



Learning processes enhanced by natural disasters

In many communities, learning processes were triggered by the 2002 flood, processes that resulted in an increased preparedness in subsequent flood events. However, learning was clearly concentrated on improving the operational and technical procedures within existing institutional structures and hence on incremental changes. After the 2013 flood, more fundamental learning processes happened. In general, the perception of the threat potential of the flood risk has changed considerably as a consequence of the 2013 flood. While after 2002 the focus was on improving the existing flood management systems (e.g., new and better dikes, improved warning systems, improved emergency management), the 2013 flood shattered the idea quite substantially that increased effectiveness and efficiency will reduce the risk of flooding, at least on the local level. People considered that the risk of flooding is not reducible to zero through improving the established approach. On the contrary, flood events, such as the ones in 2002 or 2013, can happen on a quite regular basis. In this sense, the reflection and learning processes as a consequence of the 2013 floods are more fundamental and they question, to a certain extent, not only the dominant, institutionalized way of how floods are managed, but also the very relation between settled/urbanized areas, the way such areas are protected and the role and prospective "behaviour" of the river and its surrounding floodplain. Learning from previous floods can be considered to be a basis for empowerment. Many households in the exposed areas have experienced multiple flood events since 2002, some of them up to three or even four floods in 11 years. Households that were strongly affected by the floods also report more often to have implemented private mitigation and/or purchased an insurance against natural hazards. They also feel better prepared with each flood event. As a matter of fact, households that took private mitigation measures since they experienced multiple flood events have also experienced highly negative consequences, have taken longer to return to normality and are worse off than those who have taken no measures. Therefore, there is a positive relation between high impact and active engagement regarding preventive activities. The feeling of protection is important too. People that perceive the implementation of private mitigations as a serious issue, of course, have also more often taken actions both before and during flood events. Self-efficacy has also generated attitudes towards responsibility. Therefore, a decisive factor shaping attitudes towards responsibilities has been the actual flood experience (however, such a responsibility overwhelms people; not everyone is convinced that private actions can make a difference). Inclusion in decision-making processes has also been important. Included people are more willing to take the time and would like to contribute with their knowledge and personal experience to participatory processes and have taken actions in order to prevent future floods. This created a virtuous cycle: people that took actions before the event to mitigate impacts, either through private mitigation measures or through purchasing insurance against natural hazards, were more likely to believe that they have the appropriate knowledge required to take part in such process and were also more likely to take the time to become involved. In sum, it is to be underlined that civil volunteers need to be incorporated into future planning for disaster management. However, a more detailed analysis is needed to obtain a clearer picture.

Note: See source document for full reference.

**Applicable to:**

Stakeholders: [Open-mindedness](#), [Individual/collective memory](#), [Attitudes toward environmental issues](#)

Disaster Phases: [Preparedness](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [Non-active citizens](#)

Hazards: [Natural hazards](#)

Recommendations:

- [Use local knowledge, collective memory and shared cultural values to improve disaster preparedness, response and recovery](#)
- [Foster the adoption of a culture of disaster prevention and resilience by informing and motivating citizens to take action](#)

Source

[Deliverable D7.1 "Report on literature review" \(page 65\)](#)

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