

# Chapter 15

## DRR, social crisis and conflict

### 15.1 Introduction

Social crisis, insecurity, state fragility and conflict are major development problems in many parts of the world. They create poverty, reverse development gains, and undermine social cohesion and human rights. Disasters and conflict often interact: conflict can create or increase vulnerability to other hazard events, whilst natural hazard events and other environmental stresses can exacerbate social crisis and conflict. Many conflicts and complex political emergencies are in areas which experience recurrent natural hazards. Economic and political pressures can be powerful drivers of social tension as well as over-exploitation of natural resources. Slow-onset threats, such as drought and desertification, accumulate pressure on natural resources such as water and forests, thereby degrading the environment (e.g. through deforestation and loss of pasture and topsoil from overuse), producing greater competition for these resources and thereby increasing the risk of conflict. Long-running droughts or seasonal floods reduce crop yields or wreck harvests, undermining agricultural livelihoods. This may lead ultimately to displacement and migration, which in turn can increase competition for resources with host communities where the displaced settle.

Many community-level conflicts are the result of competition for natural resources, or ineffective governance or management of resource use – particularly in the case of pasture, farmland and water, which are essential to livelihoods. Although environmental stress can sometimes lead to greater cooperation between social groups over natural resource management, disputes and conflict are a more common outcome. Access to common lands and other common resources may not be equitable, with minority and vulnerable groups losing out, whilst land disputes are often manipulated by political and other factions.

Conflict leads to environmental degradation, the breakdown of public services and disruption of infrastructure, household assets and livelihoods. Conflict, or the fear of conflict, undermines the rational use of resources, which may be over-exploited to meet immediate needs. People displaced by conflict often have no choice but to resettle in hazardous locations, such as unstable hillsides or flood plains. Social crises and conflict also create or accentuate social inequalities, where those who wield physical power exert greater influence and control: women and children are particularly marginalised in such situations. Although every situation or event is different, the interaction between disasters and conflict increases the risk of future crises by undermining individual and collective coping capacities. Case Study 15.1 (Conflict, displacement and food security) is an example of the impact that environmental pressures and conflict can have on poor people.

## Case Study 15.1 **Conflict, displacement and food security**

In Northern Mali, years of drought have had a significant impact on families that depend on farming and livestock for their livelihoods and food security. There were poor harvests in 2011, followed in 2012 by separatist campaigns involving a number of armed groups which displaced over 300,000 people. Food and seed stocks intended for consumption and sale were looted and the price of basic foodstuffs rose steeply. Livestock breeders were unable to move their animals in search of pasture and water, and were forced to sell them at very low prices in those local markets that were still accessible. In the towns, workers were no longer paid and banks ceased operating. Electricity and water supplies stopped functioning in some towns. Most community health care centres in rural areas also stopped working, having been looted or abandoned by their staff. Medicines were hard to obtain and vaccination programmes were suspended. The insecurity also hindered efforts to control locust swarms that were feeding on newly planted crops.

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J.-N. Marti, 'Addressing the Critical Humanitarian Situation in Northern Mali', *Humanitarian Exchange*, 55, 2012, <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine>.

## **15.2 Implementing disaster risk reduction in insecure contexts**

Governments and other organisations working in 'fragile' or conflict-affected states are often unable to plan and implement DRR or development programmes. Political instability, power struggles and challenges to government authority from political or armed factions undermine the normal processes of decision-making and long-term planning. Hazard-prone regions affected by insecurity or conflict are often neglected. National governments may choose to overlook them because they are too marginal economically, politically or ethnically. Lack of basic services and functioning local infrastructure, such as roads, water and power supplies, makes project implementation more difficult and expensive. Official institutions may be weak, with limited human capacity, technical expertise and material or financial resources, and corruption may be a major challenge. Civil society organisations may lack capacities or be affected by wider divisions in society.

