

Training as a Tool for Disaster Reduction

Something to Build on

by Kent Westgate & Michael Svanthner*

Since its creation in 1990, the UN Disaster Management Training Programme (DMTP), jointly managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), has become a system-wide training and capacity-building tool addressing in a comprehensive manner disaster and emergency management demands. DMTP fo-

cuses on preparedness, mitigation and response to emergencies and natural disasters.

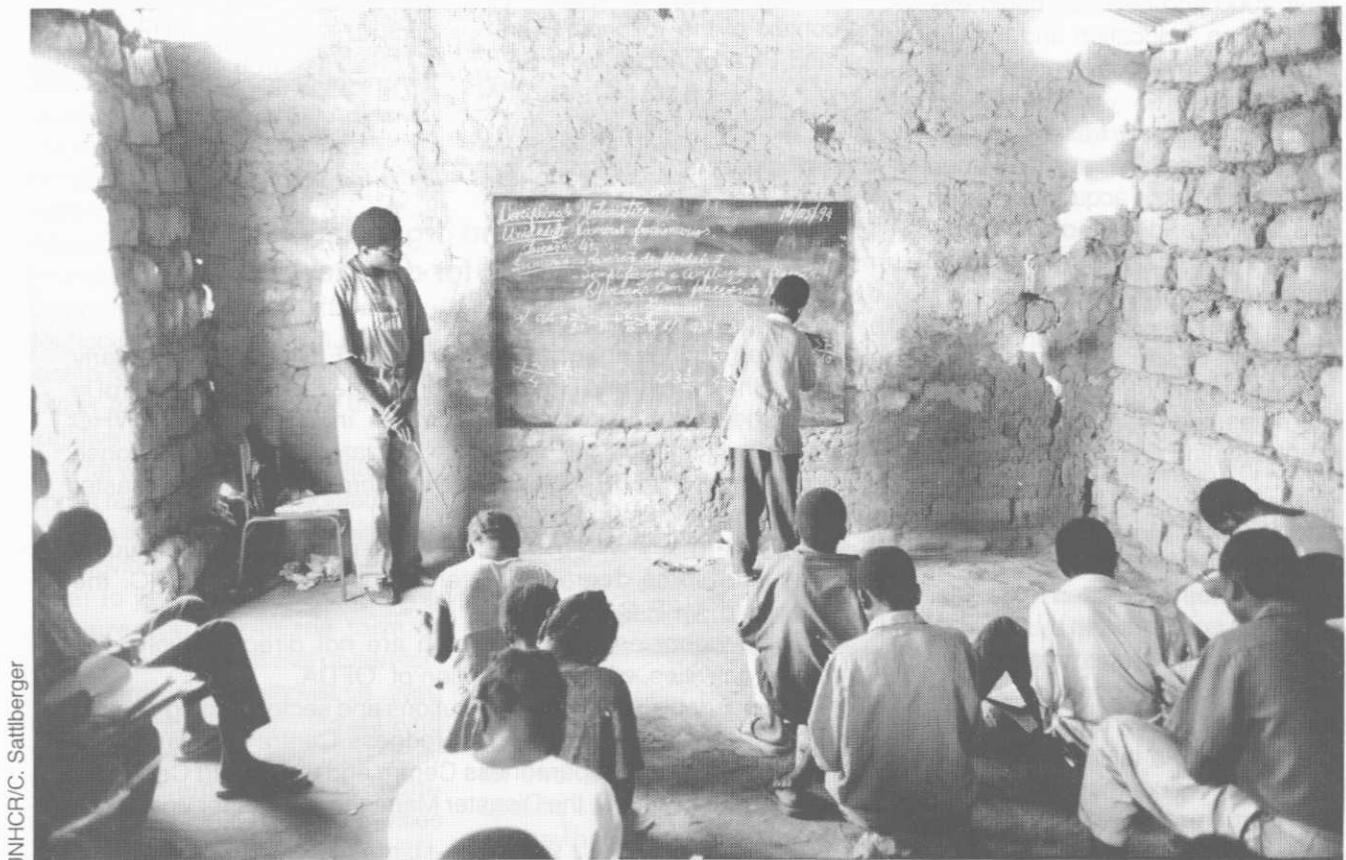
Several projects to improve disaster management at country/regional levels were launched following DMTP workshops. These include, *inter alia*:

Azerbaijan: a project aimed at reinforcing the Working Group for Humanitarian Organizations - which is the government structure dealing

with the management and coordination of humanitarian assistance to refugees, internally displaced (IDPs) and other vulnerable groups - was established following the DMTP country workshop held in June 1995.

Chile: a disaster mitigation project amounting to US \$276,000 was approved by UNDP.

Iran: support to strengthen the National Disaster Plan was provided



UNHCR/C. Sattlberger

No real training can happen without education programmes

through a US \$250,000 project.

Uganda: as a direct follow-up to the Uganda National Workshop held in February 1994, a Project Development of Disaster Management Initiatives has been prepared under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (US \$5,377,000).

