Title

Strengthening Capacities for Disaster Risk Management II: Lessons for effective support

Abstract

Across the world there are many initiatives and interventions taking place that directly or indirectly contribute to strengthening capacity for DRM. This paper discusses findings from a 2-year research project on DRM capacity development in lower and middle income countries. The research team undertook case studies of 13 recent or ongoing initiatives across six countries, complemented with an international survey of DRM practitioners. The paper therefore draws lessons from a range of different types of programme to explore the progress being made on the ground toward enhanced capacity development and identify a framework of principles that can serve to underpin effective support in this field. The findings coalesce around concerns related to issues of adaptability, ownership and sustainability, inclusion of actors and scales, the functional scope of capacity development, and the extent to which programmes reflect the wider aspects of DRR. These are factors that ultimately may either derail the success of initiatives, or, when positively addressed, may facilitate the achievement of long-term capacity gains.

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# Introduction

Strengthening of national and local capacities for disaster risk management is a foundational theme within the movement toward disaster risk reduction, articulated strongly within the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and emphasised in a range of policy and practice reports on the subject (among them IFRC, 2010; Few and Anagnosti, 2010; Walker et al., 2011; Daniel et al., 2013; Baker, 2014). The logic is thus. Reduction of risk requires action by those (people and societies) facing hazards to reduce the threat that these hazards represent. In many, though significantly not all, cases this requires a shift in practice toward more proactive planning and management of risk. This change, in turn, means that in many cases actors at all levels need to strengthen their capability to act in this way. Capacity development, whether endogenous or externally supported, therefore becomes central to the drive for improved disaster risk management (DRM) and the transition to disaster risk reduction (DRR).

However, despite its centrality to the discourse, the volume of research on capacity development in DRM is presently small. In particular there are few empirical cross-country studies examining specific approaches or interventions in low- and middle income countries. Allen (2006), Tadele and Manyena (2009), Collymore (2011), Gamboa-Maldonado et al (2012) and Hagelsteen and Becker (2013) and are some of the few English-language peer-reviewed contributions in the post-Hyogo era that focus specifically on the topic.

The research reported in this paper responds to this gap by drawing lessons and insights from empirical research on capacity development for DRM projects in lower and middle income countries. In the linked paper[[1]](#footnote-1) ([*reference removed for peer review*]) we define capacity development for DRM as ‘the process by which people, organisations and societies strengthen and sustain their abilities to take effective decisions and actions to reduce disaster risk’. That review points to how the approach and content of capacity support can better strengthen DRM, ideas that were combined, tested and explored through the research process. In this paper we present findings relating to these themes, offering examples of effective or at least partially effective practice, and set out in the conclusion a proposed framework of principles for strengthening capacity for effective DRM.

# Methodology

The research on which this paper draws was based primarily on a set of case studies in six countries, supported by an international survey of DRM professionals. The case studies were conducted between March 2014 and May 2015 in Ethiopia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Philippines, Haiti and Mozambique, using a standardised methodological framework for data collection and analysis. In each country the team studied 2-3 capacity development initiatives for disaster risk management in-depth, providing an overall portfolio of 13 initiatives. These were selected to give a broad representation across types of intervention, scales of activity, principle hazard types and development/governance contexts. Programmes were included only if they had both capacity development and disaster risk management as a central focus, if they aimed to enable government, organisations, communities or individuals to make better decisions regarding disaster risk management, if they were nearly or recently completed and if their project documents appeared to offer support that was broader than just training and direct provision of equipment or infrastructure. Table 1 shows all the initiatives studied as part of the research.

**Table 1 Initiatives studied in-depth**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Project name | Donor | Implementer | Timescale (analysed) |
| Ethiopia | Disaster Risk Reduction and Livelihoods Recovery Programme | UNDP | Ministry of Agriculture | 2012-2014 |
| Ethiopia | Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA) | DFID | Oxfam | 2012-2014 |
| Pakistan | UNDP’s contribution to the One UN Joint Programme on Disaster Risk Management (One UN DRM) | UNDP | National Disaster Management Authority in Pakistan (NDMA) | 2010-2012 |
| Pakistan | Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Management Programme | ACT   Alliance | Community World Service Asia (CWSA) | 2010-2014 |
| Myanmar | Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction Programme | Norwegian  Ministry of   Foreign  Affairs | Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) | 2011-2014 |
| Myanmar | Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction Initiative in South-East Myanmar | OFDA | International Organization for Migration (IOM) | 2012-2014 |
| Myanmar | Urban and Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Programme | Norcross | Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) | 2013-2014 |
| Philippines | Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Capacity Enhancement Project | JICA | Office of Civil Defense, Philippines (OCD) | 2012-2015 |
| Philippines | Philippines Resilience Programmes: Building Disaster Resilient Communities & Programme Partnership Agreement | DFID | Christian Aid | 2007-2010; 2011-2015 |
| Haiti | Reinforcement of Disaster Risk Management Capacities and Resources of the Haitian Population Programme | DIPECHO | IFRC and Spanish, French, German and Haitian Red Cross | 2013-2015 |
| Haiti | Reducing Urban Disaster Risk Programme | OFDA | GOAL | 2013-2014 |
| Mozambique | PRO-GRC: Institutionalising Disaster Prevention in Mozambique Programme | BMZ | German Development Cooperation (GIZ) and National Institute for Disaster Management (INGC) | 2007-2012 |
| Mozambique | Safer Schools Project | GFDRR | UN-Habitat, INGC, government ministries | 2012-2015 |

