

Permanent Dedicating one of the Articles of Rescue and Relief Journal to Documentation or Lessons Learned from Disasters, Iran

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Letter to the Editor

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Dear Editor,

Our country Iran, due to its characteristics, geographical location, and the diversity of biological communities and activities in it, has experienced the occurrence of various natural and man-made disasters and hazards, which will continue to occur in the future due to the incidence of these disasters and hazards. Accordingly, in the past, numerous measures have been taken to manage disasters at different stages of the crisis management process. In this regard, multiple specialists in different fields of expertise have addressed the topic of crisis management, and various conducted researches can be mentioned, including:

- analysis of the cognitive dimensions of disasters;
- analysis of the vulnerability of cities, villages and activity centers to disasters;
- disaster risk zoning;
- analysis of the consequences of disasters in the fields of construction,
- urban development and urban planning, economic, social and psychological damages;
- analysis of the state of resilience to disasters and other such cases.

The results of some of these studies have been published in various journals, including the Journal of Rescue and Relief under your editorship, in the form of various articles or will be published in the future.

While appreciating these studies, an important point that has received less attention is the issue of documenting, compiling, and publishing lessons learned from actions and operational plans in the crisis management process in disasters that have occurred in our country or in other countries. Documenting and compiling lessons learned from the crisis management process in previous disasters can lead to improving conditions and management in operational measures in the process of managing future disasters.

A review of previous natural disasters in the country shows that with each disaster occurrence, greater financial and economic costs than in the past are spent on rebuilding and restoring damaged cities, villages and infrastructure and compensating for the resulting losses and the damages. The existence of such a failure, rather than revealing the weakness of engineering and management operations, indicates a lack of continuous improvement in the disaster and crisis management system. However, the effective element in continuous improvement of the management system is, in fact, documentation of disaster and crisis management. (1)

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Experiences that are compiled and documented in various formats have the opportunity to become knowledge in the hands of thinkers and specialist and add to human knowledge, otherwise what is remained and recorded in the minds will be forgotten in a short time.

In the process of crisis management, like other branches of science, there is a great need to record disasters and incidents and details of actions and operations that occur in this field, because these documents can form the foundation of knowledge that is the result of the analysis, interpretation, and elaboration of those documents. Therefore, what remains and is valuable from crisis management in any disaster and risk is the recording of its documentation. With these documents, one can judge the disasters and the crisis management process and bring all the actions that have been taken to the crucible of criticism, and ultimately, only from the documents can one learn, which are both instructive descriptions of successes and stories of failures. (2)

What humans have learned throughout history is mostly the result of documentation gathered from observing events and disasters. In crisis management, the "lessons learned" from each operation are the result of theoretical actions, field experiences, studies, analysis, and investigations that have been recorded in a logical and correct process, forming documentation that is a complete mirror of the realities and disasters that have occurred in the past.

This common saying that 'the past is a beacon for the future' is only true if past events have been recorded and the resulting documentation has been scientifically researched and analyzed, otherwise a past that has not been learned from and its documentation has not been prepared has no lessons for the future.

The concept of documentation focuses on a set of planned steps and actions within the framework of a predetermined plan, project, or program, and can be expressed as follows:

- Searching, collecting, recording and compiling a set of documents related to each action;

- Organizing and classifying the aforementioned documents in terms of subject, content and time;
- Analyzing and comparing of documents, programs, functions and actions with upstream documents and instructions and determining of differences, stating the reasons for the differences and discrepancies;
- Developing strategies and solutions to improve actions, programs, upstream documents, and guidelines. (2)

Documentation is an activity that is at the center of attention in today's world, in fact, by referring to documents and finding the connection between different actions, the necessary grounds for making strategic decisions can be provided. Describing perceptions, inferences, concerns, analyses, and actions throughout the crisis management cycle demonstrates how to carry out plan-based actions. Documenting activities and actions in relief and rescue scenes often means recording raw facts as they occur. Recording how events occur, their impact, and the resulting needs in a precise manner, given the changing circumstances and the increasingly complex effects of disasters is a difficult task that requires continuous time and moment-by-moment recording of actions. (3)

Leading and directing operations in crisis management is of great importance, and making accurate, fast, and strategic decisions is one of the most important tasks of crisis managers.

Relying on mentalities and avoiding existing realities is a great threat that always threatens the success of management actions. While the field documentation and the description of the facts and objective operational reports help to make decisions based on events, realistically, and avoid falling into the terrible valley of safe feelings and emotions.

Finally, the documentation process has not been developed as it should be in organizations involved in crisis management for the following reasons: the existence of some irregularities, the lack of regular structures and a standard system for command and crisis management, and the lack of relevant knowledge and training.

Documentation can demonstrate the knowledge, skills, experience, and role-playing power of the organizations involved and their forces in relief and rescue operations and crisis management, and analyzing, interpreting, and reviewing operations can enhance their planning ability, leadership, and management power, and ultimately lead to their greater effectiveness in subsequent operations.

We should not forget that the most important treasure we have from damaging disasters and incidents is the lessons we learn, and these lessons are an extract from our documentation. (3)

Therefore, in my opinion, as an active researcher in the field of disaster management, documenting and compiling lessons learned in disaster and crisis management in various fields, including command and management of rescue and relief operations and disasters, health and nutrition, preparedness and support, relief distribution network, emergency and temporary housing, safety and security, infrastructure matters in the field of water, electricity and energy supply, is of great importance and can be effective in improving crisis management.

It should be noted that in this regard, extensive emphasis has been placed by national and international authorities on documenting and compiling lessons learned.

Therefore, it is suggested that at least one of the quarterly articles or a special issue be dedicated to documenting and compiling lessons learned in disaster management.

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