1 INTRODUCTION

The Government of the Republic of Zambia recognises the fact that it is its fundamental responsibility to protect the lives and property of its citizens during a disaster. The Zambian government has in this regard made efforts to create response mechanisms to tackle disaster situations in the country once they occur.

The concept of “disaster” and its definitions continues to alter over time, in accordance with changing ideas and scenarios concerning the causes and effects. A generally accepted definition of a disaster is that:

A disaster is serious disruption of the functioning of society, causing widespread or localised human, material or environmental losses, which exceed the liability of the affected society to cope using only its own resources.
The key elements in the above definition are disruption of normal functions and inability to cope using available resources by the concerned community. Implied in the above statement is the fact that a disaster occurs when a trigger mechanism or hazard affects human beings and their welfare. The severity of a disaster is therefore linked to the level of vulnerability of the affected population. This in turn depends on the population’s resilience to withstand the shocks or stresses of disaster impacts. That capacity is heavily influenced by the population’s prevailing socio-economic conditions or asset portfolio. High vulnerability is almost invariably a function of poverty, a lack of resources, lack of assets, lack of access to institutions education and other means of support.

2 VULNERABILITY IN ZAMBIA

The ever-rising poverty levels in Zambia are continuously increasing the country’s population susceptibility and vulnerability to disasters. Poverty is now deep and widespread in Zambia, this is according to recent World Bank reports (1994) and Central Statistical office (1997) study, extreme poverty has remained at high levels in the period between 1991 and 1996. Indeed, a slight acquaintance with the Zambian social reality reveals that a high proportion of people are living in abject poverty. While the indices that record economic growth may have perceptibly moved upward recently, the majority of the population remain mired in the misfortune of poverty (CSO1997). The poverty problem is deeper and more acute in rural areas, female-headed households, and low-income pockets of the urban areas.

The growing poverty levels have created greater vulnerability for the people either as smallholder rural farmers or an urban informal sector proletariat. Thus, the severity and prevalence of disaster impact being experienced is linked to the degree of human vulnerability than to the stresses imposed by nature. It implies that the range of response to withstand disaster impacts is severely limited.

Disasters in Zambia may be said to be characteristic of prevailing structural conditions rooted in the every day livelihood systems and experience of the people. It therefore follows that mitigation of hazard can best be achieved from within, by changing the prevailing people’s social and economic scenarios. This entails a shift towards a more proactive approach involving preparedness and mitigation measures such as water management systems, Control of Land degradation, Eco-systems management, reduction in Greenhouse Gases Emissions, including linking disaster risks to development activities and planning.

3 CURRENT INITIATIVES

Given the increased nature of recurrent disasters in Zambia mainly being droughts, Floods, Pest infestation, Fires, Industrial accidents, Epidemic (Cholera) outbreaks, Also the Aids pandemic etc. the Mitigation activities being employed are limited in nature to the mitigation effects of these particular disaster occurrences.

Despite the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit not being directly involved in the implementation of the mitigation activities, it is responsible for resource mobilisation and therefore highly involved at the policy, planning and coordination level. Programme activities such as road and bridge repairs, schools rehabilitation, communal farming are implanted at local community or village level with full participation of implementing NGOs under the popular food for work programme as part of mitigation and developmental activities.
Each Ministry, NGO with support from the Aid agencies have been spearheading their sectoral functions. It is clear or evident that a number of line ministries, aid agencies and NGOs are involved in mitigation programmes.

4 NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT POLICY

There is a draft Disaster Management and Mitigation policy whose main goal is to protect life and property of citizens through proactive and sound disaster management that links disaster related activities such as prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery to the national development process.

4.1 Policy Objectives

In order to operationalise the above goal, the following must be attained:

Create and ensure an effective system of integrated development and disaster management at national, provincial, district and community levels including active participation of ordinary members of the community in the process;

This requires that potential and frameworks should be identified in good time and care mechanisms put in place to address vulnerabilities in the context of development policies and frameworks should be introduced to improve preparedness and investment be made available to mitigate possible impact effects; and

Response capacity be developed to mobilise resources quickly for effective disaster management

4.2 Disaster Management and Mitigation Bill, 2000

There is a draft Disaster Management and Mitigation Bill of year 2000, which is supposed to be Act to establish and provide for the maintenance and operation of a system for the anticipation, coordination and control of disastrous situations and the organisation of the relief from disasters; and to provide for matters connected with or incidentals to the foregoing to be enacted by Parliament of Zambia.

