Humanitarian Practice Network
HPN
Managed by
Humanitarian Policy Group

Number 38
June 2007

Humanitarian Exchange

Commissioned and published by the Humanitarian Practice Network at ODI

In this issue

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Over the past decade, the number of people reportedly affected by disasters globally increased by one-third; reported deaths were up 84%. If trends continue it is estimated that, by 2050, natural disasters could have a global cost of over $300 billion a year, and will be a key element in the failure to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. At the recent Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sir John Holmes, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, noted the challenge of 'turning what is contained in the Hyogo Framework for Action into concrete, practical actions at every level … what we need to do is together advance the arguments which will actually support further investment in risk reduction and we need that further investment. We must share our success stories' in order to make a life-saving difference for hundreds of millions of people who are increasingly vulnerable to disaster risk.

This edition of *Humanitarian Exchange* features articles on the topic of disaster risk reduction for humanitarian practitioners. Disaster risk reduction is the broad development and application of policies, strategies and practices to minimise vulnerabilities and disaster risks for affected communities, through prevention, mitigation and preparedness. An increasing body of knowledge and best practice has emerged on this topic, but there are still many challenges, not least the dynamically changing humanitarian context in which agencies must respond. Traditional humanitarian planning and response must factor in the impacts of a changing external environment including climate change, increased displacement and migration, urbanisation, HIV/AIDS and other potential pandemics, and engage with effective disaster risk reduction strategies to mitigate the negative effects of these problems. There is a need for better coordination between climate change, disasters and development communities, greater understanding of both global and local risks associated with climate change, and improved approaches to understand and respond to local vulnerabilities, while simultaneously addressing underlying complex and partly global processes.

This edition also presents articles on other subjects of concern to policymakers and practitioners in the humanitarian sector: the role of Islamic charities, the analysis and integration of market factors in food security in West Africa and improving accountability to beneficiaries.

All these articles, along with archived editions of *Humanitarian Exchange*, are available on our website at www.odihpn.org, where you can also submit feedback on the articles presented. As always, we welcome any comments or feedback, which can be sent to hpn@odi.org.uk.

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Disaster reduction terminology: a common-sense approach

John Twigg, Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre

We're all familiar with the scene: a training course or workshop (it could be on any topic) that starts with a long and detailed presentation on concepts and terminology. Your mind begins to wander; you look at your watch and count the minutes till the coffee break …

If you are working in a busy operational environment, theories and definitions seem all too often to get in the way of doing the job. This is particularly true in high-pressure humanitarian work, but it is a barrier to development practitioners too. Why is this so? Staff in relief and development NGOs interviewed a few years ago as part of a British Red Cross study provided some answers, at least as far as disaster reduction was concerned. They showed strong signs of resistance to the relevant language and terminology: it was 'too much like jargon', 'off-putting', 'too difficult to explain' and 'too academic'. This view is understandable in the face of the elaborate academic nature of many definitions and terms, such as this explanation of 'preparedness':

> *Preparedness is a construct which connotes a process that entails activities designed to increase control in response to disasters.*[1]

There is undoubtedly a place for this kind of thing in the academic – in this case, sociological – literature, but practitioners may find it hard to digest.

> **if you are working in a busy operational environment, theories and definitions seem all too often to get in the way of doing the job**

Added problems arise from the many different ways in which terms are defined and explained. A term may be understood and used differently by different professional groups. Take 'vulnerability' for example. Architects and engineers have long applied it to buildings and other physical structures, but in the past 30 years it has been appropriated by social scientists, who have expanded its meaning to include socio-economic, political and institutional aspects. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that methodologies for vulnerability analysis have proliferated, based on different principles, prioritising different types of data, and using different data-gathering and analytical tools. 'Mitigation' has very different meanings in climate change and disaster management circles. In climate change, it means reducing greenhouse gas emis-

1 David F Gillespie and Calvin L Streeter, 'Conceptualizing and Measuring Disaster Preparedness', *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 5(2), August 1987, p. 160.

Box 1: Hazard and disaster terminology

- A *natural hazard* is a geophysical, atmospheric or hydrological event (e.g. earthquake, landslide, tsunami, windstorm, wave or surge, flood or drought) that has the potential to cause harm or loss.
- *Vulnerability* is the potential to suffer harm or loss, related to the capacity to anticipate a hazard, cope with it, resist it and recover from its impact. Both vulnerability and its antithesis, *resilience*, are determined by physical, environmental, social, economic, political, cultural and institutional factors.
- A *disaster* is the occurrence of an extreme hazard event that impacts on vulnerable communities, causing substantial damage, disruption and possible casualties, and leaving the affected communities unable to function normally without outside assistance.
- *Disaster risk* is a function of the characteristics and frequency of hazards experienced in a specified location, the nature of the elements at risk and their inherent degree of vulnerability or resilience.
- *Mitigation* is any structural (physical) or non-structural (e.g., land-use planning, public education) measure undertaken to minimise the adverse impact of potential natural hazard events.
- *Preparedness* means activities and measures taken before hazard events occur to forecast and warn against them, evacuate people and property when they threaten and ensure effective response (e.g., stockpiling food supplies).
- *Relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction* are any measures undertaken in the aftermath of a disaster to, respectively, save lives and address immediate humanitarian needs; restore normal activities; and restore physical infrastructure and services.
- *Climate change* is a statistically significant change in measurements of either the mean state or the variability of the climate for a place or region over an extended period, either directly or indirectly due to the impact of human activity on the composition of the global atmosphere or due to natural variability.

Charlotte Benson and John Twigg, *Tools for Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction: Guidance Notes for Development Organisations* (Geneva: ProVention Consortium, 2007), http://www.proventionconsortium.org/mainstreaming_tools.

©Reuters/Darren Whiteside, courtesy www.alertnet.org

A child stands in front of a destroyed shop in the Indonesian town of Meulaboh on Aceh's west coast, 4 January 2005

sions, which in disaster management would be seen as 'prevention'; disaster managers use 'mitigation' in a sense that is much closer to climate change's 'adaptation'. A glossary published recently by the United Nations University's Institute for Environment and Human Security reproduces many different definitions of key terms in disaster work, including 'disaster', 'hazard', 'vulnerability', 'capacity', 'resilience and 'risk'. Such diversity and inconsistency are unsurprising when the concepts behind the terms are the subject of intense research and discussion among the different academic disciplines that take an interest in disasters – for instance, two multi-author volumes have been published in the past decade debating that most basic of questions: what is a disaster?

With the idea of risk becoming more dominant in discussion of disasters, the potential for ambiguity and confusion may be growing. Like 'disaster', 'risk' is a simple everyday word that has become overloaded with lots of different interpretations. Just as the adoption of 'disaster risk reduction' thinking has incorporated the older, separate components of disaster management and the disaster cycle (preparedness, response, recovery) into a more integrated 'disaster risk management' approach, so the everyday use of 'risk' seems to have expanded to overlap with, if not absorb, other concepts, such as vulnerability. One indication of this is that, in practice, the terms 'risk assessment' and 'vulnerability assessment' often seem to be used interchangeably.

Terminology never stands still. It adapts to shifts in thinking, by adopting new terms or expanding old ones. For example, in the 1970s people talked about 'disaster prevention'; in the 1980s and 1990s this was superseded by 'disaster mitigation', which in turn was replaced by today's fashionable term, 'disaster risk reduction'. Terms usually become obsolete for good reasons. In the case of 'prevention', it became obvious that it was impossible to prevent hazards or escape their impacts completely. 'Mitigation' of disasters' impacts was more realistic – but arguably too broad a term, since its meaning was often unclear or ambiguous (to everyone except engineers, who had always applied it far more narrowly to hazard-restraining or hazard-resistant structures). 'Disaster risk reduction' reflects today's holistic thinking and integrated approaches to the disaster problem, but it too will become outdated in time.

Such matters worry academics, and rightly so, as scientific enquiry should lead to clarity, not confusion. But should practitioners worry about them? Does any of this matter at operational level? Ideas and language do have practical significance, of course: the way we think and speak about humanitarianism, development or disaster risk reduction shapes the way we approach our work in the field. But a lot of the debate seems to be hair-splitting (Do you know the precise difference between 'capacity' and 'resilience'? Do you care? Does it matter?) Thinking about disasters is always developing, so pinning down a term or concept is like trying to hit a moving target. And it's good that thinking moves on, otherwise we would still be seeing disasters purely as acts of God.

However, since we cannot do away with concepts and definitions entirely, let's ask what practitioners want from them. First, they must be expressed clearly, preferably in plain language. Second, they must be relatively simple to understand and communicate. If possible, they should also reflect practitioners' own view of reality, acquired from their knowledge in the field and the communities with whom they work.

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What would clear, simplified definitions look like? Box 1 illustrates one recent attempt by two researchers (Charlotte Benson and myself). We aimed to reduce a mass of often complex and sometimes contradictory definitions to a few concise, basic explanations that would be generally accepted and understood by our readers: project planners and managers, mainly in development agencies. For example, we sidestepped the fine distinction between 'capacity' and 'resilience', using the latter as an all-purpose term meaning the opposite of vulnerability. And we used the ambiguous 'disaster risk' in place of the

more accurate 'hazard risk' because 'disaster risk' is the term favoured in practice by the disaster reduction community. Our versions raised a few eyebrows in professional and academic circles, although we could arguably have simplified some of them further.

We also provided examples in some cases to make definitions more real and intelligible. Indeed, it may sometimes be better to focus on the common characteristics of key ideas rather than to seek to define them too precisely. Operational staff may respond to this approach more readily. For instance, the NGO staff interviewed in the British Red Cross study mentioned above tended to have a sound general understanding of the relevant issues, but preferred to explain specific terms and concepts such as 'preparedness' and 'mitigation' by giving concrete examples.

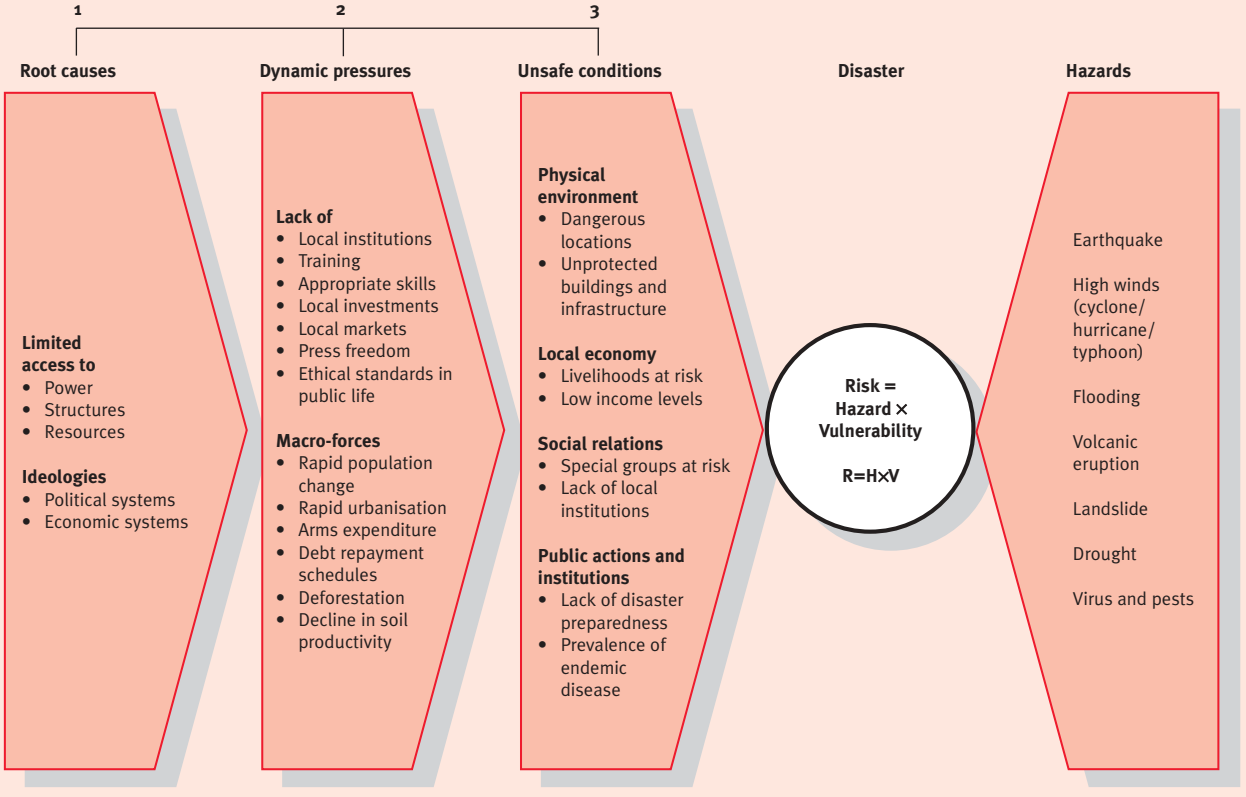
Does this mean we should give up seeking consistency in our terminology? Not entirely, for it remains important. In the case of contingency planning, for example, as Richard Choularton argues in his Network Paper: 'More consistent use of terms related to contingency planning and preparedness is needed to help improve the sharing of experience, lessons and practice'.[2] But there are dangers here, even where we avoid the over-academic approach and look for something more practical. One is that the drive towards consistency may develop into a struggle between different groups or organisations to impose their terms and meanings on everyone else. There is also the counter-risk that consensus achieved through committee will result in definitions that try to say too much in order to keep all the stakeholders happy. The definitions of 'disaster risk management' and 'disaster risk reduction' presented by the United Nations International Strategy for

2 Richard Choularton, *Contingency Planning for Improved Humanitarian Action*, Network Paper 59 (London: Humanitarian Practice Network, 2007), p. 42.

