



**SIERRA LEONE
DISASTER MANAGEMENT
POLICY
(Final DRAFT copy)**



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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The 21st Century has seen a sharp global increase, in both frequency and severity of disasters around the world. Several reasons have been put forward for this, amongst which are inclement weather, man's advancing technologies, unplanned urbanization, poor agricultural practices, conflict etc. Among other things, these disasters may cause loss of lives, severe disruptions of social structures and materials losses, causing a severe economic and psychological burden on any nation.

The ultimate result leads to poverty, slow pace of human development, injury to people (more especially the poor), disorganisation of their otherwise normal activities and diminish their chances of improving their livelihood. Reports also show that about a third of global mortalities are being caused by some form of disaster. To address these and other global concerns, the Millennium Summit held in September 2000, at UN, New York, stipulates specific time-bound targets to be reached by 2015, in what is widely known as the Millennium Declaration. This was done with the purpose of combating poverty and inequality. In order to achieve this, a set of eight goals and targets, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were set. .

These goals were integrated into the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Johannesburg Plan of Implementation in 2002. Of particular interest was the reference to Disaster Management as an integral part of sustainable development. The WSSD Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) encourages "An integrated, multi-hazard, inclusive approach to address vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management, including prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery, as an essential element of a safer world in the 21st century".

It is believed that such a proactive approach to disaster management would go a long way in maximizing disaster risk reduction, which will ensure sustainable development.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Global calls for disaster management to become an integral part of sustainable development plus the bitter experience of prosecuting a ten-year civil conflict with an uncoordinated security approach served as a wake-up call for the Government of Sierra Leone to review its National Security Structure. Thus, as part of its post-war recovery effort, the Government of Sierra Leone reviewed its National Security Structure to meet the demands of the 21st century. This led the Government of Sierra Leone to enact The *National Security and Central Intelligence Act in 2002*. Section 18 sub-section IV of this Act mandate The Office of National Security to be 'the Government of Sierra Leone's primary Coordinator for the management of national emergencies such as disasters both natural and man-made'.

Prior to the civil conflict, the general environment was rich in both fauna and flora, as well as in natural resources. The civil conflict however saw the collapse of law and order and the ultimate environmental depletion, misuse and mismanagement of most of the country's resources and infrastructure.

1.3 NEED FOR POLICY.

The thrust of disaster management is to establish a process and structure for a coordinated and effective delivery of assistance and to address the consequences of major disasters declared in the country under the appropriate national legislation.

In Sierra Leone the capacity to manage disaster has been minimal due to lack of both financial and material resources. This is so because of the lack of comprehensive Disaster Management Strategy, lack of coordinated and clear lines of roles and responsibilities, poor capacity on the part of national and local government to timely respond to disasters and poor integration of civil societies into effective disaster management.

To combat the problems mentioned above and their associated obstacles, the establishment of a National Disaster Management Department, in the Office of National Security became prudent. The office coordinates disaster management at various levels and helps promote cross-sectoral disaster management activities.

By and large, an integrated and coordinated disaster management programme is based upon partnership. Also an efficient and cost effective disaster management must be based and built upon existing capacity of government and other agencies.

Thus, the Government of Sierra Leone set out to assess its disaster management capacity, which resulted in a review of disaster management structure and approach. Since the launching of the programme by the Honourable Vice President, Solomon Berewa in September 2004, the Disaster Management Department has identified a number of stakeholder groups, which meets at regular intervals at the Office of National Security.

As a first logical step, the department was able to get a group of local consultants and researchers from the University of Sierra Leone develop a document on the hazard profile of the country. Results from the assessment revealed the following hazards faced by the country: Meteorological hazards which cover drought, tropical storm thunder and lightning; Hydrological hazards which include flooding, and erosion. Pest hazards such as pest invasion, insect pests, exotic pest, vertebrate pest, wild animals, weeds and birds. The next set of hazards highlighted in the document cover animal hazards, health hazards and man made disasters like deforestation, road traffic accidents, population movement, pollution, waste management and impact of mining.

