“Clouds but little rain…”

Views from the Frontline A local perspective of progress towards implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action
Views from the Frontline is the largest independent, global assessment of disaster reduction at the local level ever undertaken.

With a wry but wise smile, Bishop Donald Mtetemela, a development worker for over 25 years and head of an East African development organisation, looked to the sky and explained:

“The people I work with every day see many clouds – international initiatives and plans, but very little rain – actual change at the frontline”.

It’s an image that sums up the challenge of turning the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA) into practical, sustainable activity at the frontline where people at-risk live, eat and work. This is the challenge that must be met if a substantial reduction in disaster losses is to be achieved.

Listening, understanding and acting on ‘Views from the Frontline’ is critical to accelerating progress of disaster risk reduction activity

‘Views from the Frontline’ (VFL) is a research and learning project, led by the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Risk Reduction (GDNR), which serves to connect policy formulation at international and national level with the realities of policy execution at local level. VFL 2009 is the pilot of a series of planned biennial reviews designed to complement national-level HFA monitoring coordinated by UNISDR. Results from the two initiatives should help establish a clear picture of progress and guide policy discussions to identify critical gaps and actions that will accelerate progress at the national and local levels.

VFL objectives:
1. Provide an overview of progress within participating countries at the local level.
2. Strengthen public accountability for disaster risk reduction (DRR) policy execution by establishing a local level monitoring system and relevant baselines.
3. Enhance civil society monitoring, research, analytical and advocacy capabilities.
4. Increase dialogue and understanding between different groups responsible for reducing risk.

About Views from the Frontline
• VFL has collected the views of over 7000 local government officials, civil society organisations and community representatives from 48 countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas.
• In the main study over 400 organisations conducted face-to-face interviews with 5290 people. Two supporting studies, one consulting women and the other with children and young people, gained an additional 2035 views.

Views were collated primarily through a series of face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions using a questionnaire format based on the HFA five Priorities for Action (PFAs) and cross cutting issues. Core indicators were not identical with the HFA monitor indicators used in the GAR, but they were comparable.

• It meets a critical gap in disaster risk reduction (DRR) policy implementation by providing ‘bottom-up’ perspectives from the interface between local governments and at-risk communities.
• VFL offers scope for future expansion and development both within the participating countries and beyond.

Headline findings:

Perceived progress in implementing all the HFA PFAs is in the range ‘to a very limited extent’ for local VFL views, compared with ‘some activity but significant scope for improvements’ for national GAR views (see figure 1). At national level there has been investment in institutional frameworks, science and technology, and new policies and legislation for DRR. However, for people at the frontline trying to handle the practical consequences of vulnerability to disaster, national policy has not yet yielded the fruits of these investments on the ground.

Aggregating all the VFL results for PFA progress, the ‘VFL global average’ is 2.38, compared to the GAR global average, 2.95. By any measure, progress at this rate will not deliver the required reduction in disaster losses by 2015. VFL results add emphasis to the general conclusion that can be drawn from the GAR - at current rates of progress the HFA is not on track to achieve its goals.

Figure 1: Perceptions of progress towards HFA PFAs as reported by VFL and GAR

A closer look at country scores for overall HFA progress shows there are some steps forward being made, but no VFL country reports a substantial level of progress (see figure 2). Only five countries attain an overall level of 3, all others are at the lower levels of between 1.25 and 2.87.
‘By involving government, organisations and communities at the local level, Views from the Frontline has served to deepen the communication and coordination between different stakeholders on disaster risk reduction.’

VFL regional report: South America, May 2009

Figure 2: HFA implementation as reported by VFL respondent groups in 33 participating countries

There is a ‘fading out’ of assessments of progress by respondents at a national level to local government level and then to community level (see figure 3). Assessments by women are even lower. In comparison, the perception of progress reported by civil society organisations is higher than all other local-level respondents, although still less than the national respondents consulted by the GAR.

