

Why Governance Issues Are Important in Recovery?

1.1 Governance is a critical element in Post-Disaster Recovery

Governance could be one of the tools for decision-makers and community leaders to help them appreciate the importance and benefits of good policies and strategies and appropriate institutional and legislative systems at national level as frameworks for the design of effective recovery plans and programs (UNISDR 2004).¹

For long-term recovery operations, it is particularly important to advocate for “good governance” at the local government level. As the immediate public service provider and the interface with citizens, local governments are naturally situated in the best position to raise awareness of the citizens on resilient recovery (i.e. building back better approaches) and listen to their concerns. Recovery operations may fail, if the communities are not properly informed and engaged (NHRAIA 2001).²

1.2 Governance issues in recovery are already identified, thus, providing a unique window of opportunity to build back better

The idea that post-disaster recovery provides a unique window of opportunity for *building back better* has become a cliché. In effect, many countries have used the recovery context to implement, reform, or improve their institutional and legislative arrangements for disaster risk reduction. Some countries, however, have been unable to seize the opportunity, when it arises. In others, improvements in policy, legislation and institutional arrangements have not proved to be effective or sustainable. In other words, it would seem that the window of opportunity provided by recovery **can only be seized under determined conditions**. Several internationally relevant gatherings have identified primary governance issues in the context of disaster risk reduction and post-disaster recovery. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005 (WCDR 2005), Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2009 (GAR 2009), and the “Incheon Declaration” 2009 are among the many examples.

1. Governance Perspective in Recovery

1.1 Concept of Governance

The concept of governance is complex and controversial. However, there are some common points of departure. First, governance is not government. Governance, as a concept, recognizes that power exists inside and outside the formal authority and institutions of government. Many

¹ See UNISDR, “Disaster Risk Reduction, Governance and Development,” http://www.preventionweb.net/files/4080_governancedevelopment.pdf (Accessed October 15, 2009).

² Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, “Holistic Disaster Recovery: Ideas for Building Local Sustainability After a Disaster,” http://www.oregonshowcase.org/downloads/pdf/resources/holistic_recovery_guide.pdf (Accessed October 15, 2009).



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definitions of governance include three groups of actors: government, private sector and civil society. Second, governance emphasizes ‘*process*’. It recognizes that decisions are made based on complex relationships between many actors with different priorities. It is the reconciliation of these competing priorities that is at the heart of the concept of governance (UN-HABITAT 2002). Adopted from internationally relevant norms, UN-HABITAT is proposing the following definition of governance,

Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action can be taken. It includes formal institutions as well as informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens.³

2.1.2 Principles of Good Governance

Good governance is characterized by the principles of **sustainability, subsidiarity, equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability, civic engagement and citizenship, and security**. These principles, which are advocated by UN-HABITAT, are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. As introduced below, these principles include a range of illustrative practical measures for their implementation.

1. **Sustainability** in all dimensions must balance the social, economic and environmental needs of present and future generations. This should include a clear commitment to urban poverty reduction. Leaders of all sections of urban society must have a long-term, strategic vision of sustainable human development and the ability to reconcile divergent interests for the common good.
2. **Subsidiarity** of authority and resources to the closest appropriate level. Responsibility for service provision should be allocated on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity (i.e. at the closest appropriate level consistent with efficient and cost-effective delivery of services). This will maximize the potential for inclusion of the citizenry in the process of urban governance. Decentralization and local democracy should improve the responsiveness of policies and initiatives to the priorities and needs of citizens. Cities should be empowered with sufficient resources and autonomy to meet their responsibilities.
3. **Equity** of access to decision-making processes and the basic necessities of urban life. The sharing of power leads to equity in the access to and use of resources. Women and men must participate as equals in all urban decision-making, priority-setting and resource allocation processes. Local governments provide everyone (be it the poor, the young or older persons, religious or ethnic minorities or the handicapped) with equitable access to nutrition, education, employment and livelihood, health care, shelter, safe drinking water, sanitation and other basic services.

