



Statement
by
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during
the opening ceremony
of
HELP Course
at
Red Court Hotel
Nairobi
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and privilege to be here this morning to witness the opening session of the two week HEALTH EMERGENCIES IN LARGE POPULATIONS (HELP) course designed to instill professionalism in humanitarian assistance programmes. I take this opportunity on behalf of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology(JKUAT) to welcome participants who I am informed are drawn from five countries namely Pakistan, Japan, Sweden, Eritrea and Tanzania making the workshop truly international.

As a university, it is quite gratifying to be part of this international initiative through our existing relationship with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva sealed by a Memorandum of Understanding that led to the staging of the inaugural course last year. Indeed a number of our staffers are actively involved in this project mainly as researchers and trainers for this project.

In this way the knowledge on disaster management gained from this course has been useful in enriching a number of academic curriculums particularly those of our health related programmes managed under the Institute of Tropical Medicine and Infectious Diseases. It is our determination at the university to eventually ensure that the elements of disaster preparedness are cascaded to all our academic programmes. In addition, I am happy to note that our few researchers who participated in the course last year have now a new opportunity in conducting research in HELP related areas to assist in generating solutions to problems that continue to plague our people.

You may for instant be aware that Kenya like other developing countries is faced with a number of disasters from time to time. Over the last two decades for example, our country does experience serious sequences of rain failure in arid and semi-arid lands that make up 70 percent of Kenya's land mass. Such circumstances force our pastoralists to migrate with their animals mainly camels and cattle to traditional grazing areas leaving goats and sheep behind. The situation leads to acute shortages of traditional food in terms of milk, blood, and meat for family members left behind who are mainly women

and children. Soon, widespread under nutrition and high rates malnutrition take the toll with unimaginable suffering.

In addition, there are increasing cases of health related problems associated with lowered resistance to diseases that are a direct consequence of the population's declining nutrition status. There are also health problems related to the use of contaminated water from drying water pans. Some of these environmental health problems that are responsible for the high morbidity and mortality rates require practical and feasible methods of prevention which I am sure will form part of your training here.

While the course mainly focuses on health issues, it is my hope that you do not lose sight of the fact that the problems of human security are multidisciplinary in nature therefore requiring a boarder approach. In a developing country like Kenya which is struggling to grow under the ravages of rampant poverty and successive disasters, the national capacity to develop sustainable disaster management programme is severely limited. Pervasive poverty has contributed to accelerating levels of vulnerability to disasters with potentially serious environmental consequences.

One of the strategies in the promotion of sustainable disaster management is to be found in capacity building through initiatives such as this one. However, capacity development should not be viewed as an end in itself. It should be understood as a means to an end in the context of natural disaster preparedness. The end is to prepare to monitor, mitigate and manage disasters in an effective, efficient and sustainable manner.

The enhancement of human capabilities through training, education and increased access to productive resources could lead to a diversification of skills, livelihoods strategies, and sources of incomes for populations living in disaster prone areas. As I have indicated already, most communities in the traditional ASAL districts of Kenya, pastoralist or subsistence agriculture can no longer provide secure livelihood.

It is my view that recurrent droughts, the deterioration of natural resources and ecological damage displace communities from their traditional economic activities. Additional skills and knowledge are therefore important as a fall back option during disaster period. This is because of the fact that although the level of resilience is usually varied, people without diverse skills tend to be most vulnerable in the face of natural calamities.

Finally I pay special tribute to all the collaborators notably International Committee of the Red Cross, World Health Organization and the Kenya Red Cross for their support that has seen the successful staging of this course today. It is my sincere belief that we at JKUAT in the company of such reputable international organizations will be the most beneficiary from this initiative for as the Italians say “a dwarf in the shoulders of a giant sees the furthest”

I thank you most sincerely for listening to me.