

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Preparedness

It is often said that there are always some positive things that come from devastating disasters and catastrophic events. Recent events in the Philippines are no exception. One such 'positive', is the opportunity that a disaster gives us; to learn the lessons from the deadly storms Ondoy and Pepeng. One clear lesson is that we need to be better prepared. The Hyogo Framework for Action is a good starting point to be prepared and to cope with future disasters.

Local Governments and Disaster Risk Reduction (see references last page)

Common disaster risk reduction issues for local governments have to do with not enforcing the implementation of **building codes** resulting in unsafe buildings, including schools, offices, houses, hospitals and public infrastructure. Residents then become extremely vulnerable to the risk of injury and death from collapsing buildings, particularly in urban areas.

Local governments are not always **aware** of the issues on climate change and disaster risks and existing programs are not adequate or able to cope with the scale of the need. The level of awareness is often just not enough.

A recent publication on LGUs and DRR concludes that there are four key roles (opportunities) for LGUs to reduce disaster risks:

i) **Build awareness**

The need to increase **knowledge, understanding and general awareness** of the many issues about disaster risk reduction, to build capacity in the LGU with persons who learn and teach others about DRR and climate change adaptation options as well;

ii) **Know the risks**

The need to know **local risks and vulnerabilities**. This is at the very heart of any disaster risk reduction strategy. It is most important to assess those risks, to know what are the possible hazards, how they will impact the community, and what are the likely consequences? Is it a disaster, or is it a situation that can be more controlled?

iii) **Maintain infrastructure**

Maintaining and upgrading of **critical infrastructure**; while local governments are responsible for a variety of critical infrastructure (such as water, drainage, sewage, schools, hospitals), investments to make them resilient to disaster risks are not very visible and sometimes neglected or ignored. **Capital investment planning** should properly address disaster risks, based on a good risk assessment as suggested above!

iv) **Leadership**

By including long-term ideas in current planning is critical. Being a long-term process, a DRR initiative can sometimes lose momentum from staff changes and uneven interest among them. Long-term **political commitment** is crucial to successfully implement DRR programmes over time. There needs to be strong **leadership** at the top of the local government and this may mean providing on up-to-date information on DRR, examples from elsewhere that have worked well etc.



Hyogo Framework for Action¹ (HFA) – a guide to reducing disaster risks

This planning guidance document was agreed internationally in 2005. It has proved to be a most useful tool for local through to national and regional planning the reduce disaster losses (social, environmental and economic) and to help with sustainable development.

One part of the HFA calls on all levels of Government to “**mainstream**” risk reduction within development and land use planning. These plans are aimed at managing how land is used and should therefore include a good understanding of the possible risk in certain areas, so for example, the hazard-prone areas are understood by the community, the LGU and businesses.

To achieve the goals set out in the HFA, it also outlines five specific **Priorities for Action** (which could also be adopted by LGUs as a good set of basic goals to reduce disaster risk):

1. Making disaster risk reduction a priority
2. Improving risk information and early warning (know the risks and Take Action)
3. Building a culture of safety and resilience (understanding and awareness)
4. Reducing the risks in key sectors
5. Strengthening preparedness for response (be prepared and ready to act)

As part of its text, Governments agreed to **integrate** climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction through:

- i) The identification of climate-related disaster **risks**;
- ii) The design of specific risk **reduction** measures; and
- iii) The improved and routine use of climate risk **information** by planners, engineers and other decision makers.

The Hyogo Framework calls on countries to reduce underlying risks by **integrating risk reduction** measures and **climate change adaptation**. This will enable current and future efforts for climate change adaptation to benefit from practical experience in disaster risk reduction. See http://www.preventionweb.net/hyogo_framework

Local Government Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction

Local-level implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action remains one of the major challenges to achieve, requiring the active participation and involvement of local government actors at different levels. From the regional to the municipal level, local governments have a key role to play in reducing disaster risks and vulnerabilities. <http://www.unisdr.org/local-government>

Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (World Bank - UNISDR Partnership)

Disaster reduction is a critical dimension of the global poverty reduction agenda as disasters impact poor the most. With this in view, the World Bank is developing various instruments to support its client governments to integrate risk reduction strategies in development processes at the country and local levels, especially in countries where risks are high. <http://www.unisdr.org/Global-Facility DRR.pdf>

Local Governments and Disaster Risk Reduction

A compilation of good practices and lessons learnt by local governments in disaster risk reduction. <http://www.unisdr.org/local-governments.pdf>

¹ The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) in January 2005.



Key terms in disaster risk reduction

Disaster Risk Reduction: The conceptual framework of elements considered with the possibilities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) adverse impact of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development (ISDR 2007).

Disaster: A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources. A disaster is a function of the risk process. It results from the combination of hazards, conditions of vulnerability and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce the potential negative consequences of risk (ISDR 2007).

Hazard: A potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon, or human activity that may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption, or environmental degradation (ISDR 2007). This can include latent conditions that may represent future threats and can have different origins: natural (geological, hydro-meteorological and biological) or induced by human processes (environmental degradation and technological hazards). Hazards can be single, sequential or combined in their origin and effects. Each hazard is characterized by its location, intensity, frequency and probability.

Preparedness: The capacities and knowledge developed by governments, professional response organizations, communities and individuals to anticipate and respond effectively to the impact of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions.

Comment: Preparedness action is carried out within the context of disaster risk management and should be based on a sound analysis of disaster risks and is well linked to early warning systems. It includes contingency planning, stockpiling of equipment and supplies, emergency services and stand-by arrangements, communications, information management and coordination arrangements, personnel training, community drills, and public education.

Relief / Response: The provision of assistance or intervention during or immediately after a disaster to meet the life preservation and basic subsistence needs of those people affected. It can be of an immediate, short-term, or protracted duration (ISDR 2007).

Resilience: The capacity to absorb stress or destructive forces through resistance or adaptation; to manage or maintain certain basic functions and structures during disastrous events; and to recover or 'bounce back' after an event.

Risk: The probability of harmful consequences, or expected losses (deaths, injuries, property, livelihoods, economic activity disrupted or environment damaged) resulting from interactions between natural or human induced hazards and vulnerable conditions (ISDR 2007).

Vulnerability: The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards.

Contingency planning: Contingency planning is a management tool used to analyze the impact of potential crises so that adequate and appropriate arrangements are made in advance to respond in a timely, effective and appropriate way to the needs of affected populations. Contingency planning is a tool to anticipate and solve problems that typically arise during a humanitarian response.

