CONTINUUM OR CONTIGUUM ?

DEVELOPMENT FOR SURVIVAL AND VULNERABILITY REDUCTION

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Abstract (250)

Disaster management remains post-event; is there self-interest in not attending the causes - which would reduce the need for the "relief machine"? How is survival achieved for those at whom post-disaster assistance is aimed, if not by disaster-responsible development?

Vulnerability studies now acknowledge the activities of mankind; where is the change in those activities? Where is pro-active strategic development for contextual change and vulnerability reduction. Most peoples' vulnerability is caused by the actions of other people. Identified as a cause of vulnerability, development can be made the medium for its reduction. Development does not have to wait for disaster to start it off!

As well as the large media-feeding disasters, there are countless small and globally unknown ones of "normal hazardousness". Massive disasters are themselves an aggregation of countless simultaneous small ones; and vulnerable contexts are, in part, caused by them. Until we are able to cope with normal hazardousness, we will be unable to manage the abnormal.

Ethical imperatives prevail for radical restructuring of humanitarian purpose. There has to be the eradication of causative systems and processes, creation of appropriate ecological contexts, and a disaster-responsible development within those contexts, contributing to a positive contiguum for survival.

What development implementation does not do on the one hand, will be the cause of what post-disaster assistance has to do - and has to pay for - on the other; but by then it is too late.
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The word “continuum”, in "continuum from relief to development", is used to mean a continuity of action after disaster, leading to development. Such a linearity is artificial; an altogether too tidy and too convenient sequence of stages of post-disaster response.

"Continuum" could imply that disaster-related development does not start until a disaster has happened; and that disaster-responsible development requires a disaster to start it off! "Continuum" is therefore also misleading. Further, we could infer from "continuum", leading to development, that development did not exist before the disaster happened. This we know not to be the case; development and change are endemic to human existence. Worse, "continuum" requires the selection of an event to start the sequence; who's selection and which event?

"Contiguum" (!) means, more realistically, that development and change, all hazards and their impacts, all "disasters" of whatever magnitude, and all stages of post-disaster response, are operating at the same time in overlapping juxtaposition. Not in relation to one disaster, but all disasters, distant and near, past and recent. Not only the disaster of which we are informed, but the plethora of "normal hazardousness" that is the reality.

Local as well as national disasters, of widely various magnitudes, extents and impacts, creating various overlapping stages of their own pre- and post-disaster activities, with external assistance or not, always in contexts created by development and change of one sort or another and, in part, by earlier disasters of one sort and another.

"Continuum" is about a selected event and its aftermath; "contiguum" is about all events and non-events as well.

These are the contexts in which, hazards, disasters, development and daily life intermix and are created. Development may have been oblivious of natural hazards or, whether it was or not, may have made vulnerability worse - there are countless past examples of that. But it is these contexts which it now must be the purpose of development to improve. In terms of human endeavour, it is development that holds the potential for contextural change, and which holds the key to vulnerability reduction and to survival.

After all, post-disaster assistance, as part of a continuum or not, happens after the damage and destruction, and after the death and injuries have been caused. Development is on-going, between disasters and, in its capacity to reduce vulnerability, is able to reduce damage and destruction, and to reduce death and injury. Survival, in the first instance, can be induced only by the right kind of development.

Normal hazardousness

There is a severe impediment to our logical understanding about disasters. The images we receive of disasters are of massive events; earthquakes, floods, landslides. Indeed, if the disaster is not massive, there are less likely to be images to see. The reality is that as well as the comparatively rare massive ones, there are countless unheard-of small and minor ones - or significant ones in minor or remote places.

The smaller and more frequent they are, the more normal they are; it is "normal hazardousness" that first requires attention - as community development and because the small ones are a cause of vulnerability to the large ones. Only appropriate disaster-responsible development can do this. If we ignore or cannot, or do not want, to attend to the small ones, the big ones that follow will have a greater impact, vulnerability will have been increased, and action afterwards will be less effective - and will cost more!

As a victim on the inside, it makes little direct material difference if the disaster is small or large. The effect on the individual is much the same; and the needs of the individual or the family are
much the same. These needs are small but widely repeated; but our images of massive disasters imply large resources and large actions.

Instead of so much emphasis on action afterwards, multiplicities of small scale projects for community development are required. Large macro-projects can be arranged for the organisations that can't, or won't, work small, but made up of "packages" of repeated micro-funded small ones. Basic-needs for human survival and its maintenance are potable water, food, cooking facilities, secure shelter, warmth, first aid, environmental health and welfare, and communications for information. There is an ample role for localised community development.

"The condition prevailing before a disaster, of a person, structure, community, or society, is of crucial significance to the degree of loss, damage or destruction sustained and the capacity to recover afterwards." (9) By now, this is surely common knowledge, but only development can induce a positive prevailing condition.

