Chapter 11
Policy, regulation, accountability and advocacy

11.1 Policies and regulations

An appropriate policy, regulatory and implementation structure is an essential part of disaster risk management: one of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction’s four priorities is ‘Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk’.\(^1\) This ‘enabling environment’ is primarily a government responsibility, because governments are ultimately responsible for public safety and have the mandate, resources and capacity to create such an environment and to undertake or stimulate large-scale DRR initiatives, but citizens and civil society organisations can do much to influence it.

Every country should have an appropriate national policy, a strategy for attaining policy goals, a legislative framework (creating the necessary administrative structures and financial instruments, and setting relevant laws and regulations), and administrative structures and systems with the human, technical and financial capacity to implement the disaster management strategy, at all levels of government (see Box 11.1: Key features of DRR governance).

There are many different ways of reducing risk through policies and regulations, and DRR structures and systems can be built up incrementally. A large number of countries around the world have revised their disaster management policies, laws and administrative structures in recent years to incorporate new thinking on vulnerability, communities, DRR and resilience. These changes do not take place overnight: in post-apartheid South Africa, for example, the mainstreaming process of stakeholder discussion, policy and legislative development and establishing and financing national structures for implementation took 11 years (1994–2005), and considerable effort was required to maintain the momentum for reform.\(^2\)

Within the overall DRR structure, a variety of policies, regulations and procedures can be used to address particular kinds of risk and hazard. They include:

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Box 11.1 *Key features of DRR governance*

**DRR policy, planning, priorities and political commitment:**

- Political consensus on the importance of DRR
- DRR a policy priority at all levels of government
- National DRR policy, strategy and implementation plan, with clear vision, priorities, targets and benchmarks
- Local government DRR policies, strategies and implementation plans in place
- Official (national and local) policy and strategy of support to community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM)
- Local-level official understanding of, and support for, community vision

**Legal and regulatory systems:**

- Relevant and enabling legislation, regulations, codes, etc., addressing and supporting DRR, at national and local levels
- Jurisdictions and responsibilities for DRR at all levels defined in legislation, regulations, by-laws, etc.
- Mechanisms for compliance and enforcement of laws, regulations, codes, etc., and penalties for non-compliance defined in laws and regulations
- Legal and regulatory system underpinned by guarantees of relevant rights: to safety, to equitable assistance, to be listened to and consulted
- Land-use regulations, building codes and other laws and regulations relating to DRR enforced locally

**Integration with development policies and planning:**

- Government (all levels) takes a holistic and integrated approach to DRR, located within wider development context and linked to development planning across different sectors
- DRR incorporated into or linked to other national development plans and donor-supported country programmes
- Routine integration of DRR into development planning and sectoral policies (poverty eradication, social protection, sustainable development, climate change adaptation, desertification, natural resource management, health, education, etc.)

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3 Poverty Reduction Strategies, national Millennium Development Goal reports, National Adaptation Plans of Action, UNDP assistance frameworks, etc.
Box 11.1 (cont’d)

- Formal development planning and implementation processes required to incorporate DRR elements (e.g. hazard, vulnerability and risk analysis, mitigation plans)
- Multi-sectoral institutional platforms for promoting DRR
- Local planning policies, regulations and decision-making systems take disaster risk into account

Integration with emergency response and recovery:
- National policy framework requires DRR to be incorporated into design and implementation of disaster response and recovery
- Policy, planning and operational links between emergency management, DRR and development structures
- Risk reduction incorporated into official (and internationally supported and implemented) post-disaster reconstruction plans and actions

Institutional mechanisms, capacities and structures; allocation of responsibilities:
- Supportive political, administrative and financial environment for CBDRM and community-based development
- Institutional mandates and responsibilities for DRR clearly defined. Inter-institutional or coordinating mechanisms exist, with clearly designated responsibilities
- Focal point at national level with authority and resources to coordinate all related bodies involved in disaster management and DRR
- Human, technical, material and financial resources for DRR adequate to meet defined institutional roles and responsibilities (including budgetary allocation specifically to DRR at national and local levels)
- Devolution of responsibility (and resources) for DRR planning and implementation to local government levels and communities, as far as possible, backed up by provision of specialist expertise and resources to support local decision-making, planning and management of disasters
- Committed and effective community outreach services (DRR and related services, e.g. healthcare)
Box 11.1 (cont’d)

