



**CHALLENGES OF INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN NIGERIA**

Ruth OchanyaAdio-Moses (Ph.D)

Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies,

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

E-mail: [ochanyaadiomoses@gmail.com](mailto:ochanyaadiomoses@gmail.com)

Phone contact: +2348023438038

Temitope Francis Abiodun (Ph.D)

Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies,

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

E-mail: [abiodun.temitope3@gmail.com](mailto:abiodun.temitope3@gmail.com)

Phone contact: +2348033843918

Ebenezer Olusegun Fasaanu

Ph.D Student, Department of Geography,

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

**ABSTRACT**

Nigeria as state has been facing a myriad of challenges that have impeded disaster and risk management for years now. This situation is further complicated by the dearth or even lack of a comprehensive institutional framework for emergency response system in the country. The interaction between the agencies involved is one in which there is a usual disconnect instead of a joint decision making approach where power is shared and all agencies take up a collective responsibility. During emergencies, the Nigerian government emergency

agencies are supposed to solicit support or assistance from other private, civil society organizations and the public, but the current approach being employed is rather tailored towards individual coordination rather than a collaborative or cooperative approach. This paper, therefore, examines the challenges of interagency collaboration on emergency response in the country and implications for national risk preparedness and reduction. The study vividly depicts an overview of the Nigerian situation in relation to emergency response. Though challenges crop up as a result of various hindrances that make the agencies work at cross-roads, among which are: financial constraints, inadequate information on coordination process, politics and others. The paper concludes that given the current situation on in-adequate interagency collaboration in emergency response in Nigeria, there is need to embrace interagency collaboration to enhance emergency response to disasters and risks in our societies. It, however, recommends encouragement of coherent policies; learning from the lived experiences of developed countries; coupling disaster risk reduction with other more salient issues like environmental protection or poverty reduction among others.

**KEYWORDS:** Interagency collaboration, Emergency response, Preparedness, Disaster and risks, Management, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in any nation often involves multi-sectoral, multi-resource and multi-disciplinary processes, and this often involves the alignment of roles and responsibilities in emergency responses and operations. Emergency response in this country, Nigeria, is still believed to struggling for survival in its infancy. Though response to emergencies date back to the early 1900s when the first fire fighting agency (Fire Brigade) was in charge of putting out fires, protecting properties, and helping communities respond to disasters, while a comprehensive paradigm to emergency responses only got birthed around the year 1999 in Nigeria (Moore, 2010:12). Though since then, Nigeria's emergency response system has gone through various metamorphosis and positioning. These changes include improved education and enlightenment programmes and development,

organizational structure, increased training of disaster emergency personnel, and advanced collaborations with other countries on disaster management matters. However, this emergency response system still has a very long way to go as it is bedeviled with various challenges, lack of funds for response programmes, marginalization, poverty and lots of others (Jibowu, 2019).

Nigeria has a land area of approximately 356,700 sq miles (923,800 sq km), with varying climate and terrain like coastal swamps, tropical forests, woodlands, grasslands, and semi-desert (US Department of States, 2011). The country is surrounded by Cameroon to the east, Chad to the north east, Benin Republic to the west, Niger Republic to the North, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south (Nwannenaya and Abiodun, 2017). Nigeria is rated the Giant of Africa and it's the most populous nation the continent of Africa with a population of about 200 million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Nigeria has its capital situated in the Abuja. However, there are over 250 ethnic groups in the country and three main or major indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), English is the official language (NBS, 2017). Nigeria also has 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja together with number of 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs) (Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution, 1999). The two major religions in Nigeria are Islam and Christianity, although some Nigerians belong to other indigenous religions.

