Key principles for programming for Community Resilience

A Concern Worldwide Guidance Paper

Introduction

Concern defines community resilience as: *the ability of all vulnerable households or individuals that make up a community, to anticipate, respond to, cope with, and recover from the effects of shocks, and to adapt to stresses in a timely and effective manner without compromising their long-term prospects of moving out of poverty.*

Concern understands a community to be a dynamic entity, made up of individuals, living mostly in households and linked by a shared location, identity, and social ties, among other things. In Concern's view, a community can only be resilient if all of its members – no matter how vulnerable – are able to bounce back (and ideally 'bounce back better') from adversity. Thus, for Concern, community resilience programmes must not only leverage collective action from the community as a whole (e.g. to develop an early warning system) but observe and address any inequalities or heightened vulnerabilities faced by different subgroups, households and individuals within that community[1]. While building community resilience requires actions and influencing at different levels, Concern's focus is on achieving results from the community level downwards.

Shocks (single events with negative consequences, such as natural disasters or some types of conflict), and stresses (gradual changes with negative consequences, such as climate change, unemployment or slow changes in the economic or political context) erode people's ability to accrue livelihoods assets or maximise returns off the assets they do have. Shocks and stresses made worse by structural inequalities are what keep or make people poor. This is at the heart of How Concern Understand Extreme Poverty and is therefore central to Concern's approach to community resilience.

It important to remember that livelihoods assets are diverse and are generally grouped into six categories: human, social, financial, natural, physical and political. They are not simply ploughs and radios, but include things like good health, skills and knowledge (human); family and social ties (social); disposable cash, remittances and savings (financial); water and land (natural); roads and mobile phone networks (physical); and the right to vote or influence community decisions (political) [2].

Concern has developed the following nine key principles to guide fields on what to put into community resilience building programmes. If followed, they should result in a programme that builds the resilience of communities, in a manner consistent with our definition above.

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1. Some authors take a more narrow view of community resilience, as distinct from household or individual resilience and focusing on the community as an entity engaging its 'capacity for collective action as well as its ability for problem solving and consensus building to negotiate coordinated response'. (Frankenberger, T., Mueller M., Spangler T., and Alexander S. October 2013. Community Resilience: Conceptual Framework and Measurement Feed the Future Learning Agenda. Rockville, MD: Westat).

2. See How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty, May 2010, available through Concern's Knowledge Exchange

1. Systematically undertake risk analysis, including analysis of future uncertainty and extreme conditions

Building resilience is fundamentally about addressing and reducing risk and vulnerability, so the starting point must always be through the completion of a robust risk and vulnerability analysis, taking into account the multiple hazards (potentially damaging events, see glossary) that may exist in each particular context. Through the analysis of climate change, other change drivers and their impacts on risk and vulnerability, we also must recognise that in many cases the risk context is likely to worsen, especially for the poorest people, and that there is a lot of uncertainty in trying to predict what may happen in the future.

We cannot ignore this uncertainty, so we must also analyse and understand the hazards that may be less probable but that, if they occur, can be catastrophic. An important role of external agencies is to bring additional information and analysis to the community, so that vulnerable people are able to make informed decisions about whether they are willing to 'take the risk' or whether the risks are too great to live with. A simple starting point is to plot risks on a Likelihood versus Impact graph and get the community/stakeholder group to discuss what they can and are prepared to do to address the risks that are revealed.

Ideally, we would plan to address the worst that can happen (not just the likely), but this is not always possible. However, acknowledging and considering extreme events is an essential part of prioritising what action subsequently gets planned and resourced. 3.

2. Ensure programming is coordinated with other actors for delivery of the whole 'resilience building package'

Resilience building is multi-sectoral, complex and beyond the scope of any one organisation or institution. Multiple stakeholders are required to properly build the resilience of communities – including government, civil society, the private sector, etc. The actions of one programme or organisation need to be integrated with other initiatives that build resilience, so that a systems approach is used for resilience building. Individual components can contribute to resilience building but, on their own, are less likely to be successful.

While this does not necessarily mean that Concern should be implementing interventions applying all of the nine principles, or working in every sector that can address the underlying causes of vulnerability, we must ensure through coordination and cooperation that each of these principles is being applied by key partners or local stakeholders, as far as possible. Where there are no actors addressing certain key obstacles that prevent a robust improvement of resilience, Concern should identify who the correct stakeholder should be, build relations with them, and advocate for them to take on these tasks.

3. Concern's Risk Analysis Guidelines (2012) are available on the Concern intranet/ Knowledge Exchange or from Concern's DRR Adviser.

3. Reduce the scale, intensity and frequency of shocks and stresses – wherever possible

Not all hazards can be directly worked with. Earthquakes are an example of a hazard that cannot be stopped or its intensity reduced. However, there are many hazards whose impact can be partially or significantly reduced in terms of their scale (how big they are), intensity (how strong they are) or frequency (how often they occur).