Partnerships

• DRR identified as responsibility of all sectors of society (public, private, civil), with appropriate inter-sectoral and coordinating mechanisms

• Long-term civil society, NGO, private sector and community participation and inter-sectoral partnerships for DRR and emergency response

• Links with regional and global institutions and their DRR initiatives

Accountability and community participation:

• Basic rights of people formally recognised by national and local government (and civil society organisations): to safety, to equitable vulnerability reduction and relief assistance, to be listened to and consulted (implies responsibility to guarantee these rights where appropriate)

• Effective quality control or audit mechanisms for official structures, systems, etc., in place and applied

• Democratic system of governance enabling society to hold decision-makers to account

• Government consults civil society, NGOs, private sector and communities

• Popular participation in policy development and implementation; political space and mechanisms allowing citizens to contribute to decision-making

• Citizen demands for action to reduce disaster risk

• Existence of ‘watchdog’ groups to press for change


• Engineering and construction measures. These comprise design standards, building codes and performance specifications. They ensure that engineered structures can stand up to particular hazards and forces.

• Legal measures. In addition to formal disaster management legislation, the law can be used in many other ways to provide appropriate penalties and incentives. For instance, enforcement of engineering standards, health and safety regulations or environmental protection will be weak if there is no adequate legal back-up that authorises penalties for non-compliance. Legalisation of land or property ownership,
and laws protecting tenants’ rights, are good examples of legal incentives. By giving greater security, they encourage people to invest more in protecting their property (e.g. by strengthening houses or improving drainage systems). Laws can also define rights to protection and post-disaster assistance.

- Planning regulations. These can be used to prevent the use of hazardous areas (such as flood plains or unstable hillsides) for housing or commercial development, and to keep hazardous industrial activities away from population centres. Many urban plans involve land zoning of this kind. Planning should also ensure that public facilities (hospitals, emergency services, schools, water and power supplies, telephone exchanges, transport infrastructure) are kept away from hazardous zones as far as possible, and that they are not over-concentrated in a few places. For the same reason, regulations may restrict population density in a given area. Ensuring escape and access routes, creation of open spaces as areas of refuge, separation of buildings to reduce fire risk and creation of green or wooded areas to assist drainage are among other risk-reducing measures governed by planning regulations.

- Financial and economic measures. Financial incentives such as the provision of grants, ‘soft’ loans or tax breaks to companies, communities and individuals can be used to encourage investment in safer construction and mitigation measures, including location in safer areas. Alternatively, financial penalties – fines and taxes – may be used to discourage bad practice. Chapter 12 describes the economic and financial mechanisms that non-governmental agencies can deploy. One of the most valuable measures that can be taken is economic diversification. This reduces risks to the economy as a whole by reducing over-reliance on sectors that may be particularly vulnerable to certain hazards.

Other sectoral policies and laws may contribute to DRR, for example in agriculture, forestry or water resource management. Integration of DRR with other sectors is essential.

Every approach to DRR and its different components presents its own practical problems, but there are also basic challenges to making policy and regulatory mechanisms effective. One is institutional capacity. The methods described above add up to a comprehensive package of risk-reducing measures. Extensive political and legislative skills may be needed to deal with powerful groups whose interests may be affected, and to design effective laws and regulations. Government capacity to implement these laws, regulations and measures will have to be built up, particularly that of local governments, which play a major role in implementation and enforcement. To put such a package in place requires a lot of time – perhaps decades – and it will need refining frequently in the light of experience. This is a major challenge for any government.

Another challenge is enforcement. Laws and regulations are useless if they are not enforced. For example, engineers and builders must be aware of building codes and design standards,
understand them, know how to use them and accept their importance. For this to happen, awareness-raising and further professional training may be needed, and there must be a sufficient number of trained officials to ensure that the codes and standards are adopted. Formal implementation and oversight systems need to be reliable, trustworthy and free from corruption. Society’s cultures and values may also need to shift towards recognition of the need for safety and protection standards.

11.2 Accountability: general principles and approaches

DRR requires collaboration between governments, citizens and other stakeholders such as NGOs and the private sector (see Chapter 4). Communities and individuals have an important role to play (see Chapter 6), but will often require some level of external support to reduce risks and manage crises, as well as to scale up local and community-based initiatives and agencies’ individual projects. The root causes of disasters often lie in political, economic and social conditions and trends, which must be addressed at national, regional and international levels.

