Chapter 5
Partnerships and stakeholders

5.1 Rationale for partnerships

The disaster 'community' – those who are professionally engaged in efforts to prevent disasters and deal with their consequences – comprises a great diversity of professional disciplines. These include physical scientists (of many different kinds: earth scientists, hydrologists and meteorologists, for instance), social scientists (also of many different kinds including geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and economists), engineers, architects, doctors, psychologists, development and emergency planners, and humanitarian relief workers.

The disaster community also comprises people from very different organisations, such as international aid agencies, governments (at all levels), NGOs and other civil society organisations, academics, consultants, military agencies and private sector interests of various kinds. All of these have a role to play in reducing risk – together, of course, with vulnerable communities, who are the main actors in mitigation and response at local level.

The scale, frequency and complexity of disasters as physical and social phenomena can only be addressed by deploying a wide range of knowledge, skills, methods and resources, both in development and emergency programming. This means that risk reduction initiatives must be multi-disciplinary partnerships involving a range of stakeholders. Such partnerships should be vertical (between national and local actors) and horizontal (between government, the private sector and civil society). The need for such an approach is becoming ever more urgent with the rising number of disasters and their increasing impact on vulnerable people.

Risk management thinking, as outlined in Chapter 1, represents just such a holistic approach. It is also quite new. Disaster management itself is a relatively recent discipline. It largely originated in civil defence organisations, established in response to war or the threat of war during the 1940s and 1950s, which then broadened out to address wider civil protection. By the 1970s emergency management – focusing on hazard analysis, emergency planning and emergency response – was becoming recognised as a distinct

field of professional expertise in some countries, and the process of profes-sionalisation has continued ever since.

However, awareness of the need for integration between disaster prepared-ness and long-term mitigation, and acceptance of the need to address the wider socio-economic dimensions of vulnerability, did not become wide-spread until the 1990s. Even today, such views are far from being fully accept-ed.[1] Nonetheless, progress towards the goal of a 'culture of prevention' has been made in many countries, as shown in the development of laws and poli-cies, improved institutional frameworks and planning, and a growing number of risk reduction initiatives, in developed and developing countries alike (see Case Study 5.1).[2]

5.2 Challenges and opportunities

Partnerships are necessary, but they are also difficult to manage. Some of the main challenges are given here, together with instances of effective measures to overcome them.

5.2.1 A stronger disaster community

Disasters are complex problems demanding a holistic response from different disciplinary and institutional groups, but they rarely get this. The disaster community is often characterised by:

- fragmentation along disciplinary and institutional boundaries (one of the key fault lines being between those who work on hazards and those who work on disasters);
- a lack of understanding between different disciplines, and often a lack of mutual respect;
- a lack of dialogue between different actors (e.g. between physical and social scientists, between governments and NGOs, or between so-called 'experts' from developed countries and people in developing countries);
- a culture of competitiveness and professional jealousy (fuelled by compe-tition for funds); and
- insufficient humility in the face of the disaster problem – a greater readi-ness to talk than to listen.[3]

Another critical failing is that disaster specialists and people working on long-term sustainable development programmes tend to act in isolation from each other. Overcoming such deep and long-standing barriers will take consider-

Case Study 5.1
Towards a culture of prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean

Many countries in the Caribbean and Latin America are highly hazard-prone and have a significant proportion of vulnerable people in their populations. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of major disasters in the region revealed the lack of coordination in relief work, and highlighted the need for a shift in focus from response to preparedness.

This led to a series of new initiatives. In 1977, the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) launched a health sector preparedness programme. In the 1980s, government civil defence organisations began to include disaster preparedness in their work. In the 1990s, disaster mitigation rose up their agenda. They also began to recognise that there was a role for other governmental agencies and NGOs in disaster management. From the early 1980s, local NGOs and communities became increasingly involved in risk reduction work, which was often linked to socio-economic development. In some countries, new legislation has helped to define the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies. New administrative frameworks have been created.

At the same time, there has been greater collaboration between national governments, at first in relief but increasingly in preparedness. For example, the Pan-Caribbean Disaster Preparedness Project, established in 1981, ran for a decade and was then institutionalised as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA). The Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC) was established in 1988, and has played a major role in stimulating and coordinating work on mitigation.

The number and outreach of technical assistance projects in all aspects of mitigation and preparedness have grown considerably during the past 20 years. Regional, national and local training programmes have proliferated, some with support from international donors. Higher education institutions have taken up relevant topics in their courses; research centres have been created; and there is an extensive literature on disasters and their causes.

A World Safe from Natural Disasters: The Journey of Latin America and the Caribbean (Washington DC: PAHO, 1994).

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able time and effort by all parties concerned. Greater emphasis on inter-agency and inter-disciplinary networking is needed.

5.2.2 Governance

Disasters should be seen as a governance issue. It is generally agreed that national governments should be the main actors in risk reduction. They have a duty to ensure the safety of their citizens. Only governments are likely to have the resources and capacity to undertake large-scale multi-disciplinary initiatives, and a mandate to direct or coordinate the work of others. Governments also create the policy and legislative frameworks within which risk reduction can be accomplished.

In practice, governments may lack capacity and resources, especially in developing countries, but attitude and management are often the root problems: failure to recognise the importance of hazards and vulnerability to national development, coupled with short-sighted planning and inadequate organisation.

Governments are not monolithic. They are divided by function, hierarchy and politics, all of which can work against sustained risk management. In most countries, a large number of government agencies have a legitimate role in disaster management. Simply coordinating these may be a major task. In many disaster management systems, integration between higher and lower levels is weak. Case Study 5.2 illustrates some of these issues.

The 1995–97 volcanic eruptions on the Caribbean island of Montserrat illustrate some of the problems of governance that disasters can bring to light. Failure to plan and prepare for a volcanic emergency meant that officials could only respond to events, not anticipate them. For nearly two years 'wait and see' was the approach taken, until the island's main town was partly destroyed by the volcano in 1997. Effective disaster management was also hindered by a complex government system. As a British Overseas Territory, Montserrat has its own government, but also a governor appointed by Britain. The UK government became increasingly involved in managing the emergency, and there was added bureaucratic complexity in having three major UK government departments involved.[4]

Cuba's management of Hurricane Michelle in November 2001 offers a complete contrast. The hurricane made landfall with winds of 216km/hour, causing heavy damage in five provinces. More than 22,000 homes were damaged and 2,800 destroyed, yet only five deaths were reported. Some 700,000 people

Case Study 5.2
Institutional barriers to risk reduction

Severe floods and landslides in 1988 left over 18,000 people homeless and caused extensive infrastructural damage to the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro. In their wake, the World Bank supported a flood reconstruction and prevention project. The project's central goal was to strengthen the Rio metropolitan region's institutional and financial capacity to manage appropriate urban development and environmental planning.

From the start, the project faced a major problem of institutional weakness. Responsibilities were distributed between so many local agencies that coordination was almost impossible. Bank staff found it difficult to clarify and understand the roles of each institution and level of government. There was political rivalry between government institutions at federal, state and municipal levels. Numerous managerial changes in the government financial agency co-financing the project in the two years after the disaster contributed to an 18-month delay. The project was able to move ahead, but the institutional difficulties impeded progress.

In La Paz, the Bolivian capital, another World Bank urban development and disaster mitigation project in the late 1980s also found weak municipal administration to be a problem. A comprehensive scheme of measures was proposed, including structural measures to control floods and landslides and non-structural measures to build local institutional capacity. However, implementation was held up for several reasons, including frequent changes in the municipal administration. Protracted technical discussions delayed moves to improve the system for collecting public revenues, which was essential for the project's sustainability.

M. Munasinghe et al., 'Case Study: Rio Flood Reconstruction and Prevention Project', and A. Kreimer and M. Preece, 'Case Study: La Paz Municipal Development Project', in Kreimer and Munasinghe (eds), *Managing Natural Disasters and the Environment* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 1991), pp. 28–35.

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(out of a population of 11m) were evacuated. In Havana, electricity was turned off to avoid deaths or injuries from electrocution, and the water supply was suspended in case of contamination. The two million inhabitants of Havana were advised to store water and food, and it seems that most did so. Citizens

also helped to tie loose roofing down and to clear away debris that might be dangerous if picked up by strong winds. The success of these arrangements was due to an effective warning and communication system, memory of previous disasters (encouraged by the authorities), the ability to mobilise people at neighbourhood level, and the general population's trust in official warnings and advice.[5]

Government policies are often a major contributor to people's vulnerability to hazards. Disaster management efforts by one branch of government, such as civil defence, may be undermined by the general thrust of economic, social or environmental policies. The value of establishing tropical cyclone early-warning systems and building shelters, for example, is seriously reduced if coasts are being stripped of natural defences such as mangrove forests in order to build commercial shrimp farms encouraged by export-driven economic programmes.

At a more immediate level, disaster management can become subject to political forces. Casualty and damage figures are often used by political parties for their own purposes. For example, when Hurricane Georges struck the Dominican Republic in September 1998, the government consistently reported a relatively low number of deaths, while the opposition-controlled congress alleged that five times that number had been killed. The opposition used a high death toll to make the government look inept or uncaring, while the government's political interests led it to downplay the disaster's impact.[6] In other situations, governments may exaggerate the human and economic casualties in the hope of attracting more international aid. Disaster management structures may also be shaped by political motives (see Case Study 16.1, page 292).

Such problems are researched and written about by academics. Because their linkages to NGOs and other operational agencies tend to be weak, this has not generally been translated into more effective lobbying for greater policy coherence and the depoliticisation of disaster management. The humanitarian aid arena, where fundamental issues of impartiality and non-interference are publicly debated, is a notable exception to this.

5.2.3 Decentralisation

Over the past 10–15 years, many governments in developing countries have progressively decentralised a range of their responsibilities from national to local levels. This has had both positive and negative consequences for risk reduction.

On the positive side, decentralisation has changed the ways in which communities and local NGOs interact with state institutions. In some places, there are

more partnerships between the public and NGO sectors aiming to strengthen local capacities. Being closer to the communities involved, staff in local organisations of all kinds are more likely to understand or even share their needs. In some places, local government institutions may be less politicised than those of central government.

There is no standard mechanism for partnerships between local government and civil society organisations in this area – this subject deserves much more study. But it is obvious that it takes time and effort to build up levels of trust and cooperation to the point where they can significantly improve capacity to manage real disasters, as opposed to everyday emergencies. Examples of different kinds of collaboration that appear to have had some effect are given in the following paragraphs and Case Study 5.3.