Box 2: The power of images

A visual image can sometimes be sufficient to present a concept to practitioners. Take the 'Pressure and Release' model developed in the mid-1990s by a group of eminent thinkers. In its simplest, diagrammatic form (Figure 1), it appears nearly everywhere these days, in training courses, lectures, guidelines and many other publications. Very few of those who see and use the diagram will have read the many dense pages of text explaining the sophisticated theory of vulnerability which it illustrates, but they respond readily to its clarity, insight and relevance.

Figure 1: PAR model



B. Wisner et al., *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 51.

Disaster Reduction (UN ISDR) may have fallen into this trap (though to be fair its definitions of most other disaster terms are neater):

> *Disaster risk management: The systematic process of using administrative decisions, organization, operational skills and capacities to implement policies, strategies and coping capacities of the society and communities to lessen the impacts of natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters. This comprises all forms of activities, including structural and non-structural measures to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) adverse effects of hazards.*
>
> *Disaster risk reduction: The conceptual framework of elements considered with the possibilities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development.*[3]

Let us hope that we can reach a greater level of agreement in time on basic terms and concepts relating to disaster risk reduction. There is already a strong push towards harmonisation among international agencies working in this field, led by UN ISDR. There are some parallel trends in intellectual circles, particularly in work on vulnerability, sustainable livelihoods and social protection, where previously separate discourses are coming together to create a more shared vision with a common language.

There is still a long way to go here. Meanwhile, practitioners can be guided by a few common-sense principles:

- keep terms, definitions and concepts as simple as you can; it is better to over-simplify than to over-elaborate;
- in defining terms, look for common ground and shared understanding to ensure widespread acceptance;
- use key characteristics or concrete examples where definitions are difficult to explain; and
- be clear to yourself and others about what you mean when you use a term.

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http://www.benfieldhrc.org/disaster_studies/projects/ngo_ini_risk_red.htm.

United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Terminology of disaster risk reduction web page, http://www.unisdr.org/eng/library/lib-termnology-eng%20home.htm.

3 See http://www.unisdr.org/eng/library/lib-terminology-eng%20home.htm.

The Hyogo Framework for Action: reclaiming ownership?

Mihir R. Bhatt, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute

At Kobe in Japan in January 2005, the worldwide humanitarian system and partners gathered to collect their insights, views and experience to shape and launch the historic Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), a global strategy to reduce disaster risks. Like many others, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) had been demanding such a framework since the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) was concluded in 1998 in Geneva. The global event in Kobe was unique: it augmented our insights and ideas, gave them a global appeal, arranged them into doable actions and established a global mandate for disaster risk reduction. However, it also took disaster risk reduction away from us – civil society.

This dispossession was not intended. Nevertheless, this is the effect, intended or otherwise. HFA is a top-down process, UN and donor-driven, and flows through formal institutional mechanisms and legal arrangements. National platforms are being set up and thematic platforms are being formed at the instance of those who work at the global level, in the UN or donor agencies. Although large numbers of individuals and organisations are involved, and are being consulted and engaged with good effect, the process is still decided at the top, not according to local agendas.

We, as a collective civil society, as individuals, and as humanitarian practitioners, need to reclaim the HFA as our own, not by arguments but by action, and not through contestation but through cooperation. This is what I have heard again and again in the field, from local and small NGOs in Asia and in Africa over the past two years. But

how to do this? In this article I would like to show how this is being done at AIDMI, and with its partners in the field. I will give three examples: institutional, activity-specific and system-specific. For the institutional example, I have taken AIDMI's own work in South Asia. For the activity-specific example, I have taken the Indian government's National Disaster Management Authority's annual congress of 2007. For the system-specific example, I have taken the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)'s process documentation of disaster risk reduction (DRR) in Sri Lanka.

Institutional audit: the AIDMI Annual Report 2006

AIDMI has reviewed, revised and reflected upon the HFA to make it useful in organisational audits and communication about AIDMI's activities generally. In the past two years, HFA has been used as a primary tool in AIDMI annual reports to illustrate how actions fit with Hyogo's five priorities (listed below). (For more information about AIDMI publications please visit: www.southasiadisasters.net.) This has two advantages. First, it helps us identify our relative strengths and weaknesses. Second, it helps others who work with us, support us and partner with us to approach an HFA priority area as a useful reference and risk reduction resource. Below is an overview of how AIDMI's actions contribute to the realisation of global risk reduction within the HFA.

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation

The field and office team of AIDMI reviewed a wide range of activities that AIDMI had conducted, and separated out those activities that helped in making DRR a national and local priority. The activities were many, ranging from organising a national roundtable of key stakeholders to comment on the Indian government's draft Disaster Management Bill to holding an Asia-wide roundtable on the use of microfinance as a disaster risk reduction measure in tsunami recovery, to hosting former US President Bill Clinton's NGO Impact Initiative regional consultation in Chennai, India.

2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning

Although a more difficult exercise, here too the AIDMI team came up with examples, ranging from the use of GIS in city-level recovery mapping in Bhuj, which was hit by an earthquake in 2001, to creating a location-specific database for mapping the response to a series of bomb blasts in Mumbai, India, in July 2007. Similarly, methods to measure and manage the impact of livelihood recovery measures after July 2006 floods in Surat, India, were included as an example.

3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

Here key activities included over 45 community-based disaster risk reduction training sessions in 2006 in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Mumbai and Kashmir, and publishing 12 issues of Southasiadisasters.net. Sector-specific initiatives, such as publishing a book on micro insurance in tsunami recovery, are another example.

4. Reduce the underlying risk factors

Here the key effort was the expansion of *Afat Vimo* (disaster insurance), from 1,000 to 3,000 disaster-affected people in India, as well as a second infusion of microcredit to those who received livelihood relief following the Gujarat riots in 2002, to further accelerate business recovery. Other examples include the promotion of safer housing and infrastructure measures in slum communities. The use of cash transfers in several new shelter, community infrastructure and training projects in Kashmir and a pilot of an agriculture insurance scheme in Gujarat are further examples.

5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

This included facilitating local response plans and organisational preparedness plans, as well as a Safer School Campaign in 30 schools in 18 districts in Gujarat. Efforts to strengthen local emergency medicine responses in communities are another example.

Mapping research and knowledge development: the India Disaster Management Congress

The First India Disaster Management Congress (IDMC), in New Delhi in 2006, was a major step forward in recognising that disasters pose a serious challenge to human security in India. Despite India's high and steady economic growth in recent years, disasters deprive millions of poor Indians of the development opportunities that potentially accompany such growth. Since 2004 alone, India has faced two major disasters – the Indian Ocean tsunami and the South Asia earthquake – which between them killed more than 10,000 people.

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Yet offsetting the variety of hazards facing India, the country is also home to a very rich and diverse civil society, including trade unions, institutes, NGOs and professional societies. The role of these institutions in disaster management has been widely recognised. India's Disaster Management Act of 2005, as well as international agreements such as the HFA, stress the distinctive role of NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) in disaster relief and mitigation. Hundreds of Indian official and civil society organisations presented their ideas and showcased their efforts at the First IDMC. In just one of several sessions, a total of 91 papers were submitted from individuals in 22 disciplines, from 86 organisations. Simply to organise the sheer volume of papers and new information was a challenge. The HFA again proved a useful tool for analysing hundreds of these papers. The HFA was used to identify current topics that are being researched, as well as pointing out areas where more research is required to support the HFA.

Table 1: Recommended recovery actions

Hyogo Framework priorities for action	Actions taken by UNIFEM and its partners
Ensure that DRR is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis	• Advocate on gender-specific issues and concerns in national disaster management legislation (UNIFEM, National Committee on Women (NCW), Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment (MoCDWE). • Support wider institutionalisation of local-level disaster management. • Increase women's representation at all levels of planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation of disaster management, from the Task Force on Rebuilding the Nation to local committees.
Identify, asses and monitor disaster risk	• Disseminate gender-disaggregated data to key stakeholders to address gender-specific risks (National Committee on Women (NCW), the Human Rights Commission (HRC), the Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), Gender Advisor to the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC), Social and Human Resource Development Consultants (SHRDC)). • Address gender-specific issues in the development of early warning systems.
Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience	• Advocate and launch activities that address inadequacies in programmes found through engendered studies and data (all). • Mainstream disaster risk reduction in school curricula and include in the training for school teachers (e.g. Dammacarini, AIDMI).
Reduce underlying risk factors	• Expand financial risk-sharing mechanisms and micro-finance for women (savings, insurance, emergency loans) (e.g. Siyath, Women's Development Foundation (WDF), AIDMI). • Incorporate disaster risk reduction measures into women's livelihood programmes (e.g. Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum (MWRAF), WDF, CWEI). • Training on disaster risk reduction for women at household level (e.g. NGO DMC, AIDMI). • Improve reproductive health provision (WDC). • Offer more psychological support to address the tension that arises within families due to losses and disruption to their lives as a result of the tsunami (SAARTHAK, Women's Media Collective (WMC)). • Ensure implementation of the Bill on Domestic Violence (HRC).
Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response	• Incorporate disaster management into capacity-building training (e.g. MWRAF, WDF, CWEI). • Scale up information sharing between disaster managers, the development sector and government (all). • Develop and conduct exercises in preparedness and contingency plans with local partners (all).

The submitted papers demonstrated that non-governmental and other civil society organisations' activities can take various forms and can be on various different scales. Some specialised NGOs might address only one area of disaster management, such as the provision of health services. Other civil society organisations are able to run large programmes in several regions, addressing a number of aspects of disaster management by reducing underlying risk, strengthening response capacities and advocating policy changes. All of these activities make a contribution towards risk reduction in India. These efforts may be organised and understood by placing the topics of each paper into the respective Hyogo Framework priority area that the paper discussed.

Joint process review: UNIFEM Partners in Sri Lanka

The HFA has been useful in evaluating, summarising and communicating the risk reduction efforts of local women's organisations involved in tsunami recovery. For example, UNIFEM supported the efforts of 18 local partners in sustainable recovery, focusing on women's needs in Sri Lanka. This was a demand-driven effort. UNIFEM and its partners addressed a large number of priority areas for action in the tsunami response in Sri Lanka, with a specific emphasis on gender. The HFA was used to organise concrete contributions to risk reduction, as well as to communicate recommendations for each partner. Below is a sample of the measures taken by UNIFEM's local partners.

Conclusion

HFA is supple and agile; it can be applied to our own local needs and activities if suitable processes are developed and resources – human and financial – are allocated to civil society organisations to reclaim ownership. HFA means many things to many organisations. By maintaining this multiplicity of meanings, we can continue to constructively own HFA. Its sustainability lies more in resourcing such applications and innovations, rather than achieving pre-planned outputs and outcomes in a projectised way. In the end, the HFA must remain in our joint custody, a shared heritage of civil society.

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The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters

General considerations

(a) The Principles contained in the Yokohama Strategy retain their full relevance in the current context, which is characterized by increasing commitment to disaster reduction.

(b) Taking into account the importance of international cooperation and partnerships, each State has the primary responsibility for its own sustainable development and for taking effective measures to reduce disaster risk, including for the protection of people on its territory, infrastructure and other national assets from the impact of disasters. At the same time, in the context of increasing global interdependence, concerted international cooperation and an enabling international environment are required to stimulate and contribute to developing the knowledge, capacities and motivation needed for disaster risk reduction at all levels.

(c) An integrated, multi-hazard approach to disaster risk reduction should be factored into policies, planning and programming related to sustainable development, relief, rehabilitation, and recovery activities in post-disaster and post-conflict situations in disaster-prone countries.

(d) A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training.

