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# Dealing with Disasters

Capacity Building Toolkit for National  
Civil Society Organisation Platforms

**3**

**Making use of  
local knowledge**



## Making use of local knowledge

Everyday disasters are complex. Valuable information about them is often found locally from communities and local CSOs working with them. Organising and communicating this information is an important first step for action. Relationships with external actors who have limited understanding of local contexts need to be carefully managed, ensuring local voices are heard.

Everyday disasters don't normally hit the headlines. Not only are they less publicised, they are less well understood than intensive disasters. The 'experts' are often the people who experience them – local populations and local CSOs. For example, in the republic of Congo, after the civil war ended in 2017, the CCOD Platform reported: 'We still have the consequences: broken houses, looting and economic activities that are destroyed, etc. Not counting the illnesses that have developed, deaths, arrests, etc. So, basically these two so-called natural and human types are still there, but made worse by climate change and other conflicts. That causes poverty and unemployment problems.'

In complex, multiple hazard situations like this, detailed local knowledge is vital in understanding how to support risk reduction, response and recovery.

GNDR member organisations gather data in Views from the Frontline studies which 'allows you to participate not only in the survey of

seniors, families and communities at risk, but also to launch local action plans to help communities and have better advocacy with departments. This allows you to have an idea of attitudes which can contribute to building community resilience [ . . . ] You can organize many activities to remind public authorities of their role in ensuring the security of citizens'.

As well as local consultations, local institution building allows people to express their needs and priorities. For example, in Uganda, DENIVA have supported the establishment of 'Neighbourhood Assemblies' (or community parliaments). These enable people to articulate their needs and priorities and communicate them to relevant institutions, calling for action. In Colombia, CCONG created '*Consejos de Gestión del Riesgo*' (Risk Management Councils). These create their own plans of action for their territory.

An important way for CSO Platforms to strengthen access to local knowledge is through communicating it to external actors, who often have limited understanding of local needs and priorities. For example, in Dhaka slum areas, local CSO PDAP has worked closely with communities but found that external partners come with short term, project-based agendas not shaped to local needs. They found that longer term relationships based on equal partnership are more effective. Bangladeshi NCP NAHAB is also working – under the banner of localisation – on establishing local partnerships, so that when international actors are involved the relationship is on an equal footing.

### **Making use of local knowledge: Action points**

- **Local participatory consultations, such as Views from the Frontline, can be used to gather local knowledge and priorities concerning complex everyday disasters.**
- **Building local institutions, such as 'Neighbourhood Assemblies', enable people to share and communicate needs and priorities.**
- **Relationships with external actors, such as government and INGOs, need to be carefully managed so that local knowledge is respected and used as a basis for action, ensuring that information is credible to government actors through thorough information gathering and analysis activities.**

**See Case Study 2 for an example of making use of local knowledge.**