

Implementing Disaster Management Training *Converting Experience into Learning*

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LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Worldwide, hazards may lead to disasters which often require "emergency settlements" for individuals, families, neighborhoods, communities and in some cases, even nations. The causes and effects of hazards and disasters are becoming better understood. But as the world's disaster-prone population increases, there is greater need to understand better all facets of the emergency settlement which frequently follows a disaster. It is not enough simply to catalog and research the issues important to emergency settlement, we must seek ways to convert that understanding into useful learning tools. We must develop tools for use by those impacted individuals, families, neighborhoods, or communities--and for use by those who assist disaster "victims" with emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery.

WHAT IS DISASTER MANAGEMENT?

For the general public, "disaster management" means those activities which immediately follow a hazardous event which has triggered a disaster. The popular press looks on emergency response activities as the most newsworthy aspect of **disaster management**. Disaster preparedness and mitigation activities are much less photogenic--and thus appear to be less important. For educational purposes, disaster management activities are commonly grouped chronologically in three broad (and sometime overlapping) time frames: **emergency response** activities, which are carried out during the emergency; **post-disaster recovery** activities, which include rehabilitation and reconstruction; and **pre-disaster** activities, normally subdivided into disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness. Education and training are important pre-disaster activities which can lead to improvement in all aspects of disaster management.

ONE APPROACH TO IMPROVEMENT

Since 1982, the University of Wisconsin-Disaster Management Center(UW-DMC) has worked closely with experts recognized for their field experience, to develop training activities with a **practical emphasis**. Drawing on expertise from throughout the world, the UW-DMC was started as an informal joint venture between an academic institution, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and an organization with many years experience in disaster management, INTERTECT (now, InterWorks). The major focus has been to develop distance education **course modules** in text, video and computer-based media. A secondary focus has been to organize comprehensive **training courses** (seminars and workshops) for governmental groups, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental agencies, including those of the United Nations.

Self-Study Distance Learning Curriculum

Distance education is the unique aspect of training at the UW-DMC. Since 1988, more than 4,500 individuals worldwide have enrolled in one or more of the available self-study courses. Since the 1994 inauguration of the **UW-DMC Disaster Management (DM) Diploma**, 145 distance learners from 38 countries have also registered as candidates for the Diploma. A curriculum for the DM Diploma can combine UW-DMC self-study courses with courses from other organizations anywhere in the world.

In conjunction with the development of these self-study courses, the UW-DMC has established both formal and informal collaborating agreements with many educational institutions worldwide. Formal agreements have been made with the Centro de Treinamiento para Prevenção de Emergencias da Regiao Sul (1988) in Florianapolis, Brazil, with the University of Puerto Rico (1991) in San Juan and in South Africa with Technikon, SA (1995).

Informal collaborating arrangements exist with organizations such as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center in Thailand, the National Building Technology Center in China, the Centre de Reserche sur L'Epidemiologie des Desastres in Belgium, the Joint Assistance Centre in India, the Cranfield □Disaster Management Centre in England, the Red Crescent Society in Jordan, and the Centro Interdisciplinario para el Desarrollo de Proyectos Socioambientales in Argentina. This network of collaborating institutions works in both the development and administration of self-study courses, as well as other traditional training activities. The network continues to grow.

Based on three decades of experience in *audiographics* distance education at the University of Wisconsin, the UW-DMC is now developing models for teaching disaster management courses interactively via our computer-based telephone audiographics network, *WisView*. Basic UW-DMC courses are also available for electronic review over the *Internet*.

For those who do not wish to take courses for continuing education credit, lessons from selected disaster management courses are now also published

quarterly in *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine--The Official Journal of the World Association for Emergency and Disaster Medicine*.

Training Seminars and Workshops

The UW-DMC also provides traditional, on-site training in both disaster management and refugee emergency management. Since 1985, approximately 2,900 individuals, representing more than 195 organizations and 125 countries have participated in the **EMTP**, a special training program for refugee emergencies developed at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The training materials are designed to serve field staff from UNHCR (and other UN agencies), non-governmental organizations and government agencies.

From 1990 to 1995, some 3,600 persons from 49 countries have learned directly from **DMTP** training materials in training events sponsored jointly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which has now become the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In addition, a cadre of 40 experienced UN staff from UNHCR, FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and WHO were oriented as disaster management trainers. Additional thousands of people will benefit through on-going regional, national and community-level training activities, initiated as follow-ups to DMTP courses. The UW-DMC served as the coordinator for the development of training materials and the training of trainers for this global project. These training materials are all available in English, Spanish and French. Certain materials are also available in Arabic, Bahasa Indonesian, Chinese, Farsi, Mongolian, Portuguese, Russian and Vietnamese. The basic materials are training modules, composed of a text and trainer's guide, which can be used for self-study or for training groups. Each of the training modules was developed in the same fashion as UW-DMC self-study courses. Individuals with field experience were asked to share their expertise in preparing the materials. More than fifty disaster management professionals from over twenty countries were involved in the production of these DMTP training modules. In addition to the training modules, there are training videos and teaching case histories on many aspects of disaster management.

THE INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCY SETTLEMENT PROJECT

Most recently, "emergency settlement" is a theme around which learning materials are being developed. Based on two years' work by 75 humanitarian assistance professionals representing over 50 organizations, preliminary discussion papers were prepared for 24 emergency topics. These papers were then debated at the First International Emergency Settlement Conference in April 1996 by 170 conference participants from 50 countries. Knowledge and experience about principles, best practices, standards and field tools were shared at the conference. The evolution of this body of knowledge into a collection of practical learning materials for use by individuals and organizations worldwide is the task of the project's current phase.

THE FUTURE

Disasters will remain a part of the world's process of advancement. Disaster management provides a possibility to address not only the traditional relief aspects of a disaster, but also the more effective mitigation and preparedness aspects. Only by taking advantage of the development opportunities offered, even in disaster, can we expect to move forward in world development while at the same time saving lives and reducing destruction inherent in any disaster.

Along with other collaborating individuals and institutions, the UW-DMC will continue to distill the evolving experience of disaster management from situation to situation and from operation to operation into an expanding curriculum of distance learning courses in an effort to help maintain and reinforce the "institutional memory" of those who practice international disaster management. The UW-DMC strives to bring together those who work in disaster situations to create and maintain a network for experience sharing and improved action. We work to empower others to design and run their own disaster management training activities and to manage their own humanitarian assistance.

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