



SIDS and their vulnerability to Natural Disasters

Last week's article introduced the common characteristics and challenges of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). In this week's article we take a more in-depth look at a major vulnerability facing SIDS - **Natural Disasters**.

Natural Disasters

A natural disaster is any event or force of nature that has catastrophic consequences, for example; floods, earthquakes, storms, landslides, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. Natural



disasters are the combination of hazards (floods, landslides, tsunamis), conditions of vulnerability and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce the potentially negative consequences of risk.

SIDS are very prone to natural disasters and even though many successful initiatives have been carried out over the years other threats continue to emerge.

As was mentioned in last week's article, SIDS have particular

characteristics that render them susceptible to natural disasters. These are largely:

- ✚ Small size of country;
- ✚ Concentrated Economic and Administrative activities along coastlines;
- ✚ Remoteness; and
- ✚ Frail environments.

Natural disasters have major effects on SIDS such as:

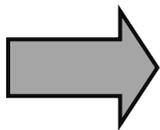


- ✚ Devastation of the agricultural sector;
- ✚ The wiping out of entire village settlements;
- ✚ The disruption of a high proportion of communication services;
- ✚ Injury or death of a relatively high percentage of inhabitants; and
- ✚ Significant damage to existing fragile and vulnerable economies.



It has been recognized that many disasters could have been greatly mitigated with adequate planning and preparation since this cost would have been smaller compared to the cost of relief and recovery efforts. However, to achieve the degree of planning and preparation it is necessary to make changes in the objectives and approaches to disaster management in SIDS. Some of the changes advocated include:

- ✚ Need for a shift in emphasis from relief and emergency response to preventive measures.
- ✚ Increased preparedness.
- ✚ Education of potentially affected populations.
- ✚ The strengthening of infrastructures,
- ✚ The design and setting up of reliable early warning systems,
- ✚ Broadcasting of mitigation measures,
- ✚ Proper information education and public awareness.



Modern thinking is that natural disasters are not entirely "**natural**", for people can be agents of disasters. For example: flooding may be caused from deforestation, poor irrigation systems and improper disposal of solid wastes. Human induced Climate Change is a factor which according to Scientists has worsened natural disasters by increasing their frequency and intensity. In addition, early warning systems are not very accurate since intensity of the disaster is becoming difficult to predict. It is therefore advisable that people living in SIDS, educate themselves on the vulnerabilities and do what is necessary to be prepared.

Sources:

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/natural+disaster>

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/priority-areas/sids/disaster-preparedness/>

photos from google images

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