

National or community based DRR?

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is a strategy for reducing the risks of natural hazards through preventive measures that limit as far as possible the impact of foreseeable disasters on individuals, communities and governments. Most concretely, DRR programs assist communities facing such threats to better prepare for catastrophes before they occur.

Children taught in school to recognize the warning signs of impending tsunamis were able to raise the alert when the first signals of the catastrophe were detected – and through their knowledge, saved the lives of hundreds of others along Asia's coastline during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. The school curriculum which integrated awareness of the risks linked to tsunamis is one example of a DRR activity supported at the national level. Children using the knowledge to raise the alarm is in turn the perfect example of DRR at work—communities using skills to prevent fatalities.

This is why at the JTI Foundation, we provide considerable support to DRR projects, which we believe address risks over the longer term, and embed disaster prevention mechanisms at many levels in society – resulting in communities more resilient to future threats.

This newsletter highlights two contrasting but complementary approaches to DRR from the perspective of two new partners. Habitat for Humanity Romania is currently implementing a 'bottom-up' Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) program in the flood-damaged Romanian village of Cudalbi.

In contrast, the Disaster Risk Management Unit (DRM Unit) of the government of Lebanon is coordinating a 'top-down' government led, multi-stakeholder Disaster Risk Reduction initiative.



*Mario De Mezzo, National Director
Habitat for Humanity Romania*

Working with communities

The JTI Foundation began supporting Habitat for Humanity Romania's (HFHR) community-based Disaster Risk Reduction and Reconstruction (DRRR) project in Cudalbi in January 2014. The project has two main phases: first, a reconstruction program rebuilding dwellings damaged by 2013 floods; and second, a prevention and preparedness phase of community-based DRR initiatives. Mario talks about the key aspects of his organization's CBDRR project in Cudalbi.

Could you explain the project's context?

In September 2013, severe floods affected 18 communities from Galati County. Cudalbi was the worst affected in the area, with almost 500 houses flooded.

How do you develop CBDRR initiatives? And how easy are they to replicate elsewhere?

Our approach is a participatory one: external experts work closely with the local community to assess their vulnerabilities, their capacities, and the likelihood of future disasters. And 'yes' – this kind of

approach is replicable because our focus is community-based and reliant on a small team of external experts. Scalability is made possible thanks to our national-level partnership with the local Ministry in charge of emergencies.

Tell us more about the CBDRR activities you've developed for this particular project...

A number of willing community members have been chosen to form the Volunteer Emergency Service (VES) group. The members develop awareness, confidence and skills, and the whole com-



The scale of disaster in Cudalbi, June 2013

munity benefits from their self-development.

20 local beneficiaries have also been selected to receive support in the rehabilitation of their destroyed properties.

There are a number of training sessions on disaster preparedness for beneficiaries – how are they conducted?

Participants are given a profile of their community's past disasters, so that they can see what changes have occurred over time, and gain an understanding of how things may continue to change in the future.

Then, a community mapping exercise is completed to evaluate and identify potential hazards and vulnerabilities linked to individual buildings and the town as a whole. The results of this exercise are then compared to the frequency and impact of disasters, and the group identifies the most important local hazards to focus on.

Each solution is community-specific and discussed in terms of how feasible it is to implement. The group works together to create a plan for improving safety in their community, including variations for possible challenges that may arise along the way – and finally, develop a plan for monitoring their progress.

What role do national authorities play – and can community-based DRR be effective without wider government involvement?

Local authorities need to be involved in order to build ownership and a pathway for the sustainability of the measures adopted by the local community. As it happens, our project has support at a national level as a result of our partnership with the Ministry of Emergency. They will be a part of the public awareness campaign, annual plan design, and monitoring and evaluation activities.

How do you know that communities are left better prepared after a project has been completed?

Good question. After completion, a community is armed with a number of tools making it more self-reliant, and less vulnerable to the impact of disasters. First of all community will be empowered by their own Volunteer Emergency Service created and operational. They will be trained to intervene immediately in case of disaster. They will also operate under an annual plan created with Habitat for Humanity Romania experts that will include common activities with the local representative of the Ministry in charge of emergencies: quarterly community information campaigns and simulation.

Also, the 20 houses reconstructed using the Build Back Better approach will be far more resilient than their predecessors.

What impact does the JTI Foundation's support have on the realization of this project?

