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“Combating Polarization in Times of Global Crisis”

Environmental Committee

*Implementing measures to minimize
damage on LEDCs by natural
disasters*

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RESEARCH REPORT



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Issue: Implementing measures to minimize damage on LEDCs by natural disasters

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Introduction

Just over a decade ago, on the 12th of January, 2010, an earthquake was triggered just 25.75 kilometers away from the Haitian capital of Port Au Prince, coming in at a whopping 7.0 on the seismic scale. 220,000 Haitians were killed following the catastrophe, 300,000 were injured, and a further two million citizens were left without food or water as the earthquake shattered the already fragile Haitian infrastructure (BBC Bitesize, n.d.).

The world has seen natural disasters shatter communities and ravage economies for most of human history. The impacts of these disasters, however, are not evenly distributed. A report published by the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) in 2016 found that 90% of deaths from natural disasters over a twenty-year period occurred in lower and middle-income states (CRED & UNISDR, 2016). The reason why Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) are more susceptible to increased human and economic impact from natural disasters is that these states often fail to have prevention and recovery networks in place, simply because they cannot afford it.

In this time of global crisis, injustice and inequality in all their forms are reaching a boiling point. The tension caused by this increased awareness of global injustices is causing our global community to become increasingly polarised. Just as we see the threat posed by the increasingly widening gap between the left and right in political arenas across the Earth, there exists a very real threat of polarity between nations. These differences are observable through not only policy and societal/cultural norms, but also through economic inequity. The issue of minimizing damage inflicted upon LEDCs is emblematic of the need to create a more equitable society for all, be it at an international, domestic, or local level.

Definition of Key Terms

Natural disaster: a sudden and terrible event in nature (such as a hurricane, tornado, or flood) that usually results in serious damage and many deaths (Merriam Webster, n.d.)

LEDCs: Less Economically Developed Country (Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Indonesia)

MEDCs: More Economically Developed Country (U.S.A, Japan, etc.)

Infrastructure: The system of public works of a country, state, or region (Merriam Webster, n.d.)

General Overview

Hurricane Katrina, one of the most high-profile natural disasters of the modern era, was a Category 5 hurricane that left chaos and destruction in its path amounting to the sum of 160 billion USD in Louisiana and surrounding areas (The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Yet, while costing over 152 billion USD more in damages than the Haitian earthquake of 2010, Katrina took 1,620 lives, versus the 222,000 lost in Haiti (BBC Bitesize, n.d.; The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Why is it that the loss of life in Haiti was so much greater than that in Louisiana? The answer lies within disparities among states in macroeconomic development and their consequent effects on domestic infrastructures.

A distinct contrast between natural disaster responses in More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) and LEDCs is communication. Developed nations' infrastructures are capable of transmitting information between cities within a matter of seconds, while developing states seldom enjoy the same privilege. This contrast is highlighted by the difference in the extent and speed with which information travelled during the 2011 Tohoku earthquake in Japan and the 1998 Afghanistan earthquakes. In 2011, the vast majority of the global community was made aware that a severe earthquake had taken place off the coast of Japan within mere minutes of the event taking place. In 1998, however, it took three days for news of the earthquake to travel from the site of the quake in the northwest quadrant of the country to the Afghan capital of Kabul (McFadden, 1998). Poor communication networks can have devastating effects on the speed with which aid reaches an affected area. While Japanese authorities were able to respond to the earthquake almost immediately, it took days for aid to reach the affected areas in war-torn Afghanistan. Even then, the Afghan government had to rely on international support to shoulder the cost of the earthquake (CNN, 1998).

Other characteristics typical of LEDCs' responses to natural disasters that yield destructive consequences are the delayed presence of aid and emergency services, as well as the absence of sufficient warning and evacuation protocols. One relevant case study is the Mount Pinatubo eruption in the Philippines. While the Philippine Institute of Seismology and Volcanology accurately predicted the eruption in advance, a poor evacuation program led to 847 lives being lost (Newhall, Hendley, and Stauffer, n.d.). Conversely, the eruption of Mount Eldfell in Iceland, an MEDC, yielded no fatalities, owing to the comprehensive warning and evacuation system used by the island nation-state (Taylor, 2017).

The root cause of LEDCs' vulnerability to natural disasters is simply a lack of capital. International inequality means that the average income of a North American is 16 times that of a Sub Saharan African (United Nations, n.d.). LEDCs situated along fault lines are unable to develop the necessary facilities to accommodate for the inevitable earthquakes and volcanoes due to occur at any minute. The same goes for LEDCs in areas prone to hurricanes, or any other natural disaster. They simply can't afford to invest in safety features. These states already borrow millions from the

international community, indebting them and limiting their access to further loans. Sadly, many of these funds are pocketed by corrupt government officials or lost in the midst of political turmoil and conflict (Bitesize 2). For this reason, the shock absorbers of Japan and the floodgates of Holland are rarely, if ever, seen in LEDCs.

Delegates will have to ensure that their proposals to solve this issue are not temporary cover-ups, but instead are sustainable solutions that will benefit LEDCs in the long run.

Treaties and Events

The sparse existence of relevant treaties and events is particularly noteworthy for delegates. While the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction takes place sequentially, it is the only collaborative international effort to reduce disaster risks, and seldom leads to meaningful action.

Sendai Declaration and Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015)

This Framework was adopted in 2015 by member states and outlines a seven-point plan to reduce and prevent disaster risks worldwide (UNDRR, 2015). However, the Framework does little to acknowledge the inequity of disaster risk reduction.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There is a notable absence of any effective international efforts to solve the issue. While the issue is recognised globally, little has been done in the international political arena. Current efforts to address the issue come in the form of aid packages from MEDCs. However, a sovereign nation has the right to spend any funds it receives in whichever way they please. With a whole host of priorities on LEDC governments' lists way ahead of disaster risk reduction, very little funds are allocated to the cause.

Possible Solutions

Delegates are encouraged to promote collaboration and productivity in their committees, and are reminded that the conference's theme is aimed at combating polarization and alienation. As such, delegates should attempt to put forward solutions to the issue that are inclusive and collaborative.

One such solution is the proposal of an international summit aimed at producing a document dedicated to addressing the issue. By laying the foundation for a working document that enables the secure flow of capital from international bodies or member states to states in need, delegates will have bypassed the pressing question of financial mismanagement. However, such a proposal will need extraordinary detail for member states to be in agreement with it.

Innovation is a crucial part of global development, and the UN tries to encourage it whenever possible. One solution for this issue that stimulates innovation is a global engineering competition. A relevant body, be it an NGO, member state, or UN organisation, can allow firms from across the globe to submit designs aimed at minimizing the damage caused by a particular natural disaster. The winning firm

would then be invited to produce their product in large quantities to be donated to LEDCs at the host body's expense.

The possibilities for solutions are endless. That being said, do your best to avoid targeting specific member states or organisations, and opt instead to pursue unity in the hopes of combating polarisation.

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