Disaster risk reduction NGO inter-agency group learning review

'What is needed now is a move from discussing WHAT needs to be done to greater concentration on HOW it can be done'

Piet van den Ende, Practical Action, contribution to UN ISDR online debate on the Mid-Term Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action, 2010

AUTHORS' ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This learning review was an excellent opportunity to explore some questions about DRR that may not necessarily be asked in conventional project evaluations. It also offered the ever-busy participating NGOs thinking space over a period of several months in which to reflect on the broader lessons learned from their work, individually and collectively. Opportunities of this kind do not come along as often as they should.

We were lucky enough to be asked to pull the learning review together by facilitating Interagency Group discussion meetings, talking to staff working on DRR in each NGO and working through a mass of reports and other evidence produced by the agencies' various projects. In this we were part researchers, part rapporteurs. It was a challenging but enjoyable task and we have learnt a great deal in the process.

The review was only possible because of the enthusiasm and commitment of all the NGO staff involved and their willingness to answer questions, debate issues and dig out evidence. Particular thanks are due to:

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John Twigg and Helen Bottomley
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Disaster risk reduction NGO inter-agency group learning review

John Twigg and Helen Bottomley
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INITIALS AND ACRONYMS

CBDRM	community-based disaster risk management
CBO	community-based organisation
CCA	climate change adaptation
CSO	civil society organisation
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRR	disaster risk reduction
DRRS	Disaster Risk Reduction through Schools (ActionAid)
HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action (UN)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PVA	participatory vulnerability analysis
VCA	vulnerability and capacity analysis

PART A

Introduction

Through its Conflict and Humanitarian Fund, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded five major NGOs

- ActionAid
- Christian Aid
- Practical Action
- Plan
- Tearfund

...in 2005 to carry out disaster risk reduction (DRR) projects. These projects, each of which covered several countries, came to an end late in 2010. Whilst the approach and aims of individual agencies varied, all the projects put great emphasis on building capacities for community-based DRR. The agencies also worked together as a *de facto* consortium on global advocacy and in learning and sharing lessons; and they collaborated in some cases at a country level.

To fulfil its grant obligations to DFID, each agency has been carrying out its own final evaluation activities as the projects draw to a close. However, both the Inter-Agency Group[1] and DFID agreed that there should be a parallel review which would synthesise learning points and evidence from the individual evaluations and other project outputs, thereby identifying significant common issues of practice and policy for sharing and debate within the Group and with other institutions engaged in DRR and resilience building.

1 Collectively, the agencies form the DFID Disaster Risk Reduction NGO Inter-Agency Group, normally – as here – referred to as the Inter-Agency Group.

Photo: Oenone Chadburn /Tearfund

PART A

This 'learning review' document is an outcome of that process. Its aim is 'To contribute to the evidence base on disaster resilience and support future learning, influencing and fundraising by synthesising and sharing learning from the portfolio of DRR projects undertaken by the group.'[2] It is based on a 'peer review' approach, in which each agency has offered significant lessons from its DFID-funded work to the Group for discussion, with the most common and important themes selected for inclusion as learning points in the final report. **The Group was concerned to highlight not only what works well in building resilience to disasters, but also where the problems and challenges lie, looking particularly at the processes of DRR.** A further concern was to highlight matters that, as well as being important to the Group's own projects, were believed to be relevant to current DRR policy debates, including that on the Mid-Term Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA).

The review document has been developed by an external writer and facilitator/commissioning editor, through an iterative process involving three Inter-Agency Group workshops, fact-finding visits to each member agency, circulation of tables of contents and draft texts, and ongoing dialogue by email and telephone. A number of agency staff were involved in the process and over 100 resources from the projects (eg: evaluation reports, case studies, operational and training manuals, research papers, institutional analyses, DVDs) were collected and reviewed.[3]

The process involved gradual distillation of issues and themes. Many were suggested initially but some were set aside because they did not appear important enough or were insufficiently relevant to the Group as a whole; others were merged into broader thematic clusters. This was a challenging task, requiring considerable thought and debate as interesting ideas had to be set aside. It resulted in selection of four thematic areas for discussion, based on: their significance to DRR generally and the work of the Inter-Agency Group in particular; the extent to which the theme might add to the wider DRR knowledge base or highlight gaps and limitations in the existing literature; and the opportunity to open up avenues for further practice, enquiry and debate. The four main themes chosen were:

1. Choices and priorities in DRR
2. Vulnerability and risk assessment
3. Scaling up
4. Governance.

The choice of themes, and their sequence, mirrors the process of implementing DRR projects, with a few additional reflections. These lessons about the realities of implementation may be particularly valuable to operational agencies trying to turn DRR concepts and idealised plans into workable initiatives with vulnerable communities.

A further challenge was presented by the proposed length of the review document. A concise paper was called for, to make it more accessible and hence likely to be read by people in agencies beyond the Inter-Agency Group, but inevitably this meant some sacrifice of detail and evidence. The examples given in the text – many in the form of quotations from project documents, to provide a flavour of the work – are representative of what the Group's members as a whole have learned but they are merely illustrative of the much bigger evidence base. They demonstrate problems as well as achievements.

2 Agreed at a meeting of the Inter-Agency Group on 5 May 2010.

3 Some of these will be shared more widely, in due course, through the newly created Eldis 'community' on Disaster Risk Reduction and Building Resilience (www.eldis.org).

PART B

Outline of the projects

ACTIONAID

ActionAid's 'Disaster Risk Reduction through Schools' project, implemented in seven countries, sought to make schools in high-risk disaster areas safer, and enable them to act as a locus for DRR and for institutionalising implementation of the Hyogo Framework within education systems.

Project activities included: undertaking Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) with children, teachers, parents and the wider community at the local level, and with authorities at the district and national level; supporting capital investments to improve school safety; raising awareness of disaster reduction and improving disaster preparedness in schools; defining and supporting district-wide action plans for DRR through schools; training, sensitising and mobilising civil society and government on the Hyogo Framework and project experiences; developing and promoting new teaching-learning materials; and influencing the policies and positions of relevant UN agencies, inter-governmental bodies, international NGOs and networks.

CHRISTIAN AID

Christian Aid's 'Building Disaster Resilient Communities' (BDRC) project was a global capacity building and learning initiative that supported local partner organisations in Africa, South and East Asia and Central America to strengthen communities' capacity to manage and recover from external shocks, as well as prepare for and reduce the risks of future disasters.

Projects were carried out in seven countries to test the approach and to incorporate DRR into community development work carried out by

Photo: Layton Thompson /Tearfund

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Christian Aid's partners and ecumenical networks, using a sustainable livelihoods and governance approach; and to elevate DRR as a policy priority through promoting the active involvement of civil society in the preparation of local and national development plans. BDRC was a holistic concept incorporating DRR into secure livelihoods, mitigation work and political advocacy which was a new innovative way of working for Christian Aid and its partners.

PLAN

Plan implemented its 'Children and Young People at the Centre of Disaster Risk Reduction' programme in eight countries. This was based on a child-centred DRR approach founded on the principle that young citizens have the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and thus they have the right to participate in the governance of DRR 'services'. It aimed to strengthen communities' resilience to disasters through the development of robust and replicable practices for managing child-centred, community-based DRR and contributing to positive changes in international policy and practice.

The programme interventions took place in schools (through the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and school management), the community (child-led and child-centred community-based interventions), the policy arena (children's participation in DRR planning and decision-making from local to global levels, and action research) and disaster response and recovery environments (promotion and implementation of the child-centered DRR approach to minimise disaster impact and losses in the preparedness, response and recovery stages).

PRACTICAL ACTION

Practical Action's project, 'Mainstreaming Livelihood-Centred Approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction', has worked with government and other development agencies in supporting community-driven DRR initiatives. Communities that are aware, prepared and practice resilient livelihoods are better able to cope with the impacts of shocks, stresses and hazards at the local level. Building on local knowledge and capacities and adopting appropriate technologies has reduced losses of assets and dependence on outside assistance in the wake of disaster events.

In the past, community-based DRR approaches have tended to be small-scale and location-specific, and operate in isolation from wider national initiatives. Under this project, they have been scaled up and linked into wider national agendas and institutional structures. Local, meso and national government authorities have been encouraged to institutionalise the livelihoods approach to disaster management into national development policies and practices. Key frontline ministry staff (such as agriculture, veterinary, health and education services) at local, district and provincial levels in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Peru and Zimbabwe have reacted positively to engagement with local communities, recognising the value of the livelihood-centred approach. While several notable successes have been achieved, embedding DRR into working practices is dependent on prevailing country policy.

TEARFUND

DFID funded Tearfund to work in DRR within highly vulnerable communities in areas of increased risk in India, Afghanistan, Malawi and Bangladesh. Tearfund utilised existing partners in India, Bangladesh and Malawi as well as its own Disaster Management Programme in Afghanistan to outwork the project. These countries represented four of the top 12 countries on DFID's list of 'least developed countries at high risk of disasters' dated March 2006.

Based upon the recommendations of the Hyogo Framework for Action, the aim of the DFID DRR project was to address both the immediate and the underlying causes of people's vulnerability to disasters. This was done by helping communities assess their exposure to risk and the capacities they have to reduce them. Tearfund actively integrated climate change adaptation into DRR at the community level. Advocacy also played a pivotal role in influencing government policies by increasing community awareness of hazards and building their capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from prevailing hazards. The project has resulted in stronger, more resilient communities across four target countries.

PART C

Review themes and findings

1 CHOICES AND PRIORITIES

DRR is a systematic approach to identifying, assessing and reducing disaster risks, which aims to reduce socio-economic vulnerabilities to disasters as well as dealing with the environmental and other hazards that trigger them. The breadth and potential complexity of the DRR endeavour make it a difficult approach to apply. How does an agency set priorities, when there are so many possible areas for intervention? How can it maximise impact and sustainability when it has only limited resources to tackle enormous challenges? This section highlights two relevant aspects of this question that were prominent in the learning review: targeting and expectations.