³ To be truly normative, the debate on the principles of good urban governance must be grounded in three potential sources of universal norms: international legal instruments; commitments made by governments at major United Nations conferences; and operational experience in cities. See UN-HABITAT, “Urban Governance”, <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=260> (Accessed October 2, 2009).

4. **Efficiency** in the delivery of public services and in promoting local economic development. Local governments must be financially sound and cost-effective in their management of revenue sources and expenditures, the administration and delivery of services, and in the enablement, based on comparative advantage, of government, the private sector and communities to contribute formally or informally to the urban economy. A key element in achieving efficiency is to recognize and enable the specific contribution of women to the urban economy.
5. **Transparency and Accountability** of decision-makers and all stakeholders. The accountability of local authorities to their citizens is a fundamental tenet of good governance. Similarly, there should be no place for corruption in cities. Corruption can undermine local government credibility and can deepen urban poverty. Transparency and accountability are essential to stakeholder understanding of local government and to who is benefiting from decisions and actions. Access to information is fundamental to this understanding and to good governance. Laws and public policies should be applied in a transparent and predictable manner. Elected and appointed officials and other civil servant leaders need to set an example of high standards of professional and personal integrity. Citizen participation is a key element in promoting transparency and accountability.
6. **Civic Engagement and Citizenship.** People are the principal wealth of local governments. They are both the object and the means of sustainable human development. Civic engagement implies that living together is not a passive exercise: in cities, people must actively contribute to the common good. Citizens, especially women, must be empowered to participate effectively in decision-making processes. The civic capital of the poor must be recognized and supported.
7. **Security** of individuals and their living environment. Every individual has the inalienable right to life, liberty and the security of person. Insecurity has a disproportionate impact in further marginalizing poor communities. Cities must strive to avoid human conflicts and natural disasters by involving all stakeholders in crime and conflict prevention and disaster preparedness. Security also implies freedom from persecution, forced evictions and provides for security of tenure. Local governments should also work with social mediation and conflict reduction agencies and encourage the cooperation between enforcement agencies and other social service providers (health, education and housing).

2. Governance Issues in Recovery

2.1 WCDR 2005⁴

- The major challenges to building effective legislative, institutional frameworks and systems for risk reduction relate to how to make disaster risk reduction a **major policy issue**. It is difficult to engage policymakers in a dialogue on reducing disasters and the social and economic benefits of investing in this when the benefits are not always obvious or immediate. The focus is still heavily weighted to disaster response and not on ex-ante risk management. When legislation does exist, progress towards enforcing laws and regulations

⁴ UNISDR, "WCDR Proceedings", http://www.preventionweb.net/files/3800_WCDRproceedings1.pdf
(Accessed October 15, 2009)



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for disaster risk reduction is often very slow.

- Reaching those most at risk is also difficult since they are often more focused on meeting the challenges of daily chronic risk, not disaster risk or sustainable development, and this perspective is difficult to modify. **Civil society is often not engaged** in risk management issues because they don't know how to get into the problem/topic and the enabling environment needed for this to occur is often not present.
- Sustained engagement takes time and requires a long-term perspective. **Advocacy and political dialogue** need to be framed in language that is appropriate, and efforts need to align national, intermediary and local levels. Need decision making amongst all the stakeholders and the relevant structures to facilitate this.
- Donors and development agencies need to make risk reduction a priority by making it an explicit part of their **development programming and financing strategies**. Efforts need to recognize the challenges and include innovative measures to address them, particularly those related to political and institutional resistance to move beyond response. The dilemma of rewarding “countries that don't do much for risk reduction and not rewarding those that do” needs to be put right. Donors need to work more and together on this issue and make maximum use of poverty reductions strategies.
- More attention needs to be given to the aspect of **civil society participation**. While many good examples and structures for civil society participation have been created, often they do not have a direct relationship to the national system. Civil society is not present in risk management because they can't get themselves into the problem or the topic. Lack of risk management formulas that address civil society concerns and needs contributes to their lack of engagement. It is fundamental to identify and understand the risk problem from their perspective. Civil society participation in risk management also requires more thinking in terms of what it means and how to meaningfully engage communities -often it is more lip service than reality.