For each case study initiative the research team undertook desk review of secondary data sources (documents and databases) including programme reports financial data and review articles, which provided key information for several of the research questions. This was followed by a series of key informant interviews and group interviews at a range of scales (national, subnational, community), according to the spatial focus of the initiative. A total of 166 data collection meetings were organised, across national, sub-national and community levels. These involved a total of 486 individuals, selected purposively for their role as implementers, partners, participants/beneficiaries or expert commentators. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken flexibly but guided by standardised question schedules focussing on the programme details, the approach and process involved in working with the target groups, and the content and effectiveness of the initiative.

Preliminary analysis of primary data sources commenced with a standardised coding scheme applied to interview transcripts. Data from across data sources was compiled for each selected activity and for the context as a whole to provide a narrative analysis. Triangulation of data sources was employed wherever possible to maximise robustness of the analytical points drawn. Findings from each case study were assigned a confidence level of High or Medium (depending on the strength of the evidence), and findings that did not achieve this confidence level were not reported.

In order to be able to complement the qualitative evidence with some quantitative data, and to be able to include the views and experiences of practitioners outside the countries selected as case studies, the research team also conducted an online survey. The aim was to collect information on the budgets, activities, duration and focus of recent capacity development for DRM programmes. A total of 76 individuals responded to the survey from a range of types of organisation including international agencies, NGOs, national governments, donor organisations, UN agencies, research organisations and Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies.

# Getting the process right

Broader discussions of capacity development emphasize the critical importance of process: approaching support in such a way that the chances for achieving and sustaining strengthened capacity are maximised. Though these are generic aspects of effective capacity strengthening it is useful to draw some brief findings from our studies of how this played out on the ground specifically in DRM support.

The capacity development literature calls for the active participation of those targeted for assistance in the design and implementation of initiatives, not only to maximise the relevance of the programmes but also to build motivation to use and maintain the strengthened capacity that has been developed (Sigsgaard, 2011; Rosén and Haldrup, 2013). Equally, it is considered best practice to tailor capacity development interventions to national and local contexts,avoiding ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches being imposed by external agencies without full consideration of local contexts and dynamics (CADRI, n.d.; Becker, 2012; Hagelsteen and Becker, 2013; Cannon et al., 2014). Though room for improvement remains, the research found that DRM capacity support programmes across the case study countries are taking clear steps to approach capacity development in an adaptive manner and to galvanise ownership at all levels. DRM capacity development implementers appear to be taking on board the guidance to place ownership and partnership at the heart of interventions, to align with domestic priorities, policies, institutions and procedures as much as feasible, and to be flexible in working with capacity needs and operational contexts.

It is important to emphasize that ownership does not materialize simply from a desire to work in partnership: it requires genuine commitment of time, structured activities, creativity and flexibility from the actors involved. This can be a challenge for both those supporting and those benefiting from capacity development initiatives (Scolobig et al., 2015). However, across the case studies, DRM stakeholders from the community and local government appeared more inclined to act on what they had learned if they took an active role in identifying their own gaps and needs followed by identifying their own solutions to meeting these needs.

At a community level, Daniel et al. (2013) have underlined that the key initial step for fostering local-scale leadership is to build knowledge and understanding of risk, and findings from the research indicate the same. Techniques such as participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCAs) and hazard mapping were widely used to build awareness of risk through facilitated self-learning. In the Institutionalising Disaster Prevention in Mozambique Programme (PRO-GRC) in Mozambique national disaster management staff members approached community leaders to raise their awareness about DRM concepts, explaining that there are elements of risk that can be controlled by the community. Acceptance had to be demonstrated for the main programme activity to begin.

Several initiatives took careful steps to make sure they had salience through connecting DRM as an objective with local cultural norms and existing values / belief systems, and linking capacity development activities to existing patterns of working and social relations. The strengthening of livelihoods was used as an entry point to build capacity for DRR, for example, as in the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance Programme (ACCRA) in Ethiopia, the Reducing Urban Disaster Risk Programme (RUDR) in Haiti, and the Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) in the Philippines. Some built in opportunities for knowledge sharing, taking an interactive approach in which participants were not passive recipients but contributed their knowledge and experiences to the mutual learning process.

Several of the case study initiatives emphasized national-level partnerships, in some cases with the national disaster management authority leading the implementation of capacity development. Two programmes that emphasised a consultative process to build ownership at all stages of the programme were the Safer Schools Project funded by GFDRR and implemented by UN-Habitat in consortium with stakeholders from the school sector in Mozambique, and the Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction Programme implemented by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) in Myanmar. Engaging high level stakeholders (ministry level) from relevant institutions from the outset through advocacy meetings was perceived as a critical first step. Once political will for improving DRM was established, high level government representatives facilitated participation of stakeholders who had relevant decision-making authority and could participate for the duration of the project where possible.

