

Policy Failures and the Challenges of Emergency Response and Disaster Management in Nigeria: Advocating a Multi-Stakeholders' Approach

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ABSTRACT: Emergency situations are commonplace occurrences in every society, including Nigeria. Despite various policies, institutions and agencies of government saddled with responding to different types of emergencies and management of disaster situations, the disaster management climate in Nigeria is still lacking in the areas of synergy, coordination, timeliness and expertise needed to effectively coordinate and manage life threatening natural or manmade disaster. Given the above, this article examines the obstacles to emergency response and catastrophe management in Nigeria and makes the case for a multi-stakeholder strategy. Secondary sources were analysed for content to create data for this article. The theory of political systems developed by David Easton served as the basis for this research. The conclusion from the analysis was that the ad hoc nature of emergency responses has not only proven to be ineffective, it is also costly in terms of losses of lives and properties. There is therefore an urgent need to rethink our emergency response and disaster management framework for better efficiency and effectiveness. Flowing from the conclusion reached, it was recommended, among others that there should be a policy framework that would assign statutory roles to traditional institutions in the coordination of disaster recovery efforts and management of post disaster situations in their domains. This will help to reduce conflict of interest between government agencies and indigenous communities in the face of emergency situations and disaster. It was also recommended that the task of disaster recovery and management should not be left to selected institutions of government alone. Intersectoral collaboration is critical. The National Insurance Corporation of Nigeria (NICON) should be encouraged to set up and manage a special fund for disaster recovery and post disaster management.

KEYWORD: Public Policy, Emergency Response, Disaster and Disaster Management.

INTRODUCTION

For most parts of 2022, Nigeria was under water. The 2022 rainy season came with massive surge in the overflow of water, leading to flooding in many parts of the country. With over 600 deaths and close to 2 million persons displaced, the flood situation in Nigeria is a national emergency that has exposed the level of unpreparedness of government and policy makers in the management of disasters. Just like in previous years, the response from government has remained largely ad-hoc and unplanned. No one can prevent natural disasters from occurring, but government can set up structures, institutions and formulate appropriate policies to manage them in ways that will mitigate its effects on the citizens.

With the unplanned nature of Nigeria's disaster management framework that focuses more on the immediate symptoms, there exist a gap in strategic post disaster management, disaster prevention – especially man-made disaster (fire outbreaks), and disaster recovery programmes for victims. The situation in the North Eastern part of Nigeria with respect to the poor management of resettlement programmes for victims of insurgency, the poor handling of the welfare of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in many parts of North Central Nigeria who are victims of communal clashes, especially between farmers and herdsmen, and the lack of any form of recovery programme for victims of flood, fire, erosion and other forms of natural disaster make the disaster management climate in Nigeria chaotic and in urgent need of policy reforms.

Emergency services and disaster management in Nigeria are as disorganised as the rest of the country's government. With a robust public sector that has several institutions; Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), each charged with a certain set of responsibilities, response to critical situations is still a herculean task. When it comes to managing emergencies in Nigeria, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is primarily in charge. They lead other government institutions like such as the Federal Ministry Health, Security agencies among others. NEMA has now been moved to the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, which was not established by the Federal Government of Nigeria until 2019.

Notwithstanding these institutional frameworks, there is a systemic governance lacuna that have continued to exist in the Nigerian public sector, which many people had referred to as the 'Nigerian factor'. The Nigerian factor is a derogatory term that loosely describes the failures of the Nigerian public sector in areas where similar institutions in other parts of the world succeeds. A typical example is the operation of a national carrier. While Rwanda Air is being run efficiently and effectively by the government of Rwanda, the Nigerian factor has prevented the Nigeria government from operating an efficient and effective national carrier after several failed attempts. The terrorist attack on an Abuja bound train from Kaduna in March 2022 further exposed the systemic rot called the Nigerian factor. Harvesting the data of travelers in the train proved a difficult task because of issues of overloading, ticket racketeering, corruption, among others. In other nations, such as the United States, it would take just a few minutes to gather such crucial information as the train's schedule, the names of the passengers, and so on. In 2000, the year Nigeria celebrated its 40th anniversary of independence, it was ranked as the most corrupt nation in the world by Transparency International.

