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A Framework for Understanding the Influence of Isomorphic Pressures on Governance of Disaster Risks

Toinpre, O^{a*}, Mackee, J^a, Gajendran, T^a

^aSchool of Architecture & Built Environment, University of Newcastle Australia

Abstract

The task of reducing disaster risks poses enormous challenges for international and local non-governmental organizations despite the immense assistance offered in reducing disaster risks and cushioning the effect of disasters. Among other issues responsible for the setback experienced is that of institutional constraints. ‘Institutions’ act as a fulcrum for achieving social norms that shape behaviour and actions within society via rules, professional ethics, standards, policies, regulations etc. Government establishments in the same organizational field - particularly those recognized to deliver public goods and services for disaster risk reduction often experience institutional constraints such as lack of clear policies and mandates to guide government institutions, lack of coordination between institutions, inadequacy in the required human capacity in public sector etc. These constraints often contribute to increased societal risk conditions. Where institutions are elements of governance, framing them also becomes a simultaneous attempt to manage risks to society. An overwhelming body of existing organizational behaviour literature affirms that organizations adopt practices or behave in a certain manner to gain access to resources and legitimacy for survival including under uncertain or complex circumstances when subjected to institutional pressures. Such pressures influence operational and strategic arrangements and has been discussed from a private sector organizations perspective. Against this background, little attention has been given to influence of institutional pressures on public sector organizations and scarcely from a disaster risk reduction perspective. The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of governance and influences of institutional pressures on public sector organizations from a disaster risk reduction perspective. This is achieved through reviewing literature on institutional theory to provide an understanding on the concept of institutional isomorphism and its effect on key issues such as goal ambiguity, professionalism and structuration as well as technical uncertainty. The implication for practitioners is that it offers background knowledge required for key players and professionals to design appropriate response strategies to isomorphic pressures to support institutional sustainability, encourage homogeneity for effective DRR delivery and fills the knowledge gap presented for further research.

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*Corresponding author. Tel.: +61416492635

Email address: Toinpre.owi@uon.edu.au

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1. Introduction

The concept of disaster risk governance describes the manner in which institutional actors (e.g. public authorities, civil servants, media, private, sector, civil society) at community, national and regional levels cooperate in order to manage and reduce disaster risks [1]. These activities are often driven by ‘institutions’ described by proponents of neo-institutional as the fulcrum for achieving social norms that shape human behaviour; and actions within society via rule of law, professional ethics, standards, policies, regulations etc. [2, 3]. The deficiency on the part of institutions to treat these existing disaster risks may result in institutional risk and the difficulty of managing risks to society creates threats to organizations managing those risks [4]. This affirmation further reflects on the fact that relevant institutional actors have to address such issues in a complex and uncertain environment which has the potential to threaten the legitimacy of public sector actors as well as influence institutional performance outcomes within society. The lack of institutional interaction and integration with disaster risk reduction may entail the redundancy of policy responses or conflicts, thus an institutional framework could play a significant role in reducing vulnerability [5]. Therefore this paper aims to investigate the role of governance and influences of institutional pressures on public sector organizations from a disaster risk reduction perspective.

2. Challenges of governing disaster risks

One crucial aspect of addressing disaster risks is through institutional efforts undertaken by public sector organizations especially for developing countries. In spite of institutional efforts, some countries still face challenges of mitigating concomitant risks and develop the ability of populations to anticipate and cope with major hazards. Research also suggest that the factors responsible for this include: absence of plans and policies to tackle land-use practices; inadequate institutional frameworks for land management; limited resources in communities at risk; insufficient stimulation for government to invest in sustainable mitigation measures; weak regulatory frameworks amongst other challenges. Nkwunonwo [6] and [7] argue that environmental sustainability and policy, social responses and environmental management require attention. Agbola [8] also noted that these weaknesses greatly contribute to the impact of floods and have been reflected in many detrimental anthropogenic activities taking place in some cities. Given the successful nature of Hyogo framework, governments have been empowered to address disaster risks in a holistic manner through a policy direction [9]. Organizations tend to reduce their level of uncertainty by adopting structures, practices that model other leading organizations (as illustrated in figure 2) in the same organizational field [10]. The multidisciplinary nature of disaster management therefore entails that different public sector organizations need to collaborate to achieve effectiveness and efficiency hence understanding the context through which external pressures influence governance of disaster risks is critical for enhanced delivery of DRR services.

3. Research Methodology

Creswell [11] suggests that an exploratory approach using literature review makes sense when uncovering topics that have been given little attention in research. An exploratory approach is utilized to investigate the influences of institutional pressures on public sector/government organizations from a disaster risk reduction perspective. A wide range of existing literature was reviewed using keywords such as “*disaster risk governance*”, “*institutions*” “*institutional pressures on organizations*”, “*institutional isomorphism*”, “*influence of isomorphic pressures*” etc. from credible databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, Scopus, google scholar etc. The literature search initially generated a total of 330 materials from journal articles, published PhD thesis, e-books, book chapters, and reports in the fields of disaster risk science, organization studies and public management which was downloaded based on significance to the intended focus. Journal articles from data bases were also sourced from commendable journals such as *Academy of management review*, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, *Public administration review* etc. Based on the premise of relevance to the study, jurisdiction of authors within the cross-section of fields

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