This is a question of accountability. In general, accountability refers to the ways by which citizens ensure that governments and others in positions of power and influence fulfil their obligations to society as a whole. It means that those in power should be:

- compliant: accepting that it is their duty to account for their decisions and actions;
- transparent: giving an account and making relevant information available (easily and in an accessible format) so that this can be monitored; and
- responsive: reviewing decisions and actions, and making the necessary improvements.

In DRR, accountability is a mechanism for ensuring public institutions and other organisations fulfil their duties and responsibilities to vulnerable people. The principle of accountability lies at the heart of genuine participation and community involvement in disaster reduction (see Chapter 6). It can be applied to everyone, from village elders to the United Nations. It applies to state institutions, which are expected to be accountable through the democratic process, and to private sector and non-profit organisations, which are not subject directly to democratic control. Although a universal principle, it allows for plenty of variation in method.

The humanitarian sector has recognised the importance of accountability for a number of years, and established and influential institutions and processes support and promote humanitarian

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accountability actions and standards internationally. These include the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAPI) and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP).\(^5\) Accountability is still an emerging issue in DRR. More examples of practical approaches in different contexts, and further comparative study and analysis, are needed before comprehensive guidelines of good practice can be developed.

Accountability is not straightforward. Agencies are accountable in many different ways: to the people they aim to help, to partners, to donors, to their own mandates and to the legislative frameworks in which they operate. Accountability functions in three main directions:

1. Downwards – to beneficiaries, local partner agencies, staff and supporters.
2. Upwards – to boards of management, donors and higher levels of government.
3. Horizontally – to partner organisations, principally through sharing of information and resources and joint decision-making.

In practice, most interventions involve all three kinds of accountability, but the balance is crucial. All too often, disaster (and other) professionals concentrate on upwards accountability at the expense of horizontal and downwards accountability. This reflects the dominant influence of donors and national governments in disaster and development work, manifested most visibly in the movement towards rigid formats, bureaucratic reporting, short-term quantitative targets and standardised indicators. The very fact that there are multiple lines of accountability can lead to confusion operationally, and problems often arise from the difficulty of setting priorities and reconciling competing demands. Accountability should be primarily towards those who are vulnerable to hazards and affected by them. Listening to disaster-affected people is essential in identifying problems and priorities, as we have seen, as well as being an essential step towards letting people take part in, and exercise some control over, DRR decision-making and processes.

External forces are not the only drivers of accountability. Many organisations – especially not-for-profit ones – see improved accountability as valuable in itself, because it improves their performance. Value-driven organisations are more likely to adopt accountability for principled reasons.

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11.3 DRR monitoring frameworks and the enabling environment

The emergence of DRR implementation and monitoring frameworks presents an opportunity to develop greater accountability in this area. The most significant internationally has been the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015, which set out a broad programme of action for national governments and regional organisations. Although it was non-binding, 168 national governments signed up to it and the UN system provided a monitoring mechanism for reviewing progress (a similar global reporting process is proposed under the Sendai Framework). Governments and regional bodies were expected to report on their progress towards the HFA’s goals every two years: these reports could be viewed online, and the collective results were reviewed in the Global Assessment Reports published by UNISDR. An HFA self-assessment tool developed for local governments was applied in several countries. Independent researchers and NGOs also used the HFA as a monitoring tool for questioning government action and holding governments to account. A number of other frameworks and indicator sets have also been applied (see Chapter 18: Monitoring and evaluation).

Frameworks, policies and programmes that are commonly used by international institutions to support national-level development can also be monitored to assess the extent to which DRR issues are incorporated, the approach taken to mainstreaming DRR and the likely effectiveness of the steps taken. These include Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which are widely used by international financial institutions, UN agencies and bilateral donors in designing their assistance programmes, and National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs), produced under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which address climate vulnerability reduction. The Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNISDR have produced guidance for parliamentarians seeking to ensure that DRR and resilience are incorporated in steps towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At the time of writing, there is considerable discussion about how they will be incorporated into

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the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will be approved at a high-level UN summit in September 2015 to replace the MDGs, with the possibility that a number of SDG goals and targets will relate to DRR, directly or indirectly.  

