

Linh Nguyen
MBA,
Marketing Manager,
Hanoi, Viet Nam/Paris, France
L.nguyen15@gmail.com

STRATEGIC CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Governments are confronted with an increasing number of crises, often consisting of new threats. They may spread beyond national borders and may create significant economic knock-on effects. In the wake of the financial and fiscal crises, global leaders are acutely aware that further systemic shocks could severely challenge economic recovery, social cohesion and even political stability. Governments are always at the forefront of efforts to manage these disruptive events, and citizens' trust in government is directly affected by how swiftly and efficiently governments react in crisis situation.

The complexities of modern crises often require the involvement of many actors, above and beyond emergency services, and this demands effective co-ordination for a successful outcome. The need for co-ordination also raises significant public governance challenges, as crisis management functions are often exercised at sub-national levels, but co-ordinated at the centres of governments. The capacity to co-ordinate crisis management is a fundamental element of good governance, as it tests governments' capacity to provide the appropriate responses at the right time, in order to protect their citizens and businesses and mitigate the impact of disasters. Ensuring that national authorities have the right tools and institutional framework for co-ordinated action is critical.

In addition to the emergence of new threats and vulnerabilities, elements to consider in the changing paradigm for crisis managers relate to the evolution of governments. While crisis management will always remain one of their fundamental roles, the wave of privatisation and decentralisation has reduced overall capacities in many governments to take direct actions to prevent or mitigate risks in sectors that are critical for the well-functioning of societies, such as utilities and infrastructure.

Crisis managers need to adapt their approaches to deal with a variety of different stakeholders that all have different interests, priorities, logics and values. Critical infrastructure in many EU countries is largely operated by the private sector. Citizens also tend to organise themselves to respond to crisis through civil society and non-governmental organisations, thus adding new players to the field who expect to be consulted during preparations and leveraged during operations.

In the meantime, government openness and transparency, constant scrutiny by the media and widespread dissemination of information on-line and through social media put governments and their decision-makers under constant pressure. This pressure is all the more acute when a crisis occurs: citizens' expectations are at the highest due

to the emotional nature of a crisis. They demand more transparency, responsibility and high standards of ethics from their governments, which need to react almost instantly or risk a political backlash amid criticism of unresponsiveness.

Disaster risk management has often focused on planning the organisation of emergency responses after disruptive events occur. Progress in science, technology and information management in recent decades has led to a better understanding of the exposures of the built environment to hazards and threats, and the vulnerabilities of populations, economic assets and environmental resources. This has enabled risk management to make better use of risk assessment for a more comprehensive and strategic approach, which also incorporates prevention policies and mitigation programmes to reduce exposure and vulnerability.

The economic argument for governments to invest more in disaster risk prevention is that a net gain could be achieved, when compared to sums spent on recovery and reconstruction after a disaster. Long-term investments in prevention have shown in many cases to provide a significant positive return. These efforts to build and develop more robust societies and economies are fundamental, but emergencies continue to occur and crises are perhaps even more frequent. Countries that have invested heavily in prevention through the development of protective infrastructure, early-warning systems, regulations on land use and building codes still experience major disasters, which highlights the continued importance of crisis management capacities.

Governments have a crucial role to play in strengthening the resilience of their populations and critical infrastructure networks. While the promotion of the concept of resilient communities and systems at all levels can be addressed through regulation and is reflected in national policy frameworks in some countries, governments remain the ultimate warranty when capacities of resilience are disrupted at any level. In the eyes of the citizens, governments must provide robust leadership in crisis management and may be held accountable in the end if they do not. Governments can benefit from exchange of practice and experience to better deliver this fundamental role in an evolving context of trans-boundary risks. This is especially the case for countries that manage critical hubs of the global economy.