

## INPUT PAPER

Prepared for the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2015

### **GOVERNMENTAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FORTRESS (GIT)**

Toward a parameter on factors unrelated to the risks that might have an effect on the final results of a disaster

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## Introduction

Considering this paper is not endorsed by a government or institution, and its author is the sole responsible for that expressed hereby, some latitude has been taken in its drafting, including a true testimonial tone on the grounds, on which asking for not to be judged for lack of seriousness, and that in any case contribute in a conscientious effort to transmit a series of ideas. The reader must also be warned, that due the impossibility to devote the time necessary to draft a document with certain methodological rigor, it was built up more as a series of reflections, hoping that its syllogisms somehow make up for the absence of data, statistics and references.

In principle, it should be said that the intention is to focus on what will be called in a first instance (subject to a more appropriate name) Governmental and Institutional Fortress (GIT) in relation to the tasks of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) or the Disaster Management (DM). Indeed, it is worth noting that the proposed topic and this modest contribution is just an outline and some ideas on the conviction that a more robust and sustained notion must be deployed, and is written with all its obvious limitations in order to awake in their conspicuous readers, that there lies a vein that is worth exploring in order to enrich the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) in 2015. Thus, the figure of GIT and its connection with the MAH should be developed.

The MAH, as a milestone in the global vision of disaster risks, especially in its reduction as a fundamental priority, it has been a scrupulous organizer of ideas and principles that now rule, to a greater or lesser extent, strategies and tasks around the DRM and DM. And although its range is vast, and it would seem that there is no longer a single corner or detail to be considered, the exercise that is now proposed to us from the 2015 Global Assessment Report (GAR15), is precisely about finding these new loopholes that can mean vast areas of opportunity into perspective by 2015.

However, any attempt to analyze the GIT first passes through the double standard with which many countries apply the MAH. In one hand, what is manifested internationally and, the other, what they really domestically applied, the extent to which they manage to incorporate it, both the legal framework and in its planning process and thus the set of public policies related. It's clear that one thing is the will of one country expressed in an international forum, and another, the intricacies and circumstances that face an initiative such as the HFA, in its transit to the partial or full integration of their priorities and principles. Many of these difficulties that shown up in this integration of MAH, and generally about the principles of the DRM in the objective of achieve positioning it as a fundamental policy in developing countries, are certainly obstacles which affect the ability and performance of their governments and institutions in disaster management, and for that very reason, they can also influence in terms of loss of human life and material damages.

This author had a brief career in the world of Civil Protection in Mexico, in the Mexican Federal Government, in the former General Coordination of Civil Protection (CGPC) (today the National Civil Protection Coordination), precisely in the office of the Natural Disasters Fund (FONDEN), and the so-called preventive financial instruments. Coinciding in a period of

institutional transition towards DRM, and tangentially, to the ideological range that represents the MAH (which was formalized with the publication of the General Law of Civil Protection, LGPC in 2012). This experience, which of course does not grant a category of an expert or academic or researcher, allowed itself to be a witness firsthand about the difficulties to introduce the ideas and principles of the HFA into the governmental work.

## **First approach to the problem**

The core of the proposed theme was generated in a given time, from a concern shared by the people whom worked in the CGPC, which can be summarized in the question: How can we react as an institution in the midst of a major disaster, if some of us are impaired, uncommunicated or disappeared?

And these were some of the factors that invoked our fears:

The institution main offices in Mexico City are sited on Avenida de la Reforma near the historic center, occupying three of the 20 stories building where its inhabitants have had different versions about its real resistance against earthquakes, which is why there was never a certainty about the level of security offered to this people, particularly in the situation of a large earthquake in a former lake area.

Also prevails over this very building, situated very near from city downtown, a risk shared with every building around, which in the case of certain extraordinary volume conditions in storm water in the City, the sewage system and its ability to channel the water output, could collapse causing a major flood with consequences that has only been surmised, but of course are not very hopeful.

