

# THE 2008 PROVENTION FORUM

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Panama City, Panama

## From Grassroots to Global: People Centered Disaster Risk Reduction



An indigenous women's group builds earthquake-resilient homes, Guatemala, March 2008, IFRC/Provention

A review and discussion of key themes, challenges and potential contributions to be made by Provention in promoting disaster risk reduction

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**PROVENTION**  
CONSORTIUM

Mark Pelling and Erin Michelle Smith  
Environment, Politics and Development Research Group, Department of Geography,  
King's College London



Photos: Justin Benn, Linda Martin Chitturi

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## **Dedication: Cyclone Nargis and the Sichuan Earthquake**

This report is dedicated to those who lost their lives in May 2008 to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and in the Sichuan earthquake in China, to those who survived, and to the many that are working at all levels to meet the basic needs and secure the human rights of the people affected.

Within just a few weeks of the ProVention 2008 forum, the failures of development that lead to disaster risk and loss were revealed once again. On May 3, the coastal regions of Myanmar were devastated by Cyclone Nargis, which left more than 100,000 people dead. Less than two weeks later, an earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale struck the Sichuan region of China, killing more than 70,000 people.

These events highlight the importance of governance and local actors having a say in development and disaster risk reduction.

In Myanmar, the conversion of a mangrove delta ecosystem into commercial rice cultivation provided an important contribution to national GDP. However, it also created vulnerability leading to the Cyclone Nargis disaster. The unsustainable development of the Irrawaddy Delta manifested itself during the disaster in many ways: the loss of a natural buffer increased exposure to coastal storms, persistent poverty and inadequate provision of basic needs created a vulnerable population. In addition, the absence of effective local-, regional- and national-level early warning, public shelters and evacuation planning meant that disaster risk had not been mitigated. Cyclone Nargis was another in a long list of recent disasters waiting to happen.

Governance failure was also at the root of the Sichuan earthquake disaster. In China, failure to regulate construction resulted in the deaths of many children as schools and residential buildings collapsed. The Chinese government estimates that 7,000 classrooms collapsed in the earthquake. As government investigators begin to examine the causes of so many building failures, parents have protested, calling for more urgent action.

Both disasters show how a lack of accountability to local populations and a lack of local participation in development decision-making have generated disaster risk. They also illustrate the great potential for disaster risk to be managed by interventions that are simple, but which rely on political will. As both disasters move into recovery mode, it is vitally important that local actors are involved. Where involvement is lacking, response can become a second disaster, eroding local economies, removing property rights and breaking up social capital.

Previous ProVention forum discussions examined the potential for reconstruction to provide a window of opportunity to promote disaster risk reduction. It is hoped that local, national and international actors can build partnerships during the relief and recovery stages in order to promote risk reduction and the provision of basic needs, as well as local participation to reduce future vulnerability. The further development and application of lessons learned during the 2008 forum is made all the more urgent by these events. The issues range from the involvement of indigenous and women's groups in risk reduction, to the role of the media, and integrating climate change adaptation into disaster risk management.

## Executive Summary

The ProVention Consortium is a global partnership of governments, international organizations, academic organizations, the private sector and civil society. Its goal is to support developing countries to reduce the risk and social, economic and environmental impacts of natural hazards on vulnerable populations. The ProVention Forum 2008 had the theme of 'From Grassroots to Global: People-Centered Disaster Risk Reduction'. The forum was held in Panama City between April 8 and 10, 2008 and brought together 170 partners.

The ProVention Forum is designed to allow free talking and frank exchange of ideas, challenges and innovation on disaster risk reduction. The aim of this forum report is to record the energy, ideas and views resulting from discussions and presentations in the formal sessions and also in the corridors of the event. The report does not provide an overview of the presentations and discussions held at the forum. For this information, please visit [www.proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=85](http://www.proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=85).

This executive summary is structured around the seven themes of the forum and also includes comment on wider conversations. Finally, the report identifies seven key challenges that ProVention and its partners might consider in their work over the coming years. This report is a summary of the views and discussions by ProVention partners at the forum as captured and contextualized independently by the authors.

### Local Risk Priorities in Panama City: Urban Risk

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Through forum field visits and case study presentations focusing on urban risk, participants observed the many ways in which urban processes can intensify or generate new hazards and vulnerability. At the community level, risk can present itself in many ways. How can different actors recognize and then engage with this risk? How can they communicate these issues between different levels of action? The interdependence of social, economic, environmental and political forms of hazard was underlined. Also highlighted were the challenges for local action, such as the difficulty in identifying and maintaining local leadership.

Field visits and case study presentations emphasized the central role of municipal government in reducing disaster risk. With some national-level platforms experiencing difficulty in defining agendas and representing civil society, there is a fundamental need to strengthen local government and community representatives. This is necessary in order to identify risks and obtain the social and political capacity to act on them in the urban context.

### Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction from the Community Perspective

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With the parallel development of the fields of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, the evolution of both debates should be harnessed in order to develop joint agendas and actions. A clear demand for links to be identified between the disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation agendas can allow both fields to reinforce subsequent activities.

While there are challenges in linking disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation practices, particularly in dispelling misconceptions in both fields, opportunities exist to strengthen policy and programming agendas. Working on both disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation at community level enables concrete discussions on how both agendas affect livelihoods and security.

## **The Role and Power of Indigenous People's and Women's Groups in Managing Disaster Risk**

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Local actors are the primary agents in local disaster risk reduction and disaster response. No one understands better the local culture, needs and capacity. Very often, the historical repositories of local knowledge on risk are indigenous groups. A failure to recognize this alienates local actors and leads to reduced efficiency in risk reduction investments. Women are often described as the glue that holds local society together, but they can also be marginalized from decision-making processes. Engaging women, indigenous people and other marginalized groups is not easy. Unexpected harmful social change can arise from well-intended interaction. Even greater harm may be caused by inaction.

As we move forward with discussions and experience on how local actors may organize to participate in local disaster risk reduction, these groups can strengthen disaster risk reduction efforts, making them both more transparent and effective from the bottom up. Grassroots-driven disaster risk reduction should not only be a right for affected communities, but also demanded by governments.

## **Communicating Risk and the Power of Visual Media**

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As one of today's most powerful communications tools, the effective use of visual media has enormous potential in risk communication, whether from one community to another or from one organization to an international audience. Using visual media effectively at a community level means partner organizations must be willing to relinquish control of the process, allowing local participants to own the task. Visual media on disaster risk is most effective as an advocacy tool when it speaks from the context and culture of those at risk. It is also effective when it goes beyond the reporting of project aims and outcomes to examine the deeper processes at work in generating risk, and in shaping capacity and action for risk reduction.

Local involvement in media production – while requiring the development of a media culture – can be a powerful tool of community empowerment as well as a means of transferring knowledge and lessons learned. Organizations can also learn to use visual media in order to increase understanding of the complex process of disaster risk production and reduction.

## **Public–private Partnerships and Risk Financing: Bringing Together Resources for Effective Risk Reduction**

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There is much scope for public–private partnerships across infrastructure development, reconstruction and risk financing. Evidence from risk financing shows that public–private partnerships are growing rapidly in popularity, and range from crop insurance to the underwriting of disaster funds. As capacity increases, so do questions on community involvement, from a partnership's inception onwards. Where commercial interests are involved, a careful balance has to be struck between this and the extraction of resources from the vulnerable. When successfully established, public–private partnerships for risk financing are indeed political in nature. However, they are also powerful and can be beneficial to all actors involved, particularly when it comes to highlighting issues such as risk mitigation that require long-term engagement.

Successful public–private partnerships are built on clear communication between parties. The benefits and costs of the various types of risk financing need to be clearly understood. Particular attention must be paid to those forms of risk financing that are most effective in meeting the needs of different communities. Partnerships also require a clear definition of roles and responsibilities, as well as procedures for resolving grievances.

