

PROPOSAL OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL DISASTER RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT AGENCY IN THE ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

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Abstract :

In a country which, regrettably is a disaster-prone as Algeria, it is of crucial importance, at the macro-level, for the country to have a well established and well regulated disaster management plan. This will enable the government to avoid undue crisis management when future emergencies occur. It is also of crucial importance, again at the macro-level, to integrate disaster management in all its facets with government's mainstream policies and plans for national development. Disaster management and economic development are not two separate disciplines that conflicts for resourcing. They are synonymous and their resourcing should be a combined administrative process.

To fulfil these goals, the proposal of the establishment of a national disaster research and management agency in Algeria has two objectives (1) to prepare the national disaster management plan and (2) to create a sustainable cadre of disaster management staff at all levels, and to promote institutional and public awareness of disasters, their effects and likely relief activities. The permanently established national disaster management organisation is presented in what follows. The organisation chart describes the structure, the chain of control and reporting, and the main working relationships. It allows to have a permanently established and functioning integrated data collection system to gather information relevant to disaster management in all its aspects. However, it has a wider application and provides an important step forwards an effective national data collection system, and this will require extensive research work. Several partial data bases are already available and these will be drawn upon in the creation of the agency which will attempt to provide a more general view within a single framework. The structure of the agency will then incorporate existing government, non-government and community information/data sources in order to provide an overall picture of potential danger zones, multi-sectoral early warning indicators and available resources.

This enables particular attention to be paid to problem geographic sectors or problem functions, and the consequent mobilisation and allocation of resources in advance of disasters.

INTRODUCTION

As any other form of action in favour of protection, social and sustainable economic development, the prevention and attenuation of the natural disasters should be based on research through a national strategy of management of natural catastrophes. It is well accepted nowadays that science and modern technology allied to a enlightened social policy are able to mitigate considerably the negative effects of natural disasters.

For this purpose, a clear definition of the national strategy of the management of disasters is primordial, for a government, for the establishment and the maintaining of adequate arrangements to respond efficiently to all aspects of the disaster threats. That is valid to all levels of the national structure, from the central government to the local authorities or local associations. If this strategy is not well defined, the preventive measures to reduce the negative effects of the calamities will be non adequate; consequently, the human lives and material losses will increase and the country globally will suffer.

A strong and clear strategy will provide the following advantages:

- Direct involvement of the government in the all affairs concerning disasters,
- A foundation for an appropriate legislation and associated regulations,
- A real organisation and a clear attribution of responsibilities,
- A general directorate to insure an optimal use of the necessary resources and a rigorous assessment of the threat,
- A national competence and a self-reliance which will breed an adequate international assistance when the country eventually asks for it.

It should be clear that in order to have a better definition of the national strategy of natural disaster management, it is necessary to have a base of organisational arrangements such as an integrated structure in the government. It is imperative that the first responsibility of the disaster management must be insured by the central government. This will allow the government to avoid surprises in the management of crisis during future catastrophes. There is also a crucial importance, at the highest level of the government, to integrate disaster management with all its aspects in the global strategy of the economic and social development. Because nowadays it is widely recognised that disaster management and the economic development are not two separate disciplines which are in conflict in terms of resources (budget), but they are synonyms and their resources should be included in the combined administrative process.

To reach these objectives, it is desirable to establish an integrated National Disaster research and Management Agency (NDRMA) in the Algerian government and whose structure is given in the figure enclosed herewith.

The agency (NDRMA) will have four principal actions:

1. Design and compilation of all the data banks necessary to research work and disaster management in Algeria; to establish a national system of collecting the data,

2. Prepare a national disaster management plan coherent with all the other institutions of the country,
3. Co-ordinate all the national institutions and organisms concerned by the mitigation of the negative effects of the natural disasters.
4. To create a sustainable and permanent cadre of disaster management staff at all levels, and to promote institutional and public awareness of disasters, their effects and likely relief activities.

The proposed organisation is integrated completely in the government structure, which requires improvement, illustrates the control chain, the circulation of the information flux as well as the main command relations.

AGENCY ROLES

The agency will establish the main orientations and recommendations of actions to undertake; particularly, all those who are in position to contribute in the mitigation of the effects of natural calamities are engaged to participate, each one in his sector and in the frame of a coherent programme, to a national action in order to take prospective measures which attenuate the vulnerabilities of the population and their properties as well as the environment.

Disaster management, to be effective, has to be implemented as a comprehensive and permanent activity, not as a campaign reaction to separate disaster situations. Therefore, the central government has to deal with a wide range of regulations, planning, clear policy, organisational, operational and other matters; it should have a clear long term strategy in disaster management.

The agency should do as the reduction of the negative effects of disasters be a priority element in the programmes of all the national organs and institutions.

The agency will allow to mitigate considerably the tragic impact of these natural and industrial phenomena by a scientific and complete management of disasters combining the planning and the attenuation together with a supported contribution of relief.

