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## Disaster and Vulnerability from people's perspective

### Introduction

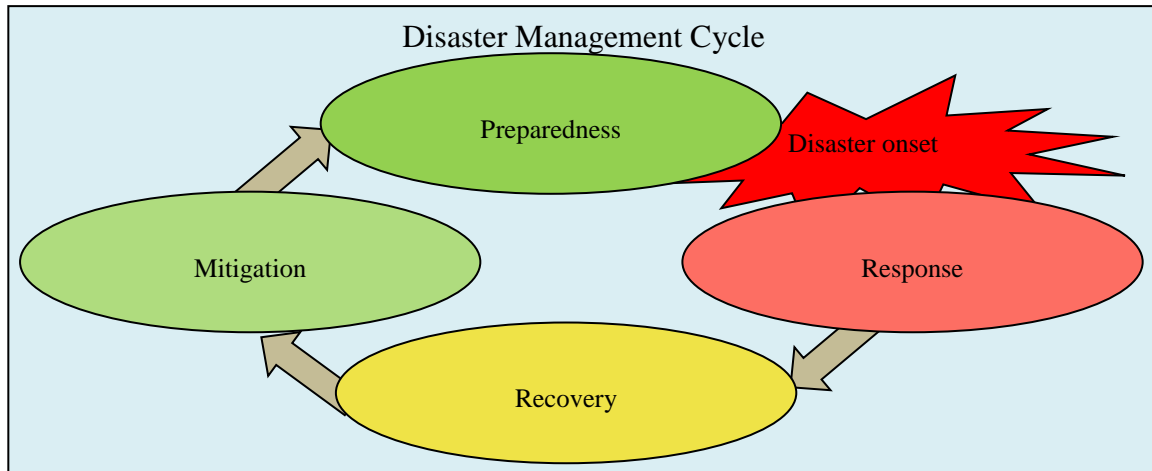
Disaster is commonly perceived as an event such cyclone, storm surge, flood, land slide or earthquake that causes great damage to and loss of life and property. The damage caused by these events is often huge and varies with the intensity of the event, geographical location and the socio-economic structure of the community. Disaster management professionals define it as the consequence of such events. The ISDR Secretariat presents the basic definition of disaster "A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources."

The definition underpins the need for response and bringing in external assistance to help the affected community return to normal functioning. The main purpose of disaster management therefore is to initiate and complete response and recovery intervention speedily and effectively. It requires taking a range administrative decisions and operational activities that involve mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation. Generally, the approaches to disaster management are based on the notion that disasters are temporary interruptions to development process. Job of humanitarian managers is to take action quickly and return to the normal course of development. There are different models to explain the activities and priorities during different stages of disaster.

### Disaster Management Cycle

This model illustrates the ongoing process through which the disaster management professionals plan their interventions during the various stages a disaster. Broadly, the activities include preparedness, *response*, *recovery* and *mitigation*. Preparedness is developing knowledge and capacities to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from, the impacts of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions. Response refers to "provision of emergency services and public assistance during or immediately after a disaster in order to save lives, reduce health impacts,

ensure public safety and meet the basic subsistence needs of the people affected. Recovery is “restoration, and improvement where appropriate, of facilities, livelihoods and living conditions of disaster-affected communities, including efforts

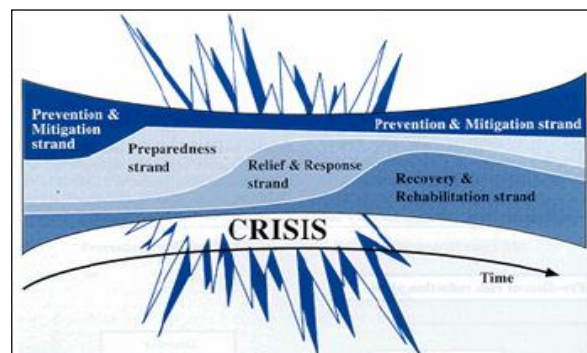


to reduce disaster risk factors.” Mitigation includes activities for “lessening or limitation of the adverse impacts of hazards and related disasters”.

There are many versions of this model – each presents a different level of details of the process or the activities. Essentially, they indicate that the different phases of disaster are linked sequentially over a period of time; and suggest a set of management priorities for each of the phases. Appropriate actions at all points in the cycle lead to greater preparedness, better warnings, reduced vulnerability or the prevention of disasters during the next iteration of the cycle.