In the Philippines, which underwent extensive decentralisation in 1991, a national NGO, the Corporate Network for Disaster Response, has since 1997 been helping Local Government Units (LGUs) to institutionalise mitigation in their development strategies. An evaluation in 2000 suggested that this work had had some effect, shown in changes in LGUs' outlook and practice, the reorganisation of local disaster coordination councils, the allocation of resources for mitigation and preparedness, and issuing of supportive legislation.[7] More generally in the Philippines, there are signs of growing collaboration between government and civil society in local-level disaster management since the fall of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986.[8]

Researchers in Nicaragua found 'creative and surprising alliances' being forged between overstretched municipal authorities and NGOs to deal with the consequences of Hurricane Mitch, despite a history of uneasy relations between the two sectors. Reasons for these alliances included the fact that municipalities were under great financial strain, unable to manage their ordinary costs with their own resources, let alone manage an emergency. Leadership assumed by mayors and municipal authorities – in the absence of national agencies and formally established arrangements – turned out to be an important factor during the Mitch emergency and subsequent rehabilitation work. Cutbacks in state funding which had led to job losses in government disaster management institutions proved to be a gain to Nicaraguan NGOs, which took on ex-government staff experienced in disaster preparedness and equipped with the skills to deal with the bureaucracy.[9]

Decentralisation can also undermine risk reduction efforts. Central governments without financial resources may simply abdicate their responsibilities, leaving local government and NGOs to take on the task of managing disasters,

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Case Study 5.3
NGO–local government collaboration to prevent a public health disaster

The Bolgatanga, Bawku West and Bawku East districts in northern Ghana are prone to outbreaks of cerebro-spinal meningitis. In 1997 9,331 cases were officially reported, of whom 861 died. The outbreak was considered a normal seasonal occurrence, and no emergency plans had been made in advance.

The NGO ActionAid Ghana and the three District Assemblies (the main local government units) recognised that something should be done to deal with the problem. The first stage was to organise a workshop for all stakeholders in emergency management: government departments and agencies responsible for fire, forestry, social welfare, community development, cooperatives, water and sanitation, civic education, disaster management, health, food and agriculture, minerals, environmental protection, national mobilisation and town and country planning.

The workshop was facilitated by ActionAid Ghana. Its main objectives were:

- To harmonise the agencies' contingency plans into one workable plan that District Assemblies could implement.
- To achieve clearer definition of an 'emergency' and develop indicators.
- To improve collaboration.
- To strengthen the District Assemblies' capacity (and that of their decentralised departments and communities) to prevent and manage emergencies.

The emergency contingency plan that came out of the workshop included a range of measures. A public awareness component broadcast songs, plays and stories on local radio stations, advising people how to avoid contracting cerebro-spinal meningitis and what to do when there was an outbreak.

Immunisation was intensified and carried out earlier in the year, before the season when outbreaks were likely to occur. The District Assemblies and local NGOs supported the immunisation by providing staff, vehicles and fuel. The Ministry of Health trained community health workers and volunteers to give first aid to victims and transport them to health facilities.

(continued)

Case Study 5.3 *(continued)*

All government departments and NGOs involved in the programme included awareness-raising as part of their community development work. In particular, they sought to strengthen community-based surveillance through training in monitoring and reporting outbreaks. Coordinating bodies with responsibility for all emergency-related issues were appointed in each district. There were regular emergency review meetings. The District Assemblies channelled part of their funding into financing the plan's activities. During the following three years, there were only 75 reported cases of cerebro-spinal meningitis and only six deaths. The contingency planning process was also generally reckoned to have strengthened working relations between the agencies involved.

'Emergencies Impact Assessment Study: Case Studies for Ghana', unpublished paper (London: ActionAid, undated).

even though they often lack the skills and finances to do so. Communities do not necessarily lower their expectations of local government to reflect this. They may continue to expect it to undertake structural mitigation measures, such as building dykes and embankments, just as they expected national government to do so.

Another fundamental, but less visible, weakness of decentralisation is that it puts responsibility for implementation on those who can only address local-level causes of vulnerability. Local government does not have the jurisdiction or political power to address the deeper political, social and economic forces that put people at risk. Under local government direction, disaster reduction can easily become fragmented into a series of small-scale initiatives, focusing on individual hazard events and artificially separated from the surrounding vulnerability context.[10]

5.2.4 Widening civil society participation

Conventional NGOs (local, national and international) feature in many disaster reduction plans. Yet often they are regarded as minor players, especially in countries whose governments remain hesitant to concede authority and resources to civil society. They have also found it hard at times to gain acceptance internationally. For example, the UN's International Decade for Natural

Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) in the 1990s was dominated by well-established networks of scientists and engineers, and by governments and the large international agencies. It had little or no impact on the NGO community, at least in some parts of the world.[11]

Governments do not always welcome the growth of civil society and resist any expansion of its role, especially where this involves criticism of government policies or practice. Disasters can open up opportunities for civil society organisations to take on a greater role, but governments may take firm steps to close these down thereafter (see Case Study 5.4). Under authoritarian regimes, more repressive measures may be taken (see Case Study 6.7, page 100).

Other civil society organisations that are perhaps not normally thought of as NGOs should also be brought into risk planning. Examples include the following (partnerships with grass-roots groups are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8):

- Trade unions are already active in promoting health and safety in the workplace. They have organisational skills and mass membership that could be mobilised to tackle hazards and vulnerability more generally. This potential has not been explored.
- Religious institutions and faith-based groups have traditions of supporting the needy and disaster victims. At times of famine in India, for instance, Hindu temples have provided grain for the hungry. Local faith organisations with established congregations and membership affiliations are often a source of volunteers and sometimes of leaders in emergencies, but there is a danger that such groups will favour people of their own religion (as sometimes alleged in the distribution of relief aid), and members of minority religions are among the more vulnerable groups in some societies. Little is known about the activities and capacities of faith-based groups overall, but given the extensive grass-roots outreach of such groups in many societies it is reasonable to assume that they could play a role in risk reduction.
- For many years in the US, amateur radio operators have been valuable in providing communications channels for emergency services during and after disasters. More than 80,000 operators have formally registered their availability to support local and state government in this way. Indian amateur radio operators played a role after the October 1999 cyclone in Orissa, when conventional communications channels broke down.[12] Such groups should be included more systematically in disaster preparedness plans.
- Universities and other research institutions are already improving understanding of hazards, vulnerability and disaster management. Academic networks and publications constitute well-established and effective channels for sharing knowledge between researchers. International networking

Case Study 5.4
Civil society and the state after disaster

In August 1999, an earthquake dev-
astated the Marmara region of
Turkey: over 17,000 lives were lost
and an estimated 100,000 houses
and 16,000 businesses destroyed or
severely damaged.

The scale of the disaster put enor-
mous pressure on emergency man-
agement systems. In the first weeks
after the earthquake, state institu-
tions were ineffective and civil society
organisations filled the gap. The gov-
ernment's clear inability to respond
adequately drew sharp criticism from
the media, some NGOs and those
affected. The media also focused on
government corruption as a factor
contributing to the disaster.

However, in the months that followed,
central authorities regained control
and there was a shift in attitude
towards civil society, from sponta-
neous acts of collaboration to system-
atic control and threats. Only desig-
nated state authorities and a few
state-friendly NGOs were allowed to
deliver aid to earthquake victims.
Other NGOs running tent cities for the
homeless were asked to leave the
region; if they refused, their depots for
donated goods were closed, they were
threatened with having water and
electricity supplies turned off, and
some had their bank accounts frozen.

Members of the Turkish Association
of Architects and Civil Engineers
were refused permission to inspect
destroyed and damaged buildings –
some lawyers claimed that evidence
to convict the building contractors
was being destroyed by the govern-
ment. A Turkish television channel,
Kanal 6, was closed down for a week
by the government for reports
deemed too critical of its response.

R. Jalali, 'Civil Society and the State:
Turkey after the Earthquake', *Disasters,*
vol. 26, no. 2, 2002, pp. 120–39.

and information-sharing is particularly strong among scientists and engi-
neers. If anything, the scientific and engineering community, with its haz-
ards-focused perspective, may have exerted too strong an influence over
disaster thinking. Social scientists have been slower to explore the sub-
ject, individually and collectively. Better interaction between researchers
and practitioners is needed across the board.

• The mass media are potentially very important partners in risk reduction
(see Chapter 11.3.2 and Case Study 11.1, page 171).

5.2.5 Networks

Many development and humanitarian practitioners have considerable experience of working with vulnerable people to protect them against hazards and help them recover from disasters. Often, this experience is neither documented nor shared. Usually this is because project staff are too busy and the institutions they work for do not give sufficient priority to organisational learning. Staff are also often ignorant of similar work in other organisations, or even in other offices of their own organisation.

Better networking – in the broadest sense of the term – is therefore essential. It improves access to, and exchange of, information and expertise. Beyond this, it can help network members to maximise their impact through the synergy that comes from partnerships and greater cooperation. The proliferation of development and emergency networks, especially at national and international levels, indicates that agencies have recognised the value of better networking. The Humanitarian Practice Network is one successful example of this.

Those working in disaster mitigation and preparedness have been slower off the mark, and the lack of effective inter-disciplinary networking remains a major stumbling-block. However, a number of significant regional and global initiatives have been established. In academic circles, the pioneering Research Committee on the Sociology of Disasters was set up in 1986 to provide a forum for academics and practitioners to share information about all aspects of disasters. During the past decade, regional networks have been established in Latin America (LA RED), South Asia (Duryog Nivaran) and Southern Africa (Peri-Peri) for the purposes of research, publication, training and advocacy, with members drawn mostly from the NGO and academic communities. A semi-formal network, the Global Alliance for Disaster Reduction, has been created by engineers, disaster managers and academics from all over the world to document and promote good practice. UN IDNDR national committees and platforms sometimes stimulated greater sharing of information, discussion and collaboration, and these forums have been maintained in some countries.

There have also been many national-level initiatives, such as the Bangladesh Disaster Forum (see Case Study 5.5) and the Community Drought Mitigation Partners Network in Zimbabwe. Local-level networks tend to focus on particular risk reduction initiatives, such as early warning or watershed management.

There has been little monitoring of the sustainability and impact of such initiatives. However, the outputs produced by many networks, the level of participation in them, their impact on thinking and policy in some cases and the

> ### Case Study 5.5
> ### A national network for disaster reduction
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> Founded in 1994, the Bangladesh Disaster Forum is a national network of 70 humanitarian and development NGOs, research institutions, government departments and independent activists working on disaster preparedness. It seeks to make agencies of all kinds more accountable to vulnerable people, and to promote more systematic, community-based approaches to disaster reduction.
>
> The Forum's work concentrates on information dissemination and capacity-building. It has developed six training modules on different aspects of preparedness; more are planned. It publishes videos, booklets, posters, leaflets and fact sheets for professionals and the public on different types of hazard and ways of dealing with them. There is also a quarterly newsletter. Situation reports are produced at times of crisis or impending disaster. Since 1997, an annual report on disasters in Bangladesh has been published.
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> Bangladesh Disaster Forum: www.disasterforum.org.

widespread support among their members and associates, are indicators of achievement.

There are many types of network and many practical challenges to networking. Common problems faced by networks include:[13]

- lack of clear objectives;
- disparity of membership;
- domination by particular organisations or interest groups;
- excessive centralisation of network administration and communications;
- lack of critical debate about achievements;
- competitiveness between participants;
- lack of resources (and in some cases donor interference); and
- the difficulty of monitoring and evaluating impact.

