



Input Paper

**Prepared for the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction  
2015**

**FOUR IMPEDIMENTS TO HFA SUCCESS**

**COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF RISK, YOUTH INVOLVEMENT, BIPARTISAN  
SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT FUNDING**

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19.12.2013

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## Introduction

The United Nations Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015<sup>1</sup> (HFA) offered a substantial pathway to reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience of nations and communities to disaster. However conspicuous obstacles remain persistent and warrant further discussion. As we head towards United Nations Hyogo Framework for Action 2 it is prudent to highlight some of these impediments which have hampered the successful implementation of the HFA goals.

This essay illuminates four reoccurring obstructions to transitioning the HFA into grassroots praxis and offers empirical case studies to highlight these. The first obstacle is ensuring community members recognize the hazards which affect them and accept some ownership of the risk involved. Secondly the role of young people throughout the disaster management cycle seems incohesive and undefined. Thirdly the apparent lack of will within some levels of government, councils and organisations to implement the HFA disrupts what should be bipartisan support. Finally the connection between development funding and the resilience, vulnerability and capacities of people affected by the development proposal is not formalised.

## Ownership of risk

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies can only be truly effective once community members acknowledge hazards as a legitimate threat and accept some ownership of their risk to the hazards. Enabling community recognition of hazards is critical to success, for people who recognize their own vulnerability to a hazard are more likely to heed warnings and attempt to mitigate the effects of the hazard (Hung, Shaw & Kabayashi 2007). Providing

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<sup>1</sup> The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA) is the strategy which aims to reduce losses from disaster around the world. This strategy was devised and agreed upon by many stakeholders including, international bodies, governments and disaster practitioners. With just two years left to run planning for a follow up strategy, or Hyogo framework for Action 2, is well under way.

information is ineffective without the acceptance of personal risk and consequential absorption of knowledge by community members. Calls for shared responsibility of emergency management and resilience strategies across all levels of Government, business, non-profit sectors and, importantly, community members (Council of Australian Governments 2011) seem elusive to achieve in practice. It would appear well meaning external support frequently overlook the capacities embedded within communities, leading to excessive or inappropriate support, which in turn, suppresses embedded capacities (Willison & Gaillard 2012).

While Kenny (2006) presents community developments "vision for empowering communities to take collective responsibility for their own development" (p. 10) no clear pathway to develop this ownership has been developed. The need to "ensure DRR is a local priority" (HFA 2005, p. 6) and to put in place the "mechanism to engage the active participation and ownership ... [of] communities" (ibid p. 13) is certain. However uncovering pathways to empowerment which facilitate community ownership of resilience issues remains elusive.

While working as disaster risk management officer with the Dominica Red Cross it became clear that many community members were proactive in working to improve their situation. A good example is the Safer Houses Training Programme implemented by the Dominican Red Cross with support from the French Red Cross in the communities of Mero, Layou and Warner. The programme began by assessing community homes to ensure suitability; this includes the state of the roof, the condition of the frame and foundations. During this exercise the number and type of hurricane straps required to strengthen each home is listed. This assessment also includes materials such as roofing nails where insufficient, and bracing of the structure as required. These materials were purchased and supplied free of charge as part of the program. Community members were involved in this process of assessment with training scheduled in communities soon after.

Day one of the training was spent in the classroom, with a Red Cross team conducting sessions through-out the day. The course covered safety, natural hazards, vulnerable building sites, bracing, structure terminology and the important concept of forming a link from the building's foundation to the roof utilizing hurricane ties. This central concept greatly reduces the likelihood of the roof being torn from the structure during high winds.

The second day training moved into the field, with community members learning to assess and strengthen homes by installing hurricane straps, collar ties and bracing as required. The trainees were then broken into groups to continue strengthening the remaining homes in their communities. The community groups were monitored and supported by the Dominica Red Cross as this was completed. People from builders to homemakers and fishermen to teachers became involved with approximately 50% gender balance. The skills and experience thus gained offer long term benefits to individuals and communities.