Before the discovery of oil in 1956 (Onuoha 2009), many Nigeria was adequately engaged in agriculture as her major source of revenue before oil discovery in 1956. During her engagement in agricultural production, much of the nation's foreign exchange earnings emerged from the exportation of cash crops like oil palm, groundnuts, cocoa, and coffee (Watts 1983). Unfortunately, as oil discovery got surfaced in the 1970s, various Nigerians who were earlier engaged in agriculture migrated from the rural communities for urban cities looking for white-collar jobs (Moore, 2010). The indication of this is that aged and less productive community members were left to cultivate the lands leading to less production and, subsequently, lower exports. Since the discovery of oil and natural gas, these two natural resources have been the mainstay of Nigeria's exports, constituting 37

per cent of Gross Domestic Product in 2006 (USDS 2011). In fact, oil alone has generated over \$800 billion in the past five decades (Onuoha 2009). This paper endeavours to examine the history of Nigeria, its geography and demography; it takes a cursory examination of the causal-factors of incessant vulnerability to disasters and hazards in the country. Besides, the study highlights the various recent disasters in Nigeria as well as the challenges facing Nigeria's emergency response or management system in the country. This paper later concludes with recommendations for improving Nigeria's emergency system.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **Concept of Collaboration**

An increasing number of various organizations are getting united in addressing the societal issues. In the same vein, inter-agencies, articulate the spirit of collaborative effort as the fundamental techniques of achieving the short and long-term goals and objectives that would not be attainable if they are working independently (Samba, 2010). Samba however notes that, "collaboration" is a hard term to grasp. However, it has the capacity to connect fragmented systems for the purposes of addressing multifaceted social concerns; its definition is somewhat elusive, inconsistent, and theoretical. 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.

In the same, McNamara (2012) lends credence to the fact that collaboration is often used synonymously to cooperation or coordination; as there is a tendency to categorize broadly interaction terms with little regard for the definitions that distinguish them from other types of interactions. That is why some theorists or researchers usually argue that cooperation, coordination, and collaboration as falling into increased interaction. Menya (2016) submits that 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. According to Nabutola (2013), collaboration 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 of it all, McNamara notes that collaboration is defined as an interaction between participants who work together to pursue complex goals and objectives based on shared interests and a collective responsibility for interconnected tasks which cannot be attained individually.

By the way, Chavez and Selin (1995) adopted the 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. Another set of scholars, Eide, Hangstveit, Halvorsrud and Boren, 2013(2013) submitted that collaboration occurs when people from different organizations produce something together through joint efforts, resources, and decision-making, and share ownership of the final products 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, and 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.

Pursuant to the arguments above, it is vividly clear that collaboration is different from cooperation and coordination in that it “requires much closer relationships, connections, and resources and even a blurring of the boundaries between organizations (Morton et al, 2010). In the same parlance, Mayer and Kenter (2015) vividly identify some components of collaboration; as they include: communication, consensus decision-making, diverse stakeholders, goals, leadership, shared resources, shared vision, social capital, and trust. Other five key characteristics of the collaboration process include: 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.”

The key components of collaboration as submitted by Mayer and Kenter (2015) are as follows:

**Communication:** Usually open lines of communication aid promotion of healthy dialogue, information-sharing, and increased social capital

**Consensus Decision-Making:** Involves well-defined and mutually agreed goals. It however breeds cooperation, reduces risk, and promotes an inclusive collaborative process.

**Diverse Stakeholders:** This needs be actively sought and can be integral to effective decision-making. Diverse stakeholders bring a variety of intellectual and tangible resources to a collaborative process

**Goals:** The articulated goals become more attainable to provide an effective evaluative criterion. Also must balance individual and group goals to ensure an effective working environment.

**Leadership:** A strong leadership adds legitimacy and credibility to a collaborative process in a society.

**Shared Resources:** Pooling of resources together is one of the primary reasons people agree to collaborate. Shared resources lead to the creation of something greater than any one individual could produce on their own

**Shared Vision:** There exists a shared vision that serves as initial bond that brings all stakeholders together.

**Trust:** In respect to the mutual understanding developed through significant dialogue, trust is critical to bringing in stakeholders to share resources

According to McNamara (2012), in case there must be a viable collaboration among agencies or organizations, there are needs for the following elements to make it more functional in the society and they include: Design (where exists the shared power arrangements among the agencies); Formality of the Agreement (that is the informal and formal agreements); Organizational Autonomy (the policies to govern the collective



arrangement are developed jointly developed by agencies); Information Sharing (open and frequent communications through formal and informal channels); Decision Making(Joint decision making); Resolution of serious issues (Agencies should endeavours to work together towards resolving all forms of conflict); Resource Allocation (resources are pooled in support of collective goals); Systems Thinking (System integration does occur to better achieve collective goals); and Trust (there need for absolute trust among the collaborating agencies).