The commissioning of a National Hazard Assessment marked one of the very first tasks of the National Disaster Management Working Group. The hazard assessment revealed, amongst other things, that Sierra Leone is endowed with abundant natural resources. These resources have continued to determine the path and pattern of economic growth, depending on how they are managed. The economy largely depends on natural resources, and as such, understanding their nature, distribution and mode of exploitation is essential for their optimal utilization without jeopardizing the environment. If these resources are properly utilized and managed efficiently, environmental hazards, man-made disasters and to some extent, natural disasters can be minimized.

However, some of the post-war activities carried out, such as post war reconstruction, mining, fishing, agriculture and other economic activities continue to be poorly regulated and this is becoming a recipe for disasters.

To address the aforementioned problem and to take the programme of disaster management risk forward, the Government of Sierra Leone felt the obvious need to develop a comprehensive policy document that clearly states the aims, objectives, strategies, roles and responsibilities of coordinating institutions and implementing agencies.

1.4 MANDATE

The National Security and Central Intelligence 2002, gives the central responsibility of coordinating the management of national emergencies, such as disasters both natural and man-made, to the Disaster Management Department in the Office of National Security.

1.5 POLICY STATEMENT

The disaster management Policy is a comprehensive approach that enhances increased political commitment to disaster risk management thereby encouraging government agencies to take the lead and supported by non-governmental organisations. It also promotes public awareness and the incorporation of disaster risk management into development planning. The policy highlights the sources of funding and the reduction of bureaucracies in accessing such funds for effective disaster coordination.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Policy document emphasizes the following:

- Ensure the integration of disaster risk management into sustainable development programmes and policies to ensure a holistic approach to disaster management.
- Ensure priority and requisite institutional capacities for disaster risk reduction at all levels
- Enhance the use of knowledge, education, training, innovation and information sharing to build safe and resilient societies
- Improve the identification, assessment, monitoring and early warning of risks
- Improve effectiveness of response through stronger disaster preparedness

1.7 **APPROACH AND STRATEGY**

The implementation framework of disaster management is not a separate sector or discipline but an approach to solving problems that will enhance disaster management and, harnesses the skills and resources across stakeholder institutions. Therefore, a key element of the policy framework is to augment the resources and capability of existing entities and build new capabilities wherever necessary. While for most activities the implementing agencies take a lead role, the Office of National Security shall provide the overall coordination and direction of activities.

The Strategic objectives are to:

- **Increase political commitment on disaster risk reduction**
 - Enact legislation on disaster risk management
 - Build a database of government institutions and other stakeholders on disaster risk management.
 - Commit government to establish an emergency preparedness fund.

- **Improve identification and assessment of disaster risks**
 - Improve the quality of information and data on disaster risk.
 - Improve identification assessment and monitoring of hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities.
 - Set up and strengthen early warning systems, institutions, capacities and resource base, including observational and research sub systems.
 - Establish communication and information exchange amongst stakeholders in risk identification and assessment.
 - Disaster Management Department shall engage other stakeholder institutions in joint assessment exercises.

- **Increase public awareness of disaster risk reduction**
 - Improve information dissemination and communication considering the existing information and feedback after problem identification.
 - Promote integration of disaster risk management in the formal and informal educational systems.
 - Mainstream the media in public education.

- Strengthen the role and experience of traditional authorities and other opinion leaders in public awareness programmes.
- Strengthen the role of women, youths and vulnerable groups in disaster risk management.
- **Improve governance of disaster risk reduction institutions**
 - Assess the existing capacities of institutions to harmonise terms, policies and strategies at national and local levels.
 - Develop and strengthen national platforms for disaster risk reduction at required levels.
 - Strengthen decentralisation of disaster risk reduction interventions.
 - Promote public participation in planning and implementing disaster risk reduction interventions.
 - Promote increased inter-country cooperation and coordination.
 - Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of programme of action.
- **Integrate disaster risk management into development effort.**
 - Advocate the inclusion of disaster risk reduction in development strategies and emergency response management at national and local level.
 - Prepare and disseminate guidelines for integrating disaster risk reduction in development planning and activities consistent with environmental action plan.
 - Facilitate the strengthening of contingency planning and emergency response towards disaster risk reduction.
 - Advocate adoption of multi-hazard approach to disaster risk reduction in sustainable development strategies taking into account prevalent hazards, for example environmental and human induced phenomena
 - Consultation with national and international partners for training and capacity building in disaster risk reduction for disaster managers and volunteers.
- **Overall coordination and monitoring in implementation of the strategy**
 - Mapping out of priority needs in the country for disaster risk management