The enthusiasm and sense of community which were evident in bringing these hardworking people together on their weekend was heartwarming. Their delight at the

thought of strengthening their own and their neighbor's roof came in many cases from personal experience of living without a roof following previous events. The community cohesion and sense of responsibility was a major factor in people's motivation for involvement and was used to further motivate additional team members. The ownership of the substantial risks they faced from cyclone and other disasters was clearly evident. Acknowledgment of the risk, coupled with a strong sense of community, in this way formed a community ownership of risk which with adequate facilitation reduced vulnerabilities and strengthened community resilience.

This ownership of risk is not only due to personal acceptance of the risk, and community cohesion, but also facilitated by a need and desire to improve their situation. Fundamental to these goals is a commitment from governing bodies to relinquish control to cohesive communities. There is a need to "rekindle the spirit and actuality of organizing collectively for the common good" (Brookfield S 2005 p. 60). Likewise social values which build involvement, collaboration, and acceptance need to be endorsed and encouraged (UNICEF and RET – Protecting Through Education 2013). It is therefore critical to engage the community and build on existing capacities.

Governments at the local level must access and make use of community knowledge, expertise and capacities (Regional Australia Institute 2013) in ways which facilitate community cohesion. It is only via community capacity development and community cohesion that essential community involvement will follow. Community cohesiveness and connectedness must be an accepted and legitimate government priority in order to rebuild a *common good* mentality. It has taken many years to erode this mentality and to transfer ownership of risk away from communities; therefore we may expect it to take many years to restore them.

### **The role of young people in emergency management**

Acceptance of individual ownership of risk must begin with our younger people. Community disaster response teams must not only be inclusive of, but specifically target, young people in order that they become the spearhead of resilient communities. The UNICEF commitment to provide safe schools and educate children about climate change and other risks they face (United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination 2013) is an excellent start point. Likewise, calls for school curriculums to include disaster risk management strategies (Council of Australian Governments 2011; UNICEF and RET – Protecting Through Education 2013) provide evidence of a movement towards youth involvement in emergency management. Unmistakably educational facilities must be structurally safe, have an active disaster management plan, and include hazard awareness activities for students. However these components are insufficient to facilitate ownership of risk within the student body.

Provision of a safe environment alone does not provide the student body with the necessary tools to respond adequately following an event. From the authors experience young people react and respond to events in a highly appropriate manner, often with little or no training. This community asset is overlooked in many countries where the assumption is made that there is some danger in including the youth in a response effort.

With caution and age appropriate training, youth involvement is a building block to long term resilience we can ill afford to ignore. Perhaps the time has come to revisit our notions relating to 'children in disasters' and to develop trained youth emergency response team members both within and outside educational facilities. Only with this level of responsibility and risk ownership will disaster risk reduction (DRR) and resilience be developed within younger people.

Youth involvement in DRR training is not a new space; many examples of youth involvement exist around the globe. The Red Cross offers varying levels of involvement to young people certainly in the Caribbean and South America. Working with the Dominica Red Cross the author experienced many examples of the massive contribution young people bring to both DRR and response given the opportunity.

The Dominica Red Cross "Club 25" began as a youth blood donor group. Members donate blood regularly and raise awareness within the community of the need for blood donation. These activities are carried out in collaboration with the Blood Lab of Princess Margaret Hospital, which acknowledged their services with an award in 2012. The club however has extended its scope to include all facets of Dominica Red Cross activities such as disaster risk management training, first aid, ambulance transfer, shelter management and community disaster awareness campaigns. Club 25 members also assist with vulnerability and capacity assessments in disaster prone communities, and provide disaster response services as National Intervention Team members. Some volunteers have progressed to the next level of accreditation as Regional Intervention Team members capable of responding to regional disaster situations. There are members as young as 16 years of age who are involved in training, simulation exercises, and community engagement. However these members are restricted from being involved in some response activities. The majority of members are between 18 and 30 years of age, full of energy, and highly motivated. This dynamic youth group contributes enormously to the Dominica Red Cross community image. The Club 25 is also heavily involved in fundraising activities such as youth camps, car wash drives, cake sales and barbecues. The proceeds of these activities fund participation in overseas youth activities and provide social activities for needy children.

The Dominica Red Cross Club 25 highlights the important contribution young people offer to disaster management in general and specifically the building of long term community resilience. The excitement and fulfilment which flow from working alongside communities to both build resilience to disaster and recover from an event, further increases enthusiasm in these young people. This enthusiasm develops a thirst for training and development which continues to push the group into new components of the disaster management cycle.

