

Community based disaster preparedness: Need for a standardized training module

Ajinder Walia examines the issues and challenges in some international examples of community-based disaster management calling for a standardized global training module.

Abstract

Disasters act as great levelers defying all existing social differences and stratifications, affecting all, and in a unique way, unifying the communities across boundaries. The community is usually the first responder to any disaster. This social capital is a crucial strength on which the community balances its existence in a disaster scenario. Realizing this need, varied models of community-based disaster risk reduction are run globally. Training is an integral component of all such programmes. However, the implementation of training modules for community based disaster risk reduction face various challenges including a project mode approach, duplication of efforts, lack of standards for training, lack of sustainability, mainstreaming it with various development projects, integration of the local resources with components of the programme, and dearth of trained experts who are meant to interface with and support local communities. So, whereas there is a need to develop a standard module for Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) in a country, there is also no need to 'reinvent the wheel'. Collation of existing strengths of the training modules would be a better strategy. There is a need to develop and evolve a standardized training module for streamlining CBDP practices carried out by various organizations in a country to ensure that CBDP doesn't become a one-off project based activity but rather a continuous process of development.

Community: Nature and Division

The term 'community' is used very loosely and has been given different interpretations by different people. Broadly speaking, community is defined as a geographic area of social living, having common centers of interests and activities and marked by some degree of social

coherence (Rao, 2006). It is a close knit sociological group sharing an environment and bound together by intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks and a number of other common conditions that affect the identity of those involved and their degree of adhesion. As a whole, the constant need for identification propels the communities to get inter-organized and further get differentiated and stratified on the basis of class/race, power and caste due to economic and cultural drivers. This stratification is the reason for the manner in which each community, and subsequently, society interacts internally or as a whole. On the basis of social superiority and inferiority the higher strata receive more power, property and prestige than the lower ones. Furthermore, relationships between community members are often embedded in different sets of values and unequal power relations, thereby making some members dominant and others being marginalized

Disasters: The great levelers

Today, our populations and communities have become increasingly vulnerable to disasters and this has been aggravated by the micro-level issues of rapid environmental degradation, resource depletion and global warming/climate change as well as the macro-level issues of poverty, illiteracy and lack of safety nets, amongst others. Thus when disasters strike a geographical location, they tend to disproportionately alter the social fabric leading to widespread damage and losses of lives and resources. As the state counts up the human and economic losses, or administers relief, those who experience disasters are conceptualized as a homogenous group called 'victims', a category which overlooks differences in terms of gender, caste, class, age or physical and mental ability (Fordham, 1999). The disruptions, thus, defy all existing social differences and stratifications, affecting all, and in a unique way, unifying the communities across boundaries. Being the first to suffer, the affected community usually becomes the first real time responder in any disaster situation ignoring the inherent differences and stratifications of the community. This 'community spirit' or the social capital is thus a crucial strength on which the community balances its existence in a disaster scenario.

Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP): Process and Importance

The concept of disaster risk management aims at reducing vulnerabilities of the affected populace, and is most effective at the community level where specific local needs can be met. In isolation, the institutional interventions often prove to be insufficient as they tend to ignore local perceptions, needs, potential value of local resources and their inherent capacities. Most often they are unsuccessful in trickling down their influence at the community level leading to the failure to utilize the social capital (Living with Risk, 2003). The process of CBDP aims at the following:

1. The community should be made well aware of the risk they are living with.
2. They must possess the necessary know - how to deal with impending disasters.
3. Communities must have a well laid down plan of action / list of activities, which they should follow to prevent the repercussions of a disaster.
4. Each one in the community is aware of his/her responsibilities in an emergency situation/disaster.

The rationale for involving communities in disaster preparedness and mitigation activities is based on the following assumptions:

1. Communities in disaster affected areas are the real sufferers and are the first responders as well.
2. Communities in high risk areas have often developed their own coping mechanisms and strategies to reduce the impact of disaster. It is important to appreciate this local knowledge and resources, and to build on them in order to improve the capacity of people to withstand the impact of disasters.
3. Ownership of disaster reduction should not be stripped from local people who would be left even more powerless in case external intervention does not occur.
4. Disaster reduction activities should be based on participatory approaches involving local communities as much as possible, considering them as proactive stakeholders and not passive targets for intervention.
5. Involvement and participation of communities will ensure a collective and coordinated action during emergencies.
6. Building community leadership and a chain of trained community cadres through participatory approach can help harness the resilience and resourcefulness of the community to cope.
7. Solution is sustainable if it comes from people themselves rather than thrusting upon them.

