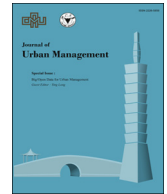




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Case Essay

Inter-agency collaboration for fire disaster management in Nairobi City

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ABSTRACT

The County Government of Nairobi faces a myriad of capacity challenges that have impeded fire disaster management in the City. This is further compounded by the lack of a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for disaster management in Kenya. Whereas the County Government enlists assistance from other public, private and civil society organizations, the approach employed is skewed towards interagency coordination rather than a collaborative approach. This paper looks at the concept of collaboration and its overall application in disaster management. It gives an overview of the Kenyan situation in relation to fire disaster management in Nairobi. The paper indicates that the County Government the County government has no framework for inter-agency collaboration thus fire disaster operations involve co-ordination of the different agencies by either the County government or the National Disaster Operations Centre. This means that the interaction between the agencies involved is one in which formal linkages are mobilized because some assistance is required for fire disaster response rather than a joint decision making approach where power is shared and all agencies take collective responsibility. The paper concludes that given the County government's inadequate capacity for fire disaster management, there is need to embrace inter-agency collaboration to enhance fire disaster management in the city. It thus recommends the formulation and adoption of a fire disaster management policy; formulation and implementation of fire disaster management legislation; fostering partnerships with the private sector through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs); and the development of an interagency fire management program/plan, as suggestions to augment inter-agency collaboration for fire disaster management.

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1. Introduction

Disaster management in urban areas is particularly complex owing to urbanization and its associated impacts which often increase the exposure of people and economic assets to hazards and create new patterns of risks. Fire disasters in particular are a common occurrence in cities across the world. Dynes and Russel (2002) attribute the increasing risk of fire occurrences to increased development interactions in cities.

In Kenya, fires have contributed to the toll of man-made disasters with varying loss of property and life. Nairobi city in particular, has experienced its share of fires over the years leading to loss of hundreds of lives and damage to properties worth billions of Kenya shillings. Notable city fires which have occurred over the last decade include; 2009 Nakumatt down town fire, 2011 Sinai fire 2012 Kimathi House fire, 2013 Jomo Kenyatta International Airport fire and Westgate mall terror related fire,

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among other numerous slum fires across the city. Most of these fire disasters called for joint efforts between the County government, National government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) during response and recovery efforts.

Interagency collaboration is crucial to fire disaster management given that fire disasters require the activation of the fire service, police, emergency medical services and other relevant agencies. The coordination of interagency operations can become more complicated during large scale situations such as terror attacks (NEC Corporation, 2014). This therefore requires an understanding of agencies' organizational structures and their roles in fire management. This understanding, coordination, and cooperation will enhance efficiency across jurisdictional boundaries (National Interagency Fire Centre, 2005).

This paper examines the concept of collaboration and its application in disaster management. It gives an overview of the current situation of interagency disaster management in Kenya with a view of suggests possible solutions to implement inter-agency collaboration for fire disaster management in Nairobi City.

2. Concept of collaboration

An increasing number of organizations are coming together to address complex societal issues. Most intentional, inter-organizational strategic alliances, articulate the collaborative effort as the primary method for achieving ideal short and/or long-term goals that would not otherwise be attainable as entities working independently (Gadja, 2004). Gadja however notes that, "collaboration" is a hard term to grasp. Although it has the capacity to empower and connect fragmented systems for the purposes of addressing multifaceted social concerns, its definition is somewhat elusive, inconsistent, and theoretical. She states that the term "collaboration" has become a catchall to signify just about any type of inter-organizational or inter-personal relationship, making it difficult for those seeking to collaborate to put into practice or evaluate with certainty.

McNamara (2012) agrees that collaboration is often used synonymously to cooperation or coordination; she notes; there is a tendency to categorize broadly interaction terms with little regard for the definitions that distinguish them from other types of interactions. In fact some theorists describe cooperation, coordination, and collaboration as falling along a continuum of increased interaction. McNamara, based on Keast, Brown, and Mandell, (2007); Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey (2001) notes that at one end of the continuum, cooperation is defined as an interaction between participants with capabilities to accomplish organizational goals but choose to work together, within existing structures and policies, to serve individual interests. She further states that coordination is placed in the middle of the continuum and based on Jennings (1994); Keast et al. (2007); Mattessich et al. (2001) is defined as an interaction between participants in which formal linkages are mobilized because some assistance from others is needed to achieve organizational goals. At the other end of the continuum, McNamara notes that collaboration is defined based on Gray (1989) as an interaction between participants who work together to pursue complex goals based on shared interests and a collective responsibility for interconnected tasks which cannot be accomplished individually.

Selin and Chavez (1995) adopt Gray's (1985) conceptual definition of collaboration, which is "the pooling of appreciations and/or tangible resources e.g. information, money, labor, etc., by two or more stakeholders to solve a set of problems which neither can solve individually." Collaboration implies a joint decision making approach to problem resolution where power is shared and stakeholders take collective responsibility for their actions and subsequent outcomes of their actions.

Kamensky and Burlin (2004) state that collaboration occurs when people from different organizations produce something together through joint effort, resources, and decision-making, and share ownership of the final product or service. It consists of the following elements: a common purpose, separate professional contributions, and a process of cooperative joint thinking and communication (Morton, Taras, & Reznik, 2010). It is worth noting that the scope and nature of collaborations, however, varies in accordance with the needs and goals of collaborating parties (Kapucu & Garayev, 2011).

From the aforementioned it is clear that collaboration differs from cooperation and coordination in that it "requires much closer relationships, connections, and resources and even a blurring of the boundaries between organizations" (Keast, Brown, & Mandell, 2007).

Mayer and Kenter (2015) identify nine key components of collaboration; these include communication, consensus decision-making, diverse stakeholders, goals, leadership, shared resources, shared vision, social capital, and trust. Table 1 presents the summary definitions of the nine components.

Mayer and Kenter (2015) however note that these components are not meant to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive; in fact, many of them are mutually reinforcing, often contingent upon, or building on, one trait or another. McNamara (2012) on the other hand describes the elements of collaboration as outlined in Table 2.

From Tables 1 and 2, it is clear that the components of collaboration are in many ways similar across the board with key components being information sharing, power sharing within formal and informal structures, participative decision making, shared resources, shared goals and trust.

Jamal and Getz (1995) based on Gray (1985) corroborate the aforementioned by outlining five key characteristics of the collaboration process: the stakeholders are independent; solutions emerge by dealing constructively with differences; joint ownership of decisions is involved; the stakeholders assume collective responsibility for the ongoing direction of the domain; and collaboration is an emergent process, where collaborative initiatives can be understood as "emergent organizational arrangements through which organizations collectively cope with the with the growing complexity of their environments."

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