



## COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE DURING GJERDRUM LANDSLIDE IN NORWAY

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents some successful elements of collaboration during an emergency response to a landslide happened in Gjerdrum, Norway. It will further shed light on the pivotal role of communication and knowledge sharing within organizations, planning versus improvisation, and formal versus informal connections. Effective collaboration networks, characterised by discursive properties such as reciprocity, participatory decision making, and collaborative leadership, are identified as successful element in this incident.

### 1. Introduction

Countries and communities need to develop adaptation solutions and implement action to respond to the impacts of climate change that are already happening, as well as prepare for future impacts'. These words are from the UN Climate Change Secretariat (UNFCCC, 2021), discussing adaptation to climate change. However, natural disasters are not isolated events, as they are often the result of complex interactions between social and environmental (Boin et al., 2020). To address this multifaceted issue, the article will address the ISO 31000 principles and refer to ASIS handbook Domain Seven.

Collaboration across multiple geographic and organisational boundaries is one of the key part of enhancing risk management and resilience that enable effective response and recovery activities in a natural disaster (Therrien, Beauregard, & Valiquette-L'Heureux, 2015). The evaluation reports of several disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, the California wildfires, and the flood in Germany in 2021, indicate that a more organised inter-organisational collaboration would have reduced the destructive effects of these events. The dynamic situation in natural disasters and responding to complex events often require emergency organisations to deviate from established organizational structures to address a novel context and new tasks (Andreassen & Borch, 2020). Responding to natural disasters requires organisations to collaborate because a single organisation may not respond independently due to rapid changes in the environment, a lack of experience, the scope of the task, and insufficient resources (Kapucu & Garayev, 2011). This inter-organizational collaboration can be ensured by the systematic sharing of information possessed by each organization and by combining their goals (Therrien, Beauregard, & Valiquette-L'Heureux, 2015). Therefore, in such collaborative emergency response, several organisations, such as police departments, paramedic services, and rescue agencies, may be involved. In addition, depending on the scale of the emergency, local authorities, government departments, military forces, and various businesses from different nations may also be engaged. Therefore, resilience enhancement in a natural disaster requires an integrated hazard mitigation and



resilience plan that includes inter-organisational collaboration among interdependent organisations (Godschalk, 2003).

This article presents some best practices of the inter-organizational relationships in the landslide event in the small town of Ask in the Gjerdrum municipality in Norway. Due to its coastline and wide mountain ranges, Norway is highly exposed to changing weather conditions. The report "Climate in Norway 2100", provided by the Norwegian Centre for Climate Services (NCCS, 2017), indicates that gradually increasing temperature, increased precipitation and extreme rainfall, and increased floods in the future climate may cause more quick clay slides in certain areas in Norway (p.34). In addition, some flood and landslide events have been studied to improve risk and crisis management related to natural hazards.

## 2. Case

The 2020 Gjerdrum landslide occurred in Norway, at Ask village, Gjerdrum's administrative center. This quick clay landslide spanned an area of 300 by 700 meters and caused debris flow to affect an additional 9 hectares. While some individuals were rescued and others evacuated themselves, 10 people lost their lives and several buildings were destroyed, resulting in an estimated economic cost exceeding \$100 million (Nikel, 2021). The Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC) report states that during the early phase of the Gjerdrum landslide, the primary challenge was to acquire a comprehensive understanding of its extent and to request appropriate resources (JRCC, 2021). Emergency situations are often characterized by uncertainty and limited information, and incidents occurring during the night or under adverse weather conditions, such as the Gjerdrum landslide at night during the Christmas period, exacerbate the challenge of gaining an overview. The incident necessitated a demanding search and rescue (SAR) operation due to the significant number of people requiring immediate attention, and the subsequent breakdowns in infrastructure, such as water, sewage, roads, and electricity in the area, added to the complexity of the operation (JRCC, 2021).

## 3. Best practices

The response to Gjerdrum landslide is considered as fairly successful. It could have been ended as a tragedy. Reviewing the evaluation reports and interviewing the involved actors revealed some elements of great collaboration. In Norway, after the terrorist attack in 2011, several reforms have happened and collaboration was added to the crisis management principles. Since then organizations have gone through exercises together to enhance interorganizational collaboration. The municipality in Gjerdrum planned an exercise based on landslide scenario but due to the outbreak of Covid, unfortunately they could not execute it. And if they had done that, the interorganizational challenges that they faced would have been minimized. This revealed the importance of joint exercises and how it can positively influence on **information dissemination, communication, clarity of roles, establishing common operating terms and allocation of resources**.

During the incidents, fire brigades invited their upper level, Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (DSB), to listen to their meeting at operating center. This is the first time they have done it and it is identified as an efficient way of passing the information to decision maker at higher level without creating any confusion. However, DSB believes this should be an invite from lower level and not



a command from them. This example highlights the importance of flexibility and trust among involved organization and across levels.

Moreover, having a liaison who has decision making authority was identified a facilitator element in collaborative emergency response. This might save huge amount of time during crisis.

The crisis management structure of Norway is found to function very well during the landslide because police was the leader of operation and there were almost no conflict when it comes to decision making and clarity of roles. There were two operation centers - side by side during the days of a rescue operation, and one of which continued its operation for two months after the first one ended. One operation center was focused on the rescue operation, the other on all the other tasks that also had to be taken care of, but which did not fall directly under the rescue operation. The tasks that were solved from the second operation center also very important tasks and had an impact on life and health. There were, for example, farms with several hundred animals within the evacuated zone, there was a need for measures to improve infrastructure such as water and roads and there was a need to retrieve important assets from evacuated buildings. This has been identified as an innovative approach to handle crisis and prevent overloading of information in one center and categorize the tasks during operation to facilitate collaboration.

This case revealed how critical is to have personal and informal contact during crisis. For example, municipality explained that due to covid there faced so many obstacles and all the roads were destroyed, therefore they had problem with transferring people to a safe place. It was almost impossible to get public transport in order, so the person in charge had some contact in private transport companies and call him for assistance.

All above examples are in line with the findings from round table that emphasis how significant are the soft skills such as communication, continuous interaction, cooperation and making innovative decisions.

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Funded by  
the European Union



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