The Yokohama strategy

The "Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World" which resulted from the discussions held at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction in May 1994, indicates that:

"Education and training programmes and facilities have not been sufficiently developed with a focus on ways and means to reduce disasters. Also, the potential of the media, industry, scientific community and the private sector has not been sufficiently mobilized."

In this respect, strategy for the year 2000 and beyond should emphasize on "education and training in disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation"

Little systematic training exists in disaster mitigation/prevention apart from specific skills acquisition as part of scientific and technological education and training (earthquake and flood engineering, for example). There is certainly little training available on issues such as the strategic management of mitigation programmes and their role in development planning and programming

Focusing on developing countries

Much training related to disaster reduction is undertaken by individual organizations and agencies and concerns their own corporate needs and functions. It is likely that much of this training is either inapplicable or unavailable to audiences outside of these organizations and agencies.

A major gap in training is at the national level within governments. Very few countries have insti-

tutionalised training available to their civil servants as part of an ongoing process of planning and programming for disaster reduction. At this level, training tends to relate to recent disasters which people still remember and to the resources that are available as part of the response to these recent disasters. Training of this kind is not sustainable.

Disaster reduction refers to actions taken to reduce the potential impact of disasters, either by affecting the "hazards" that act as triggers (earthquakes, floods, etc), or by affecting the vulnerability of populations on the ground who interact with these hazards to produce disasters of different magnitudes. Such actions are usually in the form of preparedness or mitigation/prevention. The capacity and resources of populations to minimise their risk and vulnerability to disasters are, to a large extent, created or promoted through development strategies and programmes.

Training for disaster reduction in the context of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer

World should focus on the needs of developing countries; the strengthening of national capacities and capabilities, including the mobilization of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the participation of local communities; the promotion and strengthening of sub-regional, regional and international cooperation in training for disaster reduction.

Training and research

Research is the lifeblood of effective training for disaster reduction. There is therefore a priority to define a research agenda among a range of disciplines and for different disaster types and geographical areas which focuses on major gaps in knowledge and understanding. Because of the practical requirement in disaster reduction programmes of saving lives and limiting destruction and disruption, it is important that strong links are developed between those individuals and institutions concentrating on research and those involved in teaching and training

The research agenda should

Agencies and organizations involved in training for disaster reduction

United Nations agencies [WMO, UNICEF, UNITAR (particularly among the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) member countries in West Africa), WHO (particularly through its Emergency Preparedness and Response Programme), UNHCR, UNDP and DHA (through the global Disaster Management Training Programme), etc.]

■ NGOs - many with their own in-house training, but including those with some degree of external focus such as ICRC, the Federation, MSF, CARE.

■ Donor agencies, most of whom are not directly involved in training activities, with the exception of OFDA.

■ Independent institutions - Institutions and sector training centres such as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (Thailand), the Cranfield Disaster Preparedness Centre and the Oxford Centre for Disaster Studies (UK), the Disaster Management Center Wisconsin (USA)

■ The private sector.

include the gathering, synthesis and dissemination of information and should concentrate on the development of case studies adaptable for training purposes and for exercises within training.

Public information

There is a strong link between training for disaster reduction, both formal and non-formal, the distillation of knowledge and information from research into training, and the needs of the general public in the form of public information and education. Training for disaster reduction should reinforce what people already know. Finding mechanisms to ensure that the content of public awareness and education programmes is able to find its way into the development of training for disaster reduction is also an important requirement.

Audiences and their various needs

The potential audiences for training for disaster reduction are varied. Ultimately, disaster management and disaster reduction are the responsibility of everyone. Different audiences are interdependent but have different needs. There are sectoral differences (health, water, civil engineering, etc.), different foci (governments, NGOs, etc.) and different levels (local, national, etc.). It is important to remember that training for disaster reduction is not just the prerogative of one audience.

The wide range of potential audiences requires that consideration be given to the way training is delivered. It is obvious that the needs are too great to perceive of training being delivered largely in the form of courses, be these formal or non-formal. Consideration should be given to the potential for distance learning and for on-the-job training particularly in the implementation of multi-sectoral and multi-agency activities which allows for personnel from different sectors or different agencies to train together.



UNHCRM. Vanappelghem

...Training should reinforce what people already know ...

Private sector's involvement

The private sector should be considered as an important player in training for disaster reduction. The private sector is already involved in scientific and technical research and development and its own objectives can be most successfully met within stable political, social and economic environments which can be severely disrupted by disasters. Thus staff in the private sector can be seen as recipients of training and education in disaster reduction. However, they can also be viewed as the providers of training inputs resulting from their own scientific and technical focus or because of the attempts they have made to protect their investments. Although a wide range of private sector involvement can be envisaged, specific elements of the private sector may have a more obvious contribution, either because of the systems they have developed to cope with a

high vulnerability, or because they stand to lose significantly in a disaster, for example the insurance industry.