DRR and other sustainable development agendas are likely to be marginalised by what are perceived to be more urgent needs: even in countries and communities affected by both conflict and natural hazards, and where it is acknowledged that conflict and other forms of disaster are linked, it is still common to find conflict management and DRR pursued as

independent initiatives, with a lack of coordination between organisations in the field and strategies, programming and assessment carried out independently. Humanitarian assistance agencies can often obtain donor funding in crisis-affected regions, but donors are wary of committing funds to longer-term development or DRR initiatives where the risks are high and the outcomes are perceived to be uncertain. Alternative financing mechanisms for DRR, such as those discussed in Chapter 12, are unlikely to be available, and livelihoods projects may be hampered by difficulties in accessing markets. Security may be a major concern: organisations are often deterred from working in dangerous places because they fear that aid materials and equipment will be destroyed or stolen, and because staff may be put at risk. Security planning and training, together with good risk assessments, are essential to minimise risks, although safety can never be guaranteed. Relationships may have to be built with a number of national, local, official and non-governmental organisations to ensure acceptance and safe access; delicate and protracted negotiations are often required to achieve this. At the same time, external organisations must be perceived as neutral and non-threatening by local groups and factions.<sup>1</sup>

DRR practitioners have to adapt their normal programming and ways of working to insecure contexts. They may need to operate on a different scale, for example, or use different entry points where it is impossible to work through government structures, and should be flexible in their approach to programming. As instability or crisis worsens, some types of DRR intervention may no longer be possible, particularly if they require long-term or multi-stakeholder engagement. In extreme situations, the emphasis may have to shift to short-term coping or response mechanisms, with a greater focus on external assistance to individual households in need rather than community-based approaches. Nevertheless, the overall aim should always be to build local capacities for DRR and adaptation. Humanitarian agencies may also need to adjust by implementing longer-term programmes (i.e. lasting years rather than months) in places suffering from protracted crisis.

### 15.3 Conflict sensitivity

Aid interventions in disaster-prone areas or post-disaster periods can exacerbate conflict. Badly planned programmes may increase social tensions if interventions appear to favour some sections of society over others. DRR needs to be conflict sensitive and must not cause unintended harm. All assistance programmes involve transferring resources of some kind: these might include seeds, tools, housing, water and sanitation, financial services, food,

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed guidance on aid worker security is provided in another Good Practice Review, *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments* (revised edition) (London: ODI, 2010), <http://www.odihpn.org/hpn-resources/good-practice-reviews/operational-security-management-in-violent-environments-revised-edition>. There are a number of training courses for field staff, include those offered by RedR (<http://redr.org.uk/en/Training-and-more/find-a-training-course.cfm>).

health care and technical skills. In areas suffering from instability and conflict such resources may be scarce, those who control them gain power and wealth as a result, and the resources themselves become part of the conflict.

Over the past 15 years or so, many agencies have adopted the ‘Do No Harm’ approach and frameworks in emergency and development programming (see also Section 15.4: Situation analysis).<sup>2</sup> Organisations working in DRR may not possess specialist conflict resolution or peace-building skills, but they should be conflict-sensitive, seeking to avoid contributing to social tensions and conflict through their interventions. There may be instances where natural hazard management interventions can stimulate dialogue and collaboration between social groups (see Case Study 15.2: Overcoming social tensions through DRR).

## Case Study 15.2 **Overcoming social tensions through DRR**

For some years, farmers in coastal villages in Central Java, Indonesia, experienced destructive floods, while local fishermen found their access to the sea at low tide hindered by the deposition of river sediments. Both farmers and fishermen laid the blame on deforestation by the inhabitants of villages upstream, and for some time relations between the two groups of villages were unfriendly.

A local NGO, Society for Health, Education, Environment and Peace (SHEEP), began a community-based DRR project in the area in 2009. It decided to work in both upstream and downstream villages, seeking to encourage dialogue between communities and to create a community DRR network. Community organisers worked in each village with farmers’ and fishermen’s groups and other community organisations. During 2010 the groups, organisers and community leaders collected information on changes in land use, water management and environmental conditions to produce community risk maps that were presented, discussed (and corrected) in the villages. Meetings between upstream and downstream villagers were organised, at which community representatives explained their conditions. This greatly improved awareness of all the causes of the flood and landslide problem in the different locations. The whole process took about a year. As a result, relations improved and a flood early warning system was set up linking upstream and downstream villages.

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<sup>2</sup>‘Reducing Flood Risk by Overcoming Prejudices Between Upstream and Downstream Villagers, Central Java’, in ICCO and Kerk in Actie, *CBDRM and Its Transformative Potential: Reworking Power Relations To Reduce Disaster Risks at Community Level* (Utrecht: ICCO and Kerk in Actie, 2012).

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.cdacollaborative.org/programs/do-no-harm](http://www.cdacollaborative.org/programs/do-no-harm) and M. B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999).

