

# COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES DURING PAST DISASTERS



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# Introduction

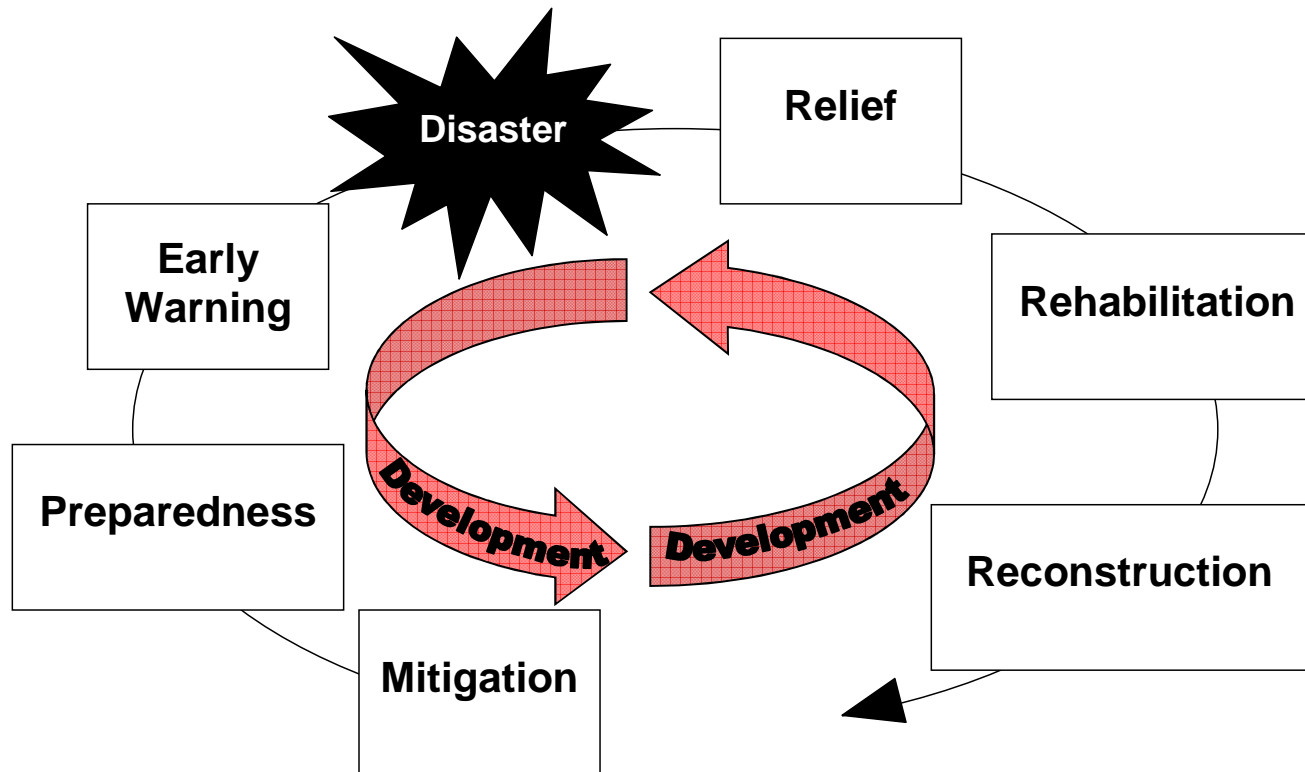
- Communication is very important in managing both natural and human made disasters.
- Damage to communications infrastructure, together with electricity supply exacerbated difficulties in carrying out response and recovery efforts during previous disasters that include floods, cyclones, cholera epidemics and road traffic accidents.

