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Editorial: Why is community action needed for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation?

DAVID SATTERTHWAITE

When disasters happen, the speed and effectiveness of response depends very heavily on local organizations that represent the needs of those most impacted and most vulnerable. As the paper by Jorgelina Hardoy, Gustavo Pandiella and Luz Stella Velásquez Barrero notes, it is at the local or neighbourhood level that disasters happen, lives and livelihoods are lost, houses and infrastructure damaged or destroyed, and health and education compromised. It is also at the local level that many of the disaster risks can be addressed before disasters occur. Much of the responsibility for disaster risk reduction falls to local governments and much of the death and destruction from disasters shows up the failings of local government. The success of post-disaster actions is also to a large extent determined by pre-disaster planning and awareness and readiness within local government and civil society organizations. In this way, community action and partnerships with local government are central not just to minimizing risk but also in responding to impact and shaping recovery in ways that can strengthen local livelihoods and quality of life.

The papers in this issue bring to our attention the importance of community action – for disaster risk reduction, for post-disaster rebuilding and for climate change adaptation. The paper by Diane Archer and Somsook Boonyabanha highlights the energy and creativity of disaster-affected communities as they rebuild their homes and livelihoods far more effectively and far more cheaply than external agencies. The paper by Norberto Carcellar, Jason Christopher Rayos Co and Zarina O Hipolito describes the support programme developed by the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines for disaster-affected communities and for disaster risk reduction, and the benefits

this brings to low-income disaster-affected or at-risk households. The paper by Cassidy Johnson reviews the roles of local civil society groups in Turkey after the 1999 earthquakes. And the paper by Mark Pelling considers the roles of community organizations in urban disaster risk reduction in Haiti, Guyana and the Dominican Republic. Other papers in this issue show the importance of community organizations in developing responses to disaster risk or in post-disaster rebuilding and in trying to get government support to do so. Furthermore, some papers have already been accepted for the April 2012 issue of *Environment and Urbanization* on the capacities of community organizations to map disaster risk and vulnerability and develop measures to address them.

But is this focus on community organization appropriate for urban contexts? And what are the limits? Community organizations cannot design and build the citywide infrastructure that is so important for resilience to storms and heavy rainfall – for instance, storm and surface drains and road and bridge networks that can cope with sudden and much increased volumes of water. The paper by Mark Pelling describes how working with community organizations on risk mapping and awareness raising can lead to small works and provide a focus for group activities (e.g. building small bridges across drainage canals,

This editorial draws on discussions at a meeting in London in 2010 organized with the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) on community-driven disaster risk reduction, in preparation for *Revealing Risk, Redefining Development: The 2011 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*. Thus, it draws on presentations and comments by Bina Agarwal, Somsook Boonyabanha, Norberto Carcellar, David Dodman, Kris Ebi, Arif Hasan, Jorgelina Hardoy, Cassidy Johnson, Andrew Maskrey, Diana Mitlin and Mark Pelling. It also benefited from comments on earlier drafts by Sheridan Bartlett, Cassidy Johnson and Mark Pelling.

making schools safer, increasing community knowledge of evacuation procedures), but it does not put in place the large-scale infrastructure that reduces risk. The devastating floods in the town of Kurnool in 2009 described in the paper by C Ramachandraiah illustrates the need for far better regional water management and a local administration that was far better prepared to manage floods and evacuate people. We also know that most of the urban dwellers who are most at risk from disasters (and climate change impacts) are low-income groups living in informally built settlements. What can community action do if these settlements are on sites at high risk – for instance, on flood plains or steep slopes at risk from landslides – and lack the infrastructure and services needed to reduce risk because local governments are unwilling or unable to ensure their provision? Community action and organization cannot ensure good management of land use for expanding cities so that new developments avoid dangerous sites and are served with infrastructure. Community action cannot put in place the building codes and standards that help ensure buildings can withstand extreme weather or, where needed, earthquakes. Nor can it bring in expert help and large funding from outside in the aftermath of a disaster. Is community action really only about working with community organizations in (mostly informal) settlements at risk, to evacuate them to safer places when a storm approaches or heavy rainfall is expected?

Don't local governments have the key roles in disaster risk reduction?