8. Furthermore it is not only the 'big' disasters that destroy life and livelihoods. Accumulated losses from small floods, droughts and landslides can exceed the losses from big disasters and contribute significantly to increased vulnerability at the local level. These disasters attract little media attention and communities are often left on their own to cope with the destruction. This provides another reason to invest in Community Based Disaster Preparedness.

CBDP: Models of Operation

Realizing the need to invest in community based disaster preparedness, various countries and organizations have developed models of community based disaster risk reduction. During the formation, planning and implementation of projects, several partnerships between government, non-government, academic institutions, bilateral and multilateral organizations with specific focus on building the capacities of a community are established. From disaster prone Bangladesh to Philippines, from Cambodia to the vulnerable India, different community based projects and initiatives led by various agencies have highlighted the partnership issues in the regional, sub-regional, national and local level. A look at the various initiatives and models available to involve communities in the process of disaster management clearly delineates the difference in approach towards CBDP by various multilateral and bilateral organizations, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and the local governments. This is demonstrated by a few examples:

1. The Philippine Disaster Management Forum emerged from the Reflection Workshop on Community Based Disaster Management held in the Philippines in February 2002. It is composed of organizations and individuals implementing, supporting and advocating for Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM). One of its members, the Citizens Disaster Response Center/Network (CDRN), is recognized as a key organization which has implemented CBDM since 1984. By working together with communities, CDRN has developed strategies to enhance capacity of the community by forming village level disaster response committees, developing local early warning systems, organizing rescue teams, and diversifying local sources of livelihood.
2. CARE-Bangladesh has implemented the Bangladesh Urban Disaster Mitigation Project (BUDMP) since July 2000. Five modules in Bengali language were developed on Basic Disaster Management; Municipal Disaster Management Committee (MDMC); Volunteers Training, including Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools; Training of Trainers and Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation. BUDMP also emphasizes the importance of awareness generation among community groups and other

sectors in placing Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) on the political agenda. Posters, billboards in vulnerable wards, signboard on rickshaws, newsletters, bulletins, actual demonstration, cultural events, idea sharing workshops, cross visits, organizing commemoration activities for the National Disaster Preparedness Day on March 29, are among the various ways and forms used.

3. In 2000-2001, the government of Indonesia asked the Bandung Institute of Technology (BIT) to implement a community empowerment project in cooperation with the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC). The Bandung Project aimed to help local residents cope with flood risk. Two flood-prone districts were selected as test cases for town watching. Local residents walked around their communities with BIT experts to discuss specific factors that could improve their capacity to live with risk. As a result, local residents proposed measures such as road improvements, construction of protective embankments and better definition of natural watercourses in order to reduce future risk factors.
4. Community-Based Flood Mitigation and Preparedness Project (CBFMP) has been implemented jointly in Cambodia since 1998 by Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Programme with the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC), Participating Agencies Cooperating Together (PACT), the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and Red Crescent Societies (RCS) in 23 villages in 3 districts in 3 provinces – Kang Mesas District in Kampong Cham, Kien Svay District in Kandal, and Peam Ro District in Prey Veng. The process for reducing flood vulnerability involved: (a) selecting project sites, targeting the most vulnerable communities; (b) selecting community members as volunteers and training them to work with communities in reducing vulnerabilities; (c) organizing communities and establishing village-level Disaster Management Committees (DMC) as a coordinating body; (d) identifying, estimating and ranking local disaster risks through risk mapping; (e) building consensus on mitigation solutions; (f) mobilization of resources and implementation of community mitigation solutions; (g) drawing and sharing lessons from implementation process; and (h) replication and overall improvement of the CBDM and preparedness system .
5. SNAP (Seattle Neighborhoods Actively Prepare) Programme assists the residents of the city of Seattle, US to be prepared for any potential emergency. The programme focuses on every household to have a Family Disaster Plan, Build a Supply Kit and set up an Out-of-Area contact. SNAP is a simple and flexible process, designed to help neighborhoods create plans that are specific to the neighborhood needs by listing out an entire kit for team building



Lilian Jeter delivering a lecture at the Australian Institute of Public Safety.

through guidelines, pamphlets, and easy to use and comprehend documents for various phases of response, which are made freely available on the web for use. The programme offers training to those interested in guarding their neighborhoods.