To address the issues under investigation, this paper is divided into four subsequent parts. The first part will be devoted to clarifying key concepts in the paper, the second part will discuss the theoretical foundations for the paper, while the third part will deal with critical subheadings that addresses the title of the paper. The last part will conclude the paper and make recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Discussions on the key concepts in this discourse will help to properly situate the points of view advanced in this study and help the public to correctly connect the dots in this treatise. Basically, three key concepts are

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critical to the discussions in this paper and they are; public policy, disaster and emergencies, and disaster management.

PUBLIC POLICY: Public policy is one concept that has continued to receive widespread scholarly attention as its complexities and scope continue to expand. Dibia (2014) quoted Thomas Dye as defining public policy to mean whatever the government chooses to do or not to do. According to Jenkins (in Olaniyi, 2008), the choices made by a political actor or group of actors about which objectives to pursue and how to pursue them within a given context, where those goals and those paths should be technically within the actors' capacities to attain, constitute public policy. Public policy, according to Chukwuemeka (2008), is the government's plan of action. He defines public policy as the normative control and goal-articulation of government operations at varying levels. Public policy, as explained by Chukwuemeka, is the government's stated aims and the means by which it plans to attain those goals. Public policy, according to Ikelegbe (2008), is the end result of governmental action. Olaniyi (2018) attempted to provide a broader definition of public policy by arguing that it encompasses decision making, implementation, and assessment.

A key feature of public policy is that it has to do with the institutions of government. Individuals and private groups make policies but these cannot be effectively described as public policies. We have business policies where customer satisfaction is the norm for most private sector businesses. In keeping to this policy, they ensure that their business premises are comfortable and neat, and that their staff are courteous and friendly to customers. They also intervene swiftly in cases of dispute between their employees and a customer and where their employee is found wanting, they mete out sanctions to the erring employee, tender apologies to the customer or offer other form of compensation to make the customer happy.

In a family, there might be a policy of no late-night movements. To enforce this, certain sanctions are stipulated to ensure compliance. Social groups also have their policies but in all, every aspect of individual or group decisions or policies are only binding on their members and cannot be legally enforced on nonmembers of the group or organization. This is a major distinguishing difference between individual policies and public policies. Public policies affect the society as a whole and have wider implications on majority of individuals and groups. The term "public policy" may also be used more loosely to refer to any activity or planned action taken by the government with the intention of accomplishing certain ends.

What public managers in government do or do not do in response to public crises is an example of public policy, as described by Dibia (2014). As a tool of government, public policy has far-reaching implications and impacts in fields as diverse as economics, academia, healthcare, social welfare, international relations, infrastructure, and the home market. The management of both natural and man-made catastrophes and crises is only one example of the many social or public concerns that nations throughout the globe must face. Public issues, according to Dibia (2014), are social circumstances generally agreed to be undesirable and in need of solution. The government has taken steps to resolve these issues in response to them.

DISASTER AND EMERGENCIES: A disaster is an incident that disrupts the normal conditions of existence. Disaster could be man-made or an act of God, called natural disaster. It could also be sudden – like a flash flood – or progressive – like erosions and droughts. Usually, disasters leave behind trails of destruction, loss of lives and properties on a large scale. An incident can be said to be a disaster when the capacity exceeds what the community or environment can handle using its own available resources. Thus, disaster exposes the vulnerability of a community and the society as a whole. Earthquakes, explosions, fire, volcanoes, landslides and floods are examples of some of the well-known disasters. In recent times, acts of terror have become one of the most commonplace disasters of the 21st century.

According to Olurunfemi, & Raheem (2010), disaster has to do with emergency situations caused either by natural hazards or manmade actions that results to a substantial change in circumstances (usually negatively)

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over a relatively short period of time. The definition by Olorunfemi & Raheem (2010) brought to the fore, the similarities between the words disaster and emergency. Both terms have been used interchangeably in this study but they are not entirely the same thing – even though they share obvious similarities.

