

The placement of the disaster management function within district, metropolitan and provincial government structures in South Africa

G van Riet

School for Social and Government
North-West University

M Diedericks

School for Social and Government
North-West University

ABSTRACT

In this article the authors investigate the optimal placement of Disaster Risk Management Centres in district and metropolitan municipalities and provincial government institutional structures in South Africa. In particular the authors investigate which organisational placement best facilitates effective disaster risk management. The findings of the study are based on interviews with senior Disaster Risk Management Centre (DRMC) staff members from both provincial and local government. The authors found that disaster risk management in district and metropolitan municipalities as well as provinces is still relatively underdeveloped. Respondents reported ignorance on the part of senior officials regarding disaster risk management as well as a lack of financial, infrastructural and human resource capacity in Disaster Risk Management Centres as significant constraints on effective disaster risk management. The authors argue that DRMCs should report to the highest possible managerial as opposed to political authority because disaster risk management is a management function requiring consistent coordination.

INTRODUCTION

In 2002 South Africa adopted legislation placing it at the forefront of a global paradigm shift from a purely response-oriented approach to disaster management to a more proactive approach encompassing Disaster Risk Management (DRM). The National Disaster Management Framework (South Africa, 2005) together with national guidelines is meant to offer guidance and recommendations on the interpretation of the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002. One such recommendation is that Disaster Risk Management Centres (DRMCs) should report directly to the highest political authority (i.e. premier or mayor). However, though there have long been concerns regarding the extent to which this aspect has been implemented, it has not yet been subjected to a systematic study. In the light of the above, the South African National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) commissioned the African Centre for Disaster Studies at North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus to investigate the nature of the placement of DMCs and the impact of the placement of district, metropolitan and provincial DRMCs on the effectiveness of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in each of these spheres of government.

Firstly, this article contextualises the research problem in terms of the South African legislation and existing academic literature. Thereafter, the methodology followed is discussed. The most important trends regarding the placement of DRMCs as well as the observed level of progress made with DRM in South Africa are then highlighted, including various constraints reported by respondents. The authors consider how the above may be impacted on by various different placements of DRMCs. The article concludes by comparing placement under the highest political versus the highest managerial authority, arguing in favour of the latter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In line with a shift in approach, especially over the past four decades, South Africa in 2002 adopted legislation for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). This legislation has been widely praised and according to Holloway (2007:1) has been emulated in other African countries and abroad. This legislation and the subsequent South African National Disaster Management Framework (NDMF) make certain recommendations regarding the placement of DRMCs in governmental institutional structures. The following section explains this international shift in perspective as well as the requirements of the South African legislation and particular context.

A global shift in thinking

During the past three decades there has been a global paradigm shift in how traditional disaster management is viewed. In the light of an increased number of disaster losses, seemingly not due to an increased number of triggering events or hazards (such as floods, drought etc), people's vulnerability to these hazards has been receiving greater attention. With initiatives such as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR 1990–1999), the Yokohama Plan of Action (World Conference on Disaster Reduction, 1994), the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR 2000–2009) and the Hyogo Framework of Action 2005–2015, signed at the World Disasters Conference in Kobe, Japan, in 2005 (World Conference on Disaster Reduction 2005), DRR seems to be becoming a key perspective in disaster management (Van Riet 2009:iv). This approach focuses on the interplay between hazards and vulnerabilities, and the involvement of multiple professional constituencies in the effort to reduce disaster risks is considered important. Accordingly, disaster risk should be managed through careful planning and the sensible conducting of the day-to-day activities of all organs of state and all relevant role-players. In this regard the link between disaster and development is clearly articulated in the international literature (for example, see Twigg 2004; Wisner *et al.* 2004; and White *et al.* 2004).

Vermaak and Van Niekerk (2004:556) assert that DRR is a multidisciplinary action. It should thus not be the role of one government department or sub-department. This is because DRR requires a broad range of activities, including vulnerability and risk assessment, capacity building, establishing physical, social and economic infrastructure and the use of early warning systems. All of these aspects require technical and other skilled abilities.

