

# SOME CONSIDERATIONS IN PLANNING FOR AND MANAGING COMMUNITY RECOVERY FOLLOWING DISASTER

Kerry Gartland

## What is a Disaster

Understanding of what constitutes a disaster has altered over time in accordance with changing notions of cause and effects. The "Black Death" which swept Europe was then regarded as inevitable, with some religious groups describing it as "An Act of God". Perception of disaster has moved from an emphasis on the physical effects of an event, such as cyclone, fire or chemical explosion, to a perception that the extent of deleterious effects is predominately a social issue.

## A Sociological View

"Sociologically, a disaster is an event, located in time and space, that produces conditions whereby the continuity of the structure and processes of social units becomes problematic. Disaster agents may differ as to their cause, frequency, controllability, speed and onset, length of forewarning, duration, scope of impact and destructive potential" (Dynes, 1975)<sup>1</sup>.

This sociological definition reflects two fundamental characteristics of disasters

– They are social phenomena rather than physical events e.g. a cyclone sweeping an uninhabited coastline is not a disaster.

– while the physical event may cause social disruption, it will not cause social disintegration.

The logical consequences of this view are that individuals and groups will continue to function in approximately the same way they functioned prior to the disaster, albeit with some distortions and exaggerations at times. This positive view of social processes has significant planning and management implications, for preparedness, mitigation and recovery activities. If those affected are assumed to be resilient and likely to take affirmative action to cope with the situation, then the personnel, support services and material assistance provided needs to take this into account.<sup>2</sup>

## Community Recovery from Disaster

Recovery from disaster is a complex, dynamic and extended social process

which is comprised of a matrix of individual, collective and organizational responses. These reactions will be influenced by a number of variables including cultural expectations, values and traditions, past experience, resources, both physical and personal, and degree of social cohesion.

While each disaster has unique features, there are many similarities in individual and group behaviour that provide a basis for proposing general principles.

## Recovery Management

The hard-learned experiences of emergencies in recent years, changes in government priorities and community expectations are increasing awareness that recovery is an area of management in its own right, best managed at the local level, with the involvement and participation of the affected community.

Recovery management which is based on developmental processes, stimulates self-reliance and activity elicits participation. The community system has to define tasks and objectives and then develop an organisational superstructure to achieve these objectives<sup>3</sup>.

## Program Implications

It may be essential for program development that one organisation is given co-ordinative responsibility for recovery activities, where particular expertise is required and to ensure that individual efforts are complimentary. However, community recovery requires collective and collaborative effort. Boundaries and mechanisms for co-operative work must be clearly defined in the planning process to avoid role conflict between involved agencies. Program development which is based on consultative and participative processes within a disaster-affected community will ensure that organisational and community goals are compatible.

Recovery management to strengthen the coping capacity of individuals and the community, so that they achieve an appropriate level of functioning and self-

determination. In order to achieve this goal, recovery management needs to be flexible, able to assess and respond to locally-based and organizational pressures, utilize existing networks and structures and adapt to changing needs and demands. Styles of leadership and management and provision of specific services need to reflect developmental stages within the community.

## Planning Considerations

1. An effective disaster recovery system requires a collaborative effort from a multiplicity of organisations, each with specific responsibilities, and in support of the work and responsibilities of the others.
2. Following disaster, new challenges and problems requiring some modification of structures and routines will be created for each organisation involved.<sup>4</sup>

## Principles Underlying Disaster Recovery Management

In line with principles of social justice, recovery management is based on a commitment to

1. **Equity** – the availability of a range of support and developmental services to all people in a disaster-affected area, regardless of socio-economic circumstances,
2. **Access** – adequate and appropriate disaster recovery services located as close as possible to where people need them. Access to accurate, relevant information, which is widely disseminated within the community.
3. **Participation** – an opportunity for everyone to be involved in the planning, development and management of services for the community.
4. **Integration of Services** – various but inter-related needs of people can be met by one service or cluster of services, without them having to travel to different locations<sup>5</sup>.



