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ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES TOWARDS DISASTER AWARENESS AND PREPAREDNESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN HOMA BAY COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Disasters disrupt education and can cause psychological trauma. This research examined disaster awareness and preparedness of secondary schools in Homa-Bay County, Kenya. The objective was to establish the administrative strategies put in place by school managers of secondary schools to enhance disaster awareness and preparedness. Using descriptive survey research design the target population consisted of 52 schools and principals, 420 teachers and 6,000 students. Purposive sampling was used for the Principals while simple random sampling was used to select teachers and students. The total sample size was 736 respondents comprising 52 principals and schools, 84 teachers and 600 students. Data were collected using questionnaires and observation. The research has established that the region is prone to floods, therefore, majority of schools are faced with rain related disasters such as heavy downpours resulting into floods as well as strong windstorms, thunder and lightning. These are basically natural disasters against which essential preparedness planning and mitigation are needed in order to minimize the threat of damage to life and property. On administrative strategies taken to promote disaster awareness and preparedness, the research reveals that little effort has been done by school administration to this end. Disaster awareness guidelines were not available in a large number of the schools. Moreover, most schools do not even have school safety sub-committees. Thus, casting aspersions on their level of disaster awareness and preparedness.

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INTRODUCTION

The safety of children at some schools has been questionable due to recurrence of disasters. The availability of preparedness measures in most of the schools in developed countries has tremendously reduced the impact of incidences. (U.S Fire Administration, National Fire Data Centre, 2007) In developing countries, however, the contrary is the case, for the lack of or inadequate preparedness measures in most schools and the increase in disaster incidents are raising alarm. The physical, financial and emotional devastation are the common impacts to both developing and developed countries. The closure of schools, damage to school property, death, injuries and trauma are very common depending on the magnitude and severity of the disaster itself; besides this it influences active participation

of students in schools. (Blackaby, 2007; Onyango, 2008) the magnitude and severity of a disaster varies depending on the level of preparedness. In this regard most of the secondary school disasters incidents in developing countries had severe impact on human being due to the poor level of preparedness. A few examples will suffice. In April 2008, fire gutted Budo Junior School near Kampala in Uganda and at least 19 girls and two adults died. It was not clear how many children were in the room, but, it was established that the hostel doors were locked from outside. (BBC, 15th April, 2008) In March 2008, Maracha Secondary School in Maracha Terengo district in Uganda was gutted by fire at 7.30am and two boys' dormitories were burnt down. (New Vision, March, 2009). There were no injuries, but the property of students and school was destroyed. Research conducted by Akali, Khabamba and

Muyinga (2011) reveals that there is little done to prepare secondary schools in Kenya for fires. He postulated that only a handful of secondary schools have fire extinguishers in offices, laboratories, stores and kitchen. The existing fire extinguishers are not even regularly serviced. Yet, fire related disasters remain some of the most commonly occurring incidences in secondary schools in Kenya. There are also disasters of serious public health importance in water systems in Kenya. Incidents of drowning in water bodies and being attacked by water-borne animals are routinely reported in the media. Floods have also become a cause of disaster all over Kenya, particularly in Nyanza and Western regions with Homa-bay, Nyando, Kisumu, Rachuonyo and Busia counties being most affected. The total number of deaths reported all over the country showed how the country has become vulnerable to floods and droughts. Experts estimate that droughts and floods cost Kenya at least Kshs. 75 billion with adverse effects on water and food security, human and animal lives as well as extensive damage to the infrastructure. The schools in these areas suffer the same predicaments and meaningful learning is always interrupted. (Achoka and Maiyo, 2008; Kenya Red Cross Society, 2006; Onyango, 2008) This leads one to ask the question 'What strategies towards disaster awareness and preparedness have school administrators put in place to cushion their schools, staff and students?'

Every school is unique by virtue of its design, location and students; and each has its own history and culture. Some schools are relatively open and safe, while others are highly protected, yet unsafe. That is why disaster preparedness in school and the facilities should be planned and implemented. The school, district disaster management staff in alliance with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emergency responders and the school community, can combine effort in assessing the safety and security of school buildings, grounds and surroundings then make a disaster preparedness plan besides seeing how to implement the plan. (Crowe, 2000) While school management, parents and children themselves need to be keen on the safety of school environment. United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations have been advocating for school safety. The protection of children from disaster has been alluded to in the Humanitarian Charter and International Humanitarian Law (Geneva Conventions, 1949) It describes the critical tenets that guide humanitarian action and asserts the right to protection and assistance (Geneva Conventions, 1949) The Charter recognizes that preparedness in the education sector advocates for preservation of the right to life with dignity, protection against threats and availability of basic needs in case of disasters (Sphere Standards Project, 2004)

