

A Comprehensive Approach For Higher Disaster Coping Capacity: The Case Of Dohli, Punjab, Pakistan

BACKGROUND

The project area, although it is located in arid region, has been prone to flood disasters. Floods taken place in the catchments areas of tributaries seriously erode scarce farmland on the small valley terraces and transport quantity of sediments, which had been rising the riverbed of the Indus and make the riverine areas of the Indus flood-prone.

The major reason of vulnerabilities to flood are, firstly, rainfall with high intensity, secondly, extremely poor vegetation cover due to overgrazing and thirdly poor range management. The root cause of vulnerabilities is deprivation of natural resources due to chronic poverty. Poverty results in further deprivation of land resources and finally gunfights, which require several lives annually. A project must be needed to break the vicious cycle of poverty environmental degradation and further poverty. Flood disasters accelerate the rotation of vicious cycle.

OBJECTIVES

In order to break the vicious cycle, the people living in the target area are expected to create economic surplus to be used for investments for flood disaster prevention.

ACTIVITIES

The project area is located in the tribal area in which sovereignty of the central government is not fully exercised because of historical reason and associated distrust between the tribal community and the central government. The project was therefore implemented taking the following steps:

- Explanation of the project objectives,
- Promotion of mutual trust among the parties concerned,
- Infrastructure building,
- Awareness promotion to the project,
- Group organization,
- Group discussion on the strategy and program, training and field trip,
- Project implementation,

- Accounting and saving, and
- Further implementation.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The project started by providing villagers with a vermifuge to remove round-worms from their cattle, free of charge. Vermifuge has had a dramatic effect in improving health of cattle and resulted in more effective foraging. Cattle prices rose in the village and, as a result, income began to increase.

The project distributed seedlings of cotton and vegetables, young fruit plants, fertilizer, pesticide and many other agriculture resources on a strictly cost sharing basis at fifty-fifty.

Savings, economic surplus in another word, have thereby increased. The villagers decided that a small amount of savings should be spent on an embankment to fight against riverbank erosion.

The villagers grew confident in their capacity and anticipated that the project areas would be expanded and project duration extended. Leaders of neighboring villages organized a meeting with the staff of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Dholi and requested the expansion of the project area beyond the boundary of the original villages. Nobody carried gun and bullets on their shoulders and village elders reported that, to the best of their recollection, it was the first time men had crossed the village boundaries without carrying gun.

A range management project aiming at disaster mitigation and preparedness had successfully resulted in disarmament at the grass-root level, but the project was neither extended nor expanded because of nuclear weapons testing and missile tests launched by both Pakistan and India.

LESSONS

The principal policy of the equal sharing of all the costs except infrastructure could successfully promote the sense of ownership, though it required enormous efforts and patience to acquire their agreements.

As soon as people fully understood the project objectives, the sense of ownership was fairly well achieved. The villagers were too busy in planting and harvesting to purchase and carry guns and bullets. They gave up weapons because they had their own properties, which needed protection from disasters.

Peaceful environment is the most essential prerequisite to make a project for income generation and disaster prevention successful.

FUTURE

The objective of the project is not yet fully materialized yet. Although some amount of funds was saved, people do not know how to use them for flood disaster prevention because they do not have any indigenous technology to fight against flood. Transfer of technology and know-how for flood fighting and their institutionalization are the next steps. Know-how to prevent degradation of fertility of the farmland is also essential. The village master remarked at the wrap-up meeting that he realized, while joining the project, the importance of primary education and decided to send his grandsons to a boarding school which is located in the town 30 km away. Primary education and necessary facilities must be a priority project.



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59 Palestine Red Crescent Society: Reducing Risk Through VCA

BACKGROUND

Reducing the impacts of disaster or conflict is impossible without knowing how vulnerable to those risks communities are and what capacities they have to cope. The International Federation has developed a community based tool to help National Societies measure risk, known as Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA).

In 1999-2000, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) embarked on a 6-month VCA, which assessed communities' perceptions of the hazards most likely to occur, their needs and the resources available to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of these hazards - whether major disasters or daily challenges. To ensure broad collaboration, other agencies (ICRC, UNICEF, UNRWA and four Palestinian Authority ministries) were invited to become members of a steering committee, closely monitoring the way the assessment was carried out.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the initiative was to reduce the risk through use of VCA and associated tools. PRCS social workers formed 22 focus groups among target communities to draw out local perspectives on disaster. The 429 individuals who took part came from a comprehensive cross-section of Palestinian society, carefully gender-balanced. The assessment asked 113 children to draw their vision of disasters and ways in which they could be mitigated. Assessment highlighted many local capacities (e.g. potential volunteers, equipment, supplies, specialized staff) as well as a need for training in communities. The VCA exposed shortfalls in coordination between institutions and a lack of communication between communities and the authorities concerning hazard risks. Worse still, not a single ministry had put disaster preparedness on its agenda - other than to stockpile supplies in warehouses.

