

COMMUNITY DISASTER AND RISK REDUCTION: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN BOTSWANA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to appraise the issues of natural disasters and the role of social workers in risk reduction at individual, household, group, and or community levels. Communities in Botswana are constantly affected by natural disasters such as droughts, floods, windstorms, heavy rains, and wildfires. The same individuals, families and communities appear to be repeatedly affected without the means for recovery and/or rehabilitation. Although the impact of disasters could be mitigated and prevented, there is little or no effort made towards disaster risk reduction by communities. There could be several reasons for the in-action either by individuals, groups, and communities and/or by the government. One of such reasons may be limited technical ability in disaster management science amongst communities, particularly community development workers. Social work is one of such professions that aims at improving the social functioning of individuals, groups, and communities within their environment. The improvement must address threats from disaster hazards, vulnerabilities, and risks within communities. In most cases, those vulnerable to disasters are the poor who find it difficult to bounce back to normal functioning due to a weak socio-economic base. As such, social workers, who drive community development, must design and implement community based disaster programmes in line with the Hyogo Framework of Action 2015 in Botswana.

Keywords: *Community, Risk reduction, Social work, Botswana*

INTRODUCTION

Communities in Botswana are plagued by natural disasters such as droughts, floods, windstorms, heavy rains, and wildfires. The past two years (2008 and 2009) have shown serious effects of floods in Gweta, Kasane, Pandamatenga, Maun, and Okavango. These are communities in western Botswana. The residents who are mainly subsistence and commercial farmers were more seriously affected by floods than in the past. Farms were flooded and crops damaged. It was not possible to drain or redirect the water away from the fields. The floods were deemed to be the result of climate change or variations in rainfall patterns in the southern hemisphere (Botswana Press Agency, 2009). The Minister for Presidential Affairs and Public Administration, Ms Margaret Nasha was quoted as saying that normally in Kasane floods come around April and in 2009 there was high possibility of more flooding, so people must prepare to avoid falling prey to disasters. In June 2009, Botswana received heavy rains of more than 100mm in Dukwi, Sua, Mmatshumu, Lephephe, and Mosetse

that caused floods in the areas and increased the need for community and individual preparedness (Sunday Standard, June 21-27, 2009:4).

The Department of Meteorological Services weather prognosis stated in 2009 that the country would be hit by severe winter rains and that the rains between 7-10 June might cause damage to crops and endanger livestock (Monitor, 2009a). Crops and livestock are core to the livelihoods and basic survival of Botswana, both in rural and urban communities (Monitor, 2009a). If crops are damaged, it means an increase in food insecurity for the entire country and heavy reliance on food imports. Food imports from South Africa and other countries are complicated by the global economic recession impact on poor members of the community. Availability and/or existence of mechanisms and strategies of community based disaster preparedness programmes that address all phases of risk management are necessary.

Therefore social work profession that aims at improving the functionality of individuals and communities to resolve their problems must take up the disaster challenge as well (Rwomire and Raditlhokwa, 1996). The problems that affect individuals and communities vary by nature and magnitude. In this case, social work must not only assist those who are afflicted by disasters but must lead in the reduction of factors that make people vulnerable to disasters. Rwomire and Raditlhokwa (1996) state that the overriding aim of social work is to promote people's well-being and to help them realize their capabilities to the fullest, so that they may live reasonably satisfying lives, comfortable within themselves and in society. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to appraise the issues of natural disaster preparedness and the role of social workers in risk reduction at individual, group, and/or community levels in Botswana.

NATURAL DISASTERS AND RELATED CONSEQUENCES

Impact of Disasters on Individuals and Communities

Natural disasters worldwide cause mass destruction to infrastructure, loss of human lives, economic downturn, and environmental degradation (Kadi, 2006). United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2009) asserts that the recorded economic costs of disasters have been increasing over decades. Humanitarian relief efforts cost the government and donor agencies thousands of PULAs, but such services do not reduce the vulnerability of the affected groups (Victoria, 2008). According to Cayman Institute (2008), global disaster economic losses in 2008 were US\$178 billion double the annual average for 2000-2007 which was US \$85 billion. In terms of global human loss, as indicator of impact, 235,816 people were killed by natural disasters in 2008, three times more than the annual averages of 66,812 for 2000-2007. The two fatal disasters were cyclone Nargis, which killed 138,366 in Myanmar, and Sichuan earthquake in China that killed 87,476 people in the same year (UNDP, 2009). According to Muianga (2006), in 2001, floods affected 500,000 people and caused 115 deaths in Mozambique.

