



**Australian Red Cross**  
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# **Relationships matter: the application of social capital to disaster resilience**

**National Disaster Resilience Roundtable report  
20 September 2012, Melbourne, Australia**



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A photograph of a man in a dark jacket smiling and talking to others at an outdoor meal. The background shows a house with a red roof and a wooden fence. The text is overlaid on the image.

# **Relationships matter: the application of social capital to disaster resilience**

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## Executive summary

The promotion of household resilience has become a key component of emergency management policy and practice in Australia over the past decade. Recent work by Associate Professor Daniel Aldrich of Purdue University in the United States<sup>1,2</sup> highlights the importance of the concept 'social capital' as a key factor in helping people prepare for, and recover from, emergencies. The release of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSfDR) by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signals a shift in the way Australia approaches disaster management. One focus of the strategy is to recognise the importance of social capacity in disaster resilience.

This report summarises the inaugural Red Cross National Disaster Resilience Roundtable, encompassing groups and parties with an interest in, experience of, or expertise with social capital, community development, and emergency

management to help shape the outcomes. Membership included but was not limited to:

- People and communities affected by disaster
- Key research institutions
- Peak bodies
- Industry groups
- Professional associations
- Experienced practitioners.

From the outset, it was considered important to include people and communities affected by disaster to ensure that any discussion was well grounded within people's experience. The Roundtable also sought to bring together emergency management agencies and community services agencies.

1 Aldrich, DP 2010, 'Fixing Recovery: Social Capital in Post-Crisis Resilience', *Journal of Homeland Security*.

2 Aldrich, DP 2012, *Building resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Recent work by Associate Professor Daniel Aldrich highlights the importance of the concept ‘social capital’ as a key factor in helping people prepare for, and recover from, emergencies.

## Theoretical inputs

The Roundtable commenced with four theoretical inputs: a research, policy, practice and community member perspective. This was followed by small group consideration of three questions looking at the application of social capital to preparedness, response, recovery and diversity.

Mr Mike Rothery made opening remarks on behalf of the Australian Government. As First Assistant Secretary, National Security Resilience Policy Division with the Attorney-General’s Department, Mr Rothery is responsible for security and resilience policy redevelopment. He has particular responsibility over the implementation of the NSfDR and he spoke about the development of this strategy.

Mr David Place, representing the Australian New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC), presented the first of the theoretical inputs for the day. Mr Place is the Chief Executive of South Australia Fire and Emergency Services Commission, the umbrella organisation covering Metro and Rural Fire Services and the SES, providing emergency management policy direction for South Australia. He has had a long career as an ambulance officer, holding senior executive roles in the SA Ambulance Service.

The second of the theoretical inputs was presented by Ms Anne Leadbeater, Strategic Project Manager at the Murrindindi Shire Council, in rural Victoria. She has a background in emergency management policy, community development and

adult education. Ms Leadbeater worked on behalf of Council to coordinate the initial recovery efforts for the Kinglake Ranges communities. Most recently, Anne was Manager of Community Engagement with the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner of Victoria. She used the example of Toolangi township, in their municipality, to highlight social capital from a practitioner’s perspective.

Associate Professor Daniel Aldrich delivered the third theoretical input via videolink from Japan. Professor Aldrich is a political scientist who has published extensively on communities that have experienced catastrophe. Having personally witnessed Hurricane Katrina, Professor Aldrich has turned his attention to social capital and disaster resilience, recently publishing a book entitled *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*. Professor Aldrich provided an outline of how social capital applies to disaster resilience, drawing upon his research.

The fourth perspective provided was that of a community member – Ms Suzy Robinson, Manager of Fernvale Futures Complex for Somerset Regional Council. Ms Robinson was directly affected by the 2011 Queensland floods, and she has been actively involved in the recovery of her local community, Fernvale, and surrounding suburbs. She is also a director of the Lowood and Fernvale Community Bank. She presented on the challenges and the solutions that the Somerset community faced after the 2011 floods.

Social capital, like resilience, is not something that can be imposed or built overnight. Funders of these activities, on which disaster resilience work can be founded, need to take a longer-term view.

## Group sessions

The participants were divided into four groups to examine preparedness, response, recovery and diversity. Membership of the groups was deliberately diverse, to promote a range of views. Each group moved around to different sessions and spent 45 minutes considering a set of questions. This section reports on discussions undertaken in the group sessions and looks to link these discussions to elements of social capital, bonding, bridging, and linking, as well as trust and reciprocity.

The preparedness groups were asked to consider the statement:

*A well connected community is more likely to be prepared<sup>3</sup>. Achieving disaster preparedness is about seeking behaviour change, getting people to act to reduce their potential impacts, not only to surviving the hazard, but also for the longer-term recovery.*

Participants were then asked: "Thinking about each of the forms of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking – what are the formal and informal networks that we can tap into to raise awareness about hazards, and to encourage household preparedness?"

The response groups were asked to consider the statement:

*The response/relief period of emergencies is characterised by high uncertainty and escalating hazard threats. The focus in this period of emergency management is upon surviving the hazard.*

Participants were then asked: "Considering bonding, bridging and linking social capital, what strengths do people and communities bring into the disaster? How can this be drawn upon to meet people's immediate safety and practical needs?"

The recovery groups had two topics to cover. The first group focused on recovery governance, while the second group focused on recovery assistance measures. Participants were asked to consider the statement:

*Recovery is a complex process that is long lasting (likened to a marathon). The nature of the disaster will change communities in a range of different ways: community members are lost, displaced, services are disrupted, landscapes are changed, sense of safety is compromised.*

Participants were then asked: "Considering the forms of social capital – bonding, bridging, and linking – what stressors are placed on a community's social capital post disaster?" and considering the forms of social capital – bonding, bridging, linking – "What is the impact of external aid (by that we mean funded or donated service support and assistance) in maintaining and building social capital post disaster?"

The diversity groups were asked to consider the following statement:

*Our diverse community is traditionally cited as 'vulnerable' in emergency management. People with a disability, from a CALD or ATSI background, or a senior, make up lists of 'vulnerable groups'. We may see strong bonding social capital in these groups, but weaker bridging and linking social capital, with poorer links to the wider community and to formal structures.*

Participants were asked: "What strengths do people who have been identified as 'vulnerable' in an emergency bring to the development of networks and relationships?"

Summary thoughts were provided by Mr Malcolm Hackett, Chairperson Strathewen Community Renewal Association. Strathewen is a small town to the north east of Melbourne, where 27 people died and 90 per cent of the township, including all the community assets, was destroyed in the 7 February 2009 bushfires. The Strathewen Community Renewal Association was established to give voice and action to community-led recovery for the township.

<sup>3</sup> Paton, D 2003, 'Disaster Preparedness: A social-cognitive perspective', *Disaster Prevention and Management*, no. 12, pp. 210-6.

To enable disaster preparedness programs to reflect the true impact of disasters, a better understanding of recovery processes, and their long term and complex nature is important.

## Emerging themes and recommendations

- The application of social capital to disaster resilience requires further investigation, including to:
  - examine the actions and activities that promote connection and networks
  - further understand how the concept of reciprocity works in a disaster resilience setting
  - look at activities that support, build or restore trust in institutions
  - examine reciprocity in social capital and its application to the disaster setting.
- To enable disaster preparedness programs to reflect the true impact of disasters, a better understanding of recovery processes, their long term and complex nature is important.
- Social capital, like resilience, is not something that can be imposed or built overnight. Funders of these activities, on which disaster resilience work can be founded, need to take a longer-term view.
- Emergency management planning needs to recognise local strengths and the long term complex nature of recovery. Hence, emergency management planners need:
  - an enabling policy framework and practice environment
  - skills development in the area of community engagement and community development.
- Community preparedness education programs need to be grounded in community development, with a strong focus on supporting existing networks and encouraging trust between community members, partners and government agencies.
- Emergency management education of preparedness, planning and recovery practitioners should focus on building competence in community development, with an awareness of social capital. This will enable local, regional and state-level programming to recognise the complexity of the challenges and support flexible, and targeted, local planning.
- Planning for preparedness and recovery needs to recognise and actively support activities designed to bring people together to share information, build trust with one another, and with agencies, and to identify areas where people can help each other.
- Trust is a particularly important concept in emergency management, as people's decisions are often based on receiving information from a trustworthy source. Trust can also be tested when governments and agencies are perceived, or found, not to have performed according to plan or to community expectations. Given that this is a complex concept involving psychology, crisis communications and leadership theory, it is an area worthy of further exploration to improve post-disaster outcomes.
- There is a range of indicators for social capital<sup>4</sup>. In order to gauge the strength of social capital in communities, it is recommended that a number of simple indicators be chosen to help with targeting and planning activities. These indicators should be easy to use, universal and need to be applied in a way that does not require complex analysis. Consideration should be given to indicators that relate to disaster resilience.
- Significant policy work is underway in the disaster resilience area, led by the ANZEMC. Policy development should take into account a range of diverse views and initiatives, such as this Roundtable, reflect that the not for profit sector has critical role to play in informing the broader policy debate.

<sup>4</sup> Measuring Social Capital: An Australian Framework and Indicators, 2004, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Relationships are key to building social capital. Young men affected by the Queensland floods are in high spirits at the Emerald Evacuation Centre.



## 1. Introduction

The promotion of household resilience has become a key component of emergency management policy and practice in Australia in the past decade. Awareness programs dealing with specific hazard survival – whether bushfire, flood or cyclone – have been implemented in each state and territory. These programs focus on educating people to survive the hazard and emphasise the protection of life and property. The impacts of disaster are complex, recognised through what recovery agencies need to deal with in the aftermath of a disaster, with social and health, economic, infrastructure, and natural consequences.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Survival issues are but one of the challenges (albeit of paramount importance) that individuals, households and their communities face in disaster. Other challenging issues are health and wellbeing consequences, loss of livelihood and financial impacts, loss of safety and trust, and damage to community networks. These issues are what Red Cross refers to as the psychosocial impacts of disaster.

