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# Local voices, Global choices:

For successful disaster risk  
reduction

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A collection of case studies about  
community-centre partnerships for DRR



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**Thank you to the following organisations:**

**Christian Aid, Oxfam, Practical Action, Save the Children and Tearfund.**

**CCAPL and ELDS (Malawi), SAHAMATI (Nepal), SAC (Philippines), Mehrangez (Tajikistan), ASONOG, CASM and OCHIDIH (Honduras)**



## FOREWARD

The second Wednesday of October each year is set-aside for the International Day of Disaster Reduction. The purpose of this day is to raise awareness, internationally, of the ongoing importance of disaster risk reduction.

A year like 2008 only highlights the urgency of this need. This year will probably go down in history as a year with one of the highest numbers of victims of natural catastrophes<sup>1</sup>. The earthquake in the Chinese province of Sichuan, the cyclone in Myanmar, and another 400 natural catastrophes recorded between January and June claimed the lives of more than 150,000 people, causing above average losses of \$US 50bn. That is more deaths than in a full year since 2004, the year of the tsunami in South Asia. More recently hurricanes and floods have devastated parts of the Caribbean and the Indian state of Bihar.

The largest number of events ever recorded in one year, was 960 in 2007. Most of these were weather related and generated US\$ 82bn of losses. This year is following the same long-term trend towards more weather related catastrophes, thought to be influenced by climate change. Add to the mix the current global economic downturn and dynamic pressures such as population growth, environmental degradation, rapid urbanisation and the figures look set to get worst, rather than better.

Nearly four years into the UN Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), progress in developing countries at the local level, in terms of lives saved, people protected, and livelihoods secured has been slow. Although there have been improvements - for example new disaster risk reduction structures and policies developed in some countries - the resources deployed are simply not enough to deal with the enormity of the problem. Resources are also disproportionately distributed, therefore leaving many of the poorest and most vulnerable out of the loop.

Political will is no longer enough. If the promises of the HFA are to be realised by 2015 then there needs to be a re-evaluation of the changing risk environment and how and where resources are deployed, to ensure adequate protection for the most number of people. It is time to start listening to local voices and for different actors to come together to work collaboratively - government line ministries, municipal and district administrations, NGOs, community based organisation, community members, donors, budget managers, climate scientists, technology innovators and scientific institutions.

This report contains a number of case studies from around the world. Together with the short film project 'Local voices, global choices' they highlight what can be achieved when local voices are respected and different actors come together to form strategic partnerships to work collaboratively to reduce disaster risks.

*Sarah Moss*

**Chair - BOND Disaster Risk Reduction Group**

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<sup>1</sup> Munich Re 2008

# CONTENTS

## Local voices, global choices

1. [A problem shared is a problem halved](#)  
A case study from Malawi
2. [Resilient livelihoods, a change for the better](#)  
A case study for Nepal
3. [Science lends a helping hand](#)  
A case study from Philippines
4. [Marketing disaster risk reduction](#)  
A case study from Kenya
5. [She heard it on the radio](#)  
A case study from Afghanistan
6. [Children prove to be effective DRR activists](#)  
A case study from Mozambique
7. [Getting vocal about disaster prevention](#)  
A case study from Tajikistan
8. [Moving the goalposts and changing the law](#)  
A case study from Honduras

## A problem shared is a problem halved

### A case study from Malawi

Many communities in Malawi have experienced drought and severe food shortages, three times or more, in the last decade. Despite millions of dollars in relief aid spent during each food crisis the problem continues to repeat itself. In the past, projects have tended to focus on treating the symptoms and rebuilding the same pre-drought livelihoods rather than seeking to analyse and address the reasons why these livelihoods were not resilient. Work carried out has often been based on assumptions made by NGOs rather than community knowledge and needs.

Local organisations CCAPL and ELDS in partnership with Christian Aid were intent on breaking this cycle. They decided to take a new approach by carrying out PVCAs (Participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments) with communities in Nthalire in Chitipa (CCAPL) and in Phalombe (ELDS).

