

Building Disaster Risk Management capacity: transitioning to DRR

How can programmes aiming to build disaster risk management (DRM) capacity contribute more effectively to supporting the shift to disaster risk reduction (DRR)? This briefing note summarizes findings from a major research project on DRM capacity building, undertaken by Oxford Policy Management and the University of East Anglia on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The research aimed to understand more about what works in DRM capacity building and why.

This note is written with DRM policy-makers and practitioners as the target audience.

The research involved six country case studies (in Ethiopia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Philippines, Haiti and Mozambique), an online survey and an extensive literature review, each of which was important for distilling lessons learned on how to build DRM capacity effectively. The research brought out many positive stories of how national governments and international agencies are approaching capacity-building initiatives but also calls for improvements that would help generate movement in the direction of more-holistic DRR. The rationale for capacity-building initiatives is that they should generate a greater sustained capability to plan for and undertake DRM (outcome) such that the risk to lives and livelihoods from disaster is reduced (impact). An effective capacity-building initiative is, therefore, one that produces outputs that contribute to this change. This briefing note summarizes some of the challenges in doing so but also points to examples where advances have been made towards integrating dimensions of DRR into capacity-building programmes.

Key messages

- Support for DRR approaches is being integrated increasingly into DRM capacity-building programmes, but still has some distance to go if it is to become strongly embedded as a foundational, rather than an additional, consideration in programme design.
- There remains a gap in capacity-building support for prevention, mitigation and long-term recovery, yet there is clear potential for these aspects of DRM to be factored into, or indeed form the prime focus of, capacity-building initiatives.
- Programmes tend to be focused on present risks and vulnerabilities, and little attention is paid to developing capacities to recognize and adapt to long-term changes, including those associated with climate change.
- Programmes should focus efforts on strengthening the functional capacity within societies to achieve a shift in approach towards the management of risk. Key support can be given in facilitating DRR policy-making and mainstreaming DRR into development planning.
- Capacity-building programmes can contribute, either explicitly or implicitly, to the creation of an enabling environment for DRR, which is crucial for fostering progress at all levels.

Current support for DRM capacity – under the spotlight

The importance of DRR in international discourse, reflected in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 and its successor the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, is reflected also in

recent calls to embed a holistic approach to DRR within DRM capacity building.¹ However, the research found evidence that programmes still tend to focus largely on managing disaster events and, typically, are not targeting vulnerable groups. Furthermore, mainstreaming DRM is not emphasized enough in programme design and programmes are preoccupied with present risks rather than with building capacities to adapt to long-term changes in risk. However, promising examples do exist and are presented below as opportunities from which to draw lessons in order to help capacity-building initiatives make greater contributions to building resilience.

Targeting prevention, mitigation and recovery

The research suggests that much remains to be done if a broader approach to managing aspects of disaster risk is to be embedded as the prevailing approach in capacity building for DRM. Capacity-building initiatives still tend to focus most heavily on preparedness and response, with significantly less attention being paid to prevention, mitigation and recovery. In some senses, this finding is not surprising, because changing the emphasis in DRM towards avoiding and reducing risk requires a major shift in institutional approaches; this change has proceeded slowly across much of the world and there have been many barriers to overcome.² It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that demand for capacity support is oriented to preparedness. Yet, what is important to note is that, while some of the capacity-building programmes studied in the research were labelled as taking a wider DRR approach, in practice, the focus often remained very heavily on the traditional fields of capacity support.

The research also provides some evidence that capacity building in relation to prevention, mitigation and recovery is feasible. For example, as part of the Building Disaster Resilient Communities (BDRC) programme in the Philippines, Christian Aid's imple-

menting partners have worked with local government to identify high-risk zones and resettle communities in safer areas as a contribution to disaster-prevention capacity building. In Haiti, community members were engaged in the implementation of mitigation micro-projects under the Reinforcement of DRM Capacities and Resources of the Haitian Population Programme, which was carried out in association with IFRC, and Spanish, French, German and Haitian Red Cross Societies. Another example that was strongly oriented beyond preparedness and response was the Safer Schools Project in Mozambique, implemented by UN-Habitat in association with stakeholders from the school sector; this has evolved towards DRR through its partnership approach. Originally, the programme started as an urgent reactionary measure to Cyclone Funso, with the objective of carrying out a needs assessment of school damage and of creating a response and recovery project to aid the affected areas. However, through its consultative assessments and alignment to the National Master Plan, the programme evolved to assume a more holistic approach that would address longer-term recovery, prevention and mitigation needs. The programme developed hazard maps to guide risk assessments, disaster-resilient school building codes and guidelines on school safety, and produced recommendations for their effective implementation. Awareness-raising of the genuine potential for creating safer schools was a key product of the programme.

There seems to be no fundamental reason why support for prevention, mitigation and long-term recovery should not be factored into or indeed form the prime focus of capacity-building initiatives. Strengthening the capacity of stakeholders in terms of land-use planning and management for risk reduction, helping communities design and undertake small structural mitigation measures, and developing reconstruction guidelines are all feasible goals for building capacity. In many cases, moving from a focus on emergency management remains a matter of prioritization.