Figure 3: A breakdown of different responses to HFA progress showing the ‘fading-out’ of perceptions of progress from national level to communities ‘at-risk’

There are differences in perceived progress across the HFA PFAs and cross cutting issues (see figure 1). At local scale, least progress is reported towards PFA 1 (Governance), PFA 2 (Risk Assessment and Monitoring) and PFA 3 (Knowledge and Education). Within PFA 4 (Underlying Risk Factors), low levels of progress are reported by community respondents in food security, poverty alleviation and social protection. A number of VFL country reports highlighted climate change to be one of many interrelated problems perceived to interact at the household level with security, poverty and well-being. Under PFA 5 (Preparedness and Response) - the review found opportunities were being missed to ‘build back better’ in post-disaster recovery. One of the lowest scoring indicators overall was community participation in decision-making process. This finding was reinforced by two complementary studies, which report that very little progress had been made in understanding the distinct vulnerabilities and attributes of high-risk groups such as women and children.

The significant differences of view among the three VFL respondent groups can be seen in a series of ‘peaks and troughs’ in figure 4. Despite the HFA’s stated requirement for multi-stakeholder partnerships to achieve effective implementation, there appear to be sharp contrasts in perceptions of progress by the three groups at a local level. Civil society organisations often report being the most active participant in HFA implementation at the local level, with both local government and communities themselves reporting less progress towards each PFA.

Figure 4: Rating of PFAs by different three local respondent groups

LG = Local government
CSO = Civil Society Organisation
CR = Community representative.
Six things people at the frontline are saying...

Results and findings from this pilot review should be considered as preliminary and will continue to be refined during further country consultations and thematic analysis, but some clear headlines have emerged:

1. **Nationally-formulated policies are not generating widespread systemic changes in local practices.**

   The review found a significant gap between national and local level action. Reports of progress fade as activities get closer to vulnerable people – overall progress at community level is ‘very limited’. Progress is unevenly distributed across local actors, with civil society organisations often appearing to emerge as DRR ‘champions’ at the local level. Levels of progress are also different across regions (Asia regions and Central America score highest; whilst East and West Africa and the Middle East score lowest). The greatest levels of progress are often associated with countries that have adopted community-based approaches.

2. **Resources are scarce and considered one of the main constraints to progress... but there are also resources at local level, which remain untapped.**

   The key to unlocking these local resources is through adopting participatory approaches that build partnerships between local actors and place at-risk people at the centre of the process of decision-making and action - civil society, particularly grassroots women’s groups, can play a critical role in facilitating this community engagement.

3. **The foundation for building resilience is people’s awareness and understanding of the risks that they face.**

   Therefore, a strategic entry point to building resilience is to undertake participatory risk assessments at the local level. Such assessments would:
   - Inform disaster preparedness including early warning for effective response (PFA 2 and 5)
   - Increase knowledge and education (PFA 3)
   - Inform local development sector action planning (PFA 4)
   - Increased awareness raises social demand, public accountability and political commitment for DRR (PFA 1)
   - Open space for dialogue, participation, trust and relationship building between different actors (PFA 1 and cross-cutting issues).

4. **Climate change creates a need, but also provides an opportunity to address underlying risk factors, raise external resources and political commitment for building resilience.**

   Whether ‘experts’ refer to climate adaptation, poverty alleviation or DRR, at a local household level it comes down to the same thing – the security and well-being of lives and livelihoods. Actions at a local level to deal with the underlying drivers of any one of these, usually helps with the others. Calls for a closer integration and alignment of efforts to reduce risk, alleviate poverty and adapt to climate change means bringing the decision-making processes that address underlying causes closer to people at-risk.

5. **Turning policy into practice requires finding the appropriate balance between top-down and bottom-up engagement.**

   It is important to understand both national and local perspectives in discussions to define strategic priorities, which accelerate progress towards reducing disaster losses. As the HFA approaches the midway point of 2010, the results of the VFL suggest that the emphasis should shift from policy formulation at international and national levels to policy execution at local levels.

6. **VFL 2009 has proven itself as an important first step towards building a global constituency and architecture to measure the effectiveness of DRR policy interventions at the local level.**

   Literally thousands of structured conversations have taken place between government, communities and civil society. Feedback from participants highlights this is an important benefit of the VFL review process. In future years VFL could be extended geographically and incorporate climate adaptation indicators to measure climate resilience as well as disaster resilience. This would be a significant development in the way civil society, communities and governments work together to address global issues such as preventing disasters and adapting to climate change.
10 recommendations

1. Reorient HFA implementation strategies to support a proactive and systematic deepening of engagement with at-risk communities, including participation of most vulnerable groups.

2. Recognise the right of at-risk women, men and children to engage in decision-making and planning processes - participation must be clearly defined and explicitly recognised through policy, legal and institutional provisions.