4.3 Definition of National Disaster

A national disaster in Zambia is known as serious unexpected misadventure caused by natural or by human induced destructive activities that disrupts the normal functioning of a large segment of human population life, life losses, damage to property, and destruction of the environment exceeding the abilities of the affected communities to cope. A misfortune of such nature is declared a national disaster by Government since the management of such disasters is beyond the capacity of local authorities, or one single government agency and requires the intervention and co-ordination of the state in order to mobilise resources at national level and some times at international level.

5 COMMON DISASTERS IN ZAMBIA

Zambia like many other African countries has experienced a number of disasters that could have been prevented from time to time if risk assessments could have been done well in advance in
the planning purposes. The main talked about disasters are for example drought, floods, human epidemic outbreaks, livestock epidemics, refugee influxes, crop pests, road traffic, famine, fires, industrial accidents, Aids pandemic etc.

The above-mentioned disasters have by now made most poor members of the communities in the different countries susceptible to several risks as they not able to cope with such disasters with their own resources. Indeed the poverty levels that have been seen to increase on a continuous basis in the developing world makes the risk situation worse and out reach in terms of control and management in most countries.

6 EVOLUTION OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN ZAMBIA

In view of the continuous disaster threats experienced in the country, the Zambian government has been putting together permanent response mechanisms to address the threats. In the first and second republics, the Contingency and Planning Unit was located in the office of the Prime Minister responsible for coordination response to emergencies. The Contingency and Planning Unit was phased out in 1992. Following the major drought of 1991/92 that affected most parts of Southern Africa, and the major relief operations that four Ministries formed an ad-hoc (Agriculture, Health, Energy & Water and Community Development) committee for managing different aspects of response. It followed that the management committees were co-chaired by ministries of Agriculture and Health, despite attempts at coordination each ministry tended to operate their own elements or response in compartments. This brought about unnecessary duplication and wastage as well as unwarranted delays.

It was clear that in the absence of formal relief framework and due to the bureaucratic delays, new structures were put in place to manage the logistics of bulk imports and relief programme, which ignored existing government channels. These structures were created at national, district and village levels. The programme for prevention of malnutrition committee (PPM) was established at national level to address policy matters, while the organisation and delivery of relief was delegated to programme to prevent malnutrition committee at local level. PAM was established for the provision of technical services to the secretariat for the support to the whole process. Government and the Donor community met the running costs of PAM.

It is a known fact that Government structures at the local level are generally weak and in the same vein the new government policy direction, the steps pass on the responsibility of management and relief delivery at local level to community groups and NGOs became necessary.

The 1991/92 drought management programme though, ad-hoc, was successful, food prices were stabilized, famine was averted and there were no reported deaths associated with food shortages. However, the food prices established during the 1991/92 droughts period tended to have a depressing effect on the market prices on the ensuing agriculture season’s maize crop and farmers suffered losses due to the excess relief food.

6.1 Institutional Framework

It is very clear from the overall disaster policy framework and the inadequacies of the existing structures, the government felt that it was important to create a permanent unit within government to coordinate disaster management programmes. The management for all Disaster Management Coordination and Management is vested in the office of the Vice President. Therefore in line with the Public Service Reform Programme, government in 1994 created the
Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit within the office of the Vice President. The operational structure is in the organogram below:

The structure in the organisation above operates as indicated below:

6.1.1 National Disaster Management Committee

It is a cabinet committee, responsible for the overall policy direction and comprises Ministers from 12 key ministries and is chaired by the Vice President with the Minister of Defence as his deputy. The decisions reached at by this committee are passed on to the technical committee.

6.1.2 National Disaster Technical Committee

This is basically a technical committee made up of permanent secretaries from ministries represented in the national disaster management committee. It is also expected to co-opt technocrats drawn from the key line ministries, NGOs, utilities, Donor community, and the United Nations system including the research institution/relevant University Departments. The purpose of this committee is to act as an advisory body to the national committee and works through sectoral subcommittees.

6.1.3 Provincial Disaster Technical Committees

These are simply technical committees at provincial level that represent the national technical committee at the province. The committees comprise the key provincial heads of departments and are usually chaired by the permanent secretaries in charge of the particular province.

6.1.4 District Disaster Management Committees

These are district level technical committees made up of key district heads of departments and influential elite citizens in the districts such as church leaders, prominent business people etc. Either the Town Clerk or District Council Secretary depending on each particular scenario prevailing usually chairs these committees.

6.1.5 Community/Satellite Level Committees

These are community level committees made up of identified local leaders in the community to spearhead disaster response. They include traditional leaders and other influential local people within the community (critical mass).