6. In India, CBDRM activities are being organized at various levels. In most of the vulnerable areas, local NGOs are working with the communities to mitigate their risks. For e.g. Bharitya Agro Industry Foundation (BAIF) is working in drought prone areas of Rajasthan in Community Pasture Development Programme. The international NGOs also collaborate with the local NGOs to carry out such activities. For e.g. SAVE THE CHILDREN is working in collaboration with local NGOs and carrying out Child Centered Drought Preparedness Programmes in Rajasthan. At the national level, Government of India has launched a project on Disaster Risk Management in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 17 states and 169 vulnerable districts of the country. The programme basically focuses on carrying out various CBDRM activities ranging from developing plans and manuals, awareness generation, conducting mock drills to developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and information booklets and making Disaster Management Committees / Teams in the villages.

Training: An Integral CDBP Activity

The concept of Community Based Disaster Preparedness is practiced under different names like Community Based Disaster Preparedness, Community Based Disaster Management or Cambodian Community Based Flood Mitigation Programme but in reality all these programs have the same purpose, which is to reduce the negative impact of disasters. The main understanding behind all

such activities is to find ways and measures to prevent, mitigate or to reduce the impact and risks of disasters through participation and involvement of communities. The aim remains the same for all the programmes but the means to achieve that aim differs in various countries and organizations. The effectiveness and quality of the end product however, depends upon the means and ways adopted to achieve it.

CBDP is a process in which training for capacity building is one of the major components. Different modules for CBDP are being run by different players like Government organizations (GOs), NGOs, multilateral/bilateral organizations and Institutes in collaboration with one another as well with other allied agencies. Training forms a vital component of all activities and it requires not only imparting knowledge but also development of skills and a change in attitudes of the participants. However, such an investment in the development of human resource can only be sustained to the extent that the value of risk reduction is institutionalized. A community should be ready to accept the management of hazards as a way of life and prevent them from becoming disasters.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the existing modules:

The existing modules of training in CBDP are being run by varied agencies and organizations and they happen to address one or more vital aspects of the process. The module developed by Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) on CBDM is an interesting and highly interactive module. It is laden with role plays and group exercises with a focus on CBDM planning. The module also includes a specific session on conflict management, which aims at dealing with divergent views in the community. The module developed by International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) focuses on sensitization of key players of the community, developing Community Based Teams (CBT) and development of plans. It emphasizes on the application of various PRA tools to involve the community in the process of management of disasters. Indian Red Cross (IRC) has developed a simple and pictorial Training of Trainers (TOT) curriculum for CBDM. The curriculum deals with overview of various hazards and the role of Indian Red Cross in various disasters that have occurred in India. It covers natural as well as human made disasters and is laden with dos and don'ts to be done before, during and after a disaster. Under the UNDP-Government of India (GOI) Disaster Risk Management (DRM) project, which is launched in India, training for the community is largely carried out by State Administrative Training Institutes (ATIs), thereby ensuring a localized approach.

The commonality between all these modules is that they emphasize on clarifying the basic concepts of



Ambassador for Community Safety Week, world lifesaving champion, Paul Lemmon.

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disaster management and have included hazard, risk, vulnerability and capacity analysis as the basis for development of plans for the community. The modules emphasize participation of the community and hence participatory appraisal tools and techniques is also a common thread that runs through the modules.

However, these modules do not cover the entire gamut of CBDP process adequately. In the ADPC module, an input on physical and psychosocial health of the community is not dwelt upon. Moreover, experience sharing with members of the community is not focused upon, and simulation exercises are left on the creativity of the participants. The module developed by IFRC focuses more on the use of PRA tools and development of plans. It however, ignores the aspect of involvement of the more vulnerable groups and a mechanism for updation of the plans. The TOT module developed by IRC does not detail out the process of development of plans and conducting awareness generation activities. The Disaster Risk Management project run by UNDP and GOI does not have a standard module for carrying out the training of the community members and largely depends upon State ATIs to run this errand for them.

