Programme Evaluation of Disaster Risk Reduction
Commissioned by Cordaid

Expanded Summary Report
February 2010

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Introduction

This is an expanded executive summary of the overall evaluation report for the Cordaid-funded Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programme. The main report was based on four country reports as well as an online survey of Cordaid partners and interviews at Cordaid’s headquarters. The purpose of the evaluation was to gain greater insight into and understanding of the efficiency, relevance, and effectiveness of the Cordaid DRR programme and the best strategies for any future DRR programme.

The programme

Cordaid’s pilot DRR programme covered ten countries and had a budget of over €20 million for 2004 to 2008. The Cordaid DRR programme has its roots in an earlier community managed drought cycle management programme working mostly with pastoralist communities in arid areas of Africa.

Figure 1: The countries with Cordaid financed DRR projects. (Countries visited by the evaluation team are outlined in black).

Cordaid’s DRR programme is firmly based at the community level. It is based around the Community-Managed DRR (CMDRR) approach. This is a community-driven approach which mobilises communities to identify the disaster risks that they face, and then assists the communities to devise plans to address these. The programme has three elements: training partners in using approach; supporting partners to work with communities; and then funding some element of the risk reduction plan developed by the communities.

Capacities and vulnerabilities

When Cordaid first began working with disaster prone communities, it adopted a model of disaster risk as being determined primarily by the hazard and the community’s vulnerability to that hazard. However, Cordaid soon realised that the capacities a community held made a very large difference to the risk that they faced and therefore adopted the now-conventional model.

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\text{Disaster risk} = \text{Hazard} \times \frac{\text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity}}
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However, working with partners, Cordaid found that partners focused too much on the general vulnerabilities that they already addressed in their existing programmes (such as poverty etc) and not enough on disaster-specific vulnerability (such as location). Cordaid therefore began to use vulnerability in its DRR training to refer to vulnerability that was specific to disaster hazards. general vulnerabilities, such as poverty was conceived as a lack of capacities.

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Although this approach is controversial (as it uses the term vulnerability in a non-standard way) it is empowering.Treating the factors that increase exposure to hazards as vulnerabilities would have served to promote the concept that those affected by disasters were passive victims, whereas treating such factors as a lack of capacity emphasises that communities can act to reduce their exposure to hazards.

1 Ethiopia, Malawi, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.
In practice, the evaluation team found that this non-standard use of the term vulnerability was not a problem, as partners who had DRR funding from a number of sources, and were exposed to different models were sophisticated enough to cope with differing definitions.

How the programme works

The evaluation developed a logic model for the DRR programme. This logic model evolved over times to reflect what the evaluation team found in the field. One strong element that emerged during the evaluation was the importance of being able to advocate for favourable policies by the government and others.

The evaluation team saw several examples of where the Cordaid approach had worked very well in all four countries visited. However, there were also sites where the approach had not been applied, or been poorly applied, and where as a result, it had not worked well. Partners noted that the approach was time consuming, and demanded high skills of their staff. This is a feature that Cordaid's DRR work shares with all good community development work. It is not easy, it takes time, and it demands skilled staff to make it happen. Partner staff need knowledge of DRR and skills in community-driven development. This requires strong Cordaid support for building the capacity of partners. However, one of the biggest threats to partner capacity was the staff turnover, with partner staff who had been trained in the CMDRR approach moving on to other organisations or other posts.

In common with many organisations Cordaid seemed to conceptualise capacity building in the approach as a one-time investment. An organisation's capacity to implement a particular approach consists of both its own learning (expressed in internal rules, policies, and procedures), and the
learning of its staff. It takes some considerable time for a new approach (such as CMDRR) to be sufficiently internalised within an partners organisation to ensure that new entrants do not need external training. Most of Cordaid’s partners have not reached this stage, and high levels of staff turnover mean that further training inputs will be needed.

The relevance of DRR to Cordaid

Disasters affect the poor most and can deepen and entrench poverty as well as wiping out development gains. This means that DRR is a development issue and not just a disasters issue. The pilot countries selected by Cordaid included some of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. The evaluation team thought that the selection of the countries for the DRR programme and of the DRR partners in those countries was reasonable given the disaster profiles of the countries and the experience of the partners.

Disasters are a risk for most of Cordaid’s partners, with one half of all Cordaid partners (including those partners not undertaking any disaster-related work) reporting that they had projects which had been negatively impacted by disasters in the last five years. Some of those interviewed gave examples of how disasters had destroyed development gains (Figure 3).