Recent work by Associate Professor Daniel Aldrich of Purdue University in the United States<sup>8,9</sup> has also highlighted the importance of the concept 'social capital' as a key factor in helping people prepare for and recover from emergencies. Social capital can be described as the networks and support that people rely upon in their daily lives, the trust that they develop, with each other and institutions, and the degree to

which people are prepared to help each other without obligation (called reciprocity). It is seen as a type of capital, like financial and human capital, that can be invested in and drawn upon.<sup>10</sup> This concept in practice has been observed by Red Cross through a long experience practice in recovery, and has been implicitly incorporated into our preparedness work, through our fourth step of Emergency REDiPlan: Know your neighbours.

The release of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSfDR) by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signals a shift in the way Australia approaches disaster management. One focus of the strategy is to recognise the importance of social capacity in disaster resilience. As a result, Red Cross identified that there was an opportunity to examine in more detail the application of social capital as a concept, to further understand the building of disaster resilience in individuals and communities in the Australian context.

This report summarises the inaugural Red Cross National Disaster Resilience Roundtable, which on 20 September 2012 brought together 43 researchers, policy makers, peak bodies, not for profit organisations and community members, representing both emergency management and the community sector, to explore the application of social capital to disaster resilience.

5 *Community Recovery Manual*, 2011, Australian Emergency Management Institute.

6 Norman, S 2004, 'New Zealand's Holistic Recovery Arrangements', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*.

7 Coghlan, A 2004, *Community Services Ministers Advisory Council Review of Recovery*.

8 Aldrich, DP 2010, 'Fixing Recovery: Social Capital in Post-Crisis Resilience', *Journal of Homeland Security*.

9 Aldrich, DP 2012, *Building resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

10 Putnam, R 2000, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster, New York.

Trust is one of the core elements of social capital



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## 2. Aims and objectives

### Aim

To host an inaugural National Disaster Resilience Advisory Roundtable that would examine the links between social capital and the building of disaster resilience.

### Outcomes:

- Policy and practice within Red Cross, and the emergency management sector more broadly, are enhanced through a better understanding of the link between social capital and disaster resilience.
- The body of evidence relating to disaster resilience and social capital is enhanced through the contribution of quality literature.

Considering recent research on social capital and disaster, it was proposed that the first Roundtable would examine the applicability of social capital to emergency management – in particular the building of disaster resilience in the Australian context.

### 3. Background

In 2011 COAG agreed to the NSfDR. While the NSfDR does not explicitly mention social capital as a concept that influences disaster resilience, a number of components of the strategy relate to activities that can be closely aligned with this concept. These include:

- Empowering individuals to exercise choice and take responsibility.
- The recognition, amongst other things, that disaster-resilient communities use personal and community strengths, and have strong social networks.
- The focus on partnerships to deliver outcomes.
- That recovery strategies are developed in partnership with local communities.

The CEO of Australian Red Cross, Robert Tickner, wrote to the then Attorney-General Nicola Roxon MP in 2011 offering assistance with the implementation of the NSfDR. Red Cross believed it could be of most use in bringing together parties in the ‘third sector or civil society’ – outside existing government committee structures – to provide commentary and input into policy and practice questions relating to the implementation of the strategy. As a result, Red Cross was invited to a meeting of the National Emergency Management Committee to outline a proposal to hold a National Disaster Resilience Roundtable. The concept of the Roundtable was to bring together thought leaders, practitioners, policy makers and those affected by disaster to consider a number of questions.

Given that one focal point of the strategy is social networks, and considering recent research on social capital and disaster, it was proposed that the first Roundtable would examine the applicability of social capital to emergency management – in particular the building of disaster resilience in the Australian context.

The terms of reference for the first Roundtable included consideration of the following:

- To explore the concept of social capital and its applicability to emergency management.
- To identify and examine the elements of social capital that promote resilience.

- To identify the policy and practical considerations for applying a social capital concept to emergency management. (How can emergency management work more closely with the community sector to further build resilience to the impacts of natural disasters?)
- To examine the application of social capital concepts in emergency management practice.

The Roundtable encompassed groups and parties with an interest in, experience of, or expertise with social capital, community development and emergency management to help shape the outcomes. Membership included, but was not limited to:

- People and communities affected by disaster
- Key research institutions
- Peak bodies
- Industry groups
- Professional associations
- Experienced practitioners.

From the outset, it was considered important to include people and communities affected by disaster to ensure that any discussion was well grounded within people’s experience. The Roundtable also sought to bring together emergency management agencies and community services agencies.

The Roundtable was chaired by Mr Noel Clement, Head of Australian Services for Australian Red Cross, and commenced with four theoretical inputs: a research, policy, practice and community member perspective. This was followed by small group consideration of three questions looking at the application of social capital to preparedness, response, recovery and diversity.

Given the importance of Associate Professor Aldrich’s paper in sparking the interest in social capital and disaster resilience, and his recently released book *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*, he was invited and kindly agreed to present the research component of the Roundtable.

**We also knew through our recovery work that supporting and facilitating connections was vitally important.**

## 4. Opening comments

### Mr Noel Clement

**Roundtable Chair and Head of Australian Services,  
Australian Red Cross**

Relationships matter. Many of the things that we achieve in life are the result of not only our own endeavours but the relationships and trust we develop with others. For many years our approach as a sector to disasters has been a simplistic one. We lose it, we replace it and, if we can't replace it, we soften the blow of the impact.

Over time in Red Cross we have recognised there is an 'X factor' in disaster management. Why are some communities more prepared and resilient than others? Why do some get on with the job? Why disaster recovery is more than just rebuilding houses and infrastructure.

When Red Cross sought to contribute more to disaster management – particular in the preparedness space – we were careful to make sure our focus did not duplicate the very good work that was being done by our emergency services colleagues. A line in a paper by Professor Douglas Paton struck a chord: communities that are well connected are better prepared. Hence step four of REDiPlan was born: *Know your neighbours*. We also knew through our recovery work that supporting and facilitating connections was vitally important. Yet often we had to defend the role of the humble barbeque against more seemingly tangible recovery initiatives. Here another paper struck a chord, by Professor Daniel Aldrich, that identified the role of social capital in facilitating recovery.

Social capital as a concept came to prominence in the early part of the millennium, with the publication of Robert Putnam's influential *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*<sup>11</sup>. The concept recognises that, like other forms

of capital, natural, financial, physical and human social capital can be 'invested in', grown, and drawn upon when needed to enable participants to act together more effectively to achieve shared objectives.

The idea is that strong social capital, that is strong individual and community networks, has been used to support a number of areas, better educational outcomes, good governance and civic participation, reduced crime and positive health and wellbeing.<sup>12,13</sup> This capital relies upon trust between the participants, and a good level of reciprocity, that is mutual help willingly given without obligation. For example, if one person borrows a lawnmower from another, at a later date that person may offer to help move furniture, without thinking, 'He helped me then, so I must help him now'.

As the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, agreed by the Council of Australian Governments last year, recognises the importance of social capacity and community networks in building resilience, we saw an opportunity to bring together a range of participants in emergency management to examine social capital and disaster resilience. Writing to the National Emergency Management Committee, the peak committee for emergency management last year, the Committee agreed that this would be a worthwhile activity.

The goal of this inaugural National Disaster Resilience Roundtable is to bring together community members, researchers, practitioners, policy makers and peak bodies – those of us in civil society and government – to deepen the understanding of the impacts of emergencies through examining the role of community networks and trust, that is social capital, to disaster resilience.

11 ibid

12 Halpern, D 2005, *Social Capital*. Polity Press, Cambridge UK.

13 Wind, TR, Fordham, M, Konproe, I 2011, 'Social capital and post disaster mental health', *Global Health Action*.

## Governments need to engage with the community, business, and not for profits, and partner with them to build resilient communities.

### Opening remarks on behalf of the Australian Government

#### Mr Mike Rothery

First Assistant Secretary  
National Security Resilience Policy Division  
Attorney-General's Department

*Mr Rothery is responsible for Security and Resilience policy redevelopment in the Australian government. He has particular responsibility for the implementation of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.*

After the Victorian bushfires in 2009, the emergency management community went back to basics to consider; what is a disaster, where do government and community intersect, and what are the expectations of each and gaps between them? It was recognised that many of the practical issues that emergency services agencies needed to deal with “on the day” have the potential to be managed much earlier in the policy and planning process, but that this requires a much broader commitment across government. It is also apparent that changing demographics of rural, and perirural areas, are challenging basic assumptions about awareness and preparedness to live in areas with a history of bushfire. As people move from cities into the rural area (often called the ‘sea change’ and ‘tree change’ phenomena), urban expectations of emergency services are carried over into rural areas.

There is clearly a need for emergency management agencies to be more involved in whole-of government policy development than ever before. Governments need to engage with the community, business, and not for profits, and partner with them to build resilient communities. There is a serious question as to the right balance between assisting communities become resilient, but not over dependent on outside help that might not always be available in an extreme event.

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience is the Council of Australian Government's attempt to bring these different elements together to guide how Australians and their communities become more disaster resilient. The strategy was drafted with input from a range of stakeholders, and is the first attempt to put disaster management in a national and multi-disciplinary context. It also recognises the role of a range of participants and stakeholders, including the community.

Through implementation of the Strategy, new approaches to emergency management are being developed, underpinned by the recognition that emergency management is everyone's business.