Disparity of membership is perhaps the most important problem in disaster reduction work, in view of the wide range of organisational and professional stakeholders. Creating a forum at which all the different viewpoints can be adequately represented has so far proved beyond the capacity of many

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disaster reduction networks, and some have struggled because of the perceived dominance of particular interest groups. It is easier to form a network around particular academic or practical disciplines (e.g. social scientists or nutritionists) or themes (e.g. arsenic in Bangladesh), but this should not be at the expense of multi-disciplinary networking, to which everyone should be encouraged to devote some of their time.

5.2.6 Private sector partnerships

There have been calls for greater private sector involvement in disaster reduction for a number of years. Business is already heavily involved commercially. Engineers, consultants, software designers, insurers, transporters and suppliers of goods and services of many kinds are among those for whom risk and disasters are business opportunities. Such commercial activity has increased in recent years.

The commercial role of the private sector in disaster management has now become a strongly contested issue, especially with regard to how far business will support broader social and humanitarian objectives. Attempts are being made to encourage commercially inspired initiatives to mitigate risks, notably the World Bank's efforts to create public–private partnerships linking insurance with mitigation. Some attempts have been made in developed countries to widen the scope of business preparedness for emergencies (known as business contingency or recovery planning) by making businesses aware that they depend on local people, resources and infrastructure, and should therefore take steps to protect these as well as their own premises.

There may be potential for corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in risk reduction at local levels. CSR has a range of meanings, but essentially it involves businesses recognising their impact on society and the environment, and acknowledging some degree of responsibility for making a more positive contribution to sustainable development. Business self-interest is rarely if ever absent from CSR thinking, but it is secondary. CSR often involves dialogue and partnerships with other stakeholders in government and society.

Research into the extent and nature of CSR in disaster reduction[14] has found that, although companies of all kinds are often keen to give cash and in-kind support to emergency relief, they are not involved in preparedness and mitigation to any great extent, especially in developing countries. Where there is activity it is usually *ad hoc* and short-term and, significantly, addresses only the immediate symptoms of need or vulnerability, not the root causes – for which business may in part be responsible.

In a number of developing countries, companies have little confidence in government or the NGO sector, preferring to act alone. Elsewhere, governments and international organisations have to persuade businesses to take part in collaborative activities. Where business takes the initiative, this usually takes the form of unilateral actions closely linked to its own activities (e.g. provision of materials or information) or interests (e.g. sponsorship of research). Business leadership and commitment are most likely to come from sectors most closely linked to issues of risk and safety: insurers, principally, but also engineers, hardware retailers, architects and telecommunications enterprises. Such firms have a large commercial stake in risk reduction and understand the problems associated with it. Business leadership appears to be influential in encouraging other businesses to join projects. Partnership-building between different sectors can take a long time.

A number of examples of CSR-inspired initiatives in risk reduction could nonetheless serve as the basis for developing strategic partnerships with business. For example, Jamaican hardware stores are said to have donated materials to encourage homeowners to fit straps to their roofs to secure them against high winds during hurricanes. In St Kitts and Nevis, a local store owner allowed the Red Cross to use one of his vacant buildings as a distribution centre for housing materials used in reconstruction after Hurricane Hugo in 1989. In the Solomon Islands, a local NGO was created in the aftermath of Cyclone Namu in 1986 to improve rural housing, principally by giving training in low-cost building techniques, for which it received technical support on a *pro bono* basis from a local firm of architects. Insurers and other firms publish and distribute information on risk reduction measures; insurance and reinsurance companies have sponsored important hazards research; and there are public–private insurance schemes in which insurance premiums are reduced if households or communities demonstrate that they have taken steps to protect their property. Business has been active in rehabilitation projects in Gujarat since the earthquake in January 2001. In the Philippines and the US, business has created NGOs to address disaster problems.

5.2.7 Military involvement in disaster reduction

This has been the subject of discussion for some years, especially with regard to military support for humanitarian work in complex emergencies. In most countries, armed forces personnel, equipment and facilities are called upon to support emergency services during major disasters. In some, they may take a leading role, especially if civil authorities are overwhelmed, as in the Dominican Republic when Hurricane Georges struck in 1998.

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Military engineers have sometimes been involved in risk reduction, usually by putting up structural mitigation measures such as embankments. In some countries, disaster management was traditionally run by the military, as in Mexico, where it had the main responsibility for disaster response until the 1985 earthquake. Many disaster management organisations originated in civil defence, while many civil protection/civil defence institutions have ongoing military links (which has led to an often uneasy relationship between disaster planners and civil defence agencies).

Civil society tends to be wary of the military's true motives for wishing to play a greater role in humanitarian and mitigation work, especially in countries where the armed forces have a history of interference in domestic policy-making. The military's 'command-and-control' approach also goes against modern risk management approaches, which stress coordination, participation and partnership.[15] However, since the military clearly does have a role to play, and considerable capacity, greater dialogue and collaboration are surely needed.

5.2.8 Regional and international collaboration

Disasters are 'shared events': they cross national boundaries and affect whole regions. A Caribbean hurricane may go on to hit Central America; an earthquake in Nepal is likely to be felt in north India; where major rivers cross national boundaries, such as those entering Bangladesh and Mozambique, floods that begin in one country can spread to others. Moreover, countries in the same region tend to face similar hazard threats, and often have similar institutional and social structures.

This creates a strong incentive for national governments to collaborate with each other, especially in sharing forecasting and warning data. There is also a role for regional and international bodies in coordination, information sharing and resourcing. Systems for sharing scientific information – particularly hydro-meteorological data for early warning – between countries are well-established and effective. However, collaboration between national governments is not yet common.

If anything, disasters are likely to raise tensions between states. The sudden release of a build-up of floodwater from dams in one country can cause severe flooding in a neighbouring state downstream. Concern is growing about the possibility of 'water wars' between states as environmental destruction, population growth and climate change combine to make water scarce in already dry regions.

Case Study 5.6
Regional response to drought in Southern Africa

Drought in 1991 triggered a major food security crisis in Southern Africa. At its height, 20m people were affected in ten countries. The crisis stimulated a concerted regional and international response that drew Southern African countries together in a complex relief effort. This cross-border collaboration would not have been possible without a number of earlier humanitarian and political measures.

The actions taken in the late 1980s to end armed conflict in the region, and moves in several countries towards democratic government from the early 1990s, were important political supports. The creation of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in 1980, to reduce economic dependence on apartheid South Africa and coordinate investment and aid, stimulated collaboration between countries. SADCC made food security a priority for regional coordination, setting up a regional early-warning unit and a centre for agricultural research. It also put great effort into improving transport and communications infrastructure and rehabilitating ports.

From late 1991, SADCC's early-warning unit, international famine early-warning systems and NGOs gathered growing evidence of drought and crop failure. The early-warning unit's vigilance and ability to work with international, bilateral and other partners was pivotal to the successful response. In June 1992, when food crisis threatened, SADCC launched a joint appeal with the UN, which provided a vital platform for attracting international attention. The appeal generated $708m in food and non-food assistance.

Between April 1992 and April 1993, 11.6m tonnes of drought-related commodities were imported and transported across Southern Africa in an operation involving nine ports, six transport corridors and 11 countries. There was an unprecedented level of communication across international borders and between different organisations. Coordination of transport and logistics also reached an unprecedented level.

A. Holloway, 'Drought Emergency, Yes ... Drought Disaster, No: Southern Africa 1991–93', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* vol. 14, no. 1, 2000, pp. 254–76.

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A lack of trust between national governments and international aid agencies can hinder collaborative preparedness efforts. One example is the reaction to warnings of the impending El Niño event in Ethiopia in 1997–98. The government of Ethiopia took the risk of erratic weather and drought caused by El Niño very seriously from an early stage, and subsequent events showed that it was right to do so. However, international donors and NGOs working in the country felt that the government's warnings of likely food shortages represented a face-saving excuse to account for earlier over-optimistic government forecasts about national food production levels, and were unwilling to take action. The resulting political impasse made adequate contingency planning impossible and, when finally overtaken by events, the international community could only respond to the food shortage through its normal relief mechanisms.[16]

5.3 Chapter summary

- Disasters are complex phenomena that can only be addressed by deploying a wide range of knowledge, skills, methods and resources. This means that risk reduction initiatives must be multi-disciplinary partnerships involving a wide range of stakeholders.
- The 'disaster community' is very diverse, and at present it is too fragmented.
- Disasters should be seen as a governance issue. National governments should be the main actors in risk reduction, but there are obstacles to this: lack of capacity and resources, short-sighted planning, inadequate organisation and political interference.
- Government policies are often a major contributor to people's vulnerability to hazards.
- Decentralisation of government has had both positive and negative consequences for risk reduction.
- Civil society has an important role to play, though it is not always welcomed. A wider range of civil society actors should be encouraged to take part in collaborative risk reduction initiatives.
- Better networking, especially inter-disciplinary networking, is needed; so too is regional collaboration, which can be very effective.
- The roles and potential of the private sector and the military are still being worked out.

Notes

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5 partnerships & stakeholders

Chapter 6
Marginalised groups

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses some of the most vulnerable groups, whose views and needs should be taken into account in risk reduction projects. It looks at four groups – people marginalised by:

- gender;
- age (the young and old);
- ethnicity or 'foreignness' (including migrants and travellers); and
- disability.

Of these, only gender has been studied in any detail, and then only recently. More research is needed, on these and other factors making particular groups vulnerable, such as political and religious affiliation.

6.2 Gender

The literature on gender and disasters has grown considerably since the mid-1990s. There are now several useful general surveys of the issues, some of which are drawn on here.[1]

6.2.1 Gender and vulnerability

The impact of disasters on women can be very different from the impact on men. In general, disasters hit women harder. One study of the cyclone that killed 138,000 people in Bangladesh in April 1991 found that mortality amongst females over ten years of age was three times as high as amongst males of the same age.[2] In the Maharashtra earthquake in India in 1993, women made up 48% of those affected, but 55% of fatalities.[3] Strategies for surviving food shortage may give priority to men over women (and to adults over children and old people) in the amount of food eaten.

Yet it is not always women who are hit hardest. Men who have to work away from the home may be more vulnerable to certain kinds of hazard: for example, deaths from cyclones are often particularly high among those who go fishing at sea.

Members of a women's farming group in Zimbabwe

Why do some disasters affect women particularly badly? In the Bangladesh example, a number of factors were probably at work. Women's physical size, strength and endurance were generally less than that of men. They may have been slowed down by clothing and children. They were probably more reluctant to venture far from their homes on their own and to be crowded into a cyclone shelter with men and strangers, and so may have delayed leaving for places of safety until it was too late. In the case of Maharashtra, female mortality rates were higher because the earthquake struck at night, when many men were sleeping outside because of the heat, but women, because of cultural constraints, slept indoors.

