

“Volunteers for Disaster Risk Reduction” Sister City Partnership

NYC, USA - Tokyo, Japan - Colombo, Sri Lanka

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1. Global Disaster Scenario

The twelve year period ending in 2011 reported 1.1 million people killed and 2.7 billion people being affected by disasters while the economic damage for the period summed up to 1.3 trillion US\$ (EM-DAT, Data Versions: 10 January 2012 -V 12.07). The natural disaster trend of the world showed an increase up to 2002, however a decreasing trend is observed thereafter, as per the statistics from 1900 to 2011. The number of reported deaths from natural disasters is too showing a reducing trend, however each year from 2002-2011 reported an annual average of 107,000 persons being killed. The number of people affected by disasters is in the rise with an annual average of 268 million for the period of 2002-2011. Estimated damage from natural disasters too is showing a rising trend, with an annual average of 143 billion US\$. Disaster statistics with regards to technological disasters for the same period show a reducing trend with regards to the number of disasters, deaths and people affected, however, the estimated damage is rising (Guha-Sapir, Vos, Below, & Ponserre, 2011).

The global time line records major disasters in the last two decades. For example, the Indian Ocean earthquake and Tsunami in 2004 claimed 280,000 deaths occurring in six countries to which humanitarian assistance amounted to 14 billion US\$ from the international community. The Kashmir earthquake in 2005 resulted in 100,000 deaths, 138,000 casualties and 3.5 million displacements. Cyclone Nargis affecting Myanmar in 2008 claimed 138,366 deaths and an economic damage of 10 billion. Typhoon Haiyan, known locally as Typhoon Yolanda in Philippines destroyed 6340 people dead and 1061 missing with an economic impact of 2.6 billion US\$ (Wikipedia.org). Haiti earthquake in 2010 has caused over 100,000 deaths with significant economic strains both in the Haiti government and the humanitarian community. Above disasters clearly demonstrate the massive scale of damage to human life, property and environment that demands large scale humanitarian assistance.

The pandemics such as Avian Influenza and SARS (Severe acute respiratory syndrome) have demonstrated the dangerous impacts of epidemics in the ever-shrinking global village. The recent Ebola outbreak is an example of a challenging disaster. The World Health Organization mentioned in a statement on 26th September 2014: "The Ebola epidemic ravaging parts of West Africa is the most severe acute public health emergency seen in modern times." (World Health Organization, 2014)

2. Important Disasters in the United States

It was reported that 6 out of 10 natural disasters by economic damage happened in United States of America in the year 2011 (Guha-Sapir, Vos, Below, & Ponserre, 2011). In the United States, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, one of the five deadliest hurricanes claimed 1833 deaths and being the costliest in the history, was responsible for 108 billion US\$ (Wikipedia.org). The September 11 attacks in 2001 resulted in around 3000 deaths (Wikipedia.org). One economic analysis states that the cost of the destruction to the United States of America from this series of incidents could be high as 3.3 trillion USD (Sanger, 2011). Hurricane Sandy reported 148 direct deaths and 138 indirect deaths to her name and 68 billion US\$ of damage, being the second costliest hurricane in the history of the country (Wikipedia.org).

3. Importance of Disasters in Japan

Japan has witnessed some of the largest natural disaster in the World. For example, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995 in Kobe destroyed 300, 000 lives and left 300,000 people homeless. The Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and tsunami of 2011 was the costliest natural disaster of the world with World Bank estimates of 285 billion US\$. Due to this earthquake, 15889 deaths were lost, 2609 people were missing and 6152 were wounded (Wikipedia.org).

4. Important Disasters in Sri Lanka

The central location of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean in the path of two monsoons has subjected it to low impact high frequency hazards such as floods and landslides (Disaster Management Center, 2014). The 29th of October 2014 reported a massive landslide in Meeriyabedda area, in Haldumulla Divisional Secretariat Division in Badulla District which is probably the largest

landslide with highest number of deaths in the history of Sri Lanka (Ministry of Disaster Management, 2014).