Nevertheless, the research also revealed several persistent shortcomings in how support for the strengthening of DRM capacity is being approached. Many DRM capacity development programmes did not conduct systematic capacity needs assessments to inform the design of the initiative, or conducted them too late in the design cycle. In the literature, it is well established that capacity assessments are crucial for the design of appropriate programmes. Guidance from UNDP’s Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI) states: ‘In each case, a thorough assessment of what capacities are needed, why they are needed and who they are for needs to be made before any capacity development action plan can be set’ (CADRI, n.d., p.12). One barrier to conducting capacity needs assessments for improving the design stage that was encountered in several countries was the pressure to launch the initiative quickly without a clear vision of capacity needs and areas of priority. In one example in Pakistan, only once the capacity assessment was done could the implementers prioritise activities to the areas of highest risk in the country. Ironically, the overall impact was time delays because of the need for programme redesign.

The DRM capacity development programmes under study also had not focussed enough on securing the sustainability of capacities that were being built. Only one of the initiatives studied in depth appeared to have started considering an exit strategy; others were unable to articulate how they were systematically considering and improving the sustainability of their programmes in the institutions they were strengthening. Capacity can only truly be considered to have been developed if it is sustainable and therefore lasting. Concerns over the sustainability of capacity development activities are echoed across the literature (Tadele and Manyena, 2009; van Riet & van Niekerk, 2012; Hagelsteen and Becker, 2013), and are a major reason for the argument that effort should be directed to strengthening the functional capacity of institutions (see next section). Sustainability of capacity gains was seen as a particular problem at subnational levels. This is partially because staff of provincial and municipal levels are more likely to be on short-term contracts or fulfilling multiple roles. It is also because capacity activities can quickly be halted, and gains sometimes reversed, by decisions made at higher levels, especially around budgeting.

Despite the lack of formalised and systematic attention to sustainability, the research found projects that could demonstrate how activities had been expanded and scaled up, or where DRM concerns had been effectively mainstreamed in development planning in future years, as well as examples of how building capacities for advocacy had resulted in permanent changes in DRM law. The issue, therefore, is not necessarily that capacities being built are unsustainable, but that capacity retention does not appear to be well considered and planned in most programmes.

For most of the initiatives studied in-depth during the course of the fieldwork, robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and frameworks also were not in place (([*reference removed for peer review*]). When monitoring was undertaken it tended to focus on internal monthly update reports or lessons-learned exercises, rather than tracking progress against pre-determined indicators at strategic points in a programme. In addition, most initiatives focused on monitoring activities and outputs, with less attention paid to evaluation of outcomes and impact.

Several authors note the importance of donor agencies providing continuity in funding and strategic direction for capacity development in general (Sigsgaard 2011; REGLAP 2012; Keijzer, 2013). It seems to be a particular challenge, however, in relation to building capacity for DRM, as programmes are often trying to shift a long-held institutional and cultural bias towards response in favour of a more holistic DRR perspective, incorporating principles such as mitigation and prevention. In the global survey, 54 out of 76 respondents (73%) said that the typical duration of capacity development programmes they had been involved in was between 1-3 years, and only 6% of survey respondents stated that they had been involved in initiatives in recent years that had timescales of over five years.

Achieving goals in functional capacity for DRM within the timeframe of a programme has been a fairly constant challenge to the majority of capacity development programmes studied under this research. The main exception was the Institutionalising Disaster Prevention in Mozambique Programme (PRO-GRC) where sufficient timetabling was recognised as a programme strength (PRO-GRC, 2013). The 5-year duration of the programme provided time for stakeholders to understand and adjust to new approaches and develop ownership of the process. The structures and systems for DRM created under PRO- GRC have continued and in some examples up-scaled independently since the end of the programme.

# Strengthening functional capacity

Capacity development interventions at all scales can relate to different elements of capacity (Brinkerhoff, 2010), including material resources (access to equipment and technology), human resources (skills, knowledge, awareness), structures (organizations and policies), processes (decision-making, coordination, delivery) and enabling mechanisms (political support, advocacy, staff incentives).

In practice, provision of training and equipment often dominates capacity development for DRM interventions (Hagelsteen and Becker, 2013). The wider literature on capacity development strongly suggests that support that is confined to technical aspects of provision of resources (equipment and training) and that does not attempt to work at a more functional level (in terms of, for example, improving coordination, decision-making processes and fostering an enabling environment) tends to be less successful in the long run (Matheson, 2011; Lucas, 2013). Similarly, guidance from multilateral agencies emphasizes the importance of building the managerial and organizational capabilities needed to ensure effective decisions and actions can flow from technical know-how (UNDP, 2008; CADRI, n.d.). There has therefore been increasing recognition that attention to the functional aspects of capacity should go hand in hand with capacity development that is more technical in focus if capacity gains are to be deep-rooted and sustainable (Brinkerhoff, 2010).

The research (including evidence from the case studies and the survey) indicates that the focus on technical capacity remains strong in capacity development for DRM initiatives. In answer to the survey question on activities included in DRM interventions, approximately 95% of respondents referred to ‘training and skills development’ – making it clearly the most common activity reported. Other activities oriented to technical capacity, ‘information provision to the public’ and ‘provision of new equipment/technology’, were both reported by 54% of respondents. However, the survey suggests that activities oriented to strengthening functional capacity are playing a significant role in initiatives in the sector, with ‘development of DRM policies, strategies and plans’, ‘creation of mechanisms for coordination’, and ‘development of DRM legislation’ all reported by the majority of respondents (79%, 71% and 51% of respondents respectively).

