

# Community-Based Disaster Risk Management: Gaining Ground in Hazard-Prone Communities in Asia

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Amidst vulnerable conditions, it is the communities' natural tendency to protect themselves from the harm and danger posed by various types of hazards, be they natural or human sourced or a combination of both, that can spell the difference. If only there were ways to go back in history and rebuild communities away from natural and technological hazard areas- seismic, coastal, mountain slopes, urban centers- and plan the use of land better, then there would be a big chance of ensuring public safety and healthy socioeconomic life. But the reality is that most poor communities in Asia are located in these vulnerable areas. Therefore it is imperative that hazard-prone communities strengthen themselves and become robust so that they are not only "disaster resilient" but "disaster resistant" communities as well. The purpose of this article is to examine how some communities have managed risks by developing their internal social capital and collaborating with external resource to strengthen themselves. How do these communities introduce and sustain measures for reducing their vulnerability to natural and technological hazards? What are the good practices and lessons learned that could be replicated in equally hazard-prone areas in other developing countries that have many vulnerabilities?

## INTRODUCTION

The last decade showed the growing recognition of the need for shifting paradigms from emergency management to disaster risk management. This involved the change of focus from emergency response to planned activities that would mitigate or prevent disasters. At the national and state level, this approach necessitated political will and the formulation of new policies and resource allocation measures to institutional mechanisms that support risk management activities. It is at the local level, however, where development planning and implementation of specific disaster risk management activities takes place.

Experience highlights the importance of local communities as it is an acknowledged fact that whatever the scale of hazards, big or small, it is the local community that either suffers the brunt of or survives from hazards' devastating effects. Since the population at the local community is the one affected, it inevitably becomes the first responder to manages the emergencies at the household and community levels. By managing emergencies well, communities prevent their escalation into full-blown disasters. But more than this, local communities have the potential power to take risk management measures long before hazards strike. In this light,

disaster risk management is most appropriate and relevant at the community level.

Though communities may have many commonalities, no two communities are alike. However, lessons from one community may be studied and applied to other community settings. Some lessons in Cambodia cited in this paper such as “not underestimating local knowledge”, “using existing community groups”, “tapping external resources but not letting money drive proposals”, cooperation, coordination, networking, linking solutions with the community needs and priorities are mostly a reiteration of the best practices found in other parts of Asia. Similarly, the Lao experience of developing and promoting environmentally sound and socially acceptable warning systems while addressing food insecurity is worth looking into for possible application in other equally flood-prone communities. Partnership between NGOs and the national government in assisting communities in Laos is a good example of working collaboration that should be emulated elsewhere. India, too, is a good model for other state governments. Here, the government initiated Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) and acted as a facilitator in organizing disaster management committees and in the formulation of community contingency plans. On the other hand, there are also new developments such as the “use of hazard mapping” in risk assessment that have proven useful for organizers but as yet have been of little value to community members.

In this case, facilitators need to rethink what tools are appropriate for particular communities.

In general, though, the experience on CBDRM of hazard-prone communities, in collaboration with NGOs and local government units (LGUs) proves that it has gained ground in some developing countries in Asia. While there are significant gains in this respect, the practice is not yet widespread. Lessons in CBDRM practice need to be studied and examined for possible application. The commitment and support of the national government to encourage and empower all LGUs and communities to undertake CBDRM is still a big challenge for the CBDRM advocates. The task is daunting.

## **DISASTER DEFINITION: A REVIEW**

It is important to review the definition of disaster to put the aim of CBDRM in context. There are many definitions of disasters, but for this purpose let us use the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center’s (ADPC) definition. “Disaster is the serious disruption of the functioning of society, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses, which exceed the ability of the affected people and the community to cope using their own resources” (ADPC 1999-2003). This means that when a hazard strikes a community, the normal life of the residents is disrupted, which subsequently results in a crisis or emergency situation. If a community or local government is

able to manage the crisis or emergency without the need for external assistance from other communities or higher order government agencies, the situation remains an emergency and does not become a disaster. Only when a community is unable to manage the crisis on its own and requires outside help, would a situation be labeled a disaster.

There are two levels here: managing the disaster risk before a hazard strikes or the crisis event when the hazard does strikes so that it will not lead to disaster (disaster resistant); and managing disaster-events with outside assistance so that people will cope, adjust and recover easily from the event (disaster resilient). CBDRM addresses both levels.