Botswana, like other countries, also experienced multiple natural disasters.

These comprise mainly of droughts, floods, wildfires, animal diseases, earthquake and tremors, pest infestations, epidemics, and HIV/AIDS. Drought is experienced country-wide; floods occur during rainy season, that is, from October to March; and veld fires are regular occurrences during the dry month of April to November with a peak in July (UNDP, 2009). In 1999/2000, the country experienced the worst floods in 23 administrative districts/cities, towns/villages. These floods resulted in the loss of life; extensive damage to 17000 structures (both public and private assets), environment, crops, and displaced thousands of people. Table 1 shows disaster risk for floods in Botswana from 1980-2000 (<http://www.undp.org>).

Table 1: Botswana flood risks

| Average No of events yearly | No of people killed yearly per million | Average No of pple killed | Ave. physical exposure yearly | Physical exposure in % of population | Relative vulnerability exposed to floods | Density of pop. living in watershed | GDP per Capita PPP |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Event per year | Killed per year | Killed per million | People per year | Percentage | Killed per million | Inhab per k | |
| 0.14 | 1.48 | 1.07 | 21,187 | 1.54 | 69.67 | 4.24 | 4734 |

In 2006, Botswana floods damaged roads, railway lines, killed four individuals in Ramotswa, and negatively affected the vulnerable people living along the Ngotwane River (Botswana Red Cross Society Report, 2006). While others lost shelter and livelihood, there was an outbreak of waterborne disease, which increased child mortality rates, and environmental degradation. The 2009 floods affected Kasane, Parakarungu, Satau, Nxamasere, and Sepopa. In Satau a man drowned, 20 families were relocated to higher grounds, tourists had to walk in water to escape to safety, and the village could not be accessed by road because of severe floods (Midweek Sun, 2009). In Kazungula, 38 ploughing fields were affected and 480 people displaced (Monitor, 2009b). Floods caused erosion of the top soil, crops, and grassing areas for livestock. The soil erosion led to the development of gullies, valleys and waterways that were not part of the environment before. This tends to worsen when floods follow a long period of drought and overgrazing of cattle in communal lands. Besides natural hazards, animal diseases like foot and mouth and the contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP) caused the eradication of 30000 cattle at the cost of 270 million Pula (Botswana Country Report, 2004a).

Botswana is thus a country where natural disasters affect individuals, communities and/or farmers without the hope of full recovery afterward. The poor are the most vulnerable to suffering, loss, injury or death during floods and droughts. The vulnerability increases greatly after each disaster event. Desjarlais, Eisenberg, Good and Kleinman (1995) argue that as is the case with famine, poverty is a vital contributor to vulnerability. The poor are made vulnerable to the effects of disasters because of the most precarious environment they live in, possess limited resources, and have the least access to health services. The effects of floods are not limited to individuals, and communities, but also extend to the economy of the country in terms of tourism. In Botswana, tourism comes third after diamonds and cattle as a foreign income earning. The recent floods caused the closure of a number of lodging facilities in the Okavango and Chobe area, hence a reduction in the number of tourists.

According to media report, the Botswana-Zambia-Namibia-Zimbabwe crossing point at Kazungula was impassable for two days and two facilities were submerged by floods. In the Okavango Delta Trotsky and Sepopa facilities were also submerged and Shakawe lodging finally had to close as well (Monitor, 2009). This contributed to a drop in the income brought about by tourists. Qisheng, Yuquan, Yang and Jingye (1999) argue that every disaster causes great losses to the country and people's lives and possessions. Thus, one cannot underestimate the negative impact on a country's economy and its sustainable development. A big disaster has a severe influence on whole national economies, and even more direct and severe influence on the area where it occurred. Turner (1995) argues that disasters, by nature, involve a magnitude of impact and a large number of victims and survivors. Therefore, to respond to this unique order of magnitude requires well defined interventions and action based research.

Survivors of disasters are traumatized by impending threats, losses, and injuries from incidents and experience other different psychological crises. The crisis arises from the loss of property, fear of further harm, subsequent life threatening incidents, and continued threat from impending disasters. It has been established by psychologists that a combination of stress factors predisposes a person to a major life crisis (Morris, 1990, Atkinson R. T., Atkinson, R. C., Smith, Bem and Hoeksema, 1996). This can be compounded by disaster events suffered by individuals, groups, and communities. As such, responders who only provide food and other items but do not address psychological needs of the affected may do more harm than good. Desjarlais, Eisenberg, Good and Kleinman (1995) argue that roughly 36 percent of people affected by disasters suffer some form of mental distress. They assert that the lack of satisfying basic health needs, such as nutrition and environmental sanitation, cause significant damage to the central nervous system, with impairments in cognition and psychological functioning.