Statement of the problem

The existence of policy guidelines on school safety has not stopped the incidences of injury, death and loss of property in secondary schools in Kenya. Although the Ministry of Education published a number of school safety policies communicated in Circular No. G9/1/169, it is becoming clear now that most schools have not complied with the said safety policies. (Republic of Kenya, 2001) Several innocent boys and girls have lost their lives to fire incidents more so in boarding schools, thereby raising a number of questions on the security of learners in boarding schools. Even with the interventions to curb fires, arson and school unrest, the latest tragedy in Homa-bay county where eight pupils perished after a fire gutted

down a dormitory in a certain girls' boarding school brought to light the real living conditions of students and the disregard of government policies. According to a report from the incident, the girls were locked in the rooms from outside.

The needs theorists in management science have made us realize that institutions such as schools must take into consideration the fact that those who live and work in them are after all humans and as such, they have human needs. Indeed Abraham Maslow (1954) quoted by Wanjala (2017) has postulated that all members of an organization have needs which he placed into a hierarchical order. At the bottom of this hierarchy are basic needs whose characteristics are as follows:

- They must be satisfied in order to sustain life
- When frustrated, they can lead to a loss of life
- In order to remain satisfied, basic needs must be met repeatedly and within relatively short periods of time.

What this means in practical terms is that basic needs require some conscious provision for their future satisfaction *and this is what justifies planning.* (Wanjala, 2013) The role of a school administration is to meet these needs. This makes the role of the principal or head-teacher both demanding and increasingly stressful. The solution obviously lies in proper planning, hence the question What administrative strategies have school managers put in place to enhance disaster awareness and preparedness? What plans do they have on how they will provide vital services such as safe water, meals sanitation and transport? Hopkins (1977) reiterates that financial constraints coupled with inadequate physical and material resources affect students' concentration and performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

A descriptive research design was adopted for this research. The design was deemed appropriate as it had the advantage of exploring the current level of disaster awareness and preparedness of secondary schools situation in Homa Bay County; thereby revealing summarised statistics by showing responses to all possible questionnaire items that lead to identifying needed changes.

Target Population

The total environment of interest to this research, which was carried out between January and September of 2013, comprised of all secondary schools in Homa Bay County. According to the County Education Office there were 52 secondary schools in the County, 52 principals, 420 secondary school teachers and 6,000 students in secondary schools in Homa Bay County at the time of the research study.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The purpose of the research was to investigate the administrative strategies that have been put in place to enhance disaster awareness and preparedness of secondary schools in Homa Bay County. To this effect, the researchers purposively selected all the principals of the 52 secondary schools as respondents. All principals were involved because they are key managers of the day to day operations in schools. Using the simple random sampling technique, the researcher selected

20% of 420 teachers and 10% of the 6,000 students. The total sample size for research was, therefore, 736 respondents comprising 52 principals and schools, 84 teachers and 600 students.

Research Instruments

Two types of instruments were used to collect data from the respondents. These were (1) questionnaire and (2) observation schedule. Close-ended questionnaires were administered to the three categories of respondents. The questionnaires had two sections. Section A gathered demographic information, while section B gathered information on disaster awareness and preparedness based on the research objectives. For triangulation, an observation schedule based on a check-list was also used in the data collection exercise to enhance the quality of data evidence.

Research Objective and Research Question

The objective of the research was:

- i. To establish the administrative strategies put in place by school managers of secondary schools in Homa-Bay County to enhance disaster awareness and preparedness. To achieve the said objective, the research was guided by the following question
- ii. What administrative strategies have school managers of secondary schools in Homa-Bay County put in place to enhance disaster awareness and preparedness?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1 : What administrative strategies have school managers of secondary schools in Homa-Bay County put in place to enhance disaster awareness and preparedness ?

The principals were asked to state whether they have put in place disaster response teams in their schools. 75% of them responded that they had not; an indication that the school administration in most schools in the county had not put in place mechanisms to deal with disaster. The research further sought to establish whether they have put in place a school safety sub-committee as required by the Ministry of Education. The findings show that none of the principals had put in place a school safety sub-committee. According to the Ministry of Education (2008) the specific functions of this committee include the following.