### **OVERVIEW OF DISASTERS OR HAZARDS THAT ARE COMMON IN NIGERIA**

Various natural emergencies are prevalent in Nigeria and they include, but are not all limited to, flooding and droughts. The flooding being addressed here usually displaces numbers of Nigerians than as obtained in any other disaster; it is observed that about 33 percents of the populace is vulnerable to flooding (Babatunde, 2011). The disaster, flooding remains an annual hazard in Nigeria and it usually claims thousands of lives and displacement of communities, most especially the ones that are very close to rivers banks. This is evident in the incidence of the flood that occurred in Abeokuta Ogun State on 26 July, 2007 following the incessant rainfall that lasted over 24 hours. This flood affected over 2,817 people, destroyed over 500 homes and 100 vehicles, and paralyzed social and economic activities for several days (Adelekan 2011). The total infrastructure loss is estimated to be about 3.2 million Naira. Also, from July to October, 2019 now,Ogun Dam break has led to death over 7 people and destruction of over 12 homes in the whole Kara, Mowe and Ibafo areas of Ogun State and Lekki and Ajah areas of Lagos State. The whole places are fully flooded and most of the businesses in the areas have all been disrupted and people displaced. This dam break was engendered by torrential rain-induced flash floods (Jibowu, 2019).

However, there is usually eruption of conflicts in Nigeria. These conflicts arise as a result of disagreement between some parties, groups and individuals in our societies. In the year, 2018, over 72 farmers were killed by herdsmen in various towns of Kogi State, Nigeria. There are also cases of kidnapping for ransom which leads to untimely death of victims. It is now an axiom that Nigeria is a notable state for incessant conflicts and violence (Jibowu,

2019). Also, the Boko Haram attacks which started since 2009 in Nigeria has claimed over 23,000 lives in the Northeastern region and some other states in Nigeria (Abiodun, 2016:45). There are also frequent cases of oil pipeline and tanker explosions in the country. For instance, the Jesse oil pipeline explosion which occurred on October 17, 1998 claimed nothing less than 1,000 lives and hundreds injured in Jesse, Delta State (Environmental Rights Action, 1998); Onuoha 2009). The explosion was caused by a pipeline leakage and vandals, which was detected a day before the explosion. In addition, there was a fire incidence that occurred on 10 July in the year 2000, after a pipeline got vandalized by some unknown vandals near in Oviru Court in Delta State and this led to death of over three hundred (N300) Nigerians and property worth millions of Naira got consumed in the inferno. The cause of the fire was a spark from metal containers used to scoop the leaking oil (Nwaneri, 2011). There are perennial cases of fire incidents in Nigeria mostly during dry seasons as a result of bush burning and this leads to total razing of numerous farms, forestations and plantations in the country.

There are cases of plane crash in the country before now, though the problem seems to have been duly addressed by the Nigeria government squarely. There are few cases of plane crash that had occurred in the past. There was a plane crash involving the Bellview Airline Boeing 737 (Flight 210) which actually occurred on 22 October, 2005, in Lisa Village, Ogun State, killing all 117 passengers on board (Nwaneri, 2011). The Bellview airline was on its way from Lagos to Abuja Airport. A sorrowful knowledge of the occurrence is that the airline was off radar six (6) minutes after it took off in Lagos, the crash scene was not located until the following day. Besides, there was a case of Sosoliso Airline that crashed in Port Harcourt, Rivers State on 10 December, 2005, claiming lives all the 103 passengers on board (Sahara Nwaneri, 2011).

Another common natural disaster in Nigeria is drought. This hazard in typically takes place in the northern region of Nigeria; this is actually within the Sudan-Sahel zone of the area. The major reason adduced to this drought in the Sudan-Sahel area is the inability of rain-bearing monsoon winds from the Atlantic Ocean to penetrate enough into the region. Man-made hazards peculiar to Nigeria include, but are not limited to, terrorism, pipeline



explosions, road and air transportation accidents, internal crises, and infernos (Sahara Reporters, 2010). There is unhealthy man-made hazard of incessant traffic jams or congestion in Nigerian cities. The roads are bad though and there is usual congestion on Nigerian roads, most especially in the cities of Lagos, Port Harcourt, Ibadan, Zaria and others.