Disaster Risk Management (DRM) (as opposed to traditional disaster management) can thus be viewed as the practical day-to-day application of DRR. It entails a continuous process involving multiple stakeholders across all relevant (to specific hazards) sectors and disciplines. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) (2004:3) defines DRM as:

“The systematic process of using administrative decisions, organisation, operational skills and capacities to implement policies, strategies and coping capacities of the society and communities to lessen the impacts of natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters. This comprises all forms of activities, including structural and non-structural measures to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) adverse effects of hazards”.

Freeman *et al.* (2003) shed further light on various roles required in DRR/DRM in explaining the different aspects of DRM, such as mitigation and preparedness. Mitigation refers to policies and activities that are aimed at reducing an area's vulnerability to damage from future disasters and can be both structural and non-structural. The former relates to the issue of engineering, ensuring that structures and infrastructure in general can withstand various types of hazards. Non-structural mitigation refers to non-engineering measures. Examples used include land use management, building ordinances and codes, education and training (Freeman *et al.* 2003:5). Various governmental departments and other organisations, such as NGOs, can implement these measures.

Preparedness implies building emergency response and disaster management capacity. This might take on the form of contingency planning, exercises/drills, education, establishing early warning systems, identifying evacuation routes and public awareness (Freeman *et al.*, 2003:9). In addition, though many hazards cannot be prevented, some might well be. By way of effective policy, for example, pollution as a slow onset hazard may be prevented.

From the above, it should be clear that DRM requires a wide range of skills, such as those of town planning, engineering, public health, community development and public management to mention only a few. Referring to the latter, DRM has emerged as one of the functional areas of public management. Both public management and DRM are concerned with the common good and well-being of society. The specific focus of DRM is to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all (Van der Waldt 2009:21). Effective Public Management might be seen as one important means of achieving this. DRM is not merely the prerogative of firemen or emergency services. Rather, it can be viewed as an additional lens through which all provincial and municipal departments should view their everyday work. In order for this multidimensional approach to be most effectively achieved, South African legislation and policies stipulate certain requirements.

The South African context

In order to fully realise effective DRM in South Africa, the DMA assigns certain responsibilities to all municipal and provincial Disaster Risk Management Centres (DRMCs) and heads of DRMCs. These responsibilities relate to issues of oversight and coordination. The coordination of DRM, through the National Disaster Management Framework (NDMF), should amongst other aids be achieved by the utilisation of "advisory forums" and "interdepartmental committees" (South Africa 2005:17). The latter are simply committees consisting of senior staff members of each municipal or provincial department, which meet regularly (normally quarterly) to discuss and facilitate decisions regarding

DRM related matters. Through this structure DRM can be assured of being the focus of all departments. Advisory forums by contrast are non-decision-making structures, in other words they have no mandate to make managerial decisions pertaining to DRM. Advisory forums typically consist of all of the members of interdepartmental committees, with the addition of members from outside municipal or provincial government, such as business, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), traditional authorities, and universities. As the name suggests, advisory forums offer advice regarding DRR/DRM related matters in the specific area of jurisdiction. It is thus imperative that DRMCs are in a position to elicit advice from these forums rather than assuming the Advisory Forums will provide solutions to unknown problems. DRM is most effectively implemented at municipal level by ensuring that functional strategies, policies, programmes and projects find embodiment at community level. This is achieved through the development and implementation of standing plans, local policies, procedures and rules. The Integrated Development Plan (IDP), the functional plan according to which municipalities need to operationalise the supply of services and goods, serves as the operational plan for development and disaster risk reduction in any municipality (Van der Waldt *et al.* 2007:242). It is therefore essential that DRM is integrated into IDPs (South Africa 2005:12). Not only should “DRR projects” aimed at reducing vulnerability to a specific hazard be included in IDPs, but IDP projects should also be considered in terms of their potential risk reduction (or aggravating) effects.