## **AIMS OF COMMUNITY-BASED DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT**

The increasing human and property losses from earthquakes, cyclones, flooding and other hazards call attention to proper development planning that would ensure the designing and building of communities in safe areas in the future. However, since it is nearly impossible to rebuild housing facilities and relocate communities to safe areas, what do we do? The answer is to improve the traditional disaster risk management program and planning in communities—mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery—to make them disaster resilient.

Disaster resilient communities are “flexible and elastic”. They have the

“ability to recover from depression” or “adjust, spring back easily from misfortune or change” (Oxford and Webster Dictionary). Like the bamboo, resilient communities “withstand even the strongest typhoons as it sways with storm winds. It is the characteristics of resiliency that has made us survive three waves of colonization. It is the same resiliency that makes us rise from the ashes of Pinatubo and Mayon, and rebuild our lives from the devastating effects of disasters<sup>1</sup>” (Delica-Willison 1997). This means that communities that are hit by a hazard (which develop into disasters) are able to spring back, resume their original form and readily recover on account of their disaster preparedness planning.

Apart from building disaster resilient communities, CBDRM also aims to promote disaster resistant communities. Such communities are able to prevent hazards from reaching disastrous proportions because their mitigation and preventive measures are embedded in a comprehensive plan that takes every aspect of community existence into consideration—public safety, good health and robust socio-economic life. A disaster resistant community is akin to a healthy person who has the immunity to resist Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) or some other life-threatening viral disease.

This is easier said than done. It requires political will on the part of government leaders to decisively formulate appropriate strategies and provide tactical guidance to lead planners in hazardous areas. An all-

inclusive approach is imperative, participatory (bottom up) and directive (top down). A top down approach may also be necessary to enforce laws and regulations, for example in the area of environmental protection. To aim for a disaster resistant community is to address the vulnerability question, both the structural and nonstructural aspects of society.

The goal of disaster resistant communities is to maintain public safety and safeguard development gains. Disaster resistant communities are difficult to attain by individual communities alone. It would entail involving local governments, that, in turn, would enlist the support of all stakeholders. Donald Geis (Natural Hazards Review 2000) suggests ten inherent principles as core guide in attaining a Disaster Resistant Community.

The need for a holistic and integrated approach, communities that are supported by physical and organizational structures and concerned with the overall workings – functioning, relationship, service, capacity, scale – of all its systems and components.

The redevelopment of existing communities in consideration of the natural and built environment (transportation and communication, social facilities, commercial development, etc.).

- Consideration of the overall context of a larger and integrated process of creating sustainable quality life communities;

- Recognized role of the local government in development planning;
- Respect for the uniqueness and diversity of communities and bottoms-up participatory governance approaches;
- Availability and provision of information regarding effective risk reduction measures;
- Prioritization of disaster risk management and the availability of environmental, social and economic opportunities to motivate and empower communities to implement disaster preparedness and mitigation measures;
- Recognition of the basic human right of communities to live as safe as possible from natural hazards;
- The reduction of costs related to natural hazards through the creation of a Disaster Resistant Community; and
- Minimization of human, property and environmental losses, along with the social and economic disruption associated with extreme hazards.

Currently, communities that are involved in CBDRM are in the process of attaining resiliency. A thorough study should be undertaken to examine how far the CBDRM proponents have gone in initiating disaster resistant communities.

## **CBDRM EXPERIENCES**

Why are there so many hazard-prone communities in developing countries? First, communities are physically situated in hazard prone and vulnerable areas: seismic, coastal, mountain slopes, watersheds and urban centers. Second, there is something wrong with the way communities are designed and built in these hazard prone areas. This is evident in many communities in the Katmandu Valley, Nepal (seismic, urban); in Kandal, Prey Veng and Kampong Cham, Cambodia (watershed); in Orissa, India (coastal); in Tongi and Gaibanda, Bangladesh (urban); and in Champasak, Laos (lowland). Most vulnerable communities in the Philippines are located in both rural and urban hazard areas.

Currently, the planning of the above communities are geared towards attaining resiliency and aspiring to become disaster resistant communities. They need comprehensive support from all direction to attain the latter.