Mr Rothery welcomed Red Cross' contribution to the implementation of the Strategy as a practical example of bringing together a range of participants, that did not normally come together to consider these issues. He looked forward to fruitful discussions coming from the roundtable.

## Collaboration and the leverage of partnerships is key to getting better outcomes for communities in disaster resilience.

### 5. Conceptual perspectives

#### 5.1 Policy perspectives

##### Mr David Place

*Chief Executive of South Australia Fire and Emergency Services Commission (the umbrella organisation covering Metro and Rural Fire Services and the SES), Mr Place has had a long career as an ambulance officer, holding senior executive roles in the SA Ambulance Service.*

Representing the Australian New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC), Mr Place presented the first of the theoretical inputs for the day.

Mr Place spoke of the changing roles of government and communities in emergency management. Although he noted that progress has been made in improving emergency management practices over the past decade, he felt that the messages were still not getting through. On a recent trip through the Adelaide Hills, one of the highest fire prone regions in Australia, Mr Place said that he saw many gutters filled with litter and simple tasks, such as clearing around homes, not being undertaken.

Mr Place suggested that society was potentially moving from resilient to reliant and, in his view, every time government takes a step forward some members of the community take a step back. He illustrated as an example the recent release of the telephone warning system that sends SMSs to people about imminent threats in their area. While speaking about it on talkback radio, one caller asked him how he would get the SMS if he was on his tractor. Mr Place felt that this example goes to the heart of shared responsibility – is it all incumbent on government, or do other community members also have responsibility to take action? Should the caller be considering that if the message is not getting through to him, what can he do to improve his circumstances?

Reflections were made on the impact of a government action, such as the payment of a universal fires services levy. In response to the challenges communities have to fundraise for fire services, the levy is designed to provide a consistent level of funding to fire agencies across the board. However the

spin off benefits of local fundraising activities, still apparent in many rural communities, is that community members engage with the challenge, and they become more aware of the issues. Mr Place made the comment that reduced impetus for local fundraising efforts had an unforeseen negative community consequence.

Noting that funding for disaster mitigation activities has remained relatively static over the past decade, Mr Place said the focus for state governments, such as South Australia, has been to provide seed funding to get innovative projects off the ground; examples being the Red Cross Emergency REDiPlan project in the Adelaide Hills, or the funding provided to the RSPCA to develop an online billeting system for pets when people leave their homes on extreme fire weather days.

Mr Place concluded that the NSfDR promotes a focus on partnerships, with nontraditional participants in emergency management helping to develop disaster resilience. This focus is a recognition that disaster resilience cannot be 'done' alone. Collaboration and the leverage of partnerships is key to getting better outcomes for communities in disaster resilience.

#### 5.2 Practitioner perspectives

##### Ms Anne Leadbeater

*Strategic Project Manager, Murrindindi Shire Council, Victoria. Ms Leadbeater has a background in emergency management policy, community development and adult education. Ms Leadbeater worked on behalf of council to coordinate the initial recovery efforts for the Kinglake Ranges communities.*

Ms Leadbeater presented the second of the inputs for the day. She started by outlining a Community Building Initiative that she had been managing prior to the fires in the Kinglake ranges area. The initiative focused on eight communities, involving 4500 people, and used the motto 'Ideas into action'. Participants mapped community assets and then defined priority projects, and developed a community plan. Out of the planning process action teams were developed

**Right:** Reciprocity: doing things for each other, an important element of social capital.

**Far Right:** The impacts of disaster, not only what is lost, but what does this mean?



to work on projects, and the overall feeling was that the process worked well.

Black Saturday changed everything on 7 February 7 2009. Ms Leadbeater drew the group's attention to the example of Toolangi, a small township affected by the bushfires. The Toolangi community called the council to help with relief matters, as there was still a significant fire threat in the area after Black Saturday. By the time the council team arrived at the CJ Dennis Hall, with relief materials in hand, they were surprised to find everything had already been set up. Local community members had taken it upon themselves to coordinate what was needed, what was offered, and provided information on a regular basis. The community drew upon its own skills and resources to make this happen. From there, two weeks after the fire, the threat subsided and the community moved into recovery. Four weeks later, they had established a recovery group, which focused on planning for medium and longer-term activities and began using the Community Building Initiative model that they had worked on prior to the fires, as they were comfortable with the processes. The community then set out to define recovery priorities and strengths, arrange action teams, identify and promote connections, and foster innovation and resilience.

The success factors within the community included:

- The importance of working with local leaders
- Communities setting their own goals and using local resources
- Strong communication
- Recognising that communities are inherently resilient and being mindful that agencies and governments can reduce this resilience, which can lead to a learned helplessness.

Ms Leadbeater also emphasised that the best way to promote disaster resilience messages is through existing groups and activities, e.g. the local knitting group. Community networks already exist, people come together to talk, and the messages can be added to activities that are already happening, rather than going to the effort of holding sessions that generally

only the committed turn up to. It is important for governments and agencies to support community engagement by tapping into existing community skills and resources, and to help communities learn new skills. All of these activities are of benefit to communities, even if there is no disaster. This has the effect of shifting the focus of resilience building to everyday activities, which are of particular benefit if a disaster strikes. Disaster resilience is individual and community resilience, everyday of the week.

### 5.3 Research Perspectives

#### Associate Professor Daniel Aldrich

*The third input of the day was provided by Associate Professor Daniel Aldrich from Purdue University, via videolink from Japan. Professor Aldrich is a political scientist who has published extensively on communities that have experienced catastrophe.*

Having personally experienced Hurricane Katrina, he has recently turned his attention to social capital and disaster resilience and has recently published a book entitled *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*.

Professor Aldrich commenced by suggesting that disasters generally didn't interest political scientists, but having moved to New Orleans just prior to Hurricane Katrina – and losing his job, home and most of his possessions – the five months of unemployment that followed allowed him to observe and think about what was happening around him.

By mapping the return of residents to neighbourhoods in New Orleans, he noticed that there were some counterintuitive processes happening; in places where there was deeper water, people returned; some of the poorer areas had early returnees. As an example, when one community needed 500 people to sign paperwork to have the power company reconnect the power, gaining the signatures was achieved in 24 hours. Professor Aldrich started to form the idea that these actions occurred because of how well these communities were connected, and their access to a range of informal resources. This led him to look at the application of social capital.



Far Left: Recovery Centres support and enable stretched community networks.

Left: Flood have insidious intangible impacts.

Professor Aldrich gave an overview of the traditional influences on recovery outcomes: financial aid, the level of destruction, governance, population density and socio-economic disparity are generally indicators on how recovery may progress. The notion that more financial aid will speed recovery, and the level of destruction will slow recovery, is generally not supported in the research that Professor Aldrich has undertaken – in the Tokyo earthquake of 1923, Kobe Earthquake of 1996, Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Professor Aldrich introduced the concept that social capital consists of bonding, bridging and linking capital elements. **Bonding social capital** consists of the strong ties within a community that link individuals within a horizontal network. These relationships are most often found at the level of family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. **Bridging social capital**, on the other hand, generally consists of ties found between people sharing traits, such as similar economic status, interests, or political stance, but who differ in factors such as location, occupation or ethnicity. Finally, **linking social capital** represents a more impersonal form of social capital found within communities. The category of linking capital represents the vertical ties within communities which develop between formal institutions, organisations and individuals. Each of these three forms of social capital represent networks vital to sustaining community vibrancy and prosperity and form part of an interrelated system of group and individual relationships.

Professor Aldrich also identified how strong social capital can lead to people collectively participating and having a voice in the recovery. Weaker forms of social capital can lead to individuals and families exiting from a neighbourhood, and if the ties are weaker then there is little reason for people to remain in their community.

A number of suggestions for promoting social capital were identified by Professor Aldrich, from block parties or street parties through to more organised action groups. He also outlined a project that he was involved with that used a community currency. In this instance volunteering was valued in a local community by a currency, which could be used to exchange goods and services with local businesses.

## 5.4 Community perspectives

### Ms Suzy Robinson

*Manager of the Fernvale Futures Complex for the Somerset Regional Council. Director of the Lowood and Fernvale Community Bank.*

The fourth perspective provided was that of community member Ms Suzy Robinson. Ms Robinson was directly affected by the 2011 Queensland floods, and has been actively involved in the recovery of her local community, Fernvale, and surrounding suburbs.

Ms Robinson outlined the challenges for her community, in a rural region that, further west of Toowoomba, was somewhat forgotten in the floods. There were significant challenges with evacuations within the area. Once the waters had subsided, the community came together and, along with the agencies in the recovery plan including Red Cross, worked well to identify needs of people affected.

One of the emergent needs identified by the community and agencies was to distribute donated and sourced goods. As a result, a recovery centre and distribution centre were set up. The centres responded to local needs and were staffed initially by local volunteers, soon becoming focal points for the local community – not just a place where people came to ‘get things’, but also to meet, talk, and run sessions (such as parent’s groups). The centres were enablers and connectors, supporting the networks that were stretched by the impact of the floods, and the development of new networks, by providing a safe, easily accessible place for people to meet.

Ms Robinson emphasised the importance of social events as a way of promoting community connections. One focus was the Getting Back to Somerset event, to demonstrate the strong ties that united local communities, and to recognise that recovery was ongoing. The community also focussed on story telling, as it was recognised as important by community members to share their stories, and to create a community narrative that could help shape recovery. A project is underway in the region to collect these stories and photographs for publication.

As a result, Ms Robinson identified social activities as playing a key role in the recovery of the Somerset Region, promoting connectedness between people whose everyday lives had been changed and challenged. Planning for recovery should always take into account social activities.

It's not just the tangible things that matter.



## Trust and good relationships with authorities and agencies providing the education and awareness activities forms strong linking social capital.