1.1 Targeting: cohesion and marginalisation

Just as community development projects have traditionally sought to work with the poorest members of the community, so in DRR the emphasis is on helping those who are most vulnerable to shocks and stresses. In general, identification of target groups for DRR might seem to be a relatively straightforward business. In addition to working with the most vulnerable in society, NGOs often have long-standing relationships with local partners and their communities and some focus their work on particular groups (eg: children and young people, women, people with disabilities)

Photo: Tearfund DRR

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who they understand well and with whom they have good contacts.

However, the literature tends to offer little guidance about targeting, beyond setting out the principles and suggesting a relatively idealised, blueprint, approach for identifying those most in need and making them partners in risk reduction (or development) actions. There is far less guidance on problem-solving. Moreover, community-based DRR cannot be straightforward when even the poorest and most vulnerable communities are not homogeneous and may contain their own marginalised groups. Amongst operational organisations, it is commonly accepted nowadays that community-level DRR must be a participatory partnership (involving communities, community-based organisations (CBOs), local government and NGOs) and that the whole community must be engaged.

The Inter-Agency Group's experience from the DFID DRR projects is that **identifying marginalised groups and applying mechanisms for ensuring their inclusion and participation are not simple one-off actions** but must be applied systematically and comprehensively throughout a project. In particular, **agencies need to probe deeper into community structures and local power relationships** to identify and involve the most marginalised individuals and groups (analysis of exclusion and marginalisation is a skill that should be incorporated more generally into the training of facilitators). It is crucial that agencies apply their participatory methods towards recognising this and towards capitalising on the potential for knowledge and capacities to be harnessed from all parts of a target community.

> ***'The understanding, know-how, practices for dealing with threats and disasters already existing in communities are often fragmented. The most vulnerable people, including children, might share little of this knowledge. They might have, however, their own perspectives and fears on disaster and threats, which are rarely heard by the whole community. PVA participants mentioned that, in retrospect, the value of the PVA was to bring together existing and scattered knowledge and experiences: the successes but also the failures in tackling threats and disasters. It was an opportunity to reassess them, to structure them, and to make them accessible to and used by all the people in the community.'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p41

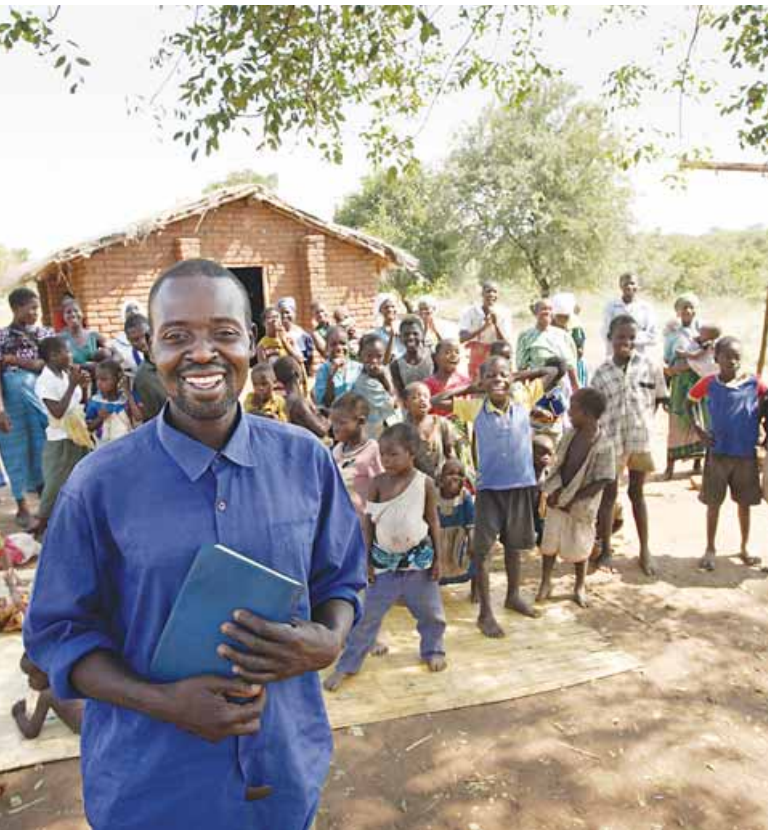

Photo: Marcus Perkins /Tearfund

To some extent, this requires moving away from textbook knowledge to analysis of the personal experiences of those most affected by hazards and disasters. Sharing their perspectives and knowledge can increase awareness and understanding in the wider community.

However, where an external agency does focus on the most marginalised within a community, this may present its own problems. The members of the Inter-Agency Group were well aware of the risk of creating tensions within communities by appearing to favour one group over others, but this is a manifestation of **a more fundamental debate about the appropriate balance of private and public gains from a project**, especially where there are limited resources to be allocated. There is sometimes a difficult choice to be made between action at the collective, community level and work focusing on individual households in need. This dilemma, common among agencies of all kinds engaged in DRR work, was recognised by Christian Aid in Honduras, where an evaluation noted that:

'while the small infrastructure mitigation projects may be seen as public goods for the whole community, the advantage of the livelihoods component (in the form of private supply of private goods, as it is) is that it can – and should – be targeted at those most vulnerable individual households.'

Christian Aid, Honduras, p38

Investment of what are inevitably limited resources in a project intervention that may reduce the vulnerability of the community as a whole, such as an embankment to protect against floods, may mean not being able to provide sufficient additional focused assistance to those who are most marginalised within that community.

1.2 Expectations and expediency

Strong, positive relationships between external agencies and vulnerable people are at the heart of community-based DRR. It is normally assumed in operational guidance and other writing on DRR that this can be achieved through participatory, inclusive approaches and it is often implied that such approaches are relatively easy to implement effectively. The experience of the DRR projects that feature in this review suggests that there are some potential pitfalls and that one of the most significant of these is **differing expectations between agency and community**.

DRR programme approaches need to be driven by the affected community (target audience), not by the priorities and agendas of external actors. Yet many communities have high expectations of what they might receive from development organisations. The problem for DRR agencies is obvious enough: by overtly adopting a holistic perspective of the disaster/vulnerability problem, they risk giving the impression that they will address all aspects of the problem even though they are in no position to do so. The opening up of such a credibility gap between community and agency has potentially serious implications.

'While there needs to be more understanding from the communities of their rights and how they can empower themselves more cohesively as a group to ask for better services from the government, this must be done sensitively in the light of operating in an insecure environment where overt petitioning could lead to anger when there is a lack of response.'

Tearfund, Mid-Term Evaluation, p15; project in Afghanistan

Direct participation of the community in identification and planning of activities fosters ownership and should promote more realistic expectations; so should clear presentation of the objectives and limitations of project activities to the target audience. However, **agencies need to be very sensitive in striking a balance: progressive yet manageable programmes with achievable objectives, dependent on factors within the local context**. It is important to be aware that open-ended participatory appraisals and vulnerability and capacity analyses (VCAs; see below, Section 2) can contribute to misunderstanding. Many agencies working on DRR that use participatory VCA methods are acknowledging this and the threat it can pose to their credibility with communities.

'Communities will often identify the "root causes" of their problems and propose solutions which are beyond the scope and resources of the project. The limitations of the project's inputs and influence need to be made clear.'

Practical Action, Annual Report, p19

The question of how to address the root causes of vulnerability is a critical area where mis-understandings or tensions between community expectations and project aims can be created or exposed. One important lesson from the Inter-Agency Group's projects is of the need for operational flexibility in this aspect of DRR. Where a project identifies underlying factors that it cannot deal with directly, it may need to put greater emphasis on advocacy and lobbying, together with other development organisations and civil society; and this may require it to play different roles.

'the PVCA seeks to broaden the remit of community-led analysis, planning and action by linking communities to many actors, at different levels (from the local to the international one, as needed). The role of the NGOs is to facilitate this engagement.'

Action Aid, DRRS, p31

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In other cases, **flexibility may involve adjusting a project to incorporate and address the community's priorities; this too may necessitate new or alternative partnerships**.

> ***'When we conducted a PVCA in Mchinji, Malawi … one of the main threats identified by the community members was HIV/AIDs (which came second only to drought). The exercise was part of a disaster-mitigation project and as such we had not contemplated HIV work directly. However, we could not ignore the community's perception of its vulnerability to HIV and its impact when planning the project, and we were able to link with Christian Aid HIV projects in Malawi.'***
>
> Christian Aid, PVCA, p6

Photo: Jim Loring /Tearfund

2 VULNERABILITY AND RISK ASSESSMENT

One of the main conclusions of the 2009 *Views from the Frontline study*, which was based on research in 48 countries, was that participatory risk/vulnerability assessments at the local level constituted 'a strategic entry point to building resilience' because the 'foundation for building resilience is people's awareness and understanding of the risks that they face' (Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction, 2009, page v). Such assessments would inform disaster preparedness, increase knowledge and education, support local development planning, increase awareness and raise social demand, and open space for dialogue and relationship building between different actors in DRR.

Vulnerability and capacity analysis or assessment (VCA) is 'a method of investigation into the risks that people face in their locality, their vulnerability to those risks and their capacity to cope with and recover from disasters' (IFRC, 2007, p6). VCA is a key component of disaster risk analysis and hence of disaster risk reduction planning. Its purpose is to identify groups who are vulnerable, identify the factors that make them vulnerable and how they are affected, assess their needs and capacities (and empower them to do so), and ensure that projects, programmes and policies address these needs, through targeted interventions or prevention and mitigation of potentially adverse impacts.

