IDENTIFYING PARTNERSHIP NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

John Twigg

j.twigg@ucl.ac.uk

Disaster Studies Working Paper 18

Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre

www.abuhrc.org

February 2009

Abstract

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 disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives must be multi-disciplinary partnerships involving a range of stakeholders. However, whilst the need for such multi-stakeholder co-operation is generally acknowledged, there is little guidance available on how to create effective DRR partnerships. This paper explores some of the theoretical and practical issues in identifying partnership needs and opportunities and promoting dialogue and collaboration. It draws on the experiences of developing the *Characteristics of a Disaster-resilient Community*, a resource for local-level DRR planning and evaluation that is currently being field-tested by a number of international and local NGOs.

1. Introduction

Two of the main challenges to making community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) effective are its sustainability and replicability (Twigg 2005). Both can be addressed through the creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships that supply the range of skills and resources needed to manage the complex problems of disasters.

The centrality of such partnerships to disaster risk reduction (DRR) in general is commonly acknowledged (UN ISDR 2005). DRR is a systematic approach to identifying, assessing and reducing the risks of disaster. It aims to reduce socio-economic vulnerabilities to disaster as well as dealing with the environmental and other hazards that trigger them. No single group or organisation can address every aspect of DRR. DRR thinking sees disasters as complex problems demanding a collective response from different disciplinary and institutional groups – in other words, partnerships.

However, the literature of DRR practice rarely undertakes a critical examination of the nature and effectiveness of partnerships or the issues involved in partnership building. This is equally true of local-level DRR studies, with occasional exceptions (e.g. Allen 2003; Wachtendorf *et al*. 2002). Where it does deal with relationships, writing on community-level initiatives tends to focus on intra-community factors or external social, economic and institutional threats, suggesting that the relationship between the community and outside actors is at worst adversarial, at best focused on advocacy for assistance or policy reform.

In many cases the implication is that NGOs and their partners are *the* driving force for local development even though, in reality, NGO work is shaped and supported by interaction with other actors, of which local government is generally the most important, even in states with weak government structures (Twigg ed. 2005). Nor do communities exist in isolation. The level of a community's resilience to disasters is also influenced by capacities outside the community, in particular by emergency management services but also by other social and administrative services, public infrastructure and a web of socio-economic and political linkages with the wider world. Virtually all communities are dependent on external service providers to some extent.

2. Characteristics of a Disaster-resilient Community

Guidance developed recently, the *Characteristics of a Disaster-resilient Community*, provides a means of identifying and assessing such partnership dimensions in local DRR initiatives. Commissioned by a group of international NGOs working in DRR (ActionAid, British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Plan International, Practical Action and Tearfund), the guidance shows what a disaster-resilient community might consist of by setting out the many different elements of resilience. It also provides some ideas about how to progress towards resilience.

A pilot version was published in 2007 (Twigg 2007) and is now being tested in the field by the commissioning agencies and many other organisations. A revised version, with additional guidance on ways of using the *Characteristics*, will be published in June 2009. The guidance note itself (in English, Spanish and Bahasa Indonesian) is available from the project's web page, together with background material and case studies of applications.[1]

The *Characteristics of a Disaster-resilient Community* guidance note is a resource, not a manual. It is designed to support processes of community mobilisation and partnership for DRR. It is not prescriptive. Users can select relevant information and ideas from it to support their field work, according to their needs and priorities. This should be the result of discussion between communities and the organisations working with them.

The guidance can be used at different stages of project cycle management, for example for baseline studies, project planning (especially in identifying indicators for logical and results-based planning frameworks), and monitoring and evaluation. It can also be linked to other tools used in DRR projects (e.g. vulnerability and capacity analysis) and used to frame research. Much of the information relates to community capacities in DRR: the guidance note may therefore be useful in assessing, planning or reviewing work that focuses on capacity-building. The findings of reviews and assessments carried out using this note may also have some value in advocacy work at local and higher levels.