Elders in Malawi spoke about how prolonged drought had forced families to sell ox-carts and other assets. In Ethiopia, the Cordaid partner in Dire Dawa told how a flash flood has washed away years of development work.

Communities who had implemented DRR projects gave example of how their DRR work had reduced the severity or frequency of disasters or both (Figure 4). Most of the DRR work of the communities supported by Cordaid was focused on reducing the severity of disasters rather than their frequency, but there were examples (such as winter-cropping in Malawi), where the intervention had reduced the frequency of severe food shortages.

Bottom up or top-down?

While the CMDRR approach is a bottom-up community-driven development approach, decisions on funding the plans developed by the community are still taken in a centralised top-down way. The community has control of planning, but not of any additional resources, thus the approach is more community-planned than community-managed.

Experience in other programmes has demonstrated that ceding control of resources (under appropriate financial controls) if very empowering. The groups that had the greatest authority in their own community were those that had resources to control.

A related funding issue was that of the timescale of funding. CMDRR is an approach that takes time to mature. The time frame of many projects was too short to enable either project success or a good return on the capacity-building investment.
The balance between participation and benefit is ensured by the CMDRR approach. However, the community contribution on a small number of interventions was relatively low compared with the total expenditure. This raises questions about longer-term sustainability of a few interventions given that maintenance costs are usually a set proportion of the cost of the initial investment.

**Risk-aware development**

Some of the CMDRR interventions are already clearly sustainable, despite the relatively short time that the project has been running. In general, activities that broadened livelihoods or produced an income stream were more likely to be sustainable and to be replicated outside the project area.

Many of the Cordaid DRR activities sought to reduce disaster risks by broadening livelihoods to increase community capacity to withstand shocks. These interventions took the form of risk-aware development. As disasters are commonplace in developing countries rather than being the rare events of the developed world, DRR provides a useful entry point for development initiatives with communities.

DRR offered an entry point for development where the solution was not specified in advance as it is in many development projects (e.g. water projects, or school building projects etc). The fact that the community could define what action was needed was a powerful enabler.

**Cross learning and support**

Partners valued the training provided by Cordaid and the cross-learning which Cordaid encouraged. Partners identified the provision of opportunities for cross learning as one of the main differences between Cordaid and other funders.

As a new approach CMDRR benefited greatly from accompaniment by Cordaid staff or by partners contracted to provide support to other partners. The quality of the country programmes was correlated with the level of accompaniment that partners had received.

Communities also very much appreciated opportunities for cross learning and study visits to working CMDRR groups were a key tool for promoting the adopting of the CMDRR approach by new groups.

**Being organised and leveraging resources**

When implemented well, Cordaid’s approach works well. Communities were able to give examples of how their resilience had increased and they typically indicated that there were two critical enablers in addition to resources: being organised; and having the necessary knowledge and skills to implement the risk reduction measures. Both of these led to the DRR group being perceived as credible.

Communities were often quite knowledgeable about the hazards that they faced. For example, they were acute aware that the climate was changing. However, they often cited knowledge about how to minimise the hazard as one of the biggest impacts of the programme, and groups in all countries referred to how they had gained in useful knowledge and skills from the DRR programme.

Being organised was seen as being particularly important as it gave the DRR groups and the communities a voice with government. One interviewee noted that while they were like grains of sand in the stream before, now that they were organised, the government had to listen to them.

Even in the poorest country visited, government resources, either in funding, skilled staff, or assets, represented a significant resource pool that an organised community could draw on (Figure 5).

The most successful DRR interventions were those which leveraged community and government resources. However, this was not the result of a conscious strategy, but had developed as a result of...
the work of particular partners and communities. Similarly, the most important linkages for the DRR projects were found to be the linkages with government. Again, although a key success factor, it was not a deliberate focus of the project.

In terms of broader advocacy for taking disaster risks into account, there have been some successes in promoting greater attention to DRR by others. Effective DRR needs action not only at the community level, but at all levels up to the global. Cordaid’s effort was concentrated on the community level (Figure 6), but there was scope for actions, especially more advocacy at national and other levels.

