

DISCUSSION PAPER

Empowering Local Stakeholders for Resilient Recovery

1. INTRODUCTION

Note: unless stated differently, “local” here refers indistinctly to any subnational governance level, whether regional, provincial, district, municipal or village-level. Distinction between these different levels is brought into the discussion as needed.

There is widespread support in international policy frameworks for disaster risk management (DRM) towards the notion that the responsibility for preventing and reducing hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increasing preparedness for response and recovery, and thus strengthening disaster resilience, cannot be the sole responsibility of central government agencies but needs to be shared with local stakeholders, and in particular local governments, civil society and communities themselves. The Sendai Framework adopts as a guiding principle that “*while the enabling, guiding and coordinating role of national and federal State Governments remain essential, it is necessary to empower local authorities and local communities to reduce disaster risk, including through resources, incentives and decision-making responsibilities, as appropriate*” and establishes the increase of local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020 as a global target.^{1 2}

Pleading for a greater role of local stakeholders in DRM, and in particular in building preparedness for resilient recovery, is of course a reflection of the combined rise in the 21st century of decentralization as a core organizing principle of the modern state and of urbanization as the most common form of human settlement.³ But it is also a reflection of lessons learnt from recent disaster recovery processes, which show that achieving effective and resilient recovery is closely linked to strengthening demand-driven recovery policies, resources and mechanisms.⁴ Some of the most threatening drivers of disaster risk, such as inappropriate land-use and physical planning, can also only be effectively tackled if localized risk-reduction strategies are adopted and local capacities to enforce them are built. Ultimately, communities need to be at the center of decision-making process affecting their capacity to prevent and recover quickly from disasters to minimize negative impacts on their development pathways. Local governments and civil society are usually seen as legitimate representatives of community members and promoters of the common good, and with the greatest community mobilization potential, and hence require special attention in terms of institutional, financial and capacity frameworks in the process of localizing disaster recovery frameworks. Communities remain the main engines of recovery and are key to building resilience against disaster risk.

Yet, empowered local-level actors for disaster recovery preparedness is far from being a global reality, especially in fragile and conflict-affected countries, but also in large sprawling cities. Recent disaster cases⁵ show that local-level actors also face important legal, capacity, financial and political challenges to be able to take decisive action in anticipation of disaster events, integrate disaster risk reduction in their plans and policies and reach a level of accountability and inclusiveness in the management of disaster recovery processes that can truly support community resilience.

¹ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, pp. 7-8.

² The Disaster Recovery Framework (GFDRR, 2015), which informed policy decision taken at the Sendai Conference, proposes a “tiered implementation within the DRF process that balances national government policy setting with decentralized implementation” p. 36.

³ 54% of the world’s population lives in urban areas and projected to reach 66% in 2050 (UNDESA, 2014).

⁴ See Draft Case Studies (Colombia, Serbia, Indonesia) for the Local Disaster Recovery Framework Guide, 2017.

⁵ For example, in the Philippines, local governments only contributed 0.04% of the total government funding of the response to Typhoon Haiyan (2013) while only 2.4% of external funding went directly to front-line organizations (Source: [Devex](#), 7 Nov 2016).

2. BACKGROUND & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In 2015, 3% of the recorded 376 disasters caused 66% of disaster victims (killed and affected) worldwide and 42% of damages;⁶ these are mega-events that affect large portions of a country (e.g. drought) or localized events of enormous magnitude (e.g. Nepal's earthquake); in both cases, the institutional, financial and human capacities to be mobilized for recovery go far beyond what local stakeholders can provide. But the great majority of disasters (or 97% of recorded events in 2015) are more limited in scope, either of low-impact and/or small geographical scale. Logically, in such events, local capacities are expected to be mobilized in priority for responding to immediate and longer-term recovery needs. This is particularly true in cities across the world, where the frequency and magnitude of disasters are increasing⁷ and where, at the same time, the concentration of political, social and economic powers is happening. In all cases, regardless of the level of impact and location of a disaster, whether urban or rural, achieving demand-driven recovery and decentralized implementation speeds up recovery and is more likely to correspond to actual needs of the affected communities – hence contributing to achieving greater resilience.