The first step was to help communities define the vision of their village through a brainstorming session. What did they want their village to look like to ensure improved and sustainable wellbeing? This question helped communities to generate various livelihoods outcomes (a vision) for their village. These livelihood outcomes were then compared to the final destination of a journey. Households then identified what stages they were towards achieving the desired destination.

Communities then brainstormed on the type of hazards they experienced and the reasons why they were vulnerable to them. In all sites, drought was prioritised as the hazard with the greatest impact on communities. Many people perceived drought to be synonymous to famine, because every time there was drought, there was a food shortage. During the

discussions, they identified that most households depend almost entirely on rain fed agriculture for food. Some households are even net-buyers because they cannot afford to produce enough food for their households. Maize crops are worst affected by drought compared to other crops such as cassava, sweet potato, millet, sorghum, banana, and mangoes. However, for most families the priority crop is maize. This over dependency on a single crop and on rain-fed agriculture, were identified as a major causes of vulnerability. Other hazards such as floods, HIV/AIDS and crop and animal disease were also identified.

Communities noted that droughts and floods are becoming more frequent. Rainfall is more erratic and the rainy season appears to be getting much later and shorter, causing long dry periods. Then when the rains *do* come, they can be very intense with excessive amounts of rain falling in a short period of time. This flooding can damage young crops. All these factors affect community well being by undermining the success of livelihoods.



*Constructing the irrigation scheme in Phalombe*

A significant element of the assessment was also to focus on capacities and resilience (positives) as much as hazards and vulnerability (negatives). Therefore, from the onset, communities started to



look at the strengths they had for reducing risks. This helped to identify opportunities to reinforce disaster resilience. For example, the assessment identified farmers in almost all sites that had previously received training on soil and water conservation technologies, compost manure making and different crop husbandry technologies. Off farm skills were also identified such as carpentry, bee keeping, pottery, basket weaving, mat making, tailoring, sewing, local baking, beer brewing, construction, etc. One suggestion was the development of community-based capacity building programmes where individuals with skills would act as local trainers. This would ultimately help people to diversify their income generation and spread risk.

A considerable effort was also made to look at structures and systems - such as family, traditional leadership structures, government, NGOs and private institutions - and the role they play in reinforcing vulnerability or resilience at local level. People noted that when maize was in short supply, private traders would often hoard grain and increase the price. They highlighted the closure of markets as a major factor in decreasing access and higher costs of food. Some people noted that where markets still exist, sometimes market officials would demand a bribe to allow people access to buy grain.

After the assessments were complete, communities developed community plans which identified a number of actions to be taken by the community to strengthen their resilience to disasters. For example Luis Mchenka from Phalombe District explains what his village decided to do.

*"The project helped us to understand risk more and motivated us to do something about it. We had the idea during the community assessment to use the spring on the mountain for irrigation as the village often suffers from drought. This will enable us to use water even when the rains don't come."*

*"The project has also motivated us to build a grain bank and put grain into it at harvest time when prices are low and access it again in the critical time of hungry season in December. It is Oct now and already some people are running low of maize so we need to do more. Hopefully when the irrigation scheme is finished we will be able to grow winter crops too, which will help fill the gap of the hungry season"*

**Luis Mchenka**

The irrigation scheme and grain banks described above were funded and supported by Christian Aid and local partner ELDS, with community members contributing their time and labour. The decision to do these activities came directly from the community and as such they met their particular needs, as described below by Christina Mukango, the vice chairperson of the Dwale Irrigation Club.

*"This is a very good project especially for women and old people who couldn't go up the hill to collect water. The women in the village use to have to walk over 2km uphill several times a day to collect water. With the piped water and irrigation we are now less fearful of drought and have more time for farming and other activities"*

**Christina Mukango**

In Nthalire, the community decided to construct an earth dam to maintain a water supply for farming in the village all year round. They formed a partnership with the local NGO, CCAPL, and the ministry of Agriculture, which has proved to be a successful collaboration.

