

3.3. Community action

“Much has been learnt from the creative disaster prevention efforts of poor communities in developing countries. Prevention policy is too important to be left to governments and international agencies alone. To succeed, it must also engage civil society, the private sector and the media.”

Kofi Annan, IDNDR Programme Forum, Geneva, July 1999

Risk reduction measures are most successful when they involve the direct participation of the people most likely to be exposed to hazards, in the planning, decision-making, and operational activities at all levels of responsibility. Local leaders, drawn from political, social and economic sectors of society need to assume a primary responsibility for the protection of their own community.

Community processes and actions to accomplish disaster risk reduction is much talked about, in theory, but it is much more difficult to realize in practice. There is however experience to suggest that the involvement of local residents in protecting their own resources is possible and can work – if sufficient attention and investment is devoted to the subject. The salient issues and examples which illustrate successful practice are presented under the following headings:

- The essential role of community action
- Community leadership and relationships
- Increasing community capabilities
- NGO and volunteer activities
- Building local self-reliance: sharing resources, building partnerships
- Dynamics of local collaboration
- Traditional community coping mechanisms at stake

The essential role of community action

Disaster reduction is most effective at the community level where specific local needs can be met. When used alone, government and institutional interventions often prove to be insufficient and frequently are seen to be sporadic and only responding to crises. They are inclined to ignore local perceptions and needs and the potential value of local resources and capacities in the process. As a result, it is not surprising that emergency relief assistance far exceeds resources invested to develop local disaster risk reduction capabilities.

First, communities must be aware of the importance of disaster reduction for their own well-being. It then becomes necessary to identify and impart essential skills that can translate risk awareness into concrete practices of sustained risk management. Such an approach needs to develop activities that can strengthen communities' capacities to identify and cope with hazards, and more broadly to improve residents' livelihoods.

Community

The definition of community in this context refers to a social group, which has a number of things in common, such as shared experience, locality, culture, heritage or social interests.

The Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Programme (AUDMP) has validated these principles through its activities with local institutions working in local Asian environments. Community-based disaster mitigation is a cross-cutting theme where assessment, planning and implementation are participatory in design and address the community's vulnerabilities and capacities.

Projects in Bangladesh and Cambodia have been built around the concept of specifically focusing people's perception of flood risk; the purpose and tools of community flood risk assessment; the strategies for community organizing, and resource mobilization and capacity building. All of these elements and



strategies contribute to mainstreaming community-based disaster management in poor and vulnerable communities as a cost effective option.

Community leadership and relationships

Any system of local planning and protection must be integrated into larger administrative and resource capabilities such as provincial, state and national disaster plans and risk reduction strategies. It is equally important to realize that communities cannot implement community-based disaster mitigation alone.

Viable forms of community-based disaster reduction depend on a favourable political environment that understands, promotes and supports this participation process.

A recent Australian study found that the extent of commitment by local governments to take action depends on emergency managers making the right choices about citizen involvement in planning risk reduction processes. This can build an informed constituency for disaster reduction and drive a real commitment among

elected officials to take action. Key decisions include:

- Objectives to be achieved by involving citizens.
- Areas in the planning process where, and when, citizens participate.
- Which citizens to include.
- Techniques to use in order to obtain citizen input.
- Information that is to be provided to citizens.

Disasters are opportunities for change and community development. Women are participating actively in rehabilitation and reconstruction around the world. Their organizations have a special role to play, and are doing so in several places. “Networks of networks” is an increasing phenomena among community-based organizations and NGOs to share their own experiences among community leaders and groups. One such network linking women’s organizations is the Grass Root Organization Operating in Sisterhood (GROOTS). The following are examples from Gujarat, India, and Turkey, of shared experiences within this network.

People - especially women - rebuilding their own communities in Gujarat

Immediately after the Gujarat, India, earthquake in January 2001, *Swayam Shiksam Prayong (SSP)*, (self-education for empowerment), an Indian NGO, joined many community-based organizations in the recovery effort. Drawing on their prior experience following the Latur earthquake in the Maharashtra State of India in 1993, they proposed a policy, which would not only rebuild the devastated Gujarat communities but reform and strengthen their social and political structures. The central concept was that people – especially women – need to rebuild their own communities. Key elements of the strategy included:

- Using reconstruction as an opportunity to build local capacities and skills.
- Forming village development committees made up of women’s groups and other community institutions to manage rehabilitation.
- Engaging village committees to monitor earthquake-safe construction.
- Redressing grievances at the village level.
- Striving to locate financial and technical assistance within easy reach of affected communities, and not be dependent on its being mediated by others.
- Arriving at a clear definition of the role of local governments in planning and monitoring, information flow, problem-solving, and infrastructure use and development.
- Distributing information about earthquake safety and entitlement to all homeowners.
- Encouraging the use of local skills and labour, and retraining local artisans in earthquake-resistant technology.
- Including women in all aspects of the reconstruction.
- Assigning titles of houses in names of men and women.
- Encouraging coordination among government officials, district authorities and NGOs.
- Seeking to facilitate public-private partnerships for economic and infrastructure development.

www.sspindia.org

Women community groups active in risk reduction and reconstruction

Turkish women displaced by the major earthquake that struck Turkey's Marmara region in August 1999, began organizing themselves immediately after the disaster. Assisted by *the Foundation for the Support of Women (FSWW)* and obtaining funds from NOVIB and the American Jewish World Services they worked together with government agencies, local municipalities, other NGOs and technical professionals.

FSWW built eight women and childcare centres to provide a safe environment for children and a public living room for local women, providing day care services as well as income earning opportunities for women. Additionally, these facilities have become centres for women to consider housing and resettlement problems and priorities, such as:

- The future utility and limitation of temporary prefabricated settlements.
- How to resolve problems of isolation, transportation, local governance, minimal infrastructure and wide-spread unemployment.
- Housing requirements of renters and others who are not legal owners.
- Earthquake safety standards for future housing.

Groups of women go door to door in their community to gather basic information about their settlements, to publicize meetings and to increase participation. The women discuss problems, consider solutions and their own role in motivating changes. They invite experts to their centres, visit construction sites, prioritise a list of officials to contact, and devise strategies to hold authorities accountable for the information they provide and the promises they make. They visit local authorities to get information about reconstruction activities and then post their findings at the centres, the settlement administration office, shops and schools.

In all eight centres a women's group meets regularly with local officials. They also exchange strategies across centres. In Izmit, they signed a protocol with the City Council and another with an organization responsible for the local implementation of Agenda 21 to develop policy proposals on the future of prefabricated settlements and housing safety in the region. Local authorities have started to understand that the women serve an effective communication function within the community.

The most important lesson women feel they have learned is that resettlement is a long process that requires ongoing monitoring. The following lists the women's response to work they are doing:

- Are more confident and feel stronger.
- Have begun to see that they can influence the decision-making process if they act together.
- Believe that only a common and widespread sense of responsibility in the community can promote public safety and mitigate the effects of a new earthquake.
- Are comfortable with the technical language related to construction and can question safety and quality standards.
- Can understand infrastructure issues.
- Can do repairs and become plumbers, electricians and carpenters for the benefit of the community.

Source: *Huairou Commission Newsletter, volume 3, No. 1, April 2001*

Increasing community capabilities

Inhabitants of local communities are potential victims of natural disaster. They also represent the greatest potential source of local knowledge regarding hazardous conditions, and are the repositories of any traditional coping mechanisms suited to their individual environment. Furthermore it is their personal assets, physical property, and way of life that are likely to be threatened by hazard.

It is little wonder that it is the local population which responds first at times of crisis. They are also the last remaining participants as stricken communities strive to rebuild after a disaster. Given these conditions, it is striking that the participation of local communities often proves to be problematic in so many disaster risk management strategies. There are several constraints or reasons why this may be so, and each points to a lesson for effective engagement of community participation.

A bottom-up approach is needed to promote change. Local communities are those most aware of historical risk scenarios and the ones closest to their own reality. It is not only a question of public awareness, it is a question of local community groups having the chance of influencing decisions and managing resources to help reduce vulnerability and to cope with risks.

Neither the widespread dissemination of prior experience nor the abundance of scientific and technical knowledge reaches local populations automatically. An informed and sustained programme of public awareness is essential to convey the benefits of experience to vulnerable communities in terms that relate to local perceptions of need.

The effective use of knowledge not only requires wide dissemination, it must also be presented in a way that relates to local conditions and customs own conditions and risks. While this has long been accepted as a cardinal principle for development accomplishments, it has remained a difficult principle in many disaster risk reduction strategies.

The realization of virtually all disaster risk reduction is essentially local in nature – and that requires community action.