DRMCs must also serve as a ‘*repository and conduit*’ (South Africa 2005:86) for information regarding disasters in their area of jurisdiction. In this regard they should be able to advise other organs of state on disaster risk management and related matters. DRMCs must also monitor progress with all disaster risk management actions in their area of jurisdiction, while reporting failures to comply with legislation to the relevant authorities (South Africa 2005:10;13;15).

In light of the above, arguments are made in the NDMF (South Africa 2005:8-9) for the placing of the disaster risk management function within the governmental hierarchy. Disaster Risk Management Centres should be in a position to report non-compliance of various organs of state with disaster risk management legislation. They should also have the necessary authority to ensure organs of state comply with information requests. If the disaster risk management function is located under a specific line function department, disaster risk management functionaries might be placed in a position where they have to report their departmental head for non-compliance or demand information from their superior. In addition, given the requirements for unbiased overview placed upon DRMCs, it could be argued that they should not be placed under a specific line function. This will lead to sectoral bias (South Africa 2005:8). Thus the NDMF (South Africa 2005:9) recommends that the disaster

risk management function in provincial and local government should report to the highest level of political authority, the premier (in the case of provinces) or the mayor (in the case of municipalities).

METHODOLOGY

The South African NDMC commissioned the African Centre for Disaster Studies at NWU to investigate aspects regarding the impact of the placement of district, metropolitan and provincial DRMCs on the effectiveness of DRM in each of these spheres of government

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To explain the effectiveness of the practice of DRM in South African provincial and municipal organs of state;
- To determine the placement of DRMCs in district, metropolitan and provincial government structures in SA;
- To understand how, if at all, the placement of DRMCs within organisational structures impacts on the implementation of the DMA and NDMF.

The research followed a qualitative research design. The research objectives were investigated with the aid of individual interviews. DRMC staff members for selected provincial, metropolitan and district municipalities were subjected to face-to-face interviews. The process included the following steps: The research process was initiated with an e-mail survey distributed to all relevant DMCs. The objective of the survey was simply to gauge how DMCs were placed and which DMCs were placed in a particular manner. The survey gave respondents four possible options (see Table 1 below). DMC staff members could indicate the applicable option as to the placement of their DRMCs and return the questionnaire to the researchers. In certain instances the exact placement of the DRMCs could easily be deduced from websites. The four categories were based on the researchers' previous experience in consulting with government. These categories were proven to be valid as not a single DRMC indicated the "other" option. The results of the survey was expected to give the researchers the necessary data required for purposive sampling of DMCs in order to obtain a fair representation of different placements. However, the results seemed to indicate that the overwhelming majority of DMCs were placed similarly. The results of the initial survey can be seen in Table 1.

The table serves as an illustration of the options researchers had as far as selecting specific DMCs for interviews. Responses seemed to indicate that most DMCs were placed similarly, making comparison between different types of placement quite difficult. Various DMCs were then targeted for in-

Table 1: The Placement of DRMCs in South Africa based on the initial e-mailed questionnaire

	District Municipality	Metropolitan Municipality	Province
As a separate department reporting directly to the municipal manager, premier, or mayor	2	0	0
As part of another department, with staff members dedicated exclusively to disaster management;	14	5	7
As part of another department with no staff members exclusively dedicated to disaster management	1	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Total	17	5	7

Source: ??

depth interviews. In total five provincial DRMCs, ten district DRMCs, and four metropolitan DRMCs participated in qualitative interviews. One senior member of each DMC was interviewed. In the case of one metropolitan DRMC, two senior staff members were interviewed.

Interviews with DRMCs started with the following open question:

How effective would you rate Disaster Risk Management in your provincial or local government? Please explain your answer.

After interviewees responded, this was followed by more specific probing questions. This relatively open-ended format was selected as the researchers expected possible important contextual issues to emerge of which they were not yet aware. Thus, participants could freely discuss their experiences. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of issues relating to the research, such as holding departments accountable for non-compliance and potential internal political considerations, confidentiality was assured to all participants. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed.

