



Natural Disasters: What Is Inside A Lesson Learned?

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The learning of lessons is something that is inherent to normal human behavior. All kind of human interaction experiences critical inspection after a severe or even disastrous event has occurred. Particular inspections have been undertaken in the field of natural disasters. Hence human risk management can continuously be improved according to lessons learned from previous disasters or with the outcome of experience shared with other stakeholders in that field. This paper shows the results of a lessons learned project over the past years: the NEDIES (Natural and Environmental Information Exchange System) deals with lessons learned during the classical risk management phases of prevention, preparedness and response

At first glance a lesson is just pure text. Basically it mirrors what has been experienced within a certain context. Having a closer look at a lesson one finds out that a lesson refers to a specific emergency-triggering situation. A situation is more than a simple reference to a hazard: a “rapidly rising lake level” could have more meaning than “a flood”.

In order to take out positive information it is advisable not only to list up all potential benefits that could be drawn from a lesson; the explicit mentioning of benefits could be helpful in order to prepare further actions beforehand. Moreover one should also consider possible actions to take if that particular situation of the lesson exhibits again or elsewhere. In the case of rapidly rising lake level an a-priori prioritization of response actions could be done.

The description of the situation is linked with other characteristics of the lesson; local issues as well as historical considerations can play a role. A flood in a densely populated town can produce different implications than a flood in the countryside. The benefits of the lesson and actions proposed could be linked with experiences made in the past.

Other issues concern people involved: the addressees. Typical addressees are local decision makers or civil protection authorities. However, a lesson could also address house owners or individuals in general.

The explicit elicitation of all that information supports the generation of good practices and the identification of bad practices. Hence the creation of further disaster reduction measures could be positively influenced.