An emergency, according to Olivia (2011) is a situation of grave danger or risk to one's health, life, or environment. Emergencies are mostly preventable and have micro level impacts. Thus, we could have medical emergencies which can effectively be addressed through timely medical intervention. A riot or civil disobedience is also an emergency. Severe weather conditions and fire incidents also constitute emergencies that can be nipped in the bud through timely interventions and response actions. In fact, any situation that poses serious threat to human life is an emergency. From the analysis, it therefore means that emergencies and disasters both present situations that demand urgent response, emergencies involve individuals or small group of people, while a disaster occurs on a much bigger scale and has the potential to cause large scale destruction of lives and properties.

Emergencies are early warning signs of disaster; thus, similar strategies are usually employed in emergency management and disaster management. However, human casualty is one of the major distinguishing features that defines what an emergency situation is and what is a disaster and if people are not hurt, then there is no disaster.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT: The aim of disaster management efforts is to increase community participation in the deliberate management of risk and the reduction of vulnerability. As a systemic problem, it requires serious effort from government and nonprofits, as well as improved sectoral and policy-level coordination (Olorunfemi & Raheem, 2010). The purpose of disaster management is to lessen the impact of disasters by preventing or mitigating losses, providing victims with timely and efficient aid, and facilitating a speedy and full recovery. To be more specific, disaster management is the process of managing the roles and duties of responders, business sector organisations, public sector agencies, nonprofit and faith-based organisations, volunteers, contributions, etc. in the face of a catastrophe. Preparedness, reaction, recovery, and mitigation all work together towards the ultimate aim of reducing the effect of a catastrophe.

The disaster management cycle is the continual process by which governments, corporations, and civil society prepare for and mitigate the effects of catastrophes, respond in the immediate aftermath of an incident, and work to rebuild and restore their communities. Taking the right steps at the right times throughout the cycle improves readiness, improves early warnings, lessens susceptibility, and prevents catastrophes in subsequent cycles. The whole cycle of disaster management involves the development of governmental policies and strategies to either prevent or lessen the impact of catastrophes on society and its infrastructure. There are five phases in the disaster management cycle, as outlined by Olivia (2011).

1. **Prevention:** Being proactive is the greatest way to deal with a calamity. Knowing what may go wrong and coming up with plans to prevent it is part of being proactive. Disasters cannot always be avoided, but this step of the cycle includes putting permanent safeguards in place that may help minimise risk. This is particularly true for what people call "acts of God," or natural calamities. Scenarios like the ones below are included in preventative measures.
 - Reducing the likelihood of flooding by careful planning and implementation of activities such as constructing locks, dams, or channels to reroute water away from populated areas.
 - Knowledge sharing and coaching on emergency preparedness such as teaching educators how to safely evacuate their pupils from a burning or tornado-stricken school.

The disaster management framework in Nigeria is largely not proactive and worse still poorly responsive to disaster situations. In many cases, recurring incidents like floods still meets us unprepared year by year.

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Every flood incident exposes our poor preventive strategies and inability to learn from history or past events. The situation is even worse for fire disaster prevention.