Data analysis took the form of thematic analysis. Often practitioners felt that DRM in their jurisdiction was functioning well when in fact very few of the requirements and recommendations of the DMA 57 of 2002 and NDMF had been met, such as interdepartmental committees, Disaster Management Plans (DMPs) and all round integration between the actions of various departments.

The researchers kept this in mind during interviews and analysis. Thus, interviewees were not simply asked how well DRM was functioning in their municipality, but the researchers rather tried to form an overall understanding of the internal dynamics of the specific province or municipality.

Constraints experienced during the research process

The researchers experienced some constraints during the research process, which implies certain limitations to the findings. Initially, the methodology included a quantitative element whereby all other municipal and provincial departments were sent an e-mail questionnaire to elicit their perspectives on DRM in their jurisdiction. The researchers considered it important to also obtain the perspectives of various other departments' staff, in addition to DRMCs, in light of the fact that DRM is supposed to be a responsibility of all provincial and municipal departments. As there were time constraints relating to the requirements of the commissioned project, the e-mail questionnaire was considered the most appropriate means of obtaining the required information. However, four months into the six-month project, after repeated follow-up e-mails, the quantitative survey was abandoned due to a very low response rate.

Secondly, the research revealed that virtually all DRMCs were placed similarly within institutional structures, with literally only three exceptions. The fact that only three DRMCs were placed differently from the norm implies that comparison of the effectiveness of DRM in a given organisation, based on where DRMCs are located in their institutional structures, was not possible. Rather, the researchers relied strongly on how DMC staff members felt that the location of their DMC impacted on their effectiveness. This left the possibility that heads of DRMCs might have commented, on the basis of their own personal interests and ambitions, feeling that they should be in a higher position in the institutional hierarchy. The researchers tried to remedy this possible bias by evaluating the merit of the arguments put forward.

PROGRESS WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DRM

DRM in South Africa does not seem to have evolved significantly since the promulgation of the DMA in 2002. Though this is true for DRM in South Africa in general, the situation seems particularly severe in district municipalities and certain provinces. Respondents reported various constraints to effective DRM. This section reflects on these constraints, seeking to explain the apparently slow progress of DRM in South Africa.

Coordination and oversight as discussed in the NDMF are in many cases functioning poorly. It was often reported that advisory forums and interdepartmental committees had either not yet been established, were in the process of being established, were poorly attended or had already collapsed due to a lack of interest. Many DRMCs indicated that they were serving as a conduit or repository for information. In particular, where disaster risk assessments have already been conducted, DRMCs gathered information about historic events. The exchange of information with other departments was however not reported by many. This seems to be indicative of a general ignorance in other line departments of DRM related matters.

For the most part DRMCs did not indicate that they had reported staff members from other organs of state for not complying with the DMA. A lack of cooperation from other departments seems typically to be interpreted as a lack of knowledge rather than ill intent. These matters were more often than not addressed in a friendlier manner, where *“educating colleagues”* rather than reporting them to superiors was the prevailing attitude. However, some (n=4) DRMCs did question the prospects for doing such reporting in the future, in the light of their particular placement within the institutional structures, which in many instances would entail reporting someone in a higher position.

There were, however, also cases which can be reflected on positively. In certain cases advisory forums and interdepartmental committees were in fact reported as functioning very well. In one of the provincial advisory forums the Office of the Premier participates through representation by an active delegate from his/her office. Other DRMCs indicated that other organs of state are becoming more aware of them and that interaction with other departments has steadily been increasing over the past few years.

The following constraints in particular were reported by many DRMCs.

Ignorance

There seems to be a significant amount of ignorance especially in district municipalities, regarding DRM. Officials often complained that they felt that their superiors or other departments did not take them or DRM seriously. A key indicator of the above is the failure in continuity of interdepartmental committees and advisory forums. Typically, representatives from various municipal departments simply fail to attend these meetings, while in other instances departmental representatives are too junior for their presence to be very useful, for example as pertains to decision making. Line function departments still seem to be ignorant of their crucial role in DRM, whether it pertains to the collaborative nature of DRM or even the shift in thinking referred to above with regard to the response as compared with DRR/DRM. The following quotation

by a district head of disaster risk management offers a good summary of what was observed by the researchers throughout:

“...there are certain people that still believe that there is a specific department that is disaster management, and it is their own baby”.

