
Guest editorial: DRR pioneer interviews

Guest editorial

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There are many historical examples of societies successfully dealing with natural hazards, often dating back several centuries. But it took until 1970 for the UN General Assembly for the first time to invite the Secretary-General to submit recommendations on:

- (1) “*Pre-disaster planning at the national and international levels*”; . . .
- (2) “*The application of technology to, and scientific research for, the prevention and control of natural disasters, or the mitigation of the effects of such disasters*”.

So, DRR at the global level in its contemporary form celebrated its 50th anniversary a few years ago! Whilst the recent history of DRR (post-2000) is overall well documented since the establishment of the United Nations International Strategy on Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), there are serious gaps in the knowledge of the different actors and initiatives during the three early DRR decades.

Therefore, a small team of committed “DRR historians” decided that the time was right to document and more widely share these early experiences. Three arguments were given for this initiative:

- (1) “Passing the baton”: there is a new generation of DRR researchers and practitioners who are not always aware of or have easy access to the early work. Many earlier lessons learnt and past insights are still valuable and could still enrich the current DRR discourse and practice.
- (2) Many of the primary witnesses and pioneers of this early period are ageing. It is therefore key to document, as soon as possible, their personal observations and reflections, making use of audio-visual means.
- (3) Much of the information and publications developed during this period date back to the pre-internet period and are not available online, which entails the risk that, over time, valuable information on this important period may be lost.

In the spring of 2021, over 30 DRR pioneers were interviewed. In these interviews, the DRR legends reflected, amongst other material, on their initial personal engagement in DRR work, their main achievements in those early days, the key insights they gained and the challenges they faced. A selection of these interviews was posted on the [UNDRR YouTube channel](#).

This issue of *Disaster Prevention and Management* publishes a selection of the transcripts of these DRR Pioneer video interviews. In a subsequent issue, additional transcripts will be published. All texts are based on the recorded interviews, but occasionally minor additions have been added or certain statements rephrased for greater clarity.

All transcripts and videos were developed in the context of a UNDRR project on the history of DRR. The views expressed therein are not necessarily those of UNDRR or its sponsors. For more information on UNDRR work on DRR history, visit the “[A Walk through DRR History](#)” PreventionWeb page.

The first editor (Bruno Haghebaert) led all this work, setting up and conducting the interviews, developing the UNDRR (2022) webpage, initiating and co-organising a summer school with the UK-based DRR pioneers in Oxford in July 2023 and following through with this special issue to publication.



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