Evaluating the Potential of Mosque Institution in Contributing to the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) System

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ABSTRACT
The institution of mosque acted as the center of activity of Muslim communities for centuries. During the early days of Islam, administrative, educational, social, financial, and judicial activities were conducted centering the mosque. Up until now, mosque is one of the major establishment within a Muslim community in countries with Muslim majority as well as countries where Muslims are minority. It is almost inevitable that every Muslim community would have at least one mosque within the locality. For most of the cases in Muslim major countries, there are more than one mosque to be found in any locality. These institutions are mostly used for prayer, meditation and recitation purposes. But there are so many potentials to utilize these existing infrastructures as centers for community development by extending the scope of activities with the participation of the community people. This paper aims to explore the possibilities of utilizing mosque as disaster management centers among Muslim communities.

Key words: Mosque, DRR, Community development

INTRODUCTION
The aim of this paper is to explore the possibilities of mosque institution in contributing to the disaster management system. Natural and man-made disasters are common phenomena all over the world. Large bureaus and institutions at national level are continuously working to reduce the risk factors in the disaster prone areas. These institutions are also working on minimizing the damages and casualties after a disaster occurs at any given place. However, along with these national level organizations, disaster management requires numerous local level or on-site institutions to conduct the aid activities within the affected communities. These local institutions are usually setup temporarily at suitable locations within the community. Disaster affected people then gather at those locations to receive survival aids during the recovery period. Local schools, community centers, public halls, religious institutions are usually utilized to serve this purpose. This paper will highlight on the institution of mosque as a central gathering point of any Muslim community. The significance of mosque within Muslim communities, its location and its impact on the community people will be discussed to evaluate its potential during disaster management activities.

The first section of this paper will identify the issues relating mosques’ role during disaster and post-disaster period. Next section will highlight the significance of mosque in Muslim communities. Third section specifically describes the mosques’ potential to contribute in disaster affected zones. At the end of the discussion scope of mosques for contributing to the disaster management system will be identified along with necessary recommendations to enhance these scopes. Proper collaboration between secular institutions and

mosques may ensure safer environment during disasters and faster recovery process for the betterment of the community.

2.0 Issues and scopes regarding mosques’ role during disasters:

There have not been much contribution to the body of knowledge regarding the role of mosques in disaster management. Usually the term disaster management refers to a set of interrelated processes i.e. response, relief, recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation phases. All these phases are required to be centered on a common base within the community to ensure proper and faster management. Naturally, the central location of religious institutions like mosque have the advantage to act as the base where the community people gathers usually during several times a day. Unfortunately, this potential of the mosque institution is overlooked or underestimated over the period of time.

[1] Cheema et al. stated that the role of community-based religious institutions has been largely undocumented, underestimated and overshadowed in the disaster studies literature. In a special issue of the journal ‘Religion’ on the theme of religion, natural hazards and disasters, [2] Gaillard identifies that the role of religious institutions has been neglected for a long time in disaster studies. This is despite the fact that religious institutions have been serving people in the face of disasters long before the European tradition of humanitarian aid.

[3] Candland reported, during times of disasters, religious institutions contribute to the disaster mitigation drive in a number of ways such as feeding hungry victims, providing shelter and supporting communities in a host of ways. Religious institutions have played an important role in developing social cohesion, building social and safety networks within communities. Important here to note that, the activities stated here, such as feeding and providing shelter to the needy and supporting people of the community are functions that have been served by the mosque institutions for thousands of years.

Social welfare activities are one of the major sectors where mosques are contributing throughout the world for Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike. By virtue of Islam, mosques are recommended to participate in welfare activities and take care of the needy and the poor of the society.

[4] Rashid emphasized on the social contribution of mosque institutions and its inherent quality to adopt the functions for disaster management. It is also rational that the acceptability of people to receive aid and support from an institution like mosque, which has been involved with these types of activities for a very long period of time. For short term relief distribution, any infrastructure could be utilized as suitable but disaster management is a long term process. Its needs proper planning in every phase of response, relief, recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Setting up establishment for serving this purposes are preferably not feasible as disasters are seasonal occurrence, not a year round phenomena. So, the scope of utilizing and reusing the existing institutions adaptively offers more feasible solution to this problem. Mosque, as a central institution for most of the Muslim communities which is already involved with teaching and training people and supporting the less-privileged members of the community has huge potential to be used as local center for disaster management.

3.0 The significance of mosque in Muslim communities:

As a religion, Islam offers the complete set of guidance both in spiritual and physical or social contexts [18]. And from the very beginning of the religion these spiritual and physical contexts were guided through the institution of mosque, around which the lives of Muslims’ revolved as the communities grew gradually. [5]. Robert Hillenbrand refers to the mosque as the principle religious building of Islam. [6]. Tajuddin, prominent contemporary scholar on Islamic architecture, stated the same opinion with more emphasis that mosque is the most important building in Islam. [7/15]

Spahic Omer’s comment should be noted for highlighting the significance of mosque institution in the life of Muslims. He stated that without any confusion the mosque is and always will be the center of Muslim life [19]. He also mentioned two justification for this comment. First one being the inherent nature of man to long for worshiping its creator while the second one is man’s tendency for social interaction and communal gathering in order to solidify the bonds of society which in return secure the welfare of the individual as well as the community life. [8]. On portraying the importance of mosque as a central institution for the Muslims, Omer combined the spiritual and the social role side by side, thus establishing the concept of Islam and mosque as its central institution in order to guide the Muslim communities toward their complete way of life.

