



**BRADFORD
DISASTER RESEARCH UNIT**

The Disaster Research Unit was formed in December 1973 as a research group within the Project Planning Centre for Developing Countries at the University of Bradford. It is currently supported by the initiating sponsorship of the Leverhulme Trust, to which the University of Bradford added a generous matching grant, and the Ministry of Overseas Development. The motive for the formation of the Unit was in the awareness of the need for precautionary planning for natural disaster and for the study of precautions which could be taken against the probability of disaster events.

It was furthermore realised that to be successfully implemented, precautions had to be seen as far as possible as part of an overall strategy within an existing economic and administrative infrastructure. Disaster is regarded as being principally the effect on settlements and communities of extreme natural phenomena, the manifestation of a continuing state of risk to form methodologies of response as a way of mitigating the effect of these events when and where they occur as earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, floods, volcanic eruptions, tornadoes, tsunamis, drought, fire, epidemic and plague. During the past three years there has been an increasing interest in and attention to man-made disasters in addition.

The team

James Lewis, ARIBA, Leverhulme Senior Research Fellow and leader of the Unit; an architect trained at the University of Manchester and with fifteen years of experience in England, USA and Hong Kong, principally with the firm of Robert Mathew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners as Resident Architect on the University of Bath and the Hong Kong Cross Harbour Tunnel. He also taught at the University of Bristol School of Architecture and continued an architectural practice which became more of a vehicle for the development of ideas in precautionary planning.

Philip O'Keefe, BA (Hons), Research Fellow, a geographer from the University of Newcastle and the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University. He completed research in Kenya and Tanzania before returning to lecture in London University. During 1973 he lectured in Khartoum University before returning to join the Disaster Research Unit.

Kenneth Westgate, BA (Hons), MSc, Research Assistant, graduated from the University of Bradford in geography and economics and completed a dissertation on human adjustment to earthquakes with particular reference to the European seismic zones. Subsequently he gained a Social Science Research Council Award to work in the field of the human element in disaster and gained an ex officio invitation to the Transport and General Workers Union enquiry on the Flixborough Chemical Plant explosion which led to a detailed analysis of the human response to this explosion.

The Unit's activities

By dividing its activities between theoretical analysis 'at home' and the undertaking of assignments overseas, the Unit is able to relate the reality of disaster prone locations-with the development of its methodology for mitigating the effects of disaster when it occurs. There is a continuing reciprocity between these two principal lines of activity. Preliminary preparations have been commenced for the commencement of the first post-experience course in precautionary planning, as a second area of application for the Unit.

Commonwealth and associated countries have played an important part in the Unit's activities so far, commencing with the inception of the idea in Hong Kong. The Unit were given their first opportunity to test some of their ideas when the League of Red Cross Societies in Geneva proposed the Bahama Islands as an appropriate location for a study in pre-disaster planning. As League delegates the Unit spent six weeks during November and December 1974 analysing the considerable extremes of the 'everyday' situation with special attention to the 'disaster context' which included not only the principal natural disaster, hurricane, but also possible man-made events of technological explosion, aviation accident and epidemic for example. Results of this assignment were published as Occasional Paper No 10 - 'A Study in Pre-Disaster Planning'. Since the report's publication, two return visits have been made to Nassau to follow-up a process of implementation.

Pilot Study

A detailed pilot study was undertaken in August 1975 in the Windward Islands by Phil O'Keefe to examine the impact, in a multi-hazard situation, of natural disaster on the principal economic activity of St Lucia and St Vincent, the production of bananas. This pilot study was financed by the Ministry of Overseas Development.

Earthquake, volcanic eruption, tsunami, hurricane, flood, drought and frost are the principal disaster occurrences in a region of the South Pacific which includes Fiji, the Cook Islands, the Gilbert Islands, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Western Samoa. These ten countries in various stages of self-government are members of the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation (SPEC) based in Suva, Fiji. In a far-sighted and innovative attempt to counter the impact within the region of natural disaster, SPEC established a regional disaster fund initiated by a contribution from the Republic of Nauru and subsequent annual subscriptions from all member governments. A pilot study to advise on the management of the fund, financed by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), Commonwealth Secretariat, has been undertaken by the Disaster Research Unit and a report by James Lewis has been submitted to CFTC and SPEC. The two-month study involved 47,500 miles of air travel to and within the region, and visits to all the member countries of SPEC as well as Auckland and Canberra.

Partly as a result of recommendations in the Pilot Study Report, a Seminar in Disaster Preparedness and Relief was held in Suva, Fiji in September 1976, jointly sponsored by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the League of Red Cross Societies in Geneva. James Lewis was appointed as a Consultant to the Commonwealth Secretariat to act as a Resource Person for the Seminar.

A detailed account of the Unit's interests and activities is given in its Newssheet, 'Disaster Research' available on request and a series of its own Occasional Papers are available, an index of which is enclosed with this Newsletter.

(The Editor would like to hear about the work of similar research units attached to universities in different parts of the Commonwealth.)