Lessons Learned:

Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction Application Experiences from the Aceh Province
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Experiences from the Aceh Province

Photo Caption:
Women in Simpang Kiri village in Aceh Tamiang district discuss how to be better prepared when a disaster strikes.
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## Acronyms

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<tr>
<td>BYTRA</td>
<td><em>Bina Rakyat Sejahtera</em></td>
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<td>CAP</td>
<td>Community Action Plan</td>
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<td>CBDRR</td>
<td>Community-based disaster risk reduction</td>
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<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-based organization</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<td>DIBI</td>
<td>Indonesian Disaster Data and Information</td>
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<td>DRR</td>
<td>Disaster risk reduction</td>
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<td>DRR-A</td>
<td>Making Aceh Safer through Disaster Risk Reduction in Development</td>
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<td>HFA</td>
<td>Hyogo Framework for Action</td>
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<td>Musrenbang</td>
<td><em>Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan</em></td>
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<td>NGO</td>
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<td>TDMRC</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
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<td>UNISDR</td>
<td>United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction</td>
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Summary

The following is a concise summary of the lessons learned captured in this document:

**Lesson #1:** When initiating CBDRR, ensure that district and sub-district government officials have sufficient understanding and capacity on DRR. If there is awareness, understanding and minimum technical capacity to support CBDRR among local government, the impact and sustainability of CBDRR can have a wider reach. Further, capacity among local government officials is needed to ensure that they understand the role of communities in the implementation of policies, regulations and plans for CBDRR. With knowledgeable interlocutors on DRR within local government, communities will have resources to call on in planning and budgeting for CBDRR, and the activities have a higher chance of receiving funds from the local government budget.

**Lesson #2:** CBDRR activities should be initiated with general information sessions and awareness on DRR among target communities. This can be followed by more targeted training on CBDRR for interested individuals identified during the information sessions. Undertaking such steps would have two benefits. First, it would ensure that people in the community have a better understanding of the concept of DRR and why they should involve themselves, and with time to digest this information, perhaps find time in their schedules to participate in a Community Forum when they would otherwise not have. Second, this would ensure that all members of a community are given the opportunity to volunteer to be a member or even the champion of the Forum and bypass the necessity of otherwise relying on community leaders to identify and nominate ‘appropriate’ individuals for the Forum.

**Lesson #3:** Community DRR Forums can fill gaps where there is a lack of opportunity for communication, discussion and learning among the various members of a community. In this instance, the Forums created a space where the transfer of local wisdom could take place, and created social cohesion – at least on DRR issues. Thus, while the Forums have the specific purpose of addressing CBDRR, they can also be used to discuss other village development issues (climate change, family planning, etc). It may therefore be an idea worth exploring in conflict regions: create community forums for dialogue based not on conflict issues, but on issues of common concern to all villagers. The dialogue process may
be able to increase mutual trust and respect, and segue into discussion on other, more contentious issues affecting the community.

**Lesson #4:** Community DRR Forums should not just be for the purpose of developing and implementing Community Action Plans. Even when the CAPs have been developed by drawing on local wisdom, it is important that the Forums create regular opportunities in which local wisdom can be shared directly between members of the community. Further, as is noted above, when there is an absence of disasters for any length of time, then wisdom is at risk of being lost. The Community Forums should also serve the purpose of supporting the routine recording and dissemination of local wisdom so that it is not lost, and can blend with new approaches and technologies. It can then help to serve future generations as they go about their own DRR activities.

**Lesson #5:** The CAP development process can, and has, acted as a catalyst for communities to engage in the annual development planning process in their communities. By showing by example (ie: focus group discussions to identify risks, hazards and ascertain capacities) that community voices can and should be heard in identifying community priorities, CBDRR has empowered the pilot communities to actively engage and participate in the Musrenbang process in their respective villages. This was particularly so in communities in Bener Meriah District. As such, the concept of the Community DRR Forums can be replicated within communities during the annual Musrenbang activities, making development planning more participatory, transparent and responsive to community needs and priorities.
Introduction

Lessons learned reports aim to extract lessons and good practices that can help inform practitioners and governments undertaking similar initiatives or processes. This report focuses on extracting lessons learn from the implementation of community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) in the UNDP-supported project ‘Making Aceh Safer through Disaster Risk Reduction in Development’ (DRR-A). The CBDRR component of the project focused on supporting the government to build the capacity of 10 Acehnese gampong/villages to institutionalize DRR within village development planning and incorporate resilience building as part the disaster management agenda at the sub-national and national levels.