These are the immediate causes of women's vulnerability. The root causes lie in women's position in society. There is a heavy economic and social burden on women, especially poor women. First, they have a 'productive' role: supporting the household economically by productive work such as farming. Then they have a 'reproductive' role: carrying out a host of domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, rearing children and caring for other family members. Finally, they have a role in community tasks, such as joining with other women to ensure that scarce water supplies are shared equally.[4]

Compared to men, women's access to education, resources and income-earning opportunities is limited. Decision-making is still largely under male control, be it about the division of household labour and control of household assets, the resolution of community problems or benefiting from official development and relief programmes. In many places, traditions and cultural taboos prevent women from travelling far from their homes without their husbands. In some societies, widows are shunned.

Disasters can accentuate such vulnerabilities. During long-running crises, women's workloads may increase as they are often left in charge of house-

holds because their menfolk have to migrate in search of work. Even in rapid-onset disasters, women are expected to carry out their normal domestic tasks, but in more difficult conditions, in addition to dealing with the consequences of the disaster itself. After disasters, women's bargaining position may be weakened during competition for relief aid and other scarce resources: single women and woman-headed households are particularly likely to lose out. Relief agencies easily lose their gender sensitivity during emergencies, amid pressures to deliver aid quickly in chaotic conditions. Many relief and rehabilitation operations target male heads of households. Jobs and training in recovery projects tend to be provided mainly for men – although women are often expected to work as labourers in reconstruction.

There is evidence that increased economic and psychological stress in disaster-affected families leads to a rise in domestic violence against women. There were signs of this in Nicaragua after Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and it has been documented on many occasions in North America. It can also lead to men abandoning their families, as was widely reported in the famines in Bengal in 1943, Bangladesh in 1974 and Malawi in the 1970s.

Participatory methods of vulnerability analysis (see Chapter 4) should identify such gender issues. Special care should be taken to ensure that women's voices are heard: women are aware of their vulnerability and the forces that create it (see Case Study 6.1).

6.2.2 Building on women's capacities

Awareness of gender issues is standard in development and relief programmes – or should be: it is certainly almost impossible to obtain funding without demonstrating some awareness of these issues. Few agencies are without gender policies or stated commitments to gender equity, even if it may be difficult to put such ideals into practice.

By contrast, disaster mitigation and preparedness programmers have been slow to adopt a gender perspective, and their awareness of gender issues remains relatively limited. This is partly because gender did not feature much in disaster literature before the mid-1990s, partly because the traditional technocratic bias in many disaster management organisations has allowed little room for considering social issues, and partly because such organisations are staffed mostly by men.

Most agencies working on risk reduction pay some attention to gender issues, but often not in a systematic manner. Recognition of the different vulnerabilities of men and women is common, but there is relatively little understanding of how

Case Study 6.1

Women's analysis of their vulnerability in urban and rural Gujarat

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India helps its 220,000 members to build more secure and sustainable livelihoods. It has used a method known as Participatory Evaluation Writing (PEW), which allows women to present their views of their vulnerability to natural and man-made hazards. The aim is to find new tools for participatory evaluation and assessment by the local stakeholders – the poor – and to 'democratise' evaluation writing.

Each PEW exercise goes through a cycle:

- focus group meetings of 10–15 participants;
- joint preparation of PEW manuals;
- two- to three-day PEW sessions with 10–15 people and facilitators;
- one-day sessions to select the final material; and
- completion of the final text (edited by outsiders but agreed by PEW participants in a separate session).

PEW has been used to help poor women from urban and rural districts in Gujarat to explain the causes of their vulnerability, the strengths and weaknesses of their coping strategies and the value of external interventions. The process showed that these women had a sophisticated view of their vulnerability as the product of a variety of deprivations and emerging conditions. Consequently, their attempts to reduce vulnerability emphasised improvements in different aspects of their lives and livelihoods.

E. R. Bhatt, 'Women Victims' Views of Urban and Rural Vulnerability', in J. Twigg and M. R. Bhatt (eds), *Understanding Vulnerability: South Asian Perspectives* (London: I. T. Publications/Duryog Nivaran, 1998), pp. 12–26.

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to address this. Many interventions focus on the most visible symptoms of women's vulnerability, and fail to look at underlying problems. For instance, risk reduction programmes may seek to ensure that women take part in training courses and community volunteering schemes, but are less likely to look at ways of getting more women into leadership positions in those programmes and in their communities. It is still possible to find project plans that do not mention gender at all, even in supposedly community-based initiatives.

Women's resilience and skills in coping with crisis make up a valuable resource that is under-utilised by field agencies. Women's efforts in producing and selling goods and as wage earners are central to household livelihoods – an important point that most organisations working on disasters have yet to appreciate. More and more women are acting as heads of household where their husbands have migrated to find work elsewhere or abandoned them. They are experienced in looking after others and often take on informal disaster management roles within their communities: managing food and water supplies during drought, for instance, or looking after people who have been injured or displaced by disasters. Research in developed and developing countries suggests that, after disasters, women are much more likely to seek support from informal structures – other women and their kinship groups – than from officials. Such roles and informal structures are often invisible to outsiders.

Women also possess considerable technical knowledge and skills that can be important for disaster mitigation. They are often expert in traditional farming practices, such as soil conservation and inter-cropping, which can reduce the damage caused by drought or sudden rainfall. Many women in Africa know a great deal about traditional drought-resistant seed varieties and how to use them, and about roots, fruits and other food growing in the wild that families can turn to when crops fail. They know how to preserve food for use during the hungry season or more prolonged periods of scarcity: in Sudan, for instance, women are known to have invented 90 different dried and fermented foods, based on crops such as sorghum and millet, wild plants and meat from wild and domestic animals.[5] Women are often expert in home health care, and knowledgeable about traditional medicines. They are likely to be responsible for keeping drinking water clean, and in some societies for building and maintaining houses.

Agencies need to recognise such capacities and build upon them. This can be very effective. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, a number of successful drought mitigation programmes have drawn on women farmers' and gardeners' knowledge of how to preserve traditional drought-resistant seed varieties and grow crops from them. In many places, disaster preparedness programmes have trained women as first-aiders, building on their customary role in giving health care. However, there are both practical and 'political' challenges to ensuring that women are adequately represented in risk reduction programmes, and are reached by such programmes.

One of the most immediate practical challenges is to make sure that risk reduction measures fit with a woman's busy working day. Training courses should be held at times of the day when women are most likely to be free from domestic and other tasks. Child care facilities may be needed to encourage

attendance. In communities where women have little or no education or experience of taking part in formal group discussions, special attention to the training approach is needed.

Even where women acquire valuable knowledge and skills as a result of training, social constraints may not offer them the opportunity to use them fully. ActionAid found that giving first aid training to women living in cyclone-prone areas of Bangladesh gave them more confidence in dealing with potential crises, but there was no visible evidence that it was influencing women's position in the community, and their participation in local disaster management committees remained limited.[6] Strong cultural conservatism locally may have been an important influence.

Methods of raising awareness of risk and transmitting early warnings are other areas needing attention. Women tend to acquire a good deal of information through informal methods, such as conversations with their neighbours when working in the fields or collecting water and fodder. More formal systems for disseminating information, such as broadcasts, leaflets or public meetings, may not reach them. For instance, in parts of Africa it has been found that transmitting climate forecasts by radio suits male farmers, who can find time to listen, better than it does women. Women farmers cannot schedule a regular time to listen to the radio. They prefer information to be made available through agricultural extension officers or in schools, so that they can ask questions and discuss it.

6.2.3 Disasters and women's empowerment

The main 'political' challenge is to ensure that women's views are properly represented in project planning and implementation – before, during and after a disaster – and from this foundation to tackle both the immediate and root causes of their vulnerability. Participatory methods provide the practical tools for giving women a voice but, given that the root causes of female vulnerability are often to be found in the social structures or customs that create gender inequality, there is clearly a potential political problem in attempting to empower women, and a significant risk that initiatives may alienate men and traditional leaders.

There are many examples from development programmes of backlashes against women who have been encouraged to speak out in public: women being beaten by their husbands for spending time at community meetings instead of on housework, and older women giving younger women extra domestic chores to stop them going out to meetings or training courses. Such problems can often be overcome through discussions in advance with poten-

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Case Study 6.2
Building women's confidence

For many years, the Bangladesh Red Crescent has managed a cyclone preparedness programme which, in recent times, has taken on an increasingly community-based character. In the Cox's Bazaar district, on the coast, women have been trained to take part in local disaster preparedness committees responsible for maintaining cyclone shelters and transmitting warnings. This disaster preparedness work has been supplemented by supporting the women more widely in their everyday lives through education and training in reproductive health, organising self-help groups and running small enterprises.

As a result, women are playing a more active role in the committees. One, 40-year-old Shoba Ranishli, exemplifies the increased confidence that their involvement has given them:

women definitely have to be involved in disaster preparedness, because women can then teach other women; men are not teaching women! In general, women can transport messages better, because they have access to more people than men, like to the elderly, to other women and of course to the children … the preparation for a cyclone at the household level is our work and responsibility. Men tell what should be done at the household without taking action themselves. But women just do it, we are more practical. Am I not correct?

H. Schmuck, 'Empowering Women in Bangladesh', *FOCUS Asia/Pacific*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2001.

tial opponents such as village elders, religious leaders, husbands and mothers-in-law, although a good deal of time and persuasion may be needed.

Nevertheless, disasters, by upsetting social norms, can become opportunities for addressing deeper social problems and conflicts. As well as presenting new income-earning opportunities, women's involvement in relief and rehabilitation projects can improve their standing in the community, especially where they take on new roles and responsibilities. It can certainly boost their confidence (see Case Study 6.2).

Women's groups formed to respond to disasters can become a resource for longer-term community development, and for future risk reduction activities.

Development and emergency organisations can do much to help such groups build their capacity by giving technical, institutional, financial and moral support, provided that this is sensitive to the nature of local society and social structures.

Organisations involved in disaster recovery can also take advantage of the temporary weakening of social constraints to press for more fundamental changes in gender relationships, notably those that increase women's control over basic assets such as food, cash and property (see Case Study 6.3).

Case Study 6.3
Women's empowerment through rehabilitation

Pakistan

In 1992, Pakistan experienced severe floods. In the Punjab, 1.7m acres of land were laid waste and over 8,000 cows killed. In response, Oxfam created a new local NGO, PATTAN, to support relief and rehabilitation work. PATTAN sought to develop new institutional structures that would enable all members of the community to reduce their vulnerability, strengthening women's capacities in particular.

The steps taken included the employment of women relief workers, distribution of food by local women and registering women as heads of household to receive food for their families. Women were also involved in designing and building new houses.

Other innovations were more radical. PATTAN helped women to set up their own village organisations because they were barred from the general village organisations. Normally, this step might have met resistance, but amidst the post-flood disruption, villagers were dependent on PATTAN's support and respected its involvement.

PATTAN also introduced the concept of joint ownership of houses by husband and wife. It took many meetings with men and women before the concept was accepted. Joint ownership gave women a greater sense of security, and there were indications that it reduced domestic conflict. As a result of these initiatives, women began to take action collectively in other projects.