The hazards regarded as most likely to occur were: lack of water, 'events of a political nature', road accidents, open sewers, pollution, fires, earthquakes, poor health and epidemics.

The findings were published in August 2000. One month later, the Palestinian territories erupted into the second Intifada (uprising) against Israel. "Events of a political nature" became the top hazard, escalating into near-war. Since then, thousands have been killed or injured. The life of

Palestinians has been totally disrupted; as well as violence came the 'closure' of residential areas, job losses and a marked deterioration in public services. From the outset, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) proved well-prepared - all the better for having just completed a comprehensive VCA.



ACTIVITIES

Inevitably, the Intifada modified the PRCS's priorities as well as accelerating the implementation of some of the VCA's recommendations. Given the major escalation of violence, the PRCS had to respond swiftly to the needs of the injured - who numbered around 20,000 during the first 18 months of the Intifada. Various measures, recommended by the VCA to improve PRCS's capacity to respond to crises, have been taken:

- Drafting of an emergency action plan, defining the respective roles for Red Crescent staff and volunteers, and partner agencies.

- Formation of a disaster management and coordination unit in Ramallah, to coordinate medical and food aid, water and sanitation, transport and fuel. It constantly evaluates capacities and vulnerabilities, manages volunteers and integrates roles within the organization.

- Formation of a new emergency medical system (EMS) - a focal point for health emergencies, covering evacuation, triage, treatment and transportation of the injured. A network of emergency operations centers has been set up in Nablus, Hebron and Gaza - to ensure the effectiveness of the EMS in the field. There are now 250 emergency medical technicians working in the EMS. The PRCS ambulance fleet has doubled to 105 vehicles.

- Opening of 16 new health stations in local communities, complete with staff trained in emergency and primary health care.

- Increasing local capacities to treat injuries on the spot - identified as critical by the VCA, since evacuating the injured during clashes is often frustrated by military roadblocks. This involves

the PRCS supplying medical kits (boxes of emergency supplies, including oxygen), setting up emergency rooms in PRCS health clinics and establishing communication with doctors in isolated communities

■ Emergency committees have been set up in 21 isolated villages, comprising a teacher, a health professional, a member of the village council and a local Red Crescent employee. They hold the clinic keys and contact details of nearby medical staff. They intervene in emergencies, help assess the situation and inform the PRCS of food and medicine shortages.

■ Establishing a new database of Red Crescent volunteers, listing their skills and availability. This ensures that the right people can be rapidly deployed to deal with emergencies. A new campaign to recruit more volunteers has started.

■ Volunteer training has been reorganized and includes six new areas of expertise: rapid damage assessment, emergency response unit backup, emergency medical services backup, camp management, water and sanitation, relief operations and administration backup. Over 400 volunteers have been trained in the past two years.

■ A 24-hour telephone hotline has been activated, acting as medical and psychological support for crisis-affected families, especially mothers and children.

■ A 50-bed field hospital has been created, capable of carrying out surgical operations.

■ Awareness campaigns promoting disaster preparedness and response have been carried out in schools and communities, through newspapers, brochures and TV spots.

■ Piloting of a rapid damage assessment surveillance tool, designed as an early warning system for public health crises in 134 communities where PRCS operates.



LESSONS

■ The VCA process enhanced understanding and cooperation between communities, government agencies and the PRCS. Duplication in crisis management has been reduced.

■ The principles of the VCA – in particular the ongoing need to employ and strengthen the

capacities of vulnerable communities – live on in the minds and decisions of PRCS staff.

■ Conducting a full, 6-month VCA process is expensive in time and money and entails considerable commitment from those involved.

■ The process would not have been possible without financial support from international organizations – including the International Federation, ICRC and UNICEF.

■ The process raised unrealistic expectations among vulnerable communities as to how much the PRCS is capable of achieving.

■ Implementation of the VCA's recommendations could have been better monitored – but the ongoing Intifada made this difficult.

■ Children could have been more involved in follow-up activities.

■ No concrete national disaster plan – a key aim of the VCA – has emerged.

CONCLUSION

Assessing the vulnerabilities and capacities of communities exposed to violence and disaster is a crucial first step in acting to reduce those risks. Partnership with communities, authorities and other organizations is a vital part of the VCA process, as it lays the foundations of trust and cooperation upon which future risk reduction plans and projects can be built. Involving vulnerable people in the VCA process helps to transform their mentality from seeing themselves as victims towards realizing their own potential to protect themselves from the consequences of conflict and disaster.



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