

Human Security in Emergencies and Conflict Theme Communiqué:

Panel Discussion: *From Disaster Risk Reduction to Comprehensive Resilience – Towards a Common Understanding*, Thursday 23rd June, London, UK

Panellists: John Abuya (International Thematic Programmes Manager, IECT, AA International); Mags Bird (Programme Coordinator, VOICE); Tim Waites (Humanitarian and Disaster Reduction Policy Advisor, CHASE, DFID); Cynthia Gaigals (Manager of the Peacebuilding Issues Programme, International Alert). The discussion was chaired by Marcus Oxley (Founding Chair of the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction).



Panellist Tim Waites addresses the audience

Context and purpose of discussion: While it is widely recognised that investing in disaster risk reduction (DRR) makes sense on both economic and humanitarian grounds, there is growing acceptance that natural disasters are just one of many factors driving vulnerability. The concept of *resilience* has therefore become increasingly central to humanitarian discourse, but key questions remain, e.g.: *What exactly is meant by comprehensive resilience? What is the relationship between resilience and DRR? What are the challenges of building resilience in fragile contexts?* ActionAid and VOICE jointly organised this event to facilitate deeper discussion about ‘resilience’ and its relationship with existing DRR discourse and practice, and to gauge appetite for developing a common resilience framework. For a more detailed background note, [click here](#).

Presentations from panellists:

John Abuya: “The case for building comprehensive resilience” – Sharing practical experiences, John highlighted how ActionAid carried out comprehensive participatory vulnerability analysis as part of its multi-country Disaster Risk Reduction through Schools project and DIPECHO projects, and how communities have been mobilised to address risks and influence governance at all levels. He also shared ActionAid’s Access to Justice for Women project as an example of building women’s resilience in conflict and fragile situations. A key learning was that communities face multiple risks and hazards – not just from climate change, but also from economic, social and political hazards, which calls for a comprehensive resilience approach.

Tim Waites: Following the UK Government’s recent response to the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR) and current discussions within DIFD, Tim gave a timely overview of the place of DRR and resilience in DFID’s thinking. The HERR has opened up an opportunity and discourse on future emergencies, and has highlighted resilience as a forward-looking concept that needs to remain broadly defined. DFID is now in the process of developing its policies and strategies around resilience, and is ready for fresh thinking and partnerships to take this forward.

Mags Bird: Bringing in an EU network and policy perspective, Mags highlighted the challenges for NGOs when developing a resilience-based approach, including the need for donor visibility and value for money within European institutions and member states; a focus on humanitarian response over prevention; and the proliferation of actors in the humanitarian arena. In light of the institutional and conceptual complexities surrounding DRR and resilience, NGOs need to clearly demonstrate their added value, develop a common language, and learn from past failures.

Cynthia Gaigals: Cynthia spoke of the two-way interaction between any agency and the context in which it works, and the risks that can be created by this interaction. Drawing attention to the ‘Violence Triangle’, Cynthia looked to Burundi to illustrate the underlying attitudinal, institutional and structural causes of sexual violence against women, and explored where resilience could be integrated into this tool. She also explored the issue of poor governance as a core factor undermining resilience.

Questions and discussion points from the floor:

- How does resilience differ from previous ‘buzzwords’ such as ‘good governance’ and ‘sustainable livelihoods’?
 - Part of the answer seems to lie in the idea of responding to and adapting to uncertainty.
- While there is value in a broad concept, in practice resilience needs to be defined more clearly in order to be workable.
 - DFID is producing a paper to describe activities around resilience. This may cover definitions, but more likely principles.
- Seeking a resilience-based approach has the ability to bring various actors to the same table and trigger cross-sectoral dialogue.
- Why has DRR come out of the humanitarian sector; is it a way of re-framing development in fragile contexts?
 - The MDGs ending in 2015 could provide a chance to redefine what development means.
- Is this discussion more for our own understanding and communication, than benefiting what is happening on the ground?

Conclusions:

- Many different actors buy into the concept of resilience – including the livelihoods, DRR and conflict communities – to address drivers of risk and look at these in a comprehensive way.
- There is an appetite and interest in deeper conversations about resilience, within the NGO and donor communities. A ‘champion’ at global level is needed.
- Resilience needs to be made more ‘attractive’ to donors and the wider public, and the impact of humanitarian principles needs to be considered.
- Resilience needs to be understood in terms of transformation out of poverty, and not simply in terms of ‘bouncing back’.