The rationale for this approach, rather than focusing on the specific outputs and targets laid out in the UNDP Results Framework, was to ensure that this lessons learned report provided information that was of use to other provinces or countries either initiating or currently implementing CBDRR, but whose contexts differ from that of Aceh. The CBDRR pilot project was designed to apply the concept of resilience as set forth by J. Twigg (DFID, 2007). The characteristics of a resilient community are described as follows:

1. Capacity to absorb stress or destructive forces through resistance or adaptation
2. Capacity to manage or maintain certain basic functions and structures during disastrous events
3. Capacity to recover or “bounce back” after an event

This report has identified several thematic lessons and good practices on CBDRR implementation, which specifically addressed the context and situation in Aceh (post-conflict and disaster area). As such, the recommendations are directed at national and local governments that are initiating processes to implement DRR activities at the community level in their provinces or countries; and their respective villages and communities. Other stakeholders, particularly international and local NGOs which focus on community development, and specialists in planning, monitoring and evaluation, will find the lessons and good practices useful in their support to their beneficiaries.

These lessons can be best incorporated into future projects if they are taken into consideration during the planning stage – to ensure that capacity
development approaches are meeting the needs of the project stakeholders during the lifetime of the project. In addition, they can be considered throughout implementation by monitoring opportunities to utilize the community DRR concept to promote participatory approaches in project management (monitoring and evaluation, for example) as well as promoting community cohesion in activity implementation.
Context and Challenges

While the tsunami of December 2004 attracted worldwide attention, lesser known calamities have occurred since then, and will continue in the future as the risk from natural disasters remains ever present, causing loss of lives and livelihoods, destruction to property, setbacks to the economy and damage to the environment. For example, the massive floods in December 2006 in Aceh Tamiang, Aceh Timur, Aceh Utara, Bener Mariah, and Gayo Lues displaced some 300,000 people. Earthquakes are a common occurrence throughout the region, many of them registering above 5.0 on the Richter scale. In the early months of 2012, two significant earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.6 (11 January 2012) and 8.5 and 8.1 (11 April 2012) struck off the west coast of Aceh and Sumatra, fortunately causing no damage or fatalities. Climate change will result in new, slow-onset disasters for the people of Aceh such as rising sea levels and salt-water intrusion into river deltas, which will have destructive impacts on coastal ecosystems and related livelihoods. Aceh can be a dangerous place to live.

The massive damage caused by the tsunami in Aceh, the earthquake in Yogyakarta and other recent events have spurred a rethinking among government agencies and the public at large, both at national and local levels. Rather than preparing for relief and response AFTER a disaster, people have begun to recognize that sound development practices that include mitigation and prevention BEFORE disaster events will be more effective in reducing human, physical and economic losses. Along with global commitments on risk reduction through the adoption of Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), the Government of Indonesia has marked the disaster management legal reform with the endorsement of a National Disaster Management Law No. 24/2007. This shift in thinking is also reflected in statements by many of the newly elected leaders of provincial and district governments in Aceh. At the provincial level, Aceh’s Mid-term Development Plan 2007-2012 lists disaster risk reduction as one of its seven development priorities.

A number of NGOs and Red Cross/Crescent societies have been working on community-based disaster risk reduction, particularly disaster preparedness. Initiatives have included building disaster preparedness and response capacity of local communities by developing community-based action teams; installing radio systems and increasing the capacity of the Indonesian Red Cross at the district level; and distributing disaster preparedness containers (containing family, hygiene kits, tarpaulins, life jackets, etc.) in all districts in
Aceh. Other projects have focussed on formulating guidelines and training on community preparedness and evacuation; build capacity of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in disaster preparedness; and women’s preparedness in facing disasters. These examples illustrate how DRR initiatives at the community level have tended to focus on preparedness measures, and UNDP consultations with the implementing organizations also indicate that there is a problem in ensuring the sustainability of these community initiatives. Continuation of the activities by the community needs attention and support from the local government. Furthermore, initiatives need to be widened to include *mitigation* measures and linkages with the local development process.

**The Response**

In response to this need, one component of the DRR-A project aimed to implement CBDRR that would test and improve measures for reducing risk from disasters in selected communities, whilst at the same time enhancing capacities of local NGOs to facilitate CBDRR implementation. Communities are at the frontline of disasters – and of disaster risk reduction, where decisions can be taken to either increase or decrease risk. Most CBDRR initiatives in Aceh previously focused on preparedness measures, but did little on mitigation.