2.2 GAR Report 2009⁵

- **Decentralization:** GAR09 highlighted the crucial role played by effective urban and local governance in addressing the underlying drivers of disaster risk. While broader processes such as climate change and economic globalization condition risk, ultimately it is configured at the local level. The existence of competent and accountable local government would seem to be a key pre-condition for success in risk reduction. *It is important to examine the strengthening of local government, through decentralization processes, in a comparative perspective, in order to identify the conditions and factors that have contributed to advancing risk reduction and post-disaster recovery.*
- **Strengthening civil society and accountability:** GAR09 similarly highlighted that the essential counterpart to competent and accountable local governments is a vibrant and active civil society. Strong civil society would seem to be the key to ensuring accountability, to enabling a better identification and articulation of needs and for making an effective use of

⁵ UNISDR, “Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2009”,
<http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/gar/report/index.php?id=9413> (Accessed October 15, 2009)



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local resources. *It is important to examine in a comparative perspective under which conditions civil society has been able to play this role in disaster risk reduction.*

- **Planning and regulation:** Another key aspect of good governance, identified in GAR09 but not explored in depth refers to the inclusion of risk reduction considerations into planning and regulatory mechanisms by governments. This may include the introduction of cost benefit analysis into public investment systems or the application of land-use planning and building codes to reduce the vulnerability of the built environment to natural hazards. In the latter case, while it is accepted that improvements to building and planning standards are key to reducing risk, it is less clear to what extent codes and regulations play a useful role in those countries and cities where most urban development is unregulated and occurs in the informal sector. *It is important to examine these issues in a comparative perspective, identifying those conditions and factors that enable planning and regulation to act as risk reduction drivers.*
- **Financial incentives:** GAR09 identified a number of innovative financial mechanisms that are currently being promoted to increase resilience to natural hazards, including catastrophe pools and bonds, index based crop insurance, microfinance and micro insurance, payment for ecosystem services and others. *It is important to examine to what extent these mechanisms are providing incentives for risk reduction amongst governments, the private sector and at the household level, and under which political, social, cultural and economic conditions.*

2.3 The Incheon Declaration 2009⁶

- **Local governance for risk reduction:** It is the local government that is the first responder, and the one responsible for community development and sustainable disaster risk reduction. The empowerment of local governments must be a key priority in order to encourage democratic decision-making that involves the citizens and all key stakeholders at the local level. The proper confirmative authority of the local government, human capacity and allocation of appropriate resources needs to be ensured. Risk reduction at the local level depends on good local governance, particularly in the political decision-making and formulation of policy and enforcement relating to land use planning, regulatory controls, zoning, and construction standards. Risk reduction calls for flexibility in the decision making process and the empowerment of communities, which in turn pushes transparency and good governance. The value and usefulness of an Alliance of Local Governments for Disaster Risk Reduction can assist in the facilitation of good governance and create the space for stakeholders to work together. Every disaster brings to bear questioning of accountability of local and regional authorities, and whether they are over-ruled by national authorities. Each local or provincial government should have an explicit policy and action plan for disaster risk reduction, and dedicated personnel and budget assigned.
- **Planning for disaster risk reduction:** There exists a need for more widespread development of municipal risk assessments and maps, including local vulnerability and

⁶ UNISDR, “Building Local Government Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction: The Incheon Declaration”, http://www.unisdr.org/preventionweb/files/10962_IncheonDeclarationFinal28Aug09.pdf (Accessed October 15, 2009).

capacity assessments. Findings of studies along these areas should serve as the basis for local and urban development plans and programmes and the development of municipal disaster risk management plans. Many good lessons are available, these need to be shared. We call for such practices to be shared by different means and ways such as web resources to be broadly available.