“And let there be (arising) from you a nation inviting to (all that is) good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.” [Surah Ali-Imran: 104] [9]

This divine commandments draws the concept that Islam is a tradition that is oriented towards community and Muslims are commanded by Allah to establish goodness and justice within the community. [10]

Similar commandments are found in other verses where Allah says,

“You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.....”[Surah Ali-Imran: 110] [9]
The practice of solidarity should reflect in Muslim communities where everyone should support each other. [10], this again reflects the opinion of Mattson who prescribed for the Muslim society to form communities based on mutual support and benefits [15/16]. During the time of Prophet (ﷺ) and early generation of Muslims, this formation of communities and its role in supporting its members in every aspect of life was very common in practice. Moreover, the complex task of managing coherence in communities was done through the institution of mosque. These two divine verses clarify the role of Muslims within the community.

4.0 The role of mosque in disaster management:

Disasters are complex and nonlinear phenomena that involve active coordination and collaboration with multiple actors, particularly local communities supported by other actors, during all phases of the disaster cycle in order to save lives, improve livelihoods and assets such as damaged buildings and infrastructure. It involves actions, plans and arrangements organized before, during and after an emergency or a disaster situation through coordination among different actors including government, NGOs, communities and the private sector. This usage is broader from commonly used terms such as crisis management that refer to specific responses to situational emergencies [12].

The role of mosque during disaster management of flood affected zones can broadly be divided into two sections. Role during early response activities such as shelter providing and relief distribution and role during the later phase- recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation. The first phase requires immediate actions to be taken and pre-defined gathering point so that the people of the community knows where to go during emergency. The second phase is a long term process and it requires appropriate planning, efficient management and active participation of the community members. [1] Cheema et al, proposed a template relating the actual role of mosque during different phases of disaster. Table 1 shows the role of mosque during different phases of disaster.

Table 1: Role of mosque during different phases of disaster according to [1].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles during response and relief</th>
<th>Initial contact point</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A space and forum for coordinating response and relief efforts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensuring the inclusion of the vulnerable</td>
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<td>Socially integrating force</td>
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<td>Recruiting of volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central point for providing information to the community</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Roles during recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation</th>
<th>Support for livelihoods</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial support, spiritual healing and creating resilience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space for community activities (for example, schooling)</td>
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[1] Cheema et al, further stated that, mosques are physically located in the center of communities in most places (Figure 1). They are a recognized and convenient point of contact for communities and able to communicate via loudspeakers with community. In this way, mosques provide the requisite physical and social space for coordinating and organizing relief efforts between the affected communities and relief organizations. Therefore, the usual central location of mosques is crucial to act as a gathering point for the community during crisis.

Another significant finding by the same researcher is the roles of mosques in the disaster recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation phase depended to a large extent on the personality of an Imam and his community’s perception about his role beyond a prayer leader. But the issue here is, Imams, historically, did not engage in economic activities because their livelihood was provided by the community. Thus, over a period of time, it had become an unwritten norm for the Imam to limit himself to worship activities. Yet, he suggested, it is the personality of an Imam that, to a large extent, determined the social role of the mosque and its capacity to perform as a community institution in any non-worship activity such as disaster management.

Mosque usually includes people from all sector of the community regardless of their social or economic state [13, 17]. This provides with better opportunities to involve poor, illiterate and marginalized members of the community with beneficiary activities. During any disaster, the poor and destitute people have become most vulnerable. It is them who need the initial support of relief and other facilities for survival. So the relief and recovery works aims at this particular group of the society at initial level of crisis. Mosque is the most appropriate platform for this as it always facilitates the flow of information in favor of the poor, who are usually left out. This is a concrete example of the essential role the mosque can play in improving transparency of actions of organizations such as government and local and international NGOs and ensuring proper and fair distribution of relief to every groups of the society.

Post disaster periods observe massive infrastructure rebuilding which is a long term rehabilitation process. For Muslim communities, the reconstruction of mosque usually gets highest priority. And it is due to the flexibility of mosque architecture that, any gathering place could be defined as mosque to perform prayers. Walls, roof etc. can be added later to provide more comfortable user experience. [1] Cheema et al, reported that
the mosque functioned well beyond the limits of men and material, brick and mortar. The mosque building may have been destroyed but the institution of the mosque remained functional and effective. It continued to serve its surviving community. Men gathered to pray on the rubble or in the open, and the mosque served as the collection point for the community even in the hardest of times. Therefore, the usability of the mosque tends to be higher than any other public institution within the community even in the post disaster period of crisis.

Fig. 1: Recommended personality of an Imam.

Conclusion:
Disaster risk reduction is a multi-layered system incorporating institutions at different level of its application. The institutions at the top level provide the policies and strategies for pre-disaster preparation and post disaster activities. However, the root level institutions are the ones responsible for realizing all these policies to train people in disaster management as well as provide them shelter and facilities during post disaster period. This paper argued that, in Muslim communities, among all the public institutions, mosque has the most potentials to be utilized as local level disaster management centers. Factors benefiting to this advantage of mosque institution are its relevant central location, inherent social welfare activities and its apparent significance as a social activity center regardless of its physical aspects. And to ensure its active participation in disaster risk reduction process, skilled and pro-active Imam, or community leader is a precondition. Further study on this subject can focus on the architectural characters and structural requirement of mosque institution in relation with different type of disaster. Moreover, cultural studies are recommended to be done for assessing people’s acceptance on involving their religious institution i.e. mosque in disaster risk reduction system.

REFERENCE