The findings of the case studies broadly concur with the importance of shifting capacity support toward greater emphasis on functional aspects. In Pakistan, for example, the focus of capacity development under the One UN DRM Programme funded by UNDP and implemented by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), was particularly on supporting the operationalization of the NDM Ordinance (later an Act), through policy development and institutional development. According to a former UNDP senior staff: ‘There was a system for dealing with disasters in place, but not a modern DRM system; One-UN DRM recognized that we needed institutions first and then to build capacity of individuals in them’. Ahmad et al. (2013) suggest that the programme catalysed both the development of DRM policy and the institutional regime. The programme helped develop the initial steps in mainstreaming of DRR, including a national working group on DRR with cross-ministerial representation to propose joint implementation measures and monitor progress. A significant achievement was the inclusion for the first time of a DRR chapter in the national development plan.

At the community level, functional capacity development can improve communities’ abilities to plan, make decisions collectively, prioritise activities and manage pooled funds for the common purpose of disaster risk reduction. Under the Myanmar Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction mechanisms for DRM are expected to be developed at all administrative levels, including villages. However, the challenges for implementation of this mandate at grassroots level in Myanmar have seldom been addressed without external intervention. Interviewees at the state level in Kayin indicated that significant progress at this scale had only taken place within the 60 villages that had received capacity development assistance from IOM through the Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction Initiative in South-East Myanmar. IOM’s work at village level centred on establishment of Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs) and development of Village DRR Plans across two states (IOM, 2014). VDMC members perceived that this multi-stage engagement has strengthened their capacity to manage risk, though an important caveat to this claim is that it was not considered feasible for the Village DRR plan to be directly co-written by the community, thereby raising questions around how thorough updating of the document will be sustained following the exit of IOM. However, one can see a balance at play here with the capacity development activities of IOM not following a model capacity development approach but nevertheless bringing a small but significant capacity gain under the weak DRM capacity context currently in existence at local level in Myanmar.

One aspect of functional capacity that is increasingly emphasized in the capacity development literature is creation of an enabling environment. This can include fostering the wider political conditions that may be required to advance DRM and to mainstream DRR as a priority, as well as attention to developing incentives both for institutional staff and for communities to engage in effective DRM (UNDP, 2008; Brinkerhoff, 2010; CADRI, n.d.). Findings from the case studies show that strengthening an enabling environment for effective DRM can emerge in a number of forms beyond creation of DRM structures and skills, often not as a stated objective of interventions (and therefore not always articulated as an ‘enabling environment’ mechanism). Activities can be aimed, for example, at strengthening advocacy mechanisms, encouraging ‘champions’ at all levels, generating support for good practice, reducing cultural barriers and demonstrating livelihood alternatives. In essence, we can articulate strengthening of an enabling environment as building the prioritization and motivation that can turn development of DRM structures and skills into effective action.

Several of the case study initiatives appear to have contributed in concrete ways to forging an enabling shift in the governance of disasters toward systematic DRM and the mainstreaming of DRR. In Myanmar, there was strong evidence that the engagement and advocacy activities of the Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction Programme (implemented by ADPC) resulted in a greater prioritisation of DRM and sustainable improvements in development planning processes and information management. Government interviewees said that the programme had led to an increased national budget for DRR in Myanmar, and more flexible budget allocations at a regional level. DRM elements are now included in the government project appraisal process and regional planning processes. This appears to represent a significant achievement as DRM is now embedded in short-term and annual planning across several sectors, including health, housing, education, roads and infrastructure, land use and urban planning and agriculture. As an example at the regional level, in Ayeyarwady region there was formerly a limit on the budget for construction of schools, but now planners can justify using extra resources to ensure a new building is hazard-resistant taking into account the risks of the area.

Generation of an enabling environment is not something confined to systems of governance at national and subnational levels. It is useful also to conceive of enabling environments being fostered in relation to communities and households’ perceptions and prioritization of DRM. In its work in communities in Ethiopia, ACCRA’s Programme activities also emphasized blending technical ‘training’ on hazard management with practical demonstration of actions such as tree planting and terracing to stabilize slopes in order to reinforce ideas and show their utility. Two villagers from one site explained that after group terracing activities they had both dug similarly designed terraces on their own plots to reduce run-off and conserve soil. This demonstration for people living in or close to poverty that new practices can be realistic and beneficial was thought to be especially key for promoting a change toward alternative livelihoods and resource use. This can be articulated as providing an enabling dual rationale for prioritizing risk reduction measures.

Support to develop an enabling environment can also extend to the generation of research skills and the creation of an academic platform to support DRM.In case study programmes in Ethiopia, Pakistan and Haiti the research team studied activities designed to build the strength and standing of academic institutes working on DRM. Though such institutes often have a strong immediate remit with regard to training, they can also have a deeper role over the longer-term in the generation of a critical research base and platform for advocacy. This can potentially provide independent and knowledge-based momentum to underpin effective DRM and the progression to DRR.

