

THE ECLIPSE

Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction into Peace Processes



Sierra Leone:

Reducing the development of slums in post-conflict

Somalia:

Disaster Risk Reduction in a Conflict Situation

Darfur:

From The Editor

Today, violent conflicts have huge costs for nations. Much resources are put into procuring weapons so that there is little resources left for developing and sustaining infrastructures and institutions, which can prevent or mitigate against the effects of natural disasters. Unfortunately, there are regions in countries in Africa that are not only suffering from the consequences of violent conflicts, but are also under the serious threat of natural disasters which sometimes have been exacerbated by violent conflicts. The humanitarian situations in these regions are complex, challenging to conflict managers, humanitarian workers and those who seek solutions.

This sort of situation makes an urgent case for incorporating disaster risk reduction education/ activities into peace building and reconstruction in our continent. Other reasons for including disaster risk reduction into peace processes (such as conflict prevention) are the numerous cases of environmental scarcity, pockets of resource based conflicts and environmental degradation.

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According to scientific projections on the occurrence of disasters and ensuing environmental scarcity, the peace and stability of the African continent depends on reducing the vulnerability of populations to disasters.

Facing the challenges of incorporating disaster risk reduction education and activities into peace processes may involve the development of new concepts such as the UNESCO peace culture, which approaches solutions to environmental issues by viewing them as issues of peace and stability.

Aramide Adebola

Environmental change, degradation and pollution is a challenge to peace in many regions of the continent of Africa. This situation is clearly visible in the Niger-delta region in Nigeria, Darfur in Sudan, Somalia and many other places on the continent. Therefore, preserving the planet has been identified as an element of peace culture developed by the United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Peace Culture promotes consumer behaviour that is responsible and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet.

Peace Culture entails building trust and understanding among and between different cultures and civilizations, as well as nations, communities and individuals, especially in situations of acute conflict and in post-conflict conditions. The defense of peace starts in the minds of men and women who should be imbued with hope for the future, especially for succeeding generations. Following a proposal made by UNESCO, the United Nations General Assembly in 1998 (resolution A/52/13) defined the Culture of Peace as consisting of values, attitudes and behaviors that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by addressing their root causes with a view to solving problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations.

The Eclipse had a chat with Professor Abuelgassim Gor of the Peace Culture Center at the Sudan University on how peace culture can influence conflicts stemming from resource allocation, environmental scarcity and degradation. According to Professor Gor developing the culture of peace in the minds of the citizens of the world would help preserve the earth and consequently ensure peace and stability. The UNESCO peace culture encourages nation and their citizens to promote consumer behaviour that is responsible and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet. According to Professor Gor:

“We can not separate the availability of natural resources and sustainability from the peace and security of nations. culture. We can not ignore the need to preserve our planet whilst we seek solutions to conflicts of ten based on the need to survive in an environment with decreasing capacity. What does peace mean when the earth is being destroyed”.

The IFAD report states that the Darfur humanitarian situation was initially caused by environmental change and the deterioration of natural resources. Since the 1980's there has been a cycle of conflict in Darfur. Yearly, the pastoralist and agrarian communities are in conflict because of scarce resources. The pastoralist in search of water and grass for their herds of cattle invade farm lands of agrarian communities, this leads to conflicts.

This scenario continued until 2003 when the drought got to its peak. This time around the pastoralist had no alternatives to fall back on, as they did in previous years. People lost their livelihood system. This issue is central to the onset of the conflict in Darfur. Therefore the challenge being confronted in Darfur has a lot to do with environmental scarcity. Unfortunately, the international community has been intervening in the Darfur crisis without much emphasis on the environmental change and the deterioration of the natural resources in Darfur.

The conflict in Darfur can be better resolved within the framework of conflict transformation projects. These projects would focus on dealing with the damage that took place in the environment as well as other issues of the conflict. This includes providing water supplies for pastoralists and their animals as well as developing alternative livelihood systems for the people of Darfur. Presently, the establishment of peace without the re-establishment of sources of livelihood may mean little to the people of Darfur.

The Eclipse spoke with Mr Zinurine Alghali of PRIDE Sierra Leone on reducing the growth of slums on the continent. Their experience in Sierra Leone served as a good case study for this.