Accessibility to resources implies decentralisation of services to small repeated units. Community clinics for health services, as well as large centralised hospitals. Some clinics will be destroyed, but it will be less far to go to those that survive, and for those that survive to service the casualties of those destroyed. When, as the only source of health care, regional hospitals are put out of action, far more people are left without indigenous health services.

If there has to be a "continuum" at all, it has to **start with** development for survival; people are our greatest resource. Without survival there can be no indigenous reconstruction.

Until there are the necessary political, institutional, administrative and social changes for effective disaster-responsible development, there will be ever increasing need for post-disaster assistance. What development does not do on the one hand, will be the cause of what post-disaster assistance has to do - and has to pay for - on the other hand. And this, **after** the death and destruction have happened!

**Development for survival**
If "disasters are the monitor of development", what kind of development is disaster-responsible?

Three main levels of developmental activity play their part:

- community self reliance.
- physical protection
- strategic political economy

**Community self reliance**
Disaster reduction at community level entails improved self-reliance and resilience, and comprises multitudes of identified small measures for local protection, services and assistance, and mutual assistance. But there is little point in focusing on community development without disaster-responsible development in the regional context as well. There is little point in improvements in domestic building construction, for example, if the sea-wall has collapsed; decentralisation for accessibility to resources and services cannot be achieved by community development alone.

**Physical protection**
Civil engineering, where required, and disaster-resistant construction require inputs at regional and national levels for legislation, training and administrative rigour. There is less point in these also, without, for example, strategic planning for habitation in relation to risk zoning. Even disaster-resistant building construction will fail at some point in force or time, and many aspects of disaster cannot be made to disappear simply by building buildings better. Improved building construction is, in any case, a long-term political, economic and social, as well as a technical process. (2)

Strategic political economy
But there is little point, also, in community development and physical protection, if there is not the political will and appropriate economic frameworks for the overall achievement of equitable and ecological access to resources. There is less point in saving lives without saving livelihoods as well. (3)

Disaster reduction strategy has therefore also to include the screening of current and planned development projects for vulnerability impact, and the integration and understanding of disaster-responsibility into all sectors of development activity. Conceptual separation of disasters from their social contexts, their separation as administrative responsibilities, and maybe even their separation as academic pursuits, all serve to make matters worse - not better.

There is thus a massive ethical imperative (another ethical imperative) for a radical restructuring of humanitarian purpose in development, so as to create a strategic framework for the creation of macro- and micro-contexts that will reduce vulnerability, that will reduce the causes of vulnerability, and that will facilitate survival.

Structural change for a strategic framework
Humanitarian response to natural disasters in general takes for granted that the developing countries in which activity is focused, largely comprise former colonial territories. How did it transpire that the societies of those countries, rich as they were in economic activity and cultural history of their own, came to be so vulnerable to catastrophe and so dependent upon both developmental and post-disaster assistance?

From the Cook Islands in 1846, after what had been a serious hurricane, tools for reconstruction would have been preferred instead of inappropriate food supplies. We still hear similar criticisms.

During work for a brief history of natural disaster occurrence in Tonga (4), it was clear that although earthquake, volcanic eruption, hurricane and tsunami were as evident in pre-history as in history, otherwise descriptively rich Tongan folklore and legend seemed largely unconcerned with reference to environmental hazards. The first references to relief come from the Colonial Report of 1909, stating "the Government of Tonga sent in relief but it was not required to any great extent." (see note)

In India(5), there were thirty-one serious famines in the first 120 years of British rule (to 1878) against only seventeen in the entire previous two millennia (p287). An examination of the history of El Nino Southern Oscillations (ENSO) in relation to famines and the origins of the Third World, suggests that "there is little evidence that rural India had ever experienced subsistence crises on the scale of the Bengal catastrophe of 1770 under East India Company rule, or of the disease and hunger that occurred between 1875 and 1920 ...." (p285). Both the preceding Moguls and the Marathas flexibly tailored their rule to take account of the crucial ecological relationships and unpredictable climate fluctuations of the subcontinent's drought-prone regions" (p287).

"There is persuasive evidence that peasants and farm labourers became dramatically more pregnant to natural disaster after 1850 as their local economies were violently incorporated into the world market. What colonial administrators and missionaries … perceived as the persistence of ancient cycles of backwardness were typically modern structures of formal or informal imperialism." (p288).
The 1943 Bengal famine which caused between two and four million deaths was described as "one of the worst disasters that has befallen any people under British rule" - a British rule that had begun with the Bengal famine of 1770 and "was now drawing to a close with a comparable tragedy" (in which was the gestation of Hindu-Muslim hatred that led to more deaths and bloodshed and eventually to Partition).