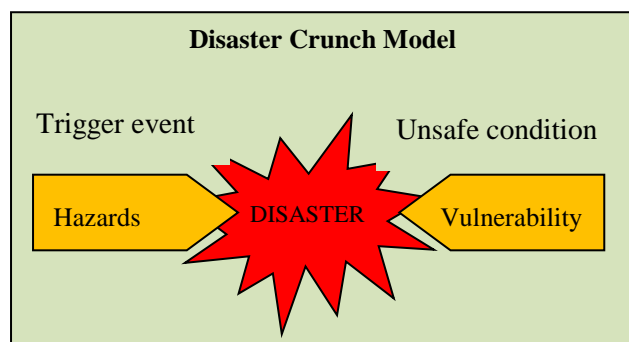
### Expand- Contract Model

Different elements of disaster management do not fit together neatly or in exact sequence in the way shown in disaster management cycle. Disaster management requires continuous process that includes parallel series of activities rather than a sequence of actions. This model illustrates the relative importance of different activities and their priorities in different phases of a disaster.



### Disaster Crunch Model

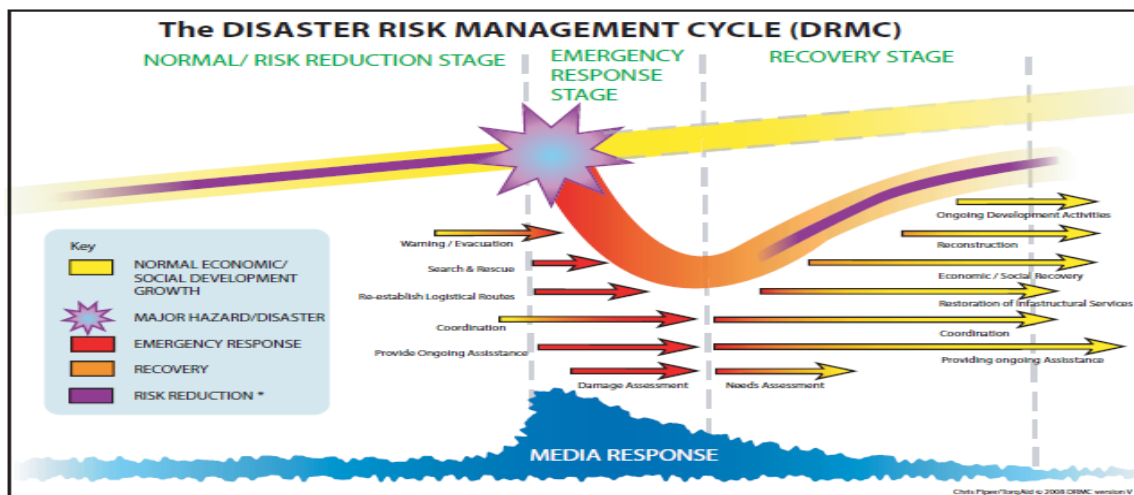
ISDR definition explains disaster as a function of the risk process. It results from the combination of hazards, conditions of vulnerability and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce the potential negative consequences of risk. This model



explains that it triggers disaster when hazard affects vulnerable people. Numbers of factors influence vulnerability to disaster - e.g. socio-economic and political processes, poverty and livelihood opportunities. The *progression of vulnerability* (Blaikie, Wisner et al, 1994) provides an explanation for the interrelationships between different elements that cause vulnerability.