### 6. Social capital in emergency management – Discussion

The participants were divided into four groups to examine preparedness, response, recovery and diversity. Membership of the groups were deliberately diverse, to promote a range of views within discussion. Each group moved around to different sessions and spent 45 minutes considering a set of questions. This section reports on discussions undertaken in the group sessions and looks to link these discussions to elements of social capital, bonding, bridging, and linking, as well as trust and reciprocity.

#### 6.1 Preparedness group

*Facilitated by Miriam Lumb Senior Project Officer, Preparedness, Australian Red Cross.*

Disaster household preparedness is the action that people take to avoid or reduce the impacts of disasters on their lives and livelihoods.

Participants were asked to consider the following statement:

*A well connected community is more likely to be prepared<sup>14</sup>. Achieving disaster preparedness is about seeking behaviour change, getting people to act to reduce their potential impacts, not only to surviving the hazard, but also for the longer-term recovery.*

Participants were then asked: *“Thinking about each of the forms of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking – what are the formal and informal networks that we can tap into to raise awareness about hazards, and to encourage household preparedness?”*

#### Discussions

One of the core elements of social capital – trust – was seen to be vital to preparedness efforts. Information from a trusted source enables people who aren't necessarily familiar with disaster preparedness initiatives to access and act upon information. It was noted that people tend to trust family and friends first over official sources.

Reciprocity is also seen as important, as many of the actions that take place during and after emergencies rely upon people helping each other, e.g. moving furniture, providing shelter, and other forms of direct and indirect support (financial and practical). Preparedness programs and activities need to promote the idea of helping each other, and sharing the responsibility for preparedness activities. Conversely, there are opportunities where people are already working together within communities, such as land care or working bees, or other community projects that use existing networks and shared activities to build awareness of disasters.

A key theme from the disaster preparedness discussions was the critical need to educate and spread awareness within communities about the threat disasters pose to an individual's wellbeing. It was identified that while social networks are important to securing positive disaster outcomes, this was in part contingent on the knowledge and education of disasters that existed for individuals within these networks. Also important was an understanding of what people can do to help each other. This is a reciprocal relationship, where one is dependent on the other. Disaster awareness requires strong networks to be effective and community networks need good awareness to know what they are dealing with.

This awareness is contingent on having strong forms of all three types of social capital. Trust and good relationships with authorities and agencies providing the education and awareness activities forms strong linking social capital. The linking social capital enables programs to be informed by local knowledge and needs. Strong linking social capital allows for the transfer of knowledge networks, and would then be facilitated by good bridging and bonding social capital, well connected groups within communities. Strong bridging social capital, i.e. well supported local institutions, acts as a conduit for information and education activities, as these entities already exist, and can act as channels for the preparedness agencies. These entities include formal or constituted groups, such as sporting clubs, interest groups, religious groups, or local institutions, like schools or child care centres. However, also important and often forgotten are the informal focal points – key community assets and gathering places, such as cafes, hotels, hairdressers, stock and station agents, and local supermarkets – where people develop

<sup>14</sup> Paton, D 2003, 'Disaster Preparedness: A social-cognitive perspective', *Disaster Prevention and Management*, no. 12, pp. 210-6.

**Right:** Dissemination of information is through many different channels.

**Far Right:** The bushfires may have destroyed homes and towns, but the strong community ties remain.



relationships with local business operators. These operators can be as important a conduit or enabler as the local councillor or school council president.

It was noted that the ability to manage consequences and mitigate outcomes in a disaster situation generally lies in community hands, recognising the value of strong networks built on friends, family and community. In reality, most individuals do not consider themselves helpless in the face of disaster (and nor should agencies consider them helpless).

In this context, disaster preparedness is seen as a means of equipping communities with the information most essential to mobilising social networks to prepare for and, in some cases avoid, disaster. Again, strong bonding and bridging social capital is critical to the development of good dynamic networks that will support people to be prepared. One challenge of strong bonding social capital is for people who are new to an area, or on the margins of society. They may find themselves isolated and unable to access the support that bonding and bridging social capital can bring. This is termed the 'dark side' of social capital.

A strong emergent theme from the discussions was that preparedness approaches should acknowledge the long term nature of recovery. These approaches need to be multi-pronged to address financial, physical and psychological barriers to both preparation for and recovery from disasters. This theme operates in the linking social capital sphere, where agencies providing preparedness education and awareness tend to focus on short term survival issues.

Tied in with building of community capacities is a need to be realistic about how recovery from a disaster takes place. When building strong social capital resources, a sense of realism is necessary in order to create mutual expectations and bolster motivation around achievable community goals. Through this comprehensive approach, community members would be able to draw on a diverse range of mutual experiences that would cement community bonds and enable shared learning in a variety of different areas relevant to the experience of disaster.

While education was identified as a key factor for improving disaster preparedness, the dissemination of information should

not take shape in a single generic form. Rather, it was recognised that education should be targeted according to community needs and existing local structures. Social capital takes many unique forms dependent on community structures. Likewise, the dissemination of information throughout community networks was seen to be situational in nature and should be necessarily flexible to community structures and needs. This would, in many cases, involve using flexible messaging that appeals to a particular demographic, cultural group, age range, etc. In addition, information could be delivered in a range of forms, depending on demographic needs. Formats could include both disaster preparedness targeted activities or general community activities, such as formal town meetings, informal social gatherings, and through the use of social media.

Disaster awareness programs need to be based on community development principles; taking into account the needs of communities and local community circumstances. Using this approach will enable programs to be aware of local issues and needs, and ensure a greater degree of success. To enable this, practitioners must be aware of, and have skills in, community development. This may be a challenge for many existing practitioners, as the tendency has been to deliver a one-size-fits-all program.

Support for these activities needs to have a long term focus. It was noted that road safety and public health campaigns have achieved success over decades, not just years. This outcome can only be attained by adopting a non-partisan approach by decision makers, and by developing long term funding models for programs and activities.

It was concluded that by creating preparedness programs that listen to community needs, rather than impose across-the-board solutions, community-driven programs have the potential to access vulnerable community members. Through the recognition of existing social capital resources, communities could use key agents within at-risk populations and work within existing programs to provide integrated and engaging messaging on preparedness. This will require good linking social capital, as well as strong bridging social capital and a form of bonding social capital that is inclusive.

## Working through established structures is key to accessing existing social capital within a community.

### 6.2 Response group

*Facilitated by Sally Paynter National Coordinator, Capacity Development, Australian Red Cross.*

Participants were asked to consider the following statement:

*The response/relief period of emergencies is characterised by high uncertainty and escalating hazard threats. The focus in this period of emergency management is upon surviving the hazard.*

Participants were then asked: *“Considering bonding, bridging and linking social capital, what strengths do people and communities bring into a disaster? How can this be drawn upon to meet people’s immediate safety and practical needs?”*

#### Discussions

Response is seen as a very time limited period, generally with a sudden or quick onset of activities. These activities are generally focussed upon basic rescue and relief needs, which tend to cease or transition to recovery once the threat of the hazard subsides, and the uncertainty it generates recedes. It was noted that whatever capacities or resources an individual or a community had available to them, that is what they had to work with in a disaster. Hence, the focus of planning needs to be on the issues that communities and individuals face when hazard threats are high, as well as resources that will be needed and ways to access them quickly. This period is also generally the focus of media and political attention.

When thinking about relief needs, such as shelter, food or information, there are many different types and sources of community resources. Often, however, these resources are not utilised as they are not identified pre-disaster and only emerge during the disaster. In addition, there is a tendency to rely upon the mobilisation of official agencies and resources detailed in emergency management plans. Communities organise themselves each day of the week, as Russel Dynes<sup>15</sup> notes, and part of the challenge of emergency managers is to know

about agencies and activities and to connect with them during the response period.

There was emphasis on the idea that one response ‘does not fit all’ as might traditionally have been applied by government and relief agencies. Contrary to this traditional approach, it was felt that the key to effective disaster response lay in the ability to tap into local resources, services and knowledge to create tailored response plans. It was suggested that responses to disaster could be designed and implemented most efficiently if great care was taken to account for existing social capital and resources – that is networks and trust – that might exist within a community.

Working through established structures, such as strong social networks, traditional gathering places and local geographical knowledge, is key to accessing existing social capital within a community. Strong bonding and bridging social capital promotes a sense of self-efficacy, and coupled with strong linking social capital, (i.e. trust in official agencies) community members are well equipped to support people’s immediate needs (safety, shelter, rescue, food, water, information, first aid). Identifying and understanding existing resources is critical to providing the most suitable assistance to communities who already have a strong level of resilience, as well as supporting communities who are less resilient.

While the role of expertise and professional assistance was widely acknowledged in the discussion as being essential to dealing with the effects of a disaster, tapping into informal insurance networks was highlighted as critical. Relationships of reciprocity were also seen as an efficient use of a community’s resources to ensure more sustainable outcomes and avoid dependency on external agencies. Through the use of these social capital resources, response outcomes were seen to be more community-tailored and offer greater sustainability. Additionally, through the cooperation of agencies and local leaders it was thought that more accurate and relevant community information might be shared with organisations providing relief, while simultaneously establishing community trust for organisations through support from respected leaders.

<sup>15</sup> Dynes, R 1970, ‘Organizational Involvement and Changes in Community Structure in Disaster’, *The American Behavioural Scientist*, Jan-Feb.

**Right and Far Right:**  
Responses to disaster work well when they draw upon existing social capital.



A challenge noted was that many of these community resources are mobilised early to support immediate relief needs, yet when communities are faced with recovery, there may be challenges in sustaining a response. The early period is characterised, through a high level of high-media and political attention, by a narrative of 'communities pulling together and doing it themselves'. In fact, experience has indicated that once the media and political attention subsides, and communities are left to themselves, there are great challenges in motivating decision-makers and supporters to extend assistance in a sustainable manner.