In every community, knowledge, professional abilities, and experience fashioned from adversity can be found, but seldom are these resources called upon or fully utilised. A special effort is required to recall locally valued traditional coping mechanisms and strategies. Modern concepts can provide innovative approaches. The advantages of modern technology, such as those provided by GIS or access to satellite weather forecasts need not diminish the values of traditional wisdom. Vietnamese villagers maintained irrigation channels and protective dykes for a reason, just as Pacific islanders were guided in their choice of materials and construction techniques in building their earlier disaster-resistant houses.

NGO and volunteer activities

Experience demonstrates that NGOs involved in disaster risk reduction are focussed primarily on public awareness activities and advocacy programmes. They particularly seek to encourage the desired shift in emphasis from emergency assistance and disaster response to the more engaged roles of local community participation in planning, vulnerability assessment, and risk management practices.

Some Asian countries, such as the Philippines, Bangladesh and India have elaborate policies, strategies, legal and operational mechanisms to accommodate the participation of NGOs and community based organizations in all aspects of national development. But the extent to which they have embraced risk reduction activities is still modest. In the Americas, there has been a recent spurt of interest in the subject. The results of that remains to be seen. In Africa, a handful of small initiatives seem to be as much a consequence of recent or continuing threats than representing a fundamental shift in policy awareness or local community commitments.

● Case: Philippines

In the Philippines, the *Citizen's Disaster Response Network (CDRN)* is a national network of 14 NGOs that promotes community-based disaster preparedness work. Since its inception in the early 1980s, it has conducted campaigns and advocacy work to mitigate the impacts of disas-

ter. By working together with communities, CDRN has developed strategies to enhance people's capacities through community organizing, forming village-level disaster response committees, developing local early warning systems, organizing rescue teams and diversifying local sources of livelihoods. Receiving little external support from donor agencies, it has reached hundreds of villages and initiated community-based disaster mitigation initiatives.

● Case: Bangladesh

To reduce the vulnerability of flood-prone communities in the Tongi and Gaibandha municipalities of Bangladesh, *CARE Bangladesh* has adopted a community-based approach working in collaboration with partner NGOs in the municipalities and with the Disaster Management Bureau of the Government of Bangladesh.

This urban disaster mitigation project, funded by OFDA/USAID and managed by ADPC's Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Programme, began by motivating community volunteers to conduct baseline surveys and vulnerability assessments. Through this initial activity, different community groups recognized the importance of their joint community participation and how each could contribute to practical risk reduction activities. This project emphasized the importance of promoting hazard and risk awareness among community groups and sought to involve collaborators in other subject areas by placing community-based disaster risk management issues on the political agenda.

Since 1998, in order to promote community awareness about the value of disaster risk reduction, the government of Bangladesh has designated the last working day of March as National Disaster Preparedness Day. In 2001, this national day was organized jointly by the Tongi and Gaibandha Municipality Disaster Management Committees, *CARE Bangladesh* and other partner NGOs.

● Case: Zimbabwe

The *Community Drought Mitigation Partners' Network* is an NGO network chaired by the local NGO *SAFIRE* and aims to promote and

strengthen drought mitigation in Zimbabwe. The current members, ENDA, ORAP, ZFFHC, World Vision and Zimbabwe Projects strive to implement joint community-based risk reduction projects, conduct public debates on drought mitigation, and produce and distribute the *Living with Drought* newsletter. These efforts seek to share lessons that have been learned and recent scientific research results related to disaster reduction. Meetings are also convened between rural farmers, scientists and innovative farmers.

A similar regional network is the anticipated *Southern African Drought Technology Network*. It will work to facilitate the sharing of information among small-scale farmers, NGOs and community-based organizations working with rural food security, agricultural research institutions, agricultural extension work, and agribusiness on drought-coping strategies that are responsive to the needs of the rural poor. Community-based disaster risk reduction initiatives are well developed in Zimbabwe, but documentation of successful practices must still be improved. It will be important to complement this with further research to feed into the national disaster management plans and strategies.

● Case: Germany

The *Community Action Group for Floodwater in the Old Community of Rodenkirchen (Bürgerinitiative Hochwasser, Altgemeinde Rodenkirchen)* is a non-profit association in a district of Cologne, founded after the severe flooding of the Rhine River in 1993 and 1995. This self-

“We are convinced that protection against flooding can only be successful in the long-term if all inhabitants along the river perceive themselves as a community working in solidarity with each other. As we ourselves have experienced with our own considerable efforts and the many setbacks we have suffered, acting together does not come naturally but, rather, it is a product of knowledge, experience and conviction, mediated through communication – and this is best achieved through personal contacts.”