In cities in high-income nations, neighbourhood residents do not need to join together to form community organizations to address disaster risks or to demand from government the infrastructure and services needed for disaster risk reduction.⁽¹⁾ Here, city structures and infrastructure are mostly resilient to extreme weather, variations in freshwater supplies and all but the most extreme earthquakes. There is universal provision of the necessary infrastructure

– piped water supplies and provision for sanitation within everyone's home, drainage, electricity, telephones and all-weather roads and paths. A comprehensive web of institutions ensures not only that these are provided but also that buildings and enterprises meet health and safety standards that take into account extreme weather and hazard events. Urban populations take for granted that such institutions, infrastructure, services and regulations will protect them from disasters, and they expect that these will be adjusted to cope with climate change. Their effectiveness is not easily measured because you cannot measure what does not happen; but these provisions prevent disasters – in most situations, for instance heavy rainfall and high winds, there are no major losses or fatalities.

Many of the measures that reduce disaster risk in these cities were installed to supply everyday needs, not to prevent disasters. But sewer and drainage systems that serve daily requirements can also be made to cope with storms. Good quality health care services and emergency services (including fire services, police and ambulances) that meet everyday needs also form a critical component of disaster risk reduction and rapid, effective post-disaster response. One gets a sense of their effectiveness by looking at the decline in disaster-related deaths and injuries over time in cities in high-income nations; also by comparing disaster-related deaths and injuries in cities in high-income nations with those in low- or middle-income nations with comparable levels of exposure to extreme weather.⁽²⁾

The monetary cost of having government (or government-funded) institutions take all of these measures is also generally accepted and routinely funded through charges and taxation. And where private companies or non-profit institutions provide some of the key services, the framework for provision and quality control is supplied by local government or local offices of provincial or national government.

There are still lapses in high-income nations – important lapses in some instances, which mean catastrophic disasters such as the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans, the impact of the heat wave in Europe in 2003 and the impact of the tsunami in Japan in 2011.

1. The discussions in this section draw on Satterthwaite, David (2011), "How can urban centres adapt to climate change with ineffective or unrepresentative local governments?", *WIRES: Climate Change*, although the focus here is on disaster risk reduction rather than climate change adaptation. Early view, 29 July, accessible at <http://wires.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WiresJournal/wisid-WCC.html>

2. United Nations (2009), *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate*, UNISDR, Geneva, 207 pages.

And although the risk of death from extreme weather has decreased substantially in high-income nations, and is much lower than in other nations,³ there are still examples each year of disasters in some locations. Often, these were caused by extreme weather with unusual or even unprecedented intensity (see, for instance, the devastation caused by extreme weather events in the USA in Spring 2011⁴). There are also policy measures in high-income nations that can be criticized – for instance, in cases where new urban developments are allowed on sites at risk, where government underwrites insurance for wealthy property owners in areas at high risk, or where necessary precautions against risks are not made. But in many cities in low- and middle-income nations, events that would be counted as major disasters in high-income nations are regular occurrences; in some cities, they happen every year. But most of these are not recorded in international disaster statistics. They may also get little attention nationally or even locally, as the deaths and most of the damage occurs in “informal settlements”.

In high-income nations, there is no need for urban populations to organize themselves into community organizations to demand the infrastructure and services they need, or to take measures themselves because local government is unable or unwilling to provide these. No families in urban areas in high-income nations, however poor, expect to live in homes made of temporary materials, built on land that they occupy illegally; or to have to walk several hundred yards to collect water from a communal standpipe shared with hundreds of others; or to have no toilet in their home, no drainage system and no service to collect household wastes. Of course, there are still particular groups, settlements or buildings in high-income nations that are not adequately protected, but they represent

a relatively small proportion of the urban population. In many cities in low- and middle-income nations, by contrast, these families make up 30–60 per cent of the population. In high-income nations, there are channels through which citizens who are excluded or inadequately served can complain – through the courts, through ombudsmen, through their local politicians. Of course, community-based and other civil society organizations had key roles in the past in such nations in obtaining the political and institutional changes that produced the safer cities and neighbourhoods, and these were shaped by local knowledge, local analyses and local citizen and civil society pressures. So most of the urban population is relatively well protected from disaster risk, even if demographic and economic shifts can upset this equilibrium, for example where ageing and care-dependent populations or illegal labour migrant populations are increasing or locally concentrated and may not have their interests adequately supported by existing institutions.