(e) Cultural diversity, age, and vulnerable groups should be taken into account when planning for disaster risk reduction, as appropriate.

(f) Both communities and local authorities should be empowered to manage and reduce disaster risk by having access to the necessary information, resources and authority to implement actions for disaster risk reduction.

(g) Disaster-prone developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States, warrant particular attention in view of their higher vulnerability and risk levels, which often greatly exceed their capacity to respond to and recover from disasters.

(h) There is a need to enhance international and regional cooperation and assistance in the field of disaster risk reduction through:

- The transfer of knowledge, technology and expertise to enhance capacity building for disaster risk reduction
- The sharing of research findings, lessons learned and best practices
- The compilation of information on disaster risk and impact for all scales of disasters in a way that can inform sustainable development and disaster risk reduction
- Appropriate support in order to enhance governance for disaster risk reduction, for awareness-raising initiatives and for capacity-development measures at all levels, in order to improve the disaster resilience of developing countries

The full, speedy and effective implementation of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, taking into account the impact of disasters on the debt sustainability of countries eligible for this programme

- Financial assistance to reduce existing risks and to avoid the generation of new risks

(i) The promotion of a culture of prevention, including through the mobilization of adequate resources for disaster risk reduction, is an investment for the future with substantial returns. Risk assessment and early warning systems are essential investments that protect and save lives, property and livelihoods, contribute to the sustainability of development, and are far more cost-effective in strengthening coping mechanisms than is primary reliance on post-disaster response and recovery.

(j) There is also a need for proactive measures, bearing in mind that the phases of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction following a disaster are windows of opportunity for the rebuilding of livelihoods and for the planning and reconstruction of physical and socio-economic structures, in a way that will build community resilience and reduce vulnerability to future disaster risks.

(k) Disaster risk reduction is a cross-cutting issue in the context of sustainable development and therefore an important element for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. In addition, every effort should be made to use humanitarian assistance in such a way that risks and future vulnerabilities will be lessened as much as possible.

Priorities for action 2005–2015

1. *Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation*

16. Countries that develop policy, legislative and institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction and that are able to develop and track progress through specific and measurable indicators have greater capacity to manage risks and to achieve widespread consensus for, engagement in and compliance with disaster risk reduction measures across all sectors of society.

Key activities:
(i) National institutional and legislative frameworks
(ii) Resources
(iii) Community participation

2. *Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning*

17. The starting point for reducing disaster risk and for promoting a culture of disaster resilience lies in the knowledge of the hazards and the physical, social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities to disasters that most societies face, and of the ways in which hazards and vulnerabilities are changing in the short and long term, followed by action taken on the basis of that knowledge.

Key activities:
(i) National and local risk assessments
(iii) Capacity
(iv) Regional and emerging risks

3. *Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels*

18. Disasters can be substantially reduced if people are well informed and motivated towards a culture of disaster prevention and resilience, which in turn requires the collection, compilation and dissemination of relevant knowledge and information on hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities.

Key activities:
(i) Information management and exchange
(ii) Education and training
(iii) Research
(iv) Public awareness

4. *Reduce the underlying risk factors*

19. Disaster risks related to changing social, economic, environmental conditions and land use, and the impact of hazards associated with geological events, weather, water, climate variability and climate change, are addressed in sector development planning and programmes as well as in post-disaster situations.

Key activities:
(ii) Social and economic development practices
(iii) Land-use planning and other technical measures

5. *Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels*

20. At times of disaster, impacts and losses can be substantially reduced if authorities, individuals and communities in hazard-prone areas are well prepared and ready to act and are equipped with the knowledge and capacities for effective disaster management.

Source: Extracted and abridged from the final report of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (A/CONF.206/6), 18–22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan.

Christian Aid and disaster risk reduction

Sarah Moss, Christian Aid

Disasters resulting from natural hazards, such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and cyclones, are widespread in many developing countries where Christian Aid partners work, and are identified as a major threat to sustainable development and poverty reduction. This is set to worsen as the frequency and intensity of disasters increase due to the effects of climate change, chronic poverty and increasing population pressure. Christian Aid has been involved in many disaster responses – providing relief and assistance to affected communities after disaster strikes. However, like many others we recognise the importance of trying to do more to prevent these humanitarian situations happening on such a vast scale. There are many ways to help poor families protect their lives and ways of living in the face of such risk – this is what disaster risk reduction (DRR) is all about.

Villagers and representatives from the local government in Bangladesh mapping and analysing their risk environment

Community-based disaster risk reduction

Christian Aid and its partners have worked for many years on projects rooted in the community, which aim to manage emergencies effectively and reduce these communities' vulnerability to future disasters. These projects are often referred to as community-based or community-centred DDR.

The benefits of inclusive community-based disaster risk reduction projects are generally acknowledged in the development and humanitarian fields. Communities themselves understand their local context and their people, and are best placed to act when something happens, to save lives and livelihoods, often searching for and rescuing people before outside help arrives, and passing on local knowledge and techniques to adapt their ways of life to circumvent major risks and hazards. Christian Aid and its partner organisations have supported many successful community-based DRR initiatives over the past ten years. Whilst these have had enormous benefits for the communities concerned, especially in the face of devastating disasters and the complacency of governments, over the past few years we have also noted the limitations of this approach when trying to meet the global development challenge presented by disasters, in particular climate change.

Box 1: Community-based approaches to DRR

The core attributes of a community-based approach to disaster mitigation and preparedness are that the principal authority over the programme must rest with the community … local knowledge and wisdom can best identify the needs of a community and the causes of their vulnerability … and the most suitable plan of action … The most effective disaster mitigation strategies will be those that build on community knowledge.

From *Facing the Storm: How Local Communities Can Cope with Disaster: Lessons from Orissa and Gujarat*, Christian Aid, 2003.

> **like many others, Christian Aid recognises the importance of trying to do more to prevent disasters happening on such a vast scale**

Meeting the global development challenge

We have become more aware of the limitations of what can be accomplished when operating on a very local scale. Despite many positive outcomes from community-centred DRR, we are less sure about how to scale-up these successful risk reduction activities to find

Case studies

Malawi

In 2005/06, Lengwe village in Chikwawa district, Malawi, suffered from serious food shortages caused by drought. Villagers resorted to desperate measures in order to survive. In nearby villages such as Ngabu, Christian Aid partner ELDS had engaged in risk reduction activities with communities, raising awareness and providing training and assistance in activities including crop diversification, winter cropping and water conservation. In these villages, the situation was not as severe, and families were able to support themselves through the crisis. The efforts were cost-effective as well: while total food aid in Lengwe village amounted to 1.5 billion Malawi Kwacha over six months, the cost of the disaster risk reduction project in Ngabu village was only 1.5 million Malawi Kwacha.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, Christian Aid is seeking to establish links with communities and governance structures through its work with Practical Action. Neither the government's Recon-struction and Development Agency (RADA) nor the Disaster Management Ministry and Centre (DMC) has the capacity and resources at district level to implement Sri Lanka's national disaster management plan. Practical Action engaged in participatory decentralised planning in Ampara and Hambantota provinces through Provincial Disaster Preparedness Committees and province-level Tsunami Reconstruction Coordination Mechanisms. These forums allow civil society to participate in decision-making, share lessons about reducing vulnerability to disasters and help to ensure the smooth implementation of disaster management at provincial level. They also minimise competition and duplication among implementers.

India

One lesson to come out of the evaluation of the West Bengal disaster preparedness programme 2004 was that, although the programme was enormously beneficial for the thousands of people who participated, coverage and overall impact could have been much greater if there had been more work with local authorities to link villages and community volunteer committees with higher-level governance structures at district and state level. We also identified an under-explored opportunity for more effective advocacy work to raise the profile of DRR at municipal, state and national level. In comparison, a project run by Christian Aid partner SEEDs in Shimla, India, is actively working to influence government to include earthquake training and preparedness in the national curriculum, and to involve different sectors of the government and society in raising awareness and influencing policy.

Haiti

In 2005, staff from 11 local organisations in Haiti including four Christian Aid partners received training in facilitating community-based DRR. The four partners then used their knowledge to help communities in Mare-rouge, north-west Haiti, to address risk in the villages through awareness-raising and small micro-projects. Communities identified flooding, deforestation and soil erosion as their biggest risks, and decided to reduce these threats through workshops on environmental protection and soil conservation for adults and schoolchildren, reducing deforestation and charcoal-making through training on the use of alternative cooking methods, planting fruit trees to reduce soil erosion and provide additional food and nutrients and establishing and training disaster management committees in their communities. Communities played a full part in analysing the risks and deciding how best to address them. Outside support was brought in where needed.

Kyrgyzstan

A Christian Aid project funded by DIPECHO in 2006 targeted five villages and local government representatives. A rural disaster team and a school disaster team was established in each village and received training on disasters, early warning and first aid and basic equipment. These committee members then trained other community members, drew disaster risk maps of the villages, planned evacuation routes and organised structural mitigation work, such as strengthening river banks and building dykes. A major challenge for the project was the political and administrative culture of top-down planning still prevalent in the region and the lack of government funding for DRR. Moreover, the concept of participatory government is a relatively new phenomenon. There is also scepticism about NGOs. In light of this, the project aimed to link government and communities with Christian Aid partner Shoola playing a facilitating role. This showed some success, with government staff participating in the training sessions and workshops, and offering to provide technical assistance for the structural mitigation work. However, the project phase (one year) was deemed too short, so Christian Aid and Shoola are continuing to support this work over the longer term in order to encourage sustainability and greater collaboration between communities and authorities.

lasting ways to help more people and communities at risk. (The term 'scaling-up' is taken here to mean increasing the size, coverage and long-term effectiveness of DRR activities, so as to overcome the overarching challenge posed by disaster risk to developing countries, and achieving municipal and national results, rather than simple and singular project objectives.) Replicating good practice to meet the needs of more and more people and contribute to safer societies and a safer world presents a major challenge, calling for a holistic, multi-sector approach.

The role of government and civil society

The root causes of people's vulnerability to disasters can often be found in national and global political, social and economic structures and trends: weak planning and building codes, inadequate policies governing civil protection and disaster response, inade-

quate international policies on greenhouse gas reduction and climate change, a lack of national welfare system or safety nets, indebtedness and aid dependency. Therefore, over the long term ensuring that people's lives and livelihoods are resilient to disaster involves much more than community-based work: it involves creating a supportive political and legislative environment in which good initiatives can thrive, be sustained and be multiplied. It involves a multi-sector and multi-level approach, as laid out in the UN Hyogo Framework for Action, and the cooperation of national and international bodies. But this needs to be a participative process which involves civil society as much as government – all citizens have a role to play, and individuals can take responsibility for different actions. In short, the sustainable scale-up of community-centred DRR work depends on governments and civil society working together. This inclusive approach has become central to Christian Aid's DRR work with local partners through the 'Building Disaster Resilient Communities Project', funded by DFID.

ensuring that people's lives and livelihoods are resilient to disaster involves much more than community-based work

Good practice in disaster risk reduction

Over the past decade, we have learned through experience that the most effective DRR projects meet the following criteria:

1. They are based on a thorough analysis of the particular risk and vulnerability environment, and an understanding of the people affected.
2. They encourage civil society and governance actors to participate in the analysis of risk, so that DRR activities ensure that the needs of citizens are acknowledged and addressed fairly.
3. They aim to develop stronger links between community-centred and government- led DRR initiatives.
4. They attempt to bridge the gaps between micro, meso and macro-level DRR activities in terms of transfer of information, assigning responsibility, funding and allocating resources.
5. They are set up to encourage a facilitating environment to promote sustainability, scale-up and the replication of good practice.
6. They promote greater interaction and participation between community members and governing authorities, are linked to the bigger picture, are resourced appropriately and are implemented effectively.

The role of NGOs

NGOs should focus on the longer-term goal of municipal and national results rather than simple and singular project objectives or internal organisational goals, which have often been the focus in the past. This might involve distinct project timelines, but should also fit into a long-term plan which is congruent with local wishes, and in line with local visions for the future. It is important to see DRR as a long-term process that requires sustained attention, even if resources, training and skills requirements may change over time.

NGOs can support this aim in the following ways:

- provide training and awareness raising of the issues;
- develop collaborative strategies to promote scale-up and the replication of good practice;
- support the rolling out of the Hyogo Framework;
- raise the profile of DRR as a policy and advocacy concern, with the aim of creating a favourable environment for sustainable DRR (restructuring processes and reforming institutions and legislation);
- aim to increase the resources deployed and the range of actors working for the common goal of risk reduction;
- provide facilitation or technical advice and assistance where requested;
- help to link donor funding for DRR with good-practice initiatives; and
- promote coherent and sustainable solutions to disasters.