### **INTERAGENCY COORDINATION AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN NIGERIA**

The success to be recorded on emergency response in Nigeria usually requires the interaction among governmental and non-governmental actors in manners that would protect and promote humanitarian principles. This emergency response through collaboration is required so as to avoid unhealthy competition, minimize inconsistency, and pursue common goals on the part of the disaster and risk management agencies. In Nigeria, the institutional structure for responding to humanitarian emergencies in Nigeria comprises; the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), and the Local Emergency Management Committee, (LEMC), serving as the coordinating bodies at the three (3) tiers of government, federal, state and local governments respectively (Babatunde, 2011).

At the federal level, NEMA is the lead agency for managing disasters through its six zonal offices spread across the country. At the state level, the Federal Government mandated the establishment of State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs) and at the local level, mandated the creation of Local Emergency Management Agencies (LEMAs) (Fagbemi 2011). All three emergency management agencies are charged with the responsibility of developing capabilities to prepare, prevent, respond to, and recover from disasters (NDMF 2010). Other players in Nigeria's emergency management system include, but are not limited to, the military, police, para-military, and CSOs. In addition, Disaster Response Units (DRUs), which can be summoned from military formation across the country, are also important players in Nigeria's emergency management system (Samba, 2010).

When a disaster occurs in any community, the first responders are community institutions like Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), and Non-Federal Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Samba, 2010). The effort of this community

emergency management structure is complemented by Emergency Management Volunteers (EMV) and if more resources are needed, SEMA and NEMA can bring in additional resources. In the disaster management cycle, these stakeholders are expected to cooperate, collaborate and coordinate in the various components of the disaster risk management including: early warning, planning; operation; data collection; information management; resource mobilization; monitoring and evaluation.

### **CHALLENGES BEDEVILLING INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION ON EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN NIGERIA**

There are many challenges facing Nigeria's emergency management systems as highlighted below:

First, the lead agency in disaster management in Nigeria, National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA) is underfunded. According to Fagbemi (2011), the amount allocated to risk reduction is not sufficient to meet the demand of the assignment. This problem of insufficient funding is currently impacting negatively on the agency's ability to implement emergency response strategies. For instance, the funding problem is one of the reasons why NEMA has only been able to implement vulnerability and capability analysis (VCA) just in only 21 out of a total number of 774 Local Government Areas existing in Nigeria. And also, it is same reason the various research works conducted by the NEMA on disaster risk reduction have not been translated into local languages for easy consumption of rural dwellers (Fagbemi, 2011). These publications contain valuable disaster-related information that would allow locals that do not speak English to understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as measures they can adopt to reduce disaster risks in their localities.

Second, although the Federal Government expects each of the 36 states to have a State Emergency Management Authority (SEMA), but as it is, only 22 out of 36 states have emergency management agency backed by law. Other states are still clinging to the outdated system known as Ad hoc Emergency Management system. When state agencies

have different emergency management structures, it is more difficult to standardize procedures, collaborate, and coordinate resources when disasters occur (Fagbemi, 2011).

Third, there is a problem of non-existence of independent courses in disaster risk reduction which still remains is a big challenge in the country. The courses on disaster awareness and prevention or management are yet to be infused in the curricula of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. The course is not clearly being run by the tertiary institutions in the country too.

In addition, there exists insufficient collaboration and cooperation among different levels of government: federal, state and local ones. This dearth of substantive collaboration is a major challenge facing Nigeria's emergency response management system. This problem is more significant because there is insufficient capability to reduce risks and develop disaster plans at the local and community levels.

Moreover, there is fear of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is an organizing principle in which matters are to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. Decisions should be taken at a local level if possible, rather than by a central authority and in this case, each social, political group or organization should help the smaller ones. It has become increasingly prominent in the theory and practice of global practice (Etuonovbe, 2011). It also responds to a need for a principled distribution of tasks between different layers of governance and expresses a general commitment to lower-level decision making during emergency needs. Therefore, the fear of getting matters handled by the smallest or least competent authority hinders effective interagency collaboration on expediting actions on emergency or disaster management in Nigeria.