Integrating disaster recovery preparedness into local governance systems and empowering local actors in leading recovery processes requires advancing the objectives listed below.⁸

- A clear division of roles and responsibilities and shared goals, backed by enabling legal and regulatory frameworks, between national and local level-actors for the different phases of the recovery cycle.
- Effective coordination mechanisms, aligned with the adopted division of responsibilities, between local and national actors and particularly between local DRM agents and national technical sector agents, and between public, civil society and private actors at the local level.
- Predictable and sufficient⁹ funding, combining local, national and international (if needed) sources, dedicated to support local-level policy-making and implementation responsibilities.
- Prioritizing DRR investments, beyond the early recovery period, into local development planning.
- Commitments and mechanisms to ensure community-led reconstruction and recovery models, meaningful participation of affected communities in recovery decision making and strong social accountability of all recovery activities.
- Strengthened local technical capacities in areas critical for effective DRM, including risk analysis, risk-reduction planning, PDNAs, devising build-back-better solutions, social impact analysis, multi-stakeholder coordination and accountable financial management of recovery funds.
- Empowered local civil society¹⁰ capable of facilitating community-led models, raising awareness on risk prevention, advocating for greater DRR investments, implementing local recovery plans, exerting social accountability over DRM agents and promoting inclusiveness (especially for women, youth, senior citizens, migrants, indigenous and disabled persons) in all aspects of the recovery process.

More broadly, engaging local governments and civil society in resilient recovery means achieving a better balance of capacities, whether legal, human or financial, between national and local levels, while not

⁶ Guha-Sapir, D. et al (2016)

⁷ The World Bank (2013) projects that, in cities in developing countries, the number of people exposed to cyclone and earthquake risks will more than double from 2000 to 2050.

⁸ Priority # 4 of the Sendai Framework (*Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction*) provides a list of concrete actions that contribute to achieving the above-listed objectives.

⁹ Internationally-accepted standards for DRR investments stand at 1-2% of total public budget at each level of governance (World Bank, 2017).

¹⁰ As per the role assigned to civil society by the Sendai Framework (p. 20): *Civil society, volunteers, organized voluntary work organizations and community-based organizations to: participate, in collaboration with public institutions, to, inter alia, provide specific knowledge and pragmatic guidance in the context of the development and implementation of normative frameworks, standards and plans for disaster risk reduction; engage in the implementation of local, national, regional and global plans and strategies; contribute to and support public awareness, a culture of prevention and education on disaster risk; and advocate for resilient communities and an inclusive and all-of-society disaster risk management which strengthen the synergies across groups, as appropriate.*

losing sight of the need to: (i) reduce risks for all; (ii) achieve fast transition from the emergency relief phase to longer-term recovery; (iii) make an efficient use of resources available; (iv) improve the links between readiness, recovery and development; and (v) build back better. Localizing recovery preparedness and management should maximize, and not compromise, progress on the above goals.

3. KEY CHALLENGES

Recent disaster cases show that local governments and civil society remain often not equipped technically or financially to play an influential part in recovery. Only few countries, and even less developing countries, have local governments that set aside 1 to 2% of their budgets for DRR, as an internationally-accepted ratio¹¹ and recovery budgets are still overwhelmingly originating from central sources, which may go against the concept of local empowerment.¹² Many cities are also lagging on their resilience-building agenda as exposed during the recent HABITAT-III Conference.¹³ And repeatedly, after-action reviews of disaster responses show that aid effectiveness has been lowered by insufficient participation and leadership of disaster-affected communities.

“Empowering” local stakeholders in resilient recovery, rather than just promoting greater “engagement”, remains therefore a policy priority. The very understanding of the concept of “empowerment” can be different however depending on the viewpoint: for central governments, it is often understood as decentralizing the implementation of recovery frameworks and policies set at their level, why for local actors, “empowerment” would rather mean giving them the leadership in priority-setting and implementation, with sufficient resources allotted by the central state. Likewise, community participation achieved in recovery processes can often be more instrumental than transformative: a few rounds of community consultations in a post-disaster needs assessment do not bring long-term empowerment. Involving communities in all stages of the recovery process, and starting from building risk reduction strategies upon local knowledge and skills, and giving citizens the power to hold accountable their local and national governments, as well as other aid providers, on their DRM policies and efforts, is what community empowerment effectively means. This needs strong political will from decision-makers as well as investments in building community and civil society capacities.

