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Full Text:

As one item within our vast portfolio for bringing disaster risk reduction to the community level, a new approach termed "relocalisation" has emerged. Relocalisation means re-establishing activities at the local level (re-local-ise), reversing the trend of centralisation and larger organisations. Diseconomies of scale, rather than economies of scale, are employed. In the case of disaster risk reduction, relocalising means ensuring that disaster-related activities occur from the local level, bottom-up with external guidance where useful. One example is maintaining local caches of emergency supplies rather than expecting external assistance after an event.

Relocalisation originated in concerns about "peak oil", the time when the extraction rate of oil—now expanded to all fossil fuels—reaches its maximum, leading to an increasingly restricted supply of fossil fuels used for energy and electricity. Crises envisioned include food supplies being reduced because of limited transport to supermarkets; blackouts during hot and cold temperature extremes where electricity generating plants depend on fossil fuels; and emergency services being unable to respond promptly. Relocalisation aims to make services such as food, energy, manufacturing, and disaster risk reduction more locally-based so that they will be minimally affected by fossil fuel restrictions and any other sudden or long-term crises.

In August 2005, in Colorado, U.S.A., Boulder Valley Relocalisation (BVR) was founded as a local residents' group to plan for the effects of peak oil and other crises on the Boulder Valley community, northwest of Denver (see <http://www.boulderrelocalization.org>). Eight BVR subgroups were created, each tackling one aspect of relocalisation, including food, energy, and the economy.

The Crisis Preparedness Group (<http://www.ilankelman.org/relocalisation.html>) defined its mandate as "to provide information on and to recommend actions for preparing for crises which could result from peak oil as illustrative of relocalising general disaster risk reduction". Based on BVR's template for all subgroups, five steps are involved: 1) Disaster risk reduction resources in Boulder Valley were inventoried and disaster events and conditions which would be particularly affected by peak oil were identified; 2) Future crisis scenarios were developed and solutions to avert these scenarios were brainstormed; 3) Ideal and realistic visions and goals were listed; 4) Specific recommendations for action along with concrete proposals are being detailed; 5) The results will be integrated into a Master Plan for Relocalising Boulder Valley.

The results emphasise that the main strength of relocalisation is reinforcing the already-established approach to disaster risk reduction of developing local skills and capabilities. Relocalisation should complement, not supplant, other approaches. By introducing a new factor, that of peak oil consequences and related crises, relocalisation engages a sector of the community concerned about fossil fuel limitations and can place that concern within the context of all disaster risk reduction activities.

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