There is some potential for linking DRR and conflict management work, even though they may require different skills and a range of different organisations may have to be involved: for example, agencies working in human rights and protection or conflict resolution, together with those specialising in technical and organisational aspects of disaster management. A recent review of disaster risk management in insecure contexts suggests that DRR programming should become ‘conflict-sensitive’ and peace-building should be ‘hazard-proof’.<sup>3</sup> In other words, DRR should be implemented in ways that do not provoke further disputes or conflict, and community cohesion must be protected against the disruption that hazards and the unsustainable use of natural resources can cause. Environmental management, conflict management and DRR should not be seen as separate activities but as linked to each other, as well as to poverty reduction and livelihoods programmes. Clearly this works better for some types of conflict (e.g. environmental conflict or conflict over contested natural resources) than others (e.g. power struggles or ethnic conflict).

If carried out sensitively, DRR programming can be a form of conflict management, especially where the conflict is linked to scarcity of resources. Disputes over natural resources can be reduced by introducing techniques that use those resources more efficiently (for instance improved irrigation schemes or water-efficient agricultural practices in drought-prone areas), by replacing lost resources in times of crisis (food aid or restocking livestock) and by establishing more participatory and transparent systems for resource sharing and management. The Kenya Red Cross installs boreholes in drought-prone communities as part of its DRR programming and, because this is often in areas of conflict over scarce water, collaborates with local peacebuilding organisations to get communities to work together to manage the boreholes.<sup>4</sup> However, it is also important to remember that the legacy of conflict – physical, economic and social – is long-lasting. Recovery from natural disaster events may also take much longer in unstable contexts.

## 15.4 Situation analysis

The key to good practice is good context or risk analysis that enables organisations and groups to plan for and manage different types of disaster, ensuring that they are aware of how conflict or instability may affect their projects, as well as the potential impact of those projects on conflict and instability. However, development and DRR agencies often lack good situational knowledge of this kind, leading to interventions that are not sufficiently conflict-sensitive.

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3 A. Mitchell and E. M. Smith, *Disaster Risk Management for Insecure Contexts* (Paris: Action Contre la Faim (ACF), 2011), [http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/sites/default/files/publications/fichiers/drm\\_for\\_insecure\\_contexts\\_0.pdf](http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/sites/default/files/publications/fichiers/drm_for_insecure_contexts_0.pdf).

4 A. Ahmed et al., *Conflict Management and Disaster Risk Reduction: A Case Study of Kenya*, Feinstein International Center, Kenya Red Cross Society, Nairobi Peace Institute-Africa, 2013, <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/publications/v.php?id=34827>.

When carrying out an analysis of context and risk, it is important to break down the distinction between conflict and natural hazards. Agencies need to know about the nature of threats of *all* kinds faced by individuals, households and communities, and understand how conflict affects these threats. They also need to be clear about how insecurity will affect their own ability to carry out DRR initiatives, and its impact on project outcomes. In considering factors that cause or worsen insecurity, they may need to define risk thresholds and adapt their project objectives and ways of working if those thresholds are exceeded.

There are a number of tools for assessing conflict and its implications for development programming at national and local levels.<sup>5</sup> These are used to analyse the conflict itself (the background situation, causes, actors, dynamics, etc.), develop scenarios of how the conflict will develop in future, map and analyse existing responses (including development and peace-building interventions) and develop new initiatives. Repeated assessments during the project cycle will be required in most cases, since situations rarely remain stable for long: crises may flare up and die down repeatedly, and under conditions of severe stress additional pressures can generate crises rapidly – see, for example, the outbreaks of rioting in several low-income countries triggered by global fuel and food price increases in 2007–2008.

Vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCAs) can be extended or adapted to include conflict sensitivity: for example, ActionAid’s Participatory Vulnerability Assessment tool (see Box 3.3) has been adapted in this way.<sup>6</sup> VCAs ought anyway to identify the full range of threats facing societies and the root causes of vulnerability, including underlying patterns of discrimination and unequal power relations (see Chapter 5). Analysis of governance issues, political dimensions, power dynamics and the immediate causes of a crisis can be added to this.