Defining the depletion, or loss of entitlement, to the natural resource base of traditional agriculture as "ecological poverty", the same source identifies a "causal triangle" with increasing household poverty and state decapacitation in explaining both the emergence of a "third world" and its vulnerability to extreme climate events." (p310).

Of Nigeria, Michael Watts\(^{(6)}\) states "Climate risk … is not given by nature but … by 'negotiated settlement' since each society has institutional, social and technical means for coping with risk … Famines are social crises that represent the failures of particular economic and political systems."

Also of Africa, Wolde Miriam\(^{(7)}\) wrote: "The physical environment presents itself as it is; no more, no less. It is society that ought to learn and constantly reduce its limitations with respect to the physical environment. Famine is a consequence of the failure to learn from the constant interactions between a society and its physical environment. In these constant interactions the burden of adjustment is on society, not on the physical environment. Famine is a human responsibility".

As are earthquakes, tropical cyclones, volcanic eruptions, fires and floods. Significantly, as a "slow onset" disaster, famine is often separated from the rest; famine was excluded for the entirety of the International Decade for Disaster Reduction. But all disasters are slow onset when considered in terms of the causes of the accretion of their vulnerable contexts. There is much to be learnt from the study of famine, about how shortsighted political and economic policies can lead to long-term social deprivation, vulnerability and catastrophe.

Nevertheless, however useful and possibly interesting historical perspective is, it is not prerequisite. Most people's vulnerability is caused by other people, directly or indirectly, and we don't have to search historical examples for that. It is still happening!

Summing it all up is Kenneth Hewitt\(^{(8)}\) for whom "There are natural forces and some damages in most disasters that lie beyond all reasonable measures any society could make to avoid them … most of them would not be disasters, and many of the damages would not occur except as a result of characteristic and vulnerable human settlements. These developments record mainly the mismatch between the requirements of sensitive, secure environmental relations at the local and regional levels … and the demands of those extensive geographies of power and economy with which technocratic strategies have grown up, and mainly serve …"

(The writing of this paper has coincided with a close proximity to the impact and effects of foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom. Striking parallels are revealed in famine histories; separation from "ecological food sources" and implications for "the new transport" (railways) in the spread of cholera amongst famine victims. This is not only a Third World thing. There is a risk-inducing separation of economic systems from food production ecology, and a socioeconomic vulnerability to the impact of the disease on farmers and their communities).

Vulnerability is a condition, or state of affairs, that comes about as the result of a process, or of a congruence of processes. These processes are not "vulnerability" in themselves, but they are the crucial cause. Singly or on combination, examples are:
• economic and social alienation of ethnic and social groups; either as groups or sectors, or as individuals and families
• concentrations (and failure to inhibit such concentrations) of habitation in high risk areas; as the result of perceived opportunity, or due to coercion, or to marginalisation and lack of options
• corrupt practices generally, and in the construction industries in particular
• inequitable land ownership and occupancy, for habitation and for food production
• forcible deprivation of habitation or livelihood; eg: by large scale agriculture, by large construction (eg: dams), and by war and conflict.

Simply identification or mapping of "vulnerable groups" or "vulnerable conditions" is not enough. There needs also to be investigation, identification and modification or eradication of the causative processes as well.

The more remote or removed is the consumer or the user of a resource or a service, physically or socially, the more at risk they become because the more vulnerable they will be when something happens or when something goes wrong. There has to be first, the removal or radical modification of causative systems and processes, and the creation of appropriate ecological contexts, and second, a disaster-responsible development within those contexts, contributing to a positive contiguum for self-reliance and survival.

Post-disaster activity and assistance, on its own, is too late.

Conclusion
"Disaster and development" is a vital connection and is here a vital opportunity to debate its implications; but a large part of that debate has yet to be within "development" itself. Many of these things have been written and said before - but they cannot be said often enough.

Thirty years ago, it was said that "preparedness" was itself "development" and that disaster "mitigation" and "prevention" would follow; you had to start with what was possible; other changes would ensue. Well ???

In spite of (or maybe because of ?) the International Decade, disaster reduction is still at the stage of tidying the deckchairs on the Titanic. Past systems and practices which were the cause of today's vulnerability are still with us; and new and even more pernicious and powerful ones are in place. People now, and people to be, are still being put at risk. And while we sell "relief", "post-disaster assistance", "preparedness", "mitigation" and even "disaster reduction", vulnerability exponentially increases.

The market for the future looks good !

Notes
Tonga was made a Protectorate within the British Empire in 1900, but remained a politically independent Kingdom in its own right, the only Pacific island state to do so. Tonga became fully independent in 1970.

References