## **Upscaling Grassroots Efforts: Opportunities and Challenges**

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In order to be effective and build on community perspectives, the reproduction of community-based disaster risk management initiatives needs to be supported by open and strong systems of governance. Where such systems do not exist, grassroots efforts may be replicated horizontally, or scaled across. Indeed, replication through horizontal learning can also be a strategy where inclusive governance is strong. Both strategies face challenges in terms of finding actors to mobilize joint actions, as well as a lack of long-term financial, political and social support for learning. However, it is thought that the benefits are greatly enhanced once the capacity to communicate information on, and react to, risk are increased.

Ways forward include gathering data on the past benefits of scaling-up or -across, and lessons learned on techniques for achieving and maintaining these goals. Experience shows that success is most likely when communities and governments work together, sometimes assisted by external actors, or where strong community-based networks are in place.

## **Developing a New Generation of Disaster Risk Reduction Champions**

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A new generation of disaster risk reduction champions is emerging as a result of increased awareness of disaster risk and the availability of supporting programs, which develop interest and knowledge in the field. Despite the evolving nature of the disaster risk reduction field, new actors face challenges when it comes to integrating their interests and ideas into the current disaster risk reduction debate.

More opportunities are needed for new actors to become involved with established actors and organizations, be it on the ground, within academia, or in professional, public, private and civil society organizations. This provides a wider opportunity to integrate thinking between academia and practice around the world.

## **In the Corridors**

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Conversations on the fringes of meetings can be as informative as program sessions, and the ProVention Forum is no exception. This section tries to capture the gist of these conversations through interviews with participants.

There was broad support for greater engagement with local actors in disaster risk reduction and, more broadly, for cultural sensitivity in planning and implementing disaster risk reduction programs. However, it was also recognized that this requires political will. One participant noted that governments should pay communities to promote disaster risk reduction efforts, if it can be proved that activities effectively reduce risk. Attendees noted a clear change of direction in the disaster risk reduction discourse, which is beginning to reflect the needs and involvement of the South, the building of bottom-up initiatives, and actions being taken not just to disseminate information to communities, but also to stimulate debate on risk at a local level around the world.

Challenges facing the disaster risk reduction agenda include the proliferation of jargon. However, as one participant noted, if we understand the culture and values of the communities in which we are working, we will always find ways to communicate. Other concerns include how to make disaster risk reduction more fashionable and how to hold media attention beyond the emergency phase. Future challenges include the growing synergy between conflict, displacement and environmental change. As one colleague asked: "Is it possible to make institutions and policies adaptable to evolving risks?"

The 2008 forum continued in the tradition of ProVention to seek ways of extending access to all stakeholders. The location in Panama was particularly significant when it came to incorporating representatives from indigenous groups. As in previous years, local government and national

government were less represented than donor governments. ProVention was challenged to continue to lead the way on research and policy development by opening up new agendas for disaster risk reduction. It was also asked to make the most of its reputation as a bridge between stakeholders. This would enable it to engage with emerging interests in disaster risk reduction such as the military and new themes such as changes to mechanisms used in the disbursement and management of bilateral and multilateral aid.

## Conclusion

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This conclusion presents seven challenges to the disaster risk reduction community:

- ◆ *How can the relevance of disaster risk reduction be built on in order to generate a broad urban risk management approach?* With multiple hazards and the uncertainty that climate change and rapid urbanization bring, disaster risk reduction offers a framework and focus for strategies to build generic capacity for risk reduction.
- ◆ *What efforts are required to ensure that the climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction agendas reinforce and complement one another in shaping progressive local development and reducing disaster risk?* As the international community begins to identify funding streams and disbursement mechanisms to support adaptation, what can be done to maximize the impact of this support for the poor and most vulnerable in a way that enhances local development opportunity, and integrates the knowledge and institutional architecture of disaster risk reduction?
- ◆ *What strategies are required to enable disaster risk reduction to be mainstreamed by key federations and networks representing the rights of marginalized people, including indigenous people and women?* Where disaster risk reduction has clear development benefits or can provide leverage for rights claims, working with social networks has real potential.
- ◆ *What is the scope for visual media as an educational and advocacy tool for disaster risk reduction?* Can visual media be harnessed to provide a voice for the vulnerable and make a real difference?
- ◆ *What are the opportunities for public–private partnerships to contribute to disaster risk management and be responsive to community needs?* There is great potential but, as yet, little experience of public–private partnerships in disaster risk reduction. Exploring opportunities requires an examination of the economic, social and political consequences of partnerships as well as their technical detail.
- ◆ *What evidence is there for the successful reproduction of good practice in community-based disaster risk management?* Little is known about the successes and failures of past efforts to replicate local disaster risk reduction projects horizontally or vertically.
- ◆ *What needs to be done to attract and retain the best new professionals in the field of disaster risk reduction?* The potential lies in recognizing the comparative advantages of academics and researchers in different regions (between the North and South, and also between Latin America, Asia and Africa), in building supportive collaboration, and in institutionalizing mechanisms for interaction between research and practitioner communities.



# 1. Introduction and Background

The 2008 ProVention Annual Forum was held in Panama City. The forum brought together ProVention partners to share experiences and views on key challenges facing disaster risk reduction work worldwide – especially in the Americas.

The annual forum is a key activity for ProVention, an organization dedicated to reducing disaster risk and loss experienced by vulnerable communities in developing countries. ProVention is structured as a global consortium and includes governments, international organizations, academic institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations. The wide range of stakeholders involved in ProVention’s work and the organization’s political neutrality allow it to contribute to global policy development in disaster risk reduction in four main ways:

- ◆ networking to build partnerships among the multiple stakeholders engaged in risk reduction
- ◆ providing an informal forum for dialogue and agenda-setting
- ◆ supporting research to document and promote good practice in all aspects of disaster risk management
- ◆ facilitating learning and information exchange between communities of practice

The value of ProVention as a catalyst for policy dialogue and debate on disaster risk issues has been highlighted consistently by its partners. In an effort to emphasize this aspect, ProVention has organized four forums. Reports and discussions can be found at [www.proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=32&projectid=7](http://www.proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=32&projectid=7). The first forum, held in 2005, was co-organized with the Organization of American States and held in Washington DC. It addressed ‘Natural Hazard Risk Management as a Development Tool’.

The 2006 forum, held in Bangkok, focused on ‘Incentives for Reducing Risk’. It examined the political, economic, social and environmental incentives required for a more proactive and preventative approach to dealing with disaster risk and vulnerability.

The 2007 forum, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, examined the theme of ‘Making Disaster Risk Reduction Work’. Discussions centered on the emerging challenges of rapid urbanization and climate change for disaster risk, financial risk transfer, local-level working, risk governance and translating knowledge into action.

The 2008 ProVention Forum was organized around the theme of ‘From Grassroots to Global: People-Centered Disaster Risk Reduction’. Held in Panama City, the forum benefited from the vibrant and committed contribution of many local actors from host country Panama, and from Central and South America. Discussion sessions included debates on urban risk, climate change and disaster risk reduction, the role of grassroots and indigenous women, communicating risk and the power of visual media, risk financing through public–private partnerships, upscaling grassroots efforts, and the development of a new generation of risk reduction actors.

Gustavo Wilches-Chaux, a Colombian author and founding member of the La Red network for the social interpretation of natural disaster risk, opened the forum with a provocative keynote address. He identified the importance of culture as a resource to be preserved through risk reduction, and also as a lens that affects the way that individuals and societies perceive risk and vulnerability, as well as opportunity. Those involved in people-centered disaster risk reduction need to appreciate the importance of culture in giving meaning to people’s lives. Culture is a force that shapes the values and goals that drive local and global agendas and organizations.

The closing address, by the first lady of Panama, brought together the core themes of people-centered disaster risk reduction. She argued for a commitment to local priorities to combat preventable public health risks.