The communities where pilot initiatives took place were selected in consultation with provincial and district authorities in areas particularly vulnerable to potential disasters, based on a provincial hazard assessment undertaken by TDMRC and historical record of disaster incidents in Aceh using the Indonesian Disaster Data and Information (DIBI). The demonstration projects aimed to identify the risks, address both preparedness and mitigation, raise awareness within the community, and incorporate these risks into the planning and decision making by local disaster management agencies. The overall objective was to ensure that community-led development planning and projects considered the incorporation of DRR measures with technical and funding support of local government.

It must be noted, however, that when the activities were initiated there was little to no interface between local governments and communities on the subject of DRR. An institutional, policy and planning enabling environment was being developed with the support of DRR-A at the provincial level, but the effects of those
interventions had yet to trickle down to the district and sub-district levels of government. Thus, communities would also face the challenge of a lack of awareness on DRR among local government officials, and face an even bigger challenge in accessing local government development funds to assist in the implementation of their DRR activities.

**The Result**

A major factor in determining the activities to be carried out under the DRR-A project was a need to ‘fill gaps’ in the implementation of the priorities of national and provincial government on disaster risk reduction in Aceh. In relation to implementation at the community level, the programme aimed to **develop Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) guidelines** based on good practices in Aceh and elsewhere in Indonesia, and then to **pilot CBDRR to raise awareness on reducing disaster risk and to identify indigenous or local early warning systems** in the process, with strong engagement of women’s groups as part of gender mainstreaming initiatives, then link them to government systems. Activities were implemented in 10 districts by three competitively selected local NGOs (BYTRA, KARST Aceh and IBU Foundation), in different geographical settings and contexts, covering specific hazards of each region including earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, landslides and volcanic eruptions.1

However, due to the long process of determining the target locations and with limited data and information on disaster-prone districts (in the absence of risk map), the selection of districts and participating communities was significantly delayed. In addition, the variation of capacities of selected NGOs contributed to challenges in achieving intended results. The implementation of CBDRR activities was restricted to developing gender sensitive CBDRR guidelines, training local NGOs on how to use them, and facilitating the 10 pilot communities to establish village DRR forums, undertake risk assessments, develop community disaster management, contingency and community action plans for DRR. The implementation of all activities within the CAPs could not be undertaken during the project.

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1 BYTRA implemented pilots along the east coast of Aceh, IBU Foundation along the west coast, and KARST Aceh in the central highlands.
timeframe. As such, it is difficult to determine the direct impact of the CAPs and to draw lessons for replication to other villages with similar characteristics and hazards. Therefore, it should be noted that this document focuses on learning from the process rather than solely from the impact of the intended outcomes.
Lessons Learned

As noted above, this report aims to draw lessons from the process of implementing CBDRR in Aceh. While this section will, to the extent possible, provide details on what could have been done different and what is worth repeating elsewhere, the findings of the desk review and the field mission to ascertain lessons learned resulted in information that does not necessarily ‘fit neatly’ into either of the two categories. As such, this section details interesting findings, followed by lessons/recommendations on how the initiation of CBDRR could be improved in the future, as well as recommendations on the good practices that could be applied – adjusted to the local context – elsewhere.

One of the key issues that presented itself during the desk review and the field mission was the impact of the lack of awareness on and capacity to support CBDRR among local government officials. This was a contributing factor to the lack of support for CBDRR by local governments more generally. In one instance, a community in the district of Bener Meriah had designed and put up signs detailing evacuation routes and outlining essential items to bring in the case of evacuation. However, the head of the local government ordered them to take down the signs because they were ‘scaring’ the villagers, despite the fact that the community had actively participated in awareness raising activities and evacuation simulations. The lack of awareness and understanding of DRR in this case undermined the impact that the CBDRR activities were able to have.

