

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF COMMUNITY-BASED DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: ORIGINS, POLITICS AND FRAMING

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Abstract

Behind a shared community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) language, I observe differing ways in which approaches that emerged from different traditions. In this paper I review the origins of several CBDRM traditions since the 1970s. I focus on a home-grown CBDRM-tradition from the Philippines, which takes a clear political perspective, and the CBDRM-tradition promoted by the international community expressed in the Hyogo Framework for Action. The purpose of this paper is to uncover how CBDRM is framed in the different traditions and the worldviews behind them. Differing worldviews attach differing meaning and goals to CBDRM. This article makes a plea for a more explicit recognition of the contested nature of CBDRM.

This paper is part of a series on challenges of creating effective disaster risk reduction partnerships . The series arose out of a panel on this theme at the World Conference of Humanitarian Studies in Groningen, The Netherlands, 4-7 February 2009 (www.humanitarianstudies2009.org). It includes papers given at the panel and those of others who submitted papers but were unable to attend the conference.

Achterhuis, 1999

Introduction

Towards the end of the 1990s, policy-makers and practitioners rapidly adopted Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM)¹ as an alternative to top-down approaches in disaster management. CBDRM approaches aim – at least in policy documents – to build resilient awareness of disaster risks, using intimate local knowledge, and recognizes pre-existing local capacities and institutions. Hereby, policy-makers and practitioners assume that CBDRM approaches improve the position of impoverished, vulnerable, disaster-affected people by addressing the root causes of their vulnerability, and by recognizing their fundamental right to participate in decisions that impact on their lives (UN-ISDR, 2005; ADPC, 2004; Li, 2002). This paper challenges this assumption by showing that CBDRM responses is shaped through the worldviews of the intervening agencies and implicit interpretations of disaster situations, making it difficult to reach the most vulnerable people in communities.

These variations arise because people have divergent worldviews, values, and experienced histories of their environment. People interpret CBDRM differently based on their own experiences. For some, CBDRM means developing technical solutions to improve early warning systems and cyclone shelters at local level, while for others CBDRM is a governance and human rights issue (Wisner & Walker, 2005). Some consider CBDRM as an approach to advance local level decision-making and partnering with local government, while others interpret CBDRM as a strategy to transform power relations, and to challenge policies and ideologies responsible for generating vulnerability locally. Further, different interpretations exist of how grassroots people could best participate in CBDRM projects: some agencies ask people to contribute their – often limited – resources, emphasizing local ownership, while others promote the kind of participation which is empowering and aimed to transform society (Pretty, 1995; Pelling, 2007).

¹ In other disciplines like forestry, natural resource management, coastal resource management and in the health sector, a longer tradition of community-based approaches exists. I reviewed literature from these disciplines as well, in so far as it showed parallels with discussions on CBDRM.

CBDRM has become a cover term for several approaches that emerged from different traditions. In this paper I review the origins of CBDRM since the 1970s. I will do this through the life histories of people who documented their views on disasters, and wrote about CBDRM in their specific local contexts. I will further use my own experiences with some of these people whom I worked with, and who were part of the history of CBDRM in Asia. Their views are

standing, and even distress, as in the scene from

(Carroll, 1998:178-

wants to buy. Suddenly, the shop turns into a river, on which Alice and the Sheep are rowing. At a certain moment Alice commits a rowing error, and she finds herself in the water. The Sheep ?

meaning the river where she is still rowi

shop. This frame-shifting distorts communication, causes confusion and even agony. I refer to these kind of distortions when the home-grown CBDRM tradition interacts with the one promoted by the international community: they act as if they share a common CBDRM language and definitions, but they attach radically different meanings to the reasons communities are unsafe and vulnerable, and believe therefore in different strategies and goals of CBDRM.

Why then do people act as if they share a common language? There is a difference between what is written in policy documents and what people do in practice: and

(Argyris and Schön, 1978). The espoused theory consists of

(Gujt, 2008: 109).