Issues and Challenges

A report in July 2004 on Emergency Capacity presented its analysis for the Interagency Working Group (IWG), with participation from CARE, United States of America (USA); Catholic Relief Services; International Rescue Committee; Mercy Corps; Oxfam Great Britain; Save the Children, USA and World Vision International. Amongst the various issues that were deliberated upon, an important aspect which came forward was the way in which the community building activities were being

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Members of the Public Safety Response Team moving debris in Rankin Street, Innisfail following Tropical Cyclone Larry.

tried and implemented by NGOs. There were some interesting observations:

1. NGOs try a variety of means to build community capacity in preparedness, mitigation, and response, without any tested and accepted models.
2. Results of these efforts have neither been well monitored nor the impact well measured. Minimal interagency learning is taking place.
3. Weak capacity of country offices of the NGOs and their partners was also a reason for the limited success of community capacity building.
4. Further, there was an immediate need to standardize practices, for example, the need to promote Sphere's charter and standards with local government, local NGOs, and communities affected by disasters.
5. IWG members also faced challenges to operationalise community participation at multiple levels in multiple aspects of humanitarian work, as called for in the Sphere guidelines. There is a sense of belief that NGOs are not doing 'enough of this' and 'not doing it well', which is reported in a 2003 global study by Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), that says: "Involving affected populations in operations to ensure their survival is one of the most difficult challenges confronting the humanitarian world. Despite the rhetoric, and enshrinement of the notion in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the participation of affected populations in humanitarian action remains, for the most part, extremely limited." (ALNAP, 2003)
6. There is an absence of generally accepted standards for community participation in emergencies.
7. It is often difficult to sustain the motivation and preparedness level of the communities in a situation

where the larger sections of civil society, Government, media and general public remain immune to the need for internalizing the culture of disaster prevention and preparedness.

8. Establishment, consolidation and empowerment of similar structures at provincial, district and local levels also has to be looked into. Assisting their establishment, capacity and growth must become a focus of external support interventions.

Apart from the issues highlighted by the ALNAP study, an important area that needs to be looked into is the issue of global sustainability in such programmes. Sustainability, whether it is at local level or at global level is only possible if the CDBP activities and programs aim at participation and empowerment of the community. Empowerment and participation are like two sides of the same coin, as, one is not effective without the other (Delicia, 1999). Hence, the challenge of such programs and projects lies in marginalizing the concept of external facilitation and focusing more on participatory approach, in true sense of the word. The challenge of inculcating a participatory approach is linked to the appropriateness and sensitivity of the CDBP activities with the culture of a community. Capturing the local relevance and incorporating it in any international or national programs has to be dealt in a very delicate manner to encourage community participation.

Some of the other challenges include linking the macro-level initiatives with micro-level initiatives and mainstreaming it with various development projects, supporting the training activities with adequate awareness material, involvement of the more vulnerable groups and dearth of trained experts who are meant to interface with and support local communities.

Making a case: Development of a standardized CBDP module

Various organizations in different countries are carrying out CBDP programmes with a project based approach. Sometimes these programmes tend to be concentrated in some pockets and may become isolated.

This also creates the risk of duplication of efforts and the community initiative ceases as soon as the project ends. The process of institutionalizing this training is not focused upon or looked into. Consequently, many community based teams become defunct after the project closes. The modules currently practiced do not take into account the different needs of varied actors like the community, local governments, community based teams, women etc. Moreover, there is a need to develop a mechanism to ensure maximum utilization of the trained community members. Trained community members should take up the task of percolating the training received not only amongst their peers but also to every member of their community.

So, whereas there is a need to develop a standard module for CBDP, there is also no need to 'reinvent the wheel'. A better strategy would therefore be to collate all the existing modules, review them meticulously, incorporate their strengths, learn from their experiences on the field and to take adequate measures to address the problems and challenges so as to fill in the lacunae. This brings in the need to develop and evolve a standardized training module for streamlining CBDP practices carried out by various organizations (GOs/NGOs/ multilateral/bilateral organizations) in various countries. This shall further lead to design and implementation of joint training for community participation in emergency work.

The exercise for identification and development of standards must have the key aspects of sustainability, flexibility and local relevance ingrained in them with focus on educating the communities. Although standardization of the module has to be global, it should have enough flexibility, scope and space for local relevance of each country. The spirit of partnership and community participation must be accentuated upon to make the activities sustainable at a global level. Further, CBDP activity should not be viewed in isolation but rather a component ensuring good governance in a country. The module development thus becomes challenging as all the aforementioned aspects

must become an integral part of the different layers and players it caters to. Finally, the key to the success of any such module will be to ensure that CBDP doesn't become a one off project based activity but rather a continuous process of development.

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