It needs to be noted that the district and sub-district governments were not primary beneficiaries of DRR-A support. The capacity development approach instituted by the project (province – district – sub-district) was necessary in order to first create the provincial policy, regulatory and institutional enabling environment that would facilitate similar environments at lower levels of government. Thus, when CBDRR activities were initiated, the impact of the creation of the enabling environment and significant awareness raising activities undertaken for government at the provincial level had yet to trickle down to the district and sub-district levels. However, during the process of identifying villages where CBDRR would be piloted, district authorities were consulted to select or recommend communities/villages which were particularly vulnerable to disaster. This raises...
the question as to whether: a) they had the necessary capacity to do this, and b) if they understood the concept of CBDRR. However, the DRR-A team has ensured that provincial and district officials have learned about and participated in some of the CBDRR activities. This exposure has ‘opened their eyes’ to the reality that sophisticated policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks do not directly result in a reduction in disaster risk. DRR takes place at the community level.

**Lesson #1:** When initiating CBDRR, ensure that district and sub-district government officials have sufficient understanding and capacity on DRR. If there is awareness, understanding and minimum technical capacity to support CBDRR among local government, the impact and sustainability of CBDRR can have a wider reach. Further, capacity among local government officials is needed to ensure that they understand the role of communities in the implementation of policies, regulations and plans for CBDRR. With knowledgeable interlocutors on DRR within local government, communities will have resources to call on in planning and budgeting for CBDRR, and the activities have a higher chance of receiving funds from the local government budget.

The actual process of developing the CAPs turned out to be more difficult than anticipated when the DRR-A project was conceived and developed. While some challenges were expected, particularly in ensuring that there was sufficient participation and quality input from women during the development of the CAPs, other challenges arose which, in most cases were overcome with useful approaches by the project team and its implementing partners, and others that were not. For instance, the project design had not considered the lack of management capacity at the village level – project management, financial management, and reporting. DRR-A’s implementing partners (local NGOs in the eastern, northern and central highlands regions of Aceh) provided the pilot communities with some training and they were able to ensure that members of the Community DRR Forums had sufficient knowledge on project and financial management to develop the CAPs and then implement activities.

Another issue was the involvement of women. While this challenge had been anticipated, and the guidelines on CBDRR provided to the local NGOs provided guidance on how to encourage women’s participation in the process, and in two villages the DRR Forums were led by women. But in some communities there was little to no women involved. The local NGOs had intensive discussions
with community leaders on how to overcome this problem, but no results were seen. While development programmes in Aceh have to take into consideration local cultural practices and contexts, with the enormous rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts after the 2004 earthquake and tsunami including attention to the needs and voices of women’s groups, their lack of participation in the CBDRR activities was somewhat discouraging. One issue may be community leadership. Another may be the time of day at the implementation of activities were being held – evenings are generally not conducive to women’s participation as they have to tend to small children and other works at that time of the day.

There may also have been the issue of awareness and understanding among the community members participating in the CAP development. DRR is still a very new concept and in recent times, especially after the devastating earthquake and tsunami of 2004, the focus has been on response. As such, encouraging women to take time away from the childcare, household, or livelihood responsibilities to participate in activities which at that time were not a priority for them (and, admittedly, others in the community) could perhaps be seen as reasonable. Awareness raising and capacity development of Community DRR Forum members on DRR as a topic only took place after the Forums were conceived and members identified, and thus may have resulted in a number of relevant and interested individuals being overlooked for membership in the Forums.

**Lesson #2:** CBDRR activities should be initiated with general information sessions and awareness on DRR among target communities. This can be followed by more targeted training on CBDRR for interested individuals.
identified during the information sessions. Undertaking such steps would have two benefits. First, it would ensure that people in the community have a better understanding of the concept of DRR and why they should involve themselves, and with time to digest this information, perhaps find time in their schedules to participate in a Community Forum when they would otherwise not have. Second, this would ensure that all members of a community are given the opportunity to volunteer to be a member or even the champion of the Forum and bypass the necessity of otherwise relying on community leaders to identify and nominate ‘appropriate’ individuals for the Forum.

One of the challenges routinely faced by the Community DRR Forums was the irregular participation by village officials. Meetings were continually being rescheduled and momentum for CAP development was being lost. In some villages this was overcome by transferring responsibility for scheduling and chairing Forum meetings from village officials to the communities’ elders and youth. This step had many positive and unexpected results. The first was that the Community DRR Forum was able to meet more frequently and the development of CAPs sped up. The second was that the joint chairmanship of the Forums by village elders and youth increased social cohesion through the increased respect between elders and youth on the knowledge and insights each could share during the CAP development process. In many villages where CBDRR was piloted, prior to the creation of the Forums there was little opportunity or desire for interaction between the various groups in the community. The Forums created both opportunity and space for this interaction, not only increasing respect between village members but also facilitating the transfer of local wisdom on disaster mitigation and preparedness from elders to youth.