Trust between agencies, and community members, is paramount in the response period, as people need to receive, process and act upon time critical life saving, or behaviour changing information. Additionally, the literature suggests that people more often than not are rescued or supported by family members, friends or neighbours, rather than emergency services.<sup>16</sup> Hence, reciprocity and strong networks are positives in the response period.

Reciprocity is also important as many response agencies' key messages now include: "You may not get a warning" and, "Do not expect a fire truck to come". Therefore, there needs to be a greater reliance on community based resources, friends, family, and neighbours, and for this to be seen in a positive light, e.g. "We pulled together" rather than "They did not come."

One concern to come out of the discussions was the need to develop responses that not only identified community leaders, but also members of the community at higher risk because of weak social capital networks and resources. While strong social capital can be a positive indicator of one's ability to overcome disaster, so too weak social capital for some individuals can result in negative outcomes. A poor level of social capital for individuals could potentially manifest in infrequent communication, low economic support, feelings of isolation and little access to shared channels of recovery. Focusing on this, it was suggested that disadvantage might be combated through approaches taking into account diversity

of language, cultural backgrounds, previous experiences of trauma and additional assistance for people with disabilities. The other end of the spectrum was also discussed; people that may be considered too highly resourceful and resilient because they are in the high income bracket and often work out of the area. Sometimes these people are less socially connected to the community in which they live and as a result have poor social capital networks.

Practical ideas to support response activities include using social networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, to disseminate information, creating communication lists or phone trees to ensure all community members are receiving accurate and up-to-date information, and creating multilingual and Auslan materials to ensure inclusion for all community members. Community activities prior to disasters, such as street parties and other very locally focused gatherings, can also help people to get to know each other. This includes knowing who might need help or be able to offer help during the response period, and knowing who people can trust for information.

Planning for response activities – particularly relief activities of shelter, food, material goods – should also examine local existing providers, such as supermarkets, cafes, hotels and schools. Planners can identify, through community support agencies, what formal or informal networks exist, what support agencies or businesses are operating. Planners can also talk to the community to find out what their needs are, and what assistance can be offered.

Finally, it was highlighted that community expectations don't often match the role and purpose of government and non-government agencies. Confusion over the purpose of agencies can lead to inaccurate expectations and create overlap, and inefficiency, in dealing with the response effort. If a sense of clarity around the role of outside agencies is established early on in the response efforts, communities can better use their social capital resources creating a collaborative approach where overlap and confusion is then minimised.

<sup>16</sup> Shaw, R, Ishiwatari, M and Arnold, M 2012, 'Community Based Risk Management', *Knowledge Notes*, Cluster 2: Nonstructural Measures, Note 2-1, World Bank Institute.

## The Thursday night dinners at Strathewen – a bushfire affected community in Victoria – were based on existing bridging social capital.

### 6.3 Recovery groups

Facilitated by Kate Brady (National Recovery Coordinator) and Shane Maddocks (National Coordinator, Community Development)

#### Recovery group 1: A focus on governance

#### Recovery group 2: A focus on assistance measures

Participants were asked to consider the following statement:

*Recovery is a complex process that is long lasting (likened to a marathon). The nature of the disaster will change communities in a range of different ways: community members are lost or displaced, services are disrupted, landscapes are changed, a sense of safety is compromised.*

Participants were asked two questions: “Considering the forms of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking – what stressors are placed on a community’s social capital post disaster?” and “What is the impact of external aid (by that we mean funded or donated service support and assistance) in maintaining and building social capital post disaster?”

#### Group discussions

There were several key themes to come out of the discussions on disaster recovery. When bridging, bonding and linking social capital are used positively, communities are more likely to be empowered to directly determine how resources are allocated and used. Well-networked communities, with good participation in institutions, can support communities directly to decide how resources should be managed. However, it was noted by groups that if community members do not participate in local institutions or they have weak bonding social capital, then the risk is that they can be excluded from the decision-making process and resources distribution.

Community-driven recovery fits well within a strong linking and bridging social capital framework, as local agencies have faith in the community to know who is affected and what is needed. Likewise, the community trusts that the agencies and

authorities have the best interests of the community at heart. This is at odds with some of the existing recovery practices, which tend to assume that communities are dysfunctional after disasters and need someone to take control. It was recognised that resources could best be allocated by local communities, with support and guidance on the nature of recovery, according to local needs and priorities. This distribution approach differs from the traditional disbursement approaches taken by government and non-government agencies, but agencies need to be prepared to let go of these processes to a degree (within the bounds of audit and transparency requirements).

By facilitating points of gathering, information sharing and cooperation, the opportunity to share stories and create common narratives might enable communities to strengthen their social capital networks and hence build internal resilience and capacity for recovery. In practice, this means supporting community events and barbeques, providing meeting places for people to come together, or identifying challenges that can be supported and tackled collectively. These community activities can either draw upon existing strong bridging social capital or serve to build social capital. For example, the Thursday night dinners at Strathewen – a bushfire affected community in Victoria – were based on existing bridging social capital. The gatherings further strengthened this social capital to enable the community to strongly and positively influence their recovery outcomes. A common narrative relating to the impact of the disaster on the community can be important for identifying how a community may react (and what assistance they may or may not need)<sup>17</sup> as well as helping shape how a community may remember the events that have happened<sup>18</sup>.

Essentially, although it was recognised that social capital is a trait particular to and built within communities, it was simultaneously recognised that actions taken by policy makers and recovery drivers could indeed help to foster and strengthen these resources. Being prepared to enable and facilitate less tangible activities, without clear outputs, is a challenge for agencies to take up and support; in particular, policy makers

17 Chamlee-Wright, E and Storr, H 2011, ‘Social capital as collective narratives and post-disaster community recovery’, *The Sociological Review*, 59:2.

18 Richardson, J 2010, ‘Disasters and Remembrance: A journey to a New Place’, *Grief Matters*, Winter 2010.

**Right:** Keep things local.

**Far right:** Recovery takes a long time.



and central government agencies who tend to focus on output based funding amid a populist focus of rebuilding quickly.

Keeping things local was a central theme throughout the discussions. This was evident in suggestions raised to identify local assets as a place to start in all recovery efforts. Strong bridging social capital comes into play here, where good links between local formal and informal groups and networks will help in identifying local capacities. While this might be a challenging task for outside agencies, such knowledge is readily accessible within communities and was identified as an important place to start building community relationships and creating spaces for collaboration. Agencies need to understand the relationships and the entry points within the community, and who in the community to work with to further explore this area.

Encouraging economic activity, and hence employment, was also raised as a local issue relevant to social capital accumulation. The impact of donated goods on local economies (well understood by practitioners) was highlighted. Examples such as voucher systems for local businesses were discussed as ways of supporting local business, networks and linkages. Such inclusive activities foster investment and economic sustainability and were seen as a way to allow communities to support one another in their recovery efforts, without taking business away from local producers and investing in areas that would hinder the local community to rebuild both physical assets and community networks.

The ability of social capital to both aid in the recovery process, while simultaneously exacerbate existing inequality divisions for those with weaker social networks, was discussed. While social capital was seen as a positive tool, a lack of social capital could work to exclude those with weak community links and create disadvantage in accessing financial aid, physical resources, information and personal support. It was recognised that approaches to social capital should not only account for the personal advantage brought about by strong networks, but should also be understood as a tool to assist those less fortunate, supporting the diversity of a community.

Another point seen to create negative outcomes for a community was competition between relief agencies, which could inhibit collaboration, cause overlap and create an inefficient use of resources.

In many instances recovery agencies bring invaluable expertise, knowledge and experience. However, inefficiency is often created through poor collaboration between communities and other agencies, with weak coordination of services. This in turn creates mixed messaging for communities and a difficulty in identifying an easy pathway to recovery. These challenges weaken linking social capital within a community, resulting in duplication and confusion amongst those that need assistance. It was commented that, for many people, the disaster was one aspect they had to deal with, the other being the so-called 'secondary disaster' of the recovery process.

The discussion groups generally agreed that recovery was best viewed as a long term process of supporting communities to overcome physical, economic, environmental, social and psychological hardship. However, it was noted that agencies and governments are often pressured to provide quick short term solutions. In particular, the role of the media in framing responses as slow and drawn out was flagged as having negative impacts on long-term investment and recovery programs within communities. While local groups were often aware of the lengthy periods it might take to build back their community, in both a physical and social sense, undue pressure to provide short-term solutions often resulted in less sustainable outcomes. The tension that arises from this scenario has the potential effect of weakening linking social capital, when expectations of governments and agencies are not matched with communities, and communities become sceptical of their intentions, in looking for 'quick fixes'.

In reference to the governance processes, suggestions were made for flexible planning and governance that would give communities autonomy in their own approaches to recovery. The government's role would then be that of 'filling the gaps' where communities might need assistance beyond their own means, rather than driving the recovery process. By facilitating the rebuilding process in this way, local capacity and expertise



Far Left: Awareness and participation is the key to resilience.

would be recognised, whilst still offering invaluable support in areas of difficulty identified by communities themselves. This can be challenging where linking social capital is weak, and the relationship between government agencies and communities is poor. This concept can also be challenging when policy makers and decision makers are pressured into quick decisions, for fear of being portrayed as slow or indecisive, often opting for centralised control models of taskforces or authorities.

Several issues were identified that might also interrupt networks and create barriers in drawing upon social capital during the recovery process. One point of particular note was the loss of facilities, and reasons for people to meet, that can produce a sense of disconnect. That is, when daily activities such as attending school, going to work or playing sports cease due to a disaster, so too people's social networks become harder to access.

