

Disaster Management Evaluation: The Current Status of the Standardised Protocol in the Utstein Style

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Since the first publication as a Disaster Research Template in 1996,¹ its refinement has progressed substantially. The process used and the product itself have been presented at different workshops and congresses, including the previous Nordic Congress in Kuopio.² This process became necessary in order to widen the scope for feedback and discussion during its development and to insure its long-term dissemination. The process now is formally tied to the World Association of Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM), since the General Assembly at the World Congress in Osaka in 1999 endorsed the Executive Summary.³ This summer, the World Health Organisation (Department for Emergency and Humanitarian Action) has signalled a wish to participate more actively, both in the ongoing development and also in the active use of the protocol as basis for research and teaching. The Task Force on Quality Control of Disaster Management (TFQCDM) remains, however, an independent body as previously outlined.²

For comparative research, disasters will be divided into identifiable phases, each described exclusively by its properties and not by time. It should facilitate comparisons regardless of the type of event that is responsible for the disaster. For example, the impact phase may vary from seconds (earthquakes) to weeks (flooding) to years (droughts), but still is the same phase. Furthermore, any or all of the Basic Societal Functions that together constitute a society may be followed through each of the defined phases of disaster, as well as how the functional status of each changes depending on the kind of assistance provided or not provided. In this context the concept of "Best Outcome Without Assistance" (BOWA) will become crucial.³

Since the previous presentation at the III Nordic Congress, further elements and concepts have been discussed in more detail. The formula that can be used to analyse all of the elements that lead to a disaster has been refined to provide a better instrument for achieving an understanding of the elements that together constitute the Damage Probability. The ultimate goal of the project, is to identify and modify the key factors responsible for turning an event into a disaster.

The Guidelines provide the instruments required to analyse not only how a disaster is handled, but also how pre-event activities may prove crucial to reduce damage in a cost-beneficial way. To analyse is to evaluate. To evaluate is to attribute a value.

We need to identify proper sets of Indicators of Effectiveness so that each activity can be performed with utmost efficiency. Different activities then will be compared as to which is more effective in solving a problem. However, we still will need to define a different set of

values if we want to verify if an activity really has benefited the victims. This demands a comprehensive understanding of the use of Indicators of Effectiveness, since one commodity (or action) may serve both as a variable and a parameter. (Water may serve as a parameter with regard to logistics, but would be a variable with regard to Crude Mortality Rate in a refugee camp). To some extent, the indicators will be quantitative, to some extent qualitative.

The TFQCDM has developed the indicators needed for the computations of a Disaster Severity Score and a Health Disaster Severity Score. Also, the concept of a Vulnerability-Preparedness Index will be subjected to already identified indicators. However, a complete list of Indicators of Effectiveness must be developed as the Guidelines become used more widely. All in all, the proper use of the Disaster Research Template should provide all of the elements needed to finally start to analyse disasters, their potential for reduction, and their management in an institutionalised way.

References

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