According to one of the respondents, disaster risk management is still confused with the management of incidents. Thus, the fundamental principles of multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral collaboration are in most instances very poorly understood, if at all:

“What we are lacking in terms of our senior staff is the understanding of the disaster management concept. Most people remember they are still regarded as extra management. They take it according to the old civil law of protections act that disaster management is a response, when there is an incident you just respond. If they could understand the current approach then I think it would be easier for us to move in terms of that”.

Another respondent explained this incident management perspective of line departments by arguing that the approach was still relatively new. Thus, there is still a dire need for politicians and staff at local level to be informed by means of workshops about the role and nature of DRM. According to Van der Walddt *et al.* (2007:245), without these bodies the principles of co-operative governance to which the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, and the DMA refer will become difficult to realise.

Resources

Very few respondents reported that they had enough resources such as an adequate budget, facilities and skilled people to fulfil their tasks. The apparently poor progress with the implementation of DRM was first and foremost blamed on the lack of funding or an inadequate budget. This was especially the case in district municipalities and some (two out of five interviewed) provinces. This may likely be attributed to the level of ignorance of senior officials discussed above, but possibly also in certain district municipalities to the absolute level of available funding. It could be assumed that district municipalities, which are more rural and less densely populated, would have a much narrower tax base than metropolitan municipalities. The interviews seemed to indicate that in general metropolitan DRMCs seem to be far better resourced than district DRMCs and many provincial DRMCs. None of the metropolitan DRMCs had major concerns regarding resources.

District municipalities stated that most of the local municipalities under their jurisdiction were relying on funds from them and were not budgeting for DRM activities. The lack of funding often implied poor access to essential facilities such as computers, vehicles and information technology systems to complete work-related tasks. In addition, important DRM related developmental projects were considered to be poorly funded. This was specifically the case for many district municipalities.

Skilled labour in terms of DRM was indicated in many cases (eight out of ten districts, one metro and two provinces) as one of the areas where capacity was lacking and an urgent priority. Two of the respondents outlined that the quality of DRM is influenced by the kind of skilled workers employed in DRM departments. These workers influence the efficiency of the DRM function by projecting a positive image to sector departments through the sharing of their knowledge and insight in the managing of issues and incidents that may occur. It was further reported that many DRMC staff had too heavy a workload. This reportedly leads to inefficient and poor delivery of DRM services.

Lines of Communication

In at least five cases, DRMC functionaries explicitly stated that the lines of reporting were cumbersome and that a quick response to requests was not forthcoming. In terms of DRM, these long reporting lines to the municipal manager or premier were viewed as being a constraint. In most cases it was reported that a more direct line to the highest authority would facilitate the implementation of disaster risk management.

THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE PLACEMENT OF CENTRES FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DRM

It seems that very few provinces or municipalities actually comply with the legislative recommendation regarding the placement of DRMCs. DRMCs are typically placed at least two to three decision-making levels from the mayor or premier. In other words, DRMCs have at least one superior official, for example a director, between them and the highest authority according to the various institutional departmental structures. In addition, it was also argued above that DRM in South Africa is not yet effectively implemented. Two questions might now be asked. Firstly, how important is the placement of Municipal Disaster Risk Management Centres (MDRMCs) and Provincial Disaster Risk Management Centres (PDRMCs) relative to the various aspects cited above, when it comes to ensuring effective DRM? Secondly, are there any causal linkages between the

placement of the DRMC and any of the aspects discussed above? The argument made here (with some qualifications) is that placement closer to the highest possible authority might well reduce the prevalence of many of these challenges such as:

- Reporting lines/ decision-making emergencies;
- Decision making DRM;
- Post level/muscle;
- Allocation of resources.

