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WHEN NATURAL DISASTERS ARE NO LONGER A FREAK OF NATURE BUT IMPOSED BY SUPERNATURAL FORCES

INTRODUCTION

One of the ominous factors about human existence on the planet earth is that, man often becomes a victim often of natural and his own activities that impinge negatively on his life and property. A disaster typically involves a discrete and natural event such as storm-force wind flood, drought, pest attack, earthquakes, landslide or avalanche as well as events caused wholly by human action such as industrial accidents and acts of war. The term disaster has also been stretched to include longer-term events such as the AIDS pandemic in the worst affected regions of the world and to complex human emergencies in which a number of these events and their repercussions play themselves out over a considerable period of time. This policy brief weighs in on the role of mysticism as the root cause of natural disasters.

Conceptualizing the Causes of Disaster

Societies with limitless religiosity, superstition and pre-Newtonian in scientific rationality perceived disasters as being caused principally by natures; such societies are totally supplicated to the wishes of smaller gods and unquestionable follow the edicts such as unseen forces and even anticipate what would be pleasing the powerful unseen beings. However, the demands of religion at times are so absolute in the sense that it runs counter to the wishes and faith. Consequently, the displeasure of the gods are evoked and the appropriate punishment meted-out to the disobedient individuals or society in the form of disaster.

However, the view from the scientific community is entirely opposite. The dominant and technocratic view of disaster has given prominence to causes of disaster as natural and the direction of explanation tended to run from the physical environment to its social impacts. For instance, famine is seen as caused by drought and consequent crop failure, loss of life and damage to property caused by storm-force winds and others, deaths from earthquake caused by severity of earthquake itself and so on.

On the other hand, the political economy view emphasizes the social reasons why people are susceptible to natural events. In their opinion, while natural events such as storms, earthquakes and floods do occur, they need not become disasters. The underlining structural processes which create and distribute material resources, wealth, influence and power in a society preconditions some sections of societies for disasters. Therefore, supernatural forces are not absolutely held responsible for every calamity that befalls humanity. Disasters triggered by human activities are closely tied to the use of resources. This view precludes that the careful management of resources would seem pertinent to avoiding disasters. Human activities which includes those related to technological and industrial activities such as industrial accidents, chemicals spills, radioactive fallout and the like are not only hazardous our health but may set in motion a chain of disastrous consequences. In the end, human beings are the cause of our own disasters.

Human beings are undoubtedly the most active agents in shaping and manipulating the landscape and the course of nature. The activities of human beings to disturb the course of nature depend very much on their scientific knowledge of how nature works and technological equipment at their disposal. Primitive societies by their nature had only elemental tools. Society is not static either in knowledge or their material needs. The transformation that occurs in the realm of knowledge comes to affect the tools or equipment that is employed to satisfy higher material needs. It is at this point therefore that society begins to witness a sort of disequilibrium between human activities and the original state of nature. As nature or the environment gets disturbed, human existence becomes more exposed to the various forces that trigger disasters. For instance, the use of advanced equipment that disturb the earth's surface predisposes human being to various forms of disasters and equipment such as the earth moving machinery employed in road construction and mining often leaves in its wake of serious disturbance to the environment that increases the risk of disasters.

However, there are some categories of disasters which can almost certainly be attributed to nature. There are completely unforeseen or unknown hazards which are entirely unknown to man. For instance, disasters which are primarily tectonic activities within earth crust which manifest itself into volcanic activity, earthquakes, and poisonous gases leakage and so on can be attributed to nature.

In conclusion, it is noted that essentially, there is an overlap between nature and the role of human beings in the causation of disasters and nowhere are mystic forces mentioned. On the surface, human action or inaction could be blamed for disasters and not curses imposed on society by supernatural forces.

Author: Gbensuglo Alidu Bukari, PhD Candidate in Development Studies at the Ghanaian-German Centre for Development Studies, ISSER, University of Ghana.

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University of Ghana, P.O.Box LG 74, Legon

Tel: +233 302 501182 / +233 302 512504

www.isser.edu.gh

publications@isser.edu.gh/info@isser.edu.gh

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