Community-led policy monitoring

One way to encourage governance actors to acknowledge the needs of their citizens is through community-led policy monitoring (CPM). In CPM, communities are at the centre of the action – identifying needs and action plans, and challenging the government to provide the right enabling environment and resources for citizens to reduce their risk to disaster.

In early 2007, Christian Aid, CAFOD and Trocaire released a joint publication entitled *Monitoring Government Policies: A Toolkit for Civil Organisations in Africa*. This is a practical tool to help local organisations plan how they can monitor different government policies. Although written for use in Africa, the majority of the toolkit contains generic information that could be used by any civil society group seeking advice on how to undertake policy monitoring.

With reference to this tool kit and the Hyogo Framework for Action, Christian Aid has produced a series of short guidance notes to help civil society organisations and communities to better monitor, influence and secure commitment to the Hyogo Framework at the local level by:

- documenting and analysing the different approaches and tools for community-led policy monitoring that will be needed to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action; and
- making specific recommendations for achieving effective and successful policy monitoring and mainstreaming of DRR at a local level, based on lessons learnt from existing policy monitoring initiatives and case studies.

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Preparedness for community-driven responses to disasters in Kenya: lessons from a mixed response to drought in 2006

Nik Bredholt and Matt Wingate, CAFOD Horn & East Africa Office

CAFOD responded to the drought in Kenya during 2006, but the response came late. This article considers ways in which better preparedness and greater and more timely involvement with drought-affected communities could have improved the response, to save lives and support livelihoods. Evidence of impending drought in Kenya was available from at least early 2005. Credible early warning information, delivered through recognised and well-resourced regional and national structures, spoke of successive rain failures, depleting pastures and worsening human and animal health. Despite this, a discernible, collective humanitarian response only got underway after another rains failure in late 2005, followed by a declaration of national emergency at the end of the year. By March 2006, when most international agencies, the UN and the government were getting up to speed, acute malnutrition rates were well above the emergency threshold,[1] 3.5 million people were said to be affected, livestock were dying in large numbers and there were severe water shortages.

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A breastfeeding mother is measured before receiving a food ration of unimix from a feeding station near Marsabit, funded by CAFOD's partner the Diocese of Marsabit

For CAFOD, and many organisations like it, the response was late, despite early warnings, including from affected communities themselves. Why? The answer lies in the specific needs of the humanitarian system, to get the right information at the right time, and in the interaction with affected local communities through which this information is made available.

Information that triggers a humanitarian response

Like others, CAFOD requires evidence to launch a humanitarian response: indicators of trends sufficiently bad to justify releasing resources, launching an appeal or scaling

1 Nutrition surveys conducted by UNICEF in March 2006 in Marsabit, Moyale and Samburu found GAM rates of between 18% and 30%.

up staff. CAFOD's local church partners were saying that there was a problem, but the information was largely anecdotal and was not credible enough.

There is a dichotomy here. On the one hand, professional, large-scale early-warning systems lack the flexibility or programme linkages to trigger responses at the local level. On the other, local actors speak with communities on the ground, but lack the systems or capacity to get their information heard. This quandary is echoed in wider evaluations of early warning systems. The UN recently flagged the need for greater emphasis on what it called 'people orientated early warning',[2] and the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) highlighted the critical role of local people and local organisations in ringing alarm bells when natural disasters occur.

> **by March 2006, when most agencies were getting up to speed, acute malnutrition rates were well above the emergency threshold**

Considerable efforts are now being made to consider the links between early warning information and prompt humanitarian response; in the Greater Horn of Africa, for instance, the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification system developed by the Food Security Analysis Unit for Somalia is gaining wider recognition. Yet there is little evidence that consistent and adequate consideration is being given to the fundamental role of local actors and communities. The key problem is that local actors lack technical capacity, when measured by usual international humanitarian benchmarks. For CAFOD and other partner-driven organisations, its methodology is rooted in a belief in the potential of local organisations to reduce poverty and bring about sustainable change. Their reason for existing is in large part to help draw out that potential. The challenge for CAFOD and like-minded organisations, therefore, is not only to support the identification of roles for local actors in early warning and response, but also to consider how to strengthen capacity to meet those responsibilities.

Local capacity limitations

Capacity limitations go beyond early warning and problem identification. CAFOD responded to the latest drought in Kenya through a programme in seven districts, working with six partners and through about 50 rural health facilities. The implementers in this case were largely local church and development offices, with a history of response rooted in the Catholic Church's charitable mandate to assist those in need. That mandate has endowed many of these partners with tremendous strengths, but has also given them technical weaknesses. The historic role in service provision and the clear sustainability of these institutions, which have existed for decades, means that there is no incentive for them to withdraw, and too often the response has been general food aid. This has done little to strengthen the community's capacity to cope, nor has it challenged the belief held by some in the humanitarian community that local actors, and particularly faith-based organisations, are seldom adequately equipped to deliver technically sound humanitarian responses.

When CAFOD sought government funds on behalf of its local partners for a supplementary feeding programme, the reply to the application highlighted concerns around the technical capacity of such partners. Could they really deliver humanitarian programmes to international standards? The immediate priority after all is saving lives, and risks should not be taken in such matters. CAFOD proceeded with a response anyway, using its own resources to deliver a nutrition programme during the first half of 2006. With limited additional staff capacity and training restricted largely to district-level officers and senior staff in partner organisations, both field staff and beneficiaries struggled to see the distinction between a supplementary feeding programme and their general food ration. The consequent frustration did little to encourage partners or communities that a so-called 'technically sound' nutrition response was worthwhile. In many locations the programme reverted to the partner's default course of general food distribution.

In mid-2006, CAFOD made a second attempt to deliver a supplementary feeding programme. Using three of the same partners, the programme considered lessons from the first phase, the most prominent of which were the lack of technical capacity and insufficient personnel to allow the scale up of such a programme. This time, however, the programme invested significantly in additional staff at rural health facilities, additional resources for transportation for monitoring and outreach and technical training and accompaniment, not only with office-based staff, but also at the community level through nurses and community health workers.

> **signs of drought are seen earliest at the local level**

The huge difference between the first and second phase of programming has led to sometimes obvious but important insights for future programmes with local partners.

- Most notably, it is clear that signs of drought are seen earliest at the local level. Whilst macro-level indicators, such as nutrition rates, grain reserves, national livestock prices or depleting water tables, are all valuable in highlighting the extent of a crisis, climate-dependent households feel the impact of a pending drought many months earlier, and are already discussing it among themselves and with local organisations.
- For local actors already on the ground, there are no inherent capacity constraints that cannot be overcome to produce quick and 'technically sound' responses.

2 UN, ISDR, 'Global Survey of Early Warning Systems', 2006.

However, support is needed, and it should come at appropriate times in the disaster cycle.

Locally relevant information and community participation

Communities have an important part to play in humanitarian action. A mechanism must be found to engage locally rooted health facilities, and their outreach services, in both the collection and dissemination of early warning information, with an emphasis on sharing information directly with disaster-prone local communities.

This extensive and established resource is hugely under utilised. With a little effort and support, rural health facilities could enhance their quantitative data and the utility of their anecdotal information to generate local responses to emerging drought, as it manifests itself at the village and even household levels. This demands the active involvement of community members, local nurses and volunteer mobilisers, and could thus serve the dual purpose of developing the evidence base, whilst also increasing the risk reduction capacity of communities, enabling them to make early and appropriate livelihoods decisions in the face of drought or other disasters.

In a recent CAFOD assessment of four pastoralist districts, Marsabit, Isiolo, Kitui and Mwingi, communities time and again spoke of threats to their traditional coping mechanisms thanks to a decade of poor rains, and petitioned tirelessly for knowledge and training to respond better to drought. This proposition is in contrast to the situation CAFOD and its partners currently face in marginalised parts of Kenya. Early warning information is generated for external responders, not for those affected by a threat. It is macro-level and one-way in its flow. In Kenya, although the most prominent system – the Arid Lands Resource Management Project (see http://www.aridland.go.ke) – is at the district level, it has little power to act until the information has passed through national structures. On the return journey, there is no evidence that information actually reaches the communities from where it came, and so what is created plays little or no role in their decision-making processes in relation to drought. At a time when participation and community-driven response are increasingly upheld by humanitarian actors, the structure of early warning in the region serves largely to reaffirm the dependency of the communities we strive to support.

Conclusion

Although some additional hardware is required, the challenge in creating an information collection mechanism through local structures lies, not primarily in equipment or infrastructure, but in capacity. Stakeholders should strive to help establish information formats that include anecdotal information, whilst also taking into account the vital statistical data that should contribute to humanitarian action, strengthening the accessibility of established systems and enhancing them wherever possible. Through a programme that contributes to the long-term management of malnutrition through rural health networks, a complementary structure could effectively be established using the same staff and volunteers to provide early warning information to local actors in a format that enables them to generate a response.

Meanwhile, parallel support must be given to address the capacity constraints most local agencies face. Genuine emergency preparedness must take place away from periods of humanitarian crisis. Since valued local actors are rarely just emergency response organisations, such capacity-building should be integrated with longer-term activities, and should recognise the impact of disasters on the livelihoods activities these actors also undertake. In particular, emergency preparedness should include contingency planning and technical specialisation, supporting partners to read the signs that local early warning is generating and establishing clear-cut response processes according to the evidence immediately – and locally – available.

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Working with vulnerable communities to assess and reduce disaster risk

Bruno Haghebaert, ProVention

The importance of community-based participatory approaches is now generally recognised in the fields of disaster preparedness and mitigation and, increasingly, also in disaster response and recovery. The rationale for using participative approaches in disaster risk reduction is well known:

- Local communities are the first responders when a disaster happens. In the hours following a disaster search and rescue and the provision of immediate assistance to the injured and homeless are almost entirely carried out by family members, relatives and neighbours. In the case of small-scale events, communities may be left entirely to their own devices, as there may be no external assistance available at all.
- Top-down disaster risk reduction programmes often fail to address the specific vulnerabilities, needs and demands of at-risk communities. These vulnerabilities and needs can only be identified through a process of direct consultation and dialogue with the communities concerned, because communities understand local realities and contexts better than outsiders.

- Even the most vulnerable communities possess skills, knowledge, resources (materials, labour) and capacities. These assets are often overlooked and underutilised and, in some cases, even undermined by external actors.

It is therefore crucial that at-risk communities are actively involved in the identification and analysis of the risks they are facing, and participate directly in the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of disaster risk activities.

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Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment in the Philippines

Over the last two decades, a diverse range of community-level risk assessment methods have been developed and field tested, mainly by NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs). The influence of participatory action research (PAR) and community development methodologies, such as participatory rural assessment (PRA) and rapid rural appraisal (RRA), is evident in many of these risk assessment methods.1

> **the importance of community-based participatory approaches is now generally recognised**

Community risk assessment (CRA)

Community risk assessment serves a dual purpose:

1. The primary purpose of a community risk assessment is to provide *data* to better inform local decisions on the planning and implementation of risk reduction measures. An effective CRA will contribute to a greater understanding of the nature and level of risks that vulnerable people face; where these risks come from; who will be worst affected; what means are available at all levels to reduce the risks; and what initiatives can be undertaken to reduce the vulnerability and strengthen the capacities of people at risk. CRA identifies specific vulnerable groups/individuals, based on key social characteristics such as gender, age, health status, disability and ethnicity (either through checklists or through a situational analysis). The process also includes an analysis of patterns of population density, livelihood security and occupational activities that increase the vulnerability of certain households and communities. Capacity assessment aims at identifying a wide range of resources: coping strategies, local knowledge, leadership and institutions, existing social capital which may contribute to risk reduction efforts, skills, labour, community facilities, preparedness stocks and a local evacuation plan. An additional and often overlooked aspect of a participatory risk assessment is the local perception of risk, which can play a key role in deciding on mitigation measures.
2. The *process* of carrying out a participatory assessment and the ensuing action planning may be of equal long-term importance as the tools that are adopted to collect and analyse data on vulnerabilities and capacities. This process is one of participatory partnership and active long-term engagement with communities in defining their problems and opportunities. The process also enables communities to analyse and better understand their capacities and strengths, building collective self confidence. As such, CRA is both an assessment tool and an organising process.

Another advantage of the participatory approach is that, when it is conducted with mutual respect, trust may develop that allows 'outside' knowledge to be integrated with 'inside' knowledge. The result is a form of hybrid knowledge that is very robust and effective in reducing risk.