- Provide support to pursue the implementation of the strategy and programme of action.
- Facilitate the development of regional strategies and district strategies to harmonise with national strategy.
- **Building the capacity of the National Disaster Management Department**
 - Enhance the information gathering capacity of the department.
 - Improve the communications network of the department.
 - Capacity building for ONS personnel
 - Facilitate the movement of personnel through provision of vehicles to facilitate transportation
- **Emergencies**
 - Joint assessment approach.
 - Involvement of local people
 - Have response standard system.
 - Provision for transition and recovery.
- **National Disaster Management Plan.**
 - Examine the plan quarterly.
 - Update the plan to reflect the current situation.

PRE-DISASTER PHASE

2.1 Conceptual Framework:

During recent centuries there has been growing awareness that disaster losses can be more effectively reduced through improved development planning and action by taking into account of policy and practice of known hazards. . Focused development actually reduces the likelihood of disastrous events. Hazards are seen as integral aspects of our environment.

Exposure to a hazard need not necessarily mean disaster. It is the level of vulnerability for those who are exposed to the hazards that increase risk and thus the likelihood of disastrous occurrence.

Therefore, from a developmental perspective, disasters are not seen as isolated random acts of nature, rather, disasters are increasingly viewed as expected consequence of poor risk management over the long-term. They are outcome of interconnected social and physical processes that increase risk and vulnerability to even modest threats.

From this perspective, both risk reduction and disaster management are clearly multi-disciplinary processes, engaging a wide range of stakeholders.

In the broadest sense, risk reduction is a developmental imperative for achieving sustainable growth, as well as a strategy that protects living and livelihood for those most vulnerable.

Similarly disaster management is a multi-disciplinary field focusing on minimizing losses from a vast array of hazards that face Sierra Leone today.

The Sierra Leone Disaster Management Policy stresses an appreciable comprehension of the national profile of the hazards, vulnerability and risks that are faced by the nation. It states clearly an all-inclusive approach and views all aspects of disasters as a holistic threat to human security. Thus, the policy shall/will address disaster management and risk reduction in the pre-disaster phase by examining the following under - mentioned issues.

In an attempt to take the programme forward the following shall play a key role in pre-disaster phase.

- a. Government of Sierra Leone (Office of National Security)
- b. Local Government Councils
- c. Public Sector
- d. Private Sector
- e. Communities
- f. UN Agencies
- g. Non-Governmental Organisations
- h. Local NGOs
- i. Civil Societies.

2.2 THE ROLE OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT/LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Government of Sierra Leone shall take a pro-active step in preventing, mitigating and preparing for disasters.

2.2.1 Collaboration: As disaster management and risk reduction are considered to be multi sectoral, multi faceted and multi disciplinary, the government would collaborate with the public sector, private sector, United Nations Agencies, Non Governmental Organisations, Local Government Council and Local Communities in identifying risk, vulnerability and hazards.

2.2.2 Coordination: Government, through the National Disaster Management Department in the Office of National Security shall be the lead government institution to coordinate and facilitate all issues pertaining to disaster risk management..

2.2.3 Relocation and Resettlement: Government shall take the lead in identifying human settlements that are disaster prone and therefore take appropriate steps for the relocation of people from those endangered settlement to safer places.

2.2.4 Disasters and Development: Government shall encourage all line ministries to incorporate disaster risk reduction into development strategies. Guidelines for civil construction, land use and planning specification must be stated. Also clear guidelines

on epidemics, flooding, search and rescue and evacuation must be within the purview of government.

2.2.5 **Public Awareness and Sensitisation:** The National Disaster Management Department shall on behalf of government take the lead in awareness raising activities countrywide.