¹ See, for example, Daniel, H., Schräss, K. and Warner, K. (eds.) (2013) *CATALYST Synthesis Report of Best Practices, Networks, Research Gaps, and Recommendations for Fostering Capacity Development for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation. A combined deliverable incorporating D5.1, D5.2 and D5.3. Version 1.0, September 2013, Bonn. Available: www.catalyst-project.eu*

² UNISDR (2013) *From Shared Risk to Shared Value – The Business Case for Disaster Risk Reduction. Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). Available: www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/33013*

Understanding and planning for long-term changes in risks

The programmes studied in the research tended to focus on present risks and vulnerabilities, and little attention was paid to developing capacities to recognize and adapt to long-term changes in hazards, exposure and social vulnerability. Unless adaptation to climate change was an explicit orientation of capacity-building programmes, attention to building capacity to manage the long-term dynamics of risk was seldom evident in the initiatives under study. Even in situations where hydro-meteorological hazards such as tropical cyclones pose high risks, climate change was not factored significantly into the programme activities.

During the fieldwork, the research team studied 15 capacity-building programmes, of which only five engaged actively with climate change dynamics. Of those five, four were driven strongly by international agencies. The Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA) in Ethiopia, implemented by Oxfam and funded by United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), is one such example that was working at national and local levels to build skills to link DRM and climate change adaptation and incorporate these into analysis and planning. At district level, ACCRA has been piloting projects that attempt to change the knowledge of and approach taken by planners by bringing a long-term climate lens into the planning process. Working with local communities to sensitize people to the idea of adaptation to long-term environmental change has been a central component of ACCRA's work in the field. ACCRA staff members at district and community levels explained some of the steps they had taken, including: working with village elders to map changes in land use and productive activities; asking villagers what changes they expect to happen in the next 30 to 50 years (for example, changes in land productivity); and discussing how they should prioritize activities to manage this future change.

Although the rationale for planning for the long-term future can be a difficult concept to convey, there was a strong perception expressed by ACCRA interviewees that many in the community understood the potential for change and now understood better the need for long-term planning to mitigate environmental and climatic risks.

Strengthening functional capacity for DRR

Recent literature on capacity building underlines the importance of moving beyond technical training to building the functional capacity within society for effective decisions and action to be taken. Though it should be recognized that, fundamentally, technical and functional capacity building are related and reinforce one another, the investigation of functional capacity building was a particular focus of the research. Significant contributions to functional capacity emerged from the case studies, including the development of policies and legislation, coordination mechanisms for decision-making and, especially, the mainstreaming of DRR in development plans at different scales.

In Pakistan, the One UN Joint Programme on Disaster Risk Management (One UN DRM) worked with ten ministries to lobby for the advancement of DRR in governance, and a national working group on DRR was established with cross-ministry representation to propose joint implementation measures and monitor progress. A significant achievement from lobbying was having a chapter on DRR included for the first time in the national development plan. Awareness-raising of politicians and other stakeholders within and outside government was a key element of the work of the One UN DRM programme at all scales.

To mainstream DRR successfully, case study programmes used a variety of strategies, with the following observations:

- Mainstreaming activities should be seen as working both vertically (i.e., across

levels of government) and horizontally (i.e., between sectors and departments).

- Mainstreaming processes need to be demand led and based on ownership and partnership rather than driven by donors. The process needs to be initiated from within the government.
- It is critical to engage high-level stakeholders within the government who can act as 'champions'.
- Advocacy and DRR awareness-raising elements can be incorporated into programmes to create a supportive political context for DRR.

The research found that the process of mainstreaming DRR typically begins with a review of the vision and goals for mainstreaming, followed by an analysis of national development plans so that relevant stakeholders can identify entry points together. In the Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction Programme implemented in Myanmar by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), the stakeholders studied existing policies, plans, and contextual and poverty analysis reports, and sectoral development documents. Taking these points into account, the groups identified appropriate opportunities for mainstreaming DRR into development plans.

Findings from the case studies, therefore, underline the importance of fostering an enabling environment for DRR as a component of functional capacity building. Strengthening an enabling environment means building the prioritization and motivation that can turn development of DRR structures and skills into effective action. This can emerge in a number of forms, often not as a stated objective of interventions but as a by-product of capacity building. Activities can be aimed, for example, at strengthening advocacy mechanisms, encouraging 'champions' at all levels, generating support for good practice, reducing cultural barriers and demonstrating alternatives. The research findings suggest that the concept of an 'enabling environment' for DRR can be applied usefully at multiple levels, including at the grassroots scale.

Changing the approach

Supporting the shift towards DRR through capacity-building initiatives is challenging but encouraging signs of progress exist. The research indicates both the need and the potential for capacity-building activities to contribute to making coherent strides towards DRR.

The recommendations generated by this research project include the following:

Recommendations

Broaden the remit of capacity-building support to all aspects of DRM, in order to strengthen capacities in prevention, mitigation and recovery.

Strengthen capacity to identify and plan for long-term changes in risk.

Ensure that support for capacity building recognizes the importance of strengthening functional capacity to mainstream DRR; this includes creating a supportive, enabling environment at all scales.

Readers are referred to the full Synthesis Report (available at: www.ifrc.org/en/get-involved/learning-education-training/research/capacity-building-for-disaster-risk-management), which discusses the evidence and recommendations in much greater depth.

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Who we are

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. Together with our 189 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we reach 97 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes as well as 85 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by *Strategy 2020* – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to ‘saving lives and changing minds’.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.



**For further information,
please contact:**

Josephine Shields Recass
Research Project coordinator
International Federation of Red Cross and
Red Crescent Societies

Telephone: +41 (0)22 730 4652
Email: josephine.shieldsrecass@ifrc.org

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