### **Case stories**

What follows are a collation of experiences drawn from selected NGOs and local governments working either with communities that have suffered from past hazards or are prone to hazards due to their geographical location and vulnerable conditions. The cases presented in this paper present the experiences of the following ADPC partner agencies: Private Agencies Collaborating

Together (PACT), Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC and RCS), National Society of Earthquake Technology (NSET), Center for Disaster Preparedness Center-Philippines (CDP), Orissa State Disaster Mitigation Authority (OSDMA), World Vision Laos (WV), and the National Disaster Management Committee of Laos (NDMC). In addition, this article is supplemented by the author's own reflection on most of the cases.

### **Empowering communities to mitigate flood risk: The Cambodian experience**

The primary natural hazards affecting Cambodia are floods, droughts and fires. Due to its location, Cambodia, one of the poorest countries in Asia, is susceptible to flooding along two major watersheds, the Mekong River and Tonle Sap. Cambodia's traditions of solidarity and trust have been negatively affected by the three decades of internal upheaval and warfare. During disasters, families feel that they can not rely on other families and that they are responsible only for themselves.

PACT, the Cambodian Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with the support of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) jointly implemented the Cambodian Community Based Flood Mitigation and Preparedness Program (CBFMP).

In Cambodia, people expect government and NGOs to provide

emergency response during major calamities. To address this dependence on external agencies, the CBFMP introduced the disaster preparedness concept by organizing and mobilizing volunteers. Chosen from flood prone communities, these volunteers are trained in participatory risk assessment. They are made to organize meetings and facilitate the identification and implementation of community level disaster management activities related to flooding such as repair of dams and dikes; cleaning irrigation ditches, culverts, and water gates; and raising road levels or constructing small bridges. This approach to flood risk management challenges the communities to act concertedly. The program initially covered 5,496 households in 23 of the most hazard-prone villages in three flood-prone districts within three provinces.<sup>2</sup>

The program, while raising the community's awareness of floods, also dealt with livelihood options and making local people understand community dynamics through participatory methodologies. The over-all result was to remarkably increase the capacity of local communities to withstand the onslaught of the 2001 flood. For example, the raised road project in Bang Sang Lech Village in Kampong Cham District reduced the speed of flood onset to the houses further inland, provided elevated ground for the safety of the villagers and their livestock and provided road access. Their experience of the flood in 2001 prompted the community members to plan the construction of higher wells

to prevent contamination of water during such events and the building of safe areas for families. The people in each village are proud of what has been attained and acknowledge the ownership of the project's outcomes. They also realized that the benefits are not limited to times of disaster. For example, the raising of roads and the construction of bridges provided a reliable transportation route and increased accessibility, allowing children to travel to school and traders to transport their agricultural produce to local markets. New, enlarged or rebuilt culverts increased the community's control over the water flow, enabling them to increase their rice crop yield, and, for some communities, even harvest a second crop. The community-based effort also enhanced community cohesion. "As we completed our project, our community becomes closer. This is something, I have not seen for a long time" (Mr. Peng Eourn, a 63-year old villager from ADPC 2002b).

These communities have the potential to become disaster resistant communities, if given more support in their efforts to address major flood risks. However, the cooperation of the Mekong River Commission and other stakeholders in the major watershed areas of the Mekong Delta and Tonle Sap and the involvement of local governments in those areas are necessary to actualize this potential.

The imperatives drawn from the Cambodian project include the following:

1. Do not underestimate local capacity. During the risk

assessment, the people offered an array of ideas, resources, and local knowledge that resulted in ownership of the results. Identifying solutions to their problems by themselves, they became dedicated to the implementation of these solutions with minimal assistance from outside.

2. Use existing community groups to assess the organizational structures currently operating in communities. These local organizations, be they traditional, civic, homeowners, religious offer viable structures to handle disaster risk management activities. If they can take on the added responsibilities of managing disaster risks, then, they should be part of and incorporated into the project design. In this regard, it is important to be inclusive of different organizations so as to ensure the broad base participation of the community.
3. Communities may tap external funding, but they should not allow money-driven proposals. The most common problems for community-based solutions are financial constraints. Where flood preparedness demands are greater than the financial resources available, it is necessary to train and mobilize local agents to seek funding from outside the community with their counterpart in the form of labor or local materials. The program has allowed communities to generate

resources for their flood preparedness through networking.