Disasters and Human Vulnerability

Disasters and human vulnerability are the major causes of suffering amongst the poor people globally. Therefore, social work, which addresses poverty, crime, juvenile delinquency, drug and substance abuse and other social ills, must also address hazards that increase poor people's vulnerability to disasters (Morales and Sheafor, 1995). Poverty is a major factor that makes people more vulnerable to disasters because it limits their access to economic and technological ability to cope (Rwomire and Raditlhokwa, 1996).

Recurring disasters exacerbate vulnerability of poor communities to various hazardous risks like poor building structures, environmental pollution and water contamination. Buildings in poor communities are not durable and resistant to storms, floods, and torrential rains. The greatest challenge to natural disasters is not only relief (in terms of providing tents, food, and evacuation), but also reconstruction and rehabilitation of affected structures (Twigg, 2007). These measures are necessary to reduce individual and communities' vulnerability to future disasters. In addition,

how the losses are remediated either by government or donors should enable (or disable) communities to build their resilience to disasters (UNDP, 2006). International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (2007) asserts that before a disaster strikes, minorities are often already vulnerable in terms of their struggle for political, social, cultural, and economic rights. The occurrence of disasters escalates the level of suffering and increases a sense of helplessness within the community.

THE CURRENT ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

The Role of Social Workers in Disaster Management

The current role of social workers in Botswana serving in the local government structures, is temporary and limited to assisting those affected by natural disasters (drought, earthquake, floods, windstorms, lightening, fire, ill health, death of a breadwinner, and any other emergency or natural disaster) (Revised National Policy on Destitute Persons, 2002). The assistance provided is in the form of food rations and cash support between P550 - P700 per month depending on the locality, including an amount of P81 for personal items. Beyond, the policy is quiet about disaster risk and hazard management. The provisions are short-term relief oriented rather than preventive, mitigation, and/or preparedness. It implies that the role of social workers is more visible on the onset of disasters and wanes immediately after the emergency period is over. The relief provides temporary assistance to beneficiaries to cushion the effects of the disaster but leaves them more vulnerable to similar hazard in the future. The skill development component of the policy for low income groups could be a positive move towards improving livelihoods but is not inclusive of disaster related initiatives (Revised Destitute Policy, 2002). The Home Economics unit in local authorities, equips families with practical skills in home management and child care in order to improve living standards and quality of life, but does not target the entire community to improve family livelihoods (Directorate of Public Service Management, 2000).

In addition, the Directorate of Public Service Management (DPSM, 2000) urges the community workers to mobilize individual, families and communities to carry out projects and programmes directed toward improving quality of life and contributing to national development. It is paramount to integrate disaster risk reduction in these programmes at individual and community level to improve the livelihoods of families, as beneficiaries. Therefore, social work efforts to improve livelihoods must incorporate disaster risk reduction and building of community resilience towards disasters. This will reduce the destructive nature of disasters which has a tendency to increase the number of beneficiaries of safety net programmes. Each time there is a disaster, the numbers of people who receive safety net assistance increases and a few hardly recover.

Morales and Sheafor (1995) identified disasters and disaster aid as an appropriate arena for social work practice. The founder of the crisis response

organization Eye of the Storm, states that while the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics mandates that social workers deliver appropriate professional services in public emergencies, too many are unprepared. Nevertheless, this does not deter helping professionals from overcrowding crisis scenes only to impede or paralyze relief efforts, creating a situation which Mitchell describes as helpers helping helpers rather than victims (Robb, 2003). As such, to avoid such accusations, social workers should muscle up their knowledge and skills to assist individuals and families to identify disaster hazards and risks and implement mitigation measures to cushion against the impact.

According to UNISDR (2005), the United Nations declared the 1990's as the international decade for natural disaster reduction and in 1994 adopted the Yokohama strategy and plan of action for a safer world to strengthen its efforts. The UN further resolved that all governments, Botswana included, should give more resources to preventing and reducing risk based on the five UN priorities for action. Thus, the role of social work should be to advocate for the implementation of the UN priorities for action at the community level:

- Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
- Identify, assess, and monitor disaster risks and enhance community and individual early warning systems.
- Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at community and individual levels.
- Reduce the underlying risk factors and
- Strengthen district disaster preparedness for effective response.