Will community action detract from getting governments to take action?

The paper by Mark Pelling notes the very large and growing urban population in low- and middle-income nations where disaster risk reduction is beyond the capacity of local governments. One common criticism of a focus on community action is that this may take attention away from the changes needed within government. But this overlooks the fact that getting governments to fulfil their roles and responsibilities on these fronts requires community organization and action. This kind of action does not replace local government action or absolve local government of its responsibilities – but it draws attention to the priorities of at-risk communities and it demonstrates more effective ways to act. The paper by Norberto Carcellar, Jason Christopher Rayos Co and Zarina O Hipolito provides a strong example of this. Here, the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines, working with its support NGO, the Philippine Action for Community-led Shelter Initiatives, developed a set of responses following six major disasters, which included: community-rooted data gathering (assessing the severity and scope of destruction and victims' immediate needs); trust

3. United Nations (2011), *Revealing Risk, Redefining Development: The 2011 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*, UNISDR, Geneva, 178 pages. For example, this report notes that mortality risk from tropical cyclones is around 225 times greater in low-income nations than in OECD nations, even as similar numbers of people are exposed to cyclones of the same intensity. See also the many background papers prepared for this report, which are available at <http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/gar>.

4. See Samenow, Jason (2011), “Spring extreme weather events in 2011 in the US: historic and record setting”, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/capital-weather-gang/post/spring-extreme-weather-events-in-2011-in-us-historic-and-record-setting/2011/06/15/AGVMkOXH_blog.html.

and contact building; support for savings; the registering of community organizations; and identifying needed interventions, including building materials loans for house repairs. Here, as in the work of other national federations of slum or shack dwellers,⁵ the community initiatives were intended to show local government the capacities of their member community organizations, in addition to carrying out urgently needed tasks. This paper discusses the limits to community processes without government support, and then through a case study in the city of Iloilo shows what can be achieved when local government works with community organizations.

The paper by Jorgelina Hardoy, Gustavo Pandiella and Luz Stella Velásquez Barrero includes an account of the experience of the city of Manizales in Colombia, which has integrated risk reduction into its development plan and its urban environmental management. The city government has also established an insurance programme for buildings that provides coverage for low-income households. But this is a city government that has long worked with community organizations and other civil society groups in addressing environmental and development issues.⁶ This paper also presents a case study of the responses to flooding in the city of Santa Fe in Argentina, which shows how much city residents depend on local government for disaster risk reduction. But the inadequacies in the support provided by local government shows how important it is for each neighbourhood to have effective disaster preparedness provision and for civil society groups to be able to influence local government responses after a disaster, for relief, for rebuilding and for measures to reduce disaster risk.

The paper by Cassidy Johnson, looking back at the 1999 earthquakes in Turkey, notes the

importance of support from local government in allowing civil society initiatives to scale up. This cannot take place if local governments do not recognize the perspectives, needs and rights of the people concerned. In this case, for example, government agencies did not recognize the needs and rights of tenants who lost homes in the earthquakes and who formed a cooperative to get land and support for house construction. Women's groups also had trouble getting their perspectives validated by local governments.

Partnerships

Several papers discuss the issue of partnerships between local government and civil society organizations. The scale and scope of what community organizations can do increases when they are supported by local government; this is well illustrated by the example of Iloilo. The local government recognized the urban poor and their support organizations as partners in the city's development. Because of resource sharing, the scale of what could be done in the delivery of housing, upgrading, post-disaster assistance and other services was much greater. Technical support from local universities and colleges could also be drawn in.

Partnerships need partners who want to work together and who see the utility of doing so. This goes beyond contracting community organizations to undertake certain tasks; rather, local government recognizes and supports these organizations in influencing what is prioritized and how it is done. Most examples of partnerships depend on grassroots organizations and their networks or federations demonstrating to local governments their capacities and their willingness to work in partnerships; ideally, senior civil servants or politicians then respond positively. Most such partnerships are not addressed specifically at disaster risk reduction but to development needs – but so often these development needs coincide with disaster risk reduction and resilience to extreme weather, including as they do the extension of infrastructure and services and more secure tenure – and sometimes improving the quality and stability of previously precarious housing and planning of new developments.