The scientific and technological knowledge of natural disasters as well as of mitigation measures of human and property losses are sufficiently advanced to establish a National Disaster research and management Agency in each country. The agency has twelve objectives to reach through a co-ordinated national action:

1. Definition of new mechanisms and strategies for the application of today's knowledge, taking into account the various social, cultural and economic differences of the regions.
2. Bring together the scientists, engineers, planners, politicians and decision-makers in the formulation of development strategies, relief organisations as well as all the concerned organisations to collaborate within the same frame in order to co-ordinate their efforts and thus to develop a national strategy in terms of Disaster management.

3. Allow all the national institutions concerned by the development, social protection and the mitigation of the effects of disasters to take advantage of the advancement of science and technology.
4. Promote a national awareness, and an active interest and permanent to the attenuation of the impact of disasters with the co-operation of the authorities concerned.
5. Collect all the information relative to disasters that occurred, as back in time as possible, at the national level, analyse them, reconstruct the most important events and finally write the history of disasters in Algeria.
6. Promote learning experience and public awareness.
7. Emphasis on preparing various sections of the population to meet challenges generated by disasters.
8. Promote training opportunities for upgrading capabilities and skills to deal with disasters.
9. Promote and develop community action plans to cope with the natural disaster considered through disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness actions.
10. Promote the interface between various sectors (including corporate sectors, the media, insurance and financing institutions, schools, universities, research centres, etc...) to enhance emergency response capabilities.
11. Establish a database for disasters in Algeria.
12. Build a disaster impact reduction culture in Algeria.

IMPACT OF THE AGENCY (NDRMA)

The agency will play a consultant role for a large community of users, including the central government authorities, regional and local authorities, the administrators, planners, engineers, architects, all the experts of all disciplines of earth sciences, technical experts, experts in human sciences, researchers in all disciplines as well as the general public.

The findings of research work of the agency should be an integral part of the general process of economic and social development. They provide fundamental means which should guide officials at the local, regional and national levels in the formulation of development strategies in disaster prone-regions, land use management, city planning, development or revision of building regulations, materials norms, siting new critical engineering projects as well as decision-making policies to stimulate and facilitate the efforts of the disaster mitigating and response communities to take specific practical preventive measures to reduce the negative impact of disasters. The advisor role of the agency will consist to what follows:

1. ADVISE

1. Respond for each type of disaster the following questions:

☛ Type of disaster, size, region and probability of occurrence?

✦ Social and economical impact?

✦ Preventive measures to reduce the risk?

2. Make all the levels of the government as well as the response organisations aware of the major disasters that are threatening a site, a zone or a region.
3. Establish adequate and appropriate measures to attenuate the risk of disasters.
4. Guide the administrators and the planners in the local, regional and national levels in the formulation of strategies to attenuate the impact of disasters.
5. Promote and develop the necessary expertise to the process of risk mitigation.
6. Contribute by technical studies for the improvement of performances of the institutions charged with the planning and relief in terms of major disaster management.
7. Conduct, at the demand of the authorities, any action or intervention in the frame of the competence of the agency.
8. Advise the organisms concerned with the view to establish norms and regulations in its competence field and to propose appropriate measures to reduce the disaster risk.
9. Orientates the research and education programs in terms of major disasters.

2. RESEARCH

1. Guide the applied and theoretical research for the social and economic development in terms of disaster risk mitigation.
2. Study the necessary social and economic conditions to integrate the preventive measures to attenuate the impact of disasters into the global process of national development.
3. Master science and modern technology for an efficient disaster management.
4. Stimulate forward-looking concepts for the future disasters
5. Contribute to improvements in ongoing disaster management capability,
6. Encourage the experts of the agency to communicate their findings at the various disaster related national and international conferences.
7. Encourage the international Co-operation in terms of disaster management.

3. DOCUMENTATION

To collect and have at the disposition of all the user sectors a documentation of references, as complete as possible, national and international. This documentation concerns:

1. establishment of a data bank of the disasters which occurred in Algeria as well as their effects,

2. Collection, treatment, conservation and diffusion of the data, information and documentation in terms of natural disasters,
3. Maintain an updated documentation of books, reports, journals, revues, newspapers and publications related to natural disasters and to their management,
4. Edit a revue devoted to the evolution of the national and international knowledge in terms of natural disasters.

4. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

1. Contribution the knowledge transfer in terms of mitigating the impact of natural disasters,
2. Identification of training needs,
3. Definition of the types of training and training policy,
4. Contribution in the conception of education programmes, at all levels, related to its domain of expertise; Disaster programmes in schools can play certainly an important role.
5. Use of media and other opportunities to apprise the public of current and proposed disaster-related activities,
6. Education of the general public to understand the advantages of long-term strategy of mitigation, particularly in relation to national development and preservation of the environment,
7. Organisation of campaigns of information, education, conferences, seminars, workshops to vulgarise the natural disaster phenomenon.
8. Contribution to training and to the improvement of skills of the personnel working in the field of natural disaster management.

CONCLUSION

In recognising the permanent threat of major investments and the population in Algeria due to the majors natural catastrophes, the government, through the agency, should multiply its efforts to continue the studies and analysis of the diverse natural calamities that are likely to occur in Algeria in view to mitigate their negative consequences.

The agency will also contribute, together with all the institutions and organisms concerned, to the formulation of an economic and social development strategy which includes the establishment of an appropriate policy of land management for a sustainable development and a national disaster management policy.