In addition, droughts too have been reported from Sri Lanka due to failure of monsoonal rain. Sri Lanka is also prone to hazards such as lightning strikes, coastal erosion, epidemics and effects of environmental pollution (Disaster Management Center, 2014).

In 2004, almost two-thirds of the Sri Lankan coast was affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami highlighting the country's vulnerability to low-frequency but high impact events. This disaster claimed 35,000 lives while injuring 21,000 persons and displacing 500,000 persons. The loss due to the 2004 Tsunami was reported to be 900 million US\$ which was 4.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (Rathnasooriya, Samarawickrama, & Imamura, 2007).

5. Global Disaster Risk Management Environment

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1999, reflected a major shift from disaster response to disaster reduction and in effect seeks to promote a "culture of prevention". The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction was established as the secretariat to ensure the implementation of the ISDR (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 1999).

"The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters" was adopted by 168 governments in 2005 at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan. The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) provided a global blueprint for disaster risk reduction for 2005-2015. Its goal is to substantially reduce disaster losses by 2015 – in lives, and in the social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and countries. The HFA has urged the governments around the world to commit to take measures to reduce disaster risk, and to adopt a guideline to reduce vulnerabilities to natural disasters. The priority actions suggested by the HFA are (1) Make Disaster Risk Reduction a Priority (2) Know the Risks and Take Action (3) Build Understanding and Awareness (4) Reduce Risk and (5) Be prepared and ready to act.

The ISDR action period is soon coming to an end. The international community is working towards a post-2015 Disaster Risk Reduction Framework through a consultative process which

will culminate in Third World Conference in Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendal, Japan in March 2015 (World Conference on Disaster Risk Redcution).

6. World Cares Center

World Cares Center (WCC) is a disaster relief organization based in New York City empowering communities through disaster response training, support and coordination. Founded by a group of spontaneous, unaffiliated, community volunteers (SUCV) during the relief efforts of September 11, 2001, WCC is a community-based, 501 © (3) non-profit organization. In addition to the September 11 incidents, World Cares Center has been involved in the response of Hurricane Sandy and Haiti earthquake. The pioneering work of World Cares Center is in the area of establishing a framework for managing and leading SUCV (World Cares Center, 2013).

7. Peace Boat, Tokyo, Japan

Founded in 1983, Peace Boat is an international non-governmental and non-profit organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. It works to promote peace, human rights, equal and sustainable development and respect for the environment through global educational programmes, cooperative projects and advocacy activities in global peace voyages. Among its peace building activities, Peace Boat has carried out disaster relief activities over the past 15 years. Some of the disasters that it has responded to include Great Kanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Kobe in 1995 and Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011.

8. Community Resilience Center

Community Resilience Center is a Sri Lankan initiative, based on experiences of 2004 Tsunami response in improving community level resilience to multiple hazards. Community Resilience Center will be working at community level promoting resilience among the most vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka.

9. Importance of volunteers in Disaster Response

Community and volunteer participation has been highlighted as a cross cutting issue in the HFA (Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities

in Disasters, 2005).

The Lima Declaration highlights the importance of volunteer groups as key partners and stakeholders of the Post-2015 framework and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, the Declaration also calls for ensuring an active role for citizens, including volunteers, in any accountability mechanism to monitor progress towards the SDGs. This declaration further affirms that “the full potential of volunteers to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs can be unlocked only by an SDG framework that explicitly recognizes and supports volunteerism” (The International Forum for Volunteering in Development, 2014).

Local volunteers are the first and the fastest wave of response in most disasters. Their contribution has been of much use in the aftermath of disasters across the cultures and geographical boundaries. Building of capacity of local volunteers is critical in disaster response. When the local surge capacity is exceeded, local volunteers should be well prepared to receive external volunteers and facilitate their smooth and effective function. Communication, coordination and self-care are areas for improvement in disaster volunteerism. Bilingual volunteers could be an asset in many disaster settings.

World Cares Center, Peace Boat International and Community Resilience Center have witnessed the importance of SUCVs during their deliberations in disaster response.

For example, the World Cares Center has been established by a group of SUCV. In addition, it has established World Cares Center Volunteer Reception Center in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. On the other hand, Peace Boat has established Peace Boat Disaster Relief Volunteer Center as a part of its Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Response.