The Eclipse: Can you tell us about slums in Freetown Sierra Leone?

Mr. Zinurine Alghali : There are a number of slums in Freetown but the two largest are Kroo bay and Susans Bay.

The Eclipse: Were some of these slums in existence before the war?

Mr. Z.A: Yes, some of these slums were in existence before the war, but the conditions were better off then because after the war the population of these slums increased drastically. After the war, many ex-combatants were not willing to go back home to various provinces outside Freetown, some because of the atrocities they committed during the war, others seeing the disparity in development between Freetown and other provinces decided to settle down in Freetown.

The Eclipse: What kinds of disaster risk do residents of these slums face presently?

Mr. Z.A: Well, flooding is one disaster, but the loss isn't much compared to that which occurs in other parts of West Africa and Africa in general. During the raining season these areas get flooded and residents lose some valuables during the season. Presently, I do not think much is being done to reduce the vulnerability of residents to floods but I am aware that within these slums are community development organisations and non-governmental organisations which are working to provide basic amenities, such as toilets and water supplies for the residents of these areas.

The Eclipse: How do you think the vulnerability of the residents of these slums to floods can be reduced, especially as your country and of course Freetown is under reconstruction after a civil war?

Mr. Z.A: Reducing the vulnerability of the residents of these slums ought to be a long-term goal. This is because decongesting or reducing the degraded state of the slums also depends on the process of reconstructing the country. Basic amenities need to be provided in various provinces across the country to encourage the populace to move to other regions other than Freetown.

Also there is the need to increase their earning capacities so that they can afford to live in better residential areas. The current emphasis on traditional skills such as tailoring, carpentry should be augmented with new, innovative skills and skills with less involvement like agriculture so that economic opportunities can be widened for a larger work force. For example, an international organisation is giving support to persons interested in agriculture; there is plenty of fertile land for cultivation in the various provinces in the country.

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Coping with disaster risk in a war torn country can be challenging. Social infrastructure and other administrative structures, which have the capacity to prevent and mitigate the effects of disasters are broken down. Nevertheless the vulnerability of communities need to be reduced to forestall a complex humanitarian crises. The Eclipse spoke with Mr. Abdinor Elmi Mohamood on the disaster risk reduction activities in Somalia.

The Eclipse: What is happening in Somali in relation to disaster risk reduction?

Mr Mohamood: Local consultants, trained by international organisations and agencies such as OXFAM, UN-OCHA and ICRC, train local NGOs who in turn train communities on contingency planning, early warning and emergency preparedness.

The Eclipse: How effective has this network been?

Mr Mohamood: It has been effective, the resilience of local communities have increased. By encouraging community managed disaster risk reduction practices and strategies, communities can respond to disasters before external help is available. The approach used by these local NGOS is the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach. Participatory Rural Appraisal aims to incorporate the knowledge and opinions of rural people in the planning and management of development projects and programs. In the approach, outsiders facilitate local people in analyzing information, practicing critical self-awareness, taking responsibility and sharing their knowledge of life and conditions to plan and to act.

The Eclipse: How has the approach helped in building the resilience of communities already traumatized by conflicts.

Mr Mohamood: Communities are learning to reduce their disaster risk in spite of the conflict, using strategies they are involved in developing.

The Eclipse: What disasters risk are present in war-torn Somalia?

Mr. Mohamood: There is the risk of epidemics, floods and drought

The Eclipse: Is it possible that conflict ridden communities in Somalia can have resilience to the disaster risks you have mentioned.

Mr. Mahomood: It is possible, what is needed is the willingness to learn. For example, learning to use modern devices such as rain guage and others to predict the onset of a flood have helped in preventing what could have been heavy losses.

The Eclipse: How does the occurrence of disasters and the on going conflict reinforce each other?

Mr. Mohamoud: When people are dislocated from one location due to conflict or disasters, they migrate to another location only to compete on natural resource. This of

Disaster Risk Reduction in a Conflict Situation: Somalia as Case Study

(Contd.)

course triggers conflict between host communities and displaced persons. The cycle of disaster and conflicts can go on and on with far reaching consequences. This has to do with common sources of livelihood. In Somalia, livelihood is based primarily on the availability of water and land.

