



THE RAPID DISASTER EVALUATION SYSTEM (RADES): A PLAN TO IMPROVE GLOBAL DISASTER RESPONSE BY PRIVATIZING THE ASSESSMENT COMPONENT

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Abstract—Background: Emergency medicine personnel frequently respond to major disasters. They expect to have an effective and efficient management system to elegantly allocate available resources. Despite claims to the contrary, experience demonstrates this rarely occurs. **Objectives:** This article describes privatizing disaster assessment using a single-purposed, accountable, and well-trained organization. The goal is to achieve elegant disaster assessment, rather than repeatedly exhorting existing groups to do it. **Discussion:** The Rapid Disaster Evaluation System (RaDES) would quickly and efficiently assess a postdisaster population's needs. It would use an accountable nongovernmental agency's teams with maximal training, mobility, and flexibility. Designed to augment the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's 2015 Emergency Response Preparedness Plan, RaDES would provide the initial information needed to avoid haphazard and overlapping disaster responses. Rapidly deployed teams would gather information from multiple sources and continually communicate those findings to their base, which would then disseminate them to disaster coordinators in a concise, coherent, and transparent way. **Conclusions:** The RaDES concept represents an elegant, minimally bureaucratic, and effective rapid response to major disasters. However, its implementation faces logistical, funding, and political obstacles. Developing and maintaining RaDES would require significant funding and political commitment to coordinate the numerous agencies that claim to be performing the same tasks. Although simulations can demonstrate efficacy and deficiencies, only field tests will demonstrate RaDES' power to improve interagency coordination and decrease the cost of major disaster response. At the least, the RaDES concept should serve as a model for discussing how to practicably

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INTRODUCTION

The Disaster Response Problem

Emergency medicine personnel frequently respond to major disasters. They expect to have an effective and efficient management system to elegantly allocate available resources and maximally employ their talents and expertise. Despite the many supragovernmental organizations (e.g., World Health Organization, International Rescue Committee), that recognize such systems as being vital to a successful disaster response and that theoretically incorporate them into their disaster plans, personal experience and discussions with numerous global disaster responders indicate that they are rarely employed.

This article is designed to initiate a discussion about the necessity of funding a private, nongovernmental group focused solely on disaster assessment. Privatizing a disaster assessment group would accomplish two goals: its assessments would dovetail with other major disaster-related initiatives, while it would not be encumbered by other disaster-related missions. In addition, its continued existence would rely on the group's demonstrated and continued efficacy.

Disaster needs assessment is often inefficient and unreasonably slow after major natural disasters, resulting in ineffective and uncoordinated responses (1,2). Multiple competing governmental and nongovernmental agencies, acting independently and unaware of the actual needs in the (often multiple) affected geographic areas, produce overlapping efforts and waste resources, often harming the involved populations (3).

In mid-2015, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) issued their Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP) document to improve the responsiveness and coordination of teams and agencies responding to major disasters (4). Composed of representatives from the United Nations (UN), International Federation of the Red Cross, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the IASC has set as their goal “to deliver effective relief and protection to affected people by strengthening humanitarian leadership, streamlining coordination, and enhancing accountability” (4). Currently in the testing phase, the ERP recognizes that “clearly defined coordination and accountability mechanisms are critical for effective humanitarian response” (4). Likewise, the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals seek a significant reduction in “the number of deaths and the number of people affected” by disasters (5).

An appropriate response to “sudden-onset” emergencies, including hurricanes, earthquakes, and industrial catastrophes, requires rapid postdisaster assessment. For optimal effectiveness, assessment should not be conflated with overall postdisaster management, but rather be an independent, accountable function. Recognizing such assessment as a vital element in postdisaster relief, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, through its Disaster Assessment and Coordination group, putatively assumed this role in 1993, without much effect (6–8).

This article posits that to effectively perform postdisaster assessment, an accountable private, nongovernmental entity should quickly provide the response-coordination center with basic information about the disaster’s effects across the affected area. The coordinators will then have the necessary data to deploy the correct resources, in appropriate quantities, to the right locales, in a timely manner.

The article further describes a framework for such a disaster-response component: the Rapid Disaster Evaluation System (RaDES), a theoretical method for forming, training, and using quickly deployable field teams to provide initial rapid postdisaster assessments. These teams, deployed from a single, accountable, private NGO, would have specialized skills, high mobility, flexibility, and excellent communications. Implementing RaDES would streamline global disaster response and provide a framework for inter-group cooperation among

the many responding governmental organizations and NGOs, maximizing their efficiency and resource use.

Accountability would result from ongoing audits by the funding agencies. Such audits would evaluate 1) Response speed, 2) Adequacy of responding teams, 3) Information collection and dissemination, 4) Transparency of methods and results, and 5) Overall benefit to the disaster-response efforts.

The enhanced interagency coordination would significantly improve major disaster responses and likely decrease their significant cost (9).

DISCUSSION

RaDES and the IASC

RaDES aligns with the IASC’s “primary aim of the ERP approach [which] is to optimise the speed and volume of critical assistance delivered immediately after the onset of a humanitarian emergency” (4). RaDES is designed to:

- Reduce the uncertainty in early postdisaster response.
- Transparently disseminate information.
- Professionalize the early response effort.
- Have an identifiable management locus.
- Accelerate the receipt and dispersal of the information needed to make a “Flash Appeal” for additional resources (4).

The RaDES mission, however, is limited in scope and performs a purely supportive, information-based role for the primary coordinating team. It differs from current and planned assessment schemes by being focused on a single task. Furthermore, it is an entity that relies for its continued existence on producing measurable results (i.e., rapid, accurate, and disseminated assessment information) for which its funders would hold it accountable.

This means that RaDES is not designed to:

- Replace the ERP’s Humanitarian Country Team, which would be the primary recipient of RaDES assessment information.
- Replace NGOs and other response groups.
- Disrupt the IASC’s planned Inter-Agency, Sector/Cluster, or Organization-Specific activities.
- Provide resources to the affected population.
- Give any organization preference.
- Provide long-term assistance.

Implementing RaDES

RaDES requires a lead organization capable of training, managing, and rapidly deploying global rapid assessment teams. The organization’s international reputation

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