Botswana social workers serving in the District Council are supposed to have representation in the members of the District Disaster Committees (DDC) with well defined roles in line with the UN priorities for action (National Policy on Disaster Management, 1996). There are limited efforts to design preparedness, preventive and mitigative strategies, and programmes in line with the UN priorities for action for communities' prone to disasters. Botswana MDGR (2004b) acknowledges that the country lack adequate disaster preparedness and management capacity to handle natural disasters; the need to establish mechanisms that would minimise exposure to natural disasters, ensure quick and effective response, and speedy recovery; and furthermore, better decision making, improved planning, effective risk management, innovation in development and environmental protection activities. The absence of these weakens the ability of districts to prevent, mitigate, prepare, and respond effectively to disasters.

The Basis of Community Social Work and Disaster Risk Reduction

One of the purposes of community social work is to guarantee sustainable community development through hazard and risk management compatible with social work practice. Community social work in Botswana focuses on social development and encompasses mass education and literacy; and general social work, including

rehabilitative casework, investigating individual cases of indigence or other forms of hardship such as physical handicaps, or recreational youth activities (Hedenquist, 1992). Current community development practices emphasize three objectives: (i) to mobilize communities towards self help projects thereby promoting the national principles of self reliance; (ii) to assist communities through village development committees by funding their development projects through, for example, LG 1109 and European Union, and (iii) to educate communities on social services and assist them to identify and prioritize their needs (DPSM, 2000).

These objectives are to be compatible with disaster relief efforts but not risk reduction. Social workers also work with the village development committees (VDC) as local institutions responsible for coordination and development of all village institutional activities, including disaster response. VDC's were established by a Presidential Directive in 1968 for the purpose of implementing government principles and developing self reliance and unity. Their functions are to: (i) identify and discuss local needs; (ii) formulate proposals for the development of the community; and (iii) raise funds for the general benefit of the village (Ministry of Local Government and Lands, 1968; National Policy on Disaster Management, 1996).

Village development committees need training in disaster risk management to discharge their roles effectively. As such, disaster management in the context of community development is an area of practice for the social workers engaged to work with communities. Social workers must ensure that resident groups play a more central role in both planning and implementation of disaster programmes. Their role in community based disaster management should include the identification of hazards, risks, and capacities within communities to prevent, reduce, and respond to disasters. The adverse effects of natural disasters thwart sustainable economic progress and may hamper the realization of the national vision. The Botswana National Vision 2016 aims for building a safe and secure Botswana nation (Presidential Task Force, 1997). The safety and security of communities is all encompassing, and is not complete if it excludes disaster risks and hazards. This proposes that local government and other agencies are to incorporate disaster risk reduction into their development programmes at the community level (UN, 2009). Improvements in communities through hazards and risks reduction and prevention would lead to a safe and secure nation as envisioned.

Social Work Education and Disaster Management

The University of Botswana social work program has not mainstreamed disaster risk reduction in its curriculum. As for now, only the Environmental Science department teaches its students environmental risk assessment principles (University Calendar 2006-2007). It might be assumed by institutions that social workers are technically equipped to identify disaster hazards and related risks based on their professional knowledge. This perception may lead to social workers exclusion from capacity building training though disaster risk management is characterized by concepts and terminology that must be undoubtedly understood. Although social

workers in Botswana can assess individuals, groups or communities for temporary disaster assistance, they need to be familiar with disaster methodologies. The social workers without appropriate disaster management training, knowledge, and techniques will not function effectively in the community disaster resilience approach. This is despite the perception by communities that social workers are technically able of managing such issues.

Social work education must equip practitioners to undertake an analysis of varying hazards and determine the likely consequence for poor communities. This echoes the sentiments of disaster risk management where predictions about disaster occurrences should be made based on the historical experiences of communities. Therefore, disaster risk management is topical to social work education and practice. It is necessary for Botswana social work education to mainstream knowledge, strategies, approaches, and methodologies in disaster management which are fundamental to building community resilience towards disasters. Admittedly disaster management cuts across professional lines but at community level, social workers are to guide communities to gradually move towards safety and resilience in relation to disasters (National Policy on Disaster Management, 1996).