2. **Mitigation:** In the event that disasters are inevitable, when all other options have been exhausted, mitigation is used. The goal of catastrophe prevention measures is to lessen the number of lives lost. Both structural and non-structural interventions may be implemented here. To mitigate the consequences of a catastrophe, it may be necessary to make adjustments to the structure of a building or the surrounding area. Building of drainages, deforestation, demolition of structures, etc. are examples of structural measures. On the other hand, nonstructural measures have to do with amendments that do not significantly alter the physical features of an environment. An example is clearing of drainage channels and implementation of safety rules and regulations. Whether structural or nonstructural measures, the disaster management system in Nigeria with respect to mitigation lacks coordination, focus and strategy. It focuses only on the symptoms per time and lacks a strategic outlook for the medium and long terms.
3. **Preparedness:** Preparedness for critical situations is a continuous process where individuals, businesses, communities and organizations can simulate, plan and train for in anticipation of how they will likely react in the case of a disaster. Preparedness is aimed at ensuring utmost readiness. Active-shooter drills, fire drills and evacuation rehearsals are all good examples of the preparedness stage. Nigeria has never been adequately prepared for any disaster situation including the recurring ones like flooding and fire incidents. We have always been caught unawares and life often returns to normal immediately the situation subsides. This has often left us with avoidable losses of lives and properties.
4. **Response:** When disaster strikes, the next stage is to deal with the aftermath. It requires both immediate and long-term responses. Prevention is more proactive than response. Coordination of resources (human, material, financial, etc.) is essential for a successful disaster response, as it is the only way to restore the safety of people and the environment and lessen the risk of additional property damage. Extinguishing any leftover flames and stabilising any areas that provide a high flammability risk are examples of actions taken during the response phase after a forest fire. If you've done your homework, you'll be ready to handle any emergency that comes your way. In the case of Nigeria, we lack both the capacity to prepare for a crisis and the speed with which to respond to one.
5. **Recovery:** Recovery is the fifth and last phase of catastrophe management. This may take many years or even decades. For instance, the effects of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 are still being felt in certain sections of New Orleans. Restoring the area's stability and normal community operations is part of this process. Food, clean water, utilities, transportation, and healthcare are all considered necessities; thus, they will be restored first throughout the recovery process. Aiding people in getting back to normal, or finding a new normal in the aftermath of a tragedy, is the ultimate goal of this phase. This phase is now at a virtual standstill in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts the Political Systems Theory by David Easton (1957) as a framework for analyzing the need for a multi stakeholders' approach to emergency responses and disaster management. The political systems theory explains the internal structure of a society as being characterized by the interrelatedness, interconnectedness and dynamism of the parts that make up the whole. Easton's method for analysing political systems is predicated on the premise that inputs of different types are what keep the system functioning, and that this can be seen if we see the system of political acts as a unit. According to Easton, these inputs are transformed by the system's processes into outputs, which in turn have effects on the system and its surrounding environment. To give form to his idea, Easton said that a system is "any set of variables, regardless of the degree, of interrelationship among them."

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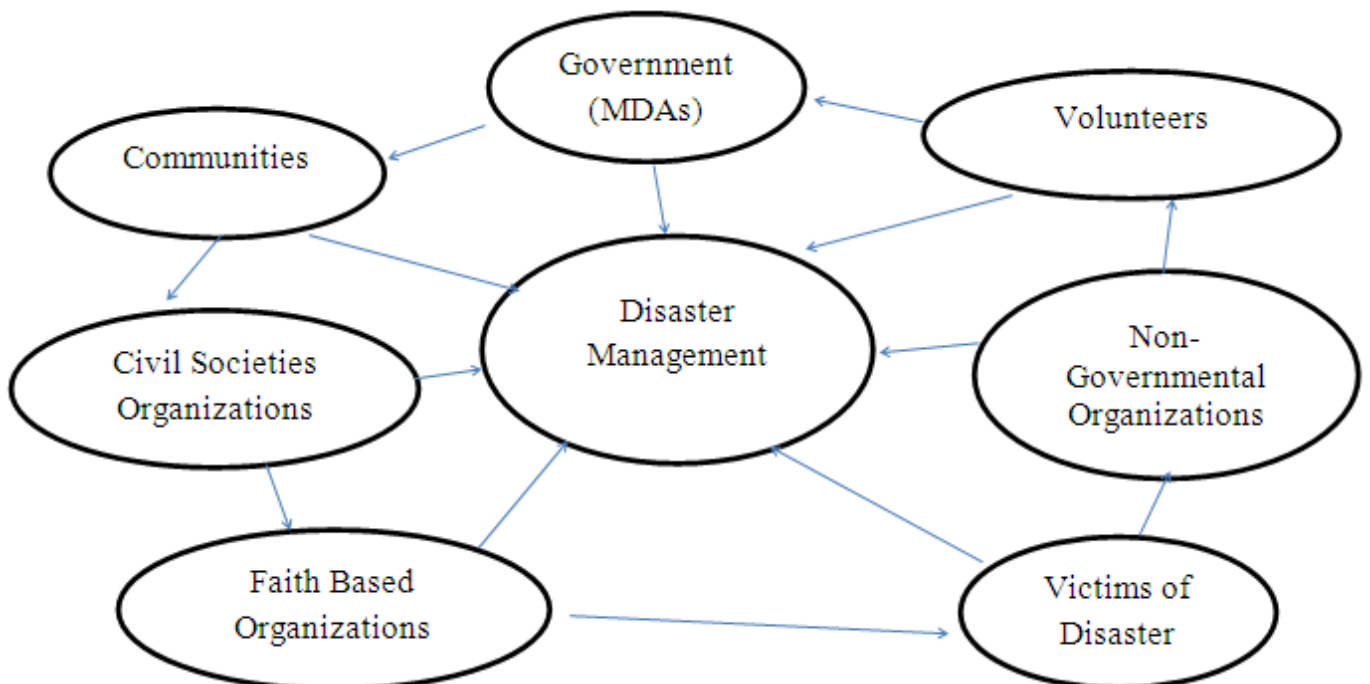
According to Easton, what sets a political system apart from others is its focus on the processes through which values are collectively and officially assigned. He distinguished between the internal and external political environments. The first group consists of non-political societal structures that coexist with the political system but do not engage in political relations. Economy, culture, social structure, and individuals all make up intra-societal systems of which the political system is a part. The political system is shaped and created by these systems. Politics may be affected by changes in the economy, popular culture, or social institutions. Everything outside the borders of a specific civilization is considered part of the extra-societal environment. They could come together to establish a supersystem of which the political system is a component. The global cultural order is a structure that exists outside of traditional societies.

