

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

What and why?

● VOICE is a European network of 82 humanitarian NGOs. Improving policy and practice of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in developing countries has been a priority issue for the network over many years. The upcoming Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in May 2013 is a key milestone in the development of the next international framework for reducing disaster risk worldwide. The EU as a global player and major donor has an important role in this discussion. While progress has been made in integrating DRR in humanitarian action, now the development community has a crucial role to play in raising awareness and practice of disaster risk reduction to protect lives and livelihoods in the global south.

● This paper is the first of a series of six working towards the Global Platform providing an introduction to key discussions around Disaster Risk Reduction. Here we explore what is meant by Disaster Risk Reduction, especially as it relates to development, and why it deserves more attention both at local and international level. Further papers will explore how DRR can be supported by a focus on real risk factors, better funding, coordination with other sectors, innovative partnerships, and via international frameworks.

Key concepts in DRR

Disaster risk reduction includes activities which support preparedness, prevention and mitigation from a local to an international level. A programme in a flood-risk area for example might address improved environmental management to stop flooding (**prevention**), river-bank reinforcement or dams (reducing the effect - **mitigation**), **early warning systems**, and evacuation planning / response capacity (**preparedness**). Community participation (a 'bottom up' approach) is particularly important to maximize resilience, as is a gender-sensitive approach.



Why is DRR so important?

As a result of climate change, natural disasters are expected to be amplified in frequency and impact.ⁱ The largest human cost to lives and livelihoods will be borne by populations already disadvantaged by poverty. In 2011, the cost of disaster loss was over 300 billion USDⁱⁱ which is more than double the total given by donor countries to support economic development and welfare. And that estimate is only part of the picture, as smallscale disasters are often missed out of the statistics. It is however, precisely the smallscale, recurring crises which are the most destructive to livelihoods at a local level and require most attention to bring down disaster risk over all.



The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) is a global plan for disaster risk reduction efforts, adopted in January 2005 by 168 governments at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. It has played a key role in promoting disaster risk reduction in international, regional and national agendas. Much progress has been made, however there is still much to do. The area of the Hyogo Framework still requiring most effort and investment is the reduction of underlying risk factors for disaster, especially at a local level. The current framework finishes in 2015 - international commitment to a strong successor framework will be essential for continued reduction of disaster risk.

What is Disaster Risk Reduction?

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) involves analyzing and managing hazards to reduce vulnerability to disasters. Effective DRR reduces disaster losses, preserving the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and populations. As such, it reduces the need for costly disaster response and subsequent recovery measures. DRR involves policies and activities that help prevent natural hazards (such as floods, storms, droughts, earthquakes) becoming disasters, which support preparedness for these hazards, and lessen the damage they can cause.

How does DRR fit with aid and development?

How to reduce the risk of disaster is often discussed in the aftermath of a disaster, especially in the humanitarian response phase. To be properly effective Disaster Risk Reduction measures need to be integrated into development programmes from the start, and into ongoing local, national, and regional strategies. Ensuring that development strategies take into account the real risks of disaster is essential to make sure that communities have the knowledge and tools to cope with disasters that could be otherwise devastating.

Necessarily engaging a range of stakeholders, DRR is also linked to promoting the good governance essential for sustainable development. DRR interlinks with and reinforces other areas of work, including Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and poverty reduction approaches. In particular it is of central importance to the current focus on improving resilience.

Overcoming barriers to Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster risk reduction is often perceived as highly technical, and treated separately from other policies and programmes. But development policies and programmes which do not take into account disaster risk will not be able to build capacities and knowledge to deal with natural hazards, and thereby reduce disaster losses. While the association with disasters means that DRR is often seen as a humanitarian issue, risk reduction needs to be seen as an essential element of sustainable development. The politics of aid are dominated by a culture of reaction; instead a shift towards a culture of prevention is required to make the necessary investment in protecting lives and livelihoods.

Whose business is DRR?