In November 2012, Peace Boat has sent a team from Japan to help World Cares Center with the Sandy Response effort. In March 2013, two team leaders returned to the World Cares Center to continue assistance for the continued recovery activities of Hurricane Sandy. The benefits of establishing international volunteer exchange programmes were highlighted during these encounters.

Community Resilience Center brings in experience of volunteers in disaster response during 2004 Tsunami in Sri Lanka, Internally Displaced Persons' Crisis in the aftermath of 30 year of internal conflict in Sri Lanka and Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines.

10. Challenges of Volunteer participation in disasters

Even though volunteers are an invaluable asset in disaster response, their support could extend well beyond the disaster response stage. There is a need to expand volunteer involvement to all stages of disaster risk management.

Considering the catastrophic nature of the recent disasters faced by the world, it is evident that international assistance will be needed more and more in disasters. Many recent disasters have clearly demonstrated that volunteers with bilingual ability can be a definitive asset in disasters.

Although spontaneous non-affiliated community volunteers play a vital role in any emergency response operations over the international boundaries, there could be cost-effectiveness issues. Hence, it is important that spontaneous unaffiliated community volunteers acquire critical skills such as leading and managing pre-deployment.

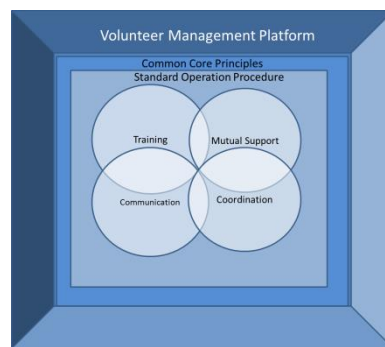
Communication and coordination are challenging issues in any disasters. Volunteer involvement can complicate communication and coordination challenges in disasters due to their diverse nature and varying level of experience. However, if best practices of communication and coordination could be inculcated within the volunteers prior to disasters, such volunteers could be an asset not only for volunteer management but also to the whole disaster management process.

Further, promoting of the self-care of the volunteers becomes a must.

Being sensitive to the changes that are occurring in the disaster risk reduction environment at global level, learning from past experiences in the volunteer management in disaster response, realizing the value of bilingual volunteers competent in leading and managing during cross-country disaster assistance efforts, recognizing the importance of effective communication and coordination in disaster response and understanding the importance of ensuring the self-care of volunteers, the World Cares Center, Peace Boat International and the Community Resilience

Center present “Volunteers for Disaster Risk Reduction” Sister City Partnership NYC,USA- Tokyo, Japan- Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Figure 1
**Conceptual Framework of
The International Disaster Volunteer Management Platform**



11. General objective

To establish an international disaster volunteer management platform that would strengthen the capacity of both local and external volunteers towards effective disaster response.

12. Specific Objectives

1. To advocate for strengthening strategic role of volunteers in disasters
2. To establish a global program for the training and management of volunteers.
3. To establish a USA-Japan-Sri Lanka disaster response system
4. To improve communication and coordination through management of volunteers.
5. To promote self-care of the volunteers in disasters.

13. Strategies:

1. To create a disaster volunteer management platform based on common principles and standard operation procedure.

2. To provide training for local and international disaster volunteers on critical skills such as leading and managing.
3. To provide mutual support during disaster response when local volunteer capacity is exceeded.
4. To promote best practices in communication among disaster volunteers and volunteer agencies
5. To promote best practices in coordination in among disaster volunteers and volunteer agencies.

14. Conclusion

Considering the current disaster scenario and the trends, it is likely that the future for humanity will be challenged seriously by disasters. Local volunteers are the first and the fastest wave of response in most disasters. Building of capacity of local volunteers is critical in disaster response. When the local surge capacity is exceeded, local volunteers should be well prepared to receive external volunteers and facilitate their smooth and effective function. Communication, coordination and self-care are areas for improvement in disaster volunteerism. Bilingual volunteers could be an asset in many disaster settings. This white paper emphasizes the importance of the international disaster volunteer management platform, its objectives and the strategies.

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