

Integrated Risk Management

Reducing disaster risks by strengthening community resilience

Introduction

Due to a number of interrelated trends, the likelihood that shocks and stresses that affect communities turn into disasters is increasing. Unguided development, climate change, population growth, marginalisation, and insufficient means and abilities to address these, keep people trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and vulnerability. ‘Natural’ and man-made hazards increasingly stretch people’s capacities beyond coping levels, and development gains are made undone by disaster situations. Relief organisations are then called on to provide external relief.

To counter this trend, the Partners for Resilience alliance members and other organisations have expanded their scope to strengthen communities’ disaster resilience. This involves strengthening capacities of communities to minimise the disaster risks to which they are exposed, and mitigating the hazards pro-actively. This disaster risk reduction is not only morally and economically sensible, but also boosts community empowerment. We need to ensure that communities enhance their resilience to crises which are caused by natural disasters and aggravated by climate change and environmental degradation. To achieve this, the Partners for Resilience alliance advocates for the application of Integrated Risk Management (IRM) in development policies, investments and practices.

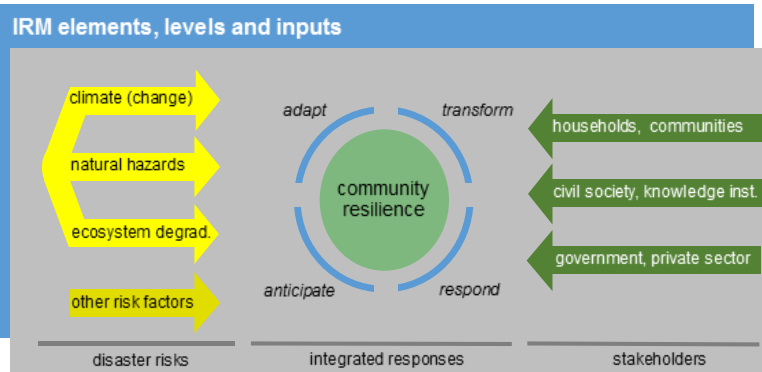
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The approach | In a context where livelihoods of people, families and communities are increasingly under pressure, civil society organisations and other stakeholders should bundle their efforts to make communities capable to deal with disaster risks. By putting community resilience central, an integrated approach can be taken: communities and civil society organisations and other stakeholders, each with their own expertise, should work together to strengthen the disaster resilience of communities. This will enable communities:

- to *anticipate* the risks they face by building on existing capacities,
- to *respond* when disaster strikes while maintaining basic structures and functions,
- to *adapt* to changing risks and to a changing local situation and its livelihood options, and
- to *transform* their environment and livelihoods to address underlying factors and root causes of risk and to be active partners for governments, private sector and other stakeholders in implementing disaster risk reduction measures.

This integrated approach, with a leading role for communities, make resilience interventions more cost effective, reduce the need for future external support, and bring more sustainable results.

To achieve this, the *Integrated Risk Management* approach combines Disaster Risk Reduction (focussed on natural hazards) with Climate Change Adaptation and Ecosystem Management & Restoration. In a specific context where communities face disaster risks, risks are assessed and addresses by looking at the natural hazards and by also taking into account the effects of climate (change), and the role of ecosystems.



In the IRM approach community interventions focus on the ability to anticipate risks (e.g. through strengthening livelihoods or restoring ecosystems), the ability to respond to shocks and stresses (incl. disaster preparedness), and the ability to adapt to recurrent periods of shocks and stresses. Besides, communities and other stakeholders transform their environment, incl. their policies and practices, to address underlying risk factors and thus work on longer-term disaster resilience.

The basic steps | The basis for the IRM approach is that disaster risk assessments are carried out with and by communities and include ecosystem and climate information. Then disaster risk reduction committees are established and risk reduction measures are being implemented and documented. As part of the risk reduction measures, hazards are mitigated (e.g. by flood protection measures). Also people's livelihoods are adapted or even transformed if needed – focusing e.g. on climate resilient agricultural production and other economic opportunities, environmental activities, stronger social structures, improved health services, and safe water and adequate sanitation. These measures are context specific, as they are tailored to the disaster resilience needs of each community or area.

By regarding climate (change) IRM looks not only at current weather-related risks, but also at future risks, which may be different in frequency and intensity, and may be even of a different nature. By regarding the role of eco-systems the approach looks at the wider landscape in which risks originate and become manifest, but which can also bring benefits to communities if well-managed.

The IRM approach brings in a range of civil society organisations, ensuring they too embrace and complement the IRM approach. Also knowledge institutes are engaged to provide insight in underlying processes that render people vulnerable. Finally, the application of constructive IRM dialogues with governments, private sector and other stakeholders will enhance / ensure a conducive legal and financial environment for IRM, and investments that minimise or prevent inherent disaster risks.

The outcome | The outcome of Integrated Risk Management efforts is a better control of (natural) hazards, reduced exposure to these hazards, and improved capacities so that communities can reduce the disaster risks they face. Disaster risk reduction at community level, including climate change adaptation and ecosystem management, and involving different stakeholders at various levels, are the central focus of IRM to strengthen community resilience. Disaster resilient communities have more robust livelihoods to overcome the shocks and crises they face, and have safe living environments, so that they are better able to shape their own development.



Integrated Risk Management – key principles

While there are many years of experience from many organisations in strengthening resilience through disaster risk reduction, the Partners for Resilience alliance has developed several key principles to move disaster risk reduction forward to 'integrated risk management'. These principles are:

- promote community self-management, boosting empowerment and creating local ownership to put communities in the driving seat of development;
 - work on different timescales to ensure adaptive planning (incl. early warning early action);
 - recognize the broader geographical scales (ecosystems and landscapes, e.g. river basins) which also determine people's exposure to hazards;
 - integrate disciplines and approaches to strengthen resilience in a local environment that encompasses many different disaster risks;
 - focus on sustainable livelihoods – the first and most important element affected by disasters;
 - form partnerships among communities, government agencies and civil society organizations, traversing different sectors (multi-stakeholder approach);
 - strengthen institutional resilience to work on changes in disaster risk, climate and ecosystems;
 - stimulate learning by combining traditional knowledge with scientific assessments, to better understand hazards, climate trends and data, and ecosystems functioning.
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