CRA has been mainly used to assess social vulnerability and capacity, but ideally it needs to be integrated with other risk assessment processes, such as:

1. **Physical, economic and environmental risk assessment.** This requires a more integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to explore the synergies and links between the natural and human-made environment.
2. **Assessment of other risks and threats.** In societies faced with multiple threats to lives and livelihoods (such as HIV, conflict and climate change), CRA has to become a fully integrated process that addresses all threats. These threats are often interrelated, for example HIV can lead to reduced resilience to drought and food insecurity.

1 For an overview of key participatory techniques (and brief descriptions), see http://www.proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=45#group3.

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3. **Post-disaster damage and needs assessment.** In most cases different groups conduct pre- and post-disaster assessments. This artificial separation is unfortunate and wastes vital knowledge and effort. There are major benefits in the full integration of CRA with pre-disaster and post-disaster damage and needs assessments. Clearly, the assessment of damage and social needs after disasters represents a far more accurate measurement of vulnerability and resources than any predictive assessment. In addition, the data from CRA, concerning risks as well as resources, collected before a disaster can be valuable in designing and implementing effective disaster relief and recovery activities in response to local needs and demands.

The ProVention CRA Toolkit

In May 2004, the ProVention Consortium organised an international workshop on 'Social and Vulnerability Analysis'. The workshop aimed to review current methods for community risk assessment, define elements of 'good CRA practice' and identify gaps.[2] One of the key recommendations by the participants was the need to document and analyse the different methods used by various organisations, and collect good practice case studies. The main project partners in the development of the CRA Toolkit initiative were the Disaster Mitigation Programme for Sustainable Livelihoods (DiMP) at the University of Cape Town, and Dr. Ben Wisner.

The CRA Toolkit has four main features:

- A register of 25 methodological resources and a compendium of 35 case studies. For most methods and case studies a guidance note has been developed. Each note provides a detailed analysis of the method and case study concerned, and a brief abstract.
- A search tool, which allows users to carry out a search according to a range of predetermined categories.
- A glossary of terms, which provides a detailed description of the different CRA concepts, methods and tools.
- Additional links to CRA, community-based disaster risk management and participation materials.

Intended users of the Toolkit are international NGOs and their partner organisations, local government staff, risk researchers and CBOs active in developmental and/or humanitarian work.

The project team's main findings with regard to the methodologies were:

- There is a wide variety of CRA material in terms of type, approach and focus. Organisations have developed a broad range of methods (and acronyms), each according to their own institutional and programmatic interests (see Box 1).
- Although all methods are aimed at 'community-level' risk assessment, not all material is people-centred and truly participatory in nature.

2 The workshop report is available at: www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/VCA_ws04.pdf.

one of the key recommendations was the need to document and analyse the different methods used by various organisations, and collect good practice case studies

Box 1 Examples of community risk assessment methods

Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment (CVA)
Community Wide Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (CVCA)
Damage, Needs and Capacity Assessment (DNCA)
Disaster Risk Assessment (DRA)
Gendered Community Risk Assessment (GCRA)
Hazard and Vulnerability Assessment (HVA)
Hazard Risk Vulnerability Assessment (HRV)
Hazard Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (HVCA)
Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment (PCVA)
Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment (PDRA)
Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (PVCA)
Participatory Vulnerability Assessment (PVA)
Resilience and Vulnerability Assessment
Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (RVA)
Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA)

- Most methodologies have been developed by INGOs and Northern experts, rather than by Southern NGOs and CBOs.

The project team also collected and analysed 35 CRA case studies from Asia, Latin America, Africa and Small Island Developing States. Key findings were:

- Partnerships between NGOs and local government enhance the effectiveness of the assessment and action planning process (see Box 2 overleaf).
- Multi-hazard approaches are feasible and are more rewarding in the long run.
- Using a livelihood approach in CRA has important benefits.
- A blending of local and external knowledge is often highly effective in reducing risk.
- CRA can also be used successfully in complex situations where there are multiple issues to be addressed in addition to risk reduction, such as community development, poverty reduction and conflict resolution (see Box 3 overleaf).
- It is vital to plan monitoring and evaluation at the design stage and collect sufficient baseline data before risk reduction activities start.
- Participatory approaches can also be used in post-disaster situations (for damage and needs assessment and recovery planning).

Box 2: Zambian Red Cross Society, Vulnerability Capacity Assessment: Sinazongwe District

In 2003, a thorough and well-designed assessment was carried out in Sinazongwe, a district in southern Zambia. The CRA team was composed of staff from the regional IFRC delegation, the Zambian Red Cross Society (ZRCS) and district and local government officials. The purpose of the study was to assist ZRCS in mapping out hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities within the target area. Research methodologies included literature review; semi-structured interviews with key informants from local government departments, NGOs and other stakeholders; and the facilitation of Community Focus Groups involving more than 400 people from rural areas, peri-urban areas and a 'squatter settlement'.

This study is essential reading for everyone interested in CRA. It is important because of its methodological rigour, the close links established between civil society organisations, local government and other service providers and its concrete recommendations. It also highlights the need to more closely coordinate development activities by multiple NGOs and governmental stakeholders (see http://www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/CRA/Zambia.pdf).

Box 3: El Salvador, Program for Prevention and Mitigation of Flood Disasters in the Lower Lempa River Basin

The Lower Lempa River Basin in El Salvador is unique in social terms and in the type of flood hazard it faces. During the civil war, this zone was depopulated. After the war, former combatants from both sides were offered land there for resettlement. A number of NGOs and civil society organisations provided assistance to the settlers, but this work was not well coordinated.

In 2000–2001, a diverse team, consisting of experts from Costa Rica and Colombia, the staff of two development NGOs and local government officials, was involved in the diagnostic and planning phase of a multi-stage programme to address natural hazard risk, livelihood enhancement and poverty reduction. This phase involved collecting background and secondary data, field study, a household survey and work with focus groups. An action plan was developed and implemented.

This case is important for agencies and institutions working in post-conflict situations, as well as those wishing to take a more holistic and integrated approach to risk reduction (see http://www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/CRA/El_Salvador.pdf).

Future plans

ProVention aims to regularly update the good practice case studies in the CRA Toolkit in order to evaluate the long-term impact of community risk assessment and planning processes. More case studies will be added to the Toolkit in the near future. Organisations that would like to share their CRA experiences for inclusion in the Toolkit are invited to send case studies to cra@ifrc.org. Lessons learned from the CRA Toolkit initiative will be documented in a publication to be released in 2008.

Bruno Haghebaert is Senior Officer at the ProVention Consortium Secretariat, which is hosted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva. For more information, visit the ProVention website: www.proventionconsortium.org. The author would like to thank Ian O'Donnell (ProVention Consortium) (ianodonnell@ifrc.org), Ben Wisner (Oberlin College) (bwisner@igc.org) and Adolfo Mascarenhas (Links Trust) (mascar@udsm.ac.tz) for reviewing this article. The CRA Toolkit is available at www.proventionconsortium.org/CRA_toolkit.

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Effective response reduces risk

Arjun Katoch, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Risk reduction is the mantra of our times. However, for some it has become purely a development mantra, which, if pursued assiduously enough, will somehow eliminate disasters. This line of thinking emphasises that, with enough prevention, risk will disappear and there will be no need for response. According to this school of thought, emergency response to disasters, dominated as it is by the need to save lives and provide emergency relief assistance, does not address the underlying causes and risks that provoked the crisis in the first place, nor does it stimulate rapid recovery. This often results in the reproduction of the very conditions of risk and vulnerability that led to the disaster in the first place. Money spent on emergency response should instead be spent on mitigation, which constitutes true risk reduction.

©Reuters/Stephen Morrison, courtesy www.alertnet.org

A man wades through flood waters in southern Somalia, December 2006

> risk reduction is the mantra of our times

Nothing could be further from reality. A more realistic view of risk reduction would define it to include all actions that reduce the suffering of the population and the damage to human habitation. Disasters are a force of nature which we cannot prevent. No amount of mitigation can insulate the people and structures of places like Istanbul, Mexico City, Almaty, Ulan Bataar or Manila from the effects of an earthquake. However, speedy and effective emergency response can reduce the number of casualties, ease the suffering of the population and telescope the time in which a semblance of normality is restored to society. Therefore, investing in effective response mechanisms reduces the likely severity of the impact of the disaster on the affected population, and as such reduces the risk to the population. Disaster response preparedness should be a key component of effective risk reduction. This is recognised by the Hyogo Framework for Action adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005.[1]

1 See chapter 5, 'Words into Action: Implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action'.

Risk reduction through disaster response preparedness

The UN General Assembly has consistently stated that the government of a disaster-affected country is primarily responsible for the response to the disaster. The quickest and most effective response to a disaster is provided by the local and national authorities of the affected country. The international system's assistance, whether bilateral or multilateral, normally represents only a very small fraction of the assistance generated from within a country. Risk reduction through effective disaster response preparedness is about working with disaster-affected governments, communities, donors and regional organisations before a disaster strikes, to improve the effectiveness of national and international response once a disaster strikes.

Currently, the international community has made limited efforts to further risk reduction by assisting disaster-prone developing countries and regional organisations to improve their response systems. Ensuring that this is done is the responsibility, as mandated by the UN General Assembly, of the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and his Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). John Holmes, the current ERC, appears to appreciate the importance of this. At the request of national governments, OCHA has utilised the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination team (UNDAC) for risk reduction through disaster response preparedness. The UNDAC team has analysed and suggested improvements to national disaster response systems in a range of countries, including Afghanistan, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Laos, Mongolia, the Philippines and Tajikistan.[2] At the same time, however, systematic risk reduction by means of disaster response preparedness needs to include complementary actions at international, regional, national and community levels. Some of these are discussed below.

Risk reduction through response preparedness at the international level

Risk reduction through emergency response preparedness at the international level should involve integrating international response processes and capacities into

2 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Field Coordination Support Section, 'UNDAC Missions', http//: ochaonline@un.org.

regional, national and local disaster response planning so that international responses fit seamlessly into ongoing national efforts. This is done by creating a consensus amongst all international responding entities on the procedures and methods of disaster response, and through coordination via discussions, seminars and exercises at international, regional and national levels.

Risk is also reduced by building international response networks such as UNDAC, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and the Environmental Emergencies network. After the Indian Ocean tsunami, the importance of building consensus and creating procedures to govern the use and coordination of military assets in disasters has become clear. This involves a considerable amount of diplomacy because of the sensitivity of using the military in an international context.

An essential element of risk reduction is shaping the discourse on disaster response by influencing academics and decision-makers. There is a need for responders to engage actively with universities, think-tanks and institutions such as the Asia Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) and Chatham House in the UK, to influence international thinking on the theory and processes of disaster response. Currently, this is being done on an *ad hoc* basis.

> risk is also reduced by building international response networks

Finally, the international community should systematically and collectively assist the governments of disaster-prone countries in developing a national disaster preparedness strategy and contingency plans. Using a database such as that developed by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), OCHA could list the 30 most disaster-prone countries in the world and focus international efforts on reducing risk by assisting them in developing efficient response systems. Similar lists already exist. The IFRC's *World Disasters Report*, for instance, lists countries affected by natural disasters, while Columbia University's Centre for International Earth Science Information Network ranks countries according to their level of preparation for climate change.

Risk reduction through response preparedness at the regional level

The nearest countries to a disaster site can obviously get there first, so investing in regional response frameworks is good risk reduction. This should involve assisting regional groupings such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Centro de Prevencion de los Desastres Naturales en America Central (CEPREDENAC) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) to create their own frameworks for regional response. A good recent example of risk reduction in this form is the ASEAN Committee of Disaster Management (ACDM), which in 2006 signed an agreement on a framework of regional disaster response. In formulating this framework it was assisted by OCHA and other UN organisations.

One way to reduce risk is by organising disaster response seminars and exercises at the regional level. INSARAG arranges regional earthquake response simulation exercises with governments of disaster-prone countries. In these exercises, international urban search and rescue (USAR) teams from the region participate in skeleton form along with national USAR teams, the Local Emergency Management Authority, UNDAC teams, NGOs such as MapAction and Telecoms Sans Frontieres and private sector companies such as DHL. The last such exercise in the Asia- Pacific was held in Shijiazhuang, China, in 2006. The next one will be held in Ulan Bataar, Mongolia, in August 2007. ASEAN has also started to conduct regional disaster response exercises, and one is planned in Singapore in October 2007.