F. Bari, 'Turning Crisis into Capacity. Pakistan: Working with Riverine Communities', in P. Fernando and V. Fernando (eds), *South Asian Women: Facing Disasters, Securing Life* (Colombo: ITDG/Duryog Nivaran, 1997), pp. 55–60.

(continued)

Case Study 6.3 *(continued)*

India

After the earthquake in Maharashtra in September 1993, the government, with support from the World Bank, began a major house repair and strengthening programme. It aimed to reach 200,000 households in 1,300 villages.

An NGO, Swayam Shiksan Prayog (SSP), was appointed to facilitate community participation after the limitations of the programme's initially top-down approach became evident. SSP worked with local women's organisations, known as *mahila mandals*, which had not been very active in the past, but became key players in the reconstruction.

The first stage was to hold meetings with 500 *mahila mandals* and convince the women that they had a role in building – they had previously considered it a male domain. The next stage was to train groups in surveying, house design and supervising construction. They were encouraged to attend village assemblies, and taken to meet government administrators.

As a result, women took up leadership roles in their villages for the first time. They went from door to door to explain construction techniques, suggested appropriate actions (e.g. regarding house design and the choice and collective purchasing of building materials) and organised contacts between householders, engineers and masons. They negotiated support from village committees, held meetings with officials and organised visits to demonstration sites. Groups organised or facilitated the purchase of materials, and the contracting and supervision of builders. They helped communities to make applications for government grants. Problems were brought to the village assemblies for discussion.

There was opposition from men, village leaders, engineers and officials, but the women's groups worked hard to build consensus, and their effectiveness as community mobilisers won them respect. They began to take a more active role in other development initiatives, including health, education, water and sanitation, and savings and credit.

P. Gopalan, *Cementing a Future: Women's Leadership in a Reconstruction Program* (Mumbai: Swayam Shiksan Prayog, 1999), www.sspindia.org/Cementing %20a%20Future.pdf.

6.3 Age

The specific needs of old and young people are often overlooked in disaster and development programmes. Both groups are highly vulnerable. Although casualty figures in disasters are often not broken down by age group, the evidence there is indicates that they are much more likely to suffer injury or lose their lives. For instance, research after the cyclone in Bangladesh in April 1991 showed that mortality was greatest among children under ten years, and women aged over 40 (for women, mortality levels increased sharply with age, reaching 40% among the over-60s). Another study of the same event showed death rates among people under 14 and 50 or over were more than three times higher than for those aged 15–49.[7]

Young and old people also have considerable capacities, and can play valuable roles in preparedness and mitigation.

6.3.1 Older people

Recognition of the needs of older people in emergencies is growing, thanks mainly to research and advocacy by HelpAge International. Generally, however, they remain invisible and marginalised, finding it hard to obtain adequate humanitarian relief and support for economic and social recovery. Aid agencies remain largely unaware of older people's needs, or tend to treat them as passive recipients of welfare rather than active members of society.

Vulnerability and capacity

Ageing makes people more vulnerable physically. Older people are frailer and less mobile. They are more likely to suffer from long-term health problems such as heart or respiratory illness, and from physical disabilities such as poor eyesight and hearing. These physical characteristics of ageing reduce older people's capacity to take action before and during emergencies: they may, for example, be unable to keep their houses properly maintained and hence more secure against hazards; or they may be unable to escape quickly enough to higher ground or shelters when floods or hurricanes threaten.

Socio-economic forces also create vulnerability among older people. Many live alone, isolated from family and community support structures. Lack of education and conservative attitudes may limit their capacity to take independent action. Older women, for instance, may be more likely than younger ones to adhere to social or religious customs that discourage them from going far from the house on their own.

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On the other hand, older people do not lack capacities. They are economically and socially active – an important point that is usually overlooked by development and humanitarian organisations alike. They may have considerable knowledge of their environment and the hazards within it. They are more likely to have first-hand experience of previous disasters (especially those which occur infrequently, such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions), together with knowledge of relevant coping strategies: for instance, knowledge of traditional drought-resistant seed varieties or fruit, nuts and roots growing in the wild that can be eaten at times of food scarcity. In this respect, they may be better at dealing with disasters than many younger people. They may well have been community leaders or held other positions of responsibility. Older women in particular are experienced in caring for children and the sick. It is not true that older people are necessarily difficult to train or unwilling to accept new ideas, and they are often keen to play an active role in their communities.[8]

Approaches to risk reduction

Risk reduction projects need to pay much more attention to such issues. Participatory approaches (see Chapter 8) are valuable in assessing older people's vulnerabilities and capacities, and giving them a voice in disaster planning.

Relatively straightforward steps, such as making homes more secure or making plans for evacuating older people well ahead of impending floods or hurricanes, can be very effective. Nisadu, a grass-roots organisation in the Indian state of Orissa, set up a scheme in which young people looked after elders when danger threatened: 48 hours before the cyclone of October 1999, the young people helped the older ones to places of safety; there was not a single fatality when the cyclone struck.[9]

Older people's knowledge, skills and experience can be put to good use in disaster mitigation and response, even in difficult operating environments. For example, humanitarian assistance projects implemented by HelpAge International in Sudan have seen older people put in charge of assessing vulnerability and distributing food and other relief aid, and of construction of shelters and water pumps for people displaced by conflict.[10]

Because singling out older people for special attention can lead to resentment among other members of the community, projects should find ways of helping them to make a greater contribution to their families and communities. This not only brings material benefits for the older people concerned, but can also improve their status (see Case Study 6.4).

Case Study 6.4
Incorporation of older people in disaster recovery

The village of Llhate, in Mozambique's Gaza Province, was cut off by the floods of February–March 2000. Older people living in the area – 97 of them – formed an association of elders to grow food for themselves and their community. HelpAge International gave them oxen to plough the fields, as well as tools and seeds.

The help of younger people was needed to prepare and plant the fields, so the older women offered in return to help the younger ones with their household chores, such as cooking and looking after children. According to a village elder, Mrs Matusse, this had more than material benefits: 'By doing this,' she said, 'we have also avoided our older people being accused of witchcraft ... Because we are gaining the trust and respect of the young ones through our contribution and the food we are producing for the community, they are less likely to accuse and blame us when things go wrong.'

In Chokwe, another flood-affected province, HelpAge International and a local partner NGO, Vukoxa, supported a volunteer-based home visiting programme in eight villages covering older people and those who were sick or disabled. The home visitors were expected to raise awareness of ageing issues in the community, give practical support and undertake counselling.

The home visitors, who called themselves *vaingeseli* (the listeners) and included many older people, were selected by the community. They were trained to understand how ageing takes place and how it changes people's needs, to identify signs of older people's vulnerability, and to listen to, understand and record problems and methods of solving them. They were issued with bicycles to travel to villages, and received a modest gift in the form of household items such as salt, sugar and soap.

By October 2000, 35 *vaingeseli* had been trained and were caring for nearly 200 people. The project appeared to be helping to change attitudes towards older people, and there were signs that the initiative was encouraging older people to become more involved in community discussions.

HelpAge International, 'Mozambique: Restoring Older People's Livelihoods', unpublished paper, 2000.

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6.3.2 Children and young people

Although much attention has been paid to the needs of children in emergencies, especially in conflicts, less thought has been given to ways of reducing their vulnerability to potential disasters. There is relatively little coverage in disaster literature.[11]

Disaster management guidelines and manuals usually start from the position that interventions to help children are best made through the 'primary caregivers' – i.e. parents or guardians. In the literature generally, women and children are usually discussed together as a combined category of people. This is logical, for several reasons.

• First, children can be very, even totally, dependent on their parents, according to their age, strength, skills, or maturity.
• Second, their daily routines are closely linked to those of adults in the household, and particularly to their mothers' work. Even quite young children help their mothers with important domestic and productive tasks.
• Third, the capacity of groups and individuals to deal with risk is greatly boosted by previous experience of disasters, from which coping strategies are learnt or knowledge of them is reinforced. Even though children and young people may have an extensive and close knowledge of their environment, which should not be overlooked, their lack of experience puts them at a disadvantage in the event of a disaster, when they will probably rely heavily on older generations for guidance.

However, much of the written material on 'women and children' overlooks any distinctiveness that there may be in the child's position.

Vulnerability

Many factors affect children's vulnerability to hazards. Nutritional deficiencies have a significant impact on the health of infants and young children in particular, as well as on their growth. Food shortages affect the health of pregnant women and foetuses, often leading to reduced birth weight – which puts babies at greater risk of ill health. Younger children are particularly likely to suffer from protein deficiency and malnutrition at times of famine. Undernourished lactating mothers are unable to breast-feed infants properly.

Children are particularly susceptible to pollutants, such as pesticides, lead and mercury, because they absorb more in relation to their total body

weight. Air and water pollution are major causes of illness among children in developing countries.

Children's lack of physical strength and of practical skills such as being able to swim can prevent them from getting to places of safety during sudden-onset disasters. Where they spend a good deal of time in and around the home, they can be at greater risk from certain sudden-onset hazards such as earthquakes or landslides. Lack of literacy and other education limits their understanding of a potentially dangerous situation and how to prepare for or react to it. They may be in particular need of psychological or emotional support for dealing with a crisis, especially if they are on their own and cannot rely on older family members.

After a disaster, children are highly vulnerable, especially if they have lost parents or become separated from them. Emergency responses do not always recognise children's particular dietary, material and emotional needs. Abuse and exploitation of children in such events is common. Poor families whose livelihoods have been wrecked by disasters often withdraw children from school to help in income-earning activities or in rebuilding homes.

Knowledge of traditional coping strategies is fundamental to understanding children's vulnerabilities. In some cultures where drought is common, for example, women and children may be given preferential treatment when scarce food is shared, but in other cultures facing similar problems, they may not.

Other than in the area of nutrition, child-focused initiatives before disasters are rare. Preparedness and mitigation activities have tended either to be aimed at the whole community, or to concentrate on supporting mothers and carers. An example of the latter would be ensuring that women with children receive warning messages sufficiently early for them to move their families to safety.

Any intervention to support children cannot address their needs alone but must respond to those needs in the context of their family, community and culture. Agencies whose mandate is to work for children sometimes find it difficult to strike the right balance in their interventions, between concentrating on small groups of vulnerable children and more diffused targeting of communities in which those children live. Setting the balance in favour of the first approach has an impact on a needy group but reaches fewer people, while a shift towards the second reaches more people but risks spreading benefits too thinly. Tricky decisions of this kind have to be made in the light of local knowledge and experience.

The tendency to regard all children and young people as a single group should be resisted. Vulnerabilities and capacities will differ, influenced by age,

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gender, class, culture and other socio-economic factors. Identifying these differences is not easy, as so many factors are involved. A survey of a Guatemalan village hit by an earthquake in 1976, for example, showed that instead of the risk to children diminishing with age, as one would expect, the risk to the youngest child was less severe than that of the second youngest. The youngest child usually slept with its mother, who, it seemed, was able to protect it.[12]

Reducing risks to children

Some organisations involved in community-based projects give young people and children opportunities to present their own views of the risks they face. In most cases, they are encouraged to express themselves by drawing risk maps or other images of hazard and vulnerability. Children are very close to their environment and observe it acutely, so this approach can provide new insights to outsiders as well as helping to raise the children's own awareness.