As if the threats mentioned were not enough, it must be add that over a large stretch of Avenida de la Reforma , which connects with other major streets where are also reunited the headquarters of several federal secretaries, the building that houses the Senate and other public places, that for that reason are often subjected to mass congregations. Additionally, that path happens to be at the core of many tourist attractions that comprise this city, as well as next to important religious shrines that permanently call their membership. In short, this whole scenario, perhaps one of the most important routes of the country due its number of people circulating in marches, meetings, celebrations, pilgrimages and events of all kinds, and for that reason a great area susceptible of paralyze the city.

These reasons briefly described, which are not hard to link with scenarios of headless organizations, paralyzed and ineffective, that are overwhelmed by circumstances, appear to be sufficient to relocate the CGPC.

From this previous ideas, is not difficult to envisage an extreme scenario, that contribute to make more evident the key issues around GIT: A large earthquake in a hypothetical country, which its DRM system is considered a model of compliance of the MAH priorities: outstanding and exemplary in matter of detection, analysis and reduction of seismic risks, and with a splendid labour on disaster prevention and preparedness. Despite all that, the building that houses the organization that possess the entire responsibility of coordinating the set of disaster tasks and protocols (satisfied high standards in matter of essential or fundamental

buildings) has collapsed under the force and characteristics of that natural phenomena, and as a result, the whole staff at every level of responsibility, is disappeared. Thus, the disaster management should be leading by different persons than those that were originally prepared and trained to do so, in a circumstance in which besides the obvious delay also will preponderate improvisation, and in many cases ignorance about the proceedings. All this picture, unfortunately, predicts very negative consequences. This almost preposterous scenario, serves to establish that there are outside the risk itself, a serial of factors which may affect the risk and disaster management.

Well, the concern over CGPC never found a satisfaction. There were serious attempts, all unsuccessful, to extract it of this vulnerable environment to a place that would ensure continuity in their functions, and thus warranty an effective disaster management.

But, to be fair it should be say that the CGPC is only the visible tip of a whole, then should be done those very same arguments about the suitability of the location of the headquarters of other agencies and officials at various levels, to whom correspond certain responsibilities that are themselves links in a great chain. And since buildings like CGPC's, or other with similar conditions (the Interior Ministry is 4 blocks away) or other levels of government (the seat of the capital's powers are in the same area) are trained and competent to initiate emergencies and disaster protocols. Officials that must make the big decisions and managing measures and actions to resolve the situation, and mainly to save the lives of people.

So a question arises: should be imperative that those institutions somehow linked to the DRM and DM, must be locate in places with certain characteristics in which their performance can be guaranteed? The answer should definitely be yes.

At this point, it is possible that questions arise, even moral, linked to the priorities that should govern the actions of those responsible for managing risks and disasters. There is conviction that the GIT must prevail on a principle of pre-eminence as a premise to establish a strong and well prepared authority, in order to more effectively support and assist the affected population in case of emergency or disaster. This principle of primacy, if such analogy is permitted, is the same logic that emerges from the protocols of commercial aviation, when in a flight with a difficult situation in the cabin, the adult person must first put the oxygen mask before doing the same with the minors under their custody.

However, even when we managed to locate the set of all related institutions, which in its moment could be consider a final solution to the problem, in fact that major effort to achieve such arrangement would have meant only a "good start" in creating the right conditions for institutions focused on disaster risk management in order to function properly. After that first question with regard to the degree of vulnerability that CGPC presented, many more questions emerge with a strong emphasis with a common denominator on those external factors that can seriously affect the course of action in the management of both risks and disasters.

## **Defining the problem**

But then, this is just a glimpse of the problem to be analyzed. This first approach, let us see that there may be other factors that can influence the results of a disaster.

The Hyogo Framework for Action, as already been said, managed to give integrality to the universe of actions aimed at disaster risk and its reduction policies at all levels, with the understanding that risk is the coincidence of a probable or imminent threat in a particular place and time, which can affect a population as they are subject to some degree of exposure and vulnerability. However, the "factors" to which we refer are outside the orbits and the phenomenology of the risks, and yet, can also influence over the final consequences of a disaster.