*"By working together we were able to share knowledge and resources. The NGO provided the resources for constructing the Earth Dam and the community provided their labour. In response the Government provided technical assistance and treadle pumps"*

**Mr F Nyirongo, Ministry of Agriculture, Mzimba District**

By raising awareness at community level and facilitating discussion between communities and local government

structures, people can be empowered to take action to reduce risks. There is much communities can achieve by taking simple steps themselves, but there are also things which may require external assistance, in the form of funding, technical or legal support. Starting with community-based assessments, which create space for local voices, ensures that both problems and appropriate solutions can be identified.

## Lessons

- Assumptions made by NGOs, government and other external institutions can often be inaccurate and lead to inappropriate, ill-conceived projects
- The people best placed to define and address problems at community level are the community themselves with external assistance only required for certain activities

## Resilient livelihoods, a change for the better

### A case study from Nepal

The community of Kritipur in the Devchuli hills in Nawalparasi District of Nepal frequently experiences the impacts of climate change and natural hazards. They suffer erratic rainfall, extended periods of drought and more frequent landslides due to deforestation, slash and burn agriculture and intense rain. A project was initiated to help communities to increase their resilience to both foreseeable and unforeseen hazard events by increasing their livelihood options and means of self-protection.

Practical Action Nepal in partnership with SAHAMATI, a local NGO, raised awareness about the causes and affects of natural disasters with the local community (population 1036). The Village Development Committee played a key role in mobilising the community and the District authorities were involved in

the initial consultation phase and throughout the project.

Community members participated in the initial vulnerability and capacity analysis and formulated community action plans. These plans were designed to increase household incomes, whilst reducing their vulnerability to disaster risks.

Participants decided to reduce their dependence on 'slash and burn' agriculture and introduced new crops and farming techniques such as irrigated terraces, fertilised with home-made compost. Fruit and other trees were planted to re-forest bare slopes and prevent landslides. A farming field school was established, linked to the local agriculture advisory service. The District Advisory Officers provided Training in land conservation, agriculture, horticulture and livestock management.

For the first time in their lives, the community is now producing vegetables for both consumption and sale. The health, income and nutritional status of the community are showing signs of improvement and their vulnerability to disasters has been reduced through the less risky land management practices. The Community cohesion created by the project has led to other initiatives such as the installation of an irrigation canal from a natural spring.



*Bal Bahadur sells tomatoes for the first time*

The success of the project relied on strategic partnerships being developed

between Practical Action, SAHAMATI, local service providers and the Nawalparasi District Development and Disaster Management Committees. The community contributed their time and labour and funded a small part of the irrigation system. Practical Action and DFID funded some of the larger project costs and local service providers and officials contributed their skills and knowledge. Together with similar projects in neighbouring communities, this project has resulted in the District Development Committee requesting Practical Action to facilitate plans for all the Village Development Committees in Nawalparasi District.

The evident benefits to peoples' livelihoods are a result of local people being able to make informed decisions about their lives and livelihoods. Engaging the community in the situational analysis and development of plans has ensured their voices are listened to and subsequently their ownership of the initiatives. Downstream communities have also benefited from the impact of more sustainable upstream land management and important links have been established between up-stream and down-stream communities. The future for these communities is now more hopefully and sustainable. Local Government Officials are keen to see the lessons learned replicated in other villages.

## Lessons

- It is important to involve all sections of the community from the onset and to facilitate the community to carry out their own vulnerability and capacity analysis and subsequent planning.
- Similarly, involve local government and service providers from an early stage so that they can share in the learning and hopefully embrace some of the responsibility to protect communities

- A lack of knowledge or poor access to technologies are often the major constraints to development. People are hungry for knowledge. Capacity building and training are relatively inexpensive inputs.

## Science lends a helping hand

### A case study from Philippines

Disaster can force change onto communities. Late November, in 2004, the provinces of Aurora and Quezon in the Philippines were devastated by widespread flash floods and mudflows brought about by four consecutive typhoons, including two super typhoons. More than 80 per cent of the rice fields were destroyed and contaminated with silt, thus changing the agricultural landscape. As a result the main source of income in the area - lowland rice - could no longer be cultivated. The cost of removing the silt from such an extensive area was far too expensive and so the community needed to find an alternative and requested support to help them do this.