4. Sustainability requires the cooperation of all stakeholders. Traditional community structures were devastated during many years of civil strife, thus communities need assurance from other actors. A disaster risk management program should bring government and interested non-government and community-based organizations to the table early in the project and work with the community to develop long-term relationships with them. There is a bigger probability that the community will pursue preparedness measures when more stakeholders are involved and when other people are willing to assist the community in developing new activities that may need external support. Gain the support of local authorities and respected individuals within and beyond the community. In this respect, it is important to make activities credible.
5. There is a need to focus on linking solutions with the needs and priorities of community members. Solutions identified to mitigate floods resulted in many benefits. While they may have been intended to reduce vulnerability to floods, they also improved livelihood, enhanced safety and eased access to important facilities and resources.
6. Disaster risk management should be promoted. The promotion of

preparedness activities within the community for awareness raising and internal support and to neighboring communities for replication is important. Use community festivals and other events to promote activities.

7. While risk mapping is a valuable tool, it is not the panacea to all problems of hazard identification. Hazard mapping, conducted during the project provided more value to the organizers/facilitators than to the community. The community members found the mapping a waste of their precious time since they knew the areas most prone to flooding based on historical knowledge and therefore did not need the mapping exercise to determine those areas. However, hazard mapping can serve as necessary information for outsiders who desire to assist the community. It is also a tool to mobilize and sensitize the community and preserve its collective memory of the past events.
8. Project implementation should be sensitive to timing. It is crucial to ensure sensitivity to work patterns, religious rites, and festivals in the communities. Community calendar of activities and events can help.

### **Pioneering initiatives in managing earthquake risk: The Nepal experience**

Nepal is located in a tectonically active region of the Himalayas and has a history of destructive earthquakes.

Over 11,000 people died from earthquake-related disasters in the twentieth century alone. Despite its history, the rapidly urbanizing Kathmandu valley, with its uncontrolled population growth and unplanned development and constructions continues to violate building codes that take earthquake risks into account. This makes the Valley highly vulnerable to the hazard. The 1934 Bihar-Nepal earthquake damaged 40 percent of the buildings including many historic sites. (UNCRD 2003) To date, the country is ill prepared to face the consequences of an earthquake because of the “many other urgent matters experts worry about.”<sup>3</sup>

As a response to this situation, the ADPC through its Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Programme and in cooperation with its national partner, NSET, launched the Kathmandu Valley Earthquake Risk Management Project (KVERMP). This is a three-tiered initiative: local community, national and international. The program conducted training and media campaign about disaster preparedness. A newspaper article that featured joint training by international and national organizations (Lutheran World Federation, United Mission to Nepal and NSET) in a community (Ward 10) led another community (Ward 34) to take action. This interest guided Ward 34 to a six day disaster risk management workshop, participated in by community residents and Committee members, local government officials, CBOs and NGOs.<sup>4</sup> This workshop was a major breakthrough in a society where many



people adopt a fatalistic view of disasters.

KVERMP also initiated a school safety program after a detailed vulnerability assessment of 643 public schools in Kathmandu. The use of participatory methodologies led to the growing interest of communities and the support of school and government officials.

As regards the strategy of Ward 34, the workshop led to the formation of the Ward 34 Disaster Management Committee (DMC), the setting up of a Disaster Management Fund to receive voluntary contributions and to community planning. The DMC conducted a household vulnerability survey and provided further training to ward residents and students. CBOs prepared hazard maps, with technical guidance from NSET. The hazard maps and other outputs were useful in raising awareness, identifying other problems aside from earthquake such as flood, fire and environmental degradation. Maps also served as good input to planning structural mitigation.

The school earthquake safety program employed community participation as an essential component in assessing schools, raising awareness and in selecting schools for piloting earthquake resistant buildings. The program strengthened selected school buildings against seismic hazards for demonstration purposes.

The pioneering initiative in Ward 34 integrated disaster risk management into over-all planning. It included the community's concerns for

the poor conditions of roads in its vicinity that impeded quick response to emergencies; the, improper disposal of waste; poor drainage that induce flooding, as well as poor sanitation and health systems that increase peoples' health vulnerability in the aftermath of floods. Furthermore, the DMC removed a dangerous pole erected in the middle of a narrow street in the Ward. Its DMC has also conducted disaster awareness sessions in schools. With positive outcomes from the project, Ward 34 received requests from other neighboring Wards for assistance in hazard mapping and in the conduct of workshops. At present, Ward 34 dreams of establishing a resource center with information, research and training components. Meanwhile, it is raising money to promote awareness of CBDRM among 4000 students, the construction of embankments along the Bagmati River, and the reconstruction and retrofitting of earthquake resistant buildings – Ward Office, schools and hospitals in Kathmandu Valley.