---

[1] www.proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=90

3. Contents of the *Characteristics*

The main section of the guidance note is a series of tables setting out a comprehensive but not necessarily complete set of the characteristics of a disaster-resilient community. These are organised in five 'thematic areas', representing the main areas of DRR intervention, which are based on those of the Hyogo Framework for Action:

1. Governance
2. Risk assessment
3. Knowledge and education
4. Risk management and vulnerability reduction
5. Disaster preparedness and response

The thematic areas are very broad. Each one is therefore divided into a set of its main sub-themes or 'components of resilience' (Table 1). Because the scope of each thematic area varies, the number and range of components differs from one thematic area to another.

Table 1: Thematic Areas and Components of Resilience

	Thematic area	*Components of resilience*
1	*Governance*	o Policy, planning, priorities and political commitment o Legal and regulatory systems o Integration with development policies and planning o Integration with emergency response and recovery o Institutional mechanisms, capacities and structures; allocation of responsibilities o Partnerships o Accountability and community participation
2	*Risk assessment*	o Hazards/risk data and assessment o Vulnerability and impact data and assessment o Scientific and technical capacities and innovation
3	*Knowledge and education*	o Public awareness, knowledge and skills o Information management and sharing o Education and training o Cultures, attitudes, motivation o Learning and research
4	*Risk management and vulnerability reduction*	o Environmental and natural resource management o Health and well being o Sustainable livelihoods o Social protection o Financial instruments o Physical protection; structural and technical measures

		o Planning régimes
5	*Disaster preparedness and response*	o Organisational capacities and coordination o Early warning systems o Preparedness and contingency planning o Emergency resources and infrastructure o Emergency response and recovery o Participation, voluntarism, accountability

For each component of resilience, the tables provide a further breakdown, identifying a set of characteristics of a resilient community. Again, the number of characteristics varies according to the nature of the component (an example is given in Table 2, using a single component from Thematic Area 3: Knowledge and Education).

Table 2: From Components to Characteristics

Component of resilience	*Characteristics of a disaster-resilient community*
Education and training	o Local schools provide education in DRR for children through curriculum and where appropriate extra-curricular activities. o DRR/DRM and other training addresses priorities identified by community and based on community assessment of risks, vulnerabilities and associated problems. o Community members and organisations trained in relevant skills for DRR and DP (e.g. hazard-risk-vulnerability assessment, community DRM planning, search and rescue, first aid, management of emergency shelters, needs assessment, relief distribution, fire-fighting). o Householders and builders trained in safe construction and retrofitting techniques, and other practical steps to protect houses and property. o (rural) Community members skilled or trained in appropriate agricultural, land use, water management and environmental management practices. o Community experience of coping in previous events/crises, or knowledge of how this was done, used in education and training.

4. Potential for exploring DRR partnerships

The guidance note permits investigation of DRR partnership issues, both through the way it is structured conceptually and its applications.

4.1   Concepts

Two features of the *Characteristics* framework are particularly relevant to investigating the principles and components of partnership.

(i)   Governance Thematic Area

The *Characteristics* assign high importance to Governance, which is a fundamental issue in DRR (UNDP *et al*. 2005). A whole thematic area (no. 1) focuses on this, but governance is really a cross-cutting theme underlying the other thematic areas. The components and characteristics that come under this heading (see Table 3) are relevant to work under the other four themes, because they are issues likely to affect any type of DRR initiative. The list of individual characteristics shows how partnership elements run throughout the thematic area: issues such as integration of activities, shared visions, consensus, negotiation, participation, collective action, representation, inclusion, accountability, volunteerism and trust.