The responses of some interviewees in the research suggested that there is still some way to go in convincing key actors in DRM that capacity support should go beyond provision of equipment, training and finance, even at national level where exposure to arguments surrounding effective capacity development is likely to be higher. But it is also important to underline that, not only are the terms technical/functional not well understood on the ground, but in many ways the distinction between them in practice is blurred. In several cases it was observed that training activities can actively generate functional capacity, not just technical capacity, especially if they are integrated with production of plans and creation of decision-making structures. This has mainly been at organisational levels, but is clearly just as applicable at community level. In Haiti, for example, Community Intervention Teams were trained and developed under the Reducing Urban Disaster Risk Programme implemented by GOAL not just to conduct preparedness and response activities but also to develop, seek funding for, and manage action and implementation plans. It is therefore not necessarily useful analytically to separate technical from functional capacity development – the two are fundamentally related and reinforcing, and elements of them both may be present in the same activity.

# Linking the levels

The published literature on DRM capacity development emphasises that, given the complex, multi-sectoral, multi-actor and multi-scale nature of DRM, different levels of government have to be engaged in DRM capacity development activities for them to be most effective, and that interventions should actively build mechanisms for coordination across scales (Tadele and Manyena, 2009; Collymore, 2011; Becker, 2012; Daniel et al., 2013). Various resources advise creating multi-stakeholder coalitions between government and NGOs, along with community based, demand led approaches wherever possible (ODI, 2009; Dumaru, 2010; UNDP, 2011). However, the literature offers few other practical lessons learned of *how to* facilitate inter-scalar activity as part of a capacity development programme, or how to build capacities for inter-scalar coordination as a means of preventing the well documented lack of communication and considerable gap in capacity and information flows between upper levels of government, implementers and local actors on the ground (Walker et al., 2011).

In the international survey only 32% of respondents said that the interventions they had been involved in over the last 5 years targeted a combination of scales and actors. This suggests that a minority of capacity development initiatives are approaching capacity from a multi-scalar perspective. The data also suggests that there is a ‘missing middle’ where the national and community levels are prioritised for capacity development, but the subnational and local government levels tend to be overlooked.

During the course of the fieldwork, the research team found strong evidence of the need to foster capacities for inter-scalar working for DRM, and several examples of initiatives that had developed effective ways to improve inter-scalar communication and coordination, including examples from Ethiopia, Pakistan, Myanmar and Mozambique. Essentially these programmes paid attention to how new capacities built at one level would integrate with other levels, and sought to ensure that mechanisms would mesh together as much as possible. For example, rather than consider district plans in isolation they considered how they could best be designed so that they would integrate with provincial budget mechanisms. These initiatives also sought to carefully design their routine DRM capacity development activities, including training, in such a way that it would facilitate and promote coordination across scales.

One example was the Institutionalising Disaster Prevention in Mozambique Programme (PRO-GRC), conducted by the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) in partnership with the National Institute for Disaster Management (INGC), which supported the decentralisation of risk reduction and emergency response responsibilities from the national to provincial and district levels (PRO-GRC, 2009). The establishment of sub-commissions with parallel designations between levels proved to be one particularly effective strategy for strengthening inter-scalar DRM. Individuals on the local, district and provincial level DRM committees were nominated to perform distinct DRM-related roles such as ‘early warning systems representative’, or ‘disaster needs assessment representative’. There were separate activities for the sub-commissions to meet and discuss issues related specifically to their counterparts at different levels. Interviewees felt that this system worked well in terms of improving communication at all times.

The research team also found initiatives that were working to specifically link the community level up with local government, for example the Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Management Programme implemented by Community World Service Asia (CWSA) in Pakistan where several interviewees attributed improved communication between the community and government DRM structures to the CWSA interventions.

The extent of decentralisation in a country can either act as an enabler or a barrier to effective DRM capacity development. As disasters are experienced first at the local level, local or district governments have a key role to play in DRM, although the decentralisation of power is often a challenging issue (Scott and Tarazona, 2011). In Pakistan the 18th Constitutional Amendment was passed in 2010 providing a division of DRM responsibilities between subnational and federal levels. As a result a provincial component for the coordination and implementation of disaster management became necessary, with agencies needing to be established down to the district level. This Amendment essentially created the administrative structural conditions necessary for subnational DRM capacity building, allowing the One UN DRM Programme to step in to assist in this process to help establish working structures and help formulate policies and regulations. A major feature of this approach was the provision of DRM coordinators at district level for a period of around two years. The rationale for appointing a network of consultants based at district offices was to help bring about the step change that was required in order to develop a functioning district-level disaster management authority (DDMA). One key capacity support they provided was in working with DDMA staff to develop customized district DRM plans out of a standardized template. At the time of the fieldwork, specific areas of Pakistan continued to show a progressive development of the DDMA system, although sustainability of institutional capacity gains appears to be an issue.

# Targeting vulnerability

Disasters take effect in the first instance primarily through impacts at the grassroots level, on lives, livelihoods and communities. But the impacts of disasters are not shared equally. Recognition of how social difference and diversity translates into differential vulnerabilities and capacities has been a formative theme within the movement toward DRR (see e.g. Wisner et al., 2004; Cannon et al., 2014), but this appears generally to be an under-researched topic specifically within DRM capacity development. For example, although the case has amply been made that disaster risk is fundamentally gendered (see e.g. Morrow and Phillips, 1999; Enarson and Chakrabarti, 2009), few publications have been written to date specifically on the gender dimensions of capacity development for DRM. There is also little direct guidance on how DRM capacity support initiatives should work to redress the socially differentiated nature of capacity at grassroots level in terms of differential access to resources, skills and decision-making power.

