Putting community resilience into practice

May 2013 | Initial lessons learned

Partners for Resilience (PfR) is a collaboration of CARE Nederland, Cordaid, the Netherlands Red Cross (NLRC), the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre, Wetlands International and 30 civil society partners in the global South. It is one of the biggest programmes of its kind in the world, working on ecosystem-based and climate-smart disaster risk reduction (DRR) in nine countries (*see map below*), reaching more than 400,000 people. As the programme is now at its halfway point, a wealth of initial successes and lessons learnt have been identified. Based on the PfR resilience vision of eight key principles, the partners have now gathered case studies that illustrate how this is currently being translated into practice.

Cherry Admana boils water for drinking in the cramped conditions of a Manila evacuation centre after severe flooding hit the Philippine capital in late 2012. Drills and evacuation plans are a standard component in the PfR programme in the country. (Photo: Joe Cropp/IFRC)

1. Working on different timescales

By learning from past disasters, anticipating hazards in the present, and adapting to changing future risks, impacts can be reduced. In Kenya, newly-established Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction groups mobilized pastoralists across a wide geographical area to prepare for the December 2012 dry season. Working together, they managed the grazing system with a seasonal timescale in mind, to ensure that enough pasture would remain for everyone at the end of the season.

In March 2013, when the long rainy season began, community groups turned their attention to short-term flood risk.

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Communicating through a newly-established platform at the river-basin level, community organizations upstream of PfR project sites sent an early-warning message to alert those downstream when heavy rains had fallen, augmenting the traditional warning systems for flooding. Although some crops were lost, communities could report that this season there were no deaths or losses of livestock in the project areas.

For the future, the partners are now looking into a radio warning system for flooding, and methods to make agriculture more resilient.

Climate-smart, ecosystem-smart

To ensure DRR techniques consciously incorporate scenarios of changing climate risks and ecosystem criteria, Wetlands International and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre have developed and designed Minimum Standards and criteria in a partnership across different levels as a result of PfR feedback from country teams in Asia and Latin America.

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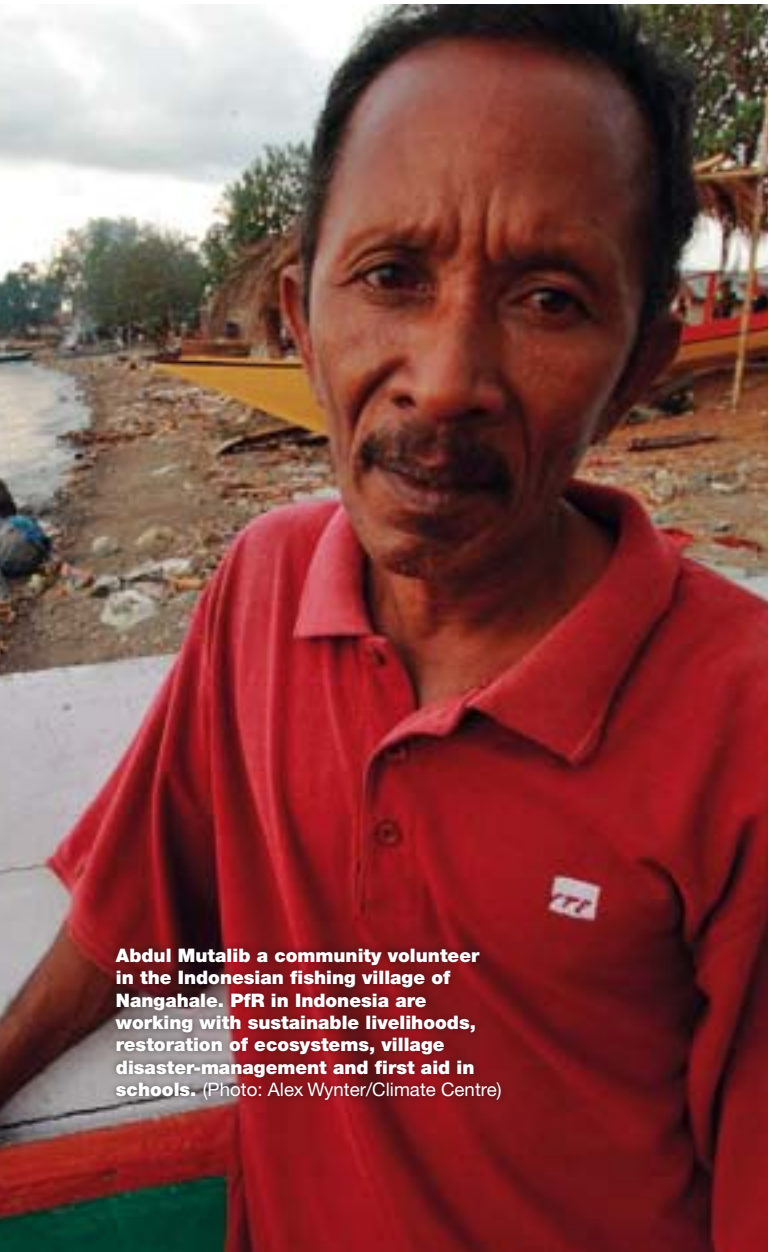