Table 3: Governance (Thematic Area 1): Components and Characteristics

Components of resilience	*Characteristics of a disaster-resilient community*
1. DRR policy, planning, priorities, and political commitment.	1.1 Shared vision of a prepared and resilient community. 1.2 Consensus view of risks faced, risk management approach, specific actions to be taken and targets to be met. 1.3 Vision and DRR plans informed by understanding of underlying causes of vulnerability and other factors outside community's control. 1.4 Community takes long-term perspective, focusing on outcomes and impact of DRR. 1.5 Committed, effective and accountable community leadership of DRR planning and implementation. 1.6 Community DRR (and DP) plans, developed through participatory processes, put into operation, and updated periodically.
2. Legal and regulatory systems	2.1 Community understands relevant legislation, regulations and procedures, and their importance. 2.2 Community aware of its rights and the legal obligations of government and other stakeholders to provide protection.
3. Integration with development policies and planning	3.1 Community DRR seen by all local stakeholders as integral part of plans and actions to achieve wider community goals (e.g. poverty alleviation, quality of life).
4. Integration with emergency response and recovery	4.1 Community and other local-level actors in sustainable development and DRR engage in joint planning with community and local-level emergency teams and structures.
5. Institutional mechanisms, capacities and structures; allocation of responsibilities	5.1 Representative community organisations dedicated to DRR/DRM. 5.2 Local NGOs, CBOs and communities of interest engaged with other issues capable of supporting DRR and response.

	5.3 Responsibilities, resources, etc., defined in community disaster plans. 5.4 Shared understanding among all local stakeholders regarding DRR responsibilities, authority and decision making. 5.5 Community-managed funds and other material resources for DRR and disaster recovery. 5.6 Access to government and other funding and resources for DRR and recovery.
6. Partnerships	6.1 Local stakeholders committed to genuine partnerships (with open and shared principles of collaboration, high levels of trust). 6.2 Clear, agreed and stable DRR partnerships between local stakeholder groups and organisations (communities and CBOs with local authorities, NGOs, businesses, etc.). 6.3 Processes are community-led (supported by external agencies). 6.4 Local capacity and enthusiasm to promote DRR and scale up activities (through community-external actor partnerships). 6.5 Community and local groups/organisations have capacity to recruit, train, support and motivate community volunteers for DRR, and work together to do so.
7. Accountability and community participation	7.1 Devolved DRR structures facilitate community participation. 7.2 Access to information on local government plans, structures, etc. 7.3 Trust within community and between community and external agencies. 7.4 Capacity to challenge and lobby external agencies on DRR plans, priorities, actions that may have an impact on risk. 7.5 Participatory M&E systems to assess resilience and progress in DRR. 7.6 Inclusion/representation of vulnerable groups in community decision making and management of DRR. 7.7 High level of volunteerism in DRR activities.

(ii) Enabling Environment

The *Characteristics* framework acknowledges the importance of wider institutional, policy and socio-economic factors in supporting community-level resilience. The tables identify the main elements of this 'enabling environment'[2] in relation to each component of resilience. They are less detailed than the characteristics of community resilience; many are taken from the national-

---

[2] The term 'enabling environment' is borrowed from the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute. See 'The Need for a More Nuanced View of Local Capacity and the Support Approaches of Outsiders'. *southasiadisasters.net* 2006 #18 (August), p.4, http://www.southasiadisasters.net/publication.htm

level DRR indicator frameworks developed by UN agencies in support of the Hyogo process (UN ISDR 2008; UN ISDR/UN OCHA 2008).

Table 4 illustrates how this works for one thematic area. Note that it includes local- and national-level characteristics. Elsewhere in the tables, international dimensions of the enabling environment are also sometimes included.

Table 4: The Enabling Environment (Thematic Area: Knowledge and Education)

