



International Strategy for Disaster Reduction



Local Governments and Disaster Risk Reduction

Good Practices and Lessons Learned

DRAFT A publication of the "Local Government Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction".



Background

Urban risk, city planning and management and the role of local governments in dealing with risk reduction has been recognized as key factors to build resilient communities and nations since the beginning of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 considers that both communities and local authorities should be empowered to manage and reduce disaster risk by having access to the necessary information, resources and authority to implement actions. Recommendations from the first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2007, echoed in the second session in 2009, put emphasis on the need to improve urban and local governance to reduce risk.

The Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, released in May 2009, analyzed global, national and local risk patterns, as well as progress to date in implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action. The report demonstrates that extensive risk (smaller and frequent disasters in an extensive territory) normally can be reduced with relatively small investments, such as minor investments in storm drainage in informal settlements to greatly reduce flood risk.

Intensive risk can be addressed over time: buildings and infrastructure (especially drainage and slope stabilizers) can be periodically renewed, replaced, repaired or upgraded. New housing and infrastructure should address risk (too costly and difficult to do massive change in existing building stocks and urban areas).

Poor urban governance, territorial occupation and urbanization, declining ecosystems and vulnerable rural livelihoods are identified as main underlying risk drivers, which need to be addressed. The report identifies as a major gap that neither local nor national policies are focusing on addressing these underlying risk factors; there is insufficient articulation between the policy frameworks that deal with disaster risk, climate change and poverty reduction in support of effective local and sectoral actions. Improved urban and local governance is a prerequisite for this to happen.

In response to the evident gap to address these issues systematically, UNISDR has worked with partners in the ISDR system to build alliances with local government to promote disaster risk reduction at different levels. The ISDR system Global Campaign for 2010-11 was already in 2004 defined to focus on Safer Cities and urban risk issues.

The case studies

As part of this initiative, the idea of publishing a compilation of good practices and lessons learnt by local governments in disaster risk reduction emerged from a consultative meeting held in Barcelona, in May 2008 between UNISDR, UNDP and ILO and the Advisory Group of an emerging Local Government Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction. The compilation showcases the essential roles played by local and regional authorities in addressing disaster risks at sub-national and local levels, but also the challenges and constraints to sustain or scale-up these efforts. It makes the case for increased local-level risk reduction action, and is aimed to stimulate more interest and commitment in this area from governments, practitioners, policy and decision makers.

To this end, partners in the Alliance provided close to 40 case studies. The contributions were provided using a questionnaire. The current compilation contains 14 case studies out of the 40, which were selected by UNISDR based on geographic representation and thematic coverage. 6 cases were contributed directly by the local governments (The Philippines, Canada, South Africa, Indonesia/Flood, Japan and France.) and the other 8 cases were by partners such as national governments and NGOs (Viet Nam, Peru, Pakistan, El Salvador, Nepal, Fiji, Bangladesh and Indonesia/Volcano), who worked with the local governments. In both cases, the roles that the local governments played are highlighted and analyzed.

The selected case studies in this compilation illustrate and reinforce some of the findings of the Global Assessment Report. They cover a wide array of policy areas, from risk assessment to recovery and from building structures to water resource management. Each one illustrates the important roles that local governments should play for various aspects of disaster risk reduction.

The cases that address specific policy areas include:

- Province-wide hazard identification and risk assessment programme (Canada)
- Community risk assessment as a part of the country's comprehensive disaster risk reduction programme (Bangladesh)
- Improvement of a flood early warning system in the capital region (Indonesia/Flood)
- Water resource management for drought risk reduction (South Africa)
- Agricultural livelihood protection through flood mitigation and drought preparedness (Nepal)
- Promotion of cyclone-resistant buildings and community awareness raising (Viet Nam)
- Locally-led recovery process from an earthquake (Peru)

Other cases concern more on the broader issues of institutional strengthening and local capacity building on different hazard types and with different stakeholders. Those include:

- Establishment of a permanent DRR office in a provincial government (the Philippines)
- DRR mainstreaming in local governments in an earthquake-affected area (Pakistan)
- DRR mainstreaming in local development planning in a flood-prone area (Fiji)
- Establishment of a multi-stakeholder forum against volcanic hazard (Indonesia/Volcano)
- Strengthening connections between local communities and local governments (El Salvador)
- Risk-awareness programme for schoolchildren and communities (Japan)
- Awareness-raising initiative against flood risk with local students (France)

The roles of local governments

Throughout the cases, four major roles of local governments in implementing disaster risk reduction are particularly highlighted.