This report presents the most salient and important key issues, ideas and challenges raised during the ProVention Forum 2008. Material is presented under the seven themes identified above, and also includes an 'In the Corridors' section. This provides an opportunity to reflect on conversations with participants outside the formal structure of the forum workshops. The report does not provide an overview of the presentations and discussions held at the ProVention showcase events or partner presentations. The conclusion identifies points of potential action that build on ProVention's strengths. For forum concept papers, program and presentations, please visit [www.proventionconsortium.org/forum2008](http://www.proventionconsortium.org/forum2008).

## 2. Workshop Themes

### 2.1 Local Risk Priorities in Panama City: Urban Risk

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Urban risk was a key theme of the 2008 forum, and field visits on the first day of the event set the tone for focused discussions based on local disaster risk reduction and development priorities. Six field visits (three regions of urban growth and three informal settlements in Panama City) and three case discussions (on issues including national platforms for disaster risk reduction and urban risk indicator development) were undertaken. This section draws on the experience of the Panama studies to derive key generic challenges and lessons for people-centered disaster risk reduction in rapidly growing cities, and in shaping national disaster risk reduction agendas.

#### ***Key Challenges and Drivers for Change***

In Panama City, urban growth has generated new kinds of hazard and vulnerability associated with land use, building design and critical services in planned and unplanned developments. While the city and surrounding region are not at high risk of large-scale natural hazards, smaller daily hazards are experienced and these can turn into local disasters. Those exposed to everyday environmental hazards associated with poor-quality housing are also most likely to be exposed to social hazards such as street crime. This combination of hazards multiplies risk so that overall risk is greater than the sum of its parts. Social hazard, for example, can undermine local capacity to organize itself in order to reduce public health or natural hazards, as well as being hazardous and undermining quality of life in its own right.

A clear challenge for those at risk and with responsibility for urban planning and risk management is to identify interactions between multiple forms of hazard and vulnerability, and to identify those members of society who are most vulnerable. It makes little sense to reduce one form of risk while another (potentially more serious) risk is not addressed. Young men, for example, may be particularly at risk from street violence and from traffic accidents, women from domestic violence and local air pollution. Once compound risks have been identified, it is a challenge to identify which agencies or local actors have the responsibility and capacity to reduce hazard and vulnerability; what kinds of hazard and vulnerability are local actors best suited to resolve and which are best resolved through citywide regulation? Where many different actors are operating at different levels to provide urban services and reduce risks, how can activities be coordinated to build additional capacity?

Panama City presents an example of situations where it is not only poverty that is associated with disaster risk. Aggressive urban development that transforms the urban landscape can also generate risk for middle- and upper-income residents. This can happen when high-density urban development restricts the proportion of public space in a neighborhood, or fails to provide sufficient road and transport access. Public parks, for example, can provide many ecosystem services, from cleaning urban air and reducing local temperatures to providing a peaceful space for relaxation and for neighbors to meet. They also provide an open space for use in disaster response and recovery, adding flexibility as well as value to urban design.

Even in rich cities, local and municipal government may have limited financial resources with which to provide services and manage risk. Although local government is best placed to

coordinate compound risk reduction, resource scarcity undermines capacity. How can they receive more support? In Panama City, as elsewhere, community groups have responded to their own issues but they too lack capacity. Building local social capital and maintaining local leadership in communities at risk is not easy. Where local organizations do exist, building effective partnerships with local government is a challenge.

This session also identified challenges for the development of national platforms for disaster risk reduction. Again, a perceived priority is to strengthen local government capacity, as it is often here that responsibility for implementing platform activities lies. The work of local authorities and community actors is further tested, as it is recognized that risks are not necessarily generated at a local level. National and international strategic action is therefore required to prevent the burden of responding to risks falling solely on the vulnerable. It is also important to ensure that national platforms have clearly defined agendas. This is a challenge that has presented itself in numerous countries and should be negotiated by government representatives and actors from civil society and the private sector – two groups which have generally been left out of national platform development processes in the past.

### ***Experience and Lessons to Learn***

Disaster risk reduction can be a component of – or even an entry point for – local urban planning and development. Vulnerability and capacity assessments offer local actors a flexible tool which can contribute to their local development; this was identified as happening in the Panama City community of Las Nubes, for instance. Vulnerability and capacity assessments can be applied to incorporate the full range of urban hazards and vulnerabilities experienced in the city, and thereby act as a local planning tool to allow communities to link local priorities arising from living with compound risk into top-down decision-making processes. But influencing policy-making is not easy.

The forum session included the sharing of experiences on understanding climate-related risks. Participants called for greater understanding of the role that various actors (public and private sectors and communities) play in managing mitigation as well as adaptation to climate risk. They highlighted the need to learn from a current lack of focus on the economic dimension of climate-related risk, and called for better cooperation with private sector actors. There were also calls for climate change to be seen as an opportunity to build capacity for sustainable development, and generate institutional change in moving from response-related activities to placing attention on building resources for preparedness. Finally, we need to learn from the recognized ways in which governments perceive disaster risk and climate risk – climate can be seen as having a paralyzing effect on a government, whereas disasters can drive action – so that we can engage in a more effective debate on both forms of risk management.

### ***A Role for ProVention?***

How can different actors involved in the identification and management of compound urban risk be more effectively connected? ProVention's capacity to bring together different levels of stakeholder means that they are able to host debates on urban risk that engage not only community actors, but also non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government authorities. Similarly, ProVention can act as a bridge to overcome disciplinary and professional gaps that exist between those working on crime, public health, poverty, disaster risk and urban governance. The legacy of the low priority given to urban development by bilateral donors in the past is a limited knowledge of how to deal with rapid urbanization. ProVention is well placed to champion urban research and advocacy on compound risk.

## 2.2 Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction from the Community Perspective

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### ***Key Challenges and Drivers for Change***

Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation efforts are gaining both momentum and support. This period of evolution provides a challenge and an opportunity. The increasing political visibility of climate change adaptation can be seen as a rival to disaster risk reduction. Climate change adaptation is certainly attracting rapidly growing support from donors and national governments. To date, however, the climate change adaptation community has collaborated with the disaster risk reduction community in academic research and policy planning to avoid a reinvention of the wheel. So far, the balance of learning has passed from the disaster risk reduction community to the climate change community. But as funding for climate change adaptation increases, the opportunity arises for the disaster risk reduction community to learn from adaptation work. Disaster risk reduction investments and policy will increasingly need to take into account innovations and implementation from the climate change adaptation community.

The opportunity for productive collaboration is huge, provided that dialogue is maintained. This includes strategic targeting of the climate change community and donors in order to demonstrate the value of disaster risk reduction to climate change adaptation agendas. Building collaboration at the national and sub-national levels can help advocates for both causes make more compelling arguments, gain broader support and create entry points for community-level mobilization.

Working on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation at a community level requires trust in the science of both fields and in local communities. Approaching disaster risk reduction and climate change from a community perspective allows for the creation of multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral dialogues and actions. It also demands a reality check on how these two agendas can have a concrete impact on livelihoods and human security. By operating at a community level, we have the best chance of reversing the North–South bias that has been generated by both disaster risk reduction and climate change discourses in the past, as well as taking a clear shot at making the links between these two fields effective.

Climate change is not the only driver of contemporary or future disaster risk or human vulnerability – and in many places may not be the most important. The scope of disaster risk reduction goes beyond hydrometeorological events and includes short-term coping as well as longer-term adaptation measures. The urban context of the Panama ProVention Forum and the Sichuan earthquake reminds us that the institutions and inequalities shaped by local dynamic pressures – such as rapid urban growth – are, in aggregate, at least as important a global driver of disaster risk as climate change.