Stimulating enthusiasm for disaster management practices in young people offers a substantial pathway to reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience of communities to disaster. This pathway furthermore enables development of compassion and community cohesion.

It is also important to address the involvement of young people under the age of 18 in disaster management. Many countries shy away from this group of motivated people due to litigation issues. However, it is interesting to note The Federal Emergency Management

Agency in the United States offers “Teen CERT” a community emergency response team training, in selected schools (FEMA 2013). In Australia, Surf Lifesaving Australia offers an exemplar of youth preparedness and involvement, while educational programs such as Red Alert (Emergency Management Queensland 2009) developed by young people, for young people, is an example of how innovative Australian Emergency management can be. In Freetown, Sierra Leone a pilot program to bring youth into community based disaster management committees harnesses this underutilised community resource (Y Care International 2013). It simply makes good sense to involve young people in all facets of disaster management, including decision making and response. Furthermore with study commitments and extracurricular activities the 18 to 25 age group may not be the most appropriate target group to develop an interest in disaster management. Why not develop a thirst for vulnerability reduction, hazard identification and resilience within people well under the age of 18.

The disaster relief organisation ShelterBox has now cooperated with local Scout groups in the aftermath of 23 disasters in 19 different countries across the globe over the past 8 years. As active members of the communities affected by natural disasters or humanitarian crises Scouts have supported the ShelterBox’s response teams in setting up emergency shelter and in ‘train the trainer’ initiatives (ShelterBox 2012). This partnership which began spontaneously in the immediate aftermath of disaster demonstrates emergency management utilising available resources and capacities within a community. This group of motivated and community minded young people have vital skills which have assisted communities recovering from disaster.

The Hyogo Framework for Action 2013 advocates some involvement of young people, however it is time to embrace and fully manifest the contribution young people can make and harness their power to effect change (Babugura 2012). Young people display capabilities for involvement in disaster risk reduction which is largely untapped (ibid) and must also play a role during any recovery process (UNICEF and RET – Protecting Through Education 2013). The involvement of young people in risk assessment and reduction strategies builds capacity now and supports their capabilities as adults (ibid). A consultative process at community level for youth driven risk reduction practices is needed (ibid) in order to engage young people and build ownership of risk within this demographic.

### **Bipartisan support for HFA implementation**

The third impediment to HFA realization is organisations, governments and council’s apparent lack of will to implement the HFA. This impediment can partly be attributed to a lack of understanding of disaster risk obligations and pathways to achieving these obligations within the people charged with reducing risk to citizens (UNICEF and RET – Protecting Through Education 2013). This highlights the need for training and education around DRR requirements and obligations within decision makers (ibid). Further exacerbating this situation is the bureaucratic nature of incorporating emerging risk and hazard information into planning arenas (Bacon 2012). Where more developed nations display such reluctance to implement HFA guidelines how can developing countries be expected to do so?

In developing countries mixed messages may cause a reluctance to implement the recommendations. The HFA proposes that "each state has the primary responsibility for its own sustainable development"(HFA 2005) and implementing disaster reduction measures, while also calling on international groups and developed countries to support them. While this support is necessary the precise delineation between individual state obligation and external support must be clear. As Patton & Johnston ( 2006) explain, some preparedness strategies may reduce individual responsibility. Just as communities may be over reliant on governments to 'handle emergency management' so too a developing nation could see emergency management as someone else's problem. National validation of local initiatives in order to facilitate disaster risk reduction on a broad scale is imperative (Willison & Gaillard 2012). Similarly international endorsement of national disaster risk reduction initiatives must also be validated.

### ***Linking development funding to disaster risk reduction***

Finally, the intrinsic link which should exist between development investment, disaster risk reduction, and resilience appears to be an elusive thread. While the need to reduce risk and build resilience to disaster continues to expand, the link to development investment, far from a ground-breaking concept, lacks momentum (Asian Development Bank 2013). While agencies and organisations continue to perceive development and resilience as individual entities, sustained community resilience will be difficult to realise. Disturbingly, new risks will accrue in spite of, and sometimes due to, development investment (ibid).