The process of strengthening school buildings has developed into an integrated program resulting in a training curriculum for masons, guidelines for community disaster preparedness and planning for teachers, parents and students. The retrofitting and reconstruction process, in turn, stimulated awareness raising activities.

As for the lessons identified, the following are worth noting:

1. Create ownership of the community-based risk management project as early as possible;

make effective use of community events; involve key people with high credibility; set up an advisory committee to increase transparency, credibility and outreach; and including awareness-raising in every activity. From the very start, the officers and residents of Ward 34 owned the idea of establishing a DMC. This ownership led to commitment, complemented by demand from the community.

2. Second, it is also important to promote sustainability by building capacity and media outreach. The ownership of the project and demand for involvement in it in turn was met by capacity building in risk assessment, implementing mitigation measures, raising funds, etc.

### **Rising from the ravage of a super cyclone: A state initiative on CBDRM – Orissa, India**

Poverty coupled with recurrent natural hazards makes the State of Orissa one of the most vulnerable in India. While the coastal districts are prone to floods and cyclones, the western districts experience frequent and severe drought. It is also prone to earthquake. The 1999 super cyclone that hit the coastal areas left in its wake 10,000 deaths and damaged houses, livestock, crops infrastructure and to the environment (UNCRD 2003).

The experience from this disastrous event resulted in a drastic change in the way the government and

people manage risks, prompting the Government of Orissa to form an autonomous organization called Orissa State Disaster Mitigation Authority (OSDMA). This organization was tasked to look after the reconstruction work and to develop a mitigation and preparedness strategy that would minimize future losses and destruction. The OSDMA recognized the primary role of the communities in confronting and responding immediately to any emergency. Hence, the OSDMA worked with communities to build their capacity and enhance their skills and traditional coping mechanisms. With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Department for International Development (DFID), the OSDMA conceptualized the Orissa Disaster Mitigation Programme (ODMP). The program though mainly initiated at the State level, focused on strengthening communities to combine disaster preparedness and mitigation work with development planning. The program targeted 1,100 villages within ten selected blocks in seven coastal districts.<sup>5</sup>

Intended to address the gaps in preparedness and disaster response that were evident duringt the 1999 cyclone, the programme focuses on reducing social, economic and physical vulnerabilities through disaster preparedness of all local stakeholders. Its key components include the preparation of multihazard disaster management plans at the Block, Gram Panchayat (GP) and village levels, formation of different groups to respond to hazards, capacity building of stakeholders in disaster

management at all levels, and vulnerability reduction through linkages with existing development programs.

Following participatory assessment and hazard mapping, community contingency plans in 1,603 villages in 205 GPs in 10 Blocks were developed. Disaster Management Committees (DMC) at the Block, GP and village level were formed and trained to organize and systematize disaster response at the local levels. Various Task Forces were also organized and trained to manage early warning, search and rescue operations, first aid, relief, medical and housing needs, damage assessment, and psychosocial counseling. The program was successful in putting disaster risk management on the agenda of the local government by integrating it into the development planning process and systems at the Block and GP levels.

Interestingly, the organizational mechanism and preparedness plans have stood the test in actual emergencies wrought by the June 2001 floods and November 2002 cyclone threat. As a result of the positive experience of village residents, the demand for replication of the mitigation and preparedness activities in other Blocks and Districts of Orissa has increased (ADPC 2003).

How did the program integrate CBDRM into the development planning system? It sensitized local government personnel to risk management and included mitigation measures identified in the process of formulating community contingency plans. These

measures include construction of schools, which can also be used as cyclone shelters, repair or installation of tube wells, strengthening of weak embankments, the construction of facilities for storing nets and dry fish, and identification of appropriate technologies for safer but affordable building construction. Non-structural measures undertaken were public awareness campaigns, training and registration of high risk groups.

