and rehabilitation at your peril, or at the peril of the affected community. Effective disaster preparedness planning should incorporate readiness for self-reliant action that will be needed for communities not only to survive but to recover

The effective organization and delivery of the disaster response suggest obvious criteria for disaster preparedness. Systematic planning, well executed distribution of relief, clear cut roles and responsibilities are all subjects that will be treated in this module. Now let's put the concepts of "effective" and "delivery" into context. Inevitably, disaster situations create conditions of chaos. The best laid plans can reduce, but not eliminate, that chaos. Effectiveness is relative. Preparedness plans should seek to anticipate the sources of chaos and should tell us what to do when plans go awry. The criterion of effectiveness becomes particularly important in the context of distribution. The key here is that effectiveness is measured in terms of the ability to deliver needed relief to those in need. Often in emergency situations, food and non-food relief arrives at the scene of a disaster without a pre-established structure to ensure that those in greatest need are the immediate beneficiaries. The most important test of effectiveness is that those in need receive adequate relief and assistance.

Effective disaster preparedness planning should incorporate the types of relief and assistance inputs that will be needed for communities not only to survive but to recover.

NOTES

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.