Most DRMC staff members interviewed felt that they would have been able to function better, had they been placed closer to the highest authority. Various reasons for this can be mentioned. These relate to long reporting lines which are problematic when quick decisions need to be taken in emergencies. It seems that after a disastrous event, easier access to an authority figure for the purposes of quick decision-making would have been helpful. At least three district DRMCs noted this. One district disaster manager indicated that:

“Die kommunikasie paadjie word baie lank. Jy het onmiddelik gesagsgesposisie nodig om ‘n besluit te neem.’ **English translation:** ‘The line of communication becomes very long. You immediately need a position of authority in order to take a decision’.

Respondents noted, however, that being placed within another department does have advantages. One MDRMC was of the opinion that being placed within emergency services helped with access to resources, as no other department operated 24 hours a day. Thus, even during abnormal office hours these resources might well be forthcoming.

Effective decision-making for DRM also seems to be hampered by the current state of institutional structures. This also relates to day-to-day DRM activities and in particular the continued involvement of various line function departments. One district disaster manager noted that: “*You know the bureaucracy is actually killing me*”, when commenting on the fact that the content of projects proposed by the MDRMC is constantly changed by their departmental head, who seems to be ignorant of the principles of DRM. Thus, projects devised with DRR in mind, often lose their DRR focus and effectiveness, when they are finally implemented. It often takes a long time for projects to be approved, due to the long chain of command that needs to be followed when projects are proposed. Since disaster risk management staff members are often too junior to attend important budgetary meetings, they have found that officials who are more senior (but who do not yet understand or have an affinity to DRM) make funding decisions, on their behalf.

In terms of obtaining cooperation from various relevant actors, such as municipal departments, the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that placement closer to the highest authority would have made their work easier, as it would entail that they had more “muscle” to do so. In most instances, DRMCs are not permitted to directly contact municipal managers. It might have been easier to achieve cooperation if the municipal manager could quickly be called on to ensure cooperation. Similarly many felt that, had the head of a DRMC been at a higher post level, he or she would have had more clout and might have been able to elicit greater cooperation from other departments. Similarly, regarding the NDMF prescription that DRMCs should be able to report non-compliance of other departments with the DMA, four respondents stated that they would have been more comfortable doing this, had they been placed closer to the highest authority.

The poor capacity in terms of resources of DRMCs may in certain cases be ascribed to a perceived lack of importance or unwillingness on the part of high level management to allocate sufficient resources. Two district DRMCs reported that they felt there was adequate money available within the municipality. The problem was however that far too little is allocated to DRMCs and DRM related projects. This point indicates the need for proper DRM induction for senior managers and politicians. If this does not occur, the placement of DRMCs reporting directly to the highest authority might not render the expected results.

The research also unveiled certain arguments in contradiction to those stated immediately above. In the case of one metro, respondents felt that the placement of the centre is a secondary concern to the quality of staff and the individuals “on board” with disaster risk management. Thus, if there are skilled staff working in the DRMC and there is buy-in from other departments’ staff members in the municipality or province as well as the mayor or municipal manager, DRM can function well. This position is merited as typically those municipalities and provinces reporting that DRM is functioning reasonably well also reported that they had good buy-in from their premiers, mayors or municipal managers. The following quotations illustrate this point.

“I’m very fortunate that I enjoy good cooperation with my city manager, you know... you could be in a situation where the city manager does not give you that support, so I’m just very fortunate in the sort of sense.” – a metropolitan disaster manager.

“I think I have to be honest, we are very happy where we are the moment. Because there is cooperation and we get the support from our HODs. Also because there is integration, you have your IDP and so on”. – a provincial disaster manager.

One might, however, question how exactly this buy-in can be achieved in instances where it does not yet exist. The most likely argument may be that the placement of the centre close to the highest possible authority may better facilitate such buy-in. If compliance by departments with the DMA is required and endorsed by an authority, buy-in from various departments might be more easily achieved. No matter how competent the staff of the DRMC may be, if they are ignored by other departments (which as discussed above is often the case), the effectiveness of DRM will be limited to those actions the DRMC can achieve on its own. This argument, however, is based on the assumption that the highest authority has bought into the concept of DRM. Ensuring this buy-in will still be an essential requirement, if the argument that the DRMC should be placed very close to this authority is to be promoted as a recommendation.