Existing data-gathering, analysis and presentation tools may be sufficient, provided that those who use them have sufficient awareness of all the relevant issues and questions. Assessment approaches for vulnerability and DRR, climate change adaptation and conflict often employ similar or even identical participatory methods and tools, offering the possibility of more coherent analysis to cover these different issues. Participatory approaches can give insights into how and why conflict arises, as well as promoting dialogue and collaboration between different groups, which can contribute towards peace-building; if carried out correctly, they can give a voice to people who are normally powerless. A more formal political economy analysis might sometimes be appropriate: this type of analysis

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<sup>5</sup> See Saferworld et al., *Conflict-sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peace-building: A Resource Pack* (London: APFO, CECORE, CHA, FEWER, International Alert and Saferworld, 2004), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/148-conflict-sensitive-approaches-to-development-humanitarian-assistance-and-peacebuilding>; Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, *How To Guide to Conflict Sensitivity*, 2012, [http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/sites/default/files/1/6602\\_HowToGuide\\_CSF\\_WEB\\_3.pdf](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/sites/default/files/1/6602_HowToGuide_CSF_WEB_3.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *How To Guide to Conflict Sensitivity*.

focuses on power relationships, the distribution of power and contests over power between individuals, communities and organised groups, and how these affect the outcomes of development initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

Early warning systems for natural hazard and conflict threats are usually quite separate, although some conflict early warning systems include environmental and food security indicators that are recognised as potential causes of social tension.<sup>8</sup> Community-based systems have proved effective,<sup>9</sup> and there is scope for combining environmental, hazard and conflict indicators in local-level forecasting and warning systems.

## 15.5 Communities, local institutions and livelihoods

### 15.5.1 Communities

Community-based DRR has the potential to contribute to peace-building by engaging people to work together to address hazard threats that affect everyone. This is particularly valuable where trust between citizens, or between citizens and the state, has broken down. In some situations, DRR programming that focuses on politically neutral natural hazards, rather than encompassing all kinds of potential risk, may be the most pragmatic approach and entry point into a community. Nevertheless, agencies should not lose sight of fundamental issues of human rights, equality and social justice.

Where there are different communities, social, religious and ethnic groups in a particular location, with associated inter-group tensions, agencies should try to locate themselves and their interventions so that they can give support across group divides, without losing sight of the need to help the most vulnerable. Careful siting of local infrastructure and mitigation measures, such as tube wells, flood defences, rehabilitation of roads and strengthening bridges is one way of achieving this. Another approach is to hire local staff from the various communities: this ensures that their perspectives feed into the agency's context awareness and also helps in securing acceptance of the project. However, such steps take time and require careful planning, which can be challenging when an agency is under pressure to produce results quickly.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information, see C. McLoughlin, *Topic Guide on Political Economy Analysis* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2012), <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/PEA.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Examples include the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Early Warning and Response Network and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Conflict, Early Warning and Response Network (CEWARN) for the Horn of Africa.

<sup>9</sup> J. Leaning and P. Meier, *Community-based Conflict Early Warning and Response*, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2008, <http://irevolution.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/hhi-deliverable-3.pdf>.

The ability to programme effectively for DRR and conflict reduction is highly dependent on local communities and institutions. People are not passive in conflicts, just as they are not passive in other disasters. They are active in seeking their own physical and economic survival, and in peace-making. Community-based initiatives are an important part of DRR practice (see Chapter 6) and building community organisations and associations is valuable in DRR and conflict resolution alike. (This approach becomes very challenging where communities are themselves divided into factions and where neighbouring communities are hostile to one another.) An emphasis on inclusiveness and equality in discussion and planning is needed. The basic principles of making DRR approaches community-based and participatory apply here too. Getting this right can contribute to community cohesion. DRR interventions may be able to create a neutral space for rebuilding relations between communities and other institutions, stimulating joint work on a single issue.

Community-based methods are more likely to work well in places with a strong civil society, and where local organisational structures and capacity are in place. This is often not the case in places affected by displacement, insecurity, violence and high levels of dependence on external assistance. In some circumstances, agencies may have to focus on households until factions can be brought together, even though this is more costly in terms of time and resources. To avoid deepening community divisions, such household-focused interventions need to appear even-handed, benefiting families in different parts of the community.

### **15.5.2 Local institutions**

Working with different levels of government is an important part of scaling up and sustaining risk and vulnerability reduction initiatives. It is also much more complicated where there is political tension or conflict because governments are not neutral actors in these situations. It may be necessary to find alternative partners for DRR activities, among NGOs and other local or even regional organisations.

Weak capacity in formal government means that customary and informal local institutions become more prominent and are often key partners in local-level DRR. Their roles in facilitating dialogue, resolving local issues and solving problems may often endure in periods of instability where more formal institutions are no longer functioning. Local institutions define and regulate many of the rules, traditions and values that govern people's behaviour. It is important to understand how such institutions maintain social order, address local problems and conflicts, manage common resources such as water and control access to resources. Note that local patronage systems, in which elite groups favour their clients in resource allocation, increase inequality and vulnerability (see Case Study 15.3: Power relations, vulnerability and conflict).