The main challenges in empowering local governments, civil society and communities for resilient recovery are presented below.

- **Finding the right legal and institutional frameworks:** evidence from a few countries with a decentralized local governance system shows the risks of relying solely on existing decentralization laws and mechanisms for organizing the division of responsibilities between levels of government in disaster risk management. On the other hand, certain centralized countries have also experienced the limits of such system for DRM after major disasters and have had to reconsider their local governance systems. Indeed, disasters open periods where decisions based on sound technical evidence need to be made swiftly and high levels of coordination achieved between national and local institutions across sectors to guarantee the most effective use of available resources. Often, the inadequacy of the existing legal and institutional frameworks for identifying and reducing risks and for a swift and effective post-disaster response has led to temporary recentralization in decision-making, undermining local self-governance and potentially introducing delays in recovery and for transitioning back to development. Many countries, following a major disaster, have issued new laws re-organizing the division of responsibilities for DRM between levels of government. This is in particular the case of

¹¹ As quoted in Indonesia Case Study (p. 22) for the Local DRF Guide (Draft), World Bank, 2017.

¹² In Indonesia, the national budget funded 78% of recovery efforts after the 2006 Central Java earthquake and 84% of the post-Merapi eruption (2010), against less than 4% from provincial and local budgets in each case.

¹³ More than 2,500 cities have signed up to the ‘Making Cities Resilient Campaign’ initiated in 2011, which addresses issues of local governance and urban risks, only about 300 of these have reported actual progress on reducing disaster risks by 2015.

Chile after the 2009 earthquake in Concepcion, Serbia after the 2014 floods, as well as Indonesia following a series of disasters in the year 2000's.

- **Increasing readiness, flexibility and efficiency in funding for local disaster risk management:** local governments can face important challenges in accessing and allocating development funding to disaster risk reduction and recovery preparedness. In many developing countries, especially the least advanced and fragile ones, local budgets often barely cover the delivery of basic services and the costs of local administrations; it is therefore politically difficult in such context for decision-makers to prioritize spending on risks and if they do so, it may not provide them with political credit...until a disaster hits. When local governments depend almost entirely on central state transfers for their development expenditures, their capacity to prioritize DRM is also contingent on national policies in this regard. In the Philippines, for example, while the law obligates local governments to allocate 5% of their development budget on DRM, it also specifies that a maximum of 30% of this amount should be allocated to risk reduction measures – something that local governments see as too little given that better prevention means also lesser damage and a lower recovery price tag after a disaster. Setting aside local contingency funds, as done in the Philippines, but also in the Lao PDR and many other countries, helps complement national resources for disaster response and gives greater flexibility for local leadership in the early recovery phase. But local contingency funds are also difficult to set up in countries with limited fiscal decentralization. Reducing dependency on external aid for recovery¹⁴ contributes to strengthening resilience and can be achieved through a variety of means, including insurance schemes for public and private assets, community cost-sharing contracts or mobilizing the corporate social responsibility of the private sector. Where donor funding cannot be dispensed with, increasing aid effectiveness in supporting local recovery can never be too much emphasized. In Myanmar for example, studies show that, overall, the least affected and most accessible villages received the lion's share of post-cyclon Nargis aid receipts.¹⁵ Multi-donor trust funds need to cover risk reduction and not just the recovery phase. Donor funding also needs to be accessible more easily and directly by local governments, civil society and private sector rather than entirely disbursed through national institutions and programmes. Finally, a major obstacle to increasing funding to local actors for disaster recovery preparedness in many countries remain the real (or perceived) high level of fiduciary risks involved with local budget execution. Concomitant efforts to improve public financial management and accountability at the local level remains therefore essential to see more fiscal resources devolved to local stakeholders.
- **Fast-tracking capacity-building of local actors to reduce the risks of decentralizing DRM:** Countries that have taken important legal steps to transfer DRM functions to the local level are often facing challenges in fast-tracking the building of local capacities for key elements of an integrated DRM approach including risk mapping and early warning, developing local disaster recovery frameworks, identifying risk reduction investments, building recovery preparedness, conducting post-disaster needs assessment, as well as for general functional skills such as multi-stakeholder coordination, community engagement, strategic communications and operational readiness. Following the passage of legal frameworks empowering local actors for DRM, capacity building strategies need to be devised and implemented swiftly. In Serbia, following the 2014 floods and given the total inadequacy of most municipal risk reduction plans with the scale of the flooding, the government realized the urgency to shift to a rapid training and certification approach for municipal staff on risk assessments for complex hazards. In Pakistan, the national disaster management agency has seconded technical staff from its central and regional offices to newly-established district-level agencies managed by local governments until home-grown capacities are in place. In Niger, the government is setting up local observatories