Risk reduction through response preparedness at the national level

For international and national response mechanisms to dovetail effectively, working relationships of trust and rapport must be established between the international community, especially the ERC (OCHA), and the governments of disaster-prone countries prior to disasters striking. It is too late to try to do so after a disaster has happened. Overall risk is reduced by assisting governments in enhancing their own disaster response capacities and systems, since this will help them respond faster and more effectively. The aim should be to reduce risk by creating:

- a suitable national policy and legal framework for disaster response;
- a designated ministry as national focal point for response, with an established system of inter-ministerial coordination;
- a similar structure at the province/district level;
- a cadre of well-trained and well-equipped responders at all levels;
- a good operations room and communications with all provinces and districts; and
- established systems of coordination with incoming or locally-based international organisations and responders such as donor teams, the UN, the IFRC and NGOs. This should include creating established standard operating procedures to integrate international responders with the local emergency management authority. The importance of this was underlined during the earthquake in Bam in Iran in 2001, which saw approximately 1,300 international responders from 34 countries on the ground in four days – enough to overwhelm the most efficient of national systems.

Risk can also be reduced at the national level by establishing links between international early warning systems such as the Global Disaster Alert and Coordination system (GDACS)[3] and national disaster management agencies,

3 The Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS) provides near real-time alerts about natural disasters around the world. and tools to facilitate response coordination. See http://www.gdacs.org.

with the aim of speeding up decision-making and factoring early warning systems into contingency planning and public awareness, education and training programmes. Risk can also be reduced by ensuring the participation of disaster-prone countries and responding countries in international response networks such as INSARAG, UNDAC and the Environmental Emergencies network. Enhancing national skills and developing national standards in this way reduces overall risk.

> **emergency response preparedness at community level must involve developing effective community-first response plans**

Risk reduction through emergency response preparedness at the community level

Assisting communities in disaster risk reduction should be the bedrock of any risk reduction strategy, since it is communities that are affected by a disaster. This is best done through national authorities and organisations in the community. For risk reduction through emergency response preparedness at this level, an analysis of possible emergencies to which the community is vulnerable, and the corresponding risk to life and structures, is essential. The response to floods is different from the response to earthquakes, so different techniques need to be applied to reduce the risk. Professional, organised and competent emergency response at community level saves the most lives immediately after a disaster has struck.

Emergency response preparedness at community level must involve developing effective community-first response plans based on the community's needs, as perceived by the community, and with a sense of community ownership. These should include ensuring a professionally competent and practiced fire brigade, police or other NGO or volunteer local response entity. The community government, in conjunction with local Red Cross/Red Crescent societies or other social organisations, should develop early warning and contingency plans for evacuation, especially for communities threatened by floods, utilising local assets.

Risk reduction during the response to a disaster

Decisions taken during the emergency response phase of a disaster often have far-reaching and irreversible implications. This implies that risk reduction must be kept in mind from the very beginning of the response to a disaster. Decisions taken and relief structures established during the initial emergency response phase have a tendency to remain in place long after the response phase is over. For example, during the response to the earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005, the decision to use the terminology and sequencing of the newly designed 'cluster approach' for the UN Flash Appeal was taken by the UN Country Team on the second day of the UNDAC mission, for reasons of logic and convenience. However, once the Flash Appeal was written and published, the cluster approach became cast in stone, and was followed by international responders and subsequently by the Pakistan government for the duration of the emergency.

Conclusion

Disasters threaten human beings and their property. We cannot eliminate disasters, and therefore we cannot eliminate disaster risk. Despite the increasing popularity of risk reduction within the development community, good response preparedness and good response are essential ingredients in overall risk reduction because they save lives and restore functioning society as quickly as possible. Actions to reduce risk by efficient response need to be taken at the international, regional, national and community level, and dovetailed into each other. Once this is recognised, disaster response preparedness and disaster response will be accorded their due place in the risk reduction enterprise.

Arjun Katoch is Chief, Field Coordination Support Section, UN OCHA. Geneva. The views expressed in this article are the personal views of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

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Justifying the cost of disaster risk reduction: a summary of cost–benefit analysis

Courtenay Cabot Venton, Environmental Resources Management

Cost–benefit analysis (CBA) can play a pivotal role in advocacy and decision-making on disaster risk reduction (DRR) by demonstrating the financial and economic value of incorporating DRR initiatives into aid planning. Natural disasters are affecting more of the world's population, and are projected to increase in severity and intensity under climate change. The cost of disasters, both in terms of lost GDP as well as spending on relief and rehabilitation, is significant. Investment in DRR is, however, limited. There is uncertainty around where and when disasters will strike, and what harm they will cause (particularly in the case of events such as cyclones). Meanwhile, governments and donors focus spending on immediate needs for poverty reduction, such as health, water and food security, and hesitate to invest in DRR where the immediate development outcomes are not always clear.

Evidence on the costs and benefits of DRR consistently shows that investment brings greater benefits than costs, and therefore should be a priority for development planning. However, this evidence is limited and very location- and hazard-specific. Further work is needed to demonstrate to finance ministers and donors that mainstreaming DRR is financially and economically justified.

The cost of disasters

With their rising incidence and increasing severity, the cost of disasters, both in terms of lost GDP and expenditure diverted to relief and rehabilitation, is significant. The World Bank has estimated that, between 1990 and 2000, natural disasters caused damage valued at between 2% and 15% of an exposed country's annual GDP. Table 1 shows information reported by the World Bank on the impact of natural disasters for selected countries around the world, in terms of the percentage of annual GDP.

Table 1: The impact of natural disasters on GDP, 1990–2000

Country	Percentage of GDP
Argentina	1.81
Bangladesh	5.21
China	2.5
Jamaica	12.58
Nicaragua	15.6
Zimbabwe	9.21

Source: World Bank (2004)

The World Bank's conclusions have been supported by the recent, high-profile Stern Review, which estimated the costs and benefits of reducing the risks associated with climate change, of which natural disasters are a core component. Stern's central conclusion is that the benefits of strong and early action far outweigh the economic costs of not acting. The Review estimates that, if steps are not taken to combat climate change, the overall costs and risks will be equivalent to losing at least 5% of global GDP each year, now and for the foreseeable future. If a wider range of risks and impacts is taken into account, the damage could rise to 20% of GDP or more. In contrast, the costs of the action required to reduce emissions to a level which would avoid the worst impacts of climate change can be held at around 1% of global GDP each year.

> **the Stern Review's central conclusion is that the benefits of strong and early action far outweigh the economic costs of not acting**

Cost–benefit analysis and disaster risk reduction

Cost–benefit analysis is an economic tool that can be used to compare the costs and benefits of DRR interventions. Table 2 provides a summary of available evidence on the net benefits of DRR projects.

Only a handful of community-level studies have been conducted, and these have used different methodologies and approaches. Initial research suggests that DRR measures often bring greater benefits than the costs they incur, but this may vary significantly depending on factors such as the type of disaster, the country concerned and the DRR measures employed.

Further action

There is a critical need for further evidence of the costs and benefits of DRR. In particular, we need systematic studies comparing regions, types of hazard and DRR interventions to provide a sounder comparative basis upon which conclusions could be drawn on the costs and benefits of DRR measures. Practical guidance on how to undertake CBA is required for use by practitioners and governments alike to facilitate prioritisation of DRR measures and to maximise the effectiveness of limited financial resources.

Studies that seek to use the findings from CBA to engage in advocacy with governments and international institutions should be encouraged. This linkage between practice and policy is essential in order to ensure that any further detailed work on DRR options is used to effect change in high-level policy and decision-making. It is worth noting that work is also being taken forward within

Table 2: Evidence on the net benefits of disaster risk management projects

Source and type of analysis	Actual or potential benefits	Result/return
Ex-ante appraisal (assessment before implementation)		
Kramer (1995): Appraisal of strengthening the roots of banana trees against windstorms in St. Lucia	Increase in banana yields in years with windstorms	Expected return negative as banana yields decreased
World Bank (1996): Appraisal of Argentinean Flood Protection Project. Construction of flood defence facilities and strengthening of national and provincial institutions for disaster management	Reduction in direct flood damages to homes, avoided expenses of evacuation and relocation	Internal Rate of Return (IRR): 20.4% (range of 7.5%–30.6%)
Vermeiren et al. (1998): Hypothetical evaluation of benefits of retrofitting of port in Dominica and school in Jamaica	Potentially avoided reconstruction costs in one hurricane event each	Benefit/cost ratio: 2.2–3.5
Dedeurwaerdere (1998): Appraisal of a range of different prevention measures (mostly physical) against floods and lahars (volcanic flows) in the Philippines	Avoided direct economic damage	Benefit/cost ratio: 3.5–30
Mechler (2004a): Appraisal of risk transfer for public infrastructure in Honduras and Argentina	Reduction in macroeconomic impacts	Positive and negative effects dependent on exposure to hazards, economic context and expectation of external aid
Mechler (2004b): Prefeasibility appraisal of Polder system against flooding in Piura, Peru	Reduction in direct social and economic and indirect impacts	Best estimates: Benefit/cost ratio: 3.8 IRR: 31% Net Present Value (NPV): $77.7 million
Mechler (2004c): Research-oriented appraisal of integrated water management and flood protection scheme for Semarang, Indonesia	Reduction in direct and indirect economic impacts	Best estimates: Benefit/cost ratio: 2.5 IRR: 23% NPV: $45.5 million
Ex-post evaluations (assessment after implementation of measures)		
Benson (1998): Ex-post evaluation of flood control measures in China over the last four decades of the 20th century	Reduction in direct damage to property and agricultural land	$3.15 billion spent on flood control averting damage of about $12 billion
IFRC (2002): Ex-post evaluation of Red Cross mangrove planting project in Vietnam for protection of coastal population against typhoons and storms	Savings in reduced costs of dyke maintenance	Annual net benefits: $7.2 million. Benefit/cost ratio: 52 (over period 1994–2001)
Venton and Venton (2004) Ex-post evaluations of implemented combined disaster mitigation and preparedness programme at the community level in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, India	Reduction in direct social and economic, and indirect economic impacts	Bihar: Benefit/cost ratio: 3.76 (range: 3.17–4.58) NPV: $814,000 ($55,000–$129,800) Andhra Pradesh: Benefit/cost ratio: 13.38 (range: 3.70–20.05) NPV: $46,200 ($8,800–74,800)
ProVention (2005): Ex-post evaluation of Rio Flood Reconstruction and Prevention Project, Brazil. Construction of drainage infrastructure to break the cycle of periodic flooding	Annual benefits in terms of avoidance of residential property damage	IRR: › 50%

Note: This summary was provided by R. Mechler, *Cost–Benefit Analysis of Natural Disaster Risk Management in Developing Countries*, working paper for sector project 'Disaster Risk Management in Development Cooperation', GTZ, 2005.

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Box 1: Cost–benefit analysis explained

Cost–benefit analysis is an important economic tool for valuing investments, and is used in many sectors and with many applications. It can be used both pre-investment, to choose between different project options, or post-investment, to assess the economic value of a project.

Most projects are typically evaluated using cost-effectiveness analysis, in which an objective is set, and cost comparisons are made between different options for meeting those objectives. Although cost-effectiveness analysis is commonly used in evaluations, it does not account for the wider economic impacts of a project. Cost–benefit analysis, on the other hand, allows for a comparison between benefits and costs (a benefit being defined as anything that increases human well-being).

The steps included in a CBA typically include the following:

- Identification of the scenario with and without the DRR intervention, and the additional impacts resulting from the DRR intervention (e.g. reduction in lives or assets lost).
- Quantification of the impacts – both positive and negative – in both scenarios.
- Costs and benefits are discounted over the lifetime of the project at a given 'discount rate'.
- The net discounted benefits are divided by the net discounted costs to arrive at an estimate of the economic benefit received. If this ratio, referred to as the Net Present Value (NPV), is greater than one, the benefits outweigh the costs. Economists also sometimes refer to the Internal Rate of Return (IRR). This calculation estimates the IRR, or discount rate, which results in an NPV of zero.

the climate change context to understand the costs and benefits of adaptation options. Much of this is overlapping, given that increases in climate-related natural disasters are a core impact of climate change. The climate change and DRR agendas should be more closely linked to ensure that effort is not duplicated.

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Disaster risk reduction: mitigation and preparedness in aid programming
John Twigg
Good Practice Review 9, 2004

Natural disasters – disasters resulting from natural hazards such as cyclones, droughts, floods, earthquakes, landslides and volcanic eruptions – are widespread and numerous in developing and middle-income countries. They can cause great loss of life and immense damage to communities, infrastructure and national economies. Ethical, humanitarian considerations oblige us to act to protect human life and prevent suffering. Many researchers and aid institutions have identified natural disasters as a major threat to sustainable development.

This Good Practice Review aims to help project planners and managers to:

- appreciate the significance of hazards (primarily natural hazards) and the risks associated with them;
- appreciate the need for risk management in project planning and implementation, and the value of such efforts;
- recognise the main issues that must be understood and addressed when carrying out risk reduction or disaster mitigation and preparedness initiatives; and
- understand – at least in broad terms – how to address these issues in practice, throughout the project cycle.