Christian Aid's partner - Social Action Centre (SAC) helped the affected community to establish partnerships with PCARRD (Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development), UPLB (University of the Philippines Los Banos) and STARRDEC (a consortium of government agencies and academic institutions) to help the community adapt to the new context. They established farmer-managed demonstration sites in the villages where seed and land adaptability testing was carried out in order to select the best crops to grow in the changed soil.

Through this work SAC and its partner institutions were able to assist the communities to find new and more sustainable uses for their land. They identified the most suitable varieties of



corn, up land rice (palay dalatan), and vegetable that could be cultivated in the altered soil caused by landslides. In addition, the communities learnt about sustainable agricultural methods. Adopting these significantly reduced their dependency on artificial fertilizers and pesticides and this radically decreased the cost of production.

Throughout the project the communities became more aware of how their actions, were exacerbating natural hazards leading to disasters. For example deforestation practices leading to landslides in the event of intense rainfall. As a result they are now talking about risk reduction and taking action to reduce these man-made risks.

## Lessons

- Developing new partnerships with science/expert organisations can result in innovative solutions that avoid costly and input-intensive approaches and instead develop locally appropriate technologies
- Investing heavily in peoples understanding and skills can encourage self induced changes in behavior and better ownership of innovations
- There is often a large gap between scientific knowledge and local farmers practice. Bridging this knowledge gap is crucial to communities being able to take informed risk reduction choices

## Marketing disaster risk reduction

### A case study from Kenya

Turkana district is one of the poorest in Kenya, with 94% of the population below the absolute poverty line and not able to meet their food needs. Since 2003 onwards, Turkana has been repeatedly classified as a humanitarian emergency with high acute malnutrition rates.

Communities' ability to cope with drought has been fundamentally weakened in recent decades. Pastoral communities traditionally move to find water and pasture during drought periods, but these coping mechanisms have been undermined by changes in demography, levels of livestock holdings and conflict, as well as the increased frequency and duration of droughts. Markets and a cash economy are poorly developed, with the majority of people operating through well-established systems of bartering.

The health of livestock declines when droughts hit, reducing animals' value. Because of grazing and water shortages, pastoralists are forced to de-stock but during these time the terms of trade are rarely in their favour. Consequently herders can lose the majority or all of their livestock and their production and asset base is decimated Being able to sell animals at a reasonable rate and in a timely manner is a key coping mechanism for pastoralists during times of drought.

In response Oxfam supported communities to build new sale yards and created and trained LMAs (Livestock Market Associations) to operate them. This provided remote pastoralists with somewhere to sell their animals at decent market prices when they needed to (especially before drought hit hard). Interventionist de-stocking of weakened animals unlikely to survive can ensure pastoralists are adequately compensated for the value of their assets. Slaughtered meat can then be distributed to people in receipt of food assistance to provide a protein-based supplement.

*'When people have lost everything, all their goats and sheep, what can they do? They have lost their livelihood. At least if we have this money from the de-stock programme we can try and keep that money to start to restock when things improve.'*

**Lokale Ekulan**

The project directly targeted four remote locations in northern Tswana. During the current drought de-stocking has targeted 40,000 animals with compensation paid to 10,000 producers.

The LMAs are assisting with veterinary services such as supporting emergency vaccination campaigns, to improve the quality of animal being sold through the market. These in turn can increase the value and resilience of livestock and improve the pastoralists' income and means of survival.

The partnership between Oxfam and the pastoralists, through the LMAs, proved to be critical in mobilising pastoralists to participate in activities such as livestock vaccination campaigns and in utilizing the sale yards. The training and support provided to LMAs, has enabled them to function independently and profitably. The LMAs have proved to be a valuable link between pastoralists and formal livestock authorities such as the District Vet Office and the District Livestock Marketing Council. They have also played a critical role in disease surveillance and have gained legitimacy from pastoralists. This has provided pastoralists with better access to information and space to discuss the issues, which affect them, a level of organisation absent before. The sale yards have become valued assets, which are now in regular use and have raised sales income for pastoralists.

The collaboration achieved by this project has improved preparedness and allowed the flexibility to react to changing circumstances quickly. For example, the early warning monitoring carried out by the LMAs with communities can initiate a shift to de-stocking if drought conditions deteriorate or re-stocking when situations improve. The project has also assisted the district administration to review its contingency plans and to develop responses, which support rather than undermine local livelihoods.