¹⁴ As achieved by Indonesia since 2009.

¹⁵ EMREF, 2014.

on disaster vulnerability to build capacities of communities and local governments in collecting and analyzing timely and effectively risk-related data. Measures also need to be taken to reduce staff turnover in DRM departments of local governments and develop partnerships with other local actors to bridge their capacity gaps.¹⁶ Finally, capacity-building for DRM at the local level cannot be restricted to institutions: the best way to reduce the vulnerability of a decentralized DRM system is to invest in educating community members around resilient recovery, and in particular risk identification and reduction as well as first response to disaster events. In this regard, more and more countries understand the value of building strong civil protection capacities among the general population and at the most grassroots level.

- **Mainstreaming a people-centered approach throughout the DRM cycle:** post-disaster periods often see tensions between the necessity to act fast and decisively and the necessity to ensure that early and long-term recovery efforts are demand-driven, inclusive and transparent, even if at the cost of rapidity.¹⁷ The risks of unfair access to recovery assistance, marginalization of vulnerable groups (e.g. women, youth, minorities or disabled) and misuse of recovery funds in post-disaster situations is also heightened. Without a prior strong commitment by national and local actors to a people-centered approach in DRM, underpinned by relevant legal provisions, methodological tools and effective capacities in public institutions, civil society and communities, it is difficult to implement a people-centered approach in the heat of the action. Organized communities bring their own expertise to the recovery process and contribute to improving risk monitoring, such as through mobile-phone solutions as in Niger, needs assessment, priority-setting and process implementation and their involvement shapes better the recovery response to their expectations. More broadly, accountability, transparency, inclusive participation and informed decision-making need to infuse all aspects of disaster risk management. Post-disaster periods also heighten public expectations for efficient and inclusive use of recovery resources; if these are not met, the impact on the local social contract can be devastating and induce conflict in fragile settings. Civil society can play a lead role in promoting strong social accountability over the DRM cycle, from checking that the state tackles risk drivers (such as harmful land-use and improper construction) to making sure that no one is left behind in rebuilding their lives. For this, civil society needs a conducive legal framework that respect its independence, its right to information as well as access to capacity-building support and dedicated financial resources, which is still not the case in many disaster-prone countries. Finally, citizen participation in DRM needs to be transformative rather than instrumental. The latter needs more than a few community-based assessments or community working groups during the early recovery phase; it needs strong political will among decision-makers to understand local needs and aspirations in all their complexity and constant evolution.¹⁸

Furthermore, it is important to understand the unequal starting point between countries affected by disaster risks in addressing the above challenges. Countries with years of decentralization behind them, a professionalized local administration and active civil society are less challenged in engaging local government and civil society in resilient recovery, than least developed and/or fragile and conflict-affected countries, where local institutions can usually only count on scant support from central government for anything, let alone for building disaster response preparedness.¹⁹

¹⁶ In Pakistan, the National Disaster Management Authority has seconded technical experts in provincial and district-level disaster management bodies (accountable to their respective local authorities) to accelerate their capacity-building.

¹⁷ Research has shown that people affected by disasters want to be involved in their own recovery, even if it takes longer (ALNAP, 2008).

¹⁸ In Myanmar, research has shown that the post-Nargis recovery programme has failed to understand the diversity in local recovery and resilience strategies and sometimes prioritized excessively focus on the poorest sections of society, ignoring the way key local economic value chains worked.

