Disaster risk governance: dimensions, variations and transformations

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Abstract

A broad range of measures have been undertaken at different scales of governance to manage the risks associated with environmental hazards in an attempt to strengthen the resilience of social, physical and coupled systems. These activities are carried out by diverse sets of actors whose actions are shaped by complex institutional configurations that vary across socio-political contexts. The types of measures adopted to manage risk and the appropriateness of these have been the subject of intense debate but the institutional arrangements governing these choices have received considerably less scrutiny. This absence is particularly noticeable in the literature on volcanic disasters where the focus has traditionally been on the individual and collective actions of stakeholders living in close proximity to the hazard and less on the prevailing governance regimes.

This paper advances the notion that the dominance of different aspects of governance, including scales and actors, and the types of disaster risk management (DRM) actions produced as a result, vary across socio-political contexts and phases of disaster risk (of which a disaster is only one), as well as for different hazard-event types. So, while the focus of this paper is on governance in volcanic areas, this disaster risk governance framework can be used to assess the norms governing DRM for a range of extreme socio-ecological events.

A three-dimensional framework of disaster risk governance is used to explore shifts in disaster risk governance across phases of disaster risk and for different types of DRM decision-making: from reactive risk management decisions typically concerned with preparedness and emergency response during a crisis; to corrective and prospective risk reduction, before a crisis and in post-crisis recovery and reconstruction. This framework is applied to the Montserrat volcanic crisis (1995-1997) but this analysis of governance regime shifts across phases of disaster risk has implications for other social, physical and coupled systems, as well as for DRM approaches to building resilience.

Keywords: Governance, collective action, regime shift

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