Again, these factors can be described *a priori* as unrelated and independent from risks, and be the product of decisions taken or omitted by authorities under certain circumstances. And now these simply called as factors (for lack of a better term) as human acts, may represent a weakness or a strength, which in turn can generate a number of advantages and disadvantages for the DRM or DM systems of countries and regions. If this asseveration is supported, even with the necessary reservations, then it could be recognize that the absence of these weaknesses or disadvantages offered, on the contrary, a certain level of strength of governments and institutions, i.e., one greater capacity to manage risks and disasters, which can be placed in a better or more appropriate position to return to normal, and in the best case achieve to maintain political, physical, financial, structural and legal feasibility, in regions or countries.

In the extreme scenario that was raised in the Introduction part (with the disappearance of DRM and DM staff) the "factor" is the existence or absence of a policy or an instruction that resolve with full anticipation the warranty on the security and adequacy of the facility location, so that contribute with the greater certainty in case of disaster, that the coordination and the operation on established protocols will be executed by persons appointed, trained and empowered for that purpose. In the example given, clearly was not considered such measure, so it could represents in terms of GIT, a weakness or disadvantage. The results of this situation, whether be read as "lack of strength" or "institutional weakness", it becomes a factor that still if acts independent and parallel to disaster, even so affects their results, as in the mentioned case that could result in the annulment, at first instance -that always be the most important and critical- of response and emergency phase by the responsible authorities , which will surely increase the share of victims and damage , and likewise would likely also a long and tortuous recovery.

But then, are there more factors representing a weakness or strength in the apparatus arranged to deal with the risk management and the disaster itself? It argues that there are indeed.

## **Factors that might impact the GIT**

The concern described in the Introduction part was the end of the thread of a skein of ideas and arguments about how governments or institutions, and each of the officials involved with some degree of liability, meet their DRM and DM duties. And now, this moments, their forms, circumstances and conditions may represent flanks of weakness that may push to take a bad decision that in the best case, it may result innocuous, but at worst, it could mean a big mistake in terms of loss of life and severe property damage.

These factors can be varied. Apparently the most obvious example can be pointed by the following: The appointment of new officials in certain positions or new management; poor or lack of communication or information; an unfortunate budgeting, cuts or few resources in the implementation of DRM policies; the lack of legislation, or, poor or meager legislation limiting the scope of DRM policies; the health and fitness of certain key officials in the DRM; the absence or inefficient empowerment of a DRM instance, or, poor demarcation of functions between two of them; a new government program and the role assumed by the DRM; the formation of interests in domestic politics with different objectives to the DRM, etc. Lets take a brief look at some clear examples of these factors. 3 types: political, budgetary and legal.

### **a. Continuity of human capital**

If there is a way to measure the institutional strength, it is precisely thru the value of their human capital, and this based on objective and measurable aspects such as educational background, experience, publications and participation in forums and conferences, etc. But besides that strength measured in these terms, it can be done also considering mechanisms to keep that capital, avoiding their separation, and even encouraging and creating new trained cadres.

However, the erosion of human capital is common and in some cases is reflected in the performances of the governments and institutions in case of emergencies and disasters. The causes are varied, from the bad pay and lack of incentives to political transitions.

Take now the case in any country that has a political-administrative transition through elections. In these cases, with some exceptions, there will be a general change of holders of various offices, which in turn will cause a similar exercise to lower positions. This measure, of course legitimate, sometimes lacks the sensitivity required, especially in regard to certain areas which by their nature or matter, require special treatment, such as the Civil Protection.

This situation can occur in varying degrees and forms, and each of these is feasible in disaster scenarios, causes certain results. It can be distinguish at least three gradual situations, that it might be useful to measure the GIT:

#### **i. Systemic transition**

The head of organization is permanently preserved, or is retained for a reasonable time in which incoming staff internalize protocols and know-how, whether the successor is taken within the same basis, or perhaps is an outsider but with considerable expertise, so that it can minimize the learning curve at maximum. In the same way, the rest of the positions will be very probably objects of the same consideration, perhaps with a tendency to preserve the existing human capital.