Disaster recovery relies not only on physical and financial support, but also social support elements, such as the ability to share stories, talk over a cup of tea and bond through shared experiences. It was suggested that agencies and communities give particular focus to creating physical spaces and activities where mutual learning and interaction can continue to take place. These activities should also focus on the informal places of gathering (e.g. the hairdresser, the sporting match, the landcare group), where often these 'places' are not on an agency's radar. Creating such spaces allows communities to draw upon linking and bridging social capital to sort through community problems and challenges, as well as to validate their experiences.

The social capital of a community can be challenged as a result of the impacts of disaster, with disruption to people lives and networks, as well as losses to individual and community infrastructure. However, social capital is also a driver of recovery, drawing upon, strengthening and building new and existing forms of social capital.

## 6.4 Diversity group

*Facilitated by Dr Steve Francis National Manager, Movement Relations and Advocacy, Australian Red Cross.*

Participants were asked to consider the following statement:

*Our diverse community is traditionally cited as 'vulnerable' in emergency management. People with a disability, from a CALD or ATSI background, or a senior, make up lists of 'vulnerable groups'. We may see strong bonding social capital in these groups, but weaker bridging and linking social capital, with poorer links to the wider community and to formal structures.*

Participants were asked: "What strengths do people, who have been identified as 'vulnerable' in an emergency, bring to the development of networks and relationships?"

### Discussion

One of the first points raised by participants on the subject of diversity was the need to recognise that diversity does not equate to vulnerability. In many cases, the diversity of communities was seen as an opportunity to build strength through a broad array of experiences, skills and backgrounds that may all contribute to mitigating the negative effects of disaster. Many diverse communities have strong bonding social capital (e.g. well-established migrant communities), or good linking social capital (e.g. people with a disability accessing a range of support agencies). However, these strengths tend not to be recognised by agencies, who view diversity as a negative.

The traditional approach to vulnerability has focused on compiling lists of people who meet a particular criteria, e.g. over 70, from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, etc. These lists do not take into account the factors or capacities

## **In many cases, the diversity of communities was seen as an opportunity to build strength through a broad array of experiences, skills and backgrounds.**

that may make people either vulnerable or resilient. Where these groups cross over into disadvantage is when challenges emerge.

By acknowledging people's individual narratives and building networks of volunteers to reflect the diverse backgrounds of a community, diversity is seen as a chance to broaden a community's own resilience and share information that might foster trust and understanding, e.g. an older person's experience with hazard information from generations past, or traditional weather knowledge from indigenous communities to help predict cyclone and flood events.

Communication was identified as one particular area in which it was important to make sure inclusion was achieved for all community members, in order for shared learning, storytelling and information dissemination to take place. Within this idea, it is important to recognise not just the language appropriate to each community group, but also the most appropriate channel for sharing information and the networks which already exist. These channels can be used for seeking advice, building trust, and sending messages and knowledge. For example, while emergency managers traditionally look to written information, or more recently the use of social media channels, word of mouth is still very strong in many communities, such as through church services or clubs, and may be more effective for some.

When looking at the diverse groups existing within a community, ethnicity provides only one means of distinction. Disaster responses should include all groups spanning different ages, genders, learning abilities and physical mobility. By identifying factors that group individuals within a community, creating both inclusion and exclusion, the emphasis moves from a geographical conception of 'community' towards a definition based on social grouping.

Out of this discussion came two particular techniques for accessing diverse populations, to aid in spreading awareness throughout the wider community. The first of these points was the need to identify 'connectors' or 'champions' within a group who provide an access point for communication and interaction. By doing so, it is hoped that communication barriers might be overcome, as well as any sense of mistrust that would be countered by a 'champion's' respect and high level of social capital within a community.

The second point within this discussion was the need to access groups in the most appropriate contexts, rather than creating superficial environments for formal conversation. That is, in order to build trust and comfort, it is important that discussions take place within pre-existing social spaces. By accessing people within their schools, churches, sporting clubs, language groups (and so on), people may be able to discuss issues within their comfort zone and to talk freely about ideas, concerns and information relevant to their social groups.

**Environments for participation in civic life need to be created, supported and nurtured. Funding for these activities needs to take a longer-term view.**

## 7. Emerging themes and recommendations

*Facilitated by Mr Noel Clement*

The Roundtable generally agreed that the concept of social capital was applicable to the disaster resilience area. The focus of the group discussions was centred around the value of networks to preparedness, response and recovery. Less emphasis in these discussions has been on the role of trust in building resilience – and this would be worthy of further investigation.

The application of social capital to disaster resilience requires more investigation, and it was suggested that further studies be undertaken. Given the prevalence of small-scale and large-scale disasters over the past few years, there is opportunity to study the application of social capital in action. It would be particularly useful to examine the actions and activities that promote connection and networks, to further understand how the concept of reciprocity works in a disaster resilience setting, and to look at activities that support, build or indeed restore trust in institutions.

In addition, the element of reciprocity in social capital also requires further examination. It should be noted that the concept of ‘shared responsibility’ is being looked at by the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre through RMIT University<sup>19</sup>.

To enable disaster preparedness programs to be based upon the true impact of disasters, a better understanding of recovery processes, their long term and complex nature, is important.

Social capital, like resilience, is not something that can be imposed or built overnight. Environments for participation in civic life need to be created, supported and nurtured. Funding for these activities, on which disaster resilience work can be founded, needs to take a longer-term view.

Emergency management planning tends to focus on problem solving and resource allocation. The starting point for planning, however, needs to recognise local strengths and the long term complex nature of recovery. Emergency management planners require a policy framework and practice environment to enable this to happen, and this may require skills development in the area of community engagement and community development. Community preparedness education programs need to be grounded in community development, and focus strongly on supporting existing networks, and encouraging trust between community members, partners and government agencies. Emergency management education of preparedness, planning and recovery practitioners should also focus on building competence in community development, with an awareness of social capital. This will enable local, regional and state level programming to recognise the complexity of the challenges, and support flexible and targeted local planning.

<sup>19</sup> McLennan, B, Bosomworth, K, Keating, A, Kruger, T, Towers, B 2012, ‘Visions of Sharing Responsibility for Disaster Resilience’ *Workshop Proceedings*, RMIT University.

**Right and Far Right:**  
Community engagement  
is a two way street.



Given that one of the strongest elements of social capital is the establishment of networks, planning for preparedness and recovery needs to recognise and actively support activities designed to bring people together – to share information, build trust with one another and with agencies, and identify areas where people can help each other. These activities already often exist in communities (e.g. sports clubs, environment groups), so the key is to find these activities and explore ways of piggy backing onto them. If these networks and resources do not exist then the challenge for practitioners is about how to create them in a sustainable manner.

Trust is a particularly important concept in emergency management, as people's decisions are often based on receiving information from a trustworthy source. Trust can also be tested when governments and agencies are perceived, or found, not to have performed according to plan or to community expectations. Given that this is a complex concept involving psychology, crisis communications, as well as leadership theory, it is an area worthy of further exploration to improve post disaster outcomes.

There is a range of indicators for social capital<sup>20</sup>. In order to gauge the strength of social capital in communities, it is recommended that a number of simple indicators be chosen

to help with targeting and planning activities. These indicators should be easy to use, universal, and need to be applied in a way that does not require complex analysis. Consideration should be given to indicators that relate to disaster resilience, e.g. can you raise 2000 dollars in 48 hours? Or, can you ask someone in your neighbourhood to help you shift a heavy piece of furniture? These indicators can then be incorporated into recovery needs and impact assessments, to enable targeting of activities and support.

Community engagement is a two-way street, and this needs to be recognised by government and agencies. Government and agencies should recognise that long after they have withdrawn, the individuals and households that make up communities are still there, and engagement activities need to recognise this. From the community's perspective, they see these activities as 'government engagement'

Significant policy work is underway in the disaster resilience area, led by the ANZEMC. Policy development should take into account a range of diverse views and initiatives, such as this Roundtable, reflect that the not for profit sector has critical role to play in informing the broader policy debate.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004, Measuring Social Capital: An Australian Framework and Indicators Information Paper No. 1378.0

**Communities also need to feel confident that they can push back and create some space in which to determine what is important for them.**

## 8. Summary thoughts

### **Mr Malcolm Hackett**

#### **Chairperson, Strathewen Community Renewal Association**

*Strathewen is a small town north east of Melbourne where 27 people died and 90 per cent of the township, including all community assets, was destroyed in the 7 February 2009 bushfires. The Strathewen Community Renewal Association was established to give voice and action to community led recovery for the town.*

Mr Hackett began by noting that the challenges of recovery are well understood by practitioners and people who come together in a forum like this. The issue then becomes how to translate this knowledge into action and practice. Strathewen has been part of a 'lessons learnt' process for community recovery committees, advising other communities affected

by disaster. They have also participated in the Small Towns, Big Ideas digital stories project, which details some of the personal learnings after the fires, along with the importance of strong community networks and trust. Both resources can be accessed from the Strathewen website, [www.strathewen.vic.au](http://www.strathewen.vic.au).

Mr Hackett reiterated that a one-size-fits-all situation does not work; different solutions are required, and because one approach works – such as in Strathewen – it doesn't necessarily mean the approach will work somewhere else. Communities also need to feel confident that they can push back and create some space in which to determine what is important for them. Resilience may be latent in some communities, but it is there and needs to be nurtured. Programs developed to support disaster resilience must recognise existing community strengths.

