



## Why Church needs disaster response



### Churches and Disaster Preparedness: Are They Prepared?

Recent events emphasize the importance of disaster preparedness in Churches.

Below are practical steps the churches and communities can take to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

### Why do churches need disaster risk reduction?

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) aims to reduce the damage caused by natural catastrophes like earthquake, flood, drought, mudslide, tsunami and cyclones. A disaster's severity depends on how much of an impact it had on society and the environment when it hits. The scale of the impact depends on the choices we make for our lives and for our environment, how we grow our food, where and how we build our homes, what kind of government we have, how our financial system works, and even what we teach in our schools. Each decision and action we make either makes us more vulnerable or more resilient to disasters.

When disasters happen, the church is often the first place where people run to for emotional and physical support. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that churches are equipped well enough to create awareness in disaster prevention and to support the communities in rebuilding livelihoods after the disaster. Disaster risk management is best achieved when local churches and their communities work together with specialized NGOs and relief agencies to minimize their vulnerability.

DRR and Disaster management are not usually taught in seminaries or Bible colleges, yet the congregation will instinctively look up to their spiritual leaders, as well as local government bodies for help and direction. It is important that we provide the knowledge and skills that church leaders may need to respond to these requirements.

However, we identified the reason churches struggle to respond to disaster situations, they lack the basic training on this subject matter and not being proactive in keeping the church ready in the event of a disaster and the subsequent influx of displaced people coming into their church buildings along with financial and logistical commitments.

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*Then they also will answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?" Then he will answer them, saying, Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*  
(Matt. 25:44-46)

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**Practical steps**

Many natural disasters cannot be prevented. However, it is possible to take practical steps before hand to reduce the potential impact on the community and to reduce damage. This is known as resilience, risk reduction and mitigation. Church usually has significant resources which can be used in time of disaster: their buildings, their compound, and the resources of their members.

They also have a committed group of people who are motivated by compassion and can be mobilized to respond to a crisis. The church often has strong sub-groups who can be used to raise awareness on disaster risks and can bring communities together to make plans in reducing these risks.

**Mitigation measures used**



- Building flood protection dams.
- Better drainage system for the water to subside quickly.
- Planting trees on steep slopes to reduce rainwater run-off.
- Planting trees and mangroves in coastal areas to reduce tidal wave impact.
- Growing crops which are more resistant to drought.
- Peace-building and reconciliation efforts to reduce conflict.
- Rebuilding homes or livelihoods to make the community more resilient to disasters.

**Practical preparation steps**



- Pre-disaster risk assessment
- Capacity assessment (before and after disaster)
- Need assessment (after disaster)
- Early warning systems (Depth marker posts, ringing bells or flying flags in churches to raise alarm, sending digital text message)
- First Aid Training for church members
- Plans for moving people and livestock to 'safe areas'
- Keeping a small stock of emergency materials (such as plastic sheets and dry food/ Genesis 41:25-39)
- Identifying the vulnerable who will need help
- Training volunteers in search and rescue.

### How can we raise support?

Any local church may not have the capacity to respond effectively in all aspects of a disaster. If so, finding support groups who are better equipped in this endeavor is very vital. Churches should analyze their own strengths and weaknesses and carefully choose potential partners whose values, motives and priorities are genuine and not detrimental to the mission work of the church, especially if they are not coming from a Christian background. (Philippians 2:3-4)

### Possible partnerships

- Work with the Government
- Work with secular groups (Ex. Oxfam, Red Cross)
- Work with other churches
- Work with funding partners (Partnership with a donor or a NGO)
- Using our own resources (Fundraising among believers.)

### How do we sustain?

Resilient people and communities have the capacity to cope with shocks and stresses and to recover quickly. Church should build resilience in the communities to reduce their vulnerabilities to disaster through disaster risk management, while at the same time enhancing their development in food security, livelihood and environmental adaptation.

Fundamentally, resilience-building is a call to increase our focus on risk management rather than disaster management. For example putting more effort into reducing the vulnerability of an impending disaster before it takes place rather than responding to the needs of those affected by the disaster, these are intrinsic to truly sustainable development.

The focus then is not so much on getting communities back to where they were vulnerable to disasters but helping them reduce their vulnerability. In this way they are less likely to suffer the same fate twice. (Isaiah 40:31 & Jeremiah 29:11)

Some aspects of general sustainable development good practice are especially important for resilience programming. These include:

- A focus on strengthening / building community institutions. Institutions mean both community organizations (leadership councils, churches and farmer groups) and the “rules of the game” that they work by (E.g. how leaders are chosen and how resources are shared). Strong institutions are required for joint decision-making and action, management of common resources, and experimentation and learning—all vital activities for resilience.
- A thorough understanding of all the livelihood strategies available in an area and how the people use their available assets to obtain food, income and other necessities. Resilience people have diverse, flexible and ecologically sustainable livelihood strategies.



**Conclusion**

We believe local churches are the heartbeat of the communities and have a significant role to play in helping communities to build their resilience. To achieve this aim, there is an emphasis on the participation of the community, analyzing the vulnerability, appreciating the potential within the community and providing practical applications. It is about appreciating partners, valuing their networks, encouraging learning best practices, reflection and sustainability. ■