There remains the question of what can rightly and reasonably be expected from governments and others, whose capacities and resources are not infinite. What are the responsibilities of state and non-governmental actors? How realistic is it to expect them to address every aspect of DRR? What types of DRR should be given priority in a given context? On what basis are those priorities decided? Should it be based on cost–benefit analysis, the utilitarian approach of seeking the greatest benefits for the greatest number of people, or on the principle of social justice that focuses on the most vulnerable? There are ethical as well as practical issues here.

### 11.4 Accountability methods

Many methods have been used to make risk and disaster managers more accountable to the vulnerable. They vary greatly in approach. The choice of methods in a given situation must be determined by local circumstances and contexts. Many accountability initiatives are voluntary: those who subscribe to or take part in them wish to make themselves and their actions more accountable. But when key actors are not interested in accountability or dialogue, more forceful or even confrontational approaches may be adopted. The sections that follow indicate some of the options available and comment on their application. This coverage is not comprehensive. There is room for much more research on the subject, especially to identify the most effective approaches.

#### 11.4.1 Giving disaster-affected people a voice

For all the advances in participatory approaches discussed in Chapter 6, the views of those affected by disasters and those at risk are still rarely listened to, valued or understood. However, a number of techniques can be used to give people a voice and so help disaster agencies make their interventions more appropriate.

Life stories and oral histories, which are commonly used in participatory learning and action, reveal people’s vulnerabilities and capacities as well as their experiences of coping with disasters. These methods and others used in participatory vulnerability analysis (see Chapter 3) or other participatory learning and action practices (see Chapter 6) can provide a starting point for awareness-raising and advocacy at local and higher levels. They can help make external actors in DRR more aware of people’s needs and capacities, and responsive

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to them, especially where institutional stakeholders have been involved in the process. However, they do not guarantee this, and more sustained mechanisms may be needed.

Disasters sometimes stimulate the creation of organisations of affected people to engage in reconstruction and other DRR or development activities. These often originate through intervention by external NGOs and are specific to particular places or communities. Building vulnerable communities’ awareness and organisational capacities makes them conscious of their entitlements, improves their bargaining power and enables them to engage more effectively with local authorities. Formal participation in decision-making bodies helps to consolidate this. Sometimes, broader coalitions of disaster victims are formed, either for mutual support or to lobby for policy change, more effective vulnerability reduction and post-disaster assistance (see Case Study 11.1: A voice for disaster-affected people). Nevertheless, there is plenty of scope for policymakers and practitioners to engage more extensively and deeply with those who are vulnerable and at risk, to understand their perspectives and priorities and stimulate more collaborative problem-solving.

Case Study 11.1 A voice for disaster-affected people

Disaster Action is a UK charity founded in 1991 by disaster survivors and people bereaved as a result of disasters. It is an informal network with membership open to anyone in the UK with direct personal experience of a disaster, wherever it took place. It offers support through information, contact through email and telephone and family and survivor support groups. It also raises awareness of their short- and long-term needs, gives advice to government, emergency services and NGOs and takes part in formal consultations about policy and legislative change.

The National Flood Forum, established in the UK in 2002, represents communities and individuals at risk from flooding, supporting 160 local flood groups. It aims to help flood victims recover from and improve resilience to flooding. In its advocacy, it works with government agencies, the insurance industry and other organisations to ensure that the views and needs of people at risk are taken into account in policy- and decision-making.


11.4.2 Standards, charters and codes of conduct

Several codes of conduct and sets of common standards have emerged in the emergency and humanitarian response field since the 1990s, although their humanitarian response focus means that they tend to say relatively little about DRR (see Box 11.2: Standards and codes for humanitarian and emergency response).

The idea of developing charters or standards specifically for DRR has been talked about a good deal in recent years. This has not led to much concerted action, but there have been a few individual initiatives. In 2009 an international standard for risk management (ISO 31000) was issued by the International Organization for Standardization to provide businesses and other organisations with principles and general guidelines for identifying and dealing with risks. More recently, gender standards for disaster risk management have been developed in Afghanistan. The Sendai Declaration contains a call for action to ‘Promote the development of quality standards, such as certifications and awards for disaster risk management’.11

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11.4.3 Bringing pressure to bear on decision-makers

Over many years, disaster workers have been engaged in activities that bring pressure to bear on governments, politicians and other institutional decision-makers. Non-state actors in particular have an important role to play in lobbying for better policies and regulations, and for the enforcement of those already in place: this includes challenging decisions and plans that may increase risk. They can also press governments, international aid agencies and NGOs to respond more effectively to the needs of people at risk from hazards or who are victims of disasters. Advocacy initiatives should be well informed and well prepared. Direct experience and information gathered from the field (e.g. through VCAs or community-based projects) can be influential here. Advocacy can take many forms, from large-scale public campaigns to confidential meetings or private conversations with key decision-makers; often it involves a mixture of complementary activities.