- **Partnerships:** The key partners in any effective democratic decision-making are the citizens (the people), the interest groups and the organizations and structures that can assist in this process, often including specific cultural organizations and their leaders (e.g. religious, grass-root organizations, NGOs and traditional leaders). The challenge is to find ways to work with local businesses and companies, to ensure there is an opportunity to involve the private sector when policy is being developed by local governments, in projects aimed at reducing risks, and creating strong sustainable public private partnerships in the framework of Corporate Social Responsibility. In doing so, decisions relating to these must be made transparently and with sound technical and sustainable understanding of the consequences of such decisions, to not create new risks. For example, telecommunications services provision could be an opportunity to develop partnerships with emergency response and disaster reduction and preparedness. To be effective, they must be developed ahead of time.
- **Capacity development for local authorities:** This is certainly one of the most pressing issues, as capacity development can have a significant impact on minimizing losses from disaster events, climate change and variability and on strengthening decentralization of resources. There are many existing international, regional, national and local centers, training institutions and academia to build on. Capacity development is recognized as a vital ingredient for decentralized disaster risk reduction and sustainable local development and for empowering local government units and communities. As such, capacity development is a necessary component in building the Local Government Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction in carrying out the World Campaign.

2.4 Summary of Key Governance Issues

Policy: “Authority and external resources normally flow from the apex of political power, while knowledge of the situation, information, local resources and leadership all rise from the local community levels. Disaster planning will always be ineffective if confined strictly to a process of central planning and command and control practices... In order to achieve effective local disaster plans, it is essential that provincial, district and local level officials be given power to manage disaster protection activities” (ISDR 2004). A good policy provides a multi-sectoral framework for disaster risk reduction and institutions for the coordination of government agencies, participation of civil society and collaboration with the private sector and all stakeholders. Risk identification and assessment is the foundation of a comprehensive disaster risk management policy.

Planning: A national disaster risk management plan backed by legislation translates into programmes and activities. The plan, which needs to be updated periodically, spells out in detail the actions to be taken with a time frame, allocation of responsibilities, resource requirements,

preparedness measures such as early warning, public awareness, knowledge development and management, risk and vulnerability assessment, as well as mitigation and risk reduction activities.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks: Legislation provides evidence of political commitment and government intention to provide a solid basis for the policy and sound planning and the coordination of disaster risk management measures. Legislation usually defines the institutional arrangements and roles and ensures compliance for the implementation of policy, resource allocation and a framework for enforcement regulations and building codes. Legislation remains a critical element in ensuring effective coordination and local participation:

Administrative Arrangements: *“While disaster management and response coordination requires centralized command, there is a need to decentralize disaster risk reduction. Along with the decentralization of power and devolution of government authority, disaster risk reduction at the local level needs to be encouraged and supported”* (Living with Risk, ISDR, 2004:81).

Resources and Funding: Good policies and plans may be in place, but without the necessary resources for implementation these will remain hollow commitments. Governments need to allocate financial, human and material resources to disaster risk management structures. Resource allocation poses a real challenge in situations where so many demands compete for limited resources. Insufficient capacity and weak governance structure, corruption and a weak national resource base may undermine development of innovative mechanisms for resource mobilization and the providing of task incentives. However, if governments identify disaster risk reduction as a priority, and re-arrange their national development priorities, resources can be identified for disaster risk reduction.

Organization and Structure: Local communities are often more conversant with both disaster risks experienced and the necessary resources and existing opportunities to identify and manage disaster risks. Disaster risk management at local level is a key element in any viable national disaster risk reduction strategy, and must be built on community networks and effective municipal and local government institutions. Decentralized structures, which provide opportunities for participation and involvement of all segments of society, are thus critical.