VCA is now becoming standard practice in many DRR programmes, particularly those run by NGOs. The members of the Inter-Agency Group use VCA extensively in their work and apply explicitly participatory VCA models of similar kinds to engage communities in community-based action.

> ***'From the project management point of view, VCA[s] are social mobilization resources, bringing people together to reduce disaster risk and advocate for better social protection mechanisms. The community action plan – the most common output of a VCA, detailing the actions and resources needed to prevent disasters – regulates participation and guides cooperation between NGO, local authorities and community groups all along the life cycle of the project'***
>
> Penya and Nyrongo, 2008, p1

The rapidly growing literature on how to conduct VCAs presents a **normative model of good practice which, whilst clear and well informed, does not always make users sufficiently aware of the diversity of possible approaches to VCA or the nature of the operational challenges that might face them in doing such work**, and in particular of the ways of overcoming them. The Inter-Agency Group's experiences help in throwing light on some

of these matters. It became clear in the discussions while preparing this review that to date there has been little comparative analysis of the variety of different VCA approaches (even the participatory ones) and their effectiveness in different hazard and socio-economic contexts, or at different scales of application. This subject deserves further study.

2.1 VCA as catalyst and process

The importance of participatory VCA in ensuring that communities' perspectives and priorities are respected and integrated is well documented and widely accepted. The projects reviewed here provide indications that its significance can go much further. There is evidence that the application of VCA in the Group's DRR work was a major stimulus to understanding and action alike. For example, Action Aid reported that:

> ***'The enthusiasm of communities and local leaders for the PVA [Participatory Vulnerability Analysis] approach, the positive energy unleashed from participants, the positive feedback received from partners seems to suggest that there is value in promoting PVA not only to tackle vulnerabilities, but also as a way to revive truly participatory work.'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p26

Why is this so? Participatory VCA is commonly seen as an entry point for DRR interventions (and even for integrating DRR activities within development planning), usually at an early stage in the project cycle. However, these projects suggest that **participatory VCA may be the key entry point, perhaps even the catalyst for successful community-based DRR**. It delivers an understanding of the situation that is shared by the participants and also provides a setting in which to build a culture of prevention truly owned by all:

> ***'When they were brought in efficiently in the process, institution representatives had the "ah-ha" moment in discovering the resilience of the communities, in understanding that communities had a lot to offer to improve the decision-making and work around DRR ... One limitation of the project is that not always this epiphany took place [sic]: sometimes the PVA work was performed as a "community assessment" rather than as a process for building common understanding and mutual trust across several actors.*** **Once owned by a community, a culture of safety and prevention is there to stay.'**
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p40

Project experiences indicate that **one of the ways to maximise the effectiveness of participatory VCA in promoting DRR is to view it as 'both a tool and a process'** (Practical Action, Training Guide, p5). As a process, it is not tied to some fixed point in the project cycle; its findings are not filed away but remain 'live' in the eyes of project managers; it remains responsive to local conditions; and it is flexible, updated and modified to ensure continuing relevance and learning. By involving a range of local stakeholders (particularly communities) and sharing learning and experience, it increases transparency and accountability around the process.

Small-scale pilot testing can be used to ensure the process is sufficiently robust and adaptable and there are suggestions that because many VCA models are very time and resource intensive for communities and facilitating organisations (often requiring considerable training before the process can begin), simpler and quicker methods should be developed that can more easily be built into community development processes and facilitated by local people.

VCA can prompt actions by partner organisations and communities that go beyond the original activity plans. It has provided a platform for beginning to effect change on gender equality: in Malawi, for instance, community members began discussing the place of women in community decision-making (Tearfund, TPIP, p27). In Cambodia, VCAs conducted by children, with support from Plan, identified violence against women as a major hazard; the children were then helped by a local NGO to develop an action plan to address this (Plan Cambodia, project report). In ActionAid's experience:

> ***'Each vulnerability assessment confirmed that women are keen to express their needs and their ideas, and that giving women a voice is essential for putting on the agenda the specific issues that they face when disaster hits. Women joined rescue teams and DRR committees and demonstrated that active women groups can have a formidable role in mobilizing communities on disaster.***

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In the Apodabogo community (Ghana), the PVA work was a catalyzer for women's action. Independently from the DRRS programme, they continued to meet and set their own self-support groups. They got access to credit, found opportunities to "work for themselves", decreased their submission to the man, raised the family income. In Kurigram, Bangladesh, women participated to audit committees and gained the confidence to lobby the government. As a result of women speaking out in the PVA process, violations of their rights gained more visibility, and also traditional leaders decided to take a stance against them.'

Action Aid, DRRS, p23

The VCA process facilitates community investigations that go beyond listing the immediate effects of vulnerability and reach towards understanding of its root causes. Practical Action found that 'Locating VCA within the livelihoods framework is an effective way to analyse social and other aspects of risk and the root causes of vulnerability' (Practical Action, Training Guide, p5). There is a risk of creating unrealistic expectations here (see Section 1) although it can also lead to more pragmatic assessments of what is possible, as Christian Aid's mid-term evaluation showed:

'In Bangladesh and Malawi, the selection of livelihoods activities and inputs for the most part flowed logically from the communities' own identification of priorities through the PVCAs [participatory VCAs] and their ability to manage solutions. However, where communities expressed unemployment and income as general needs but stopped short of identifying specific means to address those needs, inputs were selected by the partners based on their understanding of the local context and best judgement (and available budget)'.

Christian Aid, *Mid-Term Evaluation, p21*

Photo: Tearfund DRR

2.2 Empowerment – and power relations

Participatory VCA can be empowering for vulnerable communities, in allowing them to understand their situation better, explain their own needs and perceptions, and engage in dialogue with other stakeholders about ways of reducing risk. Organisations working in community-based DRR are well aware of this. Less well appreciated is the **value of VCAs undertaken by a single group within the community in articulating particular perspectives of vulnerability and risk**. Work in some of the Inter-Agency Group's projects provides good examples of this. For example, the child-centred VCA processes implemented by Plan within its programme countries revealed that:

'Risk perception was grounded in children's ability to conceptualise and understand risks in their own terms, often relating hazards and factors driving vulnerability to their own experiences (such as localised landslides, polluted watercourses or dangerous roads). These locally defined conceptions are combined with information gained from external information sources such as the media, school curricula and training sessions. These commonly included an understanding of wider scale processes such as global climate change or El Niño climatic events on local livelihoods that was not present in adults' risk perceptions.'

Tanner, 2010, p343-4

Plan found that such child-centred VCAs, coupled with children's own energy and commitment to positive change, could bring new perspectives and dynamism into local debates about risk management.[4] In the Philippines, for instance, children involved in a Plan project were influential players in a successful local campaign to move a high school away from a dangerous site (Regan, 2010). This type of experience was echoed in Action Aid's El Salvador Disaster Risk Reduction through Schools (DRRS) programme, where children communicated their risk reduction reflections to their community through maps that visualised disaster scenarios. This was an effective strategy, as it was comprehensible and accessible for people with different educational levels. It also encouraged wider engagement, with the Municipal Councils being made aware of the DRR work. As schools covered many villages, they were well placed to spread news into the community, perspectives began to change within different communities and:

> ***'The border between "school" and "community" started to get blurred. PVA work showed that repairing an access road could provide safety to children going to schools. And that root causes of hazards were often located outside the school boundaries … It became evident that work in schools could not be an end in itself: a school can be safe only in a safe community.'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p15

Exciting though all of this is, an important caveat needs to be made: **the process, outcomes and impact of VCA are all too easily affected by existing power relationships in a community**.

> ***'if a community wants to be successful in tackling DRR issues, unity will be an asset … But unity must be rooted in equality, in the right of everyone within a community to have a* voice and power to participate. *Hence the importance of fine-tuning the VCA approach to be sensitive to power dynamics within communities … The experience of Nepal is that before PVA begins, the project must establish clear lines of communication with local- and district-level stakeholders to build trust and accountability and create an environment conducive for the participatory process'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p53-54

For this reason the members of the Inter-Agency Group all include some form of analysis of power and power relationships in their VCAs and project planning. **VCA processes should include power analysis to understand where real power lies and how it can be used for a progressive process of change**. It should consist of a systematic investigation of power structures and dynamics, including the role of traditional leaders within communities, but it can take many different forms. For example, institutional analysis can be used for understanding the roles and agendas of different organisations, policies and processes. It should appraise the opportunities and constraints presented by the governance context and identify areas for action. Practical Action's institutional analysis of drought risk reduction and management in districts of Zimbabwe highlighted difficulties and gaps in NGO co-ordination of technical and financial assistance to communities to re-build their livelihoods, and failures in agricultural policy – factors to then be considered in the planning process (Practical Action, V2R, p63).

Research by Christian Aid carried out as part of its DRR programme suggests that **NGOs often assume independence from local power structures and may not be aware of the implications of this decision for the quality and accountability of their activities at community level**. To regulate participation and ensure complete and accurate information during a VCA, NGOs do have to make selective decisions about which local stakeholders to work with and engage in the process. However, VCA methodology and, to an extent, commonly used participative techniques, may lack instruments to analyse the implications of such decisions, leaving NGOs poorly equipped to analyse the implications of their decisions on local power balances. Association of local élites with NGOs can strengthen local power bases:

> ***'The abundance of physical and financial resources, the free distribution of goods and services or the investment in development infrastructures offer incentives to local power structures to exert control over the information flows between the NGO and other local stakeholders, an action that will influence project management***

4 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=1upkBQ0tOeM&feature=player_embedded#at=165

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decisions during the whole intervention. VCA exercises, often the first activity of the project and determinant to select target groups and decide upon nature, location and distribution of project outputs, are the best moment to start this association and exert this control.'