### ***Experience and Lessons to Learn***

Challenges in linking disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation practices remain. Acknowledging the presence of these hurdles is the first step in working towards achieving sustainable joint action between the two fields. Common perceptions and assumptions about the differences between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction include:

- ◆ Disaster risk reduction is a more immediate, pressing issue, whereas climate change adaptation can be dealt with in the long term.
- ◆ Climate change is novel and exotic, whereas disaster risk reduction is more day-to-day in nature.
- ◆ Disaster risk reduction is perceived as fostering more humanitarian concerns, whereas climate change is often linked to economic considerations.
- ◆ Climate change is more science-driven, whereas disaster risk reduction is more practice-oriented.

For the most part, these differences reflect individual perspectives and experiences rather than any fundamental barriers to communication and collaboration. Both disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation include risk reduction actions that can either be immediate or that can unfold over increasingly long periods. The changing nature of disaster risk is linked to variations in the production of vulnerability as well as hazard, so that both disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation need to be dynamic and embrace novelty.

In reality, both disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation are long-term processes, which involve many of the same communities. However, they are currently unfolding at different policy levels. Disaster risk reduction policies are now focusing on reducing short-term risks, and may not deal with the root causes of risk. On the other hand, climate change adaptation discussions focus on future forecasts. Furthermore, both fields are operating with a different set of economics. While the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has created channels to access significant funding streams for climate change, the disaster risk reduction community has so far failed to make its case compelling enough to attract anywhere near the same level of financial commitment.

Climate change adaptation funding and policy circulate primarily at a global level, whereas disaster risk reduction funding and actions are often more closely linked to national and local development planning. If we are able to link these two fields, we could increase climate change's capacity to communicate at a local level while raising the level of support for disaster risk reduction to a global level. By placing the development of this partnership at the community level, actual experiences from local voices can be used to make the effects of climate change more tangible. Communities could then play a role not only in developing their own climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction agendas, but in broadening the effectiveness of both fields from the bottom up.

### ***A Role for ProVention?***

ProVention has the potential to act as a global champion for a progressive and developmental approach to climate change adaptation as part of its existing agenda for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development. This can build on ProVention's existing niche role as a bridge between the climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction scientific communities. However, this requires a step change in prioritizing work that aims to understand and implement adaptation within ProVention's portfolio of work. ProVention has been a lead actor in providing an evidence base and in advocating for the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction into development, thus providing legitimacy for the future mainstreaming of climate change adaptation. Without this approach, the progressive climate change adaptation agenda is liable to be delayed or hijacked. This is because the climate change community may repeat many of the steps already taken by the disaster risk reduction community. Or, in the event that an alternative vision of adaptation develops that is defensive, basic needs or human rights may be abandoned in order to protect core state security functions.

## **2.3 The Role and Power of Indigenous People's and Women's Groups in Managing Disaster Risk**

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### ***Key Challenges and Drivers for Change***

Indigenous people and women across the world continue to confront institutionalized inequality and exclusion from decision-makers. Partly because of this, these groups have become a focus for capacity-building through self-organization and in partnership with supporters.

Supporting the capacity of women and indigenous groups to manage disaster risk is a key step in effectively engaging local actors in disaster risk reduction activities. A core challenge is to identify ways to develop new partnerships between women and indigenous groups, and disaster risk reduction actors, including government representatives (from local to national level) and humanitarian and development agencies. Such partnerships would not only formalize the role of

grassroots actors in agenda-setting for disaster risk reduction, but would also allow for the upscaling and replication of established, successful activities involving these groups.

A second key challenge is to more effectively institutionalize the participation of grassroots groups in disaster risk reduction activities. This requires breaking down myths surrounding current involvement in risk management activities and the capacity and scale of their actions. It is not enough to identify indigenous, women and other minority or excluded groups (such as migrants, those with chronic illness, disability, children or the elderly); participation also needs to be meaningful. Too often, reports proclaim the participation of local actors, but are only able to offer scant evidence of either the depth or sustainability of such participation.

There are well-known advantages of including local actors in disaster risk reduction projects – from accessing local knowledge to saving costs and adding ownership. Women frequently form the majority in community groups and are often the glue that holds the local community together. Local actors, including indigenous people and women, are the first to respond in a disaster, they know the vulnerabilities of their families, and work together both formally and informally to build the resilience of their communities. But their contribution is often not formally acknowledged. It seems that a lack of technical language, as well as their invisibility in formal accounting processes, renders their contributions invisible, thereby perpetuating the myth of dependency and lack of capacity.

Despite this, examples of successful social organization and the building of technical capacity do exist – even at a global level. The existence of the GROOTS network is testament to this. At the heart of this challenge is a call to better understand and amplify the contribution of marginalized groups, including women and indigenous groups, to development in general and to disaster risk reduction in particular.

### ***Experience and Lessons to Learn***

Women and indigenous people already possess a great deal of risk management knowledge and experience. It is vital to learn from this experience, and to have the opportunity to share details of challenges and drivers for these activities. Lessons on how to incorporate knowledge into policy planning and to replicate lessons and good practice, as well as to learn from the lessons of failure, are key to any disaster risk reduction program that claims community-level engagement.

Grassroots organizations can hold vital knowledge on local culture and values, which can then be integrated into the risk management process and therefore strengthen activities. Experience has shown that in the field of disaster risk reduction, language can create barriers between actors, in particular, between grassroots organizations and disaster management experts. Without understanding each others' languages we will not be able to share knowledge and experience of success and failure.

Scaling up discussions of current disaster management activities and removing the barrier of technical or academic language are key steps in including the marginalized in the debate on policy and institutional platforms. How can we ensure that these groups are included in the debate at national level? How can we create a stronger understanding of the benefits that inclusion can bring to make sure that lessons learned from marginalized populations at risk are documented, shared, and incorporated into broader risk management activities?

### ***A Role for ProVention?***

How can ProVention contribute to the wider recognition and meaningful engagement of marginalized groups in disaster risk reduction? Its role in providing space for representatives to interact with policy-makers at local, national and international level is one way of sensitizing the powerful to the value of engagement, as well as ensuring the rights of the vulnerable are included in risk management decision-making. Supporting education on how local and national authorities can meaningfully engage with communities is another. Time and again, the rights of marginalized groups are sidelined in reconstruction programs, particularly with regard to land rights. There is a danger that climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction may make relocation schemes more common and, if this is the case, their success depends on the meaningful participation of

marginalized groups among the relocated and any host communities. ProVention is well placed to examine this future policy hotspot.

ProVention's investment in new risk reduction champions can also provide fresh opportunities for marginalized groups.

## **2.4 Communicating Risk and the Power of Visual Media**

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### ***Key Challenges and Drivers for Change***

Visual media is one of the most powerful communications tools in today's world. Images can shape the way we form opinions, approach issues, and communicate with each other. Participatory video is one mechanism for local voices to be heard on a broader scale. Media can be used to transmit information, store knowledge, educate and raise awareness. The effective use of visual media has enormous potential in risk communication, whether from one community to another (including in a South–South context), or from one organization to an international audience. Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, demonstrates the potential for visual media to advocate across all levels of decision-making, from the individual to the global, and to help set political agendas. What lessons can be learned for advocating for disaster risk reduction?

Visual media encompasses more than just video. It includes other complementary tools and technology, including the more traditional tools of letters, photography, murals and print journalism. In deciding how to use visual media to communicate risk, the context of the project must first be understood. While video technology is becoming more accessible to some communities (both in terms of price and in the availability of tools), it is important to also continue to use other communications and advocacy tools such as letter-writing campaigns and the collection of oral testimonies, which may be more effective in drawing out local advocacy work on a broader scale.

A key challenge in developing the use of visual media at a community level is to distinguish between work that seeks to provide a voice for local actors and the use of local voices to promote the interests of non-local disaster risk reduction actors. Where local voices are sought, experience shows that it is important for the task of creation to be put into the hands of local partners. It is only when non-local actors relinquish control of the media-creation process that people will have a full opportunity to express their own stories, and become empowered by their actions as a therapeutic act of remembrance or as an act of resistance through advocacy. In the past, the distinction between providing and using local voices has not always been maintained. This has left media communications biased towards the views of external partners, resulting in grassroots voices being lost in the world of the global media. There is a role for local voices and images in promoting the interests of non-local disaster risk reduction actors, but it is important not to confuse this with using media for local empowerment. This challenge suggests that the disaster risk reduction community needs to recognize the diversity of media tools – for local self-expression and documenting, for horizontal learning, and for advocacy. Where advocacy is the aim, it is important to identify the target audience (local actors, potential donors, government decision-makers, professionals etc.). Each agenda and target audience will require different tools.