## Lessons

- The LMAs and their links to both the community and to formal authorities proved to be an effective method of early warning and early response
- This project created the opportunity for local solutions to be found in situations of drought and acute food insecurity.
- A market based solution is an innovative way of both responding to and reducing the risk of disasters



*Lokale Ekulan takes his goat to sell at the sales yard*

## She heard it on the radio A case study from Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, a country prone to earthquakes, avalanches, floods and droughts, many villages are tucked away in high mountain ranges increasing their vulnerability to disasters. Despite their remoteness 80% of the population have a radio set in their home, offering an excellent means of communication and linking communities.

In light of this, Tearfund initiated the idea of using radio programmes to spread disaster risk reduction messages to communities.

Radio programmes can often overlook women. However, the project saw the inclusion of women as vital in ensuring disaster risk reduction practices are adopted at the household level.

Radio clubs were formed in fifteen villages in the regions of Kapisa and Kandahar. Several of these were specifically formed for women. The radio clubs were provided with journalistic training and equipment. This enabled them to devise programme ideas, conduct interviews and prepare and edit programmes for broadcasting. Partnerships were developed between the community radio clubs, the government and the main radio stations. This was key to accessing good quality training and developing good programming.

Some of the programmes broadcast were educational in nature, such as informing communities of agricultural techniques they could use to protect crops from diseases, while other programmes were intended to lobby local government to give more support to disaster risk reduction. The messages were solution oriented rather than problem oriented to encourage community implementation of the ideas. Programmes were broadcast at different hours of the day to suit both women and men.

The involvement of women in the radio clubs increased the knowledge and confidence women. This translated into risk reduction behaviour being introduced at household level. Strong community ownership was built up through the radio clubs despite the voluntary aspect.

## Lessons

- Inclusion of women in DRR projects can be key to introducing DRR at the household level
- Developing partnerships with local popular media is an effective way of dissemination important life saving and risk management information to disperse communities.

## Children prove to be effective DRR activists

### A case study from Mozambique

Children are often the most affected by disasters that occur in their communities. But they are often the least empowered or informed in terms of what they can do to reduce risks. When provided with information, support and encouragement children can become powerful advocates for better community preparedness by passing on what they have learnt. This was evidenced by a project in Mozambique.

Children from 12 to 18 years from two flood prone districts in Zambezia Province, called Morrumbala and Mopeia participated in the project. The Zambezi River has been flooding more regularly over the last decade. This scenario is predicted to worsen as climate change increases the incidence of extreme weather events in southern Africa. The project aimed to promote children's learning about flood risks in Mozambique through the use of an educational game called 'The River Game' and other sensitization materials such as community brochures, a school magazine, radio slots and theatre.

### The River Game

The River Game is a board game where children have to negotiate their way along a river by rolling a dice and confronting the different hazards in front of them. These hazards relate to the difficulties they would be expected to encounter during a typical flood.

The children have to discuss the best way to negotiate these difficulties. The first person to reach the end of the river is the winner.

The game is supervised by a trained facilitator, who will prompt some reflections arising from the game and help the children to identify good and bad practice when flooding occurs

Partnerships with local community leaders, teachers, and district education authorities were key to implementing the programme, which was supported by funds from Save the Children, and contributions from UNICEF and ECHO. At the national level there was extensive collaboration with the INGC, the Government agency responsible for disaster response in Mozambique.

Providing children with the necessary information about disasters in an accessible and fun way it empowered them to become disseminators of good practice to their peers, parents and other community members.

When floods occurred in January and February of 2008, communities along the Zambezi River displayed better preparedness and response than in previous years. Although not wholly attributable to this project, this project undoubtedly contributed to raising awareness of 'risk avoiding behavior' within communities such as:

- Earlier movement of families to higher ground once floods were predicted
- Ensuring that key documents (ID cards, Social Welfare documents, birth certificates etc) were taken with them when families abandoned their homes
- Better health, hygiene and sanitation practices displayed in resettlement camps during the actual floods
- Better systems to ensure protection of children from exploitation and abuse in the wake of the emergency
- Children avoiding swollen rivers on their way to school

This project also played a part in helping to change attitudes towards the role of children in communities. The enthusiasm and engagement by children, helped to convince parents, community leaders and teachers that children are not just victims when these events occur but have an important role to play when they do.