2.2.6 **Disaster Management Plan:** Government through the National Disaster Management Office shall take a lead role in developing a comprehensive disaster management plan through a participatory process involving all stakeholders. The plan shall be revisited through a consultative meeting and will be updated to make it reflect the current existing circumstance.

2.2.7 **Emergency Fund:** Government in its national budget to make allocation for disaster management in the country. The fund can be accessed with little or no bureaucratic protocol from the Ministry of Finance and the stakeholder government ministries and departments to respond to disasters. In line with this, GoSL shall adopt an effective system of accountability and transparency in the use of such funds.

2.2.8 **Training:** Government and its partners will develop a capacity building plan of disaster managers at national and international level and must be equipped with the necessary body of knowledge to be able to efficiently and expediently handle all issues of disasters. Also government in partnership with non-governmental organisations and United Nations Organisations shall take active steps in training office staff, institutional staff and local volunteers in disaster risk reduction and management.

2.2.9 **Institutional Disaster Management Policy:** Government shall ensure that every institution or department under its purview should develop disaster management policy. This policy shall make provision for a focal person who shall report at coordination meetings the progress and activities of the department /institution he represents.

2.2.10 **Safety and Security:** The Office of National Security on behalf of government must ensure that large commercial houses include safety and security measures as part of disaster risk reduction for their personnel and premises.

2.2.11 **Legislation:** The Government shall take a lead in the enactment of a national legislation on disaster risk management.

2.2.12 **Early Warning Systems:** To be able to effectively address disaster risk management, the government of Sierra Leone shall in collaboration with other institutions establish an early warning mechanism. Disaster reduction is not simply a matter of sophisticated technology and hardware; at root, it is also a matter of communication and education. There is need for countrywide successful disaster warning and preparedness measure. Any early warning system must touch every aspect of the hazard profile of Sierra Leone. Early warning mechanisms help the relevant authorities in taking timely preventive measures, thereby reducing the damage caused by disasters.

2.2 .13 **Establishment of Flexible Procedure:** Emergency situation usually demands simplified procedures for quick decision-making on issues like evacuation, deployment of resources, procurement of essentials, cordon and search and rescue operations. Government shall ensure that flexible procedures and systems are put in place to ensure that bureaucracies associated with the disbursement of fund, deployment of personnel, logistics and other resources are reduced. This is done to save more lives and property.

2.2.14 **Establishing Communication and Technological Networks:** A good national information network is very essential for the management of disaster and effective advocacy for risk reduction. Thus, the government shall ensure that a comprehensive information network is available. The network must enable timely collection of hazard-related information and rapid dissemination of relevant information and warning. Thus, there shall be a single Frequency communication channel dedicated to disaster throughout the country. It would be activated as and when disaster activities or events occur. This shall enable the authority to take informed decision.

2.3 **District Councils:** With the decentralisation process in its optimal stage, the government will ensure the participation and cooperation of district councils in every aspect of disaster risk reduction; this shall embrace disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response.

2.4 **Community Involvement:** When a disaster strikes, the first categories of people that are faced with the severity of the impact are the local community. Thus the government shall ensure the participation of the community in all prevention and mitigation activities. This shall be under the overall supervision of the government of Sierra Leone.

2.5 **Private Sector:** Government shall ensure the enactment of appropriate legislations that will ensure participation of the private sector in disaster management. They shall also participate actively in disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. Such legislations can be directed towards issues like oil spill, toxic waste, industrial accidents, pollution, fire accidents etc.

2.6 GoSL to ensure that all Non-Governmental Organisations, which operate within the country includes within its Terms of Reference, Disaster Risk Management package. This condition must be met before registration for operations is allowed.

2.7 **Impact Assessment:** Government of Sierra Leone to conduct environmental Impact Assessment before issuing licenses to companies whose activities may pose a threat to the environment. .

DISASTER PHASE

3.1 **Declaration of Disasters:** Government of Sierra Leone shall have the prerogative to define the occurrence of disaster and define the boundaries of the disaster-affected site. This shall be followed by a “disaster declaration” by the

National Security Coordinator. The declaration shall be made in consultation with the National Security Council Coordinating Group (NSCCG) on disasters.