For instance, drawings collected by the Palestine Red Crescent as part of its Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (described in Case Study 4.2, page 42) indicated that children were well aware of the threats facing the community, viewed disasters and their consequences as part of the broader environment, not as self-contained events, and were full of ideas for preparedness. The NGO Plan Viet Nam has drawn on children's knowledge of the local environment in designing a flood preparedness initiative.[13]

It is less clear if projects subsequently build on such activities to involve children more fully in their broader mitigation and preparedness work at community level, although this is the logical follow-up. In the US, where government agencies encourage each family to have its own disaster plan, the need to explain risks to children and discuss what they should do in an emergency is recognised. In El Salvador, young people are able to take on a more substantial role through the UNICEF-supported initiative Defensorías de los Derechos de la Niñez y Adolescencia (Defenders of Children's and Adolescents' Rights), where volunteers are trained to give psycho-social support to traumatised children and adults.[14]

Institutions such as schools, child care centres and nurseries can provide a focus for child-focused mitigation activity. Such activity can take both a physical or structural form, such as strengthening school buildings, and non-structural forms such as raising awareness of hazards and risks and promoting good practice in risk reduction through the curriculum (see Chapter 11.3.7, page 180).

One consequence of the 1999 Orissa cyclone was that many schoolbooks and other teaching materials were lost. UNICEF advocates preparedness measures on the part of educators to ensure that they can resume teaching as soon as possible after an emergency. These include making sure that reserve sets of textbooks and other teaching materials are kept in safe places.[15]

In many communities, schools serve more than one purpose. They may be community meeting places and public shelters during emergencies. In parts of Bangladesh and India, cyclone shelters double as schools or community centres during normal times. Children's nurseries or kindergartens may grow food to supplement poor children's diets; their capacity to do so can be supported during times of food shortage or crisis (see Case Study 6.5).

Case Study 6.5
Greenhouses for nurseries and kindergartens

Severe flooding in 1995–96 triggered an acute food shortage in North Korea, affecting an estimated five million people.

Children's Aid Direct (CAD) supported agricultural production by nurseries and kindergartens in South Pyongan Province. These institutions had enough land for greenhouses, and all the food produced would go to the children, supplementing official rations.

During 1998, a CAD project built 254 100m² greenhouses. The frames were manufactured locally, but the high-quality plastic sheeting required had to be imported. The state seed company was persuaded to supply seeds at competitive prices, for distribution. In some places, local government contributed doors, ventilation windows and heating and irrigation systems. It was estimated that the greenhouses would be able to provide vegetables for 31,000 children in 340 nurseries, kindergartens and hospitals.

'Greenhouses for Nurseries and Kindergartens, South Pyongan, DPR Korea: Proposal'; and 'Greenhouses for Nurseries and Kindergartens, South Pyongan, DPR Korea: Final Report', Children's Aid Direct, 1998, 1999.

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6.4 Disability

People with disabilities or 'special needs' are particularly vulnerable to many kinds of natural and man-made hazard. Yet there has been surprisingly little study of this subject.

Guidance on how to protect disabled people from the threat of disasters is limited, and most of the available material relates to developed countries.[16] It is difficult to say much about good practice because it has not been documented – indeed, there may not be much to document. Disaster planning often overlooks the needs of people with disabilities, and disaster managers have limited or no contact with disabled people's groups, or organisations working on their behalf. Until further research is done, only very general guidance can be given, and even this is tentative.

Anecdotal accounts illustrate the kinds of problem faced by disabled people in developing countries during disasters. There are stories of disabled people being left to drown during the 2000 floods in Zimbabwe and Mozambique: BBC TV news showed a man with mental health problems left chained to his bed. There is one tale of disabled members of a community in India who were put on the roofs of houses during a flood, while the rest of the community evacuated. Unfortunately, the local snakes also sought safety on the same roofs.[17]

6.4.1 Disability and vulnerability

Disabilities are of many kinds, physical and mental, including impaired sight or hearing, lack of mobility, and difficulty in understanding or communicating. The extent of disability can vary considerably. The vulnerabilities arising from disability, though, are of two main kinds: physical and social.

A number of steps can be taken to deal with physical vulnerabilities. Many of these are simple and inexpensive. The first step is to identify the disabled, the nature of their disability and how this will increase their risks to known hazards. Further steps can then be taken to make them aware of the risks they face and how to deal with them, improve the security of their homes and workplaces, move them to safe places when severe hazards threaten, and attend to their specific needs after an emergency. The kinds of measure that may be required include:

- Methods for communicating risk and early warnings that are appropriate to the nature of the disability. Examples are printed material in large type or Braille for partially-sighted or blind people, sign language on television

broadcasts for the deaf, and face-to-face discussions with people who have learning difficulties or other health problems that may affect their understanding of messages. Field staff should be trained to communicate with disabled people effectively.

• Improvements to the physical environment that give greater protection and make evacuation easier. Emergency shelters should be accessible to disabled people, for instance. Homes, offices, escape routes and emergency facilities should be designed (or redesigned) with their needs in mind. Disaster preparedness plans need to appreciate that people with disabilities often require more time to make necessary preparations for an emergency and to move to a place of safety. Staff training will also be needed, in assisting disabled people and using relevant equipment.

Physical disability leads to economic and social vulnerability. Disabled people are often poor, without education, marginalised in society, misunderstood or avoided by neighbours, excluded from community structures, and either dependent on others or assumed to be so. Some specialists in disability and development issues believe that, because disabled people lack status in their communities, little effort is made by the community to save them from disasters. This problem of status is therefore a root cause of their vulnerability.

6.4.2 Supporting disabled people to reduce risk

The notion that disabled people are unable to help themselves and must be aided or directed by others is widespread, even among welfare services that work with them. Although some do indeed require considerable help, many have skills, experience and other capacities that can be utilised. Agency staff and community volunteers ought to be trained to support the independence and dignity of people with disabilities or impairments. At present, even those organisations that do try to provide special services tend to plan from the top down: *for* disabled people, but not *with* them.

Some disaster organisations in the US attempt to go beyond this directive model by encouraging the formation of 'personal support' (or 'self-help') networks: groups of people who agree to assist an individual with a disability in an emergency. These groups comprise three or more people known to the disabled person and trusted by them – family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues – who can be made aware of the person's needs, work with them to make preparations for potential disasters, and assist them during crises.[18]

This collaborative approach should be taken further. Initiatives to reduce risk must be developed in partnership with disabled people and their organisa-

Case Study 6.6
Disabled people and disaster planning

The Northridge earthquake in Los Angeles in 1994 stimulated a more participatory approach to disaster/disability planning. A group was formed calling itself 'Disabled People and Disaster Planning'. It met between 1996 and 1997 and came up with several recommendations for dealing with problems identified during and after the earthquake. These covered preparedness, management of emergency shelters, training of rescue workers, ways of assisting wheelchair users and communicating information to people with disabilities, making emergency shelters and services more accessible after a disaster, and sources of online information.

In Turkey, after the 1999 earthquakes, a non-governmental organisation set up a programme to support deaf people. A core group of deaf people were trained as disaster awareness instructors, with the plan that they should then travel the country giving training to others. By 2002, some 2,000 deaf people had been trained.

B. Wisner, 'Disability and Disaster: Victimhood and Agency in Earthquake Risk Reduction', in C. Rodrigue and E. Rovai (eds), *Earthquakes* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

tions. This would bring disaster reduction into line with modern approaches to disability and development that place greater emphasis on participation. People with disabilities are increasingly demanding that they are not simply treated as problems to be solved by planners but as part of society, and hence entitled to equal opportunities and rights.

6.5 Ethnicity and 'foreignness'

Ethnicity, caste and other aspects of 'foreignness' – groups of people perceived by their neighbours to be different, such as migrants and refugees – are generally acknowledged to be important factors in determining vulnerability. Yet there is little guidance available on how to deal with these issues; the subject is scarcely mentioned in the literature on natural disaster mitigation, although it features strongly in writing on conflict and humanitarian crises.[19]

Minorities of all kinds are often more vulnerable to hazards than majority communities. This is due to social exclusion. Dominant groups have control over resources and political power, and tend to use these to their own advantage. The needs of minority ethnic groups are likely to overlooked by decision-makers. So too are their capacities, including indigenous knowledge and coping strategies. They may even be deliberately excluded from decision-making.

The exclusion and attendant poverty of ethnic minorities may force them into settlement in dangerous locations, or to live on land of poor quality that produces little food, while language, educational and cultural barriers can restrict access to information on risk and risk avoidance. Migrants can be doubly vulnerable: as members of minority ethnic groups, they may be neglected or even persecuted; as strangers to an area they lack the knowledge and coping strategies to protect themselves.

Migrant workers may have to take on hazardous jobs where health and safety standards may be poor (especially if they are illegal or unregistered labour). For instance, when Hurricane Georges hit the Dominican Republic in September 1998, many of those swept away by floods and landslides were migrant workers from Haiti. These are a particularly marginal group in the country, living in poor housing and unsafe conditions and facing racial hostility from local people and officials. How many died nobody could say, as so many were unregistered and unable to obtain identity papers.[20]

Ethnic and political or class divisions often overlap. Ethnicity is a significant political factor in many countries, at local and national levels. Ethnic polarisation can result from development programmes that are perceived to favour one community over another. Tensions between communities often appear when aid for relief and recovery is targeted at one particular group. For example, it is common practice to give food aid, tools and household goods to those displaced by disasters, who have lost their possessions, but host communities are likely to feel that they deserve something as compensation, especially if they too have given assistance such as food and shelter.

The displacement of communities in the cause of socio-economic development – forcing them to make way for the construction of large dams, or taking over common land on which animals are grazed or food collected – has become a controversial political issue. Communities that depend heavily on natural resources are highly vulnerable to developments that affect the natural environment. Forcible displacement of ethnic groups for political reasons has been a major factor in civil wars and low-level conflicts within

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states. Both kinds of displacement can make those affected vulnerable to all kinds of external pressures. Mitigation efforts, too, can be wrecked by ethnic politics (see Case Study 6.7) and conflict.

Development and humanitarian work needs to bear such issues in mind. Basing projects on the key principles of non-discrimination and participation is essential. From this, it will be possible to identify particular vulnerabilities and develop appropriate responses.

Case Study 6.7
Ethnicity, politics and mitigation

In February 1976, an earthquake killed 22,000 people in the rural highlands of Guatemala and in squatter settlements in the capital, Guatemala City. In the highlands, NGOs including Oxfam America and World Neighbors supported community-based programmes to build safer houses. Community development and leadership training were important components of this work – indeed, it pioneered community-based approaches to disaster mitigation.