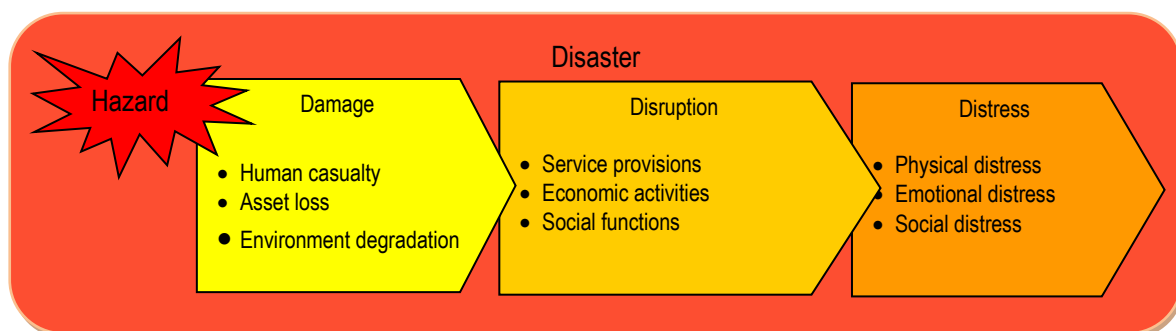
## Disaster Risk Management Cycle

Disaster risk reduction is “conceptual framework of elements considered with the possibilities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development”. It is based on the current understanding that the risks are inherent within social systems and that the risk reduction is an integral part of sustainable development. Therefore, elements of risk reduction are integrated into the mainstream development interventions. Disaster response is essentially managing the residual risks; and the preparedness, response and recovery interventions include risk reduction elements.



## Damage-Disruption-Distress

Disaster affected communities however are less interested about roles and priorities of disaster management during different phases of the disaster. They are concerned about distresses resulting from damage and disruption caused by the hazard.



## **Damage to Life, Asset and Environment**

Disaster manifest firstly through damage and destruction. Depending on their natures, scales and intensities, hazards cause damage to:

- Life - hazard such as cyclone may kill and injure many people; also, people may die during slow onset disaster - e.g. drought, due to malnutrition.
- Asset - cyclone or flood destroy assets and properties such as equipment, crops, livestock, houses, roads, bridges, water and sanitation structure and other infrastructure.
- Environment - damage results form of landslide, loss of land due to riverbank erosion), siltation and sedimentation of riverbeds, increased salinity of surface and ground water, water logging, disappearance of water bodies, deforestation and chemical contamination of water.

## **Disruption of Services, Economic Activities and Social Function**

Damages and destructions caused by the hazards lead to disruption of:

- Service provisions - for example, health care services, water and sanitation facilities, schools, power supply and communication may stop operating;
- Economic activities - for example, plantation and other agriculture work, industries and factories and market cease to function;
- Social function - for example, recreational activities, festival, ceremonies and social network become suspended.

## **Distresses of Affected Community**

Damage and disruption expose people to disorder and shock, reduce livelihood opportunities and severely diminish ability of affected people to meet their basic needs. They experience deprivation and suffer from distress which could be any combination of the followings:

- Physical distress -absence of services hinder meeting basic needs and people suffer from hunger, illness, thirst, filthiness, hypothermia and heat-stroke;
- Emotional distress - exposure to violent event, displacement and resulting increase in the vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and physical harms may cause trauma, fear, anxiety and apprehension;
- Social distress - loss of assets and incomes and reduction in employment opportunities may lead to paucity and impoverishment, disgrace and relief dependency.

## Affected People's Response to Crisis

Affected people concern more about survival, reducing distress and recovery. Threat or crisis triggers their response; and it could be by choice or by lack of it, as well strategic or reactive. Generally, their responses fall under the following broad categories.

a. **Austerity** - manage situation with resources available to households, e.g.

- Eat less - families reduce food consumption to stretch it over a longer period; this often means that children and women get disproportionately smaller quantity of food.
- Work more - family members - including children - take up additional work to compensate for the losses and repair of houses.
- Budget cutting - families stop spending on certain things - usually, education, clothing and health; it adversely affects children and women, in particular.

b. **Forfeiture** - make sacrifices to ensure survival, e.g.

- Accept low wage - to meet their immediate needs families sell labour at very low wage rates.
- Advance sale of labour - borrow money on condition that the repayment will be through labour - usually, they get poor wage rates.
- Child labour - to increase families' incomes or reduce pressure on the family budget they may send their children to work.
- Sell assets - to raise fund families sell chickens, ducks, goat, cows, trees, ornaments, utensil, agriculture equipment and even land.
- Migration - families may send some of their respective members to towns/cities for better employment prospect; more often it increases vulnerabilities of the remaining members - usually children and women.

c. **Requital** - seek to recover losses through additional efforts and inputs, e.g.

- Borrowing - families seek loans (cash or kinds) from relatives, friends, non-governmental agencies, and commercial institutions as well as from local moneylenders; the latter sometimes perpetuate poverty.
- Relief seeking - families seek relief from government and nongovernmental agencies.
- Pilfering - in dire situation affected household may sought to steal or collect resource through unlawful ways.