¹⁹ In Haiti, after the 2010 earthquake, in the absence of a robust central government, affected municipalities collaborated mostly with NGOs and faith-based organizations while receiving public resources on a very ad hoc basis (DRF, 2015).

4. ELEMENTS OF DISCUSSION:

Empowering local actors for preparing and planning for resilient recovery requires a multidimensional approach considering legal mandates, institutional arrangements, funding flows, organizational and human capacities and social capital, applying to all steps of the DRM cycle. Considering the challenges to identified in the previous section, the following key questions were discussed during the session:

1. What is the most appropriate division of responsibilities between different governance levels for disaster risk management, considering existing political, social and institutional contexts?
2. How make sure that the decentralization of DRM does not work at cross-purpose with the need for efficient risk-reduction and recovery preparedness and timely disaster response at the local level?
3. Which approaches work best in decentralizing disaster recovery functions in least developed and/or fragile countries?
4. What are viable and effective means to increase financial capacities of local governments for post-disaster recovery preparedness?
5. What can be done to increase the share of external aid reaching directly local actors in post-disaster situations?
6. What are effective mechanisms to bridge gaps in local technical capacities for DRM without comprising the need for locally-driven recovery processes?
7. Which systems and capacities are needed to increase the share of DRR spending in local budgets?
8. How can existing community capacities be better harnessed in disaster recovery preparedness?
9. What are the prerequisites for an effective application of social accountability approaches over the DRM cycle, from risk identification to recovery?
10. What measures are useful to take when building disaster recovery frameworks to prevent the marginalization of women and other vulnerable groups in post-disaster situations?

5. CONCLUSIONS

Major catastrophes can easily overwhelm local institutions by the impact and subsequent demands placed on them and uncover organizational flaws and fractures and expose serious gaps in national and local disaster recovery frameworks, including lack of capacities in local governments and civil society and insufficient participation of affected communities. While limitations in balancing the roles and means of national and local actors to build effective and demand-driven recovery preparedness need often rapid focused responses, especially given the higher frequency of natural disasters linked to climate change, these limitations are also closely related to the lack of empowerment of local stakeholder in achieving better local development results. **More effective DRM through empowerment of local stakeholders is inseparable from a broader reform effort at strengthening core systems of local governance & local development.**

Post-disaster periods provide strong incentives and opportunities to reform or restructure legal and institutional aspects of local governance and DRM. Countries that have taken important steps towards accelerating the decentralization of DRM functions have prioritized the following: (i) empowering local authorities with expanded mandates for civilian protection; (ii) mainstreaming the use of integrated and risk-informed local development planning; (iii) improving local governments' democratic, accountability and transparency; (iii) making local governance systems more participatory and inclusive. However, there are also important political economy considerations surrounding the decentralization of disaster risk management and every country has its own set of unique parameters in that regard. There are also risks: decentralizing too fast and wide a function that is so critical for a country's stability and economy to local stakeholders that are not sufficiently prepared, can be disastrous. Therefore, **solutions for sharing**



responsibilities for DRM with local stakeholders, anchored in carefully contextualized analysis, will always work better than best practices imported from other disaster-prone settings.

Above all, these countries have made a strong commitment to the principle of community-led recovery (and not just community-based needs assessment) which, in the longer term, is the best guarantee of resilience to disaster-risk. Indeed, **people should be at the centre of the recovery processes**. Recovery must be inclusive, fair and equitable, non-discriminatory, and address the needs of all disadvantaged groups. It should be built on the needs of the affected people, driven by their development goals and ambitions, and informed by their knowledge and experiences. In particular, women should have a special space in recovery as both participants and leaders in this process.

Finally, **government and donors needs to increase financing made available directly to local stakeholders for recovery**. Combined with recovery policies and institutional arrangements, sufficient and predictable decentralized funding can accelerate recovery and reconstruction. Governments must identify funding sources (national and external) for supporting recovery preparedness needs of local actors, and also enable them to mobilize their own resources to ensure adequate and sustained financial availability to implement their recovery priorities. At the same time, local stakeholders, must also build their capacities and commit to allocate their regular development resources towards DRM and adhere to accountable and transparent financial management; both commitments will create the necessary confidence with central governments and donors to spend more through local channels.

6. REFERENCES

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