Mainstreaming of Disaster Victim Identification into Disaster Risk Reduction in Malaysia

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In March 2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) ("Sendai Framework") was adopted at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. It is a non-binding document that is people centred in its approach to disaster risk reduction ("DRR"), succeeding the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015). It shifts responses from reducing disaster losses or impacts to one that focuses on reducing the scale and impact of disaster risks. It offers a renewed goal, focusing on the preventing the creation of risk, reducing risk and strengthening resilience, shifting from managing disasters to managing risks. Among the approaches that can be used to help manage risks is the Disaster Victim Identification ("DVI") method, which is used to identify victims of mass casualty, where multiple technical disciplines are used to help determine cause of death and nature of death. The information obtained from DVI can be of great use to help reduce risks. It can provide valuable information to assist first responders when faced with an incident involving exposure to dangerous chemicals, for example, where information can be used to ensure the right protective procedures and measures are observed before responding. Problem Statement: Despite having access to DVI information, it has yet to be formally used to help develop procedures that can help reduce risks of responders and rescuers during a disaster event. Objective: The objective of this research is to see how DVI can be incorporated into the DRR management process, and how it can be used to help develop standard operating procedures ("SOP") to reduce exposure to risks. Methodology: The DVI method and process will be carefully studied to identify key techniques that can be leveraged on to help develop a risk profile and determine measures that can help reduce risks, thereby minimising injury and even loss of life. At the same time, the DRR management process will be studied, to determine the points of interventions whereby DVI information can be used to strengthen existing standard operating procedures. Once the key contributory components of DVI and the points of interventions in DRR management are identified, they will then be able to give recommendation for change in governmental policy and contribute to formation of a DRR SOP. This paper will briefly highlight how DVI information can be used to help reduce risks during a disaster, through a brief discussion of case examples. Conclusion: Suggestions on what and how to incorporate DVI will be briefly highlighted, as this research is still in its early stages.