Components of resilience	*Characteristics of an enabling environment*
1. *Public awareness, knowledge and skills*	➢ General public aware of and informed about disaster risks and how to manage them. ➢ Appropriate, high-visibility awareness-raising programmes designed and implemented at national, regional, local levels by official agencies. ➢ Media involvement in communicating risk and raising awareness of disasters and counter-disaster measures. ➢ Public communication programmes involve dialogue with stakeholders about disaster risks and related issues (not one-way information dissemination). ➢ External agencies understand communities' vulnerabilities, capacities, risks, risk perception and rationality of risk management decisions; and recognise viability of local knowledge and coping strategies. ➢ Levels of education provision, access, literacy, etc., facilitate effective information dissemination and awareness raising.
2. *Information management and sharing (more formal)*	➢ Government (national and local) is committed to information sharing (transparency) and dialogue with communities relating to information about risk and DRM. ➢ Legislation specifies right of people to be informed and obtain information about risks facing them. ➢ Common understanding among external agencies of principles, concepts, terminology, alternative approaches in DRR. ➢ Public and private information-gathering and -sharing systems on hazards, risk, disaster management resources (incl. resource centres, databases, websites, directories and inventories, good practice guidance) exist and are accessible. ➢ Active professional networks for disaster risk management (sharing scientific, technical and applied information, traditional/ local knowledge).
3. *Education and training*	➢ Inclusion of disaster reduction in relevant primary, secondary and tertiary education courses (curriculum development, provision of educational material, teacher training) nationally. ➢ Specialised vocational training courses and facilities for DRR/DRM available, at different levels and for different groups, linked through overall training strategy. Certification of training. ➢ Appropriate education and training programmes for planners and field practitioners in DRR/DRM and development sectors designed and

	implemented at national, regional, local levels. ➢ Training resources (technical, financial, material, human) made available by government, emergency services, NGOs, etc., to support local-level DRR.
4. Cultures, attitudes, motivation	➢ Political, social and cultural environment that encourages freedom of thought and expression, and stimulates inquiry and debate. ➢ Official and public acceptance of precautionary principle: need to act on incomplete information or understanding to reduce potential disaster risks.
5. Learning and research	➢ National and sub-national research capacity in hazards, risk and disaster studies (in specialist institutions or within other institutions), with adequate funding for ongoing research. ➢ Encouragement of inter-disciplinary and policy-oriented research. ➢ National, regional and international cooperation in research, science and technology development. ➢ Comprehensive agenda for scientific, technical, policy, planning and participatory research in DRR.

People who work on community resilience need to be conscious of the enabling environment and the effect it may have on their work, but they cannot be expected to analyse it in detail. An individual project will probably undertake a quick, subjective assessment of the enabling environment. However, an organisation working on a number of community projects in a particular country – e.g. a national or international NGO – may wish to carry out a more thorough assessment to inform its work or to support advocacy.

Many features of the ideal enabling environment will be missing in many cases. In some situations the lack of key components of support may be so great that it creates what may be called a 'disabling' environment for local-level initiatives. Users of the guidance note will therefore have to base their plans on realistic assessments of the type and level of external support they can expect.

4.2 Applications

Over the past few months, a large number of local, national and international organisations have been testing the *Characteristics* in their work. The principal applications have been in project design (including establishing project-specific indicators) and evaluation; others include design of research frameworks, development of more generic vulnerability and DRR indicator frameworks, teaching and training.

There are several ways in which the *Characteristics* could be used to identify, assess and stimulate partnership opportunities.

(i)   Mapping Activities and Actors in DRR

An organisation proposing to work on DRR in a particular district could carry out an initial 'mapping' or 'scoping' exercise to identify which main areas of resilience or DRR it, and other agencies, are currently addressing in that district; where the current emphasis is in their interventions; and any major gaps in coverage or missing links between DRR components. An exercise of this kind may be particularly helpful in multi-stakeholder settings by indicating gaps in agencies' collective coverage and highlighting the potential for new or stronger collaboration on specific issues.

It is extremely unlikely that a single organisation will be working in all of the relevant areas. It is probably not advisable that it should, since specific technical expertise is required in many cases. Where an organisation's own expertise lies in one particular field (e.g. disaster preparedness, livelihood support, education), it will usually want to build on its existing strengths. But a mapping or scoping exercise will enable it to consider if it should be involved, alone or in partnership, in other related aspects of DRR.