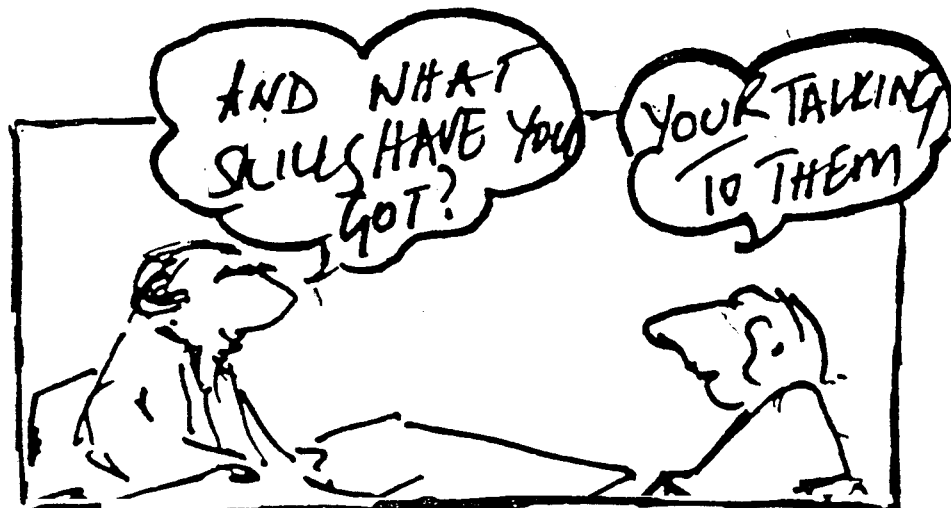
Appropriate planning processes can create opportunities for knowledge of personnel and the responsibilities of involved organizations to be disseminated throughout a community. They can ensure the integration of groups, networks and individuals within the planning system, and incorporate local structures and resources.

### Concluding Comments

Disaster and its aftermath affects the entire social and organisational fabric of the area of impact and of the wider community. If care is taken that:

- the potential effects of disaster on people and communities are acknowledged and integrated into planning and management processes.
- the disaster-affected community participates in setting directions for appropriate recovery activities.
- skills, competencies and capacities of workers and organisations are supported and strengthened so that an effective response can be made, which is of relevance and benefit to the affected community

Then effective recovery may be achieved.



### References

1. R.R. Dynes, and adapted from statement by E.L. Quarantelli, "Helping Behavior on Large Scale Disasters", Participation in Social and Political Activities (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1980) page 340.
2. *Disaster Prevention and Mitigation*. A compendium of current knowledge. Vol. 12. Social and Sociological Aspects

(UNDR0 New York, 1986) page 9.

3. B. Raphael. "When Disaster Strikes" (Hutchinson? London, 1986) page 302.
4. "Disaster Prevention and Mitigation". A compendium of current knowledge. Vol.12. Social and Sociological Aspects (UNDR0 New York, 1986) page 9.
5. Annual Report of the Department of Community Services, Victoria. 30th June, 1986. page 5.

Major disasters between January 1986 - January 1987 compiled by the Insurance Council of Australia.

Date	Event	Insurance Loss	
		Original Dollars	Jan. 1987 \$
January 1986	Tropical Cyclone 'Hector', Wyndham, WA	Damage under \$2m	
January 1986	Hailstorm, Orange and Districts, NSW	\$8m damage	\$8.5m
January 1986	Floods, Fitzroy Crossing, WA	Damage under \$2m	
January 1986	Tropical Cyclone 'Vernon', Qld. Coast	No damage	
January 1986	Tropical Cyclone 'Winifred', Qld Coast between Cairns and Ingham	\$40m damage	\$42.7m
February 1986	Storm, Melbourne suburbs, Vic.	Minor damage	
February 1986	Bushfires, Vic.	Minor damage	
February 1986	Tropical Cyclone 'Rhonda', WA Coast	No damage	
February 1986	Tropical Cyclone 'Selwyn', WA Coast	No damage	
February 1986	Tropical Cyclone 'Tiffany', WA Coast	No damage	
February 1986	Tropical Cyclone 'Victor', WA Coast	No damage	
March 1986	Tropical Cyclone 'Alfred', Qld Coast	No damage	
March 1986	Mini Tornado, Brisbane, Southern Suburbs	\$5m damage	\$5.3m
March 1986	Bushfires, ACT and NSW	Below \$2m	
May 1986	Hailstorm, Murray Bridge etc., SA	Minor damage	
May 1986	Storm, Perth and suburbs, WA	Below \$2m	
May 1986	Floods, North and North-east Tasmania	Minor damage	
August 1986	Storms and flooding, Sydney, NSW	\$100m damage	\$100m
September 1986	Bushfires, Noosa Heads, Qld	Minor damage	
October 1986	Hailstorms, West suburbs, Sydney, NSW	\$80m	\$80m
October 1986	Storm, South-east, Bribie Island, Qld	Below \$2m	
November 1986	Man-made bomb, South Yarra, Vic.	Below \$2m	
November 1986	Hailstorm, Brisbane, Qld	Minor damage	
December 1986	Tornado, Coober Pedy	Minor damage	
December 1986	Storm, Suburbs, SA	\$10m damage	\$10m
December 1986	Storm, Biggenden, Qld	Below \$2m	
December 1986	Hailstorm, Darling Downs	Damage to crops	