Various arguments pertaining to reporting lines constraining effective DRM and emergency decision-making, resource allocation and the clout or authority of DMCs, are presented above (with qualifications based on certain counterarguments), supporting the placement of DRMCs close to the highest possible authority. However, we make such a recommendation with caution. In only two cases are DRMCs reporting directly to the municipal manager and in no cases reporting to the mayor. Thus, the potential pitfalls and virtues of such a placement can only be speculated on. Still, the placement of centres closer to the highest possible authority is likely to improve the quality of DRM, as it should improve oversight and coordination by placing greater weight behind DRM, provided there is buy-in from that highest authority. It could also improve the ignorance about DRM by various municipal and provincial departments if it becomes a concept endorsed and a practice enforced by the highest authority.

THE PLACEMENT OF THE DRMC

In the section above the authors argue that PDRMCs, district and metropolitan DRMCs should ideally be placed closest to the highest authority. However, exactly under which authority (political or managerial/administrative) the DRMCs should be placed, is another contentious issue. Though the NDMF recommends the highest political authority, such cases were not found anywhere. In two cases DRMCs were however placed in a position reporting directly to the highest managerial/administrative authority, namely the municipal manager, who reports to the mayor.

In the case of provinces, the office of the premier (with relevant duties delegated to managerial staff) serves both a political and a managerial function (South Africa 1994, 69-70; South Africa 2007: 14). Thus, regarding provinces, it can be recommended that PDRMC report directly to the Office of the Premier.

However, in metropolitan and district municipalities, there is a distinction between the Office of the Mayor and that of the municipal manager.

Respondents provided various arguments regarding the placement of DRMC in district or metropolitan municipalities. Those who argue that disaster risk management should report directly to the Office of the Mayor, argue that disaster risk management is often a political matter. One disaster manager responding to a probe regarding where he feels the DMC should be placed argued that:

“I still feel, like the framework says, we should be in the office of the mayor, because everything around disaster management is very political as the community is involved. When the community is affected by the disaster and the first place they go to... their contact with government is their political..., their ward councillor. And the ward councillor reports to the mayor. So that is where the first contact is – in the office of the mayor.”

The argument above however, seems to relate more to response than DRM. The induction of politicians in DRM and response related issues, with clear lines of communication to all relevant administrative or managerial officials, such as the DRMC and municipal manager, would be necessary for the above stated reasons. However, DRM for the most part revolves around the everyday management of developmental and various other activities undertaken by a municipality. Thus, if one takes it as a given that MDRMCs should be located as close as possible to the highest authority, then surely the appropriate positioning is close to the municipal manager.

According to Van der Waldt *et al.* (2007:75), the municipal manager is responsible to the mayor for the functions and responsibilities assigned to him or her by the council and mayor such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and the performance management system of the relevant municipality. Section 55(1) of the Municipal Systems Act furthermore states that the responsibilities of municipal managers extend to various developmental activities. They are responsible for the administration and implementation of the municipality's by-laws, policies and other applicable legislation, as well as monitoring progress with the implementation of the IDP and the management of the provision of services to the local community in a sustainable and equitable manner.

The functions of mayors are stipulated in section 56(2) of the *Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998*. One of the functions is that a mayor should recommend to the municipal council strategies, programmes and services to address priority needs through the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (Craythorne 2006:109). Since 1994 local government has been required to implement integrated development planning. This requires municipalities to co-ordinate all development activities within their areas of jurisdiction with the aim

of promoting the economic and social development of the community. Both political and administrative authorities in local government are expected to be involved in development planning.

According to section 26 of the Municipal Systems Act and the NDMF (South Africa 2005:105), DRM should be incorporated into the IDP. It should thus be clear that, if there is a link between continuous development planning and the implementation of IDPs and DRM, then overseeing the implementation of DRM should also firmly fall within the ambit of the responsibilities of the municipal manager. The municipal manager reports to the mayor and while the latter and other politicians, in particular council, may make recommendations regarding local development policy, it is the responsibility of the municipal manager to see to it that these policies are in fact implemented.