## Cont..

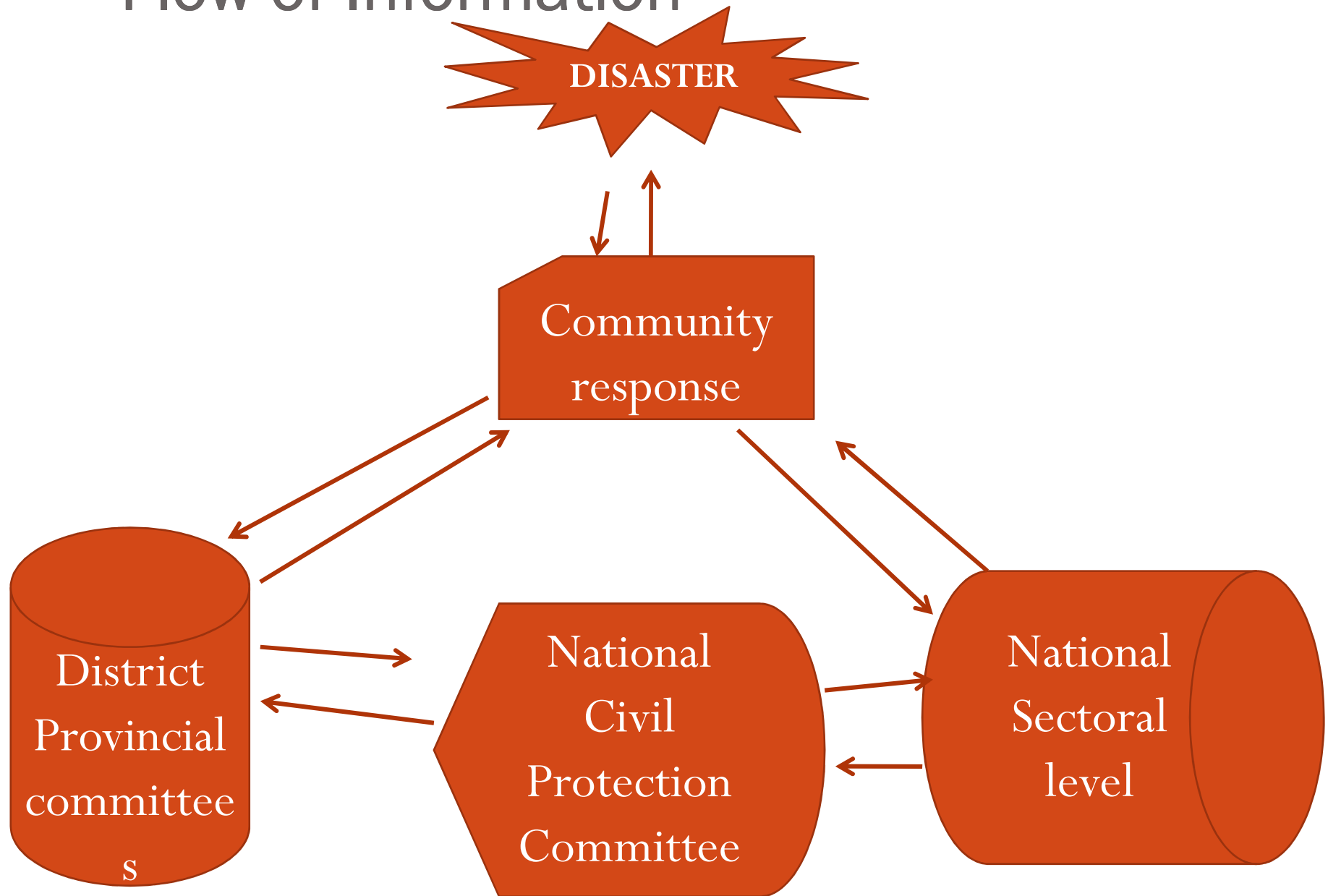
- Some disasters are inevitable but the sufferings can be minimized by proper information management and effective early warning systems.
- Effective communication should ensure dissemination of timely, accurate and understandable warning to populations at risk and political authorities.
- Should facilitate appropriate response measures so as to minimise loss and damage

# Cont..

- Communication is important in almost all phases of the disaster management process.



# Flow of Information



# Nature of information

- Early warning information about pending disasters
- distress calls / nature of emergency
- Response activities
- Needs assessment reports,
- Press releases
- Situation reports
- Assistance required
- number affected
- etc

# Our media of communication

- Telephones ( Land lines)
- Fax machines
- Mobile phones
- HFR – ZRP, Red Cross
- Internet facilities
- Electronic media
- Print media
- Word of mouth,
- Pamphlets,
- Flyers

# Challenges

- Telephones ( Land lines)
  - Telephones are not available
  - Where they are available they are not functional when most needed
  - Most of the time there is no power supply
  - Some ZESA power lines are down
  - No alternative source of power
- Fax
  - As above
  - Lack facility



# Challenges

- **Mobile phones:**

- Disasters usually occur in the wilderness where there is no network coverage, (Mbire, Muzarabani, Malipati)
- Communities rely on networks from neighbouring countries eg Zambia
- Sometimes there is no time to find an anthill or tree to make a call

- **HFR – ZRP,**

- Radios are not available
- If they are available, they have no batteries ,
- Lack of standby power supply equipment



## Cont..

- **Print media**

- Expensive to flight messages
- Sometimes messages are distorted and cause false alarms “*LOOMING DISASTER IN MUZARABANI*”
- The media will decide what is NEWS to them,
- Papers will get to communities two to three days later
- Poor readership