In this first case, the institutional strength will be minimally affected, so the risk management won't be object of violent twists and will maintain regularly on strategies and lines of action, and in a disaster event this situation should not gravitate in the final results, either in casualties and damage, and recovery shall not suffer from major disruptions.

#### **ii. Moderate transition**

The change in the head and other upper positions is done in a short term, although new members have DRM and DM experience and reasonable command of the issues, with a not so steep learning curve. Considering the existing human capital, changes will be minimal, and with new trained cadres in the short and medium term.

This circumstance certainly mean an expense in terms of GIT, which may be reflected in the risk management, and perhaps could have a major impact on the care and emergency response, and recovery thereof.

### **iii. Radical transition**

Finally, the third level would be a radical transition, which would mean an immediate change of the upper and middle staff, without considering a prudent time. The new members mostly or totally have no experience in matters relating to the Civil Protection and the general principles of DRM and DM, and also come from very different areas or are politicians.

In this case, the GIT could reach its lowest level and the results of any possible disaster management with some degree of severity, may be affected and remote from procedures or established protocols. The considerations that can be handled on this various scenarios will be scarce, there will be lack of leadership and decision making. The impact on the ultimate consequences will be overwhelming and easily identifiable.

A visible parameter of GIT about this transitions, would be an Act that subject the creation of a civil service career, which in turn achieves preserve the human capital, so that, it is not exposed to a power thoughtless decisions and based purely on political reasons.

### **b. Certainty of funding policies and strategies**

Governments each year face the challenge to comply with a government program, and also to do with a limited budget, which is always subject to the vagaries of political forces and a certain political and social pressure. This pressure is due to different interests and points of view about the premises or spending orientation.

There is an apparent international unanimity expressed in the HFA, about that:

*« 4. There is now international acknowledgement that efforts to reduce disaster risks must be systematically integrated into policies, plans and programmes for sustainable development and poverty reduction... »*

However, this fades within many of the supporting countries, as these guidelines are not have the proper echo or support, or, their time to process its integration is too slow. The programmed activities linked to DRM, are in many situations under reduced expenses and second, there is a tendency to focus resources primarily on reactive measures and instruments, and that logic is clear that ignores much of what could be valuable for GIT.

This tortuous relationship between the budget and the DRM, and certainly divorced from logical principles in the HFA, clearly reflect a potential to affect the GIT, particularly in developing or underdeveloped countries that are frequent victims of disasters. And that is when the value of risk reduction is not recognized, and the need for integration with other axes and policies that complement the resources available are subject to other interests, although equally legitimate, cause loss worthy opportunities to support people affected by calamities.

It is not difficult to arrive at the conclusion that there must be a rule previously reconciled, that bring some parameter with certainty about the amount of resources that must be provide to DRM policies in order to address those kinds of disaster events. Thus, the GIT, in terms of maneuverability involving those responsible for dealing with emergencies and disasters can vary significantly as this issue is solved in a country. The contrary of course will have the opposite effect.

For example, a developing country, victim of emergencies and disasters, which achieved not without some sacrifice hire a catastrophic insurance for some risks, which brings certainty about the ability to bring resources to afford the financial needs of future events. Suppose, however, in this country there is no lock on the law or the budget to ensure these resources between fiscal years. So, one year to another that catastrophic contract is not renewed, and for that reason no longer available, and worse yet, without established the substitute ways to provide the means and resources to achieve the same level of certainty. The consequences are of course abandon a country at the expense of a probably catastrophic event without a financial mattress.

So, in this example, the GIT definitely increase as spending be subject to DRM parameters supported by the law. This circumstance is just a sample, the truth is that there are an infinite number of possible scenarios to consider with respect to this factor.