5. See, for instance, Patel, Sheela (2004), "Tools and methods for empowerment developed by slum dweller federations in India", *Participatory Learning and Action* 50, IIED, London; also Mitlin, Diana (2008), "With and beyond the state; co-production as a route to political influence, power and transformation for grassroots organizations", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 20, No 2, October, pages 339–360.

6. Velásquez, Luz Stella (1998), "Agenda 21; a form of joint environmental management in Manizales, Colombia", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 10, No 2, October, pages 9–36; also Velásquez, Luz Stella (1999), "The local environmental action plan for Olivares bio-comuna in Manizales", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 11, No 2, October, pages 41–50.

Mapping risks and vulnerabilities

One important contribution of community action to getting local governments to take on risk reduction is helping to provide the detailed, locally rooted information base that this requires in each neighbourhood of a city and its surrounds. It is rare for local governments to have this information base. Indeed, there may be very little official information about risks and vulnerabilities in informal settlements, even as these constitute a large proportion of the housing stock. When a city government has complete information about all households, buildings, neighbourhoods and enterprises within its jurisdiction, and all these have basic infrastructure and services, this provides the basis for mapping disaster risk, especially if there are accurate, detailed, location-specific records of the impacts of extreme weather and other hazard events that caused accidental deaths and injuries. Other data sources can be drawn on – for instance, records from hospitals, the police and fire services. Thus, a detailed disaster risk map can be developed from existing data.

But most urban centres in low- and middle-income nations do not have such an information base. Much of the disaster risk is usually concentrated within informal settlements, which also constitute a large proportion of the housing stock. Yet these are also settlements for which there is least likely to be the data needed for mapping and identifying disaster risk. There is also the problem in many nations of no recent census – or of census data that is not made available to local authorities in a form that allows its use for risk mapping in each neighbourhood. It is difficult for city governments to fill this data gap, as any data-gathering exercise will usually be viewed with suspicion or even hostility by the inhabitants of informal settlements. If a government has failed to provide them with infrastructure and services and declares them illegal, often threatening them with eviction, why would the data gatherers be trusted? And in any case, how can data gatherers from outside a settlement know whether the data they collect is correct, especially if the data is to be used for determining households' eligibility for upgrading or re-housing after a disaster?

There is a well-developed alternative approach that has been tried and tested in many cities, and this is to involve the inhabitants of the

informal settlements and their organizations in this data gathering and analysis.⁷ Of course, this depends on city and sub-city (e.g. district or ward) authorities agreeing to engage and work with these inhabitants and their organizations – i.e. working in a real partnership.

The paper by Norberto Carcellar, Jason Christopher Rayos Co and Zarina O Hipolito describes how, in the Philippines, the Homeless People's Federation and its support NGO, PACSII, are identifying and profiling at-risk communities in 12 cities and 10 municipalities. Federation members and leaders focus on informal settlements located under bridges, near cliffs and other landslide-prone areas, on coastal shorelines and river banks, in public cemeteries near open dumpsites, and on those in flood-prone locations.

The paper by Caroline Moser and Alfredo Stein describes the participatory methodologies used in low-income communities in Mombasa and Estelí to understand their vulnerability and what they specify as the most serious hazards; also to identify asset adaptation that builds long-term resilience, damage limitation and protection, and rebuilding. Community discussions also identified the institutions that support adaptation and those that do not.

Mark Pelling's paper describes the risk mapping that was a central element of disaster risk reduction initiatives in Santo Domingo, Georgetown, Port-au-Prince and Cap Haitien. This risk mapping brought a core group of engaged citizens together with project team members. But it proved difficult to get the needed balance between scientific rigour and accuracy on the one hand, and awareness raising and community building around risk and its management on the other. In Guyana, a lack of technical capacity led to maps having limited practical use – many simply showed road networks with an arbitrary line to indicate that flooding was a greater hazard further inland. By contrast, risk mapping in Cap Haitien deployed a highly technical approach,

7. See Patel, Sheela, Celine d'Cruz and Sundar Burra (2002), "Beyond evictions in a global city; people-managed resettlement in Mumbai", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 14, No 1, April, pages 159–172; also Weru, Jane (2004), "Community federations and city upgrading: the work of Pamoja Trust and Muungano in Kenya", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 16, No 1, April, pages 47–62; and Karanja, Irene (2010), "An enumeration and mapping of informal settlements in Kisumu, Kenya implemented by their inhabitants", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 22, No 1, April, pages 217–239. Many more papers on this topic will be published in the April 2012 issue.

with geographic information system maps only accessible through a small number of computers. Technology afforded some legitimacy to the project for local government, but alienated local actors and proved short-lived as computers broke down. In Santo Domingo, technical mapping was undertaken in parallel with community mapping projects and this worked well, as it gave a visible face to the project and helped consolidate the leadership group, while the necessary technical data was also collected and finally both types of data combined.

