



PREPAREDNESS & Disaster Risk Reduction

This paper is one in a series that examines how the act of helping civilians brace for violence can complement and benefit efforts in many fields related to peace and conflict.

Local capacity for self-preservation has powerful implications for protection, human rights, nonviolent resistance, development aid, disaster risk reduction, early warning and response, humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, and security sector reform, as well as efforts to manage conflict, reduce recruitment into violence, mitigate displacement, and prevent conflict returning.

The knock-on effects of civilians being better prepared for inexorable violence have scarcely been considered (even within the field of protection). Nothing else has such crosscutting potential as preparedness: It is the hidden common denominator of our work.

Aid service providers will often be the best situated to support local preparedness. But by getting better joined up with such providers, the practitioners in these other fields may see a very impactful multiplier upon their work on the ground.

1. The fundamental mission of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) can benefit millions more than it currently does.

Extend DRR's meaning of "disaster" to include conflicts

2. Everyone who has ever lived through conflict knows it as *disaster*. It is deadly hazard. Yet to date, international organizations have held fast to a very different and limited meaning of the word.
3. Some UN bodies acknowledge this. "Disaster risk reduction under the *Hyogo Framework for Action* does not include conflict, but risk reduction principles can also be applied to contexts involving conflict and civil unrest."¹ DRR has instead largely focused on disaster caused by nature (or manmade impacts on nature). Civilians in the path of violence would be forgiven for not appreciating our distinction: they die as surely from machetes as monsoons.
4. The political context between a deadly raid and a deadly rain differs. Yet as is described in the upcoming *Facilitator's Guide for Preparedness Support*, there proven way of navigate sensitive contexts. Moreover, it is worth noting that the field of DRR already does tread on very sensitive issues. It has moved far from its traditional moorings and become pointedly political as it increasingly stresses that vulnerability to natural hazards is often the "unnatural" result of gross governmental failure or neglect. In taking this bold step it may save a great many more lives.
5. The issue is not that the principles and tactics of DRR do not apply to conflict—they do—rather it is that we seldom try to apply them to conflict.

6. Yet it can be done. As Mary Anderson insists, we can help populations reduce the risks of pending violence, and do so “in conditions of social and political upheaval, and where the regime in power imposes limits on NGO work. It is even possible...where the situation is extremely volatile and polarized.”²
7. Sam Worthington, head of the American aid consortium *InterAction*, has argued that, “Disaster risk reduction can mitigate the impact of every type of hazard—earthquake, flood, cyclone, *conflict*... NGOs can implement low-cost interventions that go far to reduce vulnerabilities and increase the capacities of communities to cope.”³ [Emphasis added] His advice is well aligned with classic DRR formulations like “Risk = (Hazard x Vulnerability x Exposure) / Resilience”.

Apply DRR’s tactics and pedagogies to “conflict risk reduction”

8. The term “conflict risk reduction” is, sporadically, starting to be used. But again we tend to restrict the meaning of what we say. In practice, the words “conflict risk reduction” are usually conflated with conflict *prevention*. Instead of the central premise of DRR which is to *prepare* for a threat which is likely to come, the notion instead is that it might be prevented. This is questionable assumption given that some conflicts appear about as cyclic and inevitable as seasonal natural disasters.
9. Conflict prevention work has largely been disinterested in preparing people for violence that proves unpreventable. The field does not need another buzzword such as conflict risk reduction. Rather, CRR needs a place to be housed.
10. By equating “conflict risk reduction” with conflict prevention we keep it away from its most suitable home: the field of disaster risk reduction. That is there where one finds a valuable range of tactics built around local hazard, vulnerability, exposure and resilience.
11. The DRR field employs preparedness measures very applicable to pending violence. These include low-cost steps to assess community risks and assets; draw up hazard maps; monitor dangers; build local early warning upon clear command and control; conduct simulation exercises and evacuation drills; identify secure shelter at safe secondary sites; train in first aid and psycho-social care; identify blood types; learn search and rescue procedures; cache supplies; mobilize families to prepare reaction and regrouping plans, assemble packs for flight; and *much more*.
12. The DRR field employs pedagogies for mass transmission of information. Their techniques for rudimentary protection messaging reach millions of civilians. They are proven to work remarkably well at getting hard learned lessons about natural disaster to those who will need it. The exact same can be said of violent conflict: there are many lessons waiting to be shared, whether within a community, between neighboring communities, or even on a South-to-South axis of sharing—just as the worldwide DRR movement is doing. Why should civilians in today’s conflicts not benefit from the lethal learning curve of civilians in yesterday’s conflicts?
13. Preparedness support can help disaster risk reduction work save many more lives if the field itself would shed its constraints about addressing conflict.

Endnotes

¹ *Integrating Conflict and Disaster Risk Reduction into Education Sector Planning*, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, 2011; p. 10.

² Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising From the Ashes*, Westview Press, Boulder and San Francisco, 1989; pp. 41 and 312.

³ Sam Worthington, "Overview", Monday Developments, Vol. 26, No. 4, InterAction, Washington, D.C., April 2008; p.3.