As such, the interface between social work education and disaster risk management is inevitable, but not yet existent in Botswana. Social workers in the academia and practice must, therefore, define the parameters of practice at all levels to operationalize influence in disaster risk management field. Beauchesne (2007) defines comprehensive emergency management as an integrated program that includes a number of elements from hazard assessment and resource management to logistics, training, and finance. Disaster risk management is about measures taken to prevent, prepare, and respond to catastrophes in the community. Botswana's National Policy on Disaster Management (1996) defines disaster management as "an integrated series of activities and strategies involving disaster mitigation, disaster preparedness, and emergency response implemented within the national development context". The policy outlines systems that must be in place to comprehensively manage disasters. The community disaster risk reduction framework should aim systematically at realizing the recommendations by (Victoria, 2008). She states that a disaster risk reduction framework must aim at:

- Reducing vulnerability and increasing capacities of vulnerable groups and communities to cope with, prevent or minimize loss and damage to life, property and the environment
- Minimizing human suffering, and
- Hastening recovery

Therefore, a community based disaster programme must be developed following a comprehensive process with the involvement of community members. Victoria (2008) recommended that community based disaster management programme must ensure:

- People's participation: community members must be the main actors and

- propellers; they also directly share in the benefits of disaster risk reduction and development.
- Priority for the most vulnerable groups, families, and people in the community: in urban areas the vulnerable sectors are generally the urban poor and informal sector while, in rural areas, these are the subsistence farmers, the fisherfolk and indigenous people, the elderly, the differently abled, children, and women (because of their care giving and social function roles).
 - Risk reduction measures are community specific and are identified after an analysis of the community's disaster risk (hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities, and perceptions of disaster risks).
 - Existing capacities and coping mechanisms should be recognized: Community Based Disaster Management builds upon and strengthens existing capacities and coping strategies.
 - The aim is to reduce vulnerabilities by strengthening capacities: the goal is building disaster resilient communities.
 - Disaster risk reduction links with development and addresses vulnerable conditions and causes of vulnerabilities.
 - Outsiders have supporting and facilitating roles.

SOCIAL WORK AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: THE WAY FORWARD

Community Based Disaster Management Programmes

The approach that is recommended for social workers is the community based disaster management (CBDM). It is premised on the notion that local people know the hazards they are prone to, areas of high risk, and have knowledge on what has to be done. However, they might need technical assistance to plan and use locally available resources to mitigate against disasters (Hutton, 1992). This is where social workers knowledgeable in disaster risk reduction play a vital role with communities. Through Community Based Disaster Management, social workers could transform vulnerable groups and communities to disaster resilient communities. Key indicators would be increase in safety, livelihood, security and sustainable economic, social and physical development. The integration of disaster risk management in community development would lead to the development of locally appropriate strategies to mitigate the impact of disasters and reduce community vulnerability. The community does so by identifying and mapping hazard risks, vulnerability to hazards, and strengthening available coping capacities.

The exercise is possible with the technical assistance of community development social workers equipped with knowledge to establish initiatives or preventive measures. The technical knowledge derived from revised social work education curriculum of the University of Botswana, coupled with research, and experiences of social work practitioners could equip communities to tackle disaster problems.

The community social work must establish mitigation measures to reduce

and limit the destructive and disruptive effects of disaster hazards on the elements at risk. The activities should include risk assessment, risk reduction planning, public awareness, food security, and land use zoning. Therefore, the community must strengthen its preparedness strategies with appropriate and effective actions before, during, and after emergencies. The actions should include setting up early warning systems, coordination and institutional arrangements, evacuation and emergency operation management, public education and awareness, disaster evacuation drills, and stock piling of relief material (Heijman and Victoria, 2001), as has been observed in vulnerable communities in China, Panama, Mozambique, and Malawi among others (IFRC, 2008). In Botswana, community social workers should work with other stakeholders to put these in place:

- a) Community disaster action teams
- b) Conduct vulnerability community assessments (VCA) to identify hazards, risks, vulnerabilities, and capacities within the community.
- c) Draw community maps: displaying high, moderate, and low risk areas for community disaster education and awareness program.
- d) Design a community specific disaster risk reduction educational program
- e) Design and train Disaster Action Teams and community volunteers for disaster related activities.
- f) Design monitoring and evaluation systems.
- g) Develop community related early warning systems (World Disaster Report, 2007).

These systems must enable communities to prepare and respond effectively to disasters which are more prevalent to their locality. The community programme must address preparedness, response, relief, evacuation of people and their property, safety, recovery, and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure (IFRC, 2005).