Speaker for Community Action Group for Floodwater in the Old Community of Rodenkirchen, Cologne, Germany



help group advocates the interests of more than 4,000 residents in matters of local flood protection. It strives to achieve a balance between the legitimate protection of the population and the aims of a sustainable floodwater policy which also must include the rights of downstream inhabitants and the river as a whole. This means, for instance, that while the group supports the construction of polders on the upper reaches of the Rhine and its tributaries, it also expects the city of Cologne to undertake its own considerable efforts to ensure that any retention areas which are sacrificed as a result of structural mitigation practices are compensated by other natural means of water retention in the municipal area.

Building local self-reliance: sharing resources, building partnerships

Disaster reduction depends on the conscious commitment of individuals and communities – understanding and accepting the values of changed behaviour, having access to the technical and material resources necessary for doing so, and accepting the personal responsibility to carry through the efforts involved.

Communities are generally unaware of the hazards they face, underestimate those they know of, and overestimate their ability to cope with a crisis. They also tend not to put much trust in disaster reduction strategies, and rely heavily upon emergency assistance when the need arises.

Taking such a viewpoint into account highlights the need for tools that can create a culture of prevention against all forms of hazards within local communities. This requires the knowledge of practical and low-cost methods which address likely hazards that can be conveyed to a wide-variety of participants including, community groups, trades people, commercial and financial interests and local government employees.

● **Case: Indonesia**

In recent years, Bandung, Indonesia has suffered repeated floods. The communities most affected are low-income populations. They sel-

dom have ready access to warning information or emergency equipment that would enable them to evacuate or otherwise protect their possessions. Efforts to reduce the risk of annual floods through strategic plans on reducing damage created by disasters are necessary. These plans should include knowledge on protecting lives and assets, encouragement to the community for minimizing risk of disasters, and continuing to improve the quality of life.

In 2000-2001, the government of Indonesia asked the *Bandung Institute of Technology (BIT)* to implement a community empowerment project in cooperation with ADRC. ADRC, located in Japan, learned lessons from the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, about how community participation is indispensable to enhance disaster management capability at local level. Thus the project was aimed to enable local residents in the communities to cope properly with flood disasters. Two flood-prone districts were taken as model cases. This project included town-watching, in which local residents walked around their communities with experts such as researchers from BIT and related institutions, to discuss the risk of disaster occurrence and points to be improved for disaster reduction. As a result, local residents themselves proposed specific measures, such as making roadway improvements, constructing protective banks and better defining the watercourse in order to reduce future flood risks.

● **Case: selected Asian countries (India, Indonesia, Nepal, and Uzbekistan)**

The United Nations Centre for Regional Development/Disaster Management Planning Hyogo Office (UNCRD Hyogo Office) was established in Kobe, Japan in April 1999 to promote disaster mitigation activities by examining the reconstruction process in Hyogo and disseminating the experiences there to disaster-damaged areas in developing countries. It provides advisory services to vulnerable communities, especially in ways that can improve the safety of primary community facilities such as schools and hospitals vulnerable to disasters, and by identifying and then disseminating best practices in disaster management at the community level. UNCRD Hyogo Office helps to develop disaster resistant communities by link-

ing socio-economic considerations with physical hazards in urban development work at the local levels.

Under the framework of human security, the goal of the initiatives is to attain safer and more sustainable livelihoods. To achieve this goal, the initiatives focus on community development and empowerment activities. In specific programmes such as the School Earthquake Safety Initiative, new approaches are formulated to integrate disaster mitigation components into urban development work at different levels of urban growth processes through various activities for schools. The programme is being conducted in India, Indonesia, Nepal, and Uzbekistan with the overall goals to:

- Empower the community with know-how and technology for safer earthquake construction.
- Build a disaster-resilient and self-reliant community.

To achieve this, a specific focus has been given to the school systems, where the vulnerability of the school buildings are evaluated and technically tested, and affordable retrofitting techniques are then provided. There are five direct objectives of the project:

- Evaluate the vulnerability of school buildings in each of the selected cities.
- Recommend designs and affordable means of strengthening vulnerable schools.
- Retrofit one or two demonstration schools using appropriate or improved traditional technology.
- Provide training to workers from the local construction industry who build schools and residential dwellings.
- Prepare disaster education materials for school children, teachers and communities and use them for training and education purposes.