Abdul Mutalib a community volunteer in the Indonesian fishing village of Nangahale. PfR in Indonesia are working with sustainable livelihoods, restoration of ecosystems, village disaster-management and first aid in schools. (Photo: Alex Wynter/Climate Centre)

2. Recognizing geographical scales

Climate change is global, yet its impacts are local; ecosystems care little for political borders, whilst river catchments are home to communities both upstream and downstream. Working across spatial scales – from a household to an entire watershed – can increase community resilience by taking into account risks that may not be directly visible at the village level, and ensuring sustainability of actions at the local level.

For example, in the Mahanadi Delta in Orissa, India, community-risk assessments were conducted in each of the PfR villages. The results were compared and analysis revealed patterns in the hazards facing any given geographical cluster: for example, most of the villages within the coastal cluster experienced hazards like tidal inundation, coastal storms, saline intrusion and erosion.

Taken as a cluster, coastal villages were given opportunities to jointly invest in landscape-scale ecosystem and natural-resource management projects, such as greening the coastline, maintaining river flow through removal of silt, and providing advice on better management of upstream hydraulic structures. If the interventions had been limited to village boundaries, they would most likely have taken the form of “community-confined” DRR, such as building

Communities reported no deaths or losses of livestock in the project areas

concrete structures that reduce the intrusion of sea water or protect from cyclones. But these “hard” intervention techniques may have limited scope as they do not encompass the root causes of disaster risks such as ecosystem degradation. Additionally, other non-physical interventions to enhance resilience have been taken up jointly in the cluster, linking to policy processes and capacity building.

3. Strengthening institutional resilience

Changing institutional culture is one of PfR’s greatest challenges: for example, raising sufficient awareness to influence organizations to incorporate climate change and environmental considerations into their DRR and development work. However, change can take root through intensified dialogues with community-based organizations, local institutions and governments.

For this purpose, all local community-based organizations and NGOs relying on the lower Ewaso Ngiro River basin in Kenya were united into a common platform called the Waso River Users Empowerment Platform (WRUEP). The WRUEP has become the largest institution in Isiolo County and represents an area with a population of more than 143,000.