It is easy to be intimidated by the scale and extent of the problem, and the variety of counter-risk approaches that can be taken. But lasting protection against disasters will not be reached overnight. It is a long-term goal to be attained through a continuous process of improvement. Community resilience to hazards can be built up incrementally over time, as long as the basic approach is sound.

This Review is above all a practical document. However, it is not a manual. Its emphasis is on the process of planning and implementing risk reduction initiatives. It focuses on key issues and decision points and how to address them. Readers are referred to more detailed technical manuals and studies where appropriate. It has been difficult to present a balanced coverage of such a broad and diverse subject, and there are inevitable gaps. Nevertheless, the book is evidence-based. The descriptions and discussions are supported by case studies, which aim to give a sense of the range and diversity of practical approaches that can be used.

Good Practice Review 9 is available for download from the HPN website at www.odihpn.org.

Cross-border trade and food markets in Niger: why market analysis is important for humanitarian action

Geert Beekhuis, WFP, and Ibrahim Laouali, FEWS NET

In the early 1990s, Sahelian countries embarked on a process to develop markets, limit government market interventions and liberalise trade. The achievements of this process, which was encouraged at the regional level by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Union économique et monétaire de l'Afrique de l'ouest (UEMOA), have to date been mixed: barriers to trade, both formal and informal, still limit the free play of the market. This mix of trade liberalisation and trade restrictions has an important influence on household food security. The high retail price of cereals in Niger during the summer of 2005 – and its devastating impacts on poor households – is often used to support the argument that 'markets' are to blame for creating food insecurity. Free trade proponents, however, emphasise that the majority of Sahelian households benefit from markets for their food and income.

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A malnourished child at a Médecins Sans Frontiéres feeding centre in Maradi, Niger, August 2005

Humanitarian actors recognise that markets can alleviate or aggravate food insecurity, and acknowledge the imperative need to understand how markets work, and the links between markets and livelihoods. This article explores the vital role of markets in food security in the Sahel, and the lessons learned from the Niger food security crisis. It concludes with an agenda to guide the future work of the World Food Programme (WFP), the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), FEWS NET, National Market Information Systems and other partners, to reinforce their market analysis and monitoring capacities.

Why are markets so crucial for food security in the Sahel?

According to a popular Nigerian saying from 20 years ago, a Sahelian man who wished to marry should not depend on the market: he should be self-sufficient in food production. Today, however, high population growth has reduced the size of agricultural plots. This, in the context of market liberalisation, has obliged Sahelian households to rely increasingly on markets for their food security.

In April 2005, a typical household in Niger depended on market purchases for 90% of its food.[1] The large majority of Sahelian households – be they pastoralists, subsistence farmers or urban families – are not self-sufficient in staple foods. This market dependence increases in years of poor agricultural production. Households also rely on markets to earn income from the sale of animals, staple foods, cash crops and labour, to cover non-food expenditures. During bad years, coping strategies include selling small livestock and taking out loans with traders. Debt forces subsistence farmers to sell staples at very low post-harvest prices to repay loans, creating spillover effects into the following year.

humanitarian actors recognise that markets can alleviate or aggravate food insecurity

Food security analysis in the Sahel has for some time focused on the assessment of agricultural production; it is now time to devote more resources to analysing how markets contribute to the distribution and pricing of food; other supply sources, such as imports; demand factors; and policies, informal trade barriers and public interventions. CILSS, the key player with respect to food security analysis in the Sahel, as well as its national counterparts, have moved in this direction, and this process should continue, with the technical and financial assistance of its partners.

1 WFP, 'Niger, profil des marchés', 2005 ; WFP's market analysis activities are part of a three-year plan to strengthen its Emergency Needs Assessments Capacities with funding from ECHO, DFID, the Citigroup Foundation, CIDA and the Danish and German Governments.

Why is market analysis important for food security assessments?

First, markets have the capacity to ameliorate the negative impacts of shocks. Without trade, a modest drop in domestic cereal production may lead to huge price increases and consumption shortfalls. With trade, prices increase until they reach parity with import prices, limiting the consumption shortfall. Understanding how markets function, and the interventions that can facilitate trade, can help in identifying measures to alleviate the negative impacts of shocks. It may also allow us to better estimate the appropriate amount of food aid to import, reducing potential market distortions.

Second, market analysis contributes to food security monitoring. If markets function well, surpluses readily move to deficit zones with adequate purchasing power. However, if purchasing power in deficit zones is very low, or trade is constrained by security problems, lack of infrastructure or the absence of competition, disastrous effects on local food supply and prices may result. Market monitoring should provide the logic of food price changes, it should explore future market developments, and it should assess the potential impact of prices on the food security of the various livelihood and wealth groups.

Third, market analysis informs the debate over cash versus food assistance. If markets are well-integrated, transport costs are reasonable and food is available, then cash assistance may be appropriate: traders will respond to the increased demand from households.

What happened to the food markets of Niger and Nigeria during 2004–2005?

The hike in food prices in Niger followed steep price rises in Nigeria, caused by lower agricultural production and buoyant demand stemming from high consumer purchasing power and demand from the poultry and food processing sectors.[2] Higher prices in Nigeria caused a drastic drop in exports to Niger, while cereal flows reversed: Niger was supplying Nigeria. This trade-driven supply squeeze was compounded by lower domestic crop production because of locust attacks and some dry spells. As similar supply reductions may occur in the future, we have to ask why the response to the price hike in Niger took so long to materialise.

The national system for agricultural market information, SIMA, has been collecting food price data on more than 40 markets in Niger since the early 1990s. During 2004–2005, SIMA and FEWS NET reported relatively high price levels. However, this alert was not well-received by humanitarian actors and donors. The reasons advanced to explain the price increases were neither complete nor convincing, mainly because of a lack of shared knowledge of cereal markets and trade and the absence of reliable statistics on imports and agricultural production in Nigeria. In addition, humanitarian actors did not understand how dependent households in Niger were on food market purchases, how households were linked to markets and how these relations had evolved. Lastly, there was no agreed alert threshold for price increases amongst humanitarian actors. As a result, humanitarian actors did not agree on the significance of the price hike or its impacts until very late in the crisis.

2 See FAO GIEWS Global Watch, 'Endogenous and Regional Factors Underlying Niger's Food Crisis', August 2005, and FAO/WFP, 'Special Report, Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission', December 2005.

Market analysis in Niger during 2005

The widespread publicity given to food prices and markets during the Niger crisis encouraged greater analysis of cross-border trade and markets. Public awareness of the importance of markets also increased. Journalists, NGOs and other institutions started reporting on food and livestock markets, and FEWS NET, SIMA and CILSS began conducting missions to markets in northern Nigeria. These missions, combined with WFP's Niger market profile, provided an explanation of the 2005 price hike. They also laid the foundations for today's collaboration in monitoring Niger's markets by WFP, SIMA and FEWS NET.

> the publicity given to food prices and markets during the Niger crisis encouraged greater analysis of cross-border trade and markets

Market analysis by institutions such as CILSS, FEWS NET, SIMA and WFP offers the following lessons: i) a sub-regional or regional approach, covering all the key trade-linked zones in West Africa, is preferable to a purely 'national' approach; ii) assessments should devote more attention to demand factors at the micro level, in addition to analysing the various sources of food supply, prices and market and trade structures; iii) market monitoring should be conducted on the basis of an agreed understanding of the market's structure, conduct and performance, and the analysis should cover flow information, as well as prices; and iv) partnerships for market assessments should be broadened to capture the multidimensional character of markets, and to agree on conclusions and recommendations.

Joint market analysis in 2006

At the end of 2005, FEWS NET and WFP launched a study to identify knowledge gaps regarding links between markets and food security in West Africa. The study also formulated recommendations to reinforce market analysis of food security assessments, including: i) establishing a regional monitoring system for cross-border flows; ii) strengthening capacities to conduct market analysis; and iii) developing tools to analyse the links between households and markets. CILSS, which plays a central role in food security monitoring in the Sahel, made similar recommendations during its annual meeting in December 2005. Under the guidance of CILSS, a technical working

group was established to conduct market assessments in key cross-border trade corridors such as the Maradi, Kano and Katsina zone, and to develop proposals for a cross-border monitoring system.

The crucial role of CILSS cannot be overstated: it is a permanent body representing its nine member states, and ECOWAS and UEMOA count on its technical assistance to support their regional market and trade integration activities. CILSS is therefore best placed to provide guidance to its member countries' market information systems, ensure cross-fertilisation between countries and report on regional market trends. All key partners adhere to this approach, and provide technical and financial support to CILSS.

Challenges ahead

In the context of making CILSS the regional centre of excellence for market analysis in West Africa, two high-priority challenges have been identified. First, CILSS and its sister organisation, the 'Réseau des Systèmes d'Information sur les Marchés en Afrique de l'Ouest (RESIMAO)', must be supported to establish a strong regional market monitoring system and to become a technical assistance provider to national market information systems. The regional market monitoring system will encompass prices and flows for both agricultural and livestock products, and publish a regular bulletin. To do this, an agreed in-depth regional understanding of market behaviour is necessary, as well as support for database and cartography development. This should be complemented with financial resources to implement the pilot phase of a proposed project to collect cross-border flow data. WFP and FEWS NET are committed to supporting this priority objective, for example through a sub-regional market study being undertaken in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

The second challenge concerns the interaction between households and markets. Characterising these relationships would assist in identifying when price changes could jeopardise food access. Pilot testing of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse these interactions has been conducted in Mauritania, but further work is necessary. As the influence of markets on household food security varies for each livelihood group, a livelihood approach is essential. In addition, due to intra- and inter-annual variations, longitudinal data is necessary to enable a meaningful characterisation of households' interaction with markets. FEWS NET and WFP are ready to support CILSS in tackling this priority challenge; an initial stock-taking of experiences in other regions of the world, which might be adapted to the West African context, has been initiated by FEWS NET, in collaboration with its partners.

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Islamic charities and the 'War on Terror': dispelling the myths

Mohammed R. Kroessin, Islamic Relief

In the public mind, Islamic charity organisations have become little more than funding fronts for terrorism and *jihad*. Yet, despite allegations in television programmes, books and investigative reports in the UK, very little evidence has actually been forthcoming linking agencies or their staff with terrorist activity. Since 1998, the British government's Charity Commission has conducted only 20 inquiries into suspected links with terrorism, ten of which have been dropped. One has led to the closure of a Tamil organisation linked to the LTTE in Sri Lanka. At the same time, the 1,000-plus Islamic charities and trusts in the UK have been exposed to extraordinary levels of scrutiny under anti-terror legislation.

The history of charitable giving in the Muslim world

The principles of charitable giving and compassion are enshrined in Islamic teaching through the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. In Islamic theology, humankind is seen as a trustee of all the world's God-given resources. Only through following 'divine guidance' can a functioning social and global system be established and maintained. In Islamic teaching, this system is based on the optimal utilisation of the resources God has endowed to mankind, and their equitable use and distribution.

The redistribution of wealth in the form of charitable giving is an obligation on every believer. The basic mecha-

nism for this is *Zakah* (obligatory charity), which became a mandatory act of worship at the time when the Islamic state was established by the Prophet Muhammad in 622. Many Qur'anic verses deal with the topic. The word *Zakah* is derived from the verb '*zaka*', which means to grow and improve. *Zakah* must be given by every Muslim, and is calculated at a rate of 2.5% of any disposable wealth above a minimum amount at the end of each year. According to the Qur'an:

> *Zakah expenditures are only for the poor and the needy, and for those employed to collect [Zakah] and for bringing hearts together and for freeing captives and for those in debt and in the way of Allah and for the traveller – an obligation imposed by God and God is Knowing and Wise* (Qur'an, 9:60).

Today, this could perhaps be translated into the following expenditure headings:

- poverty reduction;
- administrative overheads for civil servants dealing with public welfare;
- peace-building and community cohesion;
- promotion of freedom, basic human rights and civil liberties;
- personal insolvency settlements;
- public work, including security and defence; and
- supporting the homeless, refugees and migrants.

Voluntary charity – in Arabic *Sadaqah*, meaning to give away and realising one's faith by action – is also strongly encouraged. It is based on many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, such as 'Charity is due upon a person on every day that the sun rises'. Charity here goes beyond material support to encompass any voluntary act, even the offering of a smile (a famous saying of the Prophet Muhammad). It is regarded as an individual devotion given directly to the beneficiary, without the need for state administration or mediation.

the importance of charitable giving in the Muslim World should not be underestimated

Other Islamic teachings stress particular seasons for giving, such as during the month of Ramadan, when Muslims are expected to feed the destitute whilst fasting themselves. A special contribution has to be made at the end of the fasting month, called *Zakat al-Fitr*, an amount of food or the monetary equivalent to feed one person in need. Similarly, during the *Hajj* (pilgrimage) season, Muslims are expected to sacrifice a cow, goat or camel to feed the needy, called *Qurbani*.

