

Understanding how we respond to disasters (the disaster cycle)



Why use this activity?

This activity helps a group to understand the basic disaster cycle, and to see that all four stages are very important. It will help a group to see how their community might be able to better prepare for disasters.



A brief description

The facilitator explains the disaster cycle to the group. The group is then given a list of 40 actions and they are asked to decide in which of the four stages of the disaster cycle each action belongs. A discussion follows to help think through the disaster cycle and steps a community might take to become better prepared.



You will need

- 40 small pieces of paper with either words or pictures representing the 40 actions in the 'list of actions' below
- 4 large pieces of paper, each with one of these words written on it: Response, Recovery, Mitigation, Preparedness



Timeline

This activity will take around 1 hour.





What to do

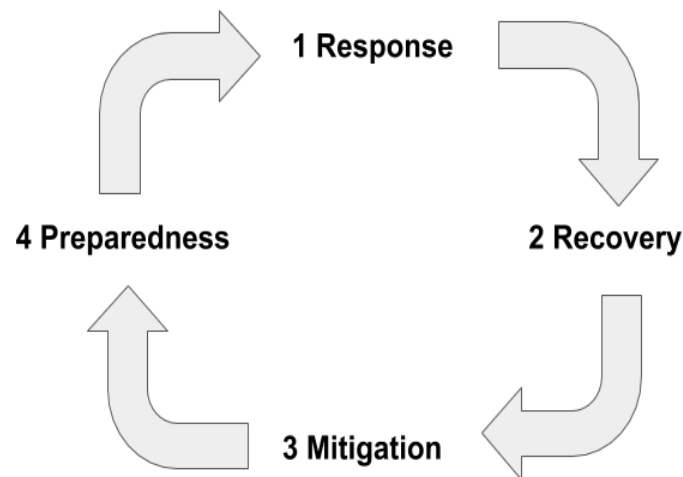
- Begin by explaining to the group some of the terminology (wording) that might be used during this activity:
 - **Hazard** – an extreme event which could injure people or damage property and the environment
 - **Vulnerability** – how likely people are to suffer serious loss, damage, injury or death as a result of a hazard
 - **Disaster** – a disaster occurs when a hazard affects vulnerable people who are unable to cope with its effects

For example: A flood represents a **hazard**. **Vulnerability** may be high for people who live in the floodplain and are elderly or very young. If they are unable to get out of the way of the flood, then a **disaster** may result, the effects of which may be injury, loss of possessions or even death.

- Explain that how we respond to disasters can be seen as a series of stages which are linked together, as the simple diagram of the disaster cycle below shows. You could copy one of the two diagrams below onto flip chart paper and hold it up so that everyone can see it.

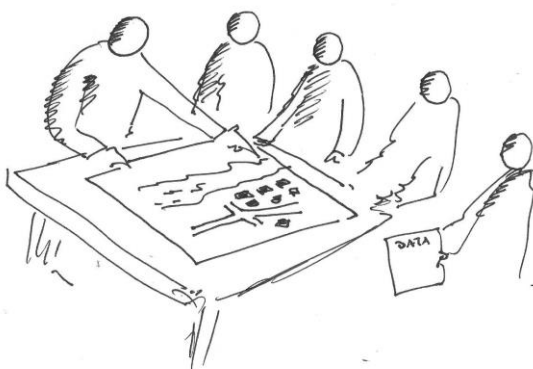
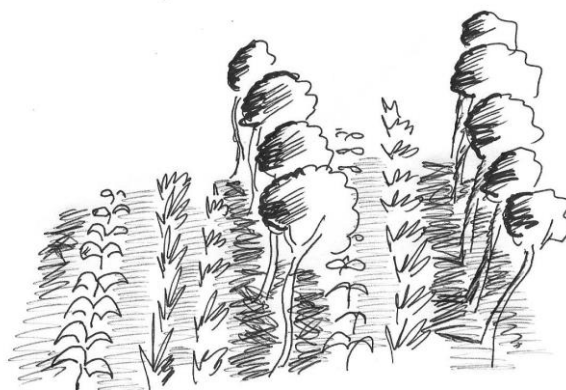
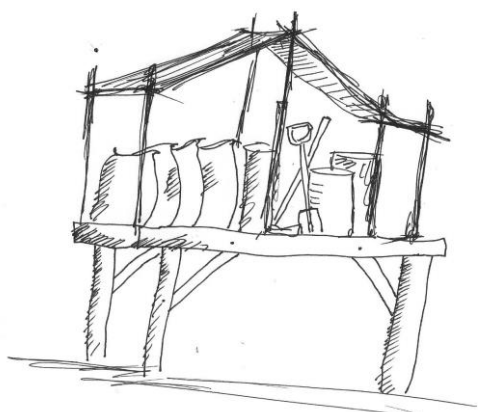