The political system is vulnerable to stresses from both internal and external systems. The political system might undergo changes due to stress brought on by internal or external disruptions to the intra- and extra-societal systems. Some disruptions may even help the system endure, while others may have little effect on its resilience to stress. Political systems need to serve two purposes if they are to survive. They need to be able to determine society's ideals and persuade the vast majority of people to adopt those values. Important factors that set political systems apart from others are the allocation of values for a society and the degree to which its members adhere to those values.

The system theory, from management perspective, is viewed as an integrative approach which presents organisations as a WHOLE made up of different but unified and interrelated PARTS. Different departments, divisions and units exist within a structured organization, each performing different functions. It is instructive to state here that these functions are supposed, in an ideal situation, to be more complementary than competitive. Thus, any dysfunction in the functioning and operations of a part in the system can negatively affect the system as a whole.

The system theory can be represented in the diagram below. The diagram represents the disaster management framework, shows the interconnectivity among the various agencies and institutions responsible in one way or the other in emergency response and disaster management.

Figure 1:



Researcher’s conceptualization, 2023

The postulations of the systems theory appropriately capture our discussions in this study. The emergency response and disaster management process can be likened to the WHOLE in the system. The various stakeholders involved are the PARTS. From the framework above, the whole parts are interconnected with the whole and the linkage arrows indicate how each part is expected to impact on the whole. This is the focus of this study.

MULTI STAKEHOLDERS’ APPROACH TO EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: A NECESSITY

Nigeria is susceptible to various types of disasters, both natural and man-made. Natural disasters are acts of God that are better managed because they are not preventable. A good strategy for managing natural disasters will help to mitigate its consequences and reduce its catastrophic effects. However, there are also a number of man-made disaster peculiar to Nigeria. A number of the fire incidents that occur in Nigeria are man-made. Also, terrorism and insurgency, pipeline explosion, communal clashes, road and air transport accidents, religious riots, among others constitute significant aspects of man-made disaster. Thus, while natural disasters are manageable, man-made disasters can be prevented. This makes the whole web of disaster management more complicated and also exposes the apparent fact that ad-hoc arrangements without appropriate policy frameworks cannot be effective to the management of disaster in Anambra state and Nigeria as a whole.