## Case Study 15.3 Power relations, vulnerability and conflict

An Afghan NGO, Co-operation for Humanitarian Assistance (CHA), worked with eight villages in Balkh Province, which is prone to drought and floods. All the villages used a 10km irrigation canal. In spring, floods damaged houses in upstream villages, but downstream villages depended on floodwater for irrigation. The upstream villages lobbied CHA for flood protection measures, but this was opposed by those downstream because it would deprive them of water.

CHA discovered that there were long-running tensions between the upstream and downstream villages over water. Under the Taliban, water had been allocated according to the amount of land held, but after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 local government was taken over by groups connected with the upstream villages, who changed the water distribution rules in their favour. This led to water gates along the canal being closed for several months each year. A prolonged drought in 2006–2007 put great pressure on the downstream villages and their livelihoods: as a result, some young men left the district and joined armed groups.

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A. Heijmans et al., 'A Grassroots Perspective on Risks Stemming from Disasters and Conflict', *Humanitarian Exchange*, 44, 2009, <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine>.

Where national and local government is weak, NGOs and other external actors sometimes have to bypass official institutions, but there is a risk that this will undermine them even further. Local institutional and capacity development should be a core part of DRR activities, in order to secure long-term and sustainable risk and conflict reduction.

### 15.5.3 Livelihoods

Livelihood support is likely to form an important part of DRR programmes in unstable settings. This may be to replace lost resources, such as tools, seeds and livestock, which have been destroyed or stolen. It could also create income and employment opportunities and thereby reduce economic and social stress, disputes over resources and the risk of violence. Such support should be broad-based, to match the wide range of livelihood strategies on which people rely. As insecurity increases, the focus of programming may shift from supporting systems and basic services to protecting household livelihoods, with an emphasis on physical assets. Conventional livelihoods frameworks have been adapted for use in conflict settings, to explain the range of factors and forces at work (see Figure 15.1).



Building or rebuilding local infrastructure such as roads, bridges, electricity supplies and water and sanitation services is likely to be a critical task in areas emerging from conflict. Local contractors should be hired for such work wherever possible. Inclusion of those who are or have been engaged in conflict in the repair and construction of infrastructure and other types of DRR intervention, such as early warning systems, encourages communities to work together to address common needs. In some cases it can encourage individuals away from violence by providing them with income-earning opportunities. Such approaches often target young men to prevent them from being drawn into criminality or violence because they cannot find work.

Projects that support the acquisition and strengthening of households' livelihood assets to increase resilience to disasters – an effective approach in peaceful and stable settings –

## Case Study 15.4 DRR, livelihoods and peace-building

In parts of East Africa, persistent cattle raiding has caused acute tension and conflict between pastoralist groups. Herders have found it increasingly difficult to obtain access to grazing land and water sources, which often requires negotiations between different communities.

In 2006 Practical Action launched an initiative to mitigate the impacts of drought and animal disease amongst pastoralist groups living on either side of the Kenya–Uganda and Kenya–South Sudan borders. Twenty wells and four boreholes were sunk or rehabilitated, serving more than 30,000 pastoralists and their livestock. Because traditional institutions regulating land access were weak or no longer existed, two committees were formed and given training in conflict resolution and managing grazing land. In addition, 50 community animal health workers were trained to treat and prevent diseases. The training, which involved animal health workers from three countries, led to an improvement in communal relations, with members of one tribe able to treat others' animals.

Relations between pastoralist groups improved as a result of these interventions. Cross-border peace meetings were held and trade across borders and between groups increased. There were also examples of stolen livestock being returned to their rightful owners. Herders from groups previously in dispute shared grazing areas and water for the first time in over a decade.

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*Building Resilience to Drought in the Karamoja Cluster of Eastern Africa* (Nairobi: Practical Action, undated), [https://practicalaction.org/docs/region\\_east\\_africa/karamoja\\_project\\_profile.pdf](https://practicalaction.org/docs/region_east_africa/karamoja_project_profile.pdf).

can sometimes have the opposite effect where there is conflict. Here, assets may become liabilities, increasing families' vulnerability because other groups may target them: livestock and food crops are often stolen in conflicts, for example. In some circumstances it may make sense to provide less visible assets to support or rebuild disaster-affected livelihoods and stimulate local markets, such as cash or vouchers. This has been done effectively in emergencies including the long-running crisis in southern Somalia.