DRR involves people at every part of society, across multiple professional and private sectors and at every level of government. DRR involves choices about how we organise communities, how we manage our environment, where homes are built, and even which skills are taught to children. As we understand more about how we can manage the risks associated with disaster, policy makers in every field have the responsibility to ensure that decisions taken in development and other sectors are DRR-sensitive.

¹ IPCC Special Report (2012) *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (SREX)*

⁴ Munich RE, (2012) *Natural Catastrophes Worldwide 2011*

CASE STUDY



Benno Neeleman

*Early warning
megaphone in
Bangladesh*

Preparing for floods and cyclones in Bangladesh

This case study from Bangladesh is an example of specific risk reduction activities at a local level which enable some of the poorest people to resist the effects of floods and cyclones, protecting lives and livelihoods from disaster.

CONTEXT

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The majority of the population, about 70%, depends on agriculture and 50% of the population lives below the poverty line. During the annual monsoon many rivers burst their banks; every year, in July and August, 25% of the country floods and every four or five years 60% of the country is flooded. Due to climate change, the magnitude and severity of these floods and other natural disasters are also increasing. Overcrowding and poverty means that people live in low areas along rivers and the coastline that are often affected by floods and hit by severe storms.

PROJECT EXAMPLE

A three-year project run by Dutch NGO Cordaid and local partner organisation Caritas Bangladesh aims to enable communities to manage the risk of seasonal floods and other disasters, with the support of the local government. Activities to improve livelihoods for the poorest families are also linked to the programme, so that disaster risk reduction measures are connected with other development measures.

The project empowers communities to manage disaster risk by building local capacity and knowledge. Activities take place at family and community level. Task forces and committees are formed to plan and support activities, mobilise resources, and oversee ongoing preparedness and training.

Early warning systems are an important element of enabling people to take necessary measures in the face of disaster. The project supports equipment for early warning systems, and training on warning signals and response. Mock drills are carried out, including preparedness for search, rescue and first aid. Trainings also cover raft and boat-making, and flood/cyclone shelters are constructed using local resources. Some preparedness measures seem very simple, but are easy to neglect if not prioritised in the family, such as wrapping important documents and book in polythene and hanging from ceiling/wall to be safe from flood waters.

The disaster risk reduction committees and task forces are trained and equipped to be able to continue their work after the project. Their disaster risk reduction plans are also linked to existing local development programmes which receive international support and have involvement of the local government and other stakeholders.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Location: Khulna, Chittagong and Mymensingh, Bangladesh
Working with: 153 communities (99 860 families)
Duration: 3 years
Cost: 400,000 euros



Key messages

- EU policy makers, including in the field, as well as development practitioners, need to ensure DRR is a priority when developing policy, especially for high disaster-risk countries.
- Risk reduction needs to be systematically included in development strategies, with consideration given to local-level frequent hazards as well as large-scale events.
- Emphasis should be placed on managing risk rather than managing the crisis. This requires political commitment and investment in preparedness and prevention. Parliamentarians have a role to play in keeping this high on the agenda.
 - A sound argument for DRR is that it is an investment rather than an additional cost, as it will save lives and money in future crises. This is particularly relevant in the current economic climate.

FURTHER READING

- VOICE position paper (2012) *Disaster Risk Reduction - a fundamental element of building resilience*
- Global Network for Disaster Reduction (2011) *If we do not join hands (Views from the Frontline)*
- Save the Children and Oxfam (2012) *A Dangerous Delay The cost of late response to early warnings in the 2011 drought in the Horn of Africa*

*This paper was prepared by the **VOICE Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**. Established in March 2007, the group brings together 25 European NGOs with the goal of contributing to and improving EU policy and practice on DRR, with particular reference to the Hyogo Framework for Action. In 2012 the DRR Working Group supported the development of the abovementioned VOICE position paper.*



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Commission through its Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department.

The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.

VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. It is a network representing 82 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. As a European network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

VOICE

Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies

Tel: +32 (0)2 - 541.13.60 • Fax: +32 (0)2 - 534.99.53

E-mail: voice@ngovoice.org

Website: www.ngovoice.org