Disasters can create opportunities for change by prompting critical reflection on how and why the disaster occurred. Major disasters may stimulate new policies and legislation, the restructuring of disaster management institutions and revisions of codes and regulations. Civil society organisations can take advantage of these openings, but they need to have good evidence and analysis of existing weaknesses, workable ideas and plans for improvement and a strong collective voice: this seems to have been the case in the passing of the 2010 Disaster Management Act in the Philippines, for example (see Case Study 11.2: Advocacy for policy and legislative change).

11.4.4 Auditing DRR

Some innovations in accountability take the form of an auditing process by independent organisations, civil society groups or communities. They include social audits, report cards, citizens’ juries, public expenditure tracking and policy monitoring. Case Study 11.3 (Social audit after Hurricane Mitch) describes an unusual example of national-level social auditing of reconstruction plans after a major disaster. Report cards have been given out to disaster victims during relief operations to evaluate the performance of the agencies that have come to help them. Financial tracking systems and complaints mechanisms have been set up in the aftermath of disasters to provide more accountability concerning the use of relief and recovery assistance. For example, the IFRC and British Red Cross set up free phone lines for questions and complaints relating to their shelter and community regeneration initiatives in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. A large number of calls were received, and this feedback led to improvements in programme delivery and quality.\footnote{IFRC, Beneficiary Communication and Accountability: A Responsibility, Not a Choice. Lessons Learned and Recommendations, Indonesia, Haiti, Pakistan (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2011), http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/beneficiary-communications.}
Case Study 11.2 Advocacy for policy and legislative change

The Philippines is a very hazard-prone country, with considerable experience of disasters. Many local NGOs have been working in DRR for a number of years, particularly in support of community-based action. However, until 2010 the government’s approach to disaster management was based on legislation passed in the 1970s. There was some decentralisation, with local governments being given calamity funds, but these could only be used for post-disaster relief and recovery. Reform of the disaster management system was not a political priority, and several formal proposals for new legislation had become bogged down in Congress.

A combination of factors served to break the deadlock. The main influence, probably, was widespread and effective lobbying, particularly by Disaster Risk Reduction Network Philippines (DRRNetPhils), a broad-based coalition of civil society stakeholders (see Case Study 4.11: Global and national networks for disaster reduction), but the need for reform was generally acknowledged among both government and civil society. A series of severe tropical storms in 2009 finally stimulated action. A bill submitted early the following year quickly passed through Congress and came into law in May 2010 as the Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act.

The act commits the government to addressing the root causes of vulnerability, building community resilience, strengthening institutional capacities for disaster risk reduction and management (especially at local levels), promoting the involvement of all sectors and stakeholders (particularly communities), mainstreaming DRR and CCA into development processes, and integrating DRR into school curricula and the mandatory training given to public sector employees. Local government calamity funds can now be applied to a wider range of DRM activities. A new disaster risk management framework has been established to support an all-hazard, multi-sector, inter-agency and community-based approach, and NGOs are represented on the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

Public scrutiny or tracking of national or local government plans, service delivery, budgets and expenditure can bring issues of cost-effectiveness and equity into the open, and expose weaknesses in planning and gaps between plans and practice. Participatory budgeting has proved to be an effective development tool for improving basic services in many parts of the world.\(^\text{13}\) There is considerable experience of these approaches in development contexts that could be applied to DRR. Policy monitoring involves gathering evidence on specific policies, using that evidence to evaluate the policies’ strengths and weaknesses and using the evidence and analysis to lobby for policy change and improved implementation. Community-led policy monitoring can be particularly effective with local government. Different approaches to community-led DRR policy monitoring, and their effectiveness in different contexts, need to be studied further, but some practical guidance is beginning to appear.\(^\text{14}\) At the global level, the ‘Views from the Frontline’ initiative (see also Chapter 4) collects a broad range of perspectives from communities, local authorities and civil society organisations, and feeds these into the UN system’s biennial reviews of progress.\(^\text{15}\)