Common occupations include: pastoralists, farmers, agro-pastoralist and those living in the riverine areas are mostly fishermen. Therefore, conflict ensues when IDPs migrate from their communities to other communities. Unfortunately, sometimes Internationally agencies have provided for the needs of IDPs without consideration of host community, this of course generates another conflict.

Also because there is no administration, it is difficult to distribute resources evenly, a community may ask for a well. After the well has being given you may find that some Chief has arrogated the well to himself and has ask that if other community members what to use the well they have to pay for it.

The Eclipse: How have the NGOs being working on disaster risk reduction projects in spite of the conflict in Somalia?

Mr A.E Mohamood: NGOs are taught to be conflict sensitive. Without being sensitive to the occurrence of conflicts projects would be destroyed even before their effects can be felt. In a place as Somalia is presently , every situation is sensitive. NGOs have to have the list of all actors in a likely conflict and how these actors can affect projects. Also reoccurring conflicts develop indicators that show that a conflict is about to erupt. NGOs providing aid in this situation use these indicators as guide for the distribution of food, seeds, medicine and more..

The Eclipse: How do you think that the livelihood security of communities in Somalia can be supported?

Mr. A.E Mohamood: I think that any intervention projects should focus on what suits the need of the communities, for example helping pastoralist get back to their systems by buying them animals (restocking) would suit them far better then trying to settle them into the major occupation of host community. Also the developing of alternative skills is also important for protecting livelihood security in Somalia.

Mr Mohamood is a consultant with Oxfam Novib Emergency Preparedness and Response Action

International Peace and Conflict Institute Training

The International Peace and Conflict Institute in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, organized a training workshop from the 5th to the 16th of November 2007. The workshop was organized primarily for personnel engaged in peace initiatives and activities in East Africa. East Africa has been plagued by violent conflicts in recent times. This violence has affected Rwanda, Burundi, Congo Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of Congo. There is relative peace now in the region and there is a strong focus on reconstruction in affected countries. During the two weeks of training at the workshop, participants were exposed to issues specifically related ensuring enduring peace in East Africa. These issues were expounded on in various presentations, which include human rights, UN Resolution 1325, Peace Culture, Conflict Analysis Mediation and Negotiation and more.

Participants also contributed to presentations in respect to their countries of origin and abode. From discussions, issues which degenerated to violent conflicts in East Africa and Africa in general were mostly resource based. There is therefore an urgent need for the protection of the environment, equity in the distribution of gains from natural resources, and sustainable development for peace to endure in the continent of Africa.

In view of scientific projections on disasters and environmental scarcity, the continent of Africa through relevant professionals need to develop indicators from experiences gained from past conflicts, to break the likely cycle of disasters and conflicts in Africa.

Community Disaster Risk Profile: KOMA

Koma is an indigenous community in Jada Local Government in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Disasters which have occurred in recent times include floods, sand storms, mountain fires and erosion. These disasters have an annual cycle and effect significant impact on the villages in the region. The affected villages or communities however recover from these disasters often within a couple of weeks and sometimes even within days.

This relatively speedy rate of recovery shows that there is appreciable level of resilience within the community despite their vulnerability to these disasters. Nevertheless, the community's resilience needs to be strengthened by external support because losses attributed to these disasters impedes the growth and development of the community. The disasters also impact on certain developmental efforts. For example, every year, during the raining season, many children are out of school because of floods. This issue is important because the Komas are being encouraged to send their children to school.

The economic impact of the disasters are also significant as farms and homes are often destroyed due to floods and mountain fires. The community's coping strategies include abandoning homes and farms and moving to new sites to build their homes and farms. Apart from these actions there are no indigenous disaster risk reduction activities. For many Komas these disasters and their effects are seen as inevitable.

Although Koma is an indigenous community, far removed from the industrial world the, effect of climatic change is being felt here as well. There has been marked increase in rainfall and invariably flooding. There has also been reports of violent attacks by Fulani herdsmen on Koma farmers. This happens as the herdsmen seek food for their herds during severe seasons of drought. This situation is common in the northern and middle belt regions of Nigeria and it is attributed to desertification.

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The Eclipse is a magazine focused on issues of disaster management in Africa. It discusses issues pertinent to reducing the risk of disasters in African communities and cities. The Eclipse seeks to provide an informative network on reducing the risk of disasters for everyone.