The theory-in-use defines what people actually do, and this may be different or not from the espoused theory. In the espoused theory, people use

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contradictions within these narratives? How one views CBDRM has consequences for CBDRM practice, the kinds of strategy and interventions one selects, and who benefits from risk on the political process of how these choices are made and their impact. Mosse (2004:644) refers to

emerged later during the late 1990s which limit awareness-raising to and

worth mentioning

up

resilient communities. Secondly, representatives from CDRN together with AIDMI and La Red - influenced policy frameworks proposed by the IDNDR, especially after the mid-term IDNDR conference in Yokohama in 1994. To grasp the compassion of these CBDRM advocates, it is necessary to understand the context from which they come, and why they frame CBDRM in a specific way.

typhoon, tectonic and volcanic belts

-prone countries: it is located at the centre of

-economic, political and environmental context (CDRC,

organizations, and in the Philippine context organized along sectoral lines representing peasants or workers, and later fisherfolk, women, indigenous people or urban poor at the grassroots level.

martial law in 1972, and when human rights were increasingly violated, fueling the contradictions within Philippine society (Lubi, 1992). Ordinary people and disaster survivors complained and criticized how the government handled disasters during the Martial Law years. Relief was used to further patronage- on a

Manila to generate financial, material, technical and human resources to support the people in disaster affected areas, especially in the rural areas where there was no ready access to basic social services. The positive experience of working together in relief gave birth to the idea of institutionalizing a so- -based and development- response, in short CBDO- NGOs, one in Manila and one in Bicol region. The network expanded to other regions nation-

Social movements, framing collective action and a neutral image

ces alone will not automatically result in mobilizing collective action to challenge authorities (Snow, 2004). Snow argues, that if a social movement should get

-minded

order to openly support disaster affected communities, it had to adopt a neutral outlook. That High government officials labeled, and still label, progressive NGOs like CDRC as sympathizers of the political opponents (Amnesty International, 2006). To reduce the risk of government harassment or of being forced to work underground, the people establishing CDRC favored the adhering to moral duty and solidarity among citizens to help each other, recognizing that local people have agency and capacity further expresses the partnership between the vulnerable and less vulnerable sectors called the middle forces in the language of the social movement². The less vulnerable sectors are able to contribute resources like finances, leadership, technical skills, intellectual thinking and material resources which are much needed to sustain the social movement to achieve its vision of a just, democratic and peaceful society. This explanation worked and was acceptable for a as a distinguishing feature compared to other CBDRM-traditions.

By the end of the 1990s, the concept of CBDRM had become a generally accepted approach by the international com

community organizers had to solve this internal contradiction. They understood the meaning of the

least served and poorest segments in a village, whose socio-economic conditions make them

transforming or removing the structures generating inequity and underdevelopment;
(4) it considers people participation essential to disaster management;
(5) it puts a premium on the organizational capacity of the vulnerable sectors through the formation of grassroots disaster response organizations;
(6) it mobilizes the less vulnerable sectors into partnership with the vulnerable sectors in disaster management and development work.

The first four features resemble the CBDRM-language of the Hyogo Framework of Action. However, underneath this language, you will find a blend of different values, views and experienced realities, which are specific to the Philippine context, and will lose their meaning when transplanted to other places.

When I started working with CDRC in 1993, the coordinator of the Field Operations Department gave me the followi

1976),
(Wijkman & Timberlake, 1984) and
(Anderson & Woodrow, 1989)³

The

and Release model developed by Blaikie (1994). Vulnerability refers to multiple interdependent interacting between global and local level generating adverse and unsafe conditions at the community level for the poorest segments in society (Hewitt, 1998; Wisner, 2004). Hence, vulnerability to disasters is related to location and powerlessness.

are not helpless in times of disasters. CDRC finds this confirmed in the literature of Cuny (1983) and Anderson (1989). CDRC particularly stresses here Filipino values like family and community cooperation, the (resourceful) coupled with Filipino wit and humor enables Filipinos to deal with hardship (Heijmans & Victoria, 2001). These capacities mainly refer to social and motivational resources people have, and it is

are several arguments for this. In a context of recurrent and increasingly damaging disasters, physical and material vulnerabilities presently far outweigh capacities, and it is more viable and durable to strengthen organizational and motivational resources. Skills, knowledge, positive attitudes and beliefs are assets that stay with people, regardless displacement, can be shared, transferred, and are believed by CDRC to reduce grassroots vulnerabilities in the long run and are instrumental in accumulating material capacities. Interventions to strengthen organizational and motivational capacities are closely linked to features 3 and 5. They deal with leadership development, negotiation skills, speaking in public, awareness raising on human rights and paralegal training, and are part of the organizing work to strengthen the

le showed more comprehensive set of responses and included preparedness and mi()4(s)4gation. Staff realized

are not isolated entities, but linked to institutional mechanisms created beyond community level, both horizontally and vertically, which facilitate raising grassroots voices and entering the political arena to demand safety and protection, although with varying success.