**Case Study 11.3 Social audit after Hurricane Mitch**

Hurricane Mitch, which struck Central America in October 1998, was one of the deadliest Atlantic hurricanes in history. In February 1999 a coalition of over 320 Nicaraguan non-governmental and social organisations carried out a ‘social audit’ in order to incorporate communities’ points of view into reconstruction planning. The audit surveyed more than 10,000 homes in 16 municipalities affected by Mitch. Community leaders, mayors and leaders of other local organisations were also interviewed. The audit provided evidence of the extent and nature of the losses suffered (both economic and psychological), but was particularly valuable in allowing victims to express their views about the quality, value and equity of the aid they had received, and how far victims’ views were taken into account.


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\(^\text{15}\) See http://www.globalnetwork-dr.org/views-from-the-frontline.html.
The International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) has developed an international standard for auditing governments’ DRR performance (ISSAI 5510). Auditing approaches such as these can be effective in persuading governments to listen and respond to people’s needs and aspirations. However, a good understanding of political structures, policy actors and processes is needed in order to know whom to influence, how to influence them and when it is appropriate to act. It also takes time and organisational commitment to keep up the pressure on decision-makers.

11.4.5 Access to information

Access to relevant information is an essential element in improved accountability. Effective advocacy requires good information on hazards, risk and vulnerability, and the decisions, systems and processes that are used to plan and implement DRM. As we saw in Chapter 3, such information may not have been collected in many cases, or if it is can be inadequate or unavailable to the public. Moreover, access to information requires government support for the right to information and citizens’ awareness of their legal right and willingness to assert it.

11.4.6 Litigation

The law provides a potentially valuable tool for enforcing accountability. Legal action is obviously of value in gaining redress after a disaster, for example to ensure that victims of disasters are treated fairly in the allocation of relief resources and to secure compensation from those whose actions or negligence have led to disasters. Compensation and liability claims are often filed after industrial or environmental accidents, but they also feature in natural hazard events, for instance where physical mitigation measures such as flood embankments fail or warning procedures are not followed.

It is not clear how effective legal action can be as an instrument to ensure greater safety by reducing a potential risk. However, this may be possible through public interest litigation (i.e. seeking to remedy an actual or potential public grievance through the courts). In some countries this has been used to tackle issues such as human rights, environmental destruction, the handling of hazardous substances, pollution and the social and environmental consequences of development projects.

The extent to which the law has been invoked at different times and in different places to enforce DRR accountability and raise standards is unknown. Many countries’ disaster risk management legislation is relatively recent, and there has been little opportunity to test or challenge it in the courts. There may be considerable potential for using environmental law

to stimulate and improve DRR. Environmental management is a key element in vulnerability reduction and environmental law is well established and wide-ranging, covering pollution and hazardous substances, planning, agriculture and biodiversity, conservation and land and water resource management.\(^\text{17}\)

It is probable that the number of lawsuits brought by disaster victims and those who feel that they are being exposed to hazards will increase in the years to come. There are examples of success, such as legal action by communities and civil society organisations in New Orleans against a plan to put a waste dump of unsorted debris from Hurricane Katrina in a location close to human habitation and vulnerable to storm surge and flooding.\(^\text{18}\) However, legal action may also be an obstacle to more sustained, comprehensive disaster reduction because its adversarial nature can undermine opportunities for collective action.

### 11.4.7 Accountability and rights

The subject of rights occupies an important place in the debate about accountability. Many organisations working in international aid and development have committed themselves to a ‘rights-based’ approach. This tends to encompass both human rights (i.e. those that are internationally accepted through international agreements) and other rights that an agency believes should be accepted as human rights. In such contexts, the language of rights can sometimes be used vaguely, with a risk of causing confusion. Those advocating rights-based approaches to development tend to steer clear of definitions, focusing instead on frameworks for analysis, discussion and action. Terms such as ‘basic rights’ and ‘equal rights’ are often used in the development context to cover issues of access to aid and participation in decision-making.