1. To play a central role in coordinating and sustaining a multi-level, multi-stakeholder platform to promote DRR in the region or for a specific hazard

The active commitment and leadership of a local government is important for the implementation of any local disaster risk reduction measures to deal with different stakeholders and multiple layers of government. In many cases, a comprehensive disaster risk reduction measure takes long time to fully implement, and the leadership of the local government is particularly crucial to ensure the political momentum and support among external stakeholders throughout the process.

In **Peru**, with the support from the UNDP office, municipal governments in the affected area of a recent earthquake coordinated and led a development-focused recovery process alongside national and local actors. They also initiated updating of their own development plans for promoting disaster risk reduction. It was emphasized in the case study that the crucial role of local government should be recognized in the disaster recovery process, who will sustain development once external supporters leave.

In **Indonesia**, the provincial government in Jakarta, in partnership with the national, local and technical partners, implemented a process to improve the flood early warning system. As the main owner of the early warning system, the province provided significant political and technical support and publicity. It was highlighted that, in the context of megacities, the collaboration between provincial and city governments is very important in order to coordinate overlapping resources and responsibilities.

Also in **Indonesia**, local governments surrounding an active volcano formed a multi-stakeholder forum against volcanic hazard. The project was initiated by the local governments who have also taken significant coordination role. It was analyzed that a multi-stakeholder forum is effective for pooling the resources and expertise, especially in encouraging cross-border and cross-sectoral risk management.

2. To effectively engage local communities and citizens to disaster risk reduction activities and link their concerns with governments' priorities

As the immediate public service provider and the interface with citizens, local governments are naturally situated in the best position to raise awareness of the citizens on disaster risks and listen to their concerns. Even the most sophisticated national DRR measures (such as early warning systems) may fail, if the communities are not properly informed and engaged. Likewise, community preparedness measures are sometimes as effective as costly public investments in reducing casualties from disasters, and

local governments should play a central role for community education and training.

In **El Salvador**, a consortium of NGOs and donors supported municipalities in strengthening disaster preparedness by local communities and their connections with local governments to promote DRR. In the project, linking local communities to local governments was perceived as the key element to make DRR programmes sustainable.

In **Nepal**, an NGO helped district and village authorities to promote agricultural livelihood protection and DRR, through animal protection, drought mitigation and flood preparedness measures. Both district and villages played key coordination role for implementing these projects at the community level.

3. To strengthen their own institutional capacities and implement practical DRR actions by themselves

As the governmental body responsible for the long-term development and viability of its area, a local government is required to consider and institutionalize DRR into its day-to-day operations, including development planning, land use control and the provision of public facilities and services.

In **Pakistan**, a national authority helped provincial and community-level governments in the area affected by the 2005 earthquake to promote DRR mainstreaming and community-based disaster risk management. As the result of this intervention, community-level governments started to organize disaster management committees and emergency response teams.

In **Fiji**, with the support from UNDP, a provincial administration mainstreamed DRR in local development planning in a flood-prone area. The provincial government incorporated DRR and development priorities identified by communities into the provincial development plan.

4. To devise and implement innovative tools and techniques for DRR, which can be replicated elsewhere or scaled up nationwide

Because of its smaller scale and flexibility, a local government is better positioned than a national government to develop and experiment on various new tools and techniques, with its unique settings and policy priorities.

In **Japan**, a city government in a rural region conducted a risk-awareness programme for schoolchildren and communities, which involved field trips to different areas of the city. The very direct and participatory methods (called 'mountain-watching' and 'town-watching') that involved schoolchildren, attracted participants' interest and motivated learning about disaster prevention.

In **France**, a regional river management agency, in cooperation with local governments in the river basin, implemented awareness-raising initiative against flood risk in the region, through carrying out a community survey by local students. Somewhat similar to the above case from Japan, the innovative nature of the survey and engagement of young people were excellent ways to get people's attention to the issue.

Challenges and opportunities for replication

Each case contains its particular set of lessons learnt. However, the following general observations can be drawn from many of the cases as the key challenges and opportunities for scaling-up those efforts or replicating them by other local governments.

1. Lack of interest and capacities

An initial challenge is often the lack of interest and capacities for DRR by local governments. The support from partners, such as national government, NGOs and UN agencies, can play catalytic roles to fill the initial gaps with local governments.

In Viet Nam, an international NGO worked with local governments to promote cyclone resistant buildings and related awareness-raising for local communities. Initially supported by the NGO, the local governments then took over many roles that the NGO fulfilled as the projects progress. They also formed a network of local governments to share experience with other governments in similar conditions and risks.