3. Undertake participatory local hazard-vulnerability assessments and associated risk mapping as strategic entry points to raising critical awareness and understanding of risk and to building relationships among different actors. Set specific time-bound targets with clear responsibilities and delegated authority in support of these assessments. Teach children to do this too, using schools as important local centres for community action for disaster risk reduction.

4. Use local disaster risk knowledge to inform local programming and action planning of principal development sectors; risk considerations should become routine in all development investment planning and programming.

5. Decentralise authority and resources to appropriate administrative levels in support of local multi-stakeholder partnerships (including equitable representation from most vulnerable); to coordinate and manage risk reduction, poverty alleviation, development and climate adaptation policy execution.

6. Develop innovative financial strategies for supporting local level initiatives and partnerships, including direct local-level access to disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation trust funds and technical resources.

7. Extend VFL’s geographical coverage and modify indicator metrics to incorporate climate adaptation characteristics ahead of Global Platform-DRR 2011 as a means to independently audit disaster risk and climate adaptation progress.

8. Maximize the potential of existing traditional social networks and investigate potential of social networking and internet-based communications innovations as approaches to communicating and sharing information, raising critical awareness, building broad-based constituencies and coalitions, mobilising social demand for DRR.

9. Invest in networks at all levels that improve the exchange of good practice and learning, promote civil society harmonisation and coordination, and foster dialogue and collaboration between state and non-state actors.

10. Carry out reform of the humanitarian response system, making it one committed to engaging with and strengthening local and national preparedness and response/recovery capacities, and one that bases programme interventions on assessments of people’s own perceived priority needs in relation to their capacities and vulnerabilities.
South America:
RCO. Soluciones Prácticas Peru
Peru: Asociación Ministerio Diocesano Faz y Esperanza (NCC), PREDES, Soluciones Prácticas – ITDO Peru, SHALOM PERI S.O.S. VIDA PERU, GRIDES LAMBAYEQUE, PIURA, ANCASH

Venezuela: NCO. CIESAP

Bolivia: Soluciones Prácticas Bolivia (NCC), World Vision Bolivia.
Municipios de Artesio, Pojo y Tiquipaya – Cochabamba, Fundación ATICA – Cochabamba, Fundación ASOBHARA – Potosí, Fundación ATICA – Sucre

Uruguay: Amigos del Viento (NCC), Red Organizaciones Ambientalistas del Uruguay, ANONG, Scoutingismo, Cruz Roja, Escuela de la Comunidad Animista,

Dirección, Planificación y Educación, Sistema Nacional de Emergencia, CCOCED, DNMA, MCAP, OPYYA, MDES, Universidad de la República - Extensión Universitaria (CECUAM), Red de Educación Ambiental del ME, ADASU

Central America/Caribbean:
RCO, Concertación Regional para la Gestion de Riesgo, El Salvador
El Salvador: MGPR - FUNDESA (NCC), Plan El Salvador, PROVIDA, PROCÓMOC, FUMA, Comandos De Salvamento, Sindicato Luterano, CIP, CRD, RDES, FUNDESA, APROCSAL, UNES, FUDECOM, CRIPDES, CORDES, Servicio Jesuita, VAMOS

Honduras: ASONGC (NCC), Nicaraguan: Mesa Nacional de Gestión de Riesgos (NCC), Centro Alexander von Humboldt, Plan Internacional
Plan Nicaragua, Federación Luterana Mundial (FLM), Acción Médica Cristiana (AMC), Centro de Información y servicios de asesoría en salud (CIESAS), Centro de Investigación y estudios de la Salud (CIES), Asociación de Municipios de Nueva Segovia (AMUNISE), Asociación de Municipios del Norte de Chinandega (AMUNORCIN), Asociación de Municipios de León Norte.

