

CHRISTCHURCH EARTHQUAKES: GOVERNANCE TRANSFORMATION DURING RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

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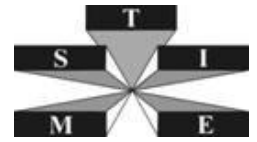
ABSTRACT

Scholarship has identified that supportive governance is necessary to ensure coping capacities in societies. Governance determines the ways in which a variety of actors engage and coordinate their efforts in disaster management. It enables comprehensive, integrated management of risks, involving risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery.

Existing disaster and risk management frameworks are commonly based on principles of sustainable development and collaborative planning, supported by policies and structures enabling shared system of governance. Risks and disasters are managed at the local level, with central governments providing strategic direction through national policies while supporting locally specific implementation of those policies and operational delivery. Recent events, however, have tested common interpretations of the principles of decentralized, bottom-up risk management and juxtaposed current regimes with demands of large scale disasters.

Examples from different countries reflect an acute awareness of the political and fiscal risks and the recognition on the part of respective governments that there is urgency to demonstrate leadership and deliver on the needs of communities affected by disasters. Governments' response in those situations often led to transformation of governance. In New Zealand, the increasingly nationalized and centralized response to and recovery from Canterbury (Christchurch) earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 led to governance transformation that reflected similar developments in other countries, such as Australia, Japan and the USA. In all these countries recent major disasters were followed by changes to previously existing arrangements, mainly pertaining to strengthening of the role of central government, and often accompanied by establishment of special agencies or introduction of new roles for the existing institutions. This trend highlights the necessity to acknowledge that practice of comprehensive, integrated risk management with devolved responsibility has been challenged.

Scholarship, as well as international policy-makers, identified that building disaster resilience is to a large extent a matter of democratic governance. Integrating social capital, ensuring meaningful deliberation and engagement with affected communities, achieving effective vertical coordination with multiple levels of government and other stakeholders, and capacity building at the local and regional level are among key factors for effective governance for resilience. Yet, the complexities and interdependencies of disaster impacts and the sheer size of financial obligations required to invest in long-term resilience cannot be easily managed at the local level. It seems that disasters have brought out the importance of the role of central government, or the 'top-down' aspect of the integrated



approach. The challenge now is to find solutions that bring ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ together in a way that enhances the framework without compromising established and tested principles of effective risk management. Disaster governance might be the key to better understanding and developing systems that can withstand the challenges of large magnitude events while safeguarding the principles of integrated risk management for resilience.

KEYWORDS:

Disaster resilience, governance, integrated management