Findings from the case studies also reflected this gap. Explicit targeting of vulnerable groups was not strongly developed in the case study initiatives. Vulnerable locations are often targeted for capacity development interventions, including sites of poverty and marginalisation (such as some migrant villages targeted in the IOM Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction Initiative in South-East Myanmar) but in the case study programmes there was little differential social targeting seen within the sites selected. In a number of cases, the initiatives included developing the capacity of local disaster/emergency committees to undertake vulnerability assessments and record the priority needs of elderly people, pregnant women, people with disabilities and young children within local disaster plans. However, essentially this involved a mapping of differential vulnerability rather than directly targeting the capacity strengthening to specific vulnerable groups.

This perhaps reflects a reasonable tendency in initiatives working at the grassroots level to focus on strengthening capacity of community-level DRM committees, rather than the wider public. However, it does raise the need to check whether direct capacity development gains are limited to specific social groups (without adequate representation of more marginalized sections of the community).

The research team aimed to focus particular attention in the case studies on examining the gender dimensions of DRM capacity development, but found that, in most cases, the idea of considering gender was reduced to ensuring female participation in activities. For example, one programme studied in Myanmar, had been actively promoting ‘gender balance’ in DRM community structures and targeted women with the aim of having more female participation in the DRR committees. They also conducted gender awareness meetings in their target areas to engage more women to participate in their capacity development activities. Although it is important to have these type of activities, it did not automatically mean that the project addressed the issues of power relations over access and control of resources, or leadership in decision-making processes. Likewise, a DRM capacity project in the Philippines did not incorporate gender considerations; even though project implementers recognized that women held the main responsibility for DRM within the household, they were not seen as needing extra or different support to men (Neame et al, 2009; Christian Aid, 2013).

Although achieving gender balance is an important element to achieving gender equality, this approach alone is insufficient. It does not take into consideration how women and men may be affected differently by certain hazards or disaster risks, or how they can play different roles, have distinctive priorities, have different strengths and existing capacities, and acquire particular responsibilities in an emergency or in the recovery phase of a disaster (Dung et al., 2012; Harvey and Smyth, 2012). Furthermore, this approach does not ask the questions ‘which women’ and ‘which men’ that are essential when analysing and understanding the social difference among women and among men. Throughout the research the team found that often when project implementers were asked whether gender dimensions had been taken into consideration in their projects they would reply ‘yes’. However when asked to provide more detail on exactly how gender had been considered, and what changes had been made to project design and implementation as a result, they were unable to provide specific answers. This suggests that implementers know it is something that of which they should be aware, but they lack understanding and skills in how to operationalise gender awareness. There appeared to be confusion and poor understanding of what exactly a gendered approach to capacity development might mean in the context of DRM and how it could be implemented.

One example from the initiatives studied in which gender was addressed beyond simply focusing on the number of women participating in capacity development activities was Community World Service Asia’s (CWSA) Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Management programme in Pakistan. Although the project had various objectives at different levels related to capacity development for DRM, it also had very clear aims with regards to gender. At the district / community level a programme was created: Alleviating Poverty through Women’s Empowerment and Livelihoods Development with a Disaster Resilient Approach. Amongst other DRR related objectives, the project had specifically aimed to reduce poverty and promote gender equality through economic empowerment, adult literacy and awareness-raising on sexual and reproductive health, provide DRR trainings, provide product development training for 16 women enterprise groups, and establish male and female Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs), School Disaster Management Committees and action plans for improving resilience. CWSA worked with communities to identify appropriate ways to include women, and as the programme evolved women were given more decision making opportunities and elected the leader and other positions of females on the VDMC. Interviewees suggested that provision of female trainers for female participants improved the organisations’ and programmes’ acceptability in communities and in schools, and that women feel more empowered to act independently of men during times of crisis.

# Building resilience through capacity support

The grounds for a more holistic approach to managing disaster risk, and thereby to DRM capacity, have long been expressed within the critical literature in this field (Bankoff et al., 2004, Wisner et al., 2004). This includes moving beyond a focus in DRM on preparedness and emergency management to building capacity in disaster prevention, mitigation and long-term recovery, and taking climate dynamics into account – further supporting the shift to DRR.

The research suggests that capacity development initiatives still tend to focus most heavily on preparedness and response, with much less attention being paid to prevention, mitigation and recovery. In the international survey, 46% of respondents indicated that programmes they had been involved in targeted a combination of these aspects. However, another 44% identified preparedness and response as the main focus of investment within the DRM capacity support programmes they had been involved in, compared with less than 8% for prevention and mitigation. Only 1 survey respondent (out of 76) identified recovery as the key focus. The low attention given to the wider aspects of DRM was also mirrored across the range of case studies, the majority of which were oriented *in practice* most strongly toward preparedness.