## Appendix A: Attendees

### Chair

Mr Noel Clement Australian Red Cross

### Speakers

Professor Daniel P Aldrich Purdue University, USA  
(via videolink)

Ms Anne Leadbeater OAM Murrindindi Shire Council, Victoria

Mr David Place Representing ANZEMC

Ms Suzy Robinson Community Member, Somerset Region, Queensland

Mr Mike Rothery Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government

### Facilitators

Ms Kate Brady Australian Red Cross

Mr Steve Francis Australian Red Cross

Ms Miriam Lumb Australian Red Cross

Mr Shane Maddocks Australian Red Cross

Ms Sally Paynter Australian Red Cross

### Participants

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Dr Susie Burke	Australian Psychological Society, Melbourne	Ms Ruth Lane	Australian Red Cross
Ms Noelene Byrne	Community Member, Tully, Queensland	Ms Amanda Leck	Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Council
Mr Andrew Coghlan	Australian Red Cross	Ms Lynette Lynch	Community member, Somerset Region, Queensland
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The Rev'd Tania Eichler	St Catherine's Anglican Ministry, Queensland	Mr Kevin Munroe	Adventist Development and Relief Agency, New South Wales
Ms Ronnie Faggotter	Department for Communities and Social Inclusion, South Australia	Mr Loucas Nicolaou	Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, ACT
Ms Leah Galvin	St Lukes, Bendigo, Victoria	Ms Victoria Norris	University of Melbourne (intern)
Ms Alexandra Gartmann	Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, Victoria	Mr Laurie Ratz	Insurance Council of Australia, New South Wales
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## Appendix B: Invited but unable to attend

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<b>Mr Nik Filips</b>	City of Darebin, Victoria	<b>Ms Jeanette Pope</b>	Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria
<b>Dr Daryl Fisher</b>	Australian Institute of Family Studies, Victoria	<b>Mr Karl Sullivan</b>	Insurance Council of Australia, New South Wales
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## Appendix C: Acknowledgements

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## Appendix D: Theories and application of social capital and disaster resilience

### Briefing paper for the National Resilience Roundtable

*Victoria Norris, University of Melbourne*

*John Richardson, Australian Red Cross (2012)*

There is a diverse range of literature on social capital, both in a broader theoretical context and more specifically in relation to disaster resilience and emergency recovery. The purpose of this paper is to give a brief overview of the theory and literature pertaining to social capital in order that a more detailed discussion and analysis may ensue.

### Disasters and their impacts

While there are a number of different definitions of 'disaster', for the purposes of this paper Red Cross focuses on the impacts of disaster. In particular, we focus on the disruption to people's lives and communities caused by the loss of:

- family, friends, colleagues and neighbours
- a sense of security
- hope, initiative and dignity
- faith and trust in others
- personal functioning, through injury
- social networks, routines and institutions
- access to services

- infrastructure
- property (including homes and businesses), material goods and pets
- prospects of a livelihood
- place and landscapes.<sup>21</sup>

We see these losses and their attendant disruption manifest in many different ways, including an increase in economic pressures, increased incidence of mental health, wellbeing, and physical issues, the loss of productivity, and the fragmenting of communities. These factors may impact on a person's identity, their ability to do things (physical, emotional, economic), their sense of purpose and independence, sense of control over their life, future and place in their community.

### Individual and community resilience

Resilience is defined in many different ways. For Red Cross purposes, we utilise the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) definition, that is: the ability of individuals, communities, organisations, or countries exposed to disasters and crises and underlying vulnerabilities to:

- anticipate
- reduce the impact of
- cope with
- and recover from

the effects of adversity without compromising their long term prospects.

The word 'ability' is key to understanding resilience. Ability is capacity or capability based on different human, psychological, social, financial, physical, natural or political assets. The resilience approach acknowledges that there is always capacity in people or communities; resilience can be strengthened by both reinforcing individual and community capacity and addressing vulnerabilities.<sup>22</sup>

For individuals, some of the protective factors that reduce the impacts of disaster include: a good level of functioning, access to social support, ability to cope, strong moral belief systems and the ability to return to routines (i.e. reducing household disruption).<sup>23</sup>

For communities, Norris and others have identified a set of adaptive capacities that promote community level resilience – economic development, community competence, social capital, and information and communication.<sup>24</sup>

Red Cross uses the following practical definition; community generally describes one of three things:

- All people, organisations and structures within a defined geographical area having a common government
- A group of people with a common interest, or
- people with a common affiliation.<sup>25</sup>

### Social capital theory

Social capital has been summarised in two simple words: relationships matter.<sup>26</sup> The concept recognises that like other forms of capital – natural, financial, physical and human – social capital can be 'invested in', grown, and drawn upon when needed to enable participants to act together more effectively to achieve shared objectives.

The idea is that strong social capital, that is strong individual and community networks, has been used to support a number of areas: better educational outcomes, good governance and civic participation, reduced crime, and positive health and wellbeing.<sup>27</sup>

For the sake of uniformity, it is important to first establish a singular definition of social capital from which we can further elaborate. In this instance, with the applicability of social capital in disaster resilience in mind, social capital may be seen as 'the social ties or membership of particular communities that [make] resources, advantages and opportunities available to individuals [and groups]'.<sup>28</sup>

These social ties used to link groups and individuals together are referred to as 'networks'. The role of social capital in creating networks and linking people together is manifested in various forms, from bonding groups, bridging individuals with similar interests, and linking groups in a vertical relationships, through to formal institutional arrangements, and bracing between public and private sectors.<sup>29</sup> Through these relationships, the production of trust and reciprocity creates the potential for mutual benefits which can be accessed through membership of a social group or network. These mutual benefits are demonstrated in a number of forms through the sharing of knowledge, financial risk, market information and claims for reciprocity.<sup>30</sup> Through this system of shared information and advantage, mutual benefits of group membership are housed under the umbrella-term 'social capital'.

21 Australian Psychology Society and Australian Red Cross 2010, 'Psychological First Aid: An Australian Manual'.

22 IFRC 2012, 'The Road to resilience: IFRC discussion paper on resilience'.

23 Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and IFRC 2008, 'Public Health Guide in Emergencies', 2nd edn, Geneva, Switzerland.

24 Norris, FH, Stevens, SP, Pfefferbaum, B, Wyche, KF, and Pfefferbaum, RL 2008, 'Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness', *Am J Community Psychol*, 41:127–150.

25 Australian Red Cross 2010, 'Ways of Working', p6.

26 Field, J 2008, 'Social Capital', *Key Ideas Series*, Routledge.

27 *ibid*

28 Pope, J 2003, 'Social Capital and Social Capital Indicators: A Reading List', *Working Paper Series*, Public Health Information Development Unit, Adelaide.

29 Vallance, S 2011, 'Early Disaster Recovery: A Guide for Communities', *Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies*, vol.2011, no.2, pp.19-25.

30 Adger, WN 2003, 'Social Capital, Collective Action, and Adaptation to Climate Change.' *Economic Geography*, vol.79, no.4, pp.387-404.

Observed in a number of forms, the networks in which social capital exist reflect the diversity of citizens and stakeholders found within each community. Ranging from networks of friends, neighbours and family to larger organised groups, such as faith communities, clubs and businesses, social capital resources are embedded within a large number of relationships.<sup>31</sup> Given the complexity of networks through which social capital is transferred, a number of different forms of social capital have been identified. Broken into three categories, these are referred to as bonding, bridging and linking capital.

Bonding capital consists of the strong ties within a community that link individuals within a horizontal network.<sup>32</sup> These relationships are most often found at the level of family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, more generally consists of ties found between people sharing traits, such as similar economic status or political stance, but who differ in factors such as location, occupation or ethnicity.<sup>33</sup> Finally, linking capital represents a more impersonal form of social capital found within communities. The category of linking capital represents the vertical ties within communities which develop between formal institutions, organisations and individuals.<sup>34</sup> Each of these three forms of social capital represents networks vital to sustaining community vibrancy and prosperity, and form part of an interrelated system of group and individual relationships.

### Social capital in a disaster resilience context

When linking this theory of social capital with contexts of emergency recovery and disaster resilience, the idea of social capital emphasises the need to look at community recovery in a holistic sense. That is, disaster resilience relies on society as a whole and not solely government, emergency services departments and local authorities.<sup>35</sup> While regulated emergency response initiatives are essential to relief efforts, they form only one single part of a complex and long term process of recovery. Providing both financial and technical support at crucial stages in community recovery, in actual disaster contexts it is most often local residents and community members who are able to respond first after a disaster, while trained emergency personnel are present only after information has flowed through a system of alerts.<sup>36</sup>

Essentially, communities through their access to networks of social capital and positive group relationships, hold a great level of influence over their own level of disaster resilience. Utilising a system of mutual assistance, communities exhibiting a high level of social capital are able to exchange support in the form of labour, shelter, expertise, care, tools and equipment.<sup>37</sup> Given this system of exchange rather than relief – through the utilisation of social capital – communities are able to direct their own paths to recovery and hence exhibit greater levels of disaster resilience when social capital networks are strong. Questioning the assumption that disaster recovery depends on levels of aid and the overall level of damage experienced, when applied to an emergency context, social capital theory suggest that it is in actual fact the bonds which tie citizens together in an interdependent system of networks that act as the main driver of long-term recovery.<sup>38</sup>

### Specific forms of social capital

In order to elaborate further on this link between social capital and disaster resilience, we have identified several relevant forms of social capital that relate most specifically to emergency recovery outcomes at a community level.

#### Collective narratives

Framing how communities and individuals interpret their circumstances and chances of recovery, collective narratives refer to the way in which community members describe themselves and their prospects for recovery, and they can heavily influence how people respond to a disaster.<sup>39</sup> Collective narratives provide an interpretive framework for individuals to gauge wider community responses to disaster and hence enable individuals to position themselves within, and in accordance to, these narratives. That is, collective narratives help to coordinate expectations within a community. If through both formal and informal communication channels residents expect each other to return and invest a high-level of energy in the disaster recovery process, they too will return and work hard towards redevelopment.<sup>40</sup>

#### Signalling

In a similar fashion signalling through actions, such as ongoing mutual assistance, helps to restore the fabric of communities undergoing disaster recovery processes by sending signals throughout the community that individual members are committed to recovery efforts. The signals sent by such

31 Chamlee-Wright, E 2007, 'The Long Road Back: Signal Noise in the Post-Katrina Context', *The Independent Review*, vol.12, no.2, pp.235-259.