- Identify the safety needs of the school with a view to enhancing school safety
- Form sustainable networks with all stakeholders to foster and sustain school safety
- Keep learners, parents and other stakeholders informed about school safety policies and implementation activities
- Seek the support of parents and stakeholders and ensure their participation in activities relating to school safety
- Constantly review issues of child safety in and around the school

The absence of this sub-committee, therefore, means that secondary school administrations in Homa-bay County have failed in their responsibilities to promote disaster awareness and preparedness. Principals were further requested to indicate

whether they have put in place disaster early warning mechanisms in their schools. None of the principals studied had indeed said they had early warning systems of any kind in their schools. What this means in practical terms is that school administrations are not doing enough to ensure that students and other members of the school community receive timely warning of disasters. Odalo (2001) posits that institutions should have early warning systems and according to the Ministry of Education (2008) it is important to note that not all disasters are rapid or sudden. Some disasters develop over time and there is usually a lead time to receive information and react to early warnings. Nevertheless, careful monitoring and early warning are useful only if they help to avert potentially dangerous events or circumstances that can lead to emergency or disaster or if they lead to action taken to minimize damage. The purpose of monitoring and early warning is to enable remedial measures to be initiated and to provide more timely and effective relief through disaster and emergency preparedness actions. Early warning mechanisms will provide the school community and other stakeholders with relevant information to enable them make informed decisions for evacuation or relocation. The research also sought to know from the principals whether they have provided emergency safety procedures that are accessible to all in their schools. 81.4% of them admitted that they have not put in place emergency response procedures in their schools. This further points to a failure by the school administration in ensuring disaster awareness and preparedness. This is contrary to the recommendations of the Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya which requires managers to create mechanisms and procedures that ensure stakeholders are conversant with measures needed to prevent occurrence of disasters and steps required to reduce the impact. The research asked principals to list disaster response guidelines available in their schools. The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Disaster Response Guidelines Available in Schools

Disaster Response Guidelines	Frequency	Percentage
A Telephone Tree List including all employees (include e-mail address, pagers, mobile phone numbers)	40	83.3
Fire Safety Guidelines	40	83.3
Guidelines on Safety during Floods	17	35.4
Thunderstorms and Lightening	14	29.1
Schedule for Disaster Drills	14	29.1
Guidelines on Safety during Poisonous	10	20.8
Chemical Emissions or severe Pollution		
Landslide Safety Guidelines	3	6.3

Table 2. Regular Spot-checks in Dormitories

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	20	41.6
Often	26	54.1
Rarely	6	12.5
Never	14	29.1

Table 3. Inspection of Hygiene Standards of Dormitories

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	24	50.0
Often	17	35.4
Rarely	7	14.5
Never	14	29.1

From the data it is clear that fire has been given more attention while other disasters like poisonous chemical emissions /severe pollution which are more likely to occur due to

laboratory activities have not been adequately recognized. The most neglected guidelines were those on safety during an earthquake; none of the schools had these guidelines and yet the area is prone to such disasters. The principals of schools with boarding sections were asked to indicate how frequent spot checks are conducted in dormitories in their schools. The responses are recorded in Table 2. Which shows that a majority of the secondary schools in the county do conduct spot checks in dormitories. This is usually done when students are in class, in the field or engaged in other curricular and co-curricular activities. In fact the Ministry of Education recommends that both teachers and school administration should carry out the said spot-checks before students retire to bed.

In addition, principals were asked to indicate how often inspection of hygiene standards of dormitories is conducted in their schools. The results were as presented in Table 3.

The results show that secondary schools in Homa-bay county do actually carry out inspection to ascertain the hygiene standards of dormitories. According to Kay (2003) there should be inspection of hygiene standards of dormitories and the learners on alternate days of the week. In addition, principals were asked to indicate how often they take roll-calls when students retire to their dormitories. 52.0% of them responded that roll-calls are taken very often while 31.2% of them said that roll-calls are taken often. According to the Ministry of Education (2008) an accurate roll-call should be taken every day and records well maintained. Finally, the principals were asked whether the school security personnel in their schools conducted regular patrols in the schools; to which a higher number of principals (62.5%) responded that patrols are carried out. This shows that secondary schools in Homa-bay county have effective security systems which are essential in minimizing occurrence of disasters. According to the Ministry of Education (2008) there should be regular patrols by the school security personnel or any other authorized security agents. No stranger should be allowed in the dormitory.

Conclusion

On administrative strategies taken to promote disaster awareness and preparedness, the research reveals that little effort has been done by school administration to this end. Disaster awareness guidelines were not available in a large number of the schools. Moreover, most schools do not even have school safety sub-committees. However, it was established that in most of the schools, regular spot-checks are conducted, roll-calls are often taken before students retire for the night, inspections of hygiene standards as well as security patrols were often carried out; all these to ensure safety in the schools.

Recommendation

For effective disaster awareness and preparedness of secondary schools in Homa Bay County, the research

recommends that school administrations and other stakeholders provide necessary information and material support to schools to promote disaster preparedness.

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