Penya and Nyrongo, 2008, p4

This presents a potential challenge to external NGOs' assessment teams. On the one hand they must ensure they receive complete, accurate and impartial information on the risks affecting the community and that all local stakeholders are engaged in the process and have complete and equal access to VCA results. On the other, by setting up alternative communication channels or creating new community groups and organisations, they risk increasing community tension and fragmentation.

Gender analysis is also vital in this context, used to assess men's and women's level of access to resources in the community, or who exerts more influence on decisions within the household. This **can help to determine interventions that are more sensitive to the specific needs, skills and capacities of men and women in the community, especially in times of crisis**. VCA can be a catalyst for raising awareness about gender issues in disasters and enabling women to speak out and act in DRR (above, Section 2.1), but the Inter-Agency Group's members point out that meaningful empowerment of women can be very difficult to achieve in societies where there is a lack of commitment or capacity to address women's rights. Women may be more visible in community DRR programmes but they often remain under-represented in project activities and particularly decision making. Better understanding and renewed effort are needed in all agencies. Greater awareness and utilisation of the practical guidance already available on gender and DRR[5] would certainly help; but the strongest spur to better practice is often likely to come from local partners who are themselves already committed to working for equality and rights.

Photo: Jim Loring /Tearfund

3 SCALING UP

In development circles, the challenge of scaling up projects to achieve widespread and long-term impact has been recognised for many years and has generated a body of literature and debate in which a variety of approaches have been presented and assessed.[6] Curiously, the subject has received little attention in research and literature on DRR (apart from higher-level advocacy, discussed in Section 4, below), especially with regard to scaling up community-level work.[7]

The Inter-Agency Group members' evaluations, reviews and other studies provide neither complete nor conclusive solutions to the scaling up challenge, but they do suggest a number of approaches or pathways to follow that may assist projects to grow more sustainably.

5 eg: *The Gender and Disaster Sourcebook* (Gender and Disaster Network, 2008; www.gdonline.org/sourcebook/); UN ISDR, *Gender Perspectives: Working Together for DRR: Good Practices and Lessons Learned* (Geneva: UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2007).

6 See for example Edwards M, Hulme D, eds, *Making a difference: NGOs and development in a changing world* (London: Save the Children/Earthscan, 1992).

7 Twigg J, 'Community participation – time for a reality check?' *Know Risk* (Geneva: UN ISDR/Tudor Rose, 2005) pp. 64-5.

3.1 Starting right

Implicit in all the projects' reports and evaluations is **the necessity of getting off to the right start**, at least in terms of the basic approach used. New interventions need to be well informed, clearly targeted at certain groups or issues, and supported or capable of gaining community-level support. **Participatory VCA** approaches (see Section 2), which were a notable strength across the agencies' work, were a **key entry point** in engaging communities in scoping the risk context and providing a basis for targeted action planning and the engagement of local stakeholders. The sustainability of community-based DRR programmes requires developing collective awareness of rights, ownership of resources and control and locally-resourced activities, backed up by a supportive DRR network (this also requires training of local facilitators to help sustain and expand the approach, building the capacity of communities).

Careful programme development through piloting is also essential, in establishing working models at the community level and developing a context-specific toolkit of viable methods and practice. Similar care is needed in identifying and implementing an **appropriate strategy for scaling up**.

3.2 Targeting

By targeting particular areas of intervention or groups of people, agencies can seek to anchor their projects in local contexts as well as boosting local capacities. Two examples are given here to illustrate this:

- livelihoods
- children and schools.

Livelihoods

The linkages between sustainable livelihoods and vulnerability reduction approaches are well documented[8] and well understood by many agencies working in DRR. Practical Action, whose DRR work is based around sustainable livelihoods, makes clear how this connection works to promote DRR and at the same time reduce poverty:

> ***'Activities which strengthen livelihoods and increase resilience will reduce vulnerability. They are both risk and poverty reduction measures.'***
>
> Practical Action, Annual Report, p7

VCAs or sustainable livelihoods analyses consider the level of vulnerability of an individual or community by looking at assets they have (or have access to) for pursuing their livelihood strategy, and the strength and support of the social networks and institutions that they are part of or which have influence over them. This makes it possible to identify entry points to protect the assets that are most at risk or most valuable in times of crisis. The close integration here with poverty alleviation makes the intervention potentially more durable, and recovery more attainable. **For agencies normally engaged in humanitarian work, a livelihoods perspective allows them to move beyond merely providing goods to promoting livelihood activities** into disaster recovery (although this can be more complicated in situations of chronic poverty or crisis).[9]

Livelihood support was an important component of many agencies' DRR work. For Practical Action, livelihood promotion activities, including technological innovation, training and organisation for income generation, have demonstrated their value in enhancing social, economic and hazard resilience, as in this evaluation of a DRR project in Nepal:

> ***'As the food security level has significantly improved and vegetable farming has appeared as a new source of income generation, the project has gained popularity among the community members, local leaders, district level agencies and other stakeholders in a relatively short period. Formation of 23 community groups and their efforts to manage the saving and investment***

8 See eg: Cannon T, et al., 'Social Vulnerability, Sustainable Livelihoods and Disasters' (London: Natural Resources Institute, 2003; www.proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=43)

9 One of the important learning gaps identified during the review was the lack of shared experience or evidence across the Inter-Agency Group about DRR in insecure environments, although Tearfund had drawn some lessons from its project in Afghanistan. There is very little on this in the wider DRR literature, either, which is a significant gap in our understanding (there are indications that some agencies are beginning to look at it).

activities, construction and service of STWs [short tube wells] and canals, and agricultural and husbandry related activities have unified and enhanced social cohesion and encouraged them to deal collectively with adverse situations. Community groups have created and saved funds reducing their dependency on moneylenders. Through the capacity building activities such as trainings and workshops, communities have developed their livelihood enhancing skills and become better educated in livelihood and disaster reduction. Livelihood outcomes achieved through the project activities include more income, diversification of the source of income, increased well-being, and improved food security.'

Practical Action, Mid Term Evaluation, p18

Cost-benefit analysis carried out for a Tearfund-supported food security project in Malawi calculated net benefits of $24 for each dollar invested through increased crop and livestock production, higher levels of educational attendance and reduction in malnutrition and hunger-related mortality (Tearfund, Benefits and Costs, p17).

Building the capacity of local groups and organisations to a level where they generate their own resources and access their entitlements from local government is essential in establishing sustainable DRR programmes. Income-generating activities and savings and credit schemes can go some way towards this, within a livelihoods perspective, but this is not without difficulty – agencies inexperienced in this kind of work need support from specialists.

'It should not be underestimated what it takes to "get savings right". Savings projects need to be well managed, with basic disciplines well understood and implemented by savings groups, and effectively instilled and monitored by the supporting organisation … This will most likely need added capacity among the partners and agency'

Christian Aid, Mid Term Evaluation, p24

A livelihoods approach can also assist in creating social organisations and capital, because it focuses on immediate, everyday needs whereas organising around disasters may sometimes seem rather remote to those concerned:

'In Malawi, the partners did not aim to establish umbrella BDRC committees in the villages. In an unsupportive institutional context, characterised by too many powerless committees existing in name alone, this appears to be a sensible decision. Instead, BDRC Malawi managed to make significant inroads to members' advantage through establishing* interest groups *around various livelihoods interventions.'

Christian Aid, Mid Term Evaluation, p18

Children and schools

Two of the Inter-Agency Group's members – ActionAid and Plan – focused their work in this area, the former concentrating on schools, the latter on empowering children and young people more generally; but working with young people formed part of every agency's remit in its DRR programmes. DRR work with children and young people might involve all or some of the following: risk identification and action planning for local preparedness; training of school teachers and students in DRR; development of a school DRR curriculum; youth-led prevention and risk reduction actions; awareness-raising (eg: through peer-to-peer community exchanges and children's theatre); seed funding for youth-led local mitigation and adaptation initiatives (eg: mangrove and tree conservation); development of children's groups and organisations to seek space to participate in DRR activities, at all levels; and lobbying and networking in promoting and supporting children's voice and action.

A recent research paper based on studies of Plan projects in El Salvador and the Philippines highlights young people's potential as agents of change in preventing disasters and adapting to climate change, arguing that there is a strong rationale for focusing on this group (Tanner, 2010). Young people have a clear perspective on a wide range of hazards and risks, and can articulate this clearly; they often identify risks that are not recognised by adults; and they often have a greater capacity and willingness to absorb new information. They tend to be worried about their future and are therefore more willing to participate in the development of plans that address their needs and in lobbying for a more sustainable and secure future. Once engaged in risk education, children recognise their own value and power as risk communicators, and are thereby inspired to take the initiative in

Photo: Maggie Sandilands /Tearfund

further actions. **Working with young people opens the possibility of broader community outreach** in communicating DRR information, through a range of pathways, both formal (eg: local leaders and committees) and informal (eg: family, friends, neighbours).

> ***'Children are powerful actors and messengers of a culture of prevention … They become the best ambassadors for new practices and ideas around DRR, in their own families and in the community as a whole'.***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p14

Similarly, **schools are important hubs of contacts and linkages with other official institutions**, as well as delivering education on behalf of the state. They are public institutions found nearly everywhere, located at the core of the community, respected and valued. For ActionAid, in its Disaster Risk Reduction through Schools programme, schools are 'the institutions of choice to tackle for work on citizenship and governance' (Action Aid, DRRS, p14). Plan's 'Youth Participate in Disaster Prevention' initiative in El Salvador, which ran as a pilot project from February 2005,[10] had by July 2007 scaled up dramatically to the point where over 5,000 schools were preparing School Protection Plans and DRR had been integrated into the curriculum at the national level, through accessing and working with the Ministry of Education. This led to improvement in disaster management understanding and action planning by school boards (UNISDR, 2007, p56-58). In the Philippines, Plan facilitated the mainstreaming of DRR in the national education system by supporting the establishment of the Department of Education's permanent DRR Management Office (Plan UK, progress report, p12).