The program has met the basic requisites for organized and coordinated CBDRM from the Block to the GP to the village level. With the end of the program in November 2002, the local structures are expected to institutionalize the implementation and update of community plans

The principal lessons from the CBDRM include the following:

1. Government can initiate CBDRM and act as facilitators in organizing DMCs and the formulation of Community Contingency Plans. While in most cases, CBDRM is initiated by NGOs and their partner CBOs, it was the State Government that instigated the program in Orissa. With resolute commitment to safeguard lives, livelihood and property in the event of hydro metrological hazards, the state took pains to understanding how to work with communities and with other organizations. It followed a participatory hazard mapping at the village level with the formulation of a community contingency plan with the community.

2. The allocation of resources by the government and international donors demonstrated the determination of the State to undertake and support the CBDRM process. Mobilization of resources, including volunteers helped the program cover many villages within a short time. In less than two years, it was able to cover 1,603 villages. Time, however, will prove the effectiveness (or non effectiveness) of the DMCs.
3. The integration of disaster management into development planning is easier when the government is involved at the very beginning of the program. The government itself is the chief advocate of the integration process.
4. The basic ingredients for sustainability were present in the project such as the formation of DMCs and Task Forces, the initiation of mitigation activities, and the increased capacity to plan, prepare and respond in the establishment of the structures for coordination. While this was the case, there is still a need to comprehensively assess the CBDRM to identify areas for further improvement.

**Living with floods and drought:  
A new approach in reducing risk in  
Champasak district, Lao Peoples'  
Democratic Republic**

Due to its proximity to the Mekong Delta, the eastern part of Champasak experiences destructive flooding every

few years. The Western half, on the other hand, experiences drought and flash flooding. The worsening environmental condition aggravates the effects of flooding and constantly threatens food security. The flow of relief assistance, while alleviating people's immediate needs, have through the years encouraged a dole-out mentality among the affected population (ADPC Midterm Evaluation Report 2003).

World Vision Laos (WVL) has been working on a community development project in Champasak since 1998. WVL saw the need for a CBDRM to challenge the relief culture and introduce a more proactive approach in dealing with the hydro metrological related problems. In partnership with a government agency, the National Committee on Disaster Management Laos (NCDM) launched a two year project entitled Champasak Community Based Disaster Management Project (CBDM).

The CBDM project is about working with people to learn to live with floods by mitigating their negative and maximizing their positive effects. To attain this, the project sought to develop and promote environmentally and socially appropriate warning systems and community awareness of disaster risks and response options. To address the food insecurity issues, on the other hand, the project promoted agricultural production practices that are more appropriate to the local environment.

Considering the results, it is important to remember that CBDM is relatively new in Laos. It became

evident to WVU that two years was insufficient to effect necessary changes and achieve the sustainability of project outputs and outcomes. However, there are already major accomplishments to cite: hazard mapping, training and public awareness activities had been undertaken in 27 villages. Village Disaster Protection Units (VDPUs) were established, and are now helping communities formulate disaster risk management plans. Community Based First Aiders have been trained in 92 communities while more than 220 farmers were trained in fruit tree cultivation with many families receiving saplings and seeds to address the problem of drought and food security. About 120 hectares have been converted to vegetable production.

By employing the training of trainers approach, the project helps develop local capacity for sustainability and the efficient use of resources. Training materials are translated into the local language for sharing with other government organizations. Moreover, the active involvement in the project design and implementation also constituted hands-on training for the project team and the communities.

As to the lessons learned, the project's benefits clearly demonstrate the inextricable link between disaster mitigation and sustainable development. The farmers who took part in the dry season crop production are already enjoying the economic benefits from their efforts. Increased production of dry season

crops would contribute significantly to disaster mitigation in flood areas through reduced dependency on rice production for livelihood. Furthermore, development NGOs (in this case, WVU) could not ignore the need for disaster mitigation and preparedness since their project staff interact with survivors of disasters on a daily basis.

### **Forum for promoting CBDRM for safer communities: The Philippines**

Consistent with its advocacy role, ADPC launched the Partnership in Disaster Reduction for South East Asia in 2001 with support from DIPECHO. Through this project, ADPC conducted meetings, training and reflection workshops on CBDRM. One of the sustainable national mechanisms resulting from this initiative was the formation of the Philippine Disaster Management Forum (PDMF), which has emerged from the February 2002 Reflection Workshop on CBDRM held in the Philippines and participated in by government and non government organizations.