In some countries – Pakistan, Sudan and Saudi Arabia, for example – the collection of *Zakah* is organised by the state. In other cases, it is collected by Islamic charities. These private organisations have become a substitute for the state welfare system in the Muslim world, replacing the traditionally government-controlled 'alms store' (in Arabic *Bait al-Mal*), the institution responsible for collecting and distributing charitable assets. Donation boxes are often found in mosques and community centres, and donations can also be deposited at the offices of Islamic charities and charity shops. Donors prefer to stay anonymous in the belief that it is better to give alms discreetly than to publicise one's philanthropy. As a consequence, Islamic NGOs lack the systems of accountability and transparency commonplace among Western agencies. This has made it difficult for them to counter accusations that their funds are being used inappropriately.

Islamic charities after 9/11: threats and opportunities

The importance of charitable giving in the Muslim World should not be underestimated. According to the Saudi government, its aid to the developing world, both through unilateral and bilateral funds, places it among the largest donors in the world, with disbursements of $48 billion between 1975 and 1987. With aid levels at $4 billion a year, Saudi Arabia is the second-largest donor after the United States. However, under US pressure the Saudi government has clamped down on public fundraising activities, including banning charity collection boxes in mosques and closing down some leading charities. In July 2003, the Saudi Ministry of Information announced that all NGOs had been barred from sending funds abroad.

The ultimate cost of measures such as these is borne by beneficiaries. In Somalia, for instance, the local branch of the Saudi charity the Al Haramain Islamic Foundation (AHIF) was designated a terrorist entity by the US Office for Foreign Assets Control in 2004, prompting the Saudi government to close the organisation down. The designation of AHIF Somalia appears to have been based largely on circumstantial evidence, including salary payments to individuals allegedly linked to Al-Qaeda. But the closure of the charity has led directly to the closure of a number of orphanages supported or run by AHIF in Somalia. In another case, in the Palestinian Territories, the US government in 2003 cited the British charity Interpal as a 'Specially Designated Global Terrorist Organisation' on the grounds that it supported Hamas activities. In 1996, the Charity Commission had carried out an inquiry into allegations that some of Interpal's funds had been channelled to Hamas, but no evidence of inappropriate activity was found. Following the US government finding, the Charity Commission froze Interpal's bank accounts while it carried out another investigation. The US authorities failed to provide any evidence to support their allegations, and the inquiry was closed on 24 September 2003. Although Interpal's accounts were released, its humanitarian work in the Palestinian Territories was undoubtedly disrupted, and donor confidence in the organisation may have been undermined.

Suspicions around the role of established Islamic charities have also altered the way Muslims give to charity. Since they are obliged by their faith to give, they are forced into informal means of discharging their *Zakah*,

often through donations to unrecognised 'charities' and fundraisers at local mosques and community centres. The Saudi NGO World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) has seen a 40% drop in its fundraising income since 9/11; its Secretary-General, Saleh Wohaibi, attributes this fall to 'fear of Muslims falling foul of strict US efforts to monitor terror funding'. But this switch away from established charities may have further weakened the transparency and accountability of charitable donations. Ironically, attempts to close down or control formal charities may have had precisely the opposite effect by forcing charitable giving into less regulated channels.

> the terrorist threat is real, yet Islamic charities are not guilty by default

The terrorist threat is real, yet Islamic charities are not guilty by default. Nonetheless, both the lack of support for Islamic charities to help them address their shortcomings in transparency and accountability and the rhetoric about their funding for terrorism continues – apart from a small number of notable exceptions. The Humanitarian Forum, for example, the brainchild of the British charity Islamic Relief, was initiated in June 2004 to help foster partnerships and facilitate closer cooperation between Western humanitarian organisations and NGOs in Muslim-majority countries. Islamic Relief, which has been unaffected by the drop in funding experienced by other British Muslim charities, consulted a wide spectrum of international and Muslim NGOs. This highlighted the need for action and proactive change within the Islamic charity sector, with external help where necessary. The Forum's goal is to support Muslim NGOs in joint capacity-building, advocating for a legal framework for greater transparency, promoting humanitarian principles and standards and improving communication and cooperation within the international humanitarian community. A similar project, the 'Montreux Initiative', was launched in January 2005 by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. This aims to promote cooperation in removing unjustified obstacles for Islamic charities as a contribution towards confidence-building between the Islamic world and 'the West'.

In the United States, a number of Saudi-initiated charity organisations have come together to form the Friends of Charities Association (FOCA), which was established in January 2004. FOCA's members stress their commitment to the principle of transparency and accountability. FOCA's Transparency Project seeks to assure donors, government and the international community that Islamic charities have nothing to hide, and will work to address any deficiencies or problem areas that are exposed. Like other similar initiatives, FOCA focuses on building agency capacity.

The way forward

The way forward is to enable a more open and informed debate about the Muslim charity sector: Islamic NGOs must be seen as partners, not enemies, in combating both terror and the roots of terrorism. To do this job effectively, their vilification must end, and they must be helped to better engage with the mainstream humanitarian community, since their contribution to relief and development is considerable. Any further fallout from the ill-directed 'War on Terror' will only make the problem more deep-rooted, whilst the victims of today's greatest evil, poverty, remain unaided.

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Accountability to the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid: old messages, new messengers

John Mitchell, ALNAP

Humanitarians have spent a great deal of time talking and writing about the importance of being accountable to beneficiaries. At its simplest, it all seems very straightforward: genuine accountability through the consultation and participation of affected people is empowering and results in more appropriate and effective aid. Everyone seems to agree on this. The concept is explicit in a raft of humanitarian aid policies, codes and principles, donors are beginning to use it as a condition of funding and evaluations of humanitarian action are increasingly highlighting its importance.

The language of participation and accountability to beneficiaries is now being used much more widely and explicitly by high-ranking officials in the humanitarian community. Last year, for example, former US President Bill Clinton, in his role as UN Special Envoy, argued that we need to better utilise and work alongside local structures to ensure that relief and recovery assistance actively strengthens, rather than undermines, local actors.[1] Senior UN officials, including Jan Egeland, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, have stressed the importance of accountability to local populations and beneficiaries. In June 2006, a parliamentary inquiry into the UK's response to natural disasters specifically asked witnesses to give examples of how lives are lost through a failure to ensure accountability.[2]

> **the language of participation and accountability to beneficiaries is now being used much more widely and explicitly**

Thus, the language of participation, once the sole domain of developmental theorists and humanitarian idealists, has caught on at the highest levels. It has successfully crossed into the humanitarian sector, and has become a mainstream message articulated by humanitarianism's most senior spokespeople. On the surface, the message seems to be clearer, louder and more straightforward than ever. Consultation and participation with affected communities results in better and more appropriate aid and saves more lives. For aid agencies, therefore, the pressure to deliver accountability to beneficiaries is increasing, not least because donors are starting to apply accountability as a condition of their funding. The Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA), for instance, has asked agencies to sign up to Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) accountability standards in order to be eligible for funding.

Not so very long ago, senior aid officials had a different message. In the 1990s, the prevailing rhetoric was about results-based management and demonstrating impact. The era was epitomised by Andrew Natsios, then head of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), who once famously told an audience of NGO representatives: 'doing good is no longer enough. We have to show results. If you cannot measure aid empirically, then USAID will have to find other partners to fund'.[3] In this environment accountability to beneficiaries was a peripheral issue, something woolly and airy-fairy that could easily be put to one side in the light of more grown-up and material priorities. So, why the turnaround?

Part of the reason may be that aid agencies and research institutes have essentially failed to demonstrate the impact of their work beyond some basic data on mortality, morbidity and nutritional status. It has been possible to say something about the humanitarian imperative – i.e., saving life in the short term – but wider questions about other humanitarian concerns, such as recovery, livelihoods, capacity-building, protection and rights, remain largely unanswered. On the whole, impact evaluations have been inadequate tools for the task in hand due to, among other things, a lack of baseline data and compressed timeframes. Impact monitoring has not worked and research programmes are prone to methodological problems, including the seemingly intractable problem of how to attribute impact in a multi-variable environment. But despite the lack of empirical proof of impact, USAID has not in fact found other partners to fund, and nor have any other donors. Instead, they have simply found another demand and another idiom for their rhetoric.

From what we have seen this year, the message from the top is now more in line with the concerns of practitioners and those preoccupied with humanitarian ideals. The question of impact, once presented as a strict condition of funding, has taken a back seat as accountability to benefi-

1 Clinton was writing in the preface to the *Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami*, published by the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition in July 2006. See www.tsunami-evaluation.org.

2 Minutes of evidence, International Development Parliamentary Enquiry, 20 June (Question 126), House of Commons.

3 Natsios, quoted in John Mitchell, 'Accountability: The Three Lane Highway', *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 24, July 2003.

ciaries has come to the fore. Natsios' concern has not disappeared entirely, but it has been subsumed into a new equation. In this formulation, improving accountability to beneficiaries through increased consultation and participation will result in more appropriate and effective programming; in other words, in the absence of empirical data, better accountability to beneficiaries now serves as a kind of proxy of impact.

> **the real question is how to implement participatory processes in a way that will not expose vulnerable populations to more risk**

All of this sounds like a step forward, and one could be forgiven for believing that there must be an indisputable evidence base underpinning the assumption that participation equals better programming. But there isn't: these assumptions are not grounded in evidence. Participation theory – imported into the humanitarian sector from agricultural systems thinking in the 1970s and 1980s – has proved a very tricky concept, especially in environments characterised by war, conflict and social dislocation. We know that accountability to beneficiaries in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), northern Uganda, western and southern Sudan, West Africa and Haiti remains extremely weak. Equally, we know that it is not easy to change this given the realties on the ground. Problems such as lack of access, uncooperative authorities and the proximity of belligerent groups make close consultation with beneficiaries difficult and sometimes inadvisable. An OCHA evaluation from Darfur found that 'beneficiaries have still not been effectively engaged in the management of matters that concern themselves directly'.[4] Many agencies see participatory processes as 'empowering', but the perpetrators of violations of human rights are likely to take a very different view. Responsible field personnel have to weigh up the pros and cons of engaging with aid recipients, and in some situations may prefer to adopt alternative tactics such as 'accompaniment' 'advocacy' or 'witnessing'.

The real question therefore is how to implement participatory processes in a way that will not expose vulnerable populations to more risk. Currently, there is no clear way forward given the dearth of evidence about what has worked, where and why. The evidence base simply does not exist. It is astonishing that no-one has yet brought experiences together and presented an analysis. Guides on how to set up participatory programming exist, but their content is based primarily on developmental theories rather than on experience gleaned from the humanitarian environment. This is not to say that some experiences are not there – there is good reason to expect that there is much evidence buried in grey literature, in old agency sit reps, the odd evaluation and in the heads of the people involved. But it remains largely hidden and untested.

All this leaves one with the feeling that the new level of participatory rhetoric, although preferable in many ways to the results-based management talk of the last decade, is based on untested assumptions rather than evidence. But for some it serves a dual purpose: not only does it sidestep the problem of demonstrating impact, but it also fits with the current geopolitical agenda and the tactics for winning the war on terror. The reality is that, despite the humanitarian principles of impartiality and proportionality, most aid remains tied to bigger political objectives. As this 'war' increasingly involves winning hearts and minds, so the importance of consultation, of understanding people's views and needs, increases. In this context, the language of participation contains within it both humanitarian ideals, and military and political objectives. In a world where humanitarianism and geopolitics are often linked, participation provides an idiom that, on the surface at least, is satisfactory to all parties. One can only hope that this includes those who are most at risk of violence, discrimination and deprivation.

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4 B. Broughton, S. Maguire and S. Frueh, *Interagency Evaluation of the Humanitarian Response to the Darfur Crisis*, OCHA, February 2005.

Humanitarian Practice Network

The **Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)** is an independent forum where field workers, managers and policymakers in the humanitarian sector share information, analysis and experience.

HPN's aim is to improve the performance of humanitarian action by contributing to individual and institutional learning.

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Funding support is provided by institutional donors (AusAID, CIDA, DANIDA, DFID, Development Cooperation Ireland, MFA Netherlands, SIDA, USAID), non-governmental organisations (British Red Cross, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Concern, International Rescue Committee, MSF, Oxfam, Save the Children (UK), World Vision) and UN agencies (WFP).

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Humanitarian Exchange is edited by Rachel Atkinson.
Printed and bound in the UK by Charlesworth.
ISSN: 1472-4847