Targeting children and schools in such ways enables DRR work to put down strong roots in communities and institutional settings, but the process does not scale up automatically: it needs careful management. The participation of children in DRR is not enough in itself to motivate adults to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in risk reduction or to adopt new practices.[11] There must be a balance of support to adults as well as children, with children and adults involved in the VCA and action planning process. This approach balances the claiming of rights of children with the strengthening of adults' capacity to protect and fulfil children's rights.

> ***'Children are more effective when they know that their parents and communities are supportive of their action. It is therefore necessary that the whole community is made aware of the project's objectives in order for them to support their children's engagement which in turn will increase the likelihood of success for project's objectives'***
>
> Plan, *Force of Nature* report, p16[12]

Children, young people and schools should be seen as entry points to society, not as

10 Initially with funding from DIPECHO IV, then with DFID support.

11 In the wider DRR literature, the evidence for the impact of educational work with children on their families' and communities' actions in risk reduction remains patchy.

12 Plan gave small grants in order to enable children to manage projects, with appropriate support from adults in the community. The implementation of these projects built children's credibility in their communities.

a limited target in themselves. This is a key aspect in ActionAid's approach:

> ***'School can be a powerful entry point for sensitizing a community on DRR and push it to action. But the benefit of DRR work should be seen beyond schools … exclusive focus on schools does not unleash the full potential of the approach… When the project managed to effectively reach out to communities and to involve them actively (giving them voice, giving them tools for analysis and action, giving them awareness of rights), DRR work could also seamlessly link to the betterment of life conditions and livelihoods of people'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p11,17

Through well-facilitated children's DRR activities, children's confidence and ability to express themselves increases, as does motivation of adults to address children's issues, together with local government's appreciation of children's capacities and willingness to engage them in DRR activities.

Photo: Richard Hodgson /Tearfund

3.3 Mobilising communities

In his influential work on community-based DRR, published over 20 years ago, Andrew Maskrey argued that 'In effect, the central resource available for mitigation on any scale is people themselves and only through community based mitigation can that resource be fully utilised.'[13] This is echoed by members of the Inter-Agency Group from their experiences with the DFID-funded DRR projects. Christian Aid, for instance, observed that 'Development of a critical mass of people who are behind specific positive changes in practice is essential' (Christian Aid, Philippines: 9), whilst an ActionAid evaluation commented that 'The quantum leap is to make people realize that vulnerability is not only dependent on the existence of external threats, but that they can intervene on the cause-effects mechanisms' (Action Aid, DRRS, p11).

NGOs that work with communities have to tread an awkward path here, providing financial, material, technical and organisational support where required but ensuring that they **act as facilitators, supporting community empowerment and mobilisation instead of directing them**. Some of these partnership issues are discussed in the following section. This section considers lessons about how certain approaches to mobilisation can contribute to scaling up.

As Section 2 has already indicated, a strong participatory VCA process can provide a solid platform for effective DRR planning and action.

> ***'… PVA indicated that siltation of the canals posed a threat to the communities living nearby. It caused recurrent floods and also reduced availability of terrain for cultivation. Through PVA communities decided to join forces around the issue. They consolidated analysis and prepared common plans for action. They also contacted government authorities, urging them to provide support. They faced challenges and threats in the process, by those people in power who were worried of the increased power and awareness of communities. When the work was completed (with DIPECHO funding), not only schools and communities were again safe from floods, but they also could reclaim a considerable amount of fertile land, cultivated again after one decade of neglect.'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p23

13 Maskrey A, *Disaster Mitigation: A Community Based Approach* (Oxford: Oxfam), p90.

In many situations and places there is **a powerful spirit of volunteerism that can be tapped into and mobilised**, as the following examples, both from Bangladesh, show:[14]

> ***'the volunteers were assessed to be a hallmark strength of the project ... Mobilisation of volunteer groups is standard practice in Bangladesh in community-based disaster response ... so the initiative held the advantage of building on past experience ... they motivated other members of the community to participate in project tasks, monitored the quality of work, as well as giving their physical services directly to the interventions'***
>
> Christian Aid, Mid Term Evaluation, p19

> ***'Capacity building and training on DRR issues, including preparedness has been provided to Community based organizations (CBOs), community and youth volunteers, school students and teachers, religious leaders and Union and Upazila Disaster Management Committees in all the target areas. 300 community members and 300 youths (school children), half of whom are women, were motivated to volunteer for training on disaster risk reduction strategies at family and community level. The volunteers were trained to carry out specific roles before and during disasters. They also took part in public dramas, folk songs, rallies and school-based campaigns to raise DRR awareness throughout the year. They have organized community meetings to demonstrate mitigation works (such as raising house plinths and planting trees) and carried out simulations on what to do at the onset of floods.'***
>
> Practical Action, Bangladesh, p13

This spirit can even be channelled against powerful vested interests. In Bihar, India, where illegal land seizure by a powerful local family had prevented construction of an evacuation route for a village regularly cut off by floods:

> ***'This fired the determination of Self Help Group members to claim what was really theirs and to end the months of misery faced each year during the monsoon. Women provided most of the labour as trees were cut down, bushes cleared and the road began to take shape ... During the 2007 floods, 2500 people from Dhaneyla were able to access all services by easily reaching the highway. Every family contributed around Rs. 30 for the paving of this road to make it permanent in nature.'***
>
> Tearfund, Narrative Report 2007, p10

Yet, as Christian Aid's mid-term evaluation noted, there remained a question about how communities sustain the enthusiasm, cohesion and engagement of the volunteer cadres, especially given the relatively high turnover as young members left the community, mostly to seek work elsewhere, which is not uncommon in many countries (Christian Aid, Mid Term Evaluation, p19).

All the agencies found, as a key learning point, that **benefits of a less tangible nature (eg: rights awareness, active citizenship) contribute to make communities more resilient** and powerful, and result in tangible DRR achievements. Benefits acknowledged by communities or the external actors working with them included: new ways of thinking (better ways to assess their situation and future options); more community cohesion, new linkages and alliances (capacity to link within and between communities for common action – see Section 3.4 on partnerships); fuller citizenship (awareness of rights, laws and local governance mechanisms); and greater voice and access (capacity to express and advance issues and to lobby institutions). This was particularly evident in the formation and growth of community groups, formal and informal:

> ***'Community members stated that these newly-acquired attitudes, knowledge and skills were an asset in organizing their own initiatives ... in Ghana, the women that engaged in the PVA decided to continue to work together. Independently from AA and partners they looked at how to raise credit for their little enterprises.'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p23

14 This finding is broadly consistent with other research on social capital and emergent groups in disasters from other contexts: eg: Dynes RR, *Community Social Capital as the Primary Basis for Resilience* (University of Delaware, Disaster Research Center, Preliminary Paper 344, 2005); Drabek TE, McEntire DA, 'Emergent phenomena and the sociology of disaster: lessons, trends and opportunities from the research literature'. *Disaster Prevention and Management* 12(2): 97-112 (2003).

'Self Help Groups established by the programme have been successful in introducing income generating loans for alternative livelihoods, reducing reliance on agricultural income … In Bihar groups had saved enough to open bank accounts and in Rajasthan women reported that they had gained confidence and respect as a result of the groups, in Assam the SHGs had been successful at increasing crop diversification and animal husbandry, and some women have started weaving activities … The SHGs are strong initiatives in helping households diversify their income sources so they are not solely dependent on agriculture which is crucial in a changing climate.'

Tearfund, India, p13

Increasing communities' awareness of their rights enables members to understand their entitlements. This too is empowering and can motivate decision-making and action:

'Within communities … [they] felt that there was need to develop a stronger understanding and sense of community organisation and empowerment. Asked what they would do differently if engaging in a similar process to the PVCA exercises now, they stated that they would wish for a stronger focus on the benefits of working united and on support to make their own decisions before starting construction activities and DRR and livelihoods trainings'

Christian Aid, Bangladesh, p53

3.4 Partnerships

The challenges of making community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) sustainable and replicable can be addressed, in part, through partnerships. The scale, frequency and complexity of disasters as physical and social phenomena can only be tackled by deploying a wide range of knowledge, skills, methods and resources, both in development and emergency programming. This means that DRR initiatives must be multi-disciplinary partnerships involving a range of stakeholders. **Forming alliances optimises funding resources and magnifies the impact of project activities**. Learning and practice can be shared and developed through working with, for example, other NGOs, line ministries, local authorities and service providers, technical specialists and academic institutions (although many kinds of collaboration are to be encouraged).

However, whilst the need for such multi-stakeholder co-operation is generally acknowledged, it is not discussed much in DRR literature and **there is little guidance available on how to create effective DRR partnerships or the challenges in attempting to do so**.[15] The evaluations of the Inter-Agency Group's DRR programmes identify some significant partnership issues but in general much more research is needed into the nature of partnerships and the factors that influence their effectiveness.

The discussion of DRR work through schools and young people, above, has already drawn attention to the need for partnerships and their potential. For ActionAid and Plan, linking groups and institutions was central to the strategy. This could take a variety of forms, including: children's representation on DRR committees at community and municipal levels; integration of DRR into the school curriculum and school protection plans; promotion of child-centred DRR to partners through published case studies and research; and incorporation of child-centred issues in the thinking and practice of central government line agencies, (including departments for education, and health).