### ***Experience and Lessons to Learn***

The potential application of visual media in fostering disaster risk reduction efforts should not be underestimated. This media has an enormous capacity to develop local co-learning and advocacy strategies at a community level and beyond, through the use of testimony to hold decision-makers to account. Visual media is already well used in professional training, and national and international fundraising activities, and can continue to make a valuable contribution. We must learn how to develop such media while leaving professional misconceptions behind, including the idea that such technology might be new to a community, that a more experienced team can document a project more effectively than a local group, and that the collection of stories and knowledge is a novel activity.

Past efforts using visual media, particularly video, by international organizations and partnerships have focused on creating scripted, commercial, self-promoting materials. While such initiatives are necessary to a certain extent, and can be very successful in providing donors and volunteers with positive visual justification for their involvement, we must learn to step beyond the perception that we should only document what worked or what is positive. One of the key benefits of sharing risk communication through visual media is the impact that such images and knowledge can have beyond technical and institutional rhetoric. We know that the disaster risk reduction process is a difficult and challenging one. By using visual media to document both our successes and our mistakes, we are using the money and time of affected communities and organizations more effectively. Institutions involved in disaster risk reduction need to learn that even more credit will be given to their visual media outputs if they truly depict all elements of the complex process of reducing risk.

### ***A Role for ProVention?***

The 2008 ProVention Forum's role in hosting a film festival on disaster risk reduction was an original and positive one. This highlighted the great interest and experience in visual media that already exists within the disaster risk reduction community. A media network, to include journalists and researchers, would be a valuable tool for engaging with such opinion-shapers. Future events may bring this community together so as to engage in more structured self-critique and learning, which can push the boundaries of what is feasible for media and how it is strategically used to record testimony and enable advocacy for pro-poor disaster risk reduction.

The open and engaging nature of the ProVention Forum provides an important space for institutions to showcase visual media of a less scripted nature. Films and other outputs, which realistically identify the experiences that communities and organizations have had with risk communication, can prompt debate. Research can be encouraged that tests the effectiveness of visual media on communicating risk and on the experiences of a community or organization with specific projects. Such work could be expanded in order to determine the capacity that different forms of visual media have on influencing multiple levels of stakeholders from a local to global level.

## **2.5 Public–private Partnerships and Risk Financing: Bringing Together Resources for Effective Risk Reduction**

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### ***Key Challenges and Drivers for Change***

Public–private partnerships have the potential to build rewarding relationships to reduce disaster risk during infrastructure development, risk financing and disaster recovery. This session focused on risk financing but provides generic insight that could usefully be extended to a broader debate on the role of partnerships in promoting pro-poor and risk-reducing development.

Recognizing that risk financing is limited in both scope and scale, can public–private partnerships play a role in bringing together stakeholders to address these gaps? A key challenge is to ensure that these partnerships are made available to at-risk communities, yet still include the effective participation of higher-scale actors such as donors and governments. The PROFIN foundation in Bolivia provides an example of this kind of partnership. An NGO helped to catalyze the partnership, ensuring that local community interests were represented and community capacities were enhanced through the partnership. Public–private partnerships need clear communication strategies, not only to understand the needs of risk-affected communities, but also to ensure that an understanding is developed about the roles, goals and responsibilities of all actors. Partner goals must be transparent and developed in parallel with each other. If, for example, the private sector is thought of as only being motivated by profit, this belief must be effectively managed.

A key challenge is to learn from recent attempts to establish public–private partnerships. How can we ensure that we are learning from the perspective of affected communities (and those that have been excluded from schemes)? A program's success is predicated on the careful selection of 'customers'. Can public–private partnerships reach into these more risky markets, which



include the majority of the poorest? In national schemes, including disaster funds, do funding and distribution mechanisms contribute to human development or simply reinforce existing structural vulnerabilities?

A core challenge in the field of disaster risk reduction is the funding gap. How can we find alternatives to current financing mechanisms with which to provide the necessary resources to make risk reduction happen? Public–private partnerships are a possible tool to fill these knowledge and funding gaps. Effective public–private partnerships can be drivers for governments to decide when it is effective to release funds for risk reduction, highlighting the need for more attention to be paid to mitigation activities in addition to reconstruction.

### ***Experience and Lessons to Learn***

For all development activities (hospitals, water management, schools, electricity production, etc.), public–private partnerships that are disaster risk aware provide a mechanism for disaster risk reduction actors to share expertise with public and private actors to perform risk assessments and undertake mitigation. Where companies or company foundations do not necessarily know enough about disaster risk reduction themselves and could be better informed, partnerships can help. The private sector exists to make profit, but there is also pressure to deliver quality products and services, to respect employee rights and environmental standards, and work within constraints to keep the communities they work with happy, or they risk losing their social license to operate. The pressure on business to recognize these responsibilities varies with governance regime and political will. Unfortunately, in many places, and especially in poorer countries or those experiencing rapid economic growth, pressure on businesses to act responsibly is relaxed or ignored. Where local businesses are partnered by global capital, there may be scope for enhancing responsible behavior. Similarly, businesses with strong local ties can promote community concerns.

It can make good business sense to invest in mitigation measures to save money in the future, for example, better water management for better crop irrigation, better protection of assets and fewer interruptions due to floods. These lessons together with the institutional and incentive regimes that generated them need to be carefully learned and promoted. Our experience shows it can be difficult to develop public–private partnerships and funding mechanisms for risk reduction on a broad scale. Experience also dictates that more community involvement is required to make public–private partnerships effective. We need to share existing knowledge on the barriers and incentives related to public–private partnership and community engagement. To date, there has been much talk about this need but little documented action.

Experience from the Caribbean region demonstrates that in small countries it can be difficult to mobilize sufficient resources for recovery, let alone mitigation efforts. A key barrier to collecting economic resources is the rate at which donors respond to events, and how their available funding may be tied to types of event or specific regions. However, by working through a collective of countries, scarce financial and social resources can be distributed and shared among member states, thereby successfully uniting mitigation efforts, even on a small scale. How can public–private partnerships enhance such efforts? How can we learn from them and utilize them in other global arenas of risk, particularly where communities are too poor to diversify livelihoods or afford formal insurance?

Discussions on insurance and risk can often conceal the fact that risk, like insurance, is both political and social. Insurance is a political tool, and can be used as a counter-incentive to reduce risk by governments as it limits their involvement in financing risk reduction mechanisms. Can public–private partnerships be powerful enough to move beyond reactionary efforts? Experience shows us that the most effective way to deal with risk is to reduce it – not insure against it. We cannot continue to talk about insurance as a tool on its own; it must be aligned with other disaster risk reduction methods. Furthermore, some governments have stated that their involvement in risk reduction includes ensuring that all at-risk communities are entitled to insurance. However, this should not be regarded as a replacement for providing communities with mitigation and preventative measures.

## ***A Role for ProVention?***

Public–private partnerships will only be effective if they are robust enough to adapt to the changing nature of disaster risk and the range of stakeholders affected. By providing scope for critical assessments of public–private partnerships across the range of development, risk reduction and reconstruction activities, ProVention can encourage the evolution of partnerships in parallel with disaster risk reduction. The diversity of the ProVention Consortium membership provides a strong base for advocating for meaningful partnerships among the business community, public sector and civil society. There is a long way to go. It is not clear to what extent business interests take disaster risk in the wider community into account when planning developments or during everyday activities. Are small, medium or large businesses most experienced at forging local partnerships to reduce risk? How can reconstruction help build new partnerships that strengthen the local economy and society? How far can existing public–private partnerships be used as mechanisms for advocacy and lobbying to integrate disaster risk reduction into development?