Delivering the message

Consideration needs to be given to ensuring that, as far as possible, everyone is talking the same language. This relates to scientific and technical terminology as much as it does to disaster management terminology which is particularly confusing. Although it is always difficult to get a complete consensus, it is important to ensure that at least within specific national/regional programmes, there is consistency.

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Speeding Up the Delivery of Aid

Customs Facilitation and Emergency Assistance

by Dimitri Balabanov*

The increase in natural or other sudden onset disasters has highlighted the need to improve the efficiency of the international community's contributions to humanitarian operations. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), in close cooperation with United Nations agencies and the international community, has initiated several activities aimed at improving some key disaster response tools. One of these initiatives is to ensure application of simplified customs procedures in order to speed up the delivery of international humanitarian assistance, including military, civil defence and civil protection assets.

A study conducted by DHA showed that several international instruments, one recommendation and three conventions elaborated by the World Customs Organization, contained recommended facilitation measures to simplify and streamline customs clearance of humanitarian consignments. If fully applied, these measures would contribute considerably to the prompt delivery of humanitarian assistance.

However, an international convention is legally binding only if a government formally accepts it. The study showed that a limited number of countries had acceded to the conventions and/or annexes relating to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and that even fewer countries had translated these recommendations into provisions in their national legislation. Given the exceptional character of the circumstances in which humanitarian assistance is required from and/or through the United Nations, a new approach had to be developed.

Following the recommendations of the 1993 Workshop on Emergency

Stockpiles, the *First Meeting of the Standing Coordinating Group of the Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA)* Project, DHA initiated the development of a Model Agreement between the United Nations and a

State/Government of a Member Country concerning measures to expedite the import, export and transit of relief consignments and possessions of relief personnel in the event of disasters and emergencies (Model

The Model Customs Facilitation Agreement is intended to serve as a basis for the development of practical working tools on a bilateral, United Nations country level. It has several specific features that make it extremely suited for that purpose, in particular:

- **The agreement aims at speeding up and simplifying of existing national customs clearance procedures, and not at their abolishment;**
- **The agreement includes a confidence-building measure in the form of United Nations certification of all non-United Nations participants in a particular United Nations-led humanitarian emergency assistance operation;**
- **Full compliance with national regulations is required from all participants in any United Nations-led humanitarian emergency assistance operation;**
- **The agreement covers all United Nations-led humanitarian emergency assistance operations and is to be automatically applied by all national customs offices at border-crossing points.**

Recommended measures, included in the Model Customs Facilitation Agreement, are to be applied to the import, export and transit of relief consignments and possessions of relief personnel in the event of disasters and emergencies:

General measures

- Arrangements for clearance outside official working hours and designated places;
- Non-imposition of charges for customs attendance;
- Permission for an advance submission of documents;
- Application of simplified documents and inspection procedures;
- Waiving any economic restrictions, duties and taxes.

Specific measures at exportation

- Expeditious examination of goods against a summary declaration;
- Placement of relief consignments under customs seals to avoid delays at later stages of their journey;
- Clearance of relief consignments in advance of the need for actual export and their placement in a customs warehouse.

Specific measures at transit

- Permission to disassemble/reassemble relief consignments for onward carriage without examination;
- Facilitation of movement of consignments in customs transit.

Specific measures at importation

- Temporary admission with conditional relief from import duties and taxes;
- Expeditious examination on a sampling or selective basis,
- Release upon presentation of a provisional entry document subject to complete fulfilment of customs and other requirements within a specified time limit.

The agreement would apply, in particular, to United Nations delegates, experts on mission for the United Nations, to emergency response personnel to assist refugees and internally displaced persons, to international search and rescue teams, medical teams, specialized teams provided by foreign military, civil defence and civil protection organizations (MCDA teams), to governmental service packages requested by United Nations, and to United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams

On 13 December 1996, the Model Customs Facilitation Agreement document was presented at the Joint Meeting of the MCDA Standing Coordinating Group and the MCDU Advisory Panel and at a meeting organized by DHA in cooperation with WCO for the permanent missions to the United Nations Office at Geneva. Participants were requested to give the document to the authorities concerned in their respective countries in order to reach bilateral agreements. It is expected that actual negotiations with the countries will start in the early spring and continue through the rest of 1997-1998.

Customs Facilitation Agreement)

In May 1994 the World Customs Organization (WCO), until October 1994 – Customs Cooperation Council (CCC) – considered and approved the proposal to cooperate with DHA in the area of facilitation of delivery of international humanitarian assistance to disaster-affected areas and included the development of a Model Customs Facilitation Agreement in its work programme.

During 1994-1995, DHA and WCO conducted extensive work on the text of a draft Model Customs Facilitation Agreement in regular consultations with the interested United Nations agencies, international and national relief organizations and the national customs authorities in the countries which are members of WCO

The resulting document, which took into account the recommenda-

tions of the 1994 Meeting on Emergency Stockpiles and the 1994 Oslo International Conference on the Use of MCDA in disaster relief operations, was approved by the Permanent Technical Committee of WCO at its session in April 1996.

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