

A CONCLUDING THOUGHT: NO ADAPTATION RECOMMENDATIONS WITHOUT RAMIFICATIONS

Every assessment of a natural or human-caused disaster begins and ends with a list of recommendations or lessons learned. The recommendations or lessons are about “how to get it right the next time there is a similar risk of a hazard becoming a disaster?” That is always the hope. That is always the dream.

Many of those recommendations or lessons learned are right on target in terms of requirements needed to reduce the adverse impacts of the hazards of concern. They are the result of serious scrutiny of hazards, their impacts and societal responses to them. They are the findings through serious discussion, brainstorming and plain common sense of what went right, what went wrong, and what wasn't considered (but should have been). For Katrina, for example, America's most costly and most embarrassing so-called natural disaster, one can find thousands of lessons learned from various levels of government, industries and businesses from local to global. That is the good news. However, it is, all too often, the good news in “theory” only, because most recommendations are not acted upon. Phrased a different way, the disaster lessons we have been calling ‘lessons learned’ are really not learned but only identified. When they are addressed they can legitimately be called lessons learned. Otherwise, they should be called “lessons identified”.

The problem in all this is that when recommendations and lessons have been identified, many observers in all walks of life tend to think that the recommendations and lessons are being enacted in order to avoid similar hazard-related disasters in the future. The reality of the issue-attention cycle of any public and most policy makers lasts only a couple of years (as identified by Anthony Downs (noted scholar in public policy and public

administration, and Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C) in the early 1970s). The public tends to refocus its attention on other pressing issues, no longer focusing on the previous disaster or its recommendations. How then can we get policy makers to take recommendations and lessons more seriously? How can we get them to realize that not following up on the lessons can have costly consequences?

The vicious cycle is one of “disaster---lessons & recommendations---disaster---same lessons, ad infinitum. The recommendations and lessons remain but the political leaders change. Many of the same lessons appear decade after decade. Our children and our children’s children will be reading the same sets of disaster-related recommendations and lessons that our predecessors and we have been identifying for decades. Enacting the following recommendation can help to end the cycle:

Recommendations (and lessons learned) should not be presented without comment on what the consequences might be, if the recommendations (and lessons) are not addressed. This way, decision makers can explicitly be made aware that there is also a likely cost for inaction when the next natural hazard turns into a national disaster. Succinctly stated, “RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD NOT BE OFFERED WITHOUT NOTING THEIR RAMIFICATIONS, if recommendations are not implemented”.

The ramification, if the recommendation above is not acted upon, will be “business as usual” (BAU) with regard to identifying lessons and making recommendations in post-disaster assessments. This in turn means that policy makers in the future will likely continue to receive lists of lessons that had already been identified over previous decades and their societies will likely continue to remain at risk to the impacts of hazards for which risks could have been reduced, had those recommendations been pursued and the identified lessons applied.



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FOREST-DWELLERS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

Climate change impacts the livelihoods of forest-dwellers and adaptation of forest-dwellers and forest-dependent communities to climate change is a challenge.