## **2.6 Upscaling Grassroots Efforts: Opportunities and Challenges**

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### ***Key Challenges and Drivers for Change***

Community-based disaster risk management focuses disaster risk reduction activity at a local level. Such an approach has recently gained momentum and involves individuals who are directly exposed to the impact of hazards. Community-based disaster risk management fosters inclusive approaches to disaster risk reduction, with a special focus on livelihood sustainability in light of disaster risk, and calls for the utilization of local knowledge and skills.

When analyzing structural issues and non-local drivers for risk, some of the key challenges in community-based disaster risk management initiatives need to be addressed. Such tests, which can be categorized into broader issues of sustainability and scale, include:

- ◆ learning how to translate theory into practice within communities
- ◆ a lack of long-term financial support for local capacity-building and the longitudinal application of community-based disaster risk management
- ◆ the abuse of power granted by community-based disaster risk management to local actors, which can lead to competition and community fragmentation
- ◆ resistance from local elites when community-based disaster risk management is perceived as a threat to the status quo
- ◆ difficulties for implementation in unstable communities
- ◆ difficulties for implementation on a larger scale, and related limits on the analytical and policy applications generated by community-based disaster risk management
- ◆ segregation from broader and/or longer-term development practices
- ◆ the generation of inequality as some neighborhoods build resilience through community-based disaster risk management while others remain vulnerable
- ◆ limited examples of community-based disaster risk management, which may be referred to for scaling-up and replication

Governments and communities can face barriers in implementing community-based disaster risk management. For governments, support for community-based disaster risk management and its outputs competes with other priorities and requires a framework to link efforts between local and national actors. Local communities need channels to establish dialogue with the government, particularly about risk perception, diversity within the community (social and economic), and legal entitlements to risk reduction. Unless assistance is provided to local actors and the government in order to tackle these barriers, community-based disaster risk management initiatives will not fulfill their potential to contribute to planning for risk reduction.

The main drivers for pursuing community-based disaster risk management include the additional benefits that go beyond disaster risk reduction goals and which also impact on generic capacity-building and development. These include:

- ◆ the fostering of good governance, which means that at-risk communities can reduce their exposure to disasters and develop an awareness of local capacities
- ◆ promoting local confidence and skills to take ownership of risk reduction as well as other issues, including development-related activities
- ◆ bridge-building between different local actors and with government

### ***Experience and Lessons to Learn***

The forum workshop examined the replication of good practice in community-based disaster risk management from two perspectives: centralized scaling-up and decentralized scaling-across. Upscaling requires a functioning institutional infrastructure and so is most likely to be found where there is a supportive, inclusive and open governance system. Scaling-across may also be found where central institutions are supportive, but it is strategically useful because it does not rely on this. It can therefore provide a means of replicating good local practice when governance systems are unable or unwilling to support scaling-up. Experience has demonstrated that each of these scenarios presents its own challenges and lessons from which to learn.

Community-based disaster risk management can pose a threat to local elites and government agencies because it encourages a questioning of the status quo that can lead to calls for a redistribution of resources at local level. A lesson learned from current experience with community-based disaster risk management in assessing its benefits is that it must be undertaken with local actors, local leaders and government representatives. Where this is possible, it can maximize opportunities for mobilizing joint action. Partnership may involve extending the human resources of local actors by relabeling them as planners and advocates rather than as beneficiaries. Where governments provide a framework to support bottom-up initiatives, this can enable local actors to feed into analysis and interventions designed to address structural issues related to national-level vulnerabilities. These are otherwise beyond the reach of community-based disaster risk management and may actually conflict with it. A major challenge for upscaling community-based disaster risk management is how to successfully encourage sustained governmental involvement in community-based disaster risk management projects.

When community-based disaster risk management efforts cannot be scaled up, scaling-across can allow for horizontal replication and learning. This strategy can be an effective choice in itself; it is not just a default option when scaling-up is not possible. In urban slum settlements and isolated rural communities beyond the reach of the state, expansion through horizontal replication is a potential strategy. There are, however, few examples of successful horizontal replication with community-based disaster risk management relying on key local actors and circumstances. Without the supporting institutional infrastructure that upscaling can offer, horizontal replication represents a greater challenge. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to use existing networks of community actors and organizations to promote community-based disaster risk management horizontally. While some knowledge resources – such as an understanding of localized risks – may not translate well across contexts, the pooling of financial resources between communities, and information on entry points to cooperative and community markets, are positive steps when it comes to scaling across community-based disaster risk management efforts. However, such tasks can be a challenge if resources and trust are limited. A key tenet of successful community-based disaster risk management is that it is led by local actors. Manipulating demand through financial incentives can generate superficial take-up, but can result in the local elite capturing and keeping the financial incentives provided and is less likely to lead to long-lasting capacity.

### ***A Role for ProVention?***

Community-based disaster risk management efforts require long-term financial and social commitment. With a multi-stakeholder approach, they require government and community representatives to be involved in order to succeed. ProVention can provide a voice for these diverse groups and offer them opportunities for public dialogue. ProVention is well placed to

support research on social learning through community-based disaster risk management in both scaling-up and horizontal replication, and to lead emerging international interest in learning as a resource for coping with and adapting to changing disaster risks.

## **2.7 Developing a New Generation of Disaster Risk Reduction Champions**

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### ***Key Challenges and Drivers for Change***

A new generation of risk reduction champions is emerging. This is partly due to greater popular awareness of disaster risk, which is highlighted by the media, and the increasing frequency of extreme events and a focus on climate change. It also reflects a need for disaster risk reduction skills within the job market, the success of new academic programs, and of schemes like ProVention's Research and Action Grants for Disaster Risk Reduction, which have provided opportunities for new researchers to engage with disaster risk reduction. This generation, often perceived as young but more appropriately labeled as new, has the skill and ability to contribute to the field in innovative and engaging ways. However, there are challenges with the integration of new colleagues, ideas and perspectives into the disaster risk reduction field, despite the fact that disaster risk reduction itself is expanding and evolving.

The interdisciplinary and multifaceted nature of disaster risk reduction means that it can be difficult for new actors to enter the field with experience that is recognized by already established actors. The discipline of disaster risk reduction requires specific knowledge and understanding, which are difficult to develop given the current nature of academia and research. There is a clear need for more programs and internships directly related to disaster risk reduction studies and disaster science.

New researchers can bring a fresh perspective to the disaster risk reduction community. However, because this insight comes from little-known individuals, mechanisms that can help to bring these novel views, knowledge and data to the fore are welcomed. The way in which new individuals and knowledge are identified, presented and engaged with is important, not just for disaster risk reduction to remain at the cutting edge of practice and intellectual agendas, but also if disaster risk reduction is to influence other policy and research domains. In climate change, for example, there is much that disaster risk reduction can contribute, but this may not be recognized as it has not been highlighted to the climate change community through strategic publications or meetings. This is also true when it comes to building strategic connections with institutions of learning and policy with neighboring initiatives in agriculture, water management and urban planning, for example.

The emerging nature of the new generation of disaster risk reduction actors has close links with the younger actors in this field. There is a lack of research and shared understanding on the role that youth can play in disaster risk reduction. This topic could be expanded to inspire a debate which moves beyond the vulnerabilities of youth to incorporate the unique skills, talents and approaches that young people at risk can bring to disaster risk reduction.