Floods, landslides, many diseases, and many human derived hazards such as weak policies or poor development decisions are amenable to being influenced, at least partially. Even drought, which is a failure of rainfall, may not be directly influenced in short programme time spans, but the intensity of droughts can be reduced through maintaining a well vegetated and healthy environment and appropriate water storage facilities.

4. Reduce vulnerability and the causes of vulnerability, including through building assets and diverse livelihoods

Hazards become disasters for people exposed to them if they are vulnerable (for those who aren't vulnerable, the hazard may pass without negative impacts). So, one of the most important objectives of a community resilience building programme is to reduce vulnerability. It is clear that poverty is a major causal factor of vulnerability for a host of reasons, including that with less access and control over assets, one has less flexibility with which to counter the harmful effects of shocks and stresses; poverty can also be seen as a stress in its own right. As such, a central part of community resilience programming is the long-term building of assets to reduce vulnerability. The exact nature of these longer-term development interventions depends on the contextual analysis and availability of resources to address multiple needs, but most of the activities, outcomes and indicators for community resilience programmes will draw from the different sectors e.g. WASH, health, agriculture, education, but they should be integrated and address the key risks and vulnerabilities identified in the risk analysis.

Following the principle of not putting all of your eggs in one basket, encouraging a diversity of livelihood strategies will generally lessen the magnitude of impacts of shocks and stresses.

Other principles outlined in this paper, particularly principle 2 and 8, point to the importance of some form of coordination of both service delivery and governance. While Concern can find itself as the managing or coordinating body, this should be a last resort and short term, employed only where local institutions are not a realistic immediate option.

5. Address drivers of inequality

Chibala, 55, through attending gender training as part of Concern's RAIN programme, Zambia he has now 'learned to help' his wife (Catherine). Photo by Deborah Underdown

Embedded within the causal factors of poverty and vulnerability is inequality. The impacts of disasters are generally felt more acutely by women, children, those with disabilities and the elderly. People living further from health centres find it harder to address illness; poor people find it harder to access education or state services, etc. Most communities have groups of marginalised people within them, and it is essential community resilience programme understand and address (rather than reinforce) any inequalities that exist That these groups feel that they have the ability to be resilient and that they 'belong' to a community that supports them fairly, is also an important part of building resilience.

This principle leads us to design our programmes based on a robust analysis of power dynamics and inequalities, to work specifically with the most vulnerable sections of society, and to address the underlying reasons for that specific vulnerability, instead of just designing a 'one size fits all' programme. This is exactly the intent of our programme design and planning process, built on How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty.

6. Build coping and recovering capacity - including enhancing access to social protection, safety nets and contingencies

It may not be possible to fully satisfy principles 4 and 5 within a standard programme time-frame. Safety net mechanisms are 'fall-back plans' for the most vulnerable, to 'catch them if they fall', providing additional resources when they are most needed, which help people get through crises without resorting to harmful behaviour or negative coping strategies.

Social protection mechanisms should be a state function and a systematic response to chronic vulnerability (see Concern's Social Protection Policy), and are often proactive in providing support. Shorter-term, periodic, reactive or occasional 'safety nets' are often delivered by NGOs. Cash transfers and various asset savings mechanisms (self-help groups, community grain banks, herd sharing, etc.) are examples of community based safety nets that can play an important role in helping people cope with crisis and recover faster afterwards. Advocacy for long-term social protection should be considered as an important role for Concern where this is a realistic option.

7. Build and enhance response capacity for effective emergency responses when needed
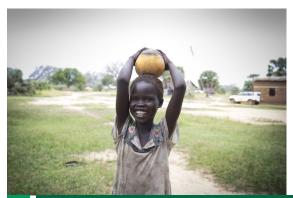
We must recognise that disasters will happen anyway, and that our ability to stop them will always be limited. Some hazards will overwhelm our preventative measures that we and others put in place, so emergency responses will remain necessary. Being well prepared to respond to disasters in an effective and timely manner is vital.

Part of preparedness, and fundamental to timely responses, is the role of anticipating shocks and stresses normally through early warning systems (EWS). We should link our preparedness and response mechanisms to early warning systems or establish them if they don't already exist. In areas of cyclical, slow-onset emergencies or chronic vulnerability, the ability to respond early, before the crisis unfolds (Early Warning & Early Action - EWEA), is also important. Holding contingency funds, or having donors ready to provide funds when needed to mount an early response, is essential, so our engagement with donors and other agencies in relation to emergency funding and coordination is vital.