(ii)   Baselines

The *Characteristics* can be used in designing and interpreting baseline studies or vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCAs). Though such applications are not yet very numerous, existing assessments can be re-interpreted from the perspective of the *Characteristics* framework. This was done with a 'disaster risk reduction assessment' (a form of VCA) carried out by Church World Service – Pakistan/Afghanistan in a mountainous region of Pakistan. Here both the vulnerabilities and capacities identified through the field study were reframed using the five thematic areas of the *Characteristics*. Within the Governance thematic area, the main issues identified were ethnic, caste and socio-economic divisions in the community; lack of effective political structures; and weak government disaster management structures (national and local). The key capacities under this heading were community self-reliance and solidarity in crisis;

political representation of poor/marginalized groups; the custom of landlords providing help in a crisis; and external involvement in development projects (Zahur 2008).

(iii)   Monitoring and evaluation

A number of project reviews and evaluations have used the *Characteristics* as a framework or 'lens' for looking at governance and partnership dimensions of DRR. Typically, these set the current situation against the ideal state set out in the *Characteristics* and identify areas for future work, such as the need for closer integration between project activities and local governance structures. Other reviews – and baseline studies – have considered those elements of the enabling environment that are relevant to the project's aims and activities.

Some reviews guided by the *Characteristics* tables have identified expanded partnerships among those projects' achievements. For example, a review of a DRR education programme in Bangladesh referred to a wider interactive consultation process with multiple stakeholders and communities in three disaster-prone districts, with the result that people, community leaders, school teachers and local-level disaster and education managers were better informed about disaster risks and their role in managing them. Local government had also been engaged in developing and implementing the project's action plan.This is not to say that the *Characteristics* guidance has, by itself, stimulated those agencies to engage more fully in DRR partnerships, but application of the *Characteristics* has helped to throw light on this aspect of DRR,

(iv)   Research studies

It is in research that the application of the *Characteristics* to questions of partnership has been most pronounced. This is illustrated by the following examples.

As part of the mid-term review of its DFID-funded project 'Building Disaster Resilient Communities', Christian Aid undertook a series of case studies based on community and partner experience of DRR in Bangladesh, Malawi and Honduras, each case study reflecting particular project focus areas and resilience components. The *Characteristics* were used to frame specific questions for the field research and to guide interview questions. In Honduras, for example, a study of accountability and non-discrimination in flood risk management drew on the

Governance Thematic Area and the Enabling Environment (together with other material) in framing its research questions (Newborne 2008). [3]

The *Characteristics* were also used by Christian Aid to guide questions used in semi-structured interviews and group discussions for a community-level study in La Reforma, Honduras, that explored factors affecting the community's ability to increase its influence on local government. This identified the importance of strategic alliances between the community and other actors (particularly other flood-affected communities) as a driver of DRR, which led to achieving changes in their relationships with municipal authorities (Christian Aid 2009).

(v)   Generic indicator development

There is evidence of the *Characteristics* being used by others engaged in work on resilience and DRR indicators in general, just as the development of the *Characteristics* drew on other methods and writings. Such work may include governance and partnership dimensions but it is impossible to identify exact causal linkages in this free flow of ideas.

Some agencies have found the scope and number of the resilience characteristics (there are over 160) make the guidance unwieldy as a planning and assessment tool and have therefore customised it to their use by reducing it to a much smaller number of key characteristics: for example, Tearfund has developed its own 'top 20' of those most directly relevant to its work, derived from the longer guidance (Tearfund 2008). This may be useful, if done as a deliberative process, and it may also serve to highlight important partnership issues. On the other hand, given agencies' tendency to lose sight of the wider partnership dimension in their work, there is a risk that such a process of reduction may make this dimension invisible once again.

---

[3] Other recent work on accountability and participation in DRR, by the Institute for Development Studies, has also used this area of the *Characteristics* (Mitchell *et al*. 2008).

5.   Feedback and conclusions

Feedback on the use of the *Characteristics* to date has been patchy. Work is continuing on collecting evidence from user agencies and the lessons will be incorporated into the planned revision of the guidance note.