In summary,

mounting vulnerability as a critique of the Philippine Government disaster framework. This experience largely determined why CDRN views disasters as a matter of vulnerability, as the outcome of bad governance, and therefore as a window of opportunity for political organizing, for demanding safety and protection in the broad sense. Over more than 20 years, CDRN has kept on analyzing and adapting its interpretations and models to a changing social and political

vulnerability and capacities by linking macro policies and processes to grassroots realities. This results in

-DR policy framed by CDRC. What works in Mindanao for internal refugees may not be of priority for laharD017D70176>40190035B0003>BT1t be 4

Brief history of UN-led disaster risk reduction policy

facilitation from the IDNDR secretariat to support civil society actors to participate in UN-conferences, an commitment to considering local agendas (Delica-Willison, 2006, 2007). However, La Red, Duryog Nivaran and CDRN continued voicing their alternative disaster management agenda at subsequent disaster risk reduction conferences, as well as through ADPC and various UN institutions where some of their members found positions later on.

After the IDNDR, the UN General Assembly decided to continue its activities in disaster reduction and established the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster many different actors as possible, and as such it encourages an open debate, allowing different views on disaster management within the UN-

The social life of CBDRM: diversity in meaning and perspectives of actors

The HFA is a negotiated document, a compromise on numerous issues. Bisiaux (2005) provide insight into the various debates and views during the WCDR. The cluster panel on reducing underlying risk factors, for instance in which CBDRM advocates participated highlighted the challenge of a lack of common terminology and of differing frames, which hampers creating effective partnerships in disaster risk reduction. By looking into the backstage dynamics and negotiations among various actors leading to the HFA, and through narrative inquiry of policy documents, I will analyze what meaning governments attach to CBDRM and its goals. Here I focus on the

fully incorporated in the UN policy on disaster risk reduction. By establishing what is in the texts and what is not, what is vague and what is clear, we can find who is in and who is out (Fairclough, 2003, Lakoff, 2000).

I

2005: p. 3). Governments view disasters as an interruption of development, of normalcy. In their view disasters are external events. Compared to the IDNDR, disasters are not necessarily

and whether the framework should include natural hazards only, or those induced by human processes as well. The final document definitions and scope refer to both types of hazards, although they are not regarded as political events.

The HFA frames the problem of disasters in terms of losses due to a lack of disaster risk awareness, and more implicitly the lack of legislation and poor coordination between different actors at various levels in society. Since solutions and strategies flow from a problem definition, the HFA proposes five priority areas to substantially reduce disaster losses (UNISDR, 2005, p. 11-18):

- (1) Ensure that DRR is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation;
- (2) Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning;
- (3) Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels;
- (4) Reduce the underlying risk factors;
- (5) Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

How governments view grassroots people, their communities, and what is expected from them

participation means consultation, not question

turned uncontrollable and affected many villages and valuable agricultural lands displacing many lowlanders. Meanwhile much profit was made by contractors and local politicians (Rodolfo, 1995: 88; Bankoff, 1999). This

grassroots people are educated on what to do in case of a disaster or how to best prepare for it.

behaviour in times of disasters, and technical measures. Volunteers groups and committees to take on specific disaster preparedness measures are formed following more or less a standard

In essence, this CBDRM-tradition still resonates with the dominant, top-down, hazard-focused approach to disaster response. Figure 1 shows the implicit interpretations and worldviews behind the CBDRM-tradition promoted by the international community and the home-grown CBDRM-tradition.

Figure 1: Nature of CBDRM traditions expressed through its primary features on a continuum

Origin

View on disasters

Purpose

Focus

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