### **c. Absent or limited legal framework regarding DRM and GD**

Similar to the previous case, again it must be noted the possible existence of notable asymmetries between the "ought" of MAH, and what happens in practice in the signatory countries. And so, while the Act does not reflect in their proper perspective, both, state responsibility, as all sectors in a country, plus integrate the richness of concepts that encloses the MAH, is clear that the GIT degree will not reach optimal levels. And even if the state takeover in case of a disaster, though there is not a clear line about the roles and liabilities, the existence of a well-structured rule based on the principles and priorities of the HFA can favor greatly to provide order and efficiency to the actions of the authorities and the use of available resources.

In the absence of an ideal legal framework, which there is not. And with a variety of legal systems among the countries participating in the HFA, what would be affordable is the determination of a number of features, or minimum standards, to outline a structure model for measuring the GIT.

Among the possible scenarios of how this factor can influence the GIT, the hypothesis serves as a country whose laws provide for a fragile and blurred line between more than one

institution to address the DRM and GD. Or another case in which the law does not provide due empowerment to the institution or institutions to fulfill their duties.

This lack of definition or weak legal basis of the range of these institutions are a major obstacle to enforce many of the premises that postulates the MAH, especially when they have to make the tough decisions, which will have to define the action to continue the efforts and resources to follow up on the present risks, or even, over the imminent disasters. This decision-making when it has to be shared with other agencies, which of course obey to different assumptions or assessments, may be an element that can produce different effects over the final balance of the way the disaster was managed.

So far, we have proposed factors that affect the GIT in the political, financial and legal matter. This with the aim of shaping some arguments that are clear and precise direction to seek substance and evidence to this proposal. However, this was only an initial exercise, that shows only the need to delve deeper to identify these factors, over which we insist, have much to do concomitant to disasters risks, in a developing risk and disaster management.

## **Measuring the GIT**

If the foregoing considerations achieve their primary objective of provide sustain logically and give viability to this figure of GIT, especially in light of the MAH, so that could become a component, that contribute toward confirming HFA as a guideline to follow internationally -of course going from national to regional and local- might yet give a reasonable explanation about the utility that could provide a parameter or index such as GIT.

The first idea that comes when it raises the GIT is that it is an index, and in its gradualism, as expected, between its extremes between the strength and the weakness of national systems to take over responsibility themselves for disaster risk management and disaster. Recalling the above, this index does not measure vulnerability or exposure, either aims to deepen the risks and nature, nor in the causes that originated.

The GIT would feed itself all those factors external and external, that in one way or another are acts, decisions or omissions of the authorities that alter the development of DRM or GD. These factors, which are probably already considered by the MAH from other angles and other purposes, would set now in this parameter looking to supply data to first visualize the differences between the "ought" of MAH and circumstances of each country, and then reconcile them.

The GIT as an index that is, it must be the result of a measurement protocol to which every country would be subject. This index once published, will provide targets to compare between countries, besides to becoming in a politically "right" element to encouraging different countries to correct and improve their policies related to DRM and GD. This index also allow international organizations, to establish differentiated criteria to support or finance projects, provoking again that countries improve and strengthen their policies.

Certainly the range of utilities and applications that would result of this proposal could be much larger, but without forgetting its principle purpose, which should be necessarily avoid interference

and involvement of additional elements from the risks of disasters, in order to reach an efficient DRM and DM.

## **Conclusion**

It is desirable that this document, despite its obvious limitations, may have at least cast some doubts on whether to create a parameter that can measure all elements that although not being part of the risks and its phenomenology, play an important role in how are managed disaster risks and the disasters itself.

The HFA of course has to be revised, but also the strategies to achieve their complete assimilation in support countries.

Apparently, there is not an efficient enough way for society to get involved, more and better, around the DRM and DM. It strongly believe that through making public, national and internationality, the level or ability of governments to address threats, this could change. GIT can then be a way to cause an exercise within countries that result in more capable governments and societies more aware and engaged.

For now, this is just an idea, waiting to be pushed to develop.

Thanks.