Guatemala: Comunidades Cristianas de Apoyo – CAPOYO (NCC), Coordinadora Nacional para la Reducción de Desastres – CONRED – Región V El Programa Ejercicio Profesional Supervisado Multiprofesional (EPSUM) de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Consorcio de ONG para el desarrollo Comunitario y del medio ambiente, del altiplano y sur de Guatemala (Asociación CORCI, Asociación para el Desarrollo Comunidades –Nueva Amanecer, ASDENA, Programa de Atención Movilización e Incidencia por la Mujer y la Adolescencia, PAMI, Asociación de Mujeres Tejedoras, LEMA

Dominican Republic: República Dominicana del Servicio Social de Iglesias Dominicanas, Inc. (SSID) (NCC), World Vision Dominican Republic

Haiti: Plan Haiti,

Southern Africa:
African Centre for Disaster Studies (RCO)

South Africa: African Centre for Disaster Studies (NCC), Khumaleni support, Fundanani Trust, South African Red Cross.

Swaziland: Associated Christians International (NCC), World Vision Swaziland

Malawi: Plan Malawi

Madagascar: Care Madagascar (NCC)


Uganda: DENIVA (NCC)

Burundi: Youth Strategy for Disaster Reduction (NCC), Association pour la Paix et les Droits de l’Homme (APDH), Croix Rouge Burundi, Ligue ikela, Association des Bibliothéiques, Archives et Documentalistes du Burundi (ABADUB)

Western Africa:
ActionAid – Ghana (RCO)


Sierra Leone: Plan Sierra Leone


Benin: WANEP (NCC), DEDRAF ONG, Alpha et Omega ONG, ALAFIA ONG, ALHERI ONG , Association des Volontaires pour le Triomphe des Initiatives de Développement (AVOTRIDER ONG), Espace de Vif ONG, Fondation Mouss pour la paix et le développement

Middle East and North Africa:
Arab Network for Environment and Development - RADD (RCO)

Egypt: Plan Egypt (NCC)


Lebanon: World vision Lebanon (NCC), Mariyoom Emergency Response and Disaster Management Committee, WWL volunteers in Beirut (active community members), WWL volunteers in Akkar (active community members), Civil Defense department in Bsharre, Municipality of Kousssaya, Municipality of Kab Elias, Education committee of Kab Elias, Social and Health center in AnnFarzabad

Central Asia:
Netherlands Red Cross (RCO)

Tajikistan: Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development

Tajikistan, Mission East, Focus Humanitarian, Tajik Red Crescent

Kyrgyzstan: Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development

Kyrgyzstan (NCC),

South/South East Asia:

National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET) (NCC)

Afghanistan: Church World Service – Pakistan/AFGHAN (NCC), Afghan Development Association (ADA), Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCA), Cooperation of Humanitarian Assistance(CHA/OHRC), Coordination for Afghan Relief (COA), Helvetas, Norwegian Project Office - Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan (NFO/RRAA), Save the Children - Sweden/Norway (SC-N), Skill Training and Rehabilitation Society (STARS)

Nepal: National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET) (NCC), Plan Nepal

India: Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS) India / NADEP (NCC), Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG), Udyama, Kanchan Seva Ashram, Covenant Centre for Development (CCV), Development of Human Action (DHAN) Foundation, ROSE, Saritas Foundation, Swayam Shivakshan Prayog, Saurashtra Voluntary Actions, and Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS), World Vision India

Pakistan: Participatory Development Initiatives (NCC), Doaba Foundation, Sindh Forestry Workers Cooperative Organization, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, NGOs Development Society.

Participating organisations
Civil Society Organisations endorsing the recommendations of Views from the Frontline

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Women's study commission:


Sangat Development Society, PDI
Balochistan Chapter, World Vision Pakistan

Bangladesh: Participatory Research and Development Initiative (PRDI)
(NCO), Plan Bangladesh, COAST Trust, Rupantak, Shariyatpur Development Society-SES, Young Power in Social Action-YPSA, FRUISHAN, BARASA, SAP Bangladesh, and PRADIP Resource Integration Organization

Sri Lanka: Practical Action Sri Lanka
(NCO), Action Aid Sri Lanka, Christian Aid Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya Women’s Movement, UNDP-DRM

Indonesia: YAKKUM Emergency Unit (NCO), YEU Yogyakarta, YEU Nias, YEU Meulaboh, YEU Unkoseumawe and YEU Band Aceh, Lingkar Association, Safer Community through Disaster Risk Reduction (SC-DRR) Yogyakarta, Forum Suara Korban Bencana, Pengurangan Resiko Bencana Yogyakarta, Plan Indonesia, World Vision Indonesia