Lesson #3: Community DRR Forums can fill gaps where there is a lack of opportunity for communication, discussion and learning among the various members of a community. In this instance, the Forums created a space where the transfer of local wisdom could take place, and created social cohesion – at least on DRR issues. Thus, while the Forums have the specific purpose of addressing CBDRR, they can also be used to discuss other village development issues (climate change, family planning, etc). It may therefore be an idea worth exploring in conflict regions: create community forums for dialogue based not on conflict issues, but on issues of common concern to all villagers. The dialogue process may be able to increase mutual trust and respect, and segue into discussion on other, more contentious issues affecting the community.
The concept of local wisdom, however, did present challenges, which were not anticipated during the design of the DRR-A program. As the DRR-A project team noted:

‘Transfer of knowledge using local wisdom is good in theory, but the concept of local wisdom is hard to grasp among many villagers – if there was a recent disaster, local wisdom tends to be passed on but is unlikely to be passed on to generations if there has been no disaster in recent memory. You cannot teach examples if they simply do not exist. Local wisdom is either a pre-established part of the culture or if it is non-existent; it is a difficult concept to teach.’

As noted above in Lesson #4, without ‘space’ to ensure that local wisdom can be passed down from generation to generation in the absence of a disaster in which to learn from directly, then local wisdom is at a high risk of being lost. For example, during the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, nearly 80 percent of the people in the town of Calang in Aceh Jaya District along the west coast of Aceh perished. However, in one family nearly all of them (more than 60 members of the extended family) were saved. While most of the community ran down to the beach when the sea retreated, leaving hundreds of fish in its wake, the matriarch of the family recalled an old folk song which tells the tale of the ‘greedy people’ who collect the fish after the sea retreats following the ‘earthquake of seven days.’ The community members who rushed to shore were killed when the waves came crashing down upon them. By recognizing the signs of the coming tsunami, she was able to save all of her children and nearly all of her grandchildren. However, if she had not been alive when the tsunami struck, that knowledge would have been lost – and likely most of her family would have been lost as well. On the other hand, how many more people in Calang might have been saved if there had been opportunities for village elders to share their knowledge – in this case in the form of a folk song – with their children and grandchildren? (Sadly, once she had been assured that her family were making their way to safety, the woman perished trying to warn other members of her community).

Interestingly, in a ‘Knowledge, Attitude and Awareness’ Study in Central Aceh undertaken by one of DRR-A’s NGO implementing partners, it was noted that villagers with a high level of local wisdom were less vulnerable in the event of
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disasters. By taking note of signs that nature was giving (for example, animal behavior or changes in the temperature of spring water), communities were better prepared in case there was a need to evacuate - knowing when and how the evacuation should take place.

Lesson #4: Community DRR Forums should not just be for the purpose of developing and implementing Community Action Plans. Even when the CAPs have been developed by drawing on local wisdom, it is important that the Forums create regular opportunities in which local wisdom can be shared directly between members of the community. Further, as is noted above, when there is an absence of disasters for any length of time, then wisdom is at risk of being lost. The Community Forums should also serve the purpose of supporting the routine recording and dissemination of local wisdom so that it is not lost, and can blend with new approaches and technologies. It can then help to serve future generations as they go about their own DRR activities.

As with Lesson #4 above, where Community DRR Forums can help serve the purpose of creating space and opportunity for dialogue on other community issues, the participatory process of developing the CAPs applied by the Forums (using focus groups discussions with all community members to ascertain disaster risks, hazards and community capacity for mitigation, preparedness and response), has created an awareness among community members of the role that they can and should be playing in the wider development process in their communities and districts. CBDRR activities created opportunities for the local community, CSOs and district government to mutually discuss their perspectives and interact constructively on DRR. Community members acknowledge there is no reason why they should not be taking the same approach in addressing education, health care, economic development, environment and other infrastructure issues. In Indonesia, the existing development planning process is known as Musrenbang (Musyawarah Rencana Pembangunan or participatory development planning process), which is a bottom-up process that begins at the village level with consolidated plans at the sub-district, then district and then provincial levels. While in theory it should be participatory – with village members discussing and agreeing on their development priorities for the coming year – in practice it is often just the village officials who decide the community needs and then input that information to the sub-district planning process. There is little to no empowerment of community members as a whole to participate in the development planning process.
Lesson #5: The CAP development process can, and has, acted as a catalyst for communities to engage in the annual development planning process in their communities. By showing by example (ie: focus group discussions to identify risks, hazards and ascertain capacities) that community voices can and should be heard in identifying community priorities, CBDRR has empowered the pilot communities to actively engage and participate in the Musrenbang process in their respective villages. This was particularly so in communities in Bener Meriah District. As such, the concept of the Community DRR Forums can be replicated within communities during the annual Musrenbang activities, making development planning more participatory, transparent and responsive to community needs and priorities.
Follow-up