The impact has been substantial, not just in terms of children and schools developing emergency response plans and manifesting more appropriate behavior when floods and cyclones occur, but in changing attitudes within communities as to the potential role of children as DRR activists. This was achieved by good liaison with local and national level authorities, conformity with Government policy in DRR and of course the involvement of children and teachers.

## Lessons

- DRR materials for children should not only be relevant but enjoyable. The River Game was a huge success because it taught key concepts of DRR in a way that was fun.
- The use of local radio and theatre allowed for a wider, more effective means of dissemination than more didactic messaging.
- Developing strategic partnerships with district, provincial and national level Government authorities has promoted take up and replication in other parts of the country.



*Children playing the 'river game'*

## Getting vocal about disaster prevention

### A case study from Tajikistan

In the Kalton region of Tajikistan, 'natural' disasters are common. Phenomena such as flash floods, mudslides, wild fires and drought have an

enormous impact on the lives and livelihoods of the inhabitants.

For example the villages of Kahra, Kizilnamuna and Okoltin are affected by flash floods nearly every year. These destroy the inlet channel feeding their irrigation and water supply canals. When this happens they are affected first, by flooding and then they are left without water because the canal banks are destroyed. Both can decimate their crops (wheat, tomatoes and cotton), which are very important in this area of extremely high unemployment. People living here depend heavily on agricultural to make a living. In addition, villagers have noted that the climate is changing, leading to much hotter and drier springs and summers. As such irrigation water is becoming vital for their crops to grow.

For many years the villagers themselves have tried to repair the inlet points but due to a lack of resources and technical knowledge these attempts do not last and when the next flood happens, they break.

Christian Aid's partner, an NGO called Mehrangez has been working with these communities over the past few years to raise awareness about disaster risk reduction. They have been helping community 'Mahalas' (village committees) to organise. They have worked together to identify problems and then prepare village development plans to address the problems raised. The main priority for the Mahalas of Kahra, Kizilnamuna and Okoltin was to repair the inlet channels of the water system, which was causing them so many problems.

As they did not have adequate funding and technical support, they applied to the local 'Jamaot - a local authority which looks after a cluster of villages. The Jamaot said they were unable to help as they didn't have any resources. The Mahalas then applied to the 'Hukumat' and then the Oblast Hukumat' the next levels of governance. Each time someone visited the site but said they were unable to help because of lack of resources.

Finally Mehrangez and the Mahalas decided to appeal to the national government. They prepared a letter signed by the Mahala leaders and sent this to government officials. As a result two local parliamentary representatives agreed to visit the site. Mehrangez helped the villagers to organise and lobby the parliamentarians. Following subsequent discussions, the government agreed to provide materials and technical support if the local population would agree to provide construction labour and make a financial contribution. Mehrangez agreed to fund the financial contribution and the villages agreed to provide their labour and food for the workers.

The work was carried out during February and March 2007 and the newly repaired inlet was opened on Tajik New Year, March 21st, much to the delight of villagers. The communities now feel that their livelihoods are more resilient during both flooding and dry season. The Mahalas have taken over the maintenance of the inlet channels and they have already planted trees in the area to prevent soil erosion.

Problems like this are common in Tajikistan. Since independent from the Soviet Union, a lot of infrastructural work has been allowed to fall into disrepair due to a lack of resources for maintenance and a change from centralised governance.

Mehangez stated that this project is a good example of how communities can organise and work together with government in order to reduce the risks threatening their lives and livelihoods. This is particularly pertinent now, as climate change is predicted to increase heavy rains and increase spring and summer temperatures leading to more floods and less water and soil moisture in summer.



## Lessons

- Vulnerability is often linked to the type of governance and social protection mechanisms, which exist.
- Disasters are multifaceted and as such require a multi-level, multi-sector approach. Therefore it is very important for civil society and government to learn how to work together effectively.