For example, in the Philippines the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Capacity Enhancement Project, funded by JICA and implemented by the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), produced training modules relating to the four thematic areas of DRM set out in the DRM Law (Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery), although the focus on recovery was limited to the immediate early recovery phase in terms of conducting Damage and Needs Assessments. In Myanmar, the Community-based DRR Initiative implemented by IOM (which overtly prioritised preparedness) supported development of Township Disaster Management Plans and Village DRR Plans which included secondary attention to structural mitigation measures, such as road, house construction and drainage improvements to reduce flood risk. Without effective finance for mitigation, interviewees suggested that these generally remained aspirational rather than actionable measures under such resource-poor conditions. However, it is also clear from the text introducing the village plans that identification of mitigation needs is seen by communities as a basis for advocacy and requests for external support.

The two capacity building projects that were strongly oriented beyond preparedness and response were the Safer Schools Project in Mozambique and the ACCRA Programme in Ethiopia. Safer Schools is an interesting case in that it is a programme that has evolved toward DRR through its partnership approach. Originally, Safer Schools started in Mozambique as an urgent reactionary measure to Cyclone Funso - with the objective to carry out a needs assessment of school damage and to create a response and recovery project to aid the affected areas. However, through its consultative assessments and alignment to the National Master Plan, the project evolved to a more holistic approach that would address longer-term recovery, prevention and mitigation needs. The programme developed hazard maps to guide risk assessments, disaster resilient school building codes and guidelines on school safety, and produced recommendations for their effective implementation (UN-Habitat/UEM, 2015). Awareness-raising of the genuine potential for creating safer schools was a key product of the project – hazard impact was already understood well, but stakeholders came to understand that they can take account of risk when dealing with building contractors – especially because the studies demonstrated that this can be cost-effective.

In its focus on DRR and adaptation, the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance in Ethiopia (ACCRA Programme) implemented by Oxfam and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), has inevitably moved away from a focus on emergency response toward capacity development oriented to prevention and mitigation. Central to the remit of ACCRA internationally is the objective to engage decision-makers at all levels in a more long-term consideration of risk and its dynamics. At district (woreda) level, ACCRA has been piloting projects that attempt to change the knowledge and approach of planning by bringing a long-term climate lens into the planning process. An example of this approach in a practical sense was promoting re-vegetation of slopes for soil conservation and reduction of landslides and flash floods, but using drought-tolerant trees to guard against future uncertainties in precipitation. To this end, the ACCRA Programme in Ethiopia has introduced an adaptation decision-making game that is played with stakeholders at different scales, working with uncertainty while encouraging players to consider potential changes and impacts, alter strategies and identify barriers and enablers to adaptive responses.

Only five of the 13 case study programmes actively engaged with climate change dynamics. Of those five, four were strongly driven by international agencies. Unless adaptation to climate change was an explicit orientation of capacity development programmes, attention to building capacity to manage long-term dynamics of risk was seldom evident in the initiatives under study. Even in situations where hydro-meteorological hazards such as tropical cyclones pose high risks, climate change was not significantly factored into the programme actions of Safer Schools in Mozambique or the Reinforcement of Disaster Risk Management Capacities and Resources of the Haitian Population Programme in Haiti, for example.

Support for DRR approaches is increasingly being integrated into DRM capacity development programmes, but much remains to be done if a broader approach to managing aspects of disaster risk is to be embedded as the prevailing approach in capacity development for DRM. In some senses this finding is not surprising, in that the movement toward avoiding and reducing risk requires a major shift in institutional approaches to disaster risk that has proceeded slowly, and has had many barriers to overcome, across much of the world (UNISDR 2014). It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that demand for capacity support is oriented to preparedness. Yet, what is important to note is that while some of the capacity development programmes studied by the research team were labelled as taking a wider DRR approach, in practice the focus often remained very heavily in the traditional fields of capacity support for preparedness and response.

# Conclusion

The focus in this research was, essentially, on investigating process, outputs and the prospects for successful outcomes, drawing lessons and insights across a range of initiatives about mechanisms through which capacity development can be made effective. Though this research design was not able to evaluate outcomes as such, in terms of whether initiatives ultimately contributed to a sustained raised capacity, sufficient signs of emerging outcomes existed to underline the value that effective capacity strengthening can bring to DRM and DRR.

The research findings show that a progressive approach to capacity development is in many ways being enabled by governments, donors and implementing agencies. Programmes are taking steps to ensure those targeted for capacity development are involved in the design and implementation, and to make sure that initiatives are tailored to the national or local context. Programmes are also showing innovation and creativity in linking DRM messages and activities with the local culture and everyday practices of target communities, thereby improving engagement and understanding. However, lack of sufficient timescales is a chronic challenge for capacity support and is the root cause for other identified common challenges such as the lack of appropriate assessments to inform programme design, weak M&E mechanisms, and insufficient attention to creating sustainability strategies.

Significant contributions to functional capacity emerged from the case studies, including development of DRM policies and legislation, coordination mechanisms for decision-making, and mainstreaming of DRR in development plans at different scales. Capacity development programmes can also contribute to the creation of an enabling environment through advocacy mechanisms, strengthening academic platforms, encouraging ‘champions’ at all levels, generating support for good practice, reducing cultural barriers and demonstrating alternatives. Greater emphasis should continue to be placed on moving beyond technical training to building the functional capacity within society for effective decisions and action on DRM to be taken. Although the literature is clear that strengthening capacities for inter-scalar working is important for DRM effectiveness, this does not appear to be prioritised in DRM capacity development interventions. Programmes should pay attention to how new capacities at one level will mesh with capacities and processes at both higher and lower levels. Further work is also needed to develop and promote uptake of approaches to recognise diversity and social difference, and to target highly vulnerable groups, within DRM capacity development programmes. Attention to gender considerations in the design and implementation of programmes that aimed to develop capacity for DRM were generally weak. In some of the programmes gender issues were entirely absent from planning processes and training approaches.