What made partners effective?
Partner effectiveness at implementing the CMDRR approach was related to a number of factors including the following:

- The openness of the partner to the DRR concept and their willingness to commit to it. The CMDRR worked best where partners were strongly committed to it.
- The partner’s disaster experience. The more direct and recent experience of disasters the partners had, the more interested they were in DRR.
- The strength of the linkages of the partners with the communities. Partners that had very good links with the community were able to implement more effectively.
- The synergy with other interventions. Where partners had other projects with communities these sometimes led to long engagement or many other activities with the community.
- The understanding of the Cordaid DRR methodology. Where partners understood the methodology and applied it, this worked well. Sometimes this was not the case where there had been significant staff turnover or where partners adhered to their former methodology.
- The technical competence of the partner. Partners with technical competence in the technical aspects of the disaster hazard were well placed to guide communities into effective action.
- The competence of the partner to mobilise communities using a community-driven approach. Partners with the greatest experience of other community-driven development were the fastest at applying the CMDRR approach.

Mainstreaming DRR
Relief, rehabilitation, and development are linked at the community level, but not within Cordaid. This is a structural issue stemming from the current sectoral division within Cordaid. Partners said that dealing with different sectors in Cordaid was like dealing with separate donors.

Disaster affect the poor most, so it is hardly surprising that, as they often work with the poor, over half of Cordaid’s partners said that they had had projects which were affected by disasters in the last five years (Figure 7).
The impact of disasters on the work of Cordaid partners

However, Cordaid does not make any formal assessment of potential disaster hazards in reviewing applications for funding. DRR is not internalised within Cordaid, or within most of their partners. However, some partners have made major strides in institutionalising DRR within their organisations. Cordaid’s own lack of mainstreaming of risk-aware approaches puts it in a weak position when it comes to encouraging their partners to adopt such approaches.

One of the principle conclusions of the evaluation was that Cordaid needed to mainstream DRR within it’s whole portfolio, and should encourage partners to do the same. However, the evaluation team also concluded that DRR was not sufficiently internalised within Cordaid for it to be mainstreamed within the broader portfolio without the attention and learning that could flow from continuing the pilot DRR programme.

Summary of recommendations

The evaluation made the following recommendations. They are grouped here in to Programme Design, Partners Support, Funding Policy, and Mainstreaming recommendations.

Programme Design Recommendations

Cordaid should select DRR partners based on their likely effectiveness in implementing DRR projects.

Cordaid and its partners should give priority to DRR works with communities to which DRR is of the greatest interest.

All DRR projects with communities should contain some livelihood element, including helping to provide a broader livelihood base.

Cordaid should formally include (unless inappropriate) the building of links with local government and the mobilisation of government resources as two of the objectives for each of the projects supported under the DRR programme.

Cordaid should formally include the creation of a favourable local regulatory environment towards DRR as a formal objective of DRR projects (where applicable).

Cordaid should adopt, as a formal objective for its DRR interventions, the building of strong credible community organisations that can influence government policies so as to reduce the risks the
Programme Design Recommendations

Community faces from hazards, through discouraging policies that increase risks, encouraging policies that reduce risk, and leveraging resources for DRR.

Partners Support Recommendations

Cordaid should continue to provide training for partners and opportunities for study visits by partners and community groups.

Cordaid should continue to support networking by partners and encourage joint advocacy by them, both at local and national levels.

Cordaid should pay more attention to staff retention by DRR partners and should take steps to support this.

Cordaid should invest more resources in project accompaniment for DRR as it brings many advantages apart from the purely monitoring function.

Funding Policy Recommendations

Cordaid should consider establishing a guideline ratio between community inputs and Cordaid inputs for specific community projects.

Cordaid should increase the maximum length of funding for DRR projects to five years.

Cordaid should cede control of at least some funding decisions to the communities planning the interventions.

Cordaid should continue funding its current DRR pilot for at least another five years to allow more learning by Cordaid and its partners about how the risks that disasters pose to the poorest can be minimised.

Cordaid should only undertake large investments where there is a significant community contribution, to indicate that the community have the resources to maintain the structure.

Mainstreaming Recommendations

Cordaid should continue funding its current DRR pilot for at least another five years to allow more learning by Cordaid and its partners about how the risks that disasters pose to the poorest can be minimised.

Cordaid should include the adoption of a risk-aware approach by partners for their whole portfolio as one of the objectives of the Cordaid DRR programme.

Cordaid should take a strategic decision to take a risk-aware approach in all of its work.

Cordaid should develop a simple manual to help its own programme officers to assess whether project proposals adequately consider disaster hazards to which they may be subjected.

Cordaid should subject all of its own project funding decisions to a review of the hazards to which they may be subjected.

Cordaid should promote the assessment of disaster hazard by all partner organisations in their whole portfolio (even for partners with no Cordaid DRR funding).

Cordaid should continue to support a separate DRR programme so that Cordaid and its partners can continue to learn about DRR while trying to mainstream it.