• Case: India

More than one year after the earthquake in Gujarat, most of the affected families were still struggling to put their lives together. While in some places aid agencies had built and handed over houses to villagers, the experience of a

local community in Patanka shows how community-led rehabilitation can yield results. Patanka, a village of about 250 families, suffered extensive damage during the earthquake, with about 170 houses collapsing and the rest being badly damaged. Since it lies in an area beyond the focus of most relief teams, it

In Japan, local community organizations with responsibility for disaster preparedness cover half the population of the country.

Japan response to ISDR questionnaire, 2001

received less attention from aid agencies. Even distribution of government compensation, as everywhere, was taking time.

Kheemabhai, a village leader from Patanka, found out about a Delhi-based disaster management NGO called SEEDS. He expressed to SEEDS his community's desire to reconstruct the village, themselves. Although SEEDS had been working in the area, this was the first time it confronted a community keen to reconstruct for itself. The village only requested logistical support from the NGO.

First, a meeting was organized with the district government to ensure speedy distribution of compensation so that the villagers could start rebuilding their homes. After a visit to the village, the enthusiasm he witnessed convinced the official to extend full support to the villagers. Patanka became a scene of hectic activity. Everyone was busy building their houses, getting material from a special material depot and collaborating with engineers about technical details of earthquake-resistant construction. Entire families became involved, with women and children seen curing the masonry work with water, or ferrying material to their sites.

In the partnership approach everyone contributes. The initiative was truly led by the community. The SEEDS team helped the villagers obtain building materials, including limited amounts of cement and steel. The villages supplied their own stone, bricks, wood, roof-tiles and labour. Architects and engineers from SEEDS trained the masons, labourers and the villagers themselves on earthquake-resistant technology through on-the-job training, and through periodic training workshops.



Patanka is on its way to becoming an international example of good practice in community-led rehabilitation. Two expert masons from Nepal's National Society of Earthquake Technology came to teach their Gujarati partners how to build safe houses. They developed a very good rapport with all the villagers, and expressed considerable respect for the abilities of the local masons. Language barriers notwithstanding, they could all be seen working, guiding and advising at the construction sites well into the evening.

While there were many supporters, the decision-making was done by the community itself. Each family determined its own house design, the material to be used, and initiated the construction. Upon completion of construction in the village, there was a pool of trained masons able to continue playing an important role in the rebuilding of the rest of Gujarat. Recognizing the strength of this community-led rehabilitation model, organizations including the UN Centre for Regional Development, Gap Inc., the Earthquake Disaster Mitigation Research Centre in Japan and a consortium of NGOs from Japan, all pitched in to support and promote it.

A wider dissemination campaign is being planned to promote such work and create more awareness about the success of do-it-yourself, low-cost earthquake-resistant construction. In Patanka, there was not only excitement about building a new village, but a great sense of ownership and pride among the villagers on having done it themselves, paid for it themselves, and also having done it in a technical way that will protect their homes in the future.

**Case: South Asian countries
(Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan,
Sri Lanka)**

Duryog Nivaran – the South Asian Network for Disaster Mitigation, sponsors a project called *Livelihood Options for Disaster Risk Reduction* that proceeds from the recognition that for many thousands of people in South Asia, if not millions, living with disaster risk is a fact of everyday life. It is therefore only by strengthening livelihoods and by building more effec-

tive coping capacities within individual communities that a viable foundation for disaster risk reduction can be created. The project is fundamentally community-based, with the intention of identifying crucial linkages between livelihoods and the related options which have the potential to reduce disaster risks. Supported by the Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department of DFID, the project has the following components:

- Research that can identify the implications of disaster risk on livelihoods.
- Formulation of strategies that strengthen livelihoods and can reduce disaster risks.
- Developing the capacities of stakeholders through community-based approaches to disaster management.
- Undertaking pilot demonstrations of risk reduction strategies.
- Advocating and promoting policies to influence a paradigm shift that recognizes that disasters are part of the development process, and empowering people and their local communities to take an active role in building resilience to hazards and to minimize future exposure to disasters.

The project has attracted cooperation from government institutions, NGOs, research and development planning organizations and media, in a process of localizing adaptations to suit the specific nature of hazards, vulnerabilities and the needs of individual South Asian communities.