Project evaluations and studies cite other types of partnership and associated benefits – for example, it:

'… strengthen[s] communities' access to relevant information on an ongoing basis through strengthening networks and linkages with other institutions … research institutes, meteorological offices, weather stations, service providers, and other governmental and non-governmental agencies … The stronger the knowledge networks that communities have, the better able they are to access information, ideas and resources to aid adaptation. Such networks should facilitate a two-way flow … to improve [their] understanding of local context and needs'

Practical Action, V2R, p56

15 Twigg J, *Identifying Partnership Needs and Opportunities* (London: Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre, Disaster Studies Working Paper 18, 2009; www.aburhc.org)

'Pursuing the joint conduct of PCVAs [Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Analyses] with Barangay and Municipal governments can strengthen the continued development of LGU [Local Government Unit] partnerships between NGOs, CBOs and LGUs as well as work towards institutionalizing participatory assessments within LGUs … such processes, when conducted well, allow the presentation of disaster concepts and experiences from the perspective of the vulnerable … For local officials who are prepared to listen this can be an eye-opener and a source of motivation'.

Christian Aid, Philippines, p45

The Building Disaster Resilient Communities (BDRC) Learning Circle established by Christian Aid as part of its Philippines programme was highlighted as contributing 'significantly to building a community of practice and knowledge' (Christian Aid, Final Report, p1). Bringing together a range of relevant stakeholders including NGOs, local organisations, academics, scientists, and DRR practitioners, it took the lead role in localising the recently passed Disaster Risk Reduction Management Act (2010) and Climate Change Act (2009) to regions where BDRC partners were situated.

As a principle or aim, partnership is straightforward but in practice it can be very challenging, requiring thorough negotiation between stakeholders and sometimes drawn-out bureaucratic or even legal procedures. Dealing with some of this may be largely a matter of practical common sense: for example, ensuring that the partnership is not over-extended geographically, technically or administratively; drawing up agreements that define partners' roles and responsibilities precisely; and providing adequate time and quality of training in induction to ensure shared understanding, strategic vision and ownership amongst them.

Partnership creation also requires leaders; otherwise momentum is lost. In many cases, it is the NGO that has to provide this leadership, a position that many find uncomfortable because they seek to facilitate a process, not to direct it.

'At the district and upper levels, citizens and institutions were linked up in networks (eg: teachers' networks, children parliaments), but the driving forces behind these networks tended to be AA and partners. This of course brings in

Photo: Oenone Chadburn/Tearfund

questions of sustainability: many networks depend on the capacity and commitment of local partners to sustain action in the long term, beyond the life of the project … community members and local institutions had a voice also in national and international DRR networks and initiatives, but the real breakthrough will happen when they will gain true ownership of these engagements, and stronger capacity to influence the agenda. As a project manager put it, "we must facilitate. We should not put OUR demand to the state".'

Action Aid, DRRS, p47

The role of individuals in all of this remains unclear. Informally, they are recognised as playing a significant part – this was certainly the sense of the Inter-Agency Group members during the review discussions – but it was not explored

in the project evaluations. The importance of well placed individuals has been identified in earlier work on NGOs and disaster reduction; and there may be value in applying the concept of 'policy entrepreneurs' (key individuals who drive change in their organisations and the public arena) to DRR; but in general the interplay between personal and institutional influences is not well understood and deserves further research.[16] Linked to this is the widely recognised but mostly unresolved problem of relatively high levels of staff turnover in the NGO sector, partly due to their dependence on fixed-term project or programme funding, which results in weaknesses in institutional memory and learning.

Partnership approaches are also a central aspect of integrating DRR with other issues and sectors, particularly with sustainable development, climate change adaptation and humanitarian response. The need for such integration is often discussed but achieving it is a very different matter with a range of conceptual and institutional barriers to be surmounted. For example, the difficulty in bridging the gap between DRR and humanitarian work, which has often been commented upon,[17] remains a live issue for many agencies (a point reiterated in the discussions during this review), whilst the failure of DRR initiatives to address underlying developmental factors affecting risk, such as poverty and social protection, was a point made repeatedly during the 2010 ISDR online dialogue on the Hyogo Framework for Action.[18]

A lot of work is now taking place on the ground and at policy level to link DRR and climate change adaptation (CCA). The review documents make it clear that the Inter-Agency Group and its members' local partners are very aware of climate change and its potential threats. At policy level this is very much a live issue – the Group's members have been engaged in a range of advocacy and awareness-raising activities around it – but at operational levels integration poses problems. There is still much debate among agencies about how best to integrate CCA with DRR and where the differences and overlaps lie. However, a number of organisations have been exploring ways of integrating work on the two issues. For instance, Tearfund has developed CEDRA (Climate Change and Environmental Degradation Risk and Adaptation Assessment), a strategic management tool for national-level organisations to review their portfolios of projects in the light of climate change and integrate DRR and CCA into development approaches. Another integrative approach, Climate Smart Disaster Risk Management, developed by the Institute of Development Studies, Christian Aid and Plan, is now being applied to several DRR initiatives which include the development of Christian Aid's Sahel regional strategy that seeks to integrate DRR and CCA considerations into long-term livelihoods programming.[19]

4 GOVERNANCE

Governance is one of the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action's five priorities ('Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation': UNISDR, 2005). Evidence for DRR progress in the governance arena since 2005 is patchy, with some signs of success but many indications of the challenges still to be met. The UN ISDR's 2009 *Global Assessment Report*, which focused on change at the national level, concluded that 'Significant progress has been made in strengthening capacities, institutional systems and legislation to address deficiencies in disaster preparedness and response' (UNISDR, 2009, p117). On the other hand, *Views from the Front Line*, a complementary review of progress at local level, published the same year, found:

> ***'a significant gap between national and local level action. Reports of progress fade as activities get closer to vulnerable people – overall progress at community level is "very limited"'***
>
> Global Network, 2009, page iv-v

The governance context, sometimes referred to as the enabling environment, exerts great influence on the ability of communities, their organizations and

16 Twigg J, Steiner D, 'Mainstreaming disaster mitigation: challenges to organisational learning in NGOs'. *Development in Practice 12(3&4): 473-479* (2002).

17 See eg: Benson C et al., 'NGO Initiatives in Risk Reduction: An Overview'. *Disasters* 25(3): 199-215 (2001).

18 www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/hfa-mtr/debates/

19 Wiggins S, Wiggins M, *Climate Change and Environmental Degradation Risk and Adaptation Assessment* (Teddington: Tearfund, 2009); Mitchell T et al., *Climate Smart Disaster Risk Management* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2010).

Photo: Maggie Sandilands /Tearfund

supporting NGOs to deliver effective risk reduction programmes. As Practical Action's *Vulnerability to Resilience* handbook observes, it 'determines how people can access resources, skills, technologies and markets to strengthen and diversify their livelihoods, how they protect themselves from hazards, and how they access support to help them recover when they are affected' (Practical Action, V2R, p61).

4.1 Advocacy: creating political space

In addressing the governance context, NGO DRR programmes typically involve the following types of action: advocating for decentralised and participatory decision making; strengthening links between local, district and national levels; promoting integrated approaches to livelihoods, disasters and climate change; and lobbying for underlying systemic issues to be addressed (Practical Action, V2R, p62). Many of the Inter-Agency Group's projects identify the problem of 'Inadequate orientation, training and capacity building of the government functionaries, especially at the lower levels, [which] impedes proper appreciation of the criticality of CBDRM for safeguarding community and developmental assets.' (Rajeev Issar, United Nations Development Programme, quoted in Tearfund, TPIP, p44). Government institutions need training to instil understanding of the DRR approach and government's responsibilities in addressing communities' DRR needs.

All of this is fundamental to scaling up the impact of local, technical interventions and reducing risk long-term, but it **requires NGOs to enter a more political environment**. The Group's members understand the power structures and dynamics of this environment very well:

> ***'Effective DRR rests on a process of empowerment of vulnerable people. Power analysis (and action on it) is at the core of the process … Communities are vulnerable when they – and their allies – lack awareness of disasters, of their causes, of the possible solutions and of their rights (power within). Communities are vulnerable when their capacity to mobilize and join forces amongst themselves or with external actors is limited … Communities are vulnerable when they are not supported by their institutions in preventing and responding to disasters … Only when these power imbalances are truly addressed, communities acquire the power to act and become resilient.'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p37

This echoes the conclusions of a discussion document prepared for the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which noted that the institutionalisation of DRR:

> ***'depends above all on governments, international agencies and other institutions becoming more responsive to the needs of people at risk and more accountable to them. There are many mechanisms for delivering greater accountability, but one of the most important is a diverse, pluralistic institutional environment … The planning and accomplishment of disaster risk reduction initiatives should never be a purely managerial matter: they must not lose sight of the wider principles of social justice, equity and rights which underpin good governance'***
>
> UNDP et al., 2005, p18

PART C

Photo: Mike Wiggins /Tearfund

The impact of advocacy efforts on decision making and resource allocation is highly dependent on political context, and the strengths of advocacy partners. **Opportunities for opening the 'political' space needed for negotiation, accountability and empowerment of the vulnerable vary widely according to current institutional systems, structures and attitudes.**

> ***'The scope for communities to work with and influence their government of course varied in different countries, and was also dependent on the existing policies and practices of the local institutions, as well as on the confidence and empowerment of the communities. Some communities lived in contexts where the government acted more transparently. Some countries are already sensitized to the need of investing in prevention and more receptive (eg: Bangladesh). Some countries (such as Ghana) are engaging in the devolution process, putting more emphasis on local governance. In some cases communities and local partners already had a sense of how to influence the government. Elsewhere, however, communities were completely disconnected from the government, had little or no access to their institution and – more importantly – little or no understanding on how to engage.'***
>
> Action Aid, DRRS, p54

These diverse challenges, and the need for correspondingly diverse strategies for dealing with them to stimulate more effective DRR, were self-evident to the Group's members and their partners; but this is probably an issue that merits further comparative research. **There was a shared recommendation across the agencies for taking up a more active role in national-level advocacy**. Creation of such political space, and its effective utilisation, are far from straightforward. Nevertheless, NGOs often do have potential power and can have a strong positive influence on government and national institutions.