The Envisioned Role of Social Work Education in Disaster Risk Management

Social work education should assume a central role in facilitating the alleviation of human suffering, including disasters. The educational training process at the University of Botswana must include equipping social work students to undertake disaster risk reduction in their various roles as enablers, brokers, advocates, educators, and researchers in the field of practice. These roles which are well articulated in social work literature can be effective in relation to disaster risk management (Robb, 2003). Therefore, knowledge, techniques, and skills to work with at risk communities more effectively must be part of the social work curriculum. This will ensure social workers avoid any serious jeopardy to professional goals. In addition, Turner (1995) states that focus in social work educational research on disasters should relate to their impact, management, and recovery stages.

Morales and Sheafor (1995) admit that disasters are a concern to social workers but did not specify the skills and knowledge they need to prevent, prepare, and respond to the phenomena. Social work education in Botswana could mainstream community-based disaster approaches within its ecological model to address poverty

and other issues. Social work education should equip practitioners to implement the United Nations five priorities for action as detailed in the Hyogo Framework of Action 2000-2015 by:

- a) Integrating risk reduction, as appropriate, into the university social work education curriculum.
- b) Promote community participation in disaster risk reduction through the adoption of specific policies, the promotion of networks', the strategic management of volunteer resources, the attribution of roles and responsibilities, and the delegation and provision of necessary authority and resources.
- c) Develop early warning systems that are people centered, which take into account gender, cultural and livelihood characteristics of the target audience.
- d) Establish periodic review and maintain information systems as part of early warning with a view to ensuring that rapid and coordinated action is taken in cases of emergency.
- e) Establish and strengthen the capacity to record, analyze, summarize, disseminate, and exchange statistical information and data on hazard mapping, disaster risks, impacts and losses and support the development of common methodologies for risk assessment and monitoring.
- f) Promote and improve dialogue and cooperation among scientific communities and practitioners working on disaster risk reduction, and encourage partnerships among stakeholders, including those working on the socioeconomic dimensions of disaster risk reduction (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2005).

Since the establishment of the Department of Social work at the University of Botswana 30 years ago, the curriculum does not make reference to UN five disaster priority areas. Although disaster risk management can be mainstreamed at the diploma and degree levels concurrent with course offered, this possibility has not been explored yet. The suggestion is that it be fused in the following course at the diploma level; social work with communities and group (DSW 102), social work with disabilities (DSW 107), selected issues in social work (DSW 202) and social work and social development (DSW 204). While at Bachelors degree level it can be amalgamated with helping in the community (SWF 102), social work and mental health (BSW 203) and / or run as a separate BSW seminar (University Calendar, 2009/2010). The social work department has to yet define how to incorporate the UN priority areas and steer dialogue with stakeholders working in the disaster risk reduction field.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social work's positive contribution to risk reduction strategy will strengthen Botswana's commitment to the millennium development goals of poverty reduction by 2015. The millennium development goals are in harmony with the Botswana national vision 2016 that envisions a healthy and a secure nation by the year 2016

(Presidential Task Group, 1997; www.un.org/millenniumgoals, 2/9/2009). Social workers involved in community development, individual, and group work are better placed to address disaster risk reduction at those levels. They are confronted and respond daily to situations that contribute to human vulnerability to disasters like poverty and increased population density. As such, it is fundamental for social workers to have knowledge, techniques, and skills in disaster risk reduction in addition to community mobilization (UN, 2009). These will enable social workers to interact effectively with communities in hazard identification, mapping and determining strategies for risk reduction. The purpose of social work, through its very definition as a profession is premised on the context of risk reduction.

Social work and disaster risk reduction cannot be divorced from one another. As such, Botswana social work which seeks to promote the good of communities, groups, and individuals who are vulnerable to poverty and disasters must act now. The inadequacy on how to map community hazards and risks, establish prevention, preparedness, and mitigation measures by Botswana social workers may hinder effective professional assistance in communities. It is acknowledged globally that disasters causes' loss of lives, escalates the cost of damages, and vulnerability. These have been increasing every ten years and are expected to replicate due to climate change or variation in the coming years.

Therefore, Botswana community social workers need to design strategies and risk reduction measures to sustain resilient communities. Botswana, as a country, must take a deliberate move to learn from neighbouring countries how massive disasters and ill-preparedness could cost a nation. Social workers in the field of practice and academia in Botswana must assume a proactive role in dealing with disasters to change the status quo of being reactive. The University of Botswana, in particular the Department of Social Work, should drive research and dialogue in this area.

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