In Bangladesh, a national government ministry has been conducting community risk assessment and DRR action planning with municipal governments across the country, as a part of the country's Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme. Local governments were encouraged to participate and assume the responsibility with 'learn through doing' approach. However, the contribution from local governments varied from one to the other, with the partner NGOs filling gaps in capacity. Moreover, the availability of a funding mechanism (the Local DRR Fund) to implement identified priority projects ensured local governments and communities see a clear path from risk assessment to funded action.

2. Understanding local risks and vulnerabilities

Local governments sometimes lack sufficient knowledge about disaster risks and vulnerabilities of their communities as well as appropriate DRR measures. Partners can help local governments understand them, in order to better plan and manage local disaster risks.

In Canada, a provincial government implemented a province-wide hazard identification and risk assessment programme. It was a comprehensive process involving all the provincial ministries and more than four hundred municipalities that identified high-risk hazards and helped developing effective DRR measures. A standardized methodology for risk assessment provided a clear baseline for the ministries and municipalities to assess their risks.

In Bangladesh, as the result the community risk assessment, local authorities got practical experience in assessing their risk environment, determining the vulnerabilities of their local communities, and taking the appropriate actions to mitigate them.

3. Maintaining and upgrading critical infrastructure

While local governments are responsible for a variety of critical infrastructure (such as water, drainage, sewage, schools,

hospitals), investments to make them resilient to disaster risks are not very visible and sometimes neglected or deterred. Capital investment planning should properly address disaster risks, based on sound risk assessment.

In South Africa, a municipal government implemented a long-term strategy to develop and manage water resources in order to reduce drought risk. In anticipation of rapid urban growth and future shortage of water, the water demand was reduced through a comprehensive water demand management strategy including clearing of invasive alien plants, public awareness campaign and leak detection and repair. At the same time, new local water sources were explored and developed by drilling for groundwater.

4. Managing long-term processes

Being a long-term process, a DRR initiative often suffers from staff changes and uneven interest among them. Long-term political commitment is crucial to successfully implement DRR programmes over time.

In the Philippines, a provincial government established and managed an independent and institutionalized DRR office with permanent staff. Through the office, the government decentralized and mainstreamed DRR into local governments' plans and programmes. The fact that the project gained consistent support for its policies and funding from the provincial governors since its inception contributed to the success of the office.

In South Africa, the municipal government has been managing the process of water resource management and development since 2001. Due to the long processes involved and staff turnover, it was analyzed as a challenge to retain project momentum and continuity. Fortunately, the stable situation in the recent years contributed to the project's progress.

5. Learning from disasters

After the onset of a disaster, people are tempted to focus on short-termed, visible recovery works. However, building on the momentum created by a disaster is often a very effective way to engage local governments and communities to long-term DRR efforts.

In Pakistan, the programme was implemented in the area that was affected by a recent earthquake in 2005. It was the most devastating disaster to have ever affected the nation. The destruction of the earthquake elicited strong commitment to DRR programmes by various stakeholders. It was identified as a challenge to combine short-term activities during the recovery phase with strategic longer-term initiatives to reduce risk, using political interests as an opportunity for gaining real commitments to risk-sensitive development.

In Japan, the city was hit by record typhoons in 2004 that led to flooding and landslides in the various parts of the city. In conducting 'mountain-watching' and 'town-watching', the group of schoolchildren and the citizens visited the area affected and damaged by 2004 typhoons, and hear stories from eye-witnesses. This way, the experience from the 2004 catastrophe was used as a new starting point for disaster education and preparation.

Conclusions

As many of the cases show, and raised in the studies undertaken in the Global Assessment Report, it is imperative to promote a culture of planning and implementation of disaster risk reduction initiatives that builds on local and national government and civil society partnerships and cooperation in support of local initiatives to dramatically reduce the costs of risk reduction, ensure local acceptance and build social capital.

There are limitations to what household and community action can do to reduce disaster risk without government support and the broader infrastructure and service framework into which community provision can integrate, as some of the examples demonstrate from a positive point of view (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Canada).

Innovative approaches and tools in urban and local governance and community based approaches exist and are being applied creatively, as demonstrated in the examples. However, they need scaling up with support from national governments. Many cities have applied innovative methods to provide access to secure land tenure, infrastructure and services for the poor, like in the example of South Africa.

Improved urban and local governance is usually built on partnership between competent and accountable local government and an active civil society that can articulate needs and priorities; plus decentralization of authority and resources from central levels, as demonstrated in the examples from Bangladesh, Vietnam, Philippines, El Salvador and Canada.

Capacity of urban and local government to plan and regulate urban development, enable access to safe housing and well-sited land and provide hazard mitigating infrastructure is a condition for risk reduction.



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