In cases of flood disaster for instance, the emphasis is more on the provision of ‘relief materials’ for flood victims, especially those that have been internally displaced by the flood. Beyond the provision of relief materials, very little is done in the areas of resettlement of the flood victims and no long-term plans or strategy is ever put in place to ensure that the victims are assisted to return to their previous state of economic and social life before the disaster. Many victims of flood are usually forced to begin their economic lives afresh probably until another disaster strikes.

Also, the management of fire disaster management is usually reactionary and short-lived. Emphasis is merely on efforts to put out the fire. Immediately the fire is put out, there is hardly a long-term, well-thought-out solution to help victims mitigate their economic losses and bounce back quicker. While loss of lives from fire or flood disasters can never be regained, economic losses can be recovered with effective policy frameworks, strategies and collaboration from relevant agencies. Post disaster recovery efforts and management is lacking and everyone is expected to move on with their lives once the lights are out and the events are over.

Many community farmlands have been destroyed by gully erosion, especially in the South Eastern parts of the country, and there has been no strategic response from the government amid several outcries from the communities for government intervention. There is also no strategic post disaster management plan for victims of terrorism and insurgency, manifesting in many parts of the South East region of Nigeria as secessionist agitations from non-state actors led by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Pipeline explosion, communal clashes, road and air transport accidents, religious riots, among others have scores of victims who have been left to lick their wounds without succor or help from government, except for occasional or happenstance interventions from philanthropists, NGOs and other categories of kind individuals who show concern and care.

From all intents and purposes, the management of disaster in Nigeria in is not holistic and while the government is supposed to take the lead in this regard, it is always caught napping in times of disaster emergencies and has remained ineffective in strategic long-term post disaster recovery and management efforts. Government agencies involved in disaster management all work in isolation and even when they collaborate, they do so on ad-hoc basis with no policy framework and long-term strategic management plan.

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The lack of synergy and institutional framework is, in the view of this paper, the missing link in effective management of disaster and response to emergencies. There is no strategic framework of collaboration between government and nongovernmental actions in emergency responses. In many cases, untrained nongovernmental actors inadvertently constitute to creating more problems than there already was. In cases of fire emergencies for instance, untrained first responders can endanger their lives while trying to help put out the fire. Effective response to emergencies requires some level of training that equips one with the requisite knowledge and skills needed to manage dangerous situations. This makes the effective collaboration of state and nonstate actors crucial since the government have consistently failed to effectively manage different kinds of emergency situations on their own.

With respect to policies, *The Humanitarian Response Plan, the National Disaster Management Framework, and the National Disaster Response Plan* all include detailed descriptions of the many tiers and structures for interagency and intergovernmental (federal, state, and local) cooperation in disaster management, in addition to those of the community, civil societies and nongovernmental organizations. The catalogue of government failures despite these policy frameworks lends credence to the need for a new strategy for better efficiency and effectiveness. To this end, we recommend as follows;

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

In conclusion, we assert that the ad hoc nature of emergency responses has not only proven to be ineffective, it is also costly in terms of losses of lives and properties. There is therefore an urgent need to rethink our emergency response and disaster management framework for better efficiency and effectiveness. To achieve a better and more effective disaster management process in Nigeria, we recommend as follows;

1. There should be a robust policy framework to formalise the workings of different government agencies involved in emergency response and disaster management. This framework should spell out and define the type and nature of the partnership that should exist in order to ensure better efficiency and effectiveness.
2. The government and the organised civil society should adopt a Memorandum of Understanding that would foster a robust working that will help in the better management of responses to emergencies and disasters.
3. There should be a policy framework that would assign statutory roles to traditional institutions in the coordination of disaster recovery efforts and management of post disaster situations in their domains. This will help to reduce conflict of interest between government agencies and indigenous communities in the face of emergency situations and disaster.
4. The task of disaster recovery and management should not be left to selected institutions of government alone. Intersectoral collaboration is critical. The National Insurance Corporation of Nigeria (NICON) should be encouraged to set up and manage a special fund for disaster recovery and post disaster management.

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