The earthquake rapidly became a political issue in Guatemala and internationally because most of its victims were the rural poor and urban squatters, whilst the middle and upper classes were left almost unscathed. The country's repressive government was unhappy about these issues being aired, and particularly about initiatives that empowered communities. A number of community workers in the capital and the countryside were murdered.

In the highlands, where the population are largely indigenous Mayan Indians, the situation worsened in the following years with disputes over the expropriation of Indian land. Tens of thousands were killed by the military in the early 1980s, and community leaders and other individuals who had been active in relief and reconstruction work after the earthquake were targeted. Many were killed by the army or fled into exile. Efforts to make communities less vulnerable physically – to earthquakes – had actually made them more vulnerable politically.

P. Blaikie, T. Cannon, I. Davis and B. Wisner, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 170–71.

In the area of warnings, one important improvement might be to make greater use of minority languages and media in order to ensure that the warnings reach minority communities. In 1985, Aboriginal people living around the town of Alice Springs in Australia were hit much harder by floods than the rest of the population, partly because the radio broadcasts that alerted local people were not on channels normally used by Aborigines.[21]

The indigenous knowledge and coping strategies of different ethnic groups can be used as a resource. Some tribal and nomadic communities may have considerable experience of coping with stress and crisis, or strong social structures that adapt well to difficult conditions.

6.6 Chapter summary

- Certain groups are particularly vulnerable to disasters: they include people marginalised by gender, age, ethnicity and disability. The root causes of their vulnerability lie in their position in society.
- The needs of such groups are often overlooked by disaster managers, and their voices are rarely heard. There should be more planning *with* them, not simply *for* them.
- Women's skills, technical knowledge and coping capacities are a valuable resource for risk reduction, which should be utilised more extensively.
- Disasters can be used as opportunities to empower women and make significant changes in gender relationships.
- Older people's knowledge and experience of previous disasters can be put to good use in risk reduction.
- Children and young people should be given more opportunities to present their views of their environment and their needs.
- Institutions such as schools and nurseries can provide a focus for a range of mitigation activities benefiting both children and the community as a whole.
- A number of simple, inexpensive steps can be taken to reduce the physical vulnerability of elderly and disabled people.
- Inclusive, non-discriminatory approaches are needed to overcome minority groups' vulnerability.

Notes

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M. Fordham, 'Challenging Boundaries: A Gender Perspective on Early Warning in Disaster and Environmental Management', paper given to the UN Division for the Advancement of Women/International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Expert Group Meeting on 'Environmental Management and the Mitigation of Natural Disasters: A Gender Perspective', Ankara, Turkey, 6–9 November 2001, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/env_manage/documents/EP5-2001Oct26.pdf; S. Kumar-Range, 'Environmental Management and Disaster Risk Reduction: A Gender Perspective', paper given to the same meeting, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/env_manage/documents/BP1-2001Nov04.pdf; A. von Kotze and A. Holloway, *Reducing Risk: Participatory Learning Activities for Disaster Mitigation in Southern Africa* (Oxford: IFRC/Oxfam, 1996); R. E. Wiest et al., *The Needs of Women in Disasters and Emergencies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Disaster Research Institute, 1994).

2   C. Bern et al., 'Risk Factors for Mortality in the Bangladesh Cyclone of 1991', *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, vol. 71, no. 1, 1993, pp. 73–78.

3   Enarson, *Gender and Natural Disasters*, p. 4.

4   C. O. N. Moser, 'Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs', *World Development*, vol. 17, no. 11, 1989, pp. 1799–1825.

5   H. Dirar, 'Traditional Fermentation Technologies and Food Policy in Africa', *Appropriate Technology*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1992, pp. 21–23.

6   *Emergencies Impact Review* (London: ActionAid, 2002), pp. 23–25.

7   Bern et al., 'Risk Factors for Mortality'; A. M. R. Chowdhury et al., 'The Bangladesh Cyclone of 1991: Why So Many People Died', *Disasters*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1993, pp. 291–303.

8   *Older People in Disasters and Humanitarian Crises: Guidelines for Best Practice* (London: HelpAge International, 2000); HelpAge International, 'Encouraging Agencies To Pay Attention to the Needs, Knowledge and Experience of Older People', *Forced Migration Review*, vol. 14, 2002, pp. 4–7

9   HelpAge International, personal communication, 2000.

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12 R. I. Glass et al., 'Earthquake Injuries Related to Housing in a Guatemalan Village', *Science*, 197(4304), 1977, pp. 638–43.

13 A. Jabry, 'Children in Disasters: After the Cameras Have Gone' (London: Plan UK, 2002), www.plan-uk.org/pdfs/Children.pdf, pp. 34–60.

14 *Family Disaster Plan*, US Federal Emergency Management Agency, www.fema.gov/rrr/talkdiz/family.shtm; *The State of the World's Children 2002* (New York: UNICEF, 2001), www.unicef.org/pubsgen/sowc02/sowc2002-eng-full.pdf, p. 66.

15 *Education in Emergencies and for Reconstruction* (New York: UNICEF, 1999), www.unicef.org/programme/education/emerg_ed.htm.

16 *Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities* (Washington DC: American National Red Cross, 1997), www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/disability.pdf; P. D. Blanck,

Disaster Mitigation for Persons with Disabilities: Fostering a New Dialogue (Washington DC: The Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies of Northwestern University, 1995), www.annenberg.nwu.edu/pubs/disada; J. C. Scott, 'Disaster Early Warning and Individuals with Special Needs', in J. Zschau and A. N. Küppers (eds), *Early Warning Systems for Natural Disaster Reduction* (Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 2003), pp. 81–83; B. Wisner, 'Disability and Disaster: Victimhood and Agency in Earthquake Risk Reduction', in C. Rodrigue and E. Rovai (eds), *Earthquakes* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

17 Beverly Ashton, Action on Disability and Development, personal communication, 2002.

18 *Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities; Assisting People with Disabilities in a Disaster*, Federal Emergency Management Agency, www.fema.gov/rrr/assistf.shtm.

19 Exceptions are P. Blaikie et al., *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 13, 19, 133–34; J. Krishnamurthy, *Strengthening the Coping Capacity of Tribal People in the Face of Natural Disasters* (Geneva: International Labour Office InFocus Programme, Crisis Response and Reconstruction, 2002).

20 M. Mowforth, *Storm Warnings: Hurricanes Georges and Mitch and the Lessons for Development* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2001), pp. 24–38; R. S. Olson et al., *The Storms of '98: Hurricanes Georges and Mitch. Impacts, Institutions' Response, and Disaster Politics in Three Countries* (Boulder, CO: Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, Special Publication 38, 2001), www.colorado.edu/hazards/sp/sp38/sp38.html.

21 Blaikie et al., *At Risk*, p. 133.

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Chapter 7
Community-level risk reduction

7.1 Introduction

This chapter forms an introduction to the chapters that follow, all of which focus to a greater or lesser extent on working with vulnerable communities. Other relevant issues that do not fit easily into those chapters are also covered here.

The choice of the phrase 'community-*level'* risk reduction is deliberate. Most community-level projects are community-based – that is, they rely on the participation of the people who will benefit – but the two terms are not synonymous. Community-level projects may offer few or no opportunities for communities to participate. Participative projects should be community-based, but are not necessarily community-level as they may cover many communities.

The main aim here is to indicate what is possible at community (or local) level, which is the level where many users of this Good Practice Review will be working. Inevitably, there is some overlap with the chapters that follow, because it is not easy to draw clear boundaries between the themes.

7.2 The value of community-level work

The importance of participative, community-based approaches is generally acknowledged in the fields of development, disaster preparedness and mitigation, and (with some qualifications) disaster relief. The rationale for participatory approaches is set out in the next chapter. For working at community/local level, further pragmatic arguments can be put forward. The principal one is that, in reality, local people and organisations are the main actors in risk reduction and disaster response.

Communities are active in risk reduction, even in the most hostile environments (see Chapter 9). When a disaster strikes, the immediate response – search and rescue, dealing with the injured, the traumatised and the homeless – is carried out almost entirely by family members, friends and neighbours. It might be many hours or days before professional emergency teams arrive. In the case of the many small-scale events triggered by natural hazards, there may be no external support. When it comes to rebuilding

homes and livelihoods, communities are again often left to their own devices. This is particularly true in countries where government capacity is limited, for whatever reason.

7.3 Operational issues and challenges

Working at community level may be essential to give protection against hazards, but it does present some important operational challenges.

7.3.1 Capacity to address bigger problems

First, how much can be accomplished on this scale? Chapter 2 discussed how the root causes of people's vulnerability can often be found in political, social and economic structures and trends at national and global levels.

Local-level activity can be dwarfed by such forces. This does not necessarily make it ineffective. The likely results of an initiative depend on the prevailing geographical, social, economic and political conditions. There are many examples of successful community-level risk reduction initiatives in this and the following chapters (and see Case Studies 7.1 and 7.2). However, project workers need to be realistic about what can be achieved locally.

7.3.2 Scaling up impact

The second challenge is related to the first. How can successful local-level initiatives be 'scaled up' so that their benefits are shared by many more poor and vulnerable groups? For development NGOs, this has been a pressing issue for many years. There are many approaches to this problem in development work, which fall under three main headings:[1]

1. *Additive strategies*, which increase the size of a programme or organisation.
2. *Multiplicative strategies*, which achieve greater impact through influence, networking, policy reform or training.
3. *Diffusive strategies,* where the spread is informal and spontaneous.

The subject has been much researched and discussed in development circles, but it has not featured in writing on disaster mitigation and preparedness, so there is little evidence showing what approaches to scaling up work best, and under what conditions.

There are, however, good examples of successful scaling up. The Bangladesh Red Crescent's Cyclone Preparedness Programme (see Case Study

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Case Study 7.1
Mobilising communities

In the mid-1980s, a Peruvian NGO, PREDES, gave technical assistance to communities affected by floods and *huaicos* (mudslides) in the Upper Rimac Valley to rebuild river defences and plan the relocation of families who had lost their houses. The defence works were built, but the relocation projects could not be implemented because people were unable to resettle on public land and could not afford to buy land.

To provide greater security a more comprehensive programme, addressing soil erosion in the upper valley and rapid urbanisation in the lower valley, was developed, while local CBOs joined together to implement a package of mitigation measures.

The results of two years' project work were a substantial strengthening of community organisation in the area, construction of a large number of local flood and *huaico* control structures that reduced immediate risks, and investment of significant central government resources in the CBO initiatives. Local CBOs gained greatly in confidence, and were thus able to negotiate more effectively with the government over resources.

A. Maskrey, *Disaster Mitigation: A Community Based Approach* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1989), pp. 47–61.

16.5, page 304) is a classic additive approach: a major agency developed a long-term initiative covering a very wide area along the country's coastline, based on thousands of community volunteers within a single overarching structure. Starting from a much smaller institutional and geographical base, the Chivi Food Security Project (Case Study 15.2, page 260), which works with smallholder farmers and gardeners in Zimbabwe, has over several years mixed additive and multiplicative strategies to achieve growth.