There remains a gap in capacity development support for prevention, mitigation and long-term recovery, and in developing capacities to recognise and adapt to long-term changes, but there seems to be no fundamental reason why support for these aspects of DRM should not be factored into support, or indeed form the prime focus of capacity development initiatives. Strengthening the capacity of stakeholders in terms of long-term land-use planning and management for risk reduction, helping communities design and undertake small structural mitigation measures, and developing reconstruction guidelines are all feasible goals for capacity support. In many cases widening the focus from emergency management remains a matter of prioritisation.

The process of the research from initial literature review to analysis and synthesis of empirical findings has enabled us to propose, discuss (with interviewees) and reflect on the building blocks of effective capacity development. Table 2 presents what we propose can form an overarching set of generic principles relating to how capacity development for DRM is approached, designed and implemented.

**Table 2 Principles for effective capacity development for DRM**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Principle | Definition |
| Flexibility & adaptability | The need to approach capacity development interventions flexibly, so that the design of the programme is appropriate to context and responsive to needs (rather than applied as an externally-imposed ‘blueprint’). It includes undertaking careful assessment of capacity needs, and working with and reinforcing existing skills, strategies, systems and capacities. It also includes understanding and accounting for the political and power dimensions that can undermine or strengthen capacity development. |
| Comprehensive planning | The need to carefully design interventions so that they can meet their objectives and are likely to be sustainable. It includes appropriate scheduling of interventions so that pressure to show visible results does not undermine capacity development. Also critical is planning for the long-term sustainability of capacity gains after the withdrawal of interventions. Comprehensive planning includes a robust system for monitoring and evaluation. |
| Ownership & partnership | The need to ensure that those targeted for capacity development have a clear and significant role in the design and implementation of initiatives (which will again help to ensure they are appropriate, effective and sustainable). Ownership is likely to rest on active participation, clear statements of responsibilities, engagement of leaders, and alignment with existing DRM/DRR strategies. |
| Attention to functional capacity | The need to focus on ‘functional’ capacity development. This means doing more than improving technical skills and resources. It means developing the ability of stakeholders and organizations to take effective decisions and actions on DRM. It includes aspects such as improving coordination, and developing policies and plans. It also includes creating an enabling environment for effective decisions and action, such as developing incentives for good staff performance, and building support among stakeholders to see DRM as a priority issue. |
| Integration of actors & scales | The need to build capacity to coordinate across scales and to work with other stakeholders (public and private). Capacity development can act to bridge capacity and communication gaps that commonly exist between national and local levels. Initiatives can focus on building capacity of networks of stakeholders, and on building local people’s capacity to interact with other stakeholders. |
| Contribution to disaster risk reduction | The need for a more holistic DRR-influenced approach to DRM capacity. This includes attention to: understanding and planning for long-term changes in risk; moving beyond a focus on short-term emergency management to capacity in disaster prevention, mitigation and long-term recovery; prioritizing the reduction of vulnerability; targeting the needs of vulnerable groups; and addressing gender disparities in both vulnerability and capacity. |

This framework of principles represents an ideal state. Though we contend that most capacity strengthening initiatives in this field should actively work towards all the principles during design and implementation, we also recognise that attainment of this idealised form may not be realistic in terms of content or sustainability. In our case study research it rapidly became clear that in real world examples many functional capacity elements, in particular, are difficult to achieve, and any research is unlikely to find perfect models.

It has to be acknowledged that the structural barriers (and enablers) to capacity development are many (Lucas 2013, Matheson 2011). As part of our inquiry, questions were also asked of project staff whether there had been active assessment of structural barriers to capacity development in the design phases of programmes. None of the programmes that were studied incorporated such formal analyses, although this is one aspect of capacity support design that is recommended in the wider literature (OECD, 2006; ODI, 2009; UNDP, 2011). Among the political, social and economic structural dimensions raised clearly in the case study examples were issues of political prioritisation of DRR, financial limitations to decentralisation of power, the impact of staff redeployment norms on institutional memory, the role of cultural values in shaping the effectiveness of capacity development, and the poor progress made to date in bringing gender dimensions into the content of programmes.

In light of this, we underline that it is important for researchers to continue to identify small or partial gains and understand how these have been achieved – for example, minor but pioneering changes in DRR mainstreaming, small but tangible improvement in coordination at district level, improvement in planning in which there are some questions around degree of ownership, or local capacity gains that are likely be sustained in some locations but not others. In many governance contexts, the path toward effective DRM is likely to be long and non-linear, and in situations of weak existing capacity imperfect gains in DRM capacity may still be considered highly significant.

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1. A linked paper focussing in depth on insights from a review of existing literature on capacity development is intended to be published together with this paper [↑](#footnote-ref-1)