# Challenges

- Internet facilities
  - A few government offices have the facility that is functional,
  - Not very suitable for immediate response ( people browse the internet at their own spare time)
  - Power cuts
- Electronic media
  - Disaster prone areas have no radio and television stations
  - Access stations from neighbouring countries

# Challenges

- Word of mouth / outreach programs
  - Expensive
  - Inaccessibility of targeted communities,
  - Public address system is not in place

## Communication challenges in responding to 2008/9 Cholera outbreak

- There were difficulties in accessing information from remote health centres due to communication problems where Tel One lines were not functional,
- This resulted in ;
  - Late notification of cholera cases
  - Rapid response was not possible without timely information,
  - Irregularities in reporting cholera cases resulted in misallocation of resources,
  - Under reporting of cases

# Hotlines

- Some hotlines are not functional,
- High volume of callers result in calls being queued
- Abuse of numbers by other rogue elements of the society,
- Lack of awareness of toll free numbers by members of the public ,
- The receiving equipment is overwhelmed and outdated,
- Lack of proper training of those who receive emergency calls

**Communication challenges in responding to Cyclone  
Eline in 2000**

# Early Warning

- Local radio and television coverage in the areas affected by the cyclones is almost zero, (Malipati, Chikwalakwala, Muzarabani )
- Vulnerable communities in these remote areas were caught unprepared,
- Use of electronic media was therefore rendered ineffective as the warning message did not get to the intended audience.



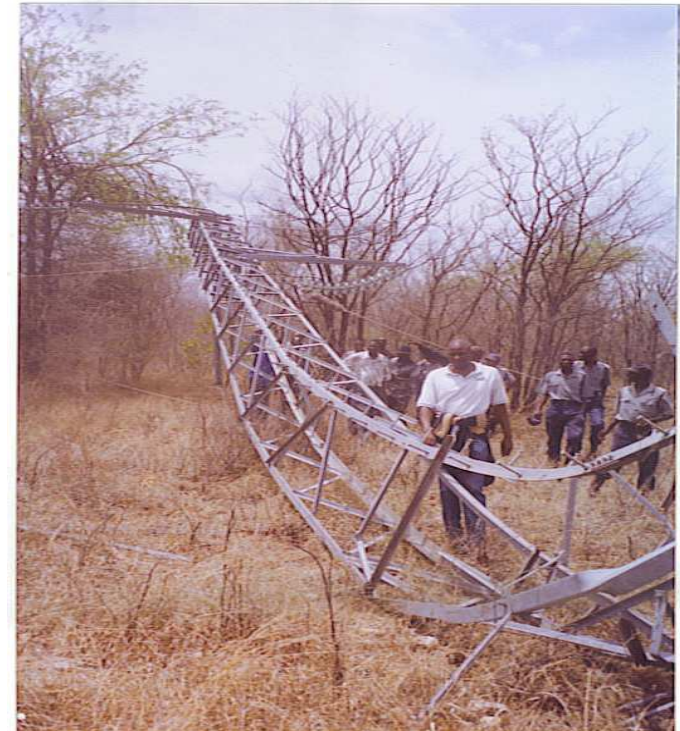
## Damage to telecommunications and ZESA

- Trees fell upon communication / power lines
- Downing of lines and poles by wind
- Mud slides affected poles
- Destruction of conductors,
- Communication was rendered impossible



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- The affected areas had no alternative means of communication except few areas with uunderground networks which survived
- Command centres which were responsible for information dissemination were not well equipped with the modern means of communication and stand by sources of power



## Cont..

- Communities living in the flood prone areas are not equipped with communication equipment for use during periods of floods
- Inadequate real time hydrological networks to timely communicate impending flood disasters.

# Recommendations

- Communities living in the disaster prone areas should be equipped with all weather communication equipment for early warning and communication during periods of disasters
- Civil protection committees at all levels should be equipped with Faxes, Email and VHF Radios rather than depending on the telephones alone.
- Satellite radios can also be of help when the transmission towers of our traditional radio channels are damaged in a disaster.

## Cont..

- During the 2005 hurricane Katrina disaster in the US, many residents of affected coastal areas were unable to make contact with relatives and friends using traditional landline phones.
- However, they could communicate with each other via SMS more easily when the network was functional.
- SMS also has another advantage over voice calls in that one message can be sent to a group simultaneously.
- Communities in Tsunami prone areas in Asia also use SMS ,

## Cont..

- Ensure that network operators expand their networks in order to decongest pressure on few receiving equipment,
- Upgrading the receiving equipment,
- Zoning emergency numbers,
- Ensure that adequate training is provided to those who man the receivers,
- Ensure that the public is well informed about the emergency numbers possibly using mobile networks

Thank you for listening