For example, Plan, in promoting its child-centred DRR approach in El Salvador, developed an effective strategy for promoting children's participation that involved working directly with the Ministry of Education in the development of a School Protection Plan, which provided guidelines for disaster management to be included in school governance, the safety of school premises and in educational curricula. Working with central government in such a strategic manner permitted the rapid achievement of significant results:

> ***'From Plan's pilot project targeting 20 rural communities, the School Protection Plan module has since been adopted at national level and is being rolled out to over 5,000 schools throughout the country … It has been observed that the School Protection Plans have also had an impact at the wider community level, with civil protection plans being updated in the project's targeted communities – including improved risk maps and action plans.'***
>
> Plan, Child Centred DRR, p2,6

Similarly, in the Philippines, Christian Aid's partners were active participants in the DRR Network Philippines, a group of over 300 different stakeholders helping to shape and stimulate the new Disaster Risk Reduction Management Act (2010) which, for the first time, focuses on the root causes of vulnerability to disasters and sets in motion measures to build community resilience, overhauling government structures to enable the integration of locally driven DRR work (Christian

Aid, Changing the Law). In Afghanistan, Tearfund was invited to join the working group for the National Development Strategy, to help develop a strategy for disaster management (Tearfund, Narrative Report 2006–7, p13).

As the Philippines example shows, advocacy tends to be more effective when it is a collective endeavour, which is further indicated in other successful initiatives:

> ***'In Honduras, advocacy was the project's most successful area. This was attributable to the* choice of lead partner*, and their strategy to capitalise on established and truly impressive networks and structured processes … Political advocacy is the central animus of organised civil society in Honduras, its core thrust is stimulated and sustained by a political environment that is historically neglectful or openly adversarial to the interest and welfare of poor and marginalised communities. CSOs, movements and leaders have learned how to engage in that complicated political space in a way that they are becoming masters of competitive process within the prevailing power dynamics and are achieving significant outcomes for their constituencies … Organised negotiation and pressure through advocacy … secured agreement for the national advocacy table to be institutionalised in law, permitting representation of civil society in the main work committees.'***
>
> Christian Aid, Mid Term Evaluation, p28

Building on existing advocacy capacities is vital, but **it is important that international agencies with skills and experience of lobbying do not overestimate the capacities of their national and local partners**:

> ***'The limited focus is due to a lack of dedicated policy staff within partner organisations and difficulties in gaining senior management buy in to the importance of advocacy as addressing root causes of vulnerability … There is the need to develop places for dialogue and interaction with national government that is pitched in an accessible and viable way through, for example, the vehicle of DRR National Platforms or sub committees of Disaster Management Ministries.'***
>
> Tearfund, Mid Term Evaluation, p22

Nevertheless, it was clear from the Group's reports and evaluations that even where such expertise is lacking there may be considerable latent capacities that can be developed. **Organising in groups and mobilising communities for action – the 'software' dimension of DRR projects – gives people voice and strength to influence**, which makes strengthening community organisation an essential element of DRR. Civil society organisations can support this and help to form collaborative platforms or networks of stakeholders, facilitating the flow of ideas, information, skills and technologies. These are strongest when they combine vertical networking (from communities through local to higher levels of authority), and horizontal networks (between households, communities and local civil society organisations). Grassroots monitoring of national/international policy implementation can be developed and can play a key role in ensuring accountability and trust.

4.2 Communities and local government

In discussion, NGOs – both within and outside the Inter-Agency Group – acknowledge the seeming gap in many DRR organisations' work where local government is concerned. Their efforts are focused on managing field projects at the grass roots, community level and/or carrying out high-level advocacy for policy change; but **the local and 'middle' levels of government tend to be neglected**. This is a significant omission, since it is widely acknowledged that local and other sub-national levels of government play important roles in risk reduction. Greater emphasis on these levels could be a key to sustainability and scaling up community-based initiatives.

To date, little research has been carried out into the subject of local government and DRR. One recent study suggests a complex interplay of political, institutional, financial and human factors at work which can generate a diversity of approaches and results (Wilkinson 2009). *Views from the Front Line* draws a similar conclusion: 'Progress is unevenly distributed across local actors, with civil society organisations often appearing to emerge as DRR 'champions' at the local level' (Global Network, 2009, page iv-v).

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There is no clear road map for progress here, although there are good examples from the DFID-funded DRR projects.[20] As the Plan example above from El Salvador (Section 4.1) shows, it is possible to work with national governments around specific needs and changes. Similarly, local laws and ordinances can be revised to help ensure the accountability of local government even after a change in administration.

In a Tearfund initiative in India, improved community links with government officials led to 50% of the self-help groups in three project locations accessing government bank loan schemes (Tearfund, Narrative Report 2010, p6). In Sierra Leone, Plan supported the development of civil society organisations which eventually should be able 'independently to access funds from donors and have a long term presence and role in checking and balancing the activities of local government' (Plan, Mid Term Review, p49). In the same country, a weekly one-hour programme on DRR produced by a Children's Forum was used as a way of exerting pressure:

> ***'Some of the issues on which they have made an impact include persuading the authorities to mend a bridge in the town, and encouraging villages to create fire belts.'***
>
> Plan, Mid Term Review, p18

In El Salvador, where in the past there has been little co-ordination on DRR advocacy, Christian Aid partners worked with other NGOs, CBOs and communities to identify major flood risks from the Lempa River and then lobby key decision makers in local and national government. The result was that local government took action, building flood defences and removing debris in the flood-prone areas; other risk reduction activities were included in the national budget. (Christian Aid, El Salvador, p45-47)

Photo: Markus Perkins /Tearfund

In Nepal, Practical Action and its partners worked to influence positive changes in funding allocations:

> ***'The District Development Committee is starting to allocate emergency funds in the Village Development Committees for disaster management, to support long-term integrated disaster management, since it takes a long time for government funding patterns to change. Unlike other annual development budgets, this fund cannot be frozen or recalled by governments, allowing local bodies to invest when needed.'***
>
> UNISDR, 2010, p38

Decentralised budgets are much sought after for funding local DRR activities, though often communities need initial assistance in applying for and successfully securing funding. The need for sustained funding and resource inputs to ensure the replication of holistic DRR programmes was a feature found across the agencies' evaluations. Gaining access to resources is a particularly strong indicator of influence. In Peru, for instance, Practical Action

20 A very recently completed but as yet unpublished paper on this subject, commissioned by Christian Aid, Practical Action and Tearfund, explores some of these issues in more detail and makes a number of suggestions for practice: Venton P, 'Meso Level Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation and how they address underlying drivers of risk: Practical experiences based on case studies in Afghanistan, Peru, Nepal, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and El Salvador' (London/Rugby/Teddington: Christian Aid/Practical Action/Tearfund, 2010), 42pp.

> ***'worked with communities in the municipalities of Yungay and Huaraz to help them to produce their own local development plans, which they submitted to the participatory budget process. At the same time, Practical Action staff liaised with municipal staff to raise their awareness of the practical needs of rural communities, relating to livelihoods, disasters and climate change, such that they have become more supportive of their applications.'***
>
> Practical Action, V2R, p66

This can be considered a particular achievement, given the context of the project concerned, for:

> ***'in Peru, excellent national policy exists for decentralised and participatory budgeting, with structures and mechanisms for municipal level allocation of budgets. However, in practice finances do not tend to be accessed by communities to meet pressing livelihood and disaster related needs. This is due in part to a lack of capacity at the community level to submit the necessary applications for funds, and in part to a lack of understanding by municipal government of the kinds of needs and constraints faced by communities'***
>
> Practical Action, V2R, p65

The Inter-Agency Group's experiences indicate that **a systematic approach is required to engage local government as a partner and supporter of DRR**. This typically involves training communities in how to access entitled support and funding for DRR and establish effective partnerships with local government. Where local government capacity is identified as weak, capacity-building can be implemented, and subsequently this enables improved delivery to communities.

Community demands can also be articulated through participatory planning and VCA. ActionAid's Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) tool is distinctive in seeking explicitly to link grassroots-level assessments with middle and higher levels of decision making.[21] This was applied to its DRR through Schools project, in which PVA was used as an entry point at the different levels. At local level, in districts at high risk of recurrent natural disasters, schools were selected for intensive work with children, teachers, parents and the wider community using PVA and other approaches for analysis of trends, awareness raising, attitudinal change and tracking in respect of risk reduction and preparedness, climate change and environment focused activities. Building on this foundation, further work was done with relevant agencies at district level with a view to influencing all schools in the district. This started with PVA at district level. Learning was consolidated and shared across schools to define best practice. Courses were developed for wider in-service training of teachers within the district and disaster risk action plans were developed to help all local schools reduce risks, raise awareness and deal with the consequences of disasters. Internationally, PVA was adapted for work on DRR in schools and core resource materials were developed at the start of the project. Learning was drawn out and compiled from the seven different project countries in order to influence programme design and policies internationally – both in education and other sectors.

The most vulnerable are typically poorly organised and lack voice in decision-making processes that might affect them. They often lack access to the kinds of services which could help them to improve their livelihoods and prepare for or respond to shocks and stresses. Even where social organisations are relatively strong and cohesive, it can be difficult to create networks for change with sufficient strength to influence higher levels of governance, which are not only more remote but also subject to many other influences.

> ***'Lobbying strategies at all levels have had varying levels of success. At the local level in Yungay there is evidence of close relationships with key stakeholders and strategic partnerships with local and international NGOs but in the Huaraz Province, according to the communities, there has been limited progress. At the Regional Government level … despite the project's efforts, it has interpreted the livelihoods issue in its own way and this has limited the***

21 For details, see ActionAid 2005, *Participatory Vulnerability Analysis: A step-by-step guide for field staff* (London: ActionAid; www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/CRA/PVA_ActionAid2005_meth.pdf). See also Chiwalka E 2005, *Mainstreaming Participatory Vulnerability Analysis in ActionAid International* (London: Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre, Disaster Studies Working Paper 13; www.abuhrc.org/Publications/Working%20Paper%2013.pdf).

degree of influence the project has managed to achieve. The Regional Government of Ica is politically distant from local governments and their priorities do not coincide with the project's interests.'