Significantly, both of these examples are long-term programmes that have adapted themselves repeatedly over time to maximise their outreach and effectiveness. In contrast, many mitigation and preparedness projects at community level never progress beyond the pilot or demonstration phase. Short-term projects (of three years or less) provide poor foundations for long-term growth.

Case Study 7.2
Disaster preparedness at grass-roots level

Buklod Tao (the name means 'people's unity') is a CBO with more than 190 volunteer members in a community of some 500 families close to the Marikina River in the Philippines. It was set up in 1995 to address acute environmental problems along the riverbank and in the river itself. In 1997, Buklod Tao secured funds for a seven-month environmental protection project, comprising a clean-up operation and planting fruit trees along the riverbank; environmental education; training in environmental management and advocacy; and disaster preparedness.

The disaster preparedness component of the project had two elements: training and organisation; and the purchase of equipment and materials for disaster response. Buklod Tao arranged a one-day training workshop on disaster management and preparedness to introduce the issues and share information. Three disaster management teams were created, each covering a different location, coordinated by a local emergency operations centre. Subsequently, a rescue drill was carried out to apply the newly learnt skills and test equipment.

Three fibreglass rescue boats were built. Ropes, first aid kits, megaphones and flashlights were ordered. The mould for the boats was borrowed from a parish priest, and they were made in a local workshop by one of the group's members. Buklod Tao also made arrangements with the Citizens' Disaster Response Centre (a national NGO specialising in building local capacities for disaster management and coordinating emergency response) to ensure that relief goods would be available in an emergency.

The new disaster preparedness system was tested within a few weeks of being established. When Typhoon Ibyang arrived on 18 August 1997, heavy rain fell on the area, leading to the flooding of two rivers and a night-time rescue operation. Thirty-one families were rescued by the disaster management teams and 28 families received relief goods in the form of food and water.

Disaster Preparedness at Grass-Roots Level (London: British Red Cross Society, NGO Initiatives in Risk Reduction Case Study 3, 2000), www.redcross.org.uk/riskreduction.

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7.3.3 Sustainability and external inputs

This leads to the third issue: sustainability. Community-level projects cannot be made sustainable overnight, whether one views sustainability in terms of the acquisition and application of technical skills, development of effective management systems or self-financing.

Projects that start promisingly may not maintain their progress. In Peru, a project to build flood defences in the highland town of Cuyocuyo in 1984 achieved a remarkably high level of community mobilisation in its first phase: for 30 consecutive days, 120 men and women worked eight hours a day to build a ten kilometre-long, two metre-high wall to control the local river. However, it lost impetus thereafter. Longer-term mitigation measures to prevent water run-off and erosion in the hills were not carried out, nor was maintenance of the river walls that had been built in the first phase.[2]

The issue of sustainability is often concealed by agencies' monitoring and evaluation reports, which tend to cover activities during relatively short-term funding periods rather than a project's longer-term development and impact. Much of the literature on local-level projects suffers from the same failing, and in many cases is little better than agency propaganda.

The level and nature of external inputs will change over time, but the need for such inputs may not go away. The Chivi Food Security Project shows that, even with a strongly participatory approach, it took years for community technical and managerial capacity and the ability to negotiate more effectively with other external agencies to really take root and become widespread in the project area. On a much smaller scale, the Buklod Tao example in Case Study 7.2 was supported by external inputs as it got under way, but appears to have maintained its impetus thereafter with minimal external support. This is probably because it is a community organisation addressing issues that are priorities for the community – the flood risk is one the community has to face every year.[3]

In some cases, external inputs will always be required. The Cyclone Preparedness Programme in Bangladesh, which has been running for 30 years, may be based on a volunteer army but depends equally on ongoing government and donor funding for its professional staff, equipment, the construction of shelters and other operational costs. In a recent study of local-level mitigation in Pampanga and Quezon provinces in the Philippines, it was shown that 'community organisers' (local people employed by NGOs) played an essential role in community-level training and planning, and

ensuring that risk reduction plans and measures were maintained and updated. Members of community disaster response committees acknowledged that their motivation dropped significantly when the community organisers were away: meetings were not held and activities were not carried out.[4]

7.3.4 Stakeholder relationships

A fourth important issue is that community-level activity does not take place in a vacuum. There are no neat boundaries between one community and another. Community activities take place in relation to other actors, such as the government, the private sector and civil society organisations, which must also be considered stakeholders. Many kinds of community organisation may be active, such as peasants' associations, gardeners' clubs, community kitchens, burial societies, irrigation committees and neighbourhood committees. The relationship between these different actors is dynamic, changing as a result of new knowledge and shifts in attitudes, resources and political power.

Facilitating these diverse, often complex, relationships effectively is essential for the success of any disaster reduction initiative. Considerable time, effort and diplomatic skill will be needed for this task. Supporting agencies, principally NGOs, will often have to assume the role of intermediaries, facilitating links between community-level organisations and other actors, especially national and international institutions. Their intermediary functions include assisting communication between project beneficiaries and governments, supporting participation and group formation, training and building the capacity of local organisations, channelling resources, and helping to identify and voice community needs.[5]

Professional emergency services often ignore community organisations and capacity, or resent them because they are outside their plans, systems and, above all, control. NGOs also vary greatly in the extent to which they ensure beneficiary participation within their own programmes. Some NGOs deliver services directly.

7.4 Community action planning

In the light of the experiences described above, some NGOs prefer to keep to a purely local-level planning process, based on principles of popular participation and pragmatism. Sometimes referred to as action planning, this has the following characteristics, many of them shared with PRA methods:[6]

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Case Study 7.3
Intermediaries in local-level vulnerability reduction

In recent years, the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) has begun facilitating community-driven initiatives. One of the main vehicles for this has been an Integrated Community Disaster Planning Programme (ICDPP). One ICDPP project, in the community of Tigbao on the island of Leyte, highlights some of the challenges the PNRC has faced.

The project gave training in first aid and disaster management, established a community disaster action team and implemented several structural measures (building a seawall, strengthening a river dyke, dredging and diverting a stream, and planting mangroves). The initiative required considerable coordination with communities as well as members of local government.

As an intermediary body or facilitator, the PNRC faced several challenges and constraints. It had to consider how far it should fill gaps in the disaster management systems that were not being covered by government agencies – yet this meant adopting a traditional service-delivery role. To reduce vulnerability, livelihood support initiatives were needed, but the project's agenda was limited to more conventional disaster management. Donor conditionality and the organisation's own standardised systems for project design and implementation ran counter to the flexibility required for community-based work.

In addition, other stakeholders came into the project with their own expectations of what the PNRC should do, based on its traditional roles as an auxiliary service to local government, a distributor of relief goods and a charitable organisation. Despite these problems, the PNRC did become significantly more of a facilitator of local actors and less a giver of aid.

K. Allen, 'Vulnerability Reduction and the Community-based Approach: A Philippines Study', in M. Pelling (ed.), *Natural Disasters and Development in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 170–84.

- problem-based and opportunity-driven;
- based on achievable solutions;
- participatory, encouraging rapport and partnerships;
- reliant on local knowledge and skills, and on traditional wisdom;
- does not rely on complete information;
- small-scale and community-based;
- incremental rather than comprehensive plans;
- emphasis on starting points, rather than end states;
- fast, but not rushed, approach; and
- visible, tangible outputs.

Although community action planning often involves engagement with a range of local stakeholders, there is no provision for scaling up impact, nor for advocacy to influence the policies and practices of more powerful stake-holders in government and elsewhere. But for many working at the grass-roots, with limited resources or capacity, this framework may help to guide them towards realistic initiatives that can be sustained by communities and their organisations (see, for instance, Case Study 7.4).

Box 7.1
Key features of local-level risk management

An analysis of local-level initiatives in Central America has identified six premises or basic features that should characterise local risk management:

1. It should be integrated with the management of development initiatives.
2. Its character as a process, not a product, implies the need for local structures and institutions to drive and coordinate it.
3. Its nature is wide-ranging and integrated, addressing all of the so-called phases in the disaster cycle.
4. Linkages with ongoing develop-ments in neighbouring and surrounding areas are needed.
5. It must involve participation and local ownership, and local government has a fundamental role in the process.
6. Sustainability is crucial.

A. Lavell et al., *Local Risk Management: Some Areas Relating to the Concept and Practice* (Panama: CEPREDENAC/UNDP, forthcoming), www.cepredenac.org.

Case Study 7.4
Reducing the risk of urban fires

Delhi has attracted an ever-growing number of immigrants in the past 40 years, many of whom live in informal settlements on public land. In 1991, squatters were estimated to comprise more than 25% of the city's population.

Squatter settlements face a number of hazards, including flooding and water-logging, poor sanitary conditions and pollution. They are also vulnerable to fire. Using a variety of participatory assessment and action planning methods, a community risk reduction initiative in a squatter settlement in the riverbed of the Yamuna River worked with slum dwellers to assess their risks and vulnerabilities, and identify risk reduction measures. Fire was identified as a major concern, an action plan was prepared by the community and a fire safety task force set up.

A number of fire protection initiatives were considered in collaboration with local authorities and the fire services, but the task force finally opted for a community fire post with its own power and water supply. The fire post is the first of its kind in this area. Its planning and establishment were led by the community, and it is manned and maintained by a trained community task force. Residents built the post and are responsible for using and maintaining it.

'Our Experiments with Action Planning', unpublished paper (Delhi: Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS), undated).

The next chapter also looks at methods of working at community level and with communities.

7.5 Chapter summary

- Community-level approaches are an important element of risk manage-ment, since in reality local people and their organisations are the main actors in reducing risk and responding to disasters.
- Working at community and local levels presents significant challenges, including how far it can address supra-local problems, how to scale up impact, and how to ensure sustainability.

- Local activities take place in relation to a range of stakeholders, within and beyond the community. Supporting agencies must often assume the role of facilitators and intermediaries.

Notes

1   M. Edwards and D. Hulme, 'Scaling-up the Developmental Impact of NGOs: Concepts and Experiences', in Edwards and Hulme (eds), *Making a Difference: NGOs and Development in a Changing World* (London: Save the Children Fund/Earthscan, 1992), pp. 13–27.

2   A. Maskrey, *Disaster Mitigation: A Community Based Approach* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1989), pp. 63–68.

3   Zenaida Delica, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, personal communication, 2002.

4   I. Brémaud, 'Disaster Risk Management: An Opportunity for Sustainable Development? Perspectives and Limits in Two Provinces of the Philippines', MSc dissertation, Coventry University, 2002, pp. 63–64, 86, 91, 104–105.

5   *Participation and Intermediary NGOs* (Washington DC: The World Bank Environment Department, Dissemination Note 22, undated), wwwesd.worldbank.org/html/esd/env/publicat/dnotes/ dn220695.htm; Maskrey, *Disaster Mitigation*, pp. 91–99.

6   N. Hamdi, 'Action Planning Theory: Characteristics, Techniques, Process', *Open House International,* vol. 24, no. 3, 1999, pp. 5–15.

7 community-level
risk reduction