Overall, and notwithstanding the examples above, the evidence that has been gathered suggests that user agencies have not made the most of the potential of the *Characteristics* for assessing and developing multi-stakeholder partnerships. Single-agency or agency-plus-single-local-partner perspectives predominate. Wider governance issues may be identified as significant in a baseline assessment only to be left out in subsequent DRR planning: this may be a reasoned decision for the agency involved, for it will naturally wish to focus its efforts on those aspects of DRR that are best suited to its capacity and skills base, but the opportunities for seeking collective action across the DRR spectrum are missed.

Why is this so? Does it reflect an unconscious bias amongst NGO users regarding the focus of their work – a form of self-centredness? Or does it indicate that most users are not yet ready to engage with the full implications of DRR: its breadth and complexity? Perhaps most find it easiest to stick to what they do already, but to repackage it as DRR work? There were signs of concern among some organisations when their work with the *Characteristics* guidance note led them to realise the full scope of DRR. The fact that this realisation did not lead them to more serious exploration of multi-stakeholder partnerships does suggest that in some sense they may be partnership-averse, be it on account of the many practical obstacles to partnership or because of some innate resistance to the idea of collaboration. Whatever the reason, this problem needs to be addressed if we are to see sustainable community-based DRR applied on a large scale.

References

Allen K 2003, 'Vulnerability reduction and the community-based approach: a Philippines study'.
Pelling M ed., *Natural Disasters and Development in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge)
pp.170-184.

Christian Aid 2009, 'Strategic Partnerships: the real key to successful advocacy actions'
(London: Christian Aid; draft).

Mitchell T *et al*. 2008, *Accountability Pathways to Disaster Risk Reduction* (Brighton: Institute
for Development Studies).

Newborne P 2008, *Accountability and Non-Discrimination in Flood Risk Management:
Investigating the potential of a rights-based approach. Honduras case study* (London: Christian
Aid/Overseas Development Institute).

Tearfund 2008, 'Characteristics of a Disaster-resilient Community – draft C' (Teddington:
Tearfund; draft).

Twigg J 2005, 'Community participation – time for a reality check?'. *Know Risk* (Geneva: UN
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction/Tudor Rose) pp.64-65.

Twigg J ed. 2005, *Filling Gaps and Making Spaces: Strengthening Civil Society in Unstable
Situations* (London: Baring Foundation).

Twigg J 2007, *Characteristics of a Disaster-resilient Community: A Guidance* Note (London:
DFID Disaster Risk Reduction Interagency Coordination Group).

UNDP *et al*. 2005, 'Governance: Institutional and Policy Frameworks for Risk Reduction'
(United Nations Development Programme/ProVention Consortium/UN-HABITAT/UNV

Thematic Discussion Paper Cluster 1, World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Kobe Japan, 18-22 January).

UN ISDR 2005, *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* (Geneva: UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction).

UN ISDR 2008, *Indicators of Progress: Guidance on Measuring the Reduction of Disaster Risks and the Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action* (Geneva: UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction).

UN ISDR/UN OCHA 2008, *Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response: Guidance and Indicator Package for Implementing Priority Five of the Hyogo Framework* (Geneva: UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction/ UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

Wachtendorf T *et al*. 2002, 'Disaster Resistant Communities Initiative: Assessment of the Pilot Phase – Year 3' (University of Delaware: Disaster Research Center).

Zahur M 2008, *Application of 'Characteristics of a Disaster-Resilient Community'. Church World Service – Pakistan/Afghanistan Case Study: Pakistan, November 2007* www.proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=90

Author's details

John Twigg is an independent researcher and consultant, and Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre. He has researched and written on many aspects of DRR, including institutionalisation and 'mainstreaming' of principles and practice. His publications include *Disaster Risk Reduction: mitigation and preparedness in development and emergency planning* (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2004) and *Understanding Vulnerability: South Asian perspectives* (edited, with Mihir Bhatt; IT Publications 1998). Email address j.twigg@ucl.ac.uk