Practical Action, Mid Term Evaluation, p25

Local power structures can also present a major obstacle. The ability of local élites to capture the benefits of DRR schemes and claw back the gains made by the most vulnerable in post-disaster interventions should not be underestimated. Yet victories are won, as this example from ActionAid's programme shows. In Assam, faced with the flooding threat caused by siltation of canals, communities:

'decided to join forces around the issue. They consolidated analysis and prepared common plans for action. They also contacted government authorities, urging them to provide support. They faced challenges and threats in the process, by these people in power who were worried of the increased power and awareness of communities. When the work was completed … not only schools and communities were again safe from floods, but they also could reclaim a considerable amount of fertile land, cultivated again after one decade of neglect.'

Action Aid, DRRS, p23

PART D

Concluding observations

Part C has identified several important points for consideration and discussion in developing strategies for future DRR work.They are not the only issues arising from the work, of course, and a few additional observations are made here regarding how to take the DRR endeavour forward.

PROCESSES AND RELATIONSHIPS

One of the main underlying themes of the different programmes undertaken by the Group – arguably *the* main underlying theme (and common thread for positive project outcomes) – is that **appropriate processes and relationships are fundamental to DRR**. At its heart, this involves a shift in the location of capacities and influence, in which vulnerable communities assess and understand their circumstances more completely, engage with other local stakeholders on a more equal footing in project design and implementation, and gain a much stronger voice in dialogues with higher levels of authority and power.

> ***'A policy shift [is required], moving away from central dominance to "people-centric institution", where local people are enabled to plan for all aspects of DRM.'***
>
> Ahsan Uddin Ahmed, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad Research Institute, quoted in Tearfund, TPIP, p49

The thematic discussion in Section 3 of Part C indicates a range of possibilities and entry points for the development of such processes and

Photo: Marcus Perkins /Tearfund

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relationships, throughout the standard project cycle and from the grassroots to the national (and even international) levels.

- In targeting and setting priorities, NGOs need to explore and understand community structures, develop methods for collective participation and find ways of including the most marginalised in the process; and this must be a reciprocal relationship based on shared understandings, trust and accountability.
- VCA is a key step in this relationship-building and, if done properly, a catalyst for empowering and mobilising communities and other stakeholders for collective action that can extend beyond conventional project output targets and timetables and begin to change social relationships in the longer term. But VCA must include an analysis of power relationships and lead to plans for addressing this issue.
- Strong integration between DRR activities and more day-to-day concerns, such as livelihoods, can reinforce grassroots group or organisational structures and help to secure commitment from communities and other local stakeholders, enabling not only self reliance but also the capacity to access resources and entitlements.

Photo: Maggie Sandilands / Tearfund

At a higher level, DRR needs to be much better integrated with work in sustainable development, climate change adaptation and humanitarian response.

- Partnerships, which can take a very wide variety of forms, organisational and individual, are fundamental to holistic DRR and were central to the successes of the Group's DRR programmes, although they can be difficult to develop and manage in practice.
- Even projects that focus on particular groups or settings – for example children or schools – depend for their success on the extent to which they can engage the wider socio-institutional environment in their aims.
- All of this enables local-level actors – be they NGOs, communities or other groups and organisations – to engage with higher-level institutions, to lobby for change, to create the political space for new thinking and decision-making, and to form new relationships and networks.

There is, then, **a complex architecture of relationships and their resulting influences that can be very powerful as an agency of change in DRR**. This can be difficult to define, assess and evaluate. Even a small local-level development can be the result of a multiplicity of events, policies, institutions, attitudes and actions. For example, a study for Plan of the influences, actors and processes involved in the decision to move a secondary school in the Philippines to a new site, away from the threat of landslides, uncovered a complex web of factors that had shaped what took place (Regan 2010).

RESILIENCE AND THE DISASTER-RESILIENT COMMUNITY

Another potentially important point suggested by the review is that **the concept of 'resilience' may provide a rallying point for DRR**, for all its ambiguities and differences of interpretation. Resilience can readily be perceived as a core component of development, sustainability and disaster reduction. Some of the agencies involved in this review are also involved in separate initiatives to understand resilience better in conceptual and practical terms, particularly with regard to climate

change.[22] In time, these may stimulate new ways of thinking and doing.

In the Inter-Agency Group's work a separate collaborative project was created in this field, to develop *Characteristics of a Disaster-Resilient Community*. This grew out of discussions within the Group about how to harmonise monitoring and evaluation frameworks and indicators across their DFID-funded DRR programmes. The *Characteristics* project was intended to assist organisations in baseline assessment, project design, monitoring and evaluation, strategic planning and research. It developed and field-tested a resource/guidance note identifying the full range of resilience features that might be attained at community or local level, by showing what an ideal resilient community might look like.

> ***'The area of DRR is a fast-moving one and since the inception of the project, several new themes have been introduced. These have been the use of the* Characteristics of a Disaster Resilient Community *as a resource for planning, monitoring and evaluation; mainstreaming DRR into other development programmes and into organisational management; and climate change as a major root cause of disasters and as the main focus for international advocacy. While it has been challenging for the Phase 1 countries to absorb these new concepts which were introduced after their projects had started, overall they are seen as strengthening the project and keeping it relevant and responsive to evolving international thought on DRR.'***
>
> Plan, Mid Term Review, p13

The *Characteristics of a Disaster-Resilient Community* resource was quickly taken up and has been widely used, not only by the Group and its partners but also by a number of other agencies around the world. The first edition was translated into French, Spanish and Bahasa (Indonesian). The second, more extensive, edition containing practical guidance from nearly two years of field testing experiences, was published recently and there are plans to translate this too.[23]

Although not an easy tool to use straight off, the *Characteristics* resource was an attempt to fill what was widely seen as a major gap in DRR project guidance – the high demand for it even before it was published was quite remarkable. The positive feedback received from many quarters indicates that it has helped to spark off new understanding and enthusiasm for DRR and stimulated DRR activity on the ground:

> ***'The* CDRC [Characteristics of a Disaster-Resilient Community] *was the publication mentioned by nearly all respondents involved in applying DRR methodologies at a programme level (whether based in London or in-country) … The "*Characteristics *document changed working practices on the ground", commented one respondent. "It helped programme people to frame what they are doing and to understand better why they are doing what they are doing." In the Sahel, for example, the* Characteristics *document has been used to analyse the governance environment and where things are at in order to create a benchmark for the DRR advocacy work.'***
>
> Christian Aid, Building Disaster-Resilient Communities

> ***'Finally, an observation: field staff usually look slightly overwhelmed by the document in the first moment (me too, by the way). Once they get to it and understand its potential uses, a fairly common consequence is a sudden burst of motivation for further action. That was especially clear during a recent field research in Malawi … I have heard field staff, local partners – usually small organizations with little specialized staff – extension officers and community leaders telling us things like "we see disasters differently, now", "we opened our eyes", "we know what to do, now" and similar expressions. I even witnessed a district government officer spontaneously criticizing his own activities and proposing changes'*** [24]

One feature of the resource which may contribute to its popularity and widespread take-up is that it is **solution-focused, rather than problem-driven, looking to identify and build upon existing capacities instead of dwelling upon challenges**. This generated a very positive attitude amongst users with

22 For example the Strengthening Climate Resilience project, in which Christian Aid and Plan are partners (www.csdrm.org).

23 For copies of the resource and other project outputs, go to www.abuhrc.org/about-us/projects/Pages/view.aspx?project=13

24 Feedback from José Luis Penya, Christian Aid, cited in Twigg, 2009: 4.

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clear psychological value. The feedback from a Tearfund workshop to introduce the *Characteristics* to DRR practitioners in Bangladesh was typical, where participants:

> ***'saw the positive value of the* Characteristics*. Previously, they knew what they wanted to prevent in a disaster-prone village, but this was turned around so that they could see what they wanted to achieve'***[25]

ADDED VALUE OF WORKING AS A GROUP

This subject was not explored specifically in the agencies' individual evaluations but was reviewed in preparing this report through a group discussion with UK staff from all the member agencies. Created at the request of DFID as a mechanism for sharing information and experiences, the Inter-Agency Group was never a formal collaboration but functioned more as a community of practice. In addition to providing space for open reflection and discussion, it offered the agencies an opportunity to present their collective views to DFID and the wider DRR community, especially through activities at the UN ISDR's biennial Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and contributions to its *Global Assessment Report*. The 'Characteristics of a Disaster-Resilient Community' project helped to bring cohesion and momentum to the group, being an initiative that everyone recognised as important and hence had a significant stake in; the same was true of the 'Local Voices, Global Choices' advocacy initiative at the 2009 Global Platform.

The length of the DFID-funded programmes allowed time for relationships to be built between the group's members, for strengthening of individual and institutional links, for the enhancement of institutional memory and for the development of a stronger shared understanding of DRR issues. The informality of the group's arrangements assisted this greatly. However, UK experiences were not replicated well in-country, where there was greater diversity of individual projects and partners.

It is not clear how the group will progress in future as the member agencies develop new initiatives individually and some of the core personnel move on to other jobs, but there is a strong desire within the group to try to maintain some kind of continuity. **It is essential that operational agencies, as well as those who fund them, support the creation and continuity of effective partnerships of this kind to ensure that DRR can be genuinely 'mainstreamed' into development and humanitarian work.**

25 Quoted in Twigg, 2009: 60.

PART E

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Photo: Peter Grant /Tearfund

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