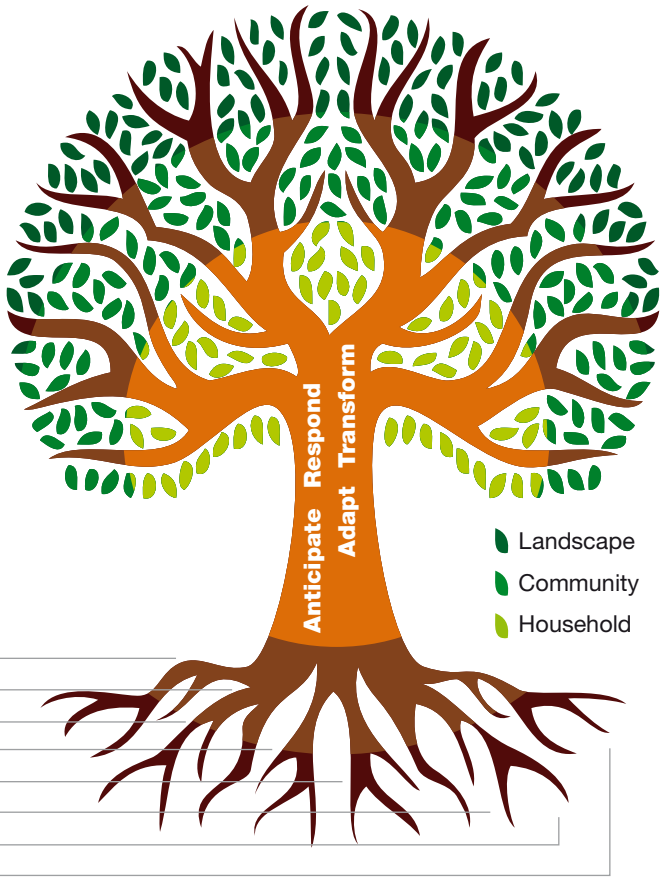
This platform has engaged the community in Early Warning, Early Action preparedness, and supported community-driven development activities. WRUEP’s long-term aim is

The PfR Vision Tree

Putting principles into practice

The PfR vision tree is a conceptual guide for putting resilience into practice. Working on community resilience is effectively based on four building blocks: to encourage communities to *anticipate* risks; to *respond* when disaster strikes; to *adapt* to changing risks; and to *transform* themselves to address underlying factors and the root causes of risk, and be active partners for governments in implementing DRR.

These building blocks are being implemented across the branches of the tree, from household to landscape level. The key principles are the roots, and promote working beyond "business as usual". In this document we demonstrate practical examples of how these eight key principles are already being translated into action across PfR communities.



1. Working on different timescales
2. Recognizing geographical scales
3. Strengthening institutional resilience
4. Integrating disciplines and approaches
5. Promoting community self-management
6. Stimulating learning
7. Focusing on livelihoods
8. Forming partnerships

PfR and its partners in Uganda facilitated the delivery of climate information to end-users, to help communities better prepare for hazards like these floods. (Photo: Anthony Mwangi/Kenya Red Cross)

to strengthen the existing community system, rather than create a new one that will be short-lived and last only as long as PfR. Through the platform, contingency plans are prepared, members are trained in several DRR and development themes and joint activities are undertaken.

4. Integrating disciplines and approaches

To work towards increased resilience it is crucial to bring DRR face-to-face with climate change adaptation, as well as measures for the restoration and management of ecosystems, livelihoods, food security, and other disciplines.

In all countries, the first phase of PfR programming included new community risk assessments (CRAs) that ensured ecosystem and climate information was incorporated alongside more typical DRR techniques. This approach emphasized the importance of identifying underlying risks; partners, stakeholders and communities need to move beyond addressing just the *symptoms* (the impact of hazards) of deeper-rooted problems that are, in fact, often socio-economically, culturally and politically embedded within communities.

In the Philippines, the partners agreed to view things through the lenses of climate change adaptation and ecosystem management and restoration, using three main tools: seasonal calendars; the historical profile of hazards; and risk and resource mapping. Previous risk maps tended to focus on hazards that occur in the present or near future. The risk maps conducted by PfR in the Philippines included information about risks in the past, present and future. By layering the three maps, the communities benefitted from the visual outputs and were able to see the changing nature of risks, such as current floods extending further than they did in the past.