3.2 **Effective Inter Agency Cooperation:** The Government of Sierra Leone shall activate appropriate response plans that have been developed and adopted by the relevant institutions. Also there must be effective communications amongst agencies to avoid duplication of efforts.

3.3 **Establishing a Proper Chain of Command:** One important benchmark for a good disaster response mechanism is the establishment of a clear chain of command. The government shall henceforth put in place a proper chain of command structure, which will serve as a nodal body for all disaster management activities and coordination mechanism that covers all entities responsible for implementation.

3.4 **Development of a Database:** Any outbreak of disaster must be followed by a quick reference to a national disaster database. It shall include contact address of institutions, capacities, resources and people. The National Disaster Management Department will develop a database of institutions consisting of a comprehensive repository of information. It shall be maintained and made easily accessible to relevant stakeholders at all times.

3.5 **Search and Rescue:** One of the priorities in the aftermath or sequel of any disaster is to apply frantic effort to drastically minimise loss of lives by conducting rescue operations for disaster victims. People who are trapped under collapsed buildings, or isolated by floods or in danger of fire disasters needs immediate assistance. Government will ensure that specialist experts, and institutions with the necessary guidelines, shall take proactive steps in such ventures. Their operations will be in accordance with disaster management plans and will be supported by local authorities.

3.6 **Emergency Relief Assistance:** Disasters of all types have the destructive potentials to disrupt human settlements and the livelihood of people. It can affect food supply, shelter and health facilities. They can also temporarily or permanently lead to displacement of people. To reduce the severity of the impact and to further avoid an outbreak of epidemic, Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) through its established institution shall take a lead by maintaining stock supplies of relief items to protect the affected person. The United Nations, non-governmental organisations, private sector and philanthropists shall compliment the effort of government organisations.

3.7 **Infrastructure and Essential Services:** Disaster impacts are not only felt on lives, but also on state infrastructure and its essential services. Such state infrastructures include public buildings, roads, bridges, airfields, seaports, communication network, electricity etc. Government shall ensure that damaged infrastructures and essential services are always in good operational order. To achieve this priority, government will work hands in gloves with local government, the private sector and development partners in reinstating these infrastructures into working order.

3.8 **Security:** During disasters, the security agencies are usually pre-occupied with search and rescue operations. At such critical moments, some members of the

public would attempt to engage themselves in anti-social behaviour and looting. The government shall therefore ensure that maximum security is provided by the institutions that are mandated to do so within the precincts of the law.

3.9 **Assessment of Damage:** When disasters take place, the local government council or chiefdom administration will make strong appeals for assessments to be conducted. This is done to assess the level of damage caused by the disaster. Thus when disasters occur, government shall ensure that rapid inter-agency assessment is conducted and advice given on appropriate response mechanism.

3.10 **Relief Packages:** The government shall ensure that victims of disasters are given relief packages in the form of food, clothing and non-food items. This shall be done by implementing agencies with international minimum acceptable standards.

3.11 **Post Relief Assessment:** To be able to learn from experience in giving out relief handouts to disaster victims, a post relief assessment is usually conducted to be able to develop gap analysis and to meet the relief needs of those that were left out in the initial relief package. Government shall ensure that a post relief assessment is done, and the report circulated to national, provincial and district disaster management committees in the country.

POST-DISASTER PHASE

4.1 **Reconstruction & Rehabilitation:** The thrust of Government's policy in this phase will be to ensure a speedy return to normalcy and mitigation of long-term consequences of the disaster. Thus, the policy objective of the Government in this phase will be to focus on economic and social consequences of the disaster and directing efforts to improve the same. The policy objectives will be carried out through the machinery of the state as well as with the aid of other stakeholders.