It would be prudent to revisit existing development funding outcomes to ensure the end product reduces risk and improves the resilience within the community. The author would suggest a holistic approach to all development funding, encompassing resilience, vulnerability and capacity assessment, is both warranted and overdue. Clearly present funding aimed at building preparedness often also builds resilience (Harris K 2013). However the relationship between development funding streams must be formalised. Therefore programs which do aim to increase resilience must incorporate vulnerability analysis (Béné et al. 2012) and also capacity assessment so that all three may be enhanced in synergy.

Development brings change which often also brings further, unexpected change; therefore all development investment holds risk(Wisner, Gaillard & Kelman 2012). There exists a real danger of building resilience at the expense of community or individual welfare(Bacon 2012). To ensure any one facet of development is not introduced to the detriment of another, planning for development must be as holistic as reasonably possible. A crucial part of this process is to ensure disaster risk reduction and resilience building projects are enduring long term.

With the focus on preparedness and prevention the international community is delivering substantial funds into the training and establishment of resilient communities. Programs which train community members in mitigation, disaster preparedness and response do save lives. Programs such as 'community disaster response training' and the thorough 'community vulnerability and capacity assessment' carried out with the assistance of varied funding bodies by Red Cross National Societies are good examples. The community and personal resilience which these tried and tested community capacity building exercises deliver are highlighted when people are compelled to utilise these skills during an event.

Funding arrangements which continually press for new highly vulnerable communities as a means of delivering high numbers of 'new people trained' and 'new communities prepared' would seem appropriate. However, while sound in theory, this procedure does not allow for follow up and revitalization of existing teams of trained persons within previously trained communities. Instead the number of new people trained or affected seems to dictate funding approval.

The author visited community disaster response teams which had become dysfunctional, and found minimal effort and expense necessary to restore functionality. One team had no members with current first aid certificates. Another had become dysfunctional due to the departure of key people and internal politics. Groups soon feel neglected, irrelevant, and finally disband. The cost effectiveness of rekindling dysfunctional teams is clear and the need urgent. Experience shows community based disaster risk reduction groups require occasional rekindling, motivation and training in order to remain active.

While most community disaster risk reduction funding remains short term, the projects often require more time to establish some sustainability (Willison & Gaillard 2012). Securing funding for ongoing maintenance of community teams is difficult. There is a clear need for maintenance to ensure the well spent funds training community groups is truly sustainable long term. Often minimal facilitation is required to support community groups and ensure engagement. Furthermore where reactivation is necessary, this requires low funding costs compared to initializing trainings in new communities.

### ***Conclusion***

These four impediments are clearly not the only hurdles to the implementation of the HFA goals; however they do appear to be persistent. These impediments require research and discussion to ascertain the best methodologies to be promoted which negate them effectively. These methodologies shall necessarily differ in varying contextual, environmental and cultural arenas, which clearly calls for community engagement in the planning process. Furthermore research is also needed to investigate alternate models for assessing community vulnerability, preparedness and resilience (Simpson D 2008).

It is clear that the pathway offered by the HFA to reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience of nations and communities to disaster has many persistent obstacles en route. All impediments to the successful implementation of the HFA warrant discussion and research as we head towards the United Nations Hyogo Framework for Action 2. Four reoccurring impediments which have hampered the successful transition of the HFA into grassroots praxis have been discussed here. The first is ensuring community recognition of hazards which affect them and individual ownership of the risk involved. This requires not only engaging communities but building on embedded capacities to facilitate and re-legitimize community cohesion. Secondly the role of young people within disaster management must be reassessed to be more inclusive of young people throughout the disaster management cycle. Only with responsibility and ownership of risk will young people recognise and utilise their capacity both now and as developing adults. Thirdly the apparent lack of will within some levels of government, councils and organisations to implement the



HFA disrupts what should be bipartisan support. This may be due to one or a combination of the following; a lack of understanding or knowledge amongst some decision makers of HFA pathways and obligations; the awkward nature of delineating responsibility for, and ownership of, risk; and the time needed to introduce new risk reduction strategies into policy. Finally the connection between development funding and the resilience, vulnerability and capacity of people affected by the development proposal must be formalised. It is only with a holistic approach to development funding that negative impacts can be avoided and best possible outcomes manifested for communities and individuals.

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