The maps also demonstrated the resources available to communities, showing how valuable ecosystem management and restoration is for sustainable livelihoods and protection from hazards, for example, by identifying a forested hillside as a valuable asset in landslide prevention.

5. Promoting community self-management

Effective community self-management refers to empowered communities organizing themselves to be in charge of sustainably building their resilience without the need for

Reforesting denuded hills, constructing water infrastructure, and better water management all support communities with a more reliable water supply, and farmers can grow more cash crops and vegetables. (Photo: Karen Stehouwer/Cordaid)

direct assistance from NGOs. Notably women face substantial challenges in dealing with risk, so are a driving force for change in their communities.

In Ethiopia, partners are making headway towards breaking a "dependency culture", in which communities receive food or money without the option of ownership or contributing to the sustainability of local activities. The PfR implementing partner, Support for Sustainable Development (SSD), works with communities, local leaders and pastoral women to raise awareness, and organize groups to create community action

The money saved can go towards paying for food during droughts

plans, and manage rangelands and water. Communities themselves identify hazards, vulnerabilities, and the capacity they have to deal with them. Women participate in all groups and awareness is raised on livelihood diversification through savings and credit groups, strengthening the skills required for cash saving and management for emergencies, and the activities have already begun to show a profit.

SSD provides follow-up guidance and savings and business plans for group members; it has stimulated women's independence and financial insurance for future hazards. The money saved, for example, can go towards paying for food during droughts or investing in water harvesting infrastructure during the rainy season. In addition, women's often family-oriented role means that resilience-building can begin to be nurtured in younger generations.

6. Stimulating learning

PfR aim to stimulate learning by combining local knowledge with scientific assessments, while using educational tools such as participatory video and educational games to raise awareness about DRR, climate change adaptation and ecosystem management and restoration.

A new training manual for Cordaid

Work in the PfR alliance inspired Cordaid to revise its training manual, *Building Resilient Communities*, which now also includes climate change adaptation and ecosystem management – based on inputs from the Partners for Resilience. The revised manual is available through the Cordaid website in various languages.

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In Guatemala, Mayan communities are supplementing traditional knowledge of weather and climate predictions by using small weather stations, all of which helps to improve their local warning systems.

During a pilot a pilot of the *Upstream Downstream* educational game in Nicaragua, participants from upstream El Chichicaste and the downstream community of Moropoto remarked on the importance of sharing risk- management strategies with each other, and in some cases acting collectively rather than pursuing individual decisions. Collective action during the game also boosted the confidence of players, which in turn was reflected in increased confidence in engaging in dialogue about ways to act for real. The ability to scale-up this game was key to its added value as a learning tool.

Interactive learning serves as more than a tool for raising awareness. It brings communities together, develops new skills in an engaging way, and enhances the capacity of beneficiaries to speak out.

7. Focusing on livelihoods

Acknowledging that disasters impact on livelihoods and that unsustainable livelihood practices can increase disaster risk is important. By implementing sustainable livelihoods initiatives that benefit from well-managed ecosystems and take a changing climate into account, the PfR hope to break this negative cycle of disaster.

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Early Warning, Early Action

How can we best make use of the scientific information that can warn us about the likelihood of disasters? The Early Warning, Early Action approach, promoted by the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre, makes use of climate forecasts for days, months and years into the future to inform risk reduction and preparedness activities. This leads to decreased levels of vulnerability and enables quicker response, to ultimately save lives and livelihoods. To build capacity and promote this concept, the Climate Centre maintains an online map room, with forecasts and climate trends that are used for disaster preparedness worldwide.

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Agricultural training was conducted by PfR Mali to promote sustainable farming. This training enhanced the knowledge and practices of farmers on the principles, methods and strategies of eco-farming, so they could engage in farming techniques suitable for a changing climate.