Case: Maldives

In the Maldives, community efforts to reduce vulnerability is common, where the entire land-mass comprising low-lying coral atolls is particularly threatened by rising sea levels. From 1998-2000 there were five damaging storms that affected 43 islands and 5 atolls. In June 2000, severe waves lashed the resort island of Bolifushi causing US\$ 1.3 million in damage. To prevent these types of hazards from becoming future disasters, local communities and NGOs have worked together in planting trees on the beaches and in constructing sea walls to prevent beach erosion, thereby minimizing the impact of tidal waves on the islands.

Case: Central American countries, community based organization

The *Central American Community Risk Management Network* was inspired by the impact of Hurricane Mitch. The perceived exclusion of community-based organizations from the reconstruction process became a stimulus to increase the participation of community organizations and to foster the development of grass-roots approaches to risk management and disaster reduction.

The Network was formed in Nicaragua in May 1999 with the support of CEPRE-DENAC, GTZ, HABITAT and the IDNDR. The network works through existing community organizations in many areas of Central America by providing training and technical advice. It has focused its attention particularly on the popular understanding of the relationships between disasters and development, and the need to strengthen existing community-based development organizations rather than creating new, local disaster organizations. Member communities of the network have participated in early warning projects and training activities supported by organizations such as GTZ.

Dynamics of local collaboration

With the proper motivation, local communities are receptive to new ideas. However, the full participation of community members is only possible to the extent that efforts are based on mutual trust, a clear definition of the decision-making process, and transparency of management practice and economic expenditure. Politics and financial disparities exist in villages and neighbourhoods, so it becomes important to identify shared values and concerns.

Scientists and engineers are challenged to translate their research findings into concepts and language understandable by communities, as much as administrators must strive to motivate risk management practices that protect residents' own interests and assets. More often than not, successful community action in disaster reduction hinges on appropriate and low-technological approaches that are



easily and economically adopted by inhabitants. These conditions underline the importance of recognizing that community action must be associated with a larger national strategy in which local efforts play a crucial part.

There must be a sense of local ownership and a cooperative working relationship among different organizations if local capacity is to flourish. Successful outcomes depend on community involvement from planning to the implementation and monitoring of activities so that local people feel that the work of reducing risks has relevance to their lives. Risk and resource analysis should include rapid appraisal tools and techniques. This means that local people have to be involved in both risk mapping and resource assessment, as too often the needs and resources that already exist within a community are overlooked or discounted. If these assets are harnessed and developed from the beginning, they form a valuable part of the process.

The IFRC Disaster Preparedness Appeals Analysis Mapping for 2002-03 indicates that a significant percentage of the sample group of 32 National Societies reviewed were including community-based disaster management activities in their 2002-03 programmes.

The IFRC learned that successful integrated and participatory planning needs to lay out a distinctive methodology with clear aims and objectives, and one that includes the involvement of different actors drawn from govern-

ment, technical agencies, NGOs, communities, UN and other international agencies. The strategy requires a serious commitment to identify genuine strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of National Societies as integrated approaches of participation should mirror the basic processes associated with vulnerability and capacity assessments.

It has proven important to identify what elements and criteria are relevant for community-based disaster preparedness and to consider the development of a unified conceptual framework which defines its role within the larger context of other national programmes. Equally, there is a need for better indicators of performance to indicate impact even when disaster does not strike. Careful thinking is necessary to consider a reliable funding strategy to ensure sustainable commitments. The

The Benefits of Experience / National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

What worked well in community participation?

- Participatory rapid appraisals provide relevance, increase ownership, and motivate self-initiated projects (Nepal: increased indigenous knowledge and confidence, unity of communities' beliefs).
- Bridges the gap between relief and rehabilitation (Mozambique).
- Increases the number of volunteers – the formation of Red Cross community groups increase capacity at the local level.
- As mitigation components increase, so does resilience at community level, encouraging partnership processes.
- Action planning and identification of vulnerability become more problem oriented (India).
- The development of community disaster plans creates a more organized response, and become a unifying force (Peru).
- Integrating community-based disaster preparedness with health programmes promotes development and income generation, increasing resilience to disasters.
- Establishing networks with local government mobilizes leaders. (Community Based Self Reliance Programme in Papua New Guinea, which is completely owned by the National Society.)
- Community originated empowerment supported by National Societies through moral support rather than hardware, for example by encouraging the identification of risks by communities.
- Integrating disaster preparedness into health workshops merges similar programme interests and aids cooperation within volunteer training of civil protection, ministry of health, and National Society (Syria).
- Creating regional awareness for community action and promoting HIV/AIDS as global disaster and health issue (North African Integrated Disaster Preparedness and Health Initiative).