8. Build institutions for efficient and equitable governance and influencing of the wider context

Local and national government institutions play a crucial role in ensuring that resilience building programmes are integrated and linked between micro, meso and macro levels. It is these institutions that will do the majority of the long term work necessary for ensuring community resilience is built and sustained. Even in the absence of strong government structures, communities always have governance mechanisms of some sort – these may be traditional or informal governance bodies, but if they are influential they need to be 'brought in' to resilience building.

Members of governance institutions must also be aware of the influence that the wider context (the environmental, political, social and economic context) has on their capacity to improve resilience. Their ability to influence the wider context, and encourage other stakeholders to remove barriers to effective resilience building, is crucial in ensuring that resilience building programmes do not happen in isolation.

A child carries a pumpkin on top of her head in a town in Aweil North in Northern Bahr el Gazal, Republic of South Sudan. Photo by Crystal Wells

9. Ensure sustainability and a culture of innovation and learning, through designing your exit strategy from the outset

Concern will not be supporting community resilience forever – at some point the communities, supported by formal and informal governance institutions, will have to 'go it alone'. This is our desired end point, marking true, sustainable resilience – and this needs to be planned for from the outset with a clear exit strategy, or the programme will run the risk of developing dependency.

The governance institutions, and the people that they represent, will need to address the unexpected, and learn from their experiences, for them to be truly capable of maintaining resilience in the long term. Their ability to innovate and learn should be fostered from the outset of a resilience building programme.

Key terms:

Disaster: A damaging physical event, phenomena or human activity which has occurred and caused any or all of the following: the loss of life, injury, physical damage, environmental degradation, and social and economic disruption. A disaster occurs when the capacity of a community to withstand, respond and recover from the impact of an event is overwhelmed.

Hazard: A potentially damaging physical event, phenomena or human activity which may cause any or all of the following: the loss of life, injury, physical damage, environmental degradation, and social and economic disruption.

Risk: The probability of an event happening in a given time span and the magnitude of its effects when it does occur. The magnitude of the effects is related to the individual or community's vulnerability to that hazard. Often expressed thus: risk = impact x likelihood.

Shock: single events with negative consequences, such as natural disasters or some types of conflict.
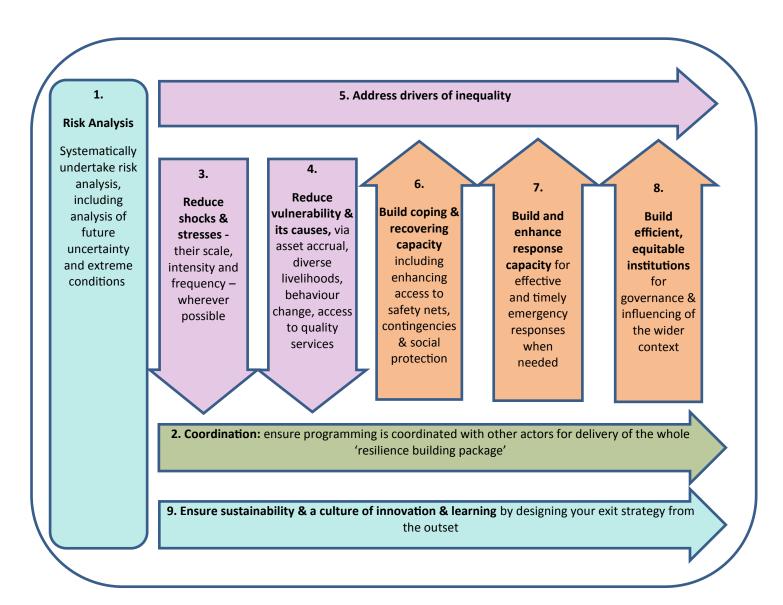
Stress: gradual changes with negative consequences, such as climate change, unemployment or slow changes in the economic or political context.

Gerald Perenal from the Philippines shows the coconut he just got from a tree. Coconut farming is another major livelihood for the people of Concepcion. Due to Typhoon Haiyan the coconut industry collapsed but Concern and the Philippine Coconut Association are now reviving this industry. Photographer: Steve De Neef

The 9 principles in diagrammatic form

1.

Risk Analysis

Systematically undertake risk analysis, including analysis of future uncertainty and extreme conditions

5. Address drivers of inequality

3.

Reduce shocks & stresses - their scale, intensity and frequency – wherever possible

4.

Reduce vulnerability & its causes, via asset accrual, diverse livelihoods, behaviour change, access to quality services

6.

Build coping & recovering capacity including enhancing access to safety nets, contingencies & social protection

7.

Build and enhance response capacity for effective and timely emergency responses when needed

8.

Build efficient, equitable institutions for governance & influencing of the wider context

2. Coordination: ensure programming is coordinated with other actors for delivery of the whole 'resilience building package'

9. Ensure sustainability & a culture of innovation & learning by designing your exit strategy from the outset

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