## Moving the goalposts and changing the law

### A case study from Honduras

In Honduras, disaster risks have increased over the past 50 years. Hurricanes and tropical storms have become more prolific in the region and have resulted in terrible loss for the people of Honduras. The three main prevailing disasters are floods, landslide and droughts, which span over the coastal plains and mountainous areas.

The more vulnerable social groups with low economic capacity have little resilience to respond to these shocks. Since 2006 Christian Aid and a network of local partner NGOs including ASONOG, CASM and OCHDIH have been implementing a project called Building disaster resilient communities (BDRC) in Honduras.

An initial scoping study highlighted the danger of disaster risk reduction falling in between the different priorities of line ministries and institutions and therefore not receiving the attention it required. Therefore a key aim of the project was to facilitate the development of strategic, multi-level partnerships between local communities, local organisations and government bodies to build an alliance for disaster reduction and to elevate DRR as a policy priority in the country.

Honduras had relatively efficient early warning systems, but in most cases

responsibilities remained unclear once the alert had been issued. Without an effective mechanism for communicating the warning, many communities did not receive warnings in sufficient time, leading to substantial loss of lives and belongings. CASM mobilised existing committees at local level (CODELs), municipal level (CODEMs) and regional level and challenged them to identify and address the problems.

A major problem defined by the committees was a lack of training and a lack of the resources and equipment, which they needed to function effectively. By providing training and strengthening these committees, communities have been able to negotiate amongst themselves and with the government for better disaster risk reduction. As a result a number of positive outcomes at the local level have been identified:

- Committees trained by the project have demonstrated effective dissemination of early warning information to communities and have organised timely evacuations.
- Communities embraced the holistic nature of the project and have evoked many changes to protect themselves from disasters such as building flood proof food stores, flood defences and changes to livelihoods practices

Whilst community action has been very effective at the local level, governments still hold the ultimate responsibility for protecting their citizens from disasters. Holding governments to account by monitoring policy formulation and budget expenditure is one way of helping people to claim their rights. Effective civil society advocacy in the BDRC project has had the following results:

- Extra funds have been elicited from municipalities for community projects.
- In Yoro the regional round table, an advocacy forum established by community-based groups and NGOs, is actively monitoring the expenditure of

the district planning commission and demanding a right to information on planning and investments in the area.

- Local development plans in the eastern region have now introduced DRR into the school curricula.
- Municipal ordinances have been issued to prevent communities from building in high-risk areas, burning or fly tipping rubbish and from de-foresting slopes

Through collaborative and organised action the project has also managed to create a space for civil society to participate at the national level in the formulation of a new Disaster Risk Management law, the SINAGER law. They have influenced some of the main clauses and wording related to disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness, and secured agreement for the national advocacy round table to be institutionalised in SINAGER, permitting representation of civil society in the main work committees.

The strategy to influence the SINAGER law was part of a three year plan that was devised by Christian Aid partner network, ASONOG, and was carried out by the regional round tables.

Benchmarks were established for each year. The first year was given to disseminating relevant information and consolidating participation of the regional tables, including disaster risk management and climate change. In the second year, each regional round table and the national round table drew up its advocacy plans. These consolidated their positions to take to the national government. The third year saw the approval of the SINAGER law by Congress.

## Lessons

- Just because disaster management structures exist, it should not be assumed that they have the resources they need to function.

- Including an advocacy component into the more standard mitigation and secure livelihoods activities has had benefits which will far outlast the end of the project
- This type of project can be a really effective way of increasing capacity at community and municipal level and can help create the right policy environment for scale-up of DRR
- Although government institutions lie beyond the direct line of intervention of NGOs the strong alliances formed by this project have directly and indirectly influenced government policy and practice which now responds better to civil society needs



*Members of Manacalito village disaster committee, Sula Valley, Honduras*



Local voices, Global choices

An interagency initiative supported by:

Action aid, British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Global Network of CSOs for DRR, International federation of the Red Cross, Oxfam, Practical Action, ProVention Consortium, Save the Children, Tearfund,