Shouldn't governments take the lead role in post-disaster reconstruction?

As the paper by Cassidy Johnson discusses, central government institutions often see it as their role to organize post-disaster response and determine whose needs are addressed. In the aftermath of a disaster, these tasks are seen as technical issues and it is not uncommon for central government agencies to take these over from local governments, which are closer to those affected and which should be more accountable to them. In Turkey, after the 1999 earthquake, massive regeneration was planned and undertaken by government (mostly central government), with little or no involvement of those affected. Here, as in many other places, government rebuilding or support for rebuilding focused on those who were registered property owners. The central government's Mass Housing Administration would build replacement houses for property owners but not for tenants, and these houses were planned and built without consultation. Here, as in many nations, government takes on more than it can do effectively – although the motivation for large construction projects is enhanced by the ways in which these can reward politicians and their clients and patrons.

In Turkey, after the 1999 earthquake, many community-based and civil society-supported initiatives for disaster recovery and risk reduction developed, but mostly as reactions to the state's top-down recovery institutions and approaches to recovery (and who did or did not get included in these). Many groups tried to cooperate with, or at least work with, the state system, but the scale, scope and success of their efforts were stifled by a lack of government support. If they were unable to work within the system to get access to what

they needed, they acted in an adversarial way – for instance, by staging protests against the central government and with lawsuits. Key issues raised by civil society groups included not only the exclusion of many of those affected but also the need for government agencies to be open and honest about the disaster recovery activities and development they were planning and implementing.

Doesn't disaster response or disaster risk reduction need foreign expertise and funding?

One consistent theme in the papers in this issue is that effective disaster risk reduction or post-disaster response need effective local organizations through which the needs of those most at risk or most affected are fully represented.

The paper by Diane Archer and Somsook Boonyabancha points to what should be obvious but which gets forgotten as international aid is mobilized and international agencies rush into disaster sites. Survivors need to be at the centre of planning and implementing reconstruction. They need a platform so that they can meet and discuss the situation with each other. This helps develop their confidence in what they can do, but it rarely happens. The survivors usually have little or no control over how external funding is used or prioritized – and this can end up weakening them rather than supporting them. International agencies have budgets that they need to spend, and what gets implemented, in effect, is the list of (often ill-coordinated) projects approved by the external funders. As in development, the effectiveness of international funding is dependent on the quality and orientation of the intermediary (mostly local) institutions through which external funding is channelled. A description of disaster response in Banda Aceh after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami referred to the “second tsunami” that hit communities there – the rushing in of international agencies, each with its own budgets and priorities – and how difficult it was for survivors to influence what was done and to get support for their priorities.⁽⁸⁾

8. Syukrizal, Ade, Wardah Hafidz and Gabriela Sauter (2009), *Reconstructing Life: After the Tsunami: The Work of Uplink Banda Aceh in Indonesia*, Gatekeeper Series 1371, IIED, London, 18 pages, available at <http://pubs.iied.org/14582IIED.html>. This also includes a case study of how survivors organized and implemented their own reconstruction programme.

The paper by Diane Archer and Somsook Boonyabancha also includes two illustrations of good practice, however. The first was in response to the tsunami in Thailand. The Bang Muang camp, which housed 850 families who had lost their homes, was managed by the survivors, who set up working groups to address their different needs – namely for housing (mapping where they used to live), livelihoods, welfare, children's activities, food supplies and cooking, camp hygiene, water supply and medical care. Tents were set up in groups of 10 families organized into three zones and each zone had its leader. Meetings were held every evening and anyone could attend. This collective management system, built from the very beginning, also helped prepare survivors for the longer-term tasks of negotiating with the state and external agencies to obtain secure land and for rebuilding and livelihoods.⁹

In Myanmar, following cyclone Nargis, the victims received assistance from outside NGOs for the reconstruction of their homes. Community leaders, when questioned, said that they were very pleased that the NGOs gave houses to the people, however, they would all have preferred to retain control over the spending and construction themselves. Local communities felt that they could build better quality houses and showed that they could do so for one-seventh of what it cost the external agencies. In doing so, they also strengthened themselves.