Participants became familiar with climate-smart agricultural techniques, such as: crop rotation; water and soil conservation; fallowing; erosion control; micro-dosing of fertilizer; food and fodder banks; and seed-protection techniques. They also learnt about the benefits of well-

The first phase of PfR has provided innumerable opportunities for learning

managed ecosystems such as floodplains with floating Bourgou grass and flood forests for cattle herding and fisheries. Through these techniques, agriculture can be adapted to climate change and important ecosystem services maintained to strenghten resilience.

8. Forming partnerships

Partnerships are vital for PfR to yield maximum impact. This requires partners to look beyond their own disciplines and

People in a Nicaraguan village play the educational game *Upstream Downstream* to learn how climate change adaptation, ecosystem management and disaster risk reduction can fit together. (Photo: Maya Schaerer/NLRC)

strengths, which can often only address a single issue. Inter-organizational learning across multiple disciplines should translate into longer term, positive impacts to increase community resilience.

An example of such partnerships is the collaboration between communities and local metereological offices in Uganda. There, most rural villages depended on local forecasting for weather and climate conditions. Village elders used their knowledge to anticipate possible climate scenarios in their area. However, this climate early-warning system began to lose credibility as the pattern of climate conditions started changing. At the same time, the national meteorology department analysed and disseminated climate early warning information to district administrative offices, but this potentially life-saving information was not reaching communties.

To rectify this so that communities were able to prepare, the delivery of climate information to end-users was facilitated, and forecasts translated into appropriate terms and local languages. Different media were used for further outreach. For the first time in history, communities were in direct

"Water grabs"

Growing competition for water on the one hand and reduced availability of freshwater are exacerbating droughts like those in the Horn of Africa and in West Africa. This is a big issue for the PfR programmes in, for example, Mali and Kenya. In order to further understand these stress factors, Wetlands International has developed the "Water grab" concept. Wetlands International issued a study on the causes of poor flooding in the Inner Niger Delta in Mali. It pointed to the crucial role that current upstream dam developments are playing downstream, affecting the livelihoods of 1.5 million people. The results from the Mali study have been shared with decision-makers and with stakeholders both upstream and downstream.

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PfR in the Mahadani Delta, in India's Odisha state, focuses on desalination of reservoirs, climate adaptation for agriculture, and cyclone preparedness. In the picture, women in Tandahar village thresh corn. (Photo: Astrid van den Berg/Cordaid).

Bio-rights

Since February 2012, bio-rights projects have been jointly implemented by CARE and Wetlands International in Guatemala across four communities in the municipalities of Nahualá and Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán; each project area is located in the same region of the watershed. Bio-rights is an innovative incentive mechanism that provides micro-credits in support of community-level risk reduction by, for example, the establishment of a shelter or the purchase of new crop varieties. Communities are involved in landscape-scale DRR, such as the rehabilitation of degraded hill slopes to prevent mudslides or the reestablishment of natural barriers by reforestation that protect against erosion and storm damage. In return for their support and once the rehabilitation measures prove successful upon termination of a contractual period, the loans are converted into a definitive payment to the community.

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contact with local metereologists to discuss forecasts and identify actions based on this information.

Creating innovative partnerships is thus key to strengthening organizations and the communities they serve.

What's next?

The first phase of PfR has provided innumerable opportunities for learning. During an intensive review, the key principles have proven to be relevant for local partners and communities. The case studies in this document provide a snapshot of how the theory of resilience can be put into practice. We believe that resilience programming can be strengthened through further testing, discussion and learning.

Through innovative approaches in risk assessments and implementation, local communities can continue to build resilience for themselves. For true local ownership of this integrated approach, the PfR urge communities to market their own action plans to relevant stakeholders, for technical, financial and legal support.

PfR will continue to draw *global* lessons on building *local* resilience and scale-up what proves successful. Uniting and strengthening partnerships between communities, NGOs, governments, academic and research institutions and other stakeholders will be a priority to ensure effective resilience building becomes standard practice worldwide.

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