32 Community Service and Research Centre 2001, 'Review of the Social Capital Measurement Literature'. Ipswich: University of Queensland.

33 *ibid*

34 *ibid*

35 McAslan, A 2011, 'Community Resilience: Understanding the Concept and its Application', *Discussion Paper*, Torrens Resilience Institute, Adelaide.

36 Aldrich, DP 2010, 'Fixing Recovery: Social Capital in Post-Crisis Resilience.' *Journal of Homeland Security*, June.

37 Chamlee-Wright, E 2007, 'The Long Road Back: Signal Noise in the Post-Katrina Context', *The Independent Review*, vol.12, no.2, pp.235-259.

38 Aldrich, DP 2010, 'Fixing Recovery: Social Capital in Post-Crisis Resilience.' *Journal of Homeland Security*, June.

39 Chamlee-Wright, E, Starr, VH 2011, 'Social Capital as Collective Narratives and Post-Disaster Community Recovery', *The Sociological Review*, vol.59, no.1, pp.266-282.

40 Chamlee-Wright, E 2008, 'Signalling Effects of Commercial and Civil Society in Post-Katrina Reconstruction', *International Journal of Social Economists*, vol.35, no.8, pp. 615-626.

collective action and mutual assistance indicate to residents considering returning to their devastated communities that others are also sharing the burdens and risks associated with a return<sup>41</sup> Best viewed as a cumulative process, the more signals sent out by a community that recovery is underway, the more individuals will feel confident to invest in this return and recovery process. By signalling a commitment to return, communities reduce individual burdens and focus on a collective process of redevelopment.

### Public rituals

Public rituals offer a further dimension of social capital through which communities facing disaster and devastation may seek comfort and express grief whilst simultaneously displaying collective action. Promoting a sense of solidarity and belonging, public rituals enable individuals access to communal displays of suffering, which help to solidify efforts towards the rebuilding process. Collectively reaffirming the community against the face of tragedy, these public rituals allow for the outpouring of grief whilst also fostering a collective sense of pride, resolve and togetherness to drive disaster resilience.<sup>42</sup>

### Risk mitigation

When recovering from a disaster, social capital and the networks of relationships that an individual holds serve as an essential form of risk mitigation, providing assistance that might not be accessible through normal formal channels of insurance. The social ties that an individual might call on to provide information, financial help, physical assistance and a wide range of support, can essentially serve as an informal type of insurance which helps to mitigate the risks associated with a disaster.<sup>43</sup> Having access to these informal channels of support better equips individuals to deal with the aftermath of disaster and places those with strong social capital networks at a lower level of risk than those with fewer ties.

### Sense of place

Finally, sense of place and the positive emotional bonds that individuals develop with their environment offer another form of explanation into the motivation to rebuild and recover after a disaster.<sup>44</sup> Holding a strong attachment with one's community, neighbourhood or block can provide huge incentive to invest and return to a community that has faced devastation. Individuals with a long-term stake in their community will experience greater levels of motivation to rebuild and will

simultaneously possess the greatest capacity to achieve these aims, whilst isolated individuals will be less likely to and also less capable of investing in this rebuilding process.<sup>45</sup>

## Fostering social capital in disaster recovery situations

Whilst physical and economic relief assistance remains crucial to the redevelopment of communities in the post-disaster period, social capital theory suggests that of equal importance is strengthening the informal networks of relationships within communities which provide personal assistance, create community buy-in, and help to solidify the long-term legitimacy of any rebuilding initiatives. While physical resources and assets provide the means to recover, and operational procedures provide the ideas and information on *how* to recover, social networks and relationships provide the critical *will* to recover.<sup>46</sup>

Given this interdependent set of factors all contributing to the disaster recovery process, it is important to recognise that public policy can often produce the most positive outcomes by scaling back regulated and institutionalised relief efforts as early as possible in order to allow communities to take ownership of their own redevelopment.<sup>47</sup> By devolving power throughout the community, individuals work within a framework of their own vested interests to ensure the ongoing commitment and sustainability of recovery outcomes.

Recognising communities as the drivers of their own change can help to foster community cohesion and create solutions best suited to a particular community. Rather than positioning individuals facing disaster as 'consumers' or 'clients', by recognising their crucial role as 'citizens' organisations providing relief can best establish a system of support and information; rather than suffocating community efforts through over- regulation.<sup>48</sup>

Getting involved in the recovery process after a disaster can be a cathartic process for many community members and such positive action can give those affected a sense of empowerment, and pride, which helps aid recovery.<sup>49</sup> By assisting in the development of a bottom-up model of recovery, organisations have the opportunity to help communities drive change rather than overshadowing this through top-down systems of policy and procedure.

41 Chamlee-Wright, E 2007, 'The Long Road Back: Signal Noise in the Post-Katrina Context', *The Independent Review*, vol.12, no.2, pp.235-259.

42 Hawden, J, Ryan, J 2011, 'Social Relations that Generate and Sustain Solidarity after a Mass Tragedy', *Social Forces*, vol.89, no.4, pp.1363-1384.

43 Aldrich, DP 2010, 'Fixing Recovery: Social Capital in Post-Crisis Resilience.' *Journal of Homeland Security*, June.

44 Chamlee-Wright, E, Starr, VH 2009, 'There's no Place Like New Orleans: Sense of Place and Community Recovery in the Ninth Ward After Hurricane Katrina', *Journal of Urban Affairs*, vol.31, no.5, pp.615-634.

45 Aldrich, DP 2010, 'Fixing Recovery: Social Capital in Post-Crisis Resilience.' *Journal of Homeland Security*, June.

46 McAslan, A 2011, 'Community Resilience: Understanding the Concept and its Application', *Discussion Paper*, Torrens Resilience Institute, Adelaide.

47 Chamlee-Wright, E 2007, 'The Long Road Back: Signal Noise in the Post-Katrina Context', *The Independent Review*, vol.12, no.2, pp.235-259.

48 Vallance, S 2011, 'Early Disaster Recovery: A Guide for Communities', *Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies*, vol.2011, no.2, pp.19-25.

49 *ibid*

## Planning and policy implications

Social capital, like many other community assets, is heavily influenced by policy and planning procedures and can be fostered or potentially hampered by specific policy moves. The bureaucratic structure which guides disaster relief can often times stifle local leadership and inhibit community redevelopment.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, policies that encourage relocation can strip individuals of their social capital assets and leave them isolated and unsatisfied with recovery outcomes.

So what can be done to take into appropriate consideration the needs of individuals and the community as a whole? Recognising the value and necessity of deploying social capital resources in the face of hardship is vital to any successful and sustainable recovery.<sup>51</sup> While ignoring the value of physical and economic solutions is inevitably detrimental, this must be viewed as one component of a complex series of recovery processes. Given the intricate nature of disaster resilience, solutions to any emergency situation should be multi-disciplinary and distinct links should be established between social and technological solutions in order to assure a rounded level of recovery.<sup>52</sup>

Broken down into three levels, these final paragraphs provide several suggestions and implications for incorporating social capital into any disaster resilience strategies:

### Community

As critical as external philanthropic support has been to disaster recovery, it is most significantly the small acts of mutual support that residents offer one another in times of crisis that help to motivate redevelopment and spur on the rebuilding process.<sup>53</sup> Given this, it is critical in the face of disaster that communities maintain these informal networks of relationships and emphasise the need for mutual assistance in order to rebuild as a collective unit. Additionally, the role of local community leaders in driving the recovery effort can provide a point of signalling for other individuals and can provide a point of connection between local residents, and external governing and organisational bodies.

### Non-government

Often in times of disaster and emergency, the support and care of people in distress has fallen on 'welfare' organisations. Given the distant relationship between community members and such groups, this can at times leave individuals feeling disconnected from the source of assistance, and often positions them as passive recipients of welfare.<sup>54</sup> This is an issue that must be overcome by actively involving communities and individuals in the planning and implementation of their own support systems. By facilitating skills development at a community level in areas such as social support, organising groups, holding meetings, writing grant applications and lobbying, organisations can better allow communities to act to their own cause.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, by employing locals and utilising the input and skills of specific professionals throughout the community, organisations keep solutions local while simultaneously fostering local business and economic activity.<sup>56</sup>

### Government

Finally, at a government level emphasis should be drawn away from purely physical redevelopment efforts towards recognising the role of social support systems in fostering recovery. It is essential that government response and policy implementation not drown out the signalling effects produced by civil and commercial society which drive community cohesion and satisfaction.<sup>57</sup> Government has a critical role to play in guiding the recovery process, but should be minutely aware of stifling community efforts and overshadowing local solutions. The most essential action governments can take in aiding communities to overcome a crisis, is to support and inform positive decision-making on the ground, while ensuring federal responses do not erect roadblocks to competent local leadership.<sup>58</sup>

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51 Chamlee-Wright, E 2008, 'Signalling Effects of Commercial and Civil Society in Post-Katrina Reconstruction', *International Journal of Social Economists*, vol.35, no.8, pp. 615-626.

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53 Chamlee-Wright, E 2008, 'Signalling Effects of Commercial and Civil Society in Post-Katrina Reconstruction', *International Journal of Social Economists*, vol.35, no.8, pp. 615-626.

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58 Chamlee-Wright, E 2007, 'The Long Road Back: Signal Noise in the Post-Katrina Context', *The Independent Review*, vol.12, no.2, pp.235-259





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