Communities can also come up with imaginative solutions when money is limited.¹⁰ In Myanmar, the financial support received by a network of 18 settlements damaged by cyclone Nargis was insufficient for the 700 affected homes. So the settlement committees worked together to examine the scale of housing need, prioritize the most urgent cases and agree who would get what kind of support. All construction work was done by the residents, who bought materials and built collectively, keeping costs so low that they were able to repair or rebuild all homes. These

examples illustrate that post-disaster responses can be a positive opportunity for change if there is a clear understanding that survivors are not victims but agents for change. Providing tools and techniques can facilitate the change process – and allow disaster-affected communities to rebuild their homes and livelihoods.

The paper by Cassidy Johnson on responses to the Turkish earthquakes includes a description of a civil society initiative that supported women in coming together to share information and offer mutual support. This was organized by an NGO (KEDV) formed by Istanbul-based professional women with grassroots backgrounds. Because it had been working in the region prior to the disaster, and as such had relations with the government, it was able to obtain cooperation from the state, unlike the civil society organizations that represented tenants and minority groups. Within two weeks of the earthquake, it had set up four centres for women and children in tent cities, who later transferred to temporary housing. Women used these centres for practical activities especially around income generation, including wood working and training as plumbers and electricians to service temporary housing. The NGO could also monitor the allocation of housing subsidies and construction quality, and later could form housing cooperatives. Its success was due not only to its prior links with the government but also because it had previous experience of successfully administering social programmes prior to the earthquake.

Flexible finance for “building back better”

The paper by Diane Archer and Somsook Boonyabancha discusses the kinds of finance that can help in disaster recovery and stresses the need for flexible finance. Straight after a disaster, funding needs to build and support collective capacity and enhance the knowledge and resources of survivors. A fund that survivors manage collectively can give them a measure of independence, and it needs to be flexible enough for survivors to collectively work out their particular development needs. If the allocation and use of funds is too strictly controlled, and if the poor do not have the power to access the funds, or there are too many procedures and steps

9. See also Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) (2005), “Tsunami; how Asia’s precarious coastal settlements are coping after the tsunami”, *Housing by People in Asia* 16, ACHR, Bangkok, 52 pages, available at www.achr.net.

10. See the discussion on insufficiency in Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) (2010), *64 Cities in Asia; First Year Report of the Asian Coalition for Community Action Programme*, ACHR, Bangkok, 96 pages, available at www.achr.net.

for approval, then this will mean inadequate reconstruction.

It is also common for some community leaders to be stronger than others, so the management of money must avoid rewarding people with more power. Having separate fund accounts for different functions allows them to be managed by different sets of needy people, thus balancing out power within the community and improving the transparency of donations and contributions to the fund. Ideally, everyone should have a say in how the funds should be used.

The paper by Diane Archer and Somsook Boonyabancha stresses the importance of building a collective spirit from the beginning, so that communities see each other as allies and partners and not as competitors for external funding. The fund can function as a tool to make people discuss their needs with each other and strengthen the community decision-making processes, which become a new way of doing things. When survivors are organized, this may help them avoid inappropriate responses – including eviction.

All the above implies less focus on what governments should do and more focus on what governments should allow and support communities to do. Flexible finance allows people to do more, and also supports learning on how people on the ground understand risk and develop their own responses.

Although the paper in this issue by Arif Hasan and Mansoor Raza is not on disasters, its description of the microcredit programme of the Orangi Charitable Trust highlights the value of flexible funding that is locally available, with simple and transparent procedures and products.

Some rules of thumb for post-disaster response

Focus on the local, use local materials, draw on local skills and use local masons (see, for instance, the paper by Joel Audefroy on this); decentralize funding to the lowest rung of government; avoid unnecessary restrictions (for example, funding being available only to people who have bank accounts).