### ***Experience and Lessons to Learn***

The new generation is diverse and includes activists, academics and practitioners. It also includes those who have more experience but who have recently moved into the disaster risk reduction field from other disciplines. Diverse career paths and opportunities in individual countries add further heterogeneity to this group of champions. This also brings strategic options to the international community, for example, by supporting new researchers and practitioners in countries and regions where capacity is weak. Lessons from the Research and Action Grants for Disaster Risk Reduction program suggest that this is a long-term commitment requiring mentoring and capacity-building support beyond the first few years of a career. The cohort of new researchers and practitioners trained through this program is a potential source of local mentors that can build on existing national and international expertise. Further support can come through the imaginative use of projects within international networks such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and NGOs, where badly needed data collection has

been combined with educational goals. Examples are master's degree research projects co-supervised by the Bangladesh Red Crescent and the Zimbabwe Red Cross Societies with King's College London, and facilitated by the British Red Cross.

For the best of the new generation, there are many opportunities outside disaster risk reduction. This is particularly true of the poorest countries with high levels of human vulnerability. Retaining this valuable human capital within the disaster risk reduction and related fields is a major challenge. Existing programs that integrate new actors and open up leadership roles to them are important for maintaining engagement as well as for revitalizing the community. More opportunities are needed for new risk reduction champions to interact with the already established disaster risk reduction community. Funding for internships, collaborative projects, mentoring and spaces for the new generation at conferences and forums, and the opportunity for independent researchers to become involved with the field are all required. The discipline of disaster risk reduction itself must expand to reflect the new tasks that this generation is faced with, including how to effectively communicate risk and sell disaster risk reduction to an ever-expanding audience, which includes academia and practitioners, as well as governments, local stakeholders and policy-makers. Inter-university partnerships, such as the Africa-based PeriPeriU, use a network of academic institutions to build capacity and connect research to the fields of disaster risk reduction and development. Other NGO–university initiatives and networks supported by ProVention, such as PHREEway (Partners for Humanitarian and Risk Education Expansion) and La Red Nueva Generación, are useful when it comes to linking up often underresourced professionals and practitioners. Beyond this, the International Disaster and Risk Conference (IDRC) youth network provides a voice and virtual meeting space for young disaster risk reduction researchers and practitioners.

### ***A Role for ProVention?***

By fostering the development of youth through its Research and Action Grants for Disaster Risk Reduction program, ProVention is already playing an active role in supporting the development of the new generation of risk reduction champions. An active grantee–alumni network would be a useful contribution to the entire field of disaster risk reduction. The new generation of disaster risk reduction actors must also take the initiative to ensure that their voices are included in debates within ProVention and the wider academic and policy communities of disaster risk reduction.

ProVention has built up much goodwill among its consortium members and the wider disaster risk reduction community. This goodwill could form the basis of strategically identified internships through which the host organization and the intern may be exposed to new ideas and practices. This provides a potential mechanism to help meet challenges identified in this report, and could include internships with media organizations, reinsurance companies, private sector construction companies (especially those engaged in reconstruction), urban government, civil society organizations and their federations. There is scope for internships to include young professionals as well as academic researchers and host organizations from the North and South so that skills development goes beyond research to knowledge transfer. Within this model, there is a special contribution to be made in building a disaster risk reduction network within Africa and its sub-regions, where a gap has long been recognized.

## 3. In the Corridors

### Introduction

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As in any meeting, chance encounters and animated discussions over coffee or lunch provide a source of new ideas and contacts. This section attempts to highlight some of the key points arising from these discussions, focusing on the forum's theme of people-centered risk reduction, views on the forum itself, and the contribution made by the ProVention Consortium. Content for this section was collected from plenary speeches, corridor conversations, and from a series of interviews. All the views expressed are those of individuals and do not represent formal positions.

### People-Centered Disaster Risk Reduction

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Participants identified the best way of building resilience as listening to communities. As Stephen Bender, an independent expert, summed up: "The potential you have to reduce risk when you involve the community is enormous." People-centered disaster risk reduction can decrease risk and allow local actors to understand how and why they are at risk. The process can build downward accountability for risk reduction and the sharing of knowledge – core stages in the effective partnering of local and external or government actors in local disaster risk reduction activities.

There was a clear consensus across the forum that a culture of prevention must be built and maintained at a local level, and that community voices should be integrated into all stages of the disaster risk reduction process. Participation is most meaningful when it is sensitive to the cultural context of each community. People-centered disaster risk reduction requires a commitment of political will, followed by practical action and the creation of accountable partnerships. Such partnerships enable discussions to be broadened from disaster risk to other risks that communities face, which are generated by factors such as poverty and environmental degradation.

People-centered disaster risk reduction is not an easy process. Effective risk management at the local level requires communities to harmonize and act as a collective. It requires support for the creation and management of both economic and social resources. One participant felt that governments should pay communities through cash programs to foster disaster risk reduction efforts, if activities can be proven to effectively reduce risk. Attendees noted a clear change in the direction of disaster risk reduction discourse. This is beginning to reflect the needs and involvement of the South, the building of bottom-up initiatives, and actions being taken to not merely disseminate information to communities, but also to stimulate debate on risk at a local level.

Participants posed questions relating to community participation in disaster risk reduction. Mohammed Boussraoui, from the Union of Cities and Local Governments, asked: "What is the community? Whose view should be taken to represent local populations? With government agencies we can identify actors, but how do we do this at village level?" Several participants posed similar questions on people-centered disaster risk reduction efforts, in relation to how we can develop tools that are people-centered, and how people-centered engagement can be used at a policy or institutional level. Discussions also explored the distinctions between people-centered and community-centered approaches and the realities of moving from disaster risk reduction projects that are based in the community to those that are owned and managed by the community. In general, participants agreed that it was worthwhile taking more time to investigate these questions as the debate on people-centered approaches evolved, but that they should be discussed as actions unfold. We should not let our actions be delayed by more rhetoric.

## Major Issues Moving Forward

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Participants highlighted a clear set of challenges to effectively moving forward in the disaster risk reduction field. One central issue was the jargon that has developed around disaster risk reduction. Diverse languages and different terminology for activities and processes can hinder the sharing of information with numerous levels of actors, particularly between distinct groups such as governments, field practitioners, academics, and community members. However, Xavier Castellanos, Deputy Head of Zone Office for the Americas at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, noted that if we understand the culture and values of the communities in which we are working, we will always find ways to communicate.

If culture is understood, then communities can more effectively share information with each other as well as with external actors. Culture can also lead to an understanding of wider processes affecting risk, such as forms of development, local political influences, and social and economic growth. Culture can be seen as a guiding force for disaster risk reduction actors; we can use it as a cornerstone to supplement scientific knowledge with elements of humanity, including intuition, identity and memory.

Participants highlighted other challenges to disaster risk reduction, including questions on how to make disaster risk reduction more fashionable and how to keep the media's attention focused on risk after the spotlight has shifted. Corridor discussions centered on concerns about how to deal with future events, which are increasing in severity and scale, but also with the new problems that disasters are creating today, such as the links between conflict, security and disaster risk reduction, and new vulnerable populations, including environmental refugees.

Vinod Chandra Menon, from India's National Disaster Management Authority, expressed the need to scale up and across disaster risk reduction actions, which he considers central to the success of community risk management. Such scaling-up is vital in terms of both level and volume, and participants felt this issue should receive much more attention in future forums. One issue that many participants debated was how to broaden activities in fragile states, if we are not able to increase them. Scaling up activities can help in the sharing of information from multiple levels of actors, and also in the creation and coordination of policy outputs, such as national-level disaster risk reduction road maps.

Many participants were interested in the discussions on disaster risk reduction and climate change. Attendees expressed an interest in cross-learning between these two communities, and closer links for climate change and disaster risk reduction activities. Participants noted that by simply associating these two fields, progress was made in refocusing the debate on risk and in inspiring new questions on future education, communication and programming.

More general questions, which steer the key issues facing the disaster risk reduction community, included how we can identify and collectively bring together risk management actors at different levels and environments, and whether it is possible to make institutions and policies adaptable to evolving risks. Corridor discussions often ended with a description of disaster risk reduction as a process. Some participants recognized that this may be a long and slow journey. While there is some progress, there are also failures and learning opportunities. It may take decades for us to see the results of present actions, from local training and education to the laying of disaster risk reduction foundations. If we are to succeed in reducing risk, then we must think at a community level and be willing to engage in this evolving and challenging process.