This lesson learned report will be of interest to development practitioners working in the field of community development. The lessons extracted from this project aim to provide guidance not only for on-going and future DRR programmes, but can also extend to other sectors working on issues that link community development initiatives with overall government development planning processes. For example, it is important to ensure that local government officials have sufficient capacity to participate in community action planning for DRR and then facilitate the incorporation of those plans into local development plans.

This lesson learned document can be shared through dissemination of printed versions to public, national and local government, and other stakeholders and published electronically on UNDP’s website, UNDP knowledge network, etc.

These lessons can be best incorporated into future projects if they are taken into consideration during the planning stage – to ensure that capacity development approaches are meeting the needs of the project stakeholders during the lifetime of the project – as well as throughout implementation by monitoring opportunities to utilize the community forum concept to promote participatory approaches in project management (monitoring and evaluation, for example) as well as promoting community cohesion in activity implementation. The DRR-A project was particularly sensitive to monitoring the wider impacts of the community forums – for promoting community cohesion, and empowering community members to take part in community decision making. This was not part of the project per se, but proved to be critical to the CBDRR outcomes. Building awareness and understanding of local government is prominent key for ensuring the adoption of community-based DRR initiatives into local government planning and budget. The capacity of local NGOs is essential for achieving and successful CBDRR application and replication in partnership with local government.
Additioinal Resources

Documents Referenced

DRR-A Project Document
DRR-A Inception Report – March 2009
DRR-A Quarterly Progress Reports 2009-2001
DRR-A Annual Reports 2009-2011
European Commission Results Oriented Monitoring Report – DRR-A - July 2010
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Characteristic of Resilient Community, DFID – 2007

Interviewees

Ibu Nanda, Disaster Management Focal Point, Department of Infrastructure, Aceh Development Planning Agency
Pak Armenia, Head of Prevention and Preparedness, Aceh Disaster Management Agency
Pak Muksin, Head of Section – Preparedness, Aceh Disaster Management Agency
Pak Bobby, Head of Section – Prevention, Aceh Disaster Management Agency
Curriculum Development Team, Aceh Department of Education
Pak Ferri, Secretary, Forum PRB
Pak Zulhan, Head of Policy, Forum PRB
Pak Yusuf, Member, Forum PRB
Pak Teuku Ramli, Member, Forum PRB
Pak Marwan, Coordinator, Head of Section, Aceh Department of Transportation, Communication and Information Telematics
Pak Sukri, Member, Public Awareness Coordination Committee
Pak Muklis, Member, Public Awareness Coordination Committee
Pak Tony Kuswoyo, Teacher and member of the Dayah module development team
Abdul Kahar Irsyadi, Executive Project Manager, Tsunami and Disaster Mitigation and Research Centre
Dr. Khairul Munadi, Knowledge Management Manager, Tsunami and Disaster Mitigation and Research Centre
Teuku Alvisyahrin, Ph.D, Professional Services Manager, Tsunami and Disaster Mitigation and Research Centre
Dr. Ir. Eldina Fatimah, Disaster Risk Assessment Specialist, Tsunami and Disaster Mitigation and Research Centre
All staff, Local Disaster Management Agency, Pidie Jaya District
Community DRR Forum, Pante Beureune, Pidie Jaya District
Community DRR Forum, Pante Raya, Bener Meriah District
Staff, Local Disaster Management Agency, Bener Meriah District
Representative, Local Development Planning Agency, Bener Meriah District
Bapak Suliaman Abda, Vice Speaker, Aceh House of Representatives
Bapak Burhanuddin, Secretary, Aceh House of Representatives
Bapak Fuady, Member, Aceh House of Representatives

Contact

malikah.amril@undp.org
andrys.erawan@undp.org
United Nations Development Programme
Menara Thamrin Building, 8-9th Floor
Kav. 3 Jl. M.H. Thamrin, Jakarta 10250, Indonesia

www.undp.or.id