

Mitigation and Preparedness for Natural Disaster in the Kingdom of Tonga

Summary of the Report of a Technical Assistance Assignment under the auspices of the Ministry of Overseas Development, London to the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga.

Undertaken in June and July 1978. Report submitted August 1978.

The Report reviews the history of the occurrence of environmental extremes within the Tonga Island groups, and vulnerability to earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, drought and volcanic eruption; and analyses the comparatively brief history of disaster relief, the growth of dependency on central government which in turn has become dependent for relief aid from external sources.

The Report notes the impact of the "relief machine" on indigenous administrative resources and consequent reduced capacity to assess and to adjust structural weaknesses exacerbating vulnerability. The role of major extreme events in accelerating change, as well as in exposing weaknesses change has brought about, is commented upon.

It is emphasised in the Report how disaster impact depends upon prevailing normal conditions, and that mitigation has therefore to do with the improvement and maintenance of basic elements of life support such as shelter, food supply and water supply. Although relief-aid funds are openly being supplied for works of improvement as well as repair and rehabilitation, this function is being applied too late - after damage, injury, loss and deprivation (and possible death) have occurred.

The Report recommends that the governmental function of development co-ordination should include a programme for disaster prevention and preparedness, in ecological consideration of all development proposals, improved local and regional environmental monitoring and data collection and improved "infrastructure for preparedness"; and that preventive and preparedness measures should be submitted and accepted as a basis for development proposals and funding.

The Report concludes with recommendations for improved institutional arrangements, which take account of existing measures and provide for the improved administration of preparedness and relief, and preventive measures within the context of social and economic development.



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