

EFFECTS / IMPACTS OF DISASTERS ON SOCIETY

Introduction and overview

Natural hazards occur all over the world and are, on their own not harmful.

However, when these natural hazards interact with people, they are likely to cause damage of varying magnitude resulting in a disaster.

This topic will be discussing the effect/ impact of disasters on the society.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this topic the learner is expected to:

1. Explain the background of disasters in Kenya
2. Discuss the impact of disasters on the society
3. Outline the recent disasters in Kenya

The background of disasters in Kenya

Natural hazards include drought, floods earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides cyclones, storms etc. These occur all over the world and are, on their own not harmful. However, when these natural hazards interact with people, they are likely to cause damage of varying magnitude resulting in a disaster. Disasters thus occur

when the natural hazards interact with vulnerable people, property, and livelihoods causing varying damage depending on the level of vulnerability of the individual, group, property or livelihoods (UNDP). Disasters disrupt people's lives through displacements, deaths and injuries. They destruct livelihoods and drain years of economic gains and development. Natural disasters for instance cause loss of lives and property, displacement of people from homes, destruction of infrastructure like roads, rails and telecommunication lines, contamination of water sources causing diseases or depletion of the same altogether.

Kenya experiences a number of natural hazards, the most common being weather related, including floods, droughts, landslides, lightening/thunderstorms, wild fires, and strong winds. Other hazards experienced in Kenya include HIV/AIDS, and conflict. In the recent past these hazards have increased in number, frequency and complexity. The level of destruction has also become more severe with more deaths of people and animals, loss of livelihoods, destruction of infrastructure among other effects resulting in losses of varying magnitudes.

Table 1: Recent History of Natural Disasters in Kenya

Year	Type of Natural disaster	Area of Coverage	No. Of People affected
2004	Drought	Widespread	2-3 Million
2004	Landslides	Nyeri, Othaya, Kihuri	5 deaths
2002	Landslides	Meru Central, Muranga, Nandi	2,000
2002	Floods	Nyanza, Busia, Tana river basin	150,000
1999/2000	Drought	Widespread	4.4 million
1997/1998	El Nino Flood	Widespread	1.5 million
1995/96	Drought	Widespread	1.41 million
1991/92	Drought	Arid and semi-Arid districts of NE, Rift Valley, Eastern	1.5 million

		and Coast	
1985	Floods	Nyanza and Western	10,000
1983/84	Drought	Widespread	200,000
1982	Floods	Nyanza	4,000
1980	Drought	Widespread	40,000
1977	Drought	Widespread	20,000
1975	Drought	Widespread	16,000

Source: Republic of Kenya (2004), National Policy on Disaster Management (Revised Draft) p4, Nairobi, Kenya

Impact of disasters on Society

Long term economic and social impacts of drought in Kenya

- Loss of livelihoods and paralyzed economic activities
- Poor health leading to vulnerability to diseases
- Deaths especially for the children and the aged
- General poverty
- Overall dependence on relief supplies from the Government of Kenya and World Food Programme among other donors.
- Increased conflicts due to

- o Diminished water and food resources
- o Political conflicts
- o Invasion by other communities from the neighborhood

Short term economic and social impacts of drought in Kenya

- Migration and displacement of families into areas with food supplies or relief foods.
- Malnutrition causing ill-health
- Price hikes for commodities like cereals and food products while prices of livestock go lower because they are emaciated and unhealthy.
- Lack of social amenities like water, food and sanitation services
- Livestock diseases like foot and mouth, lumpy skin disease and black quarter tend to increase during the drought seasons.
- Low yields or no yields from agricultural activities due to low moisture content in the soil.

Economic and social impacts of floods on the regions affected

1. Structural damage to buildings, roads, rails, communication lines, and land in general causing massive erosion resulting in wide gullies that cannot be cultivated anymore.

2. Deaths of people and animals from drowning and injuries from displaced boulders, falling buildings, trees and others.
3. Possible outbreaks of diseases like malaria, cholera, dysentery etc. due to presence of mosquitoes and contamination of water sources by the floodwaters.
4. Contamination of wells and ground water which is the major source of drinking water by most rural communities
5. Loss of harvests and crops in farms, loss of food stocks, supplies and produce from farms.