

Reframing Critical Information Needs for Disaster Response
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Information is critical to the successful response to disasters. In many ways, disasters are defined by a lack of information, whether this be not knowing the number or location of affected populations or the scale of critical needs unmet, gaps in the provision of critical services or the provision of accurate and appropriate information to disaster survivors on how to access and use assistance needed to achieve a rapid return to normal conditions.

The general response to the disaster information gap has been to increase the volume and scope of information collected and pushed to assistance providers and affected populations. The proliferation of electronic media options, whether simple phone picture taking, short messages or broadcast messaging, and a proliferation of platforms for the collection and dissemination of information, including drones, the web, crowd mapping and organizations specializing in information collection, analysis and management, are all an expanding effort to overcome the post disaster information gaps.

However, this effort to increase the volume of information collected and disseminated does not seem to have made disaster response more effective or more efficient, for four reasons:

1. The information on which to take action isn't in the growing information flow.
2. The information is not specific enough to take action on.
3. The information is not what is needed to take action.
4. The volume of information obscures the actual pieces of information needed for action.

This "fog of disaster" is similar to the more well known "fog of war", where the right decisions are not made because the right information is not available, or when available, not understood.

The paper considers three approaches to reframing critical information needs in disaster response. The first is that relief and recovery objectives are set as specific simple outcomes. While this is ideally what should happen, the objective setting process is often clouded by multiplication of objectives stretching across time and topical areas of intervention and need to be framed into post disaster stages which build on each other to provide the structure for a relief and recovery effort which grows over time.

Second, the information needed to achieve these outcomes is framed using the "SMART" approach, that is information needs should be defined as specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound¹ in relation to specific relief or recovery objectives. Third, the transition in relief and recovery objectives and activities is framed using a phase change approach², where success in achieving objectives, and the information needed for this success, is based on assessing how well the information available fits the requirements for defining whether success is being achieved. These three approaches take place in a transitional context, where relief and recovery objectives and information requirements increase as progress is made from the disaster to recovery.

¹ See http://www.wcasa.org/file_open.php?id=910 and <http://epdfiles.engr.wisc.edu/dmcweb/EP02PlanninganEmergencyResponse.pdf>.

² Kelly, C. (1999), Simplifying Disasters: Developing a Model for Complex Non-linear Events, **The Australian Journal of Emergency Management**, [Volume 14 Issue 1 \(Autumn 1999\)](#)

The paper will demonstrate these three approaches based on actual disaster examples and using a simulated disaster scenario to demonstrate how the approaches apply to responders and disaster survivors. The presentation will provide a framework through which disaster management organizations can frame and manage critical relief and recovery information needs and improve overall response operations.