International covenants on political, social, economic and cultural rights as well as national human rights legislation can be invoked on behalf of those affected by disasters, typically to challenge discriminatory practices that might increase risk or prevent equal access to humanitarian and recovery assistance after disasters. Security against disasters is not generally regarded as a right, although it is addressed in some international codes, usually indirectly. The idea of a ‘right to safety’ has been suggested: this is not the right to be completely safe, which is clearly unattainable, but the right to ‘the highest attainable standard of protection against natural and man-made hazards’.\(^\text{19}\) This appears to be consistent with some international human rights agreements, but poses problems in practice; safety is

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difficult to define, the precise nature, magnitude and extent of a hazard or risk may be unclear or disputed and the concept of a right to safety is likely to be challenged by those who fear it will increase their own liability (e.g. government and the private sector).

11.4.8 Accountability by proxy

Disaster agencies rarely give an account directly to disaster victims or potential victims. Although in the case of government agencies a degree of accountability can be achieved indirectly through the democratic process, the vulnerable and powerless – who make up the bulk of disaster victims in much of the world – are often not strong enough to call such agencies to account. They have to rely on others with more power and influence to speak out on their behalf. This can be called ‘accountability by proxy’.

NGOs or other disaster professionals may take it upon themselves to speak out on behalf of disaster victims. They may believe that there is a need to become involved in such work, and may argue that they have a responsibility to do so on behalf of those whose voices are not heard by decision-makers. However, they do not necessarily have a mandate from the people for this role (community associations and other membership-based organisations, on the other hand, can speak with some legitimacy). The issue is particularly important to NGOs, who are always vulnerable to challenge from elected authorities on this count. All non-state actors considering involvement in processes of this kind need to think about this carefully.

The media form an important proxy group, although their role in promoting disaster reduction is the subject of some debate. Sometimes they are clearly beneficial, for example in highlighting the failure of official relief services to reach those most in need, and in disseminating forecasts and warnings. However, the media tend to take a stereotyped view of disasters. They prefer stories of human tragedy to human ingenuity and they like to find people or organisations to blame, rather than considering the real causes of vulnerability. They may also perpetuate dangerous myths about disasters: one is that people affected by disasters are passive, helpless victims, when in reality they are active responders, both individually and collectively; another is that chaos, self-interest and criminality dominate the post-disaster scene, even though research shows consistently that altruism and mutual assistance are far more characteristic. They are also often influenced by other agendas, their own and those of other interest groups.

There has been much talk about educating the media to cover disasters in a way that more accurately reflects the reality, but the commercial pressures of international news-gathering are so great that such moves can make only slow headway. Significant, sustained efforts are needed to change media attitudes. Few NGOs are likely to have the resources to undertake this. Alternative news services run by non-profit organisations can take a more principled and strategic approach to the subject, but their outreach is likely to be very limited in comparison to that of the commercial media sector.
11.4.9 Organisation and association

Without participation and organisation advocacy is seriously weakened. Community-based organisations are more powerful than individuals; collective action by organisations is more effective than agencies acting alone. Coalitions and movements for change must be formed. In DRR, the growing number of national, regional and international networks involving NGOs and researchers has provided a powerful platform for advocacy on policy and practical issues (see Chapter 4). Much can be learned from the experiences and successes of collective action in other sectors.\(^\text{20}\)

Lobbying is difficult and requires sustained effort. Many calls for change fall on deaf ears. Many governments do not tolerate criticism and exert firm control over civil society organisations. In some countries advocacy can prove dangerous for those involved, especially if they challenge powerful vested interests. Even in more tolerant places advocacy needs to be objective and evidence-based: an overly confrontational approach can be counter-productive. The aim should be to seek critical engagement and partnership with government institutions.

Case Study 11.4 Informing implementation through community risk profiling

The Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR)’s Frontline programme creates community risk profiles to provide monitoring and advocacy evidence for more effective implementation of DRR. The programme is implemented by members of GNDR’s network of 750 civil society organisations. The key activity is a ‘conversation’ in which individuals and groups in a community identify the main threats facing them, their impacts, local actions that can be taken to reduce those impacts and barriers to effective action. These responses form risk profiles covering natural, economic, social and political threats. The profiles are used at local level to develop collaborations, build capacity and implement action plans. Local-level findings are then aggregated to produce national risk profiles, which can be used to inform and influence decision-makers and to monitor progress in DRR, CCA and sustainable development. Frontline was piloted in ten South American countries in 2014, involving more than 7,000 respondents, and in 2014–15 covered 21 countries in other parts of the world.


\(^{20}\) Examples include the Self Employed Women’s Association in India and Shack/Slum Dwellers International. See http://www.sewa.org; http://www.sdinet.org.