Vietnam: Development Workshop France (NCO), CARE, OXFAM

Philippines: Centre for Disaster Preparedness (NCO), Plan Philippines, Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (FIRM) (Camiguin, Surigao, Agusan, Quezon Areas), Mahasin Response 143, Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center (RDRAC) (Sian City), Lihok Pilipina (Cebu, Bohol), Negros Oriental, Leyte Areas, Plan International (Southern Leyte Areas), Bukid Talo (San Mateo, Rizal), Panay Rural Development Center (Ilocos), Eastern Rizal Parents Association (Teresa, Rizal), Center for Disaster Preparedness (CDP), Citizens Disaster Response Center (CDRC), World Vision, Save the Children, Hope Worldwide, Tambugoy, Lasalle Institute of Governance, Naga College Foundation, Coastal Core, Philippine Association of (PAEP), GDIF, Technical Working Group, Children International, I-Core, Philippine National Red Cross, Calamba, Immaculate Homeowners, Dagupan Pract Shot Association, Bantay Lawa, God’s Covenant Bible Christ Center, Barangay Babang Iyam, Patroa Farmers Association, Kagabu, Inc, RCDF, Democratic Youth Lea Forum for Peace, PSK, LUMAD, PUP-Student Org, Day Care of Teresa, Hefer International-Philippines, Kabahait, Urban Poor Association, JCB, TK, Kinosmesa, PTA, CCT, CFCA

Vietnam: Development Workshop France

Thailand: Sustainable Development Foundation Thailand (NCO)

Sustainable Development Foundation, NGO-Coordinating Committee on Development, Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Ministry of the Interior, Association of Sub-district Administrative Organizations, Southeast Asia START Regional Center, Southeast Asia Regional Committee for START, Global Change System for Analysis, Research and Training, World Vision Foundation Thailand, Good Life Foundation, Lampong Province, Peasant Organizations for Environmental Rehabilitation Development Center, Utaradit Province, Mountain Friends Association, Khon Kaen Province, Pa Dong Lan Development and Rehabilitation Project, Khon Kaen Province, Agricultural Reform and Rural Development Project, Nakhoon Sawan Province, Agricultural Reform and Rural Development Project, Phichit Province, Community Capacity Building Project, Pititlanulok Province, Department of Environment Quality Promotion, Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, Community Resource Management Development Institute, Subhathai Province, Conservation and Sustainable Development Foundation, Pititlanulok Province, Kamphaeng Phet Homeland Conservation Institute, Kamphaeng Phet Province, Peasant Organizations for Environmental Rehabilitation Development Center, Pititlanulok Province, Rakthai Foundation, Phang Nga Office, CARE International Member Organization Thailand, Save Andaman Network Foundation

Malaysia: Mercy Malaysia (NCO)

Cambodia: Save the Earth Cambodia (NCO)
Map of VFL coverage

Countries contributed data to the following studies:
- v: Views from the frontline (indicated on map)
- w: Women’s views from the frontline
- c: Child centred survey

South America
- Peru, v, w
- Venezuela, v
- Bolivia, v, w, c
- Brazil, w
- Uruguay, v

Central America/Caribbean
- El Salvador, v, c
- Jamaica, w
- Honduras, v, w
- Nicaragua, v
- Guatemala, v
- Haiti, c
- Dominican Republic, v

Southern Africa
- South Africa, v
- Swaziland, v, c
- Malawi, c
- Madagascar, v

East Africa
- Uganda, v
- Burundi, v
- Kenya
- West Africa
  - Nigeria, v
  - Cameroon, w
  - Ghana, v
  - Senegal, v
  - The Gambia
  - Sierra Leone, c
  - Benin, v
- Middle East North Africa
  - Egypt, v, c
  - Syria
  - Iran
  - Yemen
  - Jordan, v
  - Turkey, w

Middle East
- Lebanon, v
- Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan, v
- Tajikistan, v
- Uzbekistan

South Asia
- Afghanistan, v
- Nepal, v, w, c
- India, v, w, c
- Pakistan, v, c
- Bangladesh, v, w, c
- Sri Lanka, v

South East Asia
- Indonesia, v, c
- Vietnam, v
- Philippines, v, w, c
- Malaysia, v, w
- Cambodia, v
- Thailand, v

Level of progress:
- No, not at all
- To a very limited extent
- Some activity but significant scope for improvements

Find out more by reading the full VFL report, online views, VFL country specific reports, and lots more, see www.globalnetwork-dr.org