6.1.6 Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit

It is basically the secretariat of the National Disaster Management Unit Structure referred to earlier. Apart from the headquarters in Lusaka the unit has at the moment three regional offices as follows: Kabwe covering Central and Northern Provinces; Ndola covering Copperbelt, Luapula and North-Western provinces and Choma covering Southern and Western provinces.
The main purpose of setting up of the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit is to undertake the following key functions:

- Vulnerability assessment
- Risk assessment
- Coordination
- Planning
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Resource mobilisation and management
- Reporting
- Maintenance of data on disaster
- Public awareness
- Advocacy and;
- Training

The national coordinator heads the secretariat with three programme officers at headquarters and a regional disaster officer in each of the three provinces/regions.

6.2 Major Strengths of the Current System

The office of the Vice President ensures a very high level of advocacy for disaster policy and operational decisions hence the Disaster Management Unit is located under Vice President’s office. The Cabinet Committee comprises all relevant Ministries and the functional level committees facilitate the coordination and harmonisation of Government policies and activities.

The participation of donor agencies, private sector and NGOs at almost all levels of functional Committees provides and promotes some form of broad based national spirit. This therefore has been seen to breed a sense of oneness thereby promoting operational harmony and micro efficiency in the wide based arena of Disaster management and mitigation activities.

6.3 Current System Major Weaknesses

The major weaknesses of the current system have been identified as follows:

The system is open to excessive political interference, which tend to undermine the credibility of programmes and in some instances smooth implementation of well-meant programmes. For example M.Ps tend to distort disaster assessments in their constituencies of relief goods.

The effective and increased involvement of key stakeholders like civil society, NGOs, private sector, and Donors will promote the non-partisan and non-political approach to disaster management and mitigation in the operational committees.

The above arrangement will promote effective partnership among stakeholders, effective functional participation of all key stakeholders and promote objectivity, credibility, and operational efficiency in disaster management and mitigation programmes.

The Disaster management coordination system is weak, and hence the risk of costly operations duplication of efforts among key players. One of the major reasons for poor coordination is lack of adequate information flow and resources among active players.
It is of vital importance to encourage collaborative meetings among key players at national, provincial, district and community levels. There is substantial potential for joint planning of programmes at all levels.

The availability of reliable information also appears to be a serious problem. Information is one key resource for efficient planning and implementation of disaster management and mitigation programmes. For collaboration to be effective among all stake holder’s basic information must be reliable and credible. Especially that information gathering is always an expensive exercise; this would help avoid unnecessary duplication.

However, there have been protracted long unnecessary debates and some times duplications of efforts among key players in securing reliable information on household data all these debates revolve around the methodologies employed in needs assessments.

There are also observed risks of deliberate distortions especially by interest groups bent on swinging disaster relief resources to areas of personal or political advantage. This is also common among NGOs involved in disaster relief, as there is a tendency to exaggerate the relief needs to boost the NGOs operations.

The Disaster Management Unit is still in its infancy, hence the observed weak organisational system. There is still no legal framework to guide disaster management in the country. The legal framework is still being developed to put NDMMU and its activities on sound legal basis. The organisational system should be such that can respond rapidly and in a cost effective manner to disasters. The current system is such that the controlling officer for disaster resources is not the NDMMU Coordinator but the Permanent Secretary in the Vice President’s office where disaster management is just one of the several roles. This makes disaster management and mitigation vulnerable to marginalization in resource allocation in an office where political programmes may enjoy frequent priority ratings above disaster mitigation and management.

7 CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS FOR ZAMBIA

Training requirements of targeted districts vary according to a combination of factors including geographical locations and disaster threats. Districts in Agro-ecological region 1 i.e. Southern, Western, parts of Eastern, Central and Lusaka provinces are drought prone while districts in Agro-ecological region 111 i.e. North-Western, Luapula and Northern provinces are flood prone. Training needs of these two different regions should be basically to address food security and other human needs like health issues.

- Crisis management
- Community mobilisation
- Project proposal writing
- First Aid
- Disaster Management
- Emergency and relief operations
- Recovery Management
- Organisation of Humanitarian relief services, food, medical
- Leadership skills
- Coordination
The above-identified training needs do not require full time training because it is assumed some basic competence already exists, especially in the Government and Non-governmental organisation staff. It is generally known that most such staff are already trained in disaster management related functions and skills as they exhibit some form of proficiency in their normal functional roles. For example there is no need to train clinical officers or environmental health technicians in epidemic control, as they do this as part of their daily functions. Similarly members of standard emergency services such as Police, Defence Services are well trained in a variety of cross sectoral functions, therefore designing of training needs must recognise existing competencies. The steps to be taken therefore include:

- Strengthening of the disaster management and mitigation unit to reduce on costly operations duplication of efforts among key actors. This will also be by improving adequate information flow and resources among active players.
- Developing reliable information database for disaster management and mitigation
- Putting in place the legal framework at the earliest possible time to support the current Disaster Management and Mitigation Coordination Unit operations.

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