Communication strategies by Kenya Red Cross Society in disaster management during the 2008 Post Election Violence in Eldoret

Abstract:

The concept of disaster management has received considerable research attention in the natural disaster context. However, the role played by communication strategies in managing political violence disaster has not been documented. The study aimed at bridging the knowledge by undertaking a case study of 2008 post poll disaster management by Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) in Eldoret. The objectives of the study were to establish the suitability of KRCS's communication technologies for disaster management, establish the extent to which KRCS was prepared in handling the 2008 post election disaster in Eldoret and to establish the communication challenges faced by KRCS during the 2008 post election disaster management in Eldoret. To accomplish the objectives, data was collected through interviews with the Secretary General, Departmental heads, and middle level managers. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean scores and standard deviations. Content analysis was applied on qualitative data to determine the adequacy of information, and the credibility, usefulness and consistency of information. Data was presented in tables and charts. It was established that Kenya Red Cross Society used a combination of communication strategies to manage post election chaos in Eldoret. These strategies included continuous monitoring and reporting, toll free hotline, designated spokesperson, partnering with other organisations and establishing satellites in hot spot areas. Disaster management efforts suffered from weak coordination, lack of teamwork and resource limitations. The Society was not well prepared to handle post poll violence in Eldoret since facilities in terms of motor vehicles, computers, and fund allocation to Rift Valley region was inadequate. These resources were overstretched beyond limits hence, leading to failures in rescue efforts by the Society. Communication strategies put in place by KRCS enhanced financial and physical resources mobilisation for managing post election violence and settling internally displaced persons. The strategies registered huge success in tracing and uniting lost persons with their families and in promoting peaceful coexistence among different communities after the violence. It was concluded that inability by KRCS to include security units such as police in its planning and implementation of disaster management strategies contributed to more deaths and loss that would have otherwise been reduced. In addition, failure by media houses to work closely with KRCS delayed communication, thus violence having more negative effects. Based on findings of the study, the following recommendations were made: 1. The Act of Parliament which created KRCS should be amended to create a Disaster Response Police unit attached to the Kenya Red Cross Society. 2. The KRCS should strengthen its partnership with Donor community and the Government. The Society should create and nurture strong and synergistic partnership with media houses. 3. There is need for KRCS to review its structure and policies to remove bureaucracies which slow down communication during disaster management. 4. The organisation should adopt periodic reviews of its communication strategy to synchronise it with changes in the environment. 5. The KRCS should improve coordination of its rescue efforts by encouraging teamwork and technology

upgrade. 6. Future researchers should investigate causes of weak coordination of rescue efforts by KRCS.