Role of built environment professionals in disaster management

The number of reported disasters has increased steadily over the past century and risen very sharply during the past decade and they have increased the degree of uncertainty faced by policy makers, challenged emergency arrangements and raised issues regarding their appropriateness. In light of these events, the term resilience has been adopted by many policy makers in an attempt to describe the way in which they would like to reduce a nation’s susceptibility to major incidents of all kinds by reducing their probability of occurring and their likely effects, and by building institutions and structures in such a way as to minimise any possible effects of disruption upon them.

There is growing recognition that the construction industry has a much broader role to anticipate, assess, prevent, prepare, respond, and recover from a disaster. In this context, the recovery role of construction from both natural and human disasters is well documented. In particular, post-disaster reconstruction has been the subject of a significant body of research with particular emphasis on developing countries that are less able to deal with the causes and impacts of disasters. Construction is typically engaged in a range of critical activities: temporary shelter before and after the disaster; restoration of public services such as hospitals, schools, water supply, power, communications, and environmental infrastructure, and state administration; and, securing income earning opportunities for vulnerable people in the affected areas. Similarly, disaster planners have begun to realise the link between disaster and development – a large and well-established field relating to social, economic, and significantly from a construction perspective, physical aspects of society. Although more robust construction in and of itself will not eliminate the consequences of disruptive events, there is widespread recognition that the built environment community has a valuable role to play in finding and promoting rational, balanced solutions to what remains an unbounded threat.

The process of disaster management is commonly visualised as a two-phase cycle, with post-disaster recovery informing pre-disaster risk reduction, and vice versa. The disaster management cycle illustrates the ongoing process by which governments, businesses, and civil society increase resilience by planning for and reducing the impact of disasters, reacting during and immediately following a disaster, and taking steps to recover after a disaster has occurred.

Some of the questions that will be addressed during the session:

- How should built environment professionals engage with the disaster management cycle to increase the resilience of communities and the built environment?
- How can we ensure that construction professionals demonstrate an ongoing responsibility toward an infrastructure’s users?
- How can we strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills and behaviour of individuals and improve institutional structures and processes to ensure that disaster mitigation and reconstruction can efficiently meet its mission and goals in a sustainable way?

Expected "take aways" for the audience:

- Be informed about the role of the built environment community and construction & property professionals in disaster management
- Be informed about the skills gaps prevailing among built environment professionals in tackling disasters
- Be informed about the need to enhance capacities of built environment professionals involved in disaster mitigation and reconstruction of the built environment
- Be informed about existing and future research, teaching and training activities that are attempting to address these skills gaps

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