

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR IMPROVED STANDARDS OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT

THE BACKGROUND

An extended programme of research by the Cranfield Disaster Preparedness Centre, Cranfield Institute of Technology, England, examined the role and responsibilities of the administration, public services, police, the military, voluntary agencies and the people themselves, in disaster-prone developing countries for disaster preparedness.

Useful material on which to base such research is difficult to acquire because affected countries' reports of difficulties and failures are not published, those of the United Nations organizations necessarily tend towards blandness and are not critical of the performance of the internal and external organizations and agencies involved. Newspaper reports are frequently highly coloured, often inaccurate and seek the sensational at the expense of being objective. Much personal experience is either untraceable or that which is available is very local, subjective, defensive or lacks depth. There is a great deal of published material relating to experience in that most disaster-prone country the USA, but because of vast differences in available resources social and political structures, infrastructure and organization, this does not relate to circumstances in the disaster-prone developing countries many of which are among the poorest.

The research project was therefore privileged and drew great advantage from its access to UK Foreign Office files containing ambassadors' post-disaster reports and assessments, from private OXFAM material and from a close association over a period of many years with a great number of research fellows who were all senior and experienced public servants from developing countries, such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Sudan, all prone to a variety of disasters.

Through case studies, the research examined many disaster situations arising from earthquake, cyclone, flood and drought, in all continents, but during the comparatively short period 1968-85. This concentration in time permitted an assumption that the different national administrations were at similar standards of development and thus that their capabilities bore comparison with one another.

The principal conclusions of this research programme were that:-

- ◆ In the catastrophic disaster (earthquake, cyclone or flood), although the physical event causes destruction and death much of the subsequent distress arises from administrative breakdown under load or because of poor planning.
- ◆ In the slow-onset disaster, seen in famine, environmental degradation and disease, the natural event of drought is merely the catalyst which creates disaster from previous failures in development planning, farming practice, public health or environmental management.
- ◆ Failure to plan the employment and deployment of indigenous human and material resources in disaster is common-place, exacerbates distress and delays rescue and relief.
- ◆ Pre-disaster analysis and planning, leading to effective states of disaster preparedness and mitigation is the most efficient and cost effective way to minimize distress and speed relief.