Interagency collaborations or cooperation on emergency response in Nigeria is hindered as a result of various political considerations. Obviously, an event which involves local, state and federal actions has more potential for political implications. Another issue is the degree to which public policies become a part of the disaster event (Jibowu, 2019). The other issue

is the nature of the political environment in the community would surely impact on the disaster situation.

There is also lack of coordination knowledge and skills. Inadequate information on coordination process. There is inadequate information on coordination in disaster management. This lack of coordination in disaster response, disaster preparedness, health and community care, leading to a number of possible failures, for instance inappropriate allocations of first responder resources, counter-productive ordering of sequential relief processes, delayed evacuations and others (Abiri, 2017).

And pursuant to the phobia or fear of failure that could up from any of the disaster management agencies, they find it difficult to fully cooperate or collaborate with themselves in disaster and risk management process in Nigeria.

Finally, poverty is another problem confronting Nigeria; it is estimated that over 70 per cent of Nigerians currently live below the poverty line (Bakare 2017). Aliongo (2018) further stated that the combined wealth of Nigeria's five richest men could end extreme poverty at national and state levels but there would never be a room for that. It is on note that Nigerians currently live on less than \$1.90 a day, making it possible for Nigerian people to be poorer than any other nation in the global system.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper therefore gave the following recommendations aimed at fostering interagency collaboration for emergency response system in Nigeria:

- i. The Federal Government of Nigeria should endeavour to reduce vulnerability to hazards in all ramifications; steps must be taken not only to integrate risk reducing measures into national plans, but also to educate and enlighten the public on the importance of risk reduction.
- ii. In spite of many problems, there are at least three opportunities available to Nigerian government and agencies to improve emergency management system. First, the Federal Government should broaden the scope of emergency management

courses in higher education curricula. More Nigerian universities should be empowered to have developed curricula in disaster risk reduction to award degree and diploma certificates in disaster risk management.

- iii. There is need for absolute implementation of poverty alleviation and educational programmes as this would also go a long way in addressing some of the root causes of such challenges bedeviling the effort of the response agencies.
- iv. There is also the need for swift formulation and adoption of emergency response management policy to provide a clear legal and institutional framework geared towards interagency collaborative approach.
- v. The Nigerian government should by now embark on formulation and implementation of emergency response legislation to facilitate the operationalization of the disaster management policy in the country.
- vi. The Nigerian government should foster partnerships with the private sector through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) as a vehicle for collaboration in emergency response management.
- vii. The Nigerian government, in liaison with other members of the public and private agencies should develop an interagency disaster management programmes and plans, to clearly outline areas, levels and roles and terms of engagement for interagency collaborations in emergency response in Nigeria.
- viii. The disaster management agencies in Nigeria must learn from lived experiences of developed countries
- ix. There should be workable adoption of comprehensive approach with focus on more investment at the local government level on emergency response system in Nigeria.

- x. In the same vein, there should be a call for increased collaboration or cooperation between the Federal Government of Nigeria and governments of other Western countries of: United States of America, Germany, France, Japan, Britain, and Israel. Such collaboration can focus on training Nigerian emergency response agencies on the useful skills needed to prepare, prevent, mitigate, respond to, and recover from disasters.
- xi. Lastly, there is need for functional investment in infrastructure and path building for collective response

## **Conclusion**

Emergency operations, particularly large operations, frequently involve many agencies, organizations and individual participants. Given the increasing frequency of various disasters in Nigerian cities, the changing nature of such disasters goes on and on as the emergency response personnel are in shortages. It is, however, highly essential for not only the agencies of government, but also for the various emergency response agencies to foster collaboration in order to integrate the delivery of disaster management and services in the Nigeria. Collaboration has the capacity to empower and connect all key disaster management actors and thus achieve effective and efficient disaster management. A collaborative approach should aim at involving all stakeholders in preventing, preparing for, responding to and restoring communities after emergency calamities. If these recommendations are implemented, there is absolute confidence that Nigeria can once again act in compliance with global practice in the purview of emergency management and its emergency management system would definitely remain a model to reckon with in Africa and beyond.

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