Avoid the problems brought about by out-sourcing by central governments and external funders. Many governments and international agencies set reconstruction

priorities and hire local companies to build or rebuild housing and infrastructure without local consultation. Thus, these companies feel no need to discuss what they do with those who have been affected. Success is judged by how many houses are built. Usually, this is done with little or no local engagement and often, what is built is unnecessarily expensive, of poor quality and often in the wrong place. There is little consideration of how to support local communities in rebuilding.

Work instead with communities, using their ability to organize, to negotiate, to act. Community organizations often need to recapture some of the roles taken on or managed by NGOs. Community organizations can also help in standing up to the corrupt officials who want payments and the agencies who want to control them. Relief usually does not challenge the power structures, but building back better usually requires changes in these structures. Organized communities can also push politicians into seeing the political advantages of investing in risk reduction for low-income communities as part of everyday development initiatives.

Avoid post-disaster disasters such as eviction. Following a disaster, eviction is almost always an issue in most urban (and some rural) areas, as survivors are not allowed to return to their settlements to rebuild. Governments often want to re-allocate these sites to more profitable ventures, and local developers can be quick to use the post-disaster chaos to grab land or lobby government to get it. Communities need to be organized and often need to network and support each other to prevent this.⁽¹¹⁾ Low-income groups are always weak and they will not get the support of the system unless they are organized. Pre-disaster eviction in the name of risk reduction is similarly open to distortion by vested interests.

External support can divide communities. Targeting relief at individuals often brings out competition among survivors, who take whatever they can without questioning its utility. It is important for aid agencies to avoid focusing on “the most deserving”, which is difficult to do correctly and to enforce. When professionals and agencies try to do everything themselves, it can also encourage passivity among survivors. Where survivors are relocated into already settled areas it is also important to

11. See reference 8.

provide host and relocated communities with access to support to prevent local tensions.

Let affected people group together and develop their ways of working. This includes choosing how to use money (and the criteria by which it is allocated) and how to help and support the poorest collectively. So, as discussed above, this means having funds in collective control but with transparency in their use and management; let the collective assess how to rebuild. Later, collective funds can develop into a revolving fund.

Shift the focus from supply side to demand side. External funding comes to a disaster site with too many procedures, too many steps for approval, too many organizations involved and too slow a response. Big money gets stuck and does not reach those in need with what they need. Multiple bureaucracies, government ministries and agencies compete to control funding flows. Governments often rush through new regulations that hinder responses – even making the reconstruction of settlements illegal.⁽¹²⁾ There is little recognition of what the relief agencies cannot do.

Building back better includes building better relations with government agencies. Supporting communities and helping fund their initiatives can also do much to build people's and communities' relationships with local government. Where this happens, the scale and scope of what can be achieved increases greatly.

National government roles

National governments may still consider that their departments and agencies have the central role in disaster risk reduction (especially regarding the big infrastructure that this requires) and in post-disaster response. Now, they also consider that climate change adaptation falls within their jurisdiction. But disaster risk reduction in urban areas has been most successful where local governments have the knowledge and capacities to act and where they are accountable to those most at risk, thus ensuring that disaster risk reduction serves them. This is also the case for climate change adaptation. The key role

of national governments here is to provide the framework of legislation, the funding and support for local capacities and institutions capable of responding to disaster risk (and the links this has with meeting everyday needs); and now also to factor in likely changes in risk from climate change. It is local governments that need to bring coherence to agendas that historically have been tackled in isolation – development, disaster risk reduction, post-disaster response and climate change adaptation. These are now starting to be synthesized through the emergence of integrated disaster risk and climate change planning. But, of course, national governments have great importance in responding rapidly and effectively when natural hazards overwhelm local capacities.

Much of the innovation in this strengthening of local government is taking place in Latin America – which is also where the concept of disaster risk reduction (i.e. understanding and removing the structural causes of disaster risk) was first developed and applied by city governments.⁽¹³⁾ The paper by Jorgelina Hardoy, Gustavo Pandiella and Luz Stella Velásquez Barrero describes how in various Latin American nations, disaster risk reduction has been strengthened in cities by decentralization reforms that increased the power and financial capacity of city governments and by new legislation and support structures for local organizations. Several Latin American countries have enacted new legislation or are in the process of making amendments, and are enhancing local capacities for disaster risk management – in Colombia, for example, a national law was passed to support disaster risk reduction and also a National System for Prevention and Response to Disasters (Sistema Nacional para la Prevención y Atención de Desastres). The National System for Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Response (SINAPRED)⁽¹⁴⁾ developed in Nicaragua shares some of the approaches in Colombia. However, most of these national systems are relatively new and need time to consolidate. There is a worry that local governments can be allocated responsibilities for which they lack the

13 See, for instance, IFRC (2010), *World Disasters Report 2010: Focus on Urban Risk*, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 211 pages.