There are, however, potential problems with this proposed positioning. One district DRMC head reporting directly to the municipal manager, noted that his municipal manager was exceptionally busy and that it was normally very difficult to secure some of his time. This particular municipal manager is apparently often out of his office, attending meetings and performing various other duties. Though some issues can be discussed over the phone, others require longer *“sit-down”* sessions. A possible solution proposed with regard to this problem would be to appoint a deputy municipal manager or a manager in the office of the municipal manager, to whom certain responsibilities can be delegated.

Furthermore, those who propose that MDRMCs report directly to the municipal manager argue against the placement of the DRMC in the office of the mayor due to the temporary nature of the position. Indeed continuity might be enhanced if disaster risk management reports directly to the municipal manager.

To summarise, it is argued that the ideal placement of MDRMCs is to report directly to municipal managers. DRM is a management and developmental function in need of continuous oversight. Thus, someone in a more permanent position of authority who is concerned with the day-to-day management of the various municipal departments seems to be the most useful person for MDRMCs to be reporting to. Similarly, the ideal placement of PDRMC is to report directly to the Office of the Premier.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of Disaster Risk Management legislation in South Africa has been very slow since the inception of the DMA in 2002. Many, especially district municipalities, still do not have the most basic DRM structures in place. There still seems to be ignorance regarding the basic principles of DRM especially amongst most municipal departments. In general DMRCs seem to

be poorly capacitated and lack sufficient capability to obtain cooperation from other departments. Common complaints of DRMC staff members include a lack of staff, equipment and project funding.

The researchers recommend that the placement of DRMCs closest to the highest managerial authority (i.e. Office of the Premier or municipal manager) would be in the best interest of DRM in South Africa. Such a placement would be able to facilitate better cooperation from and between various departments. Furthermore, long reporting lines do hamper action in cases of emergency. Better buy-in and awareness of the principles of DRM by senior managers might also improve resource allocation in terms of DRM in municipalities and provinces.

However, in order to achieve the results envisioned above, buy-in from this highest authority must first be achieved. It cannot be viewed as a given. This recommended placement of DRMCs would not necessarily in itself achieve the desired outcomes. Such a recommendation must be accompanied by measures such as DRM induction training as a requirement for the relevant senior management staff. The NDMC through its political and administrative mechanism must advocate that city managers, municipal managers, directors in the offices of premiers and Heads of Departments at provincial and municipal level, are sufficiently capacitated, by way of thorough induction training.

DRM implies day-to-day management, thus DRMCs should be placed under the authority of the highest managerial authority. The uncertainty in terms of the duration of political appointments also implies that better continuity might be achieved were it placed under the authority of the highest administrative/managerial, as opposed to political, authority. However, due to the unavoidably political nature of disaster risk management, clear communication of disaster risk management related information to relevant politicians should still take place. These individuals, including mayors and councillors are responsible to a constituency and need to be aware of important issues regarding DRM and response in their constituency. In light of the political nature of disaster management, lines of communication between MDMCs, PDMCs and politicians at all relevant levels should still exist. For example, politicians responsible to constituencies should be informed regarding actions being taken to prevent and respond to disasters affecting that constituency. In the case of the mayor, this might merely entail additional reporting by the municipal manager to the mayor.

NOTE

- 1 This statement is made bearing in mind all municipal management activities potentially pertain to DRM; the reference here is to those perceived by participants to be conducted under the rubric of DRR/DRM.

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AUTHORS' CONTACT DETAILS

Gideon van Riet
School for Social and Government
North-West University
Potchefstroom Campus
Tel: 018 299 1630
Cell: 0732540775
Fax: 018 293 5266
E-mail: Gideon.vanriet@nwu.ac.za (corresponding author)

Melvin Diedericks
School for Social and Government
North-West University
Potchefstroom Campus
E-mail: Melvin.diedericks@nwu.ac.za