The JTI Foundation's support will have both a local and a far wider impact. Cudalbi's community will be empowered to cope with hazards – greatly reducing

the potential structural, economic and physiological damage that disasters pose to their homes and livelihoods. At a larger scale, JTI Foundation support will strengthen HFHR's capacity – and will create an example of best practice case for us and other NGOs to use more widely across Romania.



A beneficiary of the HFHR project shows his home in ruins

Lebanon's national effort for more resilient cities



Nathalie Zaarour, Program Manager, Lebanese Disaster Risk Management Unit

Nathalie is project manager in charge of the government led Disaster Risk Reduction initiative in Lebanon. Its activities are coordinated by the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Unit, which the JTI Foundation is supporting for a period of two years, beginning March 2014. Unlike Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction programs, government led initiatives are more complex to coordinate – as they involve many stakeholders – ranging from government ministries and municipalities, to multilateral agencies, NGOs and local communities. Nathalie highlights some of the challenges and rewards of this type of project.

How did Lebanon's DRR initiative get off the ground?

Looking back, the global endorsement and adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA*) in 2005 offered Lebanon a blueprint to plan and implement a DRR strategy – including prevention, mitigation, response and recovery. However, it wasn't until 2009 that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), with support from United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP), formulated a 'Strengthening DRM Capacities in Lebanon' project to help the government develop disaster management and corresponding risk reduction strategies.

What are the project's key objectives?

The project has five key objectives, which I'd summarize as follows: Establishing a Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Unit; Developing and implementing a national strategy and systems for DRR; Developing national and local DRM capacities; Raising public awareness of DRR; Integrating gender equality initiatives at the national and local level.

The project agreed with the JTI Foundation aims to save lives – and reduce economic dislocation caused by natural disasters – by supporting the mobilization of municipalities that have joined the United Nation's Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) global campaign 'Making Resilient Cities'.

*The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), "Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disaster" is a framework document for many countries, adopted in January 2005 by 168 states. It proposes how risks can be reduced using 5 priorities for Action (PA).

Could you highlight the some important activities for the overall success of the project?

All activities within the project are important. Nevertheless, there are priority areas which unlock other vital components. Some of these important activities are for example: the conduct of disaster risk assessments; the development of national strategies for disaster risk reduction and response plans.

Unlike CBDRR, much of your work is at the governmental level. Are the communities affected aware of the project?

Very much so. Increasing awareness remains a vital element in mitigation. Hence much of the project's work is at the local level – with larger municipalities targeting the wider population to raise awareness of safety measures before, during and after disasters. This participatory approach is vital to ensure that all stakeholders understand, disseminate and implement agreed action points.

Does international cooperation result in greater impact for nationally led DRR initiatives?

When local stakeholders and international actors work together, greater impact is a most likely outcome. Our local momentum has been accelerated as a result of collaboration with multilateral institutions including UNDP, UNISDR, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) – and most recently – the JTI Foundation.

Talking of disasters, in what ways is Lebanon vulnerable?

We're subject to a wide range of natural hazards, the greatest threat being a severe earthquake and the potentially associated tsunami. Smaller-scale disasters include floods, forest fires, landslides and droughts. Political instability in the region means Lebanon is also vulnerable to sudden influxes of refugees – such as the Syrian refugees arriving as the crisis there has escalated.

This project's cycle is two years – what do you think will be delivered?

In broad terms, both the government and the people of Lebanon at large will enjoy a greater degree of protection from the risks arising from natural hazards.

More specifically, five Lebanese municipalities will directly benefit as DRR becomes embedded and institutionalized. I believe that over the two years, most of our targets will be accomplished, and the DRM Unit will continue coordinating with numerous governmental agencies to ensure this.

What would you say have been your proudest achievements while working for the DRM Unit?

All of us are proud of our consistent efforts towards achieving our ultimate vision of making Lebanon substantially more resilient to both natural and man-made disasters.

Specific achievements I'd highlight include first, delivering a fully operational DRR Unit supporting responsible agencies. Second, participating in the 'Getting Airports Ready for Disaster' (GARD) initiative by implementing a pioneering simulation to test its communication systems – shifting its work from theoretical to practical. Third and finally, raising public awareness of DRR using a wide variety of outreach tools – including home guides, documentaries, drills, publications, TV and radio spots, an e-library – and even a puppet show.

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