What did not work well?

- Sometimes there was misunderstanding with local authorities, who saw the programme as a threat to maintaining a culture of dependence by the local population.
- Inadequate capacities in the National Societies to support activities at the community level. However, community-based disaster preparedness approaches progressively are resulting in increasing National Society capacities at national, branch and community levels of activity.
- Poor planning processes in some areas.
- Insufficient efforts to ensure sustainability after initial funding period.
- Roles can sometimes clash with those of local authorities, especially in the absence of an inclusive planning process.
- Lack of community-based disaster preparedness and management was a serious detriment in gaining public response at local level (Turkey earthquake).

experience of National Societies of Red Cross and Red Crescent in Bangladesh and Philippines demonstrate a positive correlation between integrated participatory planning and enhanced levels of local self-reliance.

■ Traditional community coping mechanisms at stake

Collective and environmentally sound land use and tenure at community level is in many places still based on traditional and commonly accepted practices, which help to cope with phenomena such as drought and floods. This conventional practice is respected more than modern laws in many communities in Africa and elsewhere. However, traditional ways are more and more being replaced by western or "modern" economic and social interests and values, increasing vulnerability and exposure to hazards and weakening coping capacities. Examples can be found in the Brazilian rain-forest, where indigenous groups interests are being replaced by economic ones that turn forests into pastoral land, thereby imposing land degradation, increasing drought or flood patterns and forcing social exclusion.

Long before there were national governments or development planners, Pacific islanders had to live with natural hazards and extensive losses. While a considerable sense of traditional values and social conditions remain, the internal migration from villages to urban areas are thrusting significant numbers of people into changing lifestyles in the Pacific island states and elsewhere. Urban immigrants frequently lack knowledge about local hazards and urban risks, and are seldom familiar with appropriate behaviour to minimise potential losses. They are often marginalized politically, and frequently lack the social network of kin, which provides vital support and can be relied upon for information and communal responsibilities in most villages. As far as hazards are concerned, the process of urban adaptation involves a shift away from community self-reliance and shared knowledge towards an expectation that formal government organizations will provide protection, warnings, support and relief.

These are considerations yet to be seriously accommodated in national strategies of disaster reduction and risk management.

Future challenges and priorities

Community participation is something that is understood differently in each cultural or political context. Some universal and specific challenges and priorities are outlined below.

A satisfactory link needs to be enhanced between the development of national policy guidance and direction and the widespread use of viable mechanisms that can actually translate those principles into sustained, but flexible, locally-based activities. People also have to understand and accept that they, too, have a responsibility towards their own survival – it is not simply a matter for governments to find and provide solutions.

The following priorities can be identified:

- Enhancing local technical skills:
 - Transfer of expertise at a local level should be enhanced and developed, e.g. early warning systems and procedures suited to small-scale requirements.
 - Transfer of local experiences, and their thematic application within various communities have to be developed.
 - Better communication is required among authorities and managers, and among community leaders for this purpose.
- Increasing social cohesion and community empowerment at all levels:
 - Local communities, civic groups, traditional structures, public services, collective achievements and values

should be encouraged and financed, as they considerably reduce vulnerability and strengthen local capacities.

- Existing grass-roots and community-based organizations at community level, including women organizations, should be reinforced, for them to take action and participate on disaster risk reduction activities.
- Mechanisms for community participation in information, decision-making and resource management to reduce risk should be strengthened.
- The involvement and participation of "ordinary" people in all technical, developmental and policy-related projects, needs to be encouraged, by creating inclusive discussion forums. There, people would be able to evaluate, explain and discuss their own needs, as well as debate with scientists, politicians and other skilled persons about what could be done to reduce risks.
- A re-evaluation of externally determined policies by local people should be done to make them compatible with their needs and more people-oriented.

Ultimately, effective risk reduction has to take place within the much broader context of initiatives that build an informed, capable and resilient community by drawing on its traditional strengths and the benefits of collective experience and skills. This must be pursued conscientiously over a period of time, and supported with necessary resources – long before there is any immediate threat of crisis.