4.2 Key Activities in Post-Disaster Phase

- While a preliminary damage assessment is carried out during the emergency phase, a detailed assessment must be conducted before commencing reconstruction and rehabilitation activities.
- The relevant government departments and local authorities shall initiate detailed inter agency assessment at their respective levels for damages sustained in housing, industry/ services, infrastructure, agriculture, health/ education assets in the affected regions.
- Assistance to restore houses and dwelling units: Government of Sierra Leone will formulate a policy of assistance to help the affected to restore damaged houses and dwellings.
- Relocation (need based): Government of Sierra Leone believes that need-based considerations and not extraneous factors, drives the initiative to relocate people. The local authorities, in consultation with the people affected

and under the guidance of Government of Sierra Leone Disaster Management Department shall determine relocation needs taking into account criteria relevant to the nature of the calamity and the extent of damage.

4.3 **Finalizing reconstruction & rehabilitation plan:** The effectiveness of any reconstruction and rehabilitation is based on detailed planning and careful monitoring of the relevant projects. The government shall oversee reconstruction and rehabilitation work and ensure that it takes into account the overall development plans for the state. In addition, Government of Sierra Leone will approve reconstruction and rehabilitation projects.

4.4 **Funding Mechanism:** Reconstruction & rehabilitation projects are fairly resource intensive. Such funds will be raised by the Government of Sierra Leone, supported by international agencies and other development partners. Government of Sierra Leone shall advocate and enable others to raise funds for disaster mitigation plans.

4.5 **Funds Disbursement and Audit:** The funds raised from funding agencies are usually accompanied by stringent disbursement and usage restrictions. It is therefore important to monitor the disbursement of such funds to ensure that none of the covenants are breached throughout project implementation.

4.6 **Project Management:** Since rehabilitation and reconstruction effort typically involves the co-ordinated efforts of several entities, the GoSL shall encourage the respective entities to strengthen program management capabilities to ensure that synergies across and within entities are managed efficiently. In addition, it is also necessary to constantly monitor the activity to ensure that the project is executed on time, in accordance with the technical specifications and to the satisfaction of the beneficiaries. GoSL, in conjunction with relevant Government departments, will monitor the reconstruction activity carried out by various implementations agencies.

4.7 **Dispute resolution mechanisms:** Government of Sierra Leone shall ensure an appropriate conflict resolution mechanism in all its interventions.

4.8 **The National Security Council Coordinating Group for disasters:**

The E²NSCCG shall approve the release of ‘disaster funds’ from the Ministry of Finance to the concerned Government departments and agencies for the implementation of rehabilitation and post-disaster reconstruction purposes. The release of funds must be arranged in such a way that there is little or no bureaucracy of their release at the shortest notice. Together with the ONS, the E²NSCCG shall also be responsible to facilitate and monitor reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts of various Government departments and other implementation agencies in terms of project timelines, processes, funds, deployment and benefits to the affected community.

4.9 **Government Departments and Local Authorities:** Government departments, local authorities and other non-governmental agencies shall conduct detailed damage assessment and will carry out the reconstruction and rehabilitation activities, in accordance with the policies and guidelines specified by the GoSL. They would also be responsible for reporting various parameters, as may be required by

GoSL, related to the progress and outcome of the various projects undertaken by them.

4.10 **The Private Sector**

The private sector should provide fair estimates of damage assessment to relevant authorities and provide feedback in terms of their priorities and concerns for work related to rehabilitation and reconstruction. They should participate in the post-disaster activities, in co-ordination with GoSL and in alignment with the overall policies and guidelines developed by the ONS (Disaster Management Department). They should co-operate in providing feedback regarding progress and outcome of rehabilitation and reconstruction projects undertaken in their vicinity.

4.11 **Community Groups and Voluntary:** Community groups and voluntary agencies, including NGOs should provide fair estimates of damage assessment to relevant authorities and provide feedback in terms of their priorities and concerns for work related to rehabilitation and reconstruction. They should participate in the post-disaster activities, in co-ordination with the GoSL and in alignment with the overall policies and guidelines developed by ONS (Disaster Management Department). They should co-operate in providing feedback regarding progress and outcome of rehabilitation and reconstruction projects undertaken in their vicinity.

4.12 **Educational Institutions**

GoSL shall endeavour to incorporate disaster management into the curriculum of educational institutions at all levels through the appropriate ministry.