## Perspectives on the 2008 Forum

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A major strength of ProVention Forums is the foundation of knowledge and innovative commitment to the field of disaster risk reduction that participants bring to sessions. The 2008 forum was no exception, and participants were pleased to see new additions to the mix of attendees, including greater representation from the younger generation, and more grassroots and indigenous participants. The evolving character of participants reflects the growing and expanding nature of the disaster risk reduction community. Zenaida Willison, UNDP's South-

South disaster risk reduction advisor, described such an expansion in attendees as an added value for participants looking to engage with new ideas and perspectives. The inclusion of a film festival running in parallel to the forum allowed new voices to be heard.

Some participants suggested that more attendees could be brought in from local authority bodies, government ministries and the private sector. Rubem Hofliger Topete, from the Mexican interior ministry, noted that his experience at the forum was vital in informing other ministries about the importance of disaster risk reduction from the national to the community level. Representatives of indigenous communities and women's groups, including GROOTS, claimed that by attending the forum, they were given more accountability for their actions at a local level. By ensuring that they were able to attend the event, ProVention was making a difference at the community level.

The 2008 ProVention Forum was welcomed by attendees as a process in which formal outputs were secondary to the conversation: interesting discussions took place not just in the sessions, but also throughout the event. A number of participants felt that some of the topics were so engaging (in particular, discussions on the theme of the forum as well as on climate change and disaster risk reduction) that more time was needed to explore the subject further. This would enable both formal scientific outputs and learning alongside more serendipitous and creative dialogue.

One participant noted that ProVention could ensure that the panel discussions better reflected the forum's mix of actors and ideas by appointing a facilitator to each session who was not a specialist on the chosen topic, thereby enabling discussions to be steered along new routes. The exceptional mix of participants at the forum could result in the development of new ideas from old debates, particularly ones that prompt new questions.

The 2008 forum began with group work in urban charette. A number of delegates commented on the opportunity this offered the network. It was also felt that this acted as a reality check, grounding the forum in the challenging realities promoting disaster risk reduction at the community level, and in municipal and national government, where it must compete with other demands and agendas, often more immediate or powerfully advocated than disaster risk reduction. Some participants felt that two or more smaller plenary sessions allowing direct comparison between individual field visits could have been more productive than a final group plenary session.

## **Perspectives on ProVention**

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Sandy Schilen, from the women's grassroots network GROOTS, remarked that: "ProVention likes to incubate ideas that may be ahead of their time." She noted its engagement with topics such as the scaling-up of community-based disaster risk management activities. The ability to approach and dismantle issues, without the fear of appearing ignorant, can then be followed by an exploration of new questions arising from further discussions.

Participants from donor agencies as well as from NGOs observed that the amount of knowledge contained within the ProVention community could focus on more complex questions than those discussed so far. Some interviewees suggested that by providing a safe space for constructive conversations on sensitive topics – such as the role of the military in disaster risk reduction, the non-governmental channeling of aid and current disaster risk reduction norms – ProVention could not only include a broader range of participants in conversations that drive disaster risk reduction, but could also determine the more difficult questions that drive future debate.



## 4. Conclusion

The 2008 ProVention Forum on people-centered disaster risk reduction was organized around seven critical themes. These were examined in formal sessions, as well as in informal side meetings and discussions that brought together the range of consortium partners, including local actors, international humanitarian and development NGOs, local and national government, donors and multilateral agencies. This provided both the context and resource for a free exchange of ideas to move the disaster risk reduction agenda forward. This conclusion presents seven challenges to the disaster risk reduction community emerging from the discussions in Panama City.

- ◆ *How can the relevance of disaster risk reduction be built on in order to generate a broad urban risk management approach?* Catastrophic disaster risk is rarely stated as a first priority for the urban rich or poor. Everyday concerns of governance and poverty come first. However, disaster risk reduction provides a framework and focus with which to bring together a broad risk management approach that can embrace urban pollution, public health concerns and possibly also social (crime), political (corruption) and economic (unemployment) hazards. Locally, disaster risk reduction work has been shown to bring people together, and can help to build generic capacity with which to reduce risk from the broad and interacting hazards found in urban contexts. The uncertainty that climate change and rapid urbanization bring provide strong arguments for work that can build generic capacity for risk reduction.
- ◆ *What efforts are required to ensure that the climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction agendas reinforce and complement one another in shaping progressive local development and reducing disaster risk?* The poor are likely to be made worse off in the medium term as climate change and global economic conditions conspire to raise global food and energy prices. Locally, those actors exposed to hazards associated with climate change (including new hazards yet to be identified) will also face additional risk. The thresholds for local adaptation among the poor are a critical barrier to containing climate change impacts. As the international community begins to identify funding streams and disbursement mechanisms to support adaptation, what can be done to maximize the impact of this support for the poor and most vulnerable in a way that enhances local development opportunity? At the same time, the expertise and institutional capacity built by the disaster risk reduction community – particularly at the local and national levels – can make a real contribution to the adaptation agenda. So far, this agenda has been driven by international action while recognizing the primacy of local actors in implementation.
- ◆ *What strategies are required to enable disaster risk reduction to be mainstreamed by key federations and networks representing the rights of marginalized people, including indigenous people and women?* For disaster risk reduction to be mainstreamed, this requires champions. In addition to working through humanitarian and development agencies and government departments, international and national networks and federations of marginalized social groups remain untested as a vehicle for promoting awareness and for advocating for disaster risk reduction. Where disaster risk reduction has clear development benefits or can provide leverage for rights claims, working with social networks has real potential.
- ◆ *What is the scope for visual media as an educational and advocacy tool for disaster risk reduction?* Visual media has proved itself as a tool for attitudinal and behavioral change through mass advertising. Thanks to the internet, the ability to communicate via this means is spreading rapidly. Can visual media be harnessed to provide a voice for the vulnerable and make a real difference? From internet blogs to professional documentaries and news posts, how far can visual media support communication of the disaster risk reduction message?

- ◆ *What are the opportunities for public–private partnerships to contribute to disaster risk management and be responsive to community needs?* Using private capital to support risk transfer and insurance mechanisms is growing rapidly in popularity. But how can the opportunities offered by these partnerships best be realized? Is appropriateness purely a utilitarian question or does it also require addressing political and social questions about the redistribution of wealth and influence when the private sector is involved? What innovations might make such partnerships more effective and more responsive to local stakeholder needs?
- ◆ *What evidence is there for the successful reproduction of good practice in community-based disaster risk management?* Assessments of the outcomes of local disaster risk reduction investments for sustainable development are problematic and seldom undertaken. This contributes to a lack of evidence about the value of disaster risk reduction for development and makes it harder to argue for reproduction on a wider scale. At the same time, little is known about the successes and failures of past efforts to replicate local disaster risk reduction projects horizontally or vertically. These are two significant knowledge gaps.
- ◆ *What needs to be done to attract and retain the best new professionals in the field of disaster risk reduction?* As disaster risk reduction continues to grow in popularity among students and young professionals, new work opportunities are opening up in research and policy institutions. ProVention is already active in generating opportunities for new researchers from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America so that they can compete in this growing market. But what more can be done to continue to support professionals from the South and to retain the best minds within the disaster risk reduction community? The potential lies in recognizing the comparative advantages of academics and researchers in different regions (between the North and South, and also between Latin America, Asia and Africa), in building supportive collaboration, and in institutionalizing mechanisms for interaction between research and practitioner communities.

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ProVention Consortium Secretariat  
PO Box 372  
CH – 1211 Geneva 19  
Switzerland  
Telephone: +41 22 730 44 99  
Fax: +41 22 733 03 95  
Email: [provention@ifrc.org](mailto:provention@ifrc.org)  
Web site: [www.proventionconsortium.org](http://www.proventionconsortium.org)



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