Source: image adapted from Tearfund (2011) *Disasters and the local church*



- The disaster cycle starts with the activities that immediately follow a disaster - response and recovery. These activities lead on to mitigation and preparedness for the next disaster. Briefly describe the 4 stages to the group.
 - In the **response** stage, the aim is to meet the immediate and basic needs of the people who have survived the disaster – such as food, water, clothing, shelter, medical care and emotional security. In fast-impact disasters, such as floods, earthquakes and cyclones, this process will focus on saving lives and reducing further suffering in the period immediately after the disaster. In slow-impact disasters, such as drought and famine, the emergency response period may last for a continuous period of months, or even years.
 - **Recovery** includes the actions taken to rebuild a community once the emergency response stage has passed. It may last for weeks or months after a disaster. Recovery can include repairing houses, restoring basic services (such as water and sanitation) and helping people to start earning a living again in a way that makes them less vulnerable to future disasters. Recovery also provides an opportunity to increase community cooperation by forming self-help groups or cooperatives. This may open up opportunities for new livelihoods, so that people can earn a living in ways that are less affected by hazards.
 - Many natural hazards cannot be prevented. However, it is possible to take practical action beforehand to reduce the potential impact of hazards on a community so that the risk of a disaster is reduced. This is known as **mitigation**. Mitigation and recovery are closely connected. For example, any rebuilding of homes or livelihoods should include mitigation measures to make them more resilient to hazards.
 - **Preparedness** is a set of activities preparing for the impact of a hazard – activities that will help the community members to cope and to recover.

- Once you have explained the terminology and the disaster cycle, split the larger group into 4 smaller groups and give each group ten of the pieces of paper, each with one action written on it. Place the four large pieces of paper (with the words 'Response', 'Recovery', 'Mitigation' and 'Preparedness') in each corner of the room.
- Ask the groups to decide in which part of the disaster cycle each of the ten actions would usually take place. Ask them to place that piece of paper in the correct corner of the room.
- Once the groups have finished, bring everyone together and facilitate a time of discussion.
 - Which actions have been placed within response? Does everybody agree with putting these here?
 - Which actions have been placed within recovery? Does everybody agree with putting these here?
 - Which actions have been placed within mitigation? Does everybody agree with putting these here?
 - Which actions have been placed within preparedness? Does everybody agree with putting these here?
 - Which stage are we as a community strongest in?
 - Where are we the weakest?
 - Where are we now on the cycle?
 - What more could we do?
 - What mitigation and preparedness actions could we take to make us stronger against hazards?



List of actions

Group 1	Group 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planting trees on steep slopes to reduce rainwater runoff • identifying the vulnerable who will need help in a future disaster • restoring access to clean water • keeping small stocks of emergency materials (such as plastic sheets and dry food) • establishing self-help groups • developing home gardens • providing emergency medical care • developing evacuation plans • rainwater harvesting • building flood barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building stronger houses to resist flood or earthquake • drought-resistant crops • animal restocking using animals that can survive drought conditions • providing buildings for temporary shelter • First Aid training • provision of clothing • strengthening support groups • design infrastructure to withstand landslides • tree planting to strengthen river banks • building cyclone shelters
Group 3	Group 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food distribution • temporary shelter • growing crops which are more resistant to drought • building drainage channels • emergency first aid • repairing buildings • building flood protection dykes • planting trees in coastal areas to reduce wind and tidal wave impact • training volunteers in search and rescue methods • plans for moving people and livestock to 'safe areas' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving drainage to take stormwater away more quickly • flood-resistant crops • establishing grain banks • provision of temporary shelter • peace-building and reconciliation, to reduce future conflict • early warning systems (for example, ringing bells or flying flags on the church building) • building storm shelters • community hazard-awareness training • collecting waste to prevent blockage of drainage systems • emergency provision of clean water