Due to its geographic location, the Philippines experiences all kinds of hazards, some of which result into disasters. As a response, concerned individuals organized the Citizens Disaster Response Center (CDRC) in 1984 to assist the organization of Community Based Disaster Response Organizations throughout the country. This is the basic tenet of CDRC – an organized approach to disasters. Its experiences have been shared with other countries through forums and local and international organizations. In 1999, the Center for Disaster

Preparedness (CDP) was organized by former CDRC board and staff to help promote CBDRM through training and education activities.

In line with its thrust, CDP sought the support of the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) in sponsoring a nationwide conference on CBDRM, primarily to exchange with both government and NGOs and examine the factors that facilitated or constrained CBDRM implementation. Between 28 and 30 January 2003, the PDMF, with support from the NDCC, held the first national conference on CBDRM. This was a very important event in the life of CBDRM in the Philippines as it was the first time local, national and international NGOs, community based organizations (CBOs), local and national government agencies, academics and business-initiated NGOs came together to learn from each other and address urgent challenges confronting CBDRM. The conference was attended by 82 delegates from various parts of Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao.

The conference discussed the local and the national situation and assessed the level of CBDM. Cases of communities surviving natural hazards and violent conflicts by supporting each other were presented. It also tackled the different frameworks, models, tools and approaches that the represented organizations utilize. Policies and institutional mechanisms to support CBDM were also addressed. Lastly, the conference talked about ways to advance the cause of CBDRM.

The NGOs and local government representatives narrated positive

factors in the implementation of CBDRM. Among them are, the spirit of volunteerism, strong partnership and cooperation among the external agencies and the community, local mobilization of resources, the existence of indigenous knowledge relevant to hazards, capacity building programs and community training, strong NGOs and church support, organized communities, the community and development workers' ability to reflect on past mistake and draw lessons from them; and the funding support of partner international NGOs. In fine, the representatives emphasized the sense of accountability to the people, working *with* local communities and empowering them rather than working *for* them as a key ingredient to success.

On the one hand, they blamed the lack of coordination and proper consultation, low levels of awareness, inadequate funds and bad leadership as constraints. Despite these negative factors, however, the Conference participants resolved to move forward by taking CBDRM to the level of policy advocacy. They listed recommendations that they will bring to the attention of policy and decision makers so that CBDRM practice can take off. Another conference organized for NGOs was held subsequently to plan the advocacy agenda of the PDMF.

Certainly the lessons from the experiences of the pioneers on CBDM in Nepal, Cambodia, Laos, India and the Philippines can further strengthen the goals of CBDM.

## CONCLUSION

No two disasters are the same. Neither will two communities exhibit the same characteristics. However, lessons learned from one community may be tried and adapted to other communities provided that those doing so are sensitive to the nuances of the locality to which new ideas are applied.

The experiences of the different countries presented in this paper show that a top-down approach to disaster management is wanting. Community participation is essential for effective disaster preparedness and response. However, facilitation, organization and mobilization should be managed and supported by organizational structures at various levels—from the grassroots to the national level, to ensure sustainability. After all, decision and policy makers at the national level can enhance the impact of CBDRM by

providing support mechanisms to upscale it. Moreover, particular top-down solutions need not be inconsistent with community-based approach depending.

At the local level, particular cases reveal the need to seal community and local government partnership through broad based social mobilization and coordination. Investing in the communities' social capital, incorporating participatory disaster risk management into local state development planning and building appropriate management structures are key to the successful implementation of CBDRM. In the final analysis, however, the overall success indicators of CBDRM point to the resiliency of communities during calamities and their ability to resist disasters as the most important considerations.

## NOTES

- 1 It was Jose Rizal, the Philippine national hero who originally compared Filipinos to bamboo in his early writings.
- 2 These 23 villages are dispersed in the Districts of Kang Meas, Kien Svay and Peam Ro in the Provinces of Kampong Cham, Kandal and Prey Veng respectively.
- 3 Roger Bilham of University of Colorado, USA confirmed that a big earthquake should have struck Nepal around 1984, fifty years from the last big one." ADPC, Safer Cities 1, January 2002.
- 4 Ward 34 is one of the 35 Wards of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, located in Thimi-Madhyapur Municipality.
- 5 A block is composed of several Gram Panchayat, and Gram Panchayat is composed of several villages/communities.

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