14. The Sistema Nacional para la Prevención, Mitigación y Atención de Desastres was initially known by the acronym SNPMAD and later changed to SINAPRED.

12. See reference 8.

capacities and resources.¹⁵ No government gets recognition for the disasters its programmes have prevented – and so risk reduction investments are not seen as priorities and have to compete for scarce resources with what are judged to be more pressing needs. This is only overcome where, as in Manizales, disaster risk reduction is seen as part of local development, and where collective interests overcome individual and party political interests.

But what can be done when city governments lack the capacity to act and national governments and international agencies show little interest in addressing this? The paper by Ronju Ahammad on Chittagong (Bangladesh's second largest city) highlights the lack of connection between the formal institutional structure for disaster preparedness and the groups most at risk from extreme weather disasters. The paper notes the financial weakness of local government, the lack of any clear definition of roles among local government agencies with regard to climate change adaptation and the lack of support from national government. National climate change adaptation policy does not consider it a priority to focus on urban adaptation or to strengthen urban government capacity to reduce the vulnerability of low-income groups. Civil society groups undertake programmes for community-based disaster risk reduction, but because these programmes are not integrated into local government efforts, their scale and scope are limited. The paper by Nicola Banks, Manoj Roy and David Hulme considers why urban issues are ignored in Bangladesh – despite the central role of urban centres in the economy and the fact that there are more than 30 million urban dwellers. It discusses in detail the underlying reasons why urban issues (including urban disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation) get so little attention. This paper also notes that Bangladesh's increasingly urban future is likely to deepen the scale and depth of urban poverty unless far more attention is given to urban poverty reduction and climate change adaptation.

But it is not only in Bangladesh that most discussions of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation fail to address urban issues – or understand how urban contexts and urban governance systems can greatly increase or decrease disaster risk.¹⁶ These discussions do not pay much attention to the roles and responsibilities of local government nor understand the complexities in local government and its relations with the inhabitants and civil society organizations within their jurisdictions. It is assumed that lessons from rural areas in community-driven disaster risk reduction or climate change adaptation can be applied to urban areas. Discussions of “good governance” focus on the national level, when it is local government failures that account for so much disaster risk and vulnerability to climate change. And in post-disaster actions, they fail to understand the political, institutional and regulatory blocks that urban authorities can provide to effective relief and rebuilding. Two revealing tests to gauge the interest in urban areas are, first, to search in any report on disaster risk reduction or climate change adaptation for the words “city” or “urban” (often very little or no discussion of these); and second, to search for references to “local”, to see whether there is any discussion of the roles and responsibilities of city and municipal governments (again, often very little or no discussion of this). Understandably perhaps, where there is a policy for urban disaster risk management and reduction by donors, civil society or government, this tends to be narrowly conceived and presented as an issue of local land use planning or of enhanced infrastructure management. These are critical concerns but not sufficient to address the root causes of urban risk, which often lie in broader processes and scales of government – for example, the vulnerability generated by urban land markets, or the hazardous conditions produced by coastal zone or watershed management that extend beyond urban administrative regions. Closing the vulnerability gap in cities requires addressing both well-known governance failures and economic inequalities (and their local manifestations) and the root causes shaping emerging risk profiles.

15. See the paper in this issue by Jorgelina Hardoy, Gustavo Pandiella and Luz Stella Velásquez Barrero; also Von Hesse, Milton, Joanna Kamiche and Catherine de la Torre (2008), *Contribución Temática de América Latina al Informe Bienal y Evaluación Mundial Sobre la Reducción de Riesgo 2009*, contribution to the GTZ-UNDP Background Paper prepared for the 2009 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, UNISDR, Geneva, Switzerland.

16. This is less the case in Latin America, although the innovations there do not get the attention they merit because much of the key literature is in Spanish and Portuguese.

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