START DEPP Linking Preparedness Response and Resilience in Emergency Contexts (LPRR) – how can humanitarian responses better promote community resilience?

Recommendations from crises survivors and first responders.

The LPRR consortium is led by Christian Aid; a member of the ACT Alliance and includes Action Aid, Concern Worldwide, Help Age, Kings College London, Muslim Aid, Oxfam, Saferworld and World Vision. The countries of focus include Bangladesh, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan and the Philippines.

Through a rigorous knowledge generation approach designed and implemented by Kings College London University, the LPRR project has critically analysed eight past humanitarian interventions, asking 327 crises survivors and first responders to draw upon their own experience to guide improved humanitarian programming. This two-page summary presents an overview of the core findings of the study.

What is new? What is the LPRR contribution to the debate?

The LPRR project identified and aims to address two gaps in existing research:

1. A lack of knowledge that focuses on asking crises survivors and first responders their recommendations
2. A lack of systematic implementation and evaluation of practical recommendations

What does resilience mean?

First the study asked crises survivors for their perception of what it means to be a resilient community. The factors that underpinned resilience varied depending on the context, however ultimately crises survivors felt that resilience meant both independence and support when needed.

Crises survivors felt that resilience means having the skills and capacity to look after yourself whilst knowing how and where to ask for support when needed. Good governance and a strong local and national government capacity have been highlighted as two aspects that respondents required for this.

How can community resilience be built and not undermined in a humanitarian response?

Evidence from this research has identified six core principles for strengthening community resilience in an immediate humanitarian response and better linking humanitarian response to longer term development.

1. Allow and enable the community to co-run the response
2. Coordinate interventions and work with the government
3. Support community cohesion and establish effective two-way communication
4. Address underlying causes of vulnerability: protect and prepare
5. Include psycho social support and
6. Livelihoods and savings
i. Allow and enable the community to co-run the response

Humanitarian interventions should be run by those living at risk. A lack of participation risks fragmenting social cohesion, increasing stress and anxiety and inappropriate or untimely aid. Crises survivors have expressed that they would like to be involved from the offset and empowered to run the intervention themselves, with the support of the non-government organisations. This would increase efficiency, ensure appropriate support and allow the community to take charge of their own future.

ii. Coordinate interventions and work with the government

Interventions should be coordinated better. A number of crisis survivors called for just one organisation to work in the community, avoiding the confusion, anxiety and duplication that multiple actors can create. All interventions should be designed to coordinate and work with all levels of the government. To build long term resilience, humanitarian interventions should both encourage governments to take responsibility and support governments to build their capacity to do so.

iii. Support community cohesion and establish effective two-way communication between crises survivors and implementing organisations

Social cohesion and community togetherness is an essential attribute required for resilience. Poor communication is a common issue that has a negative impact on community cohesion. Effective, two-way communication between the community and humanitarian organisations is an essential aspect of a humanitarian response.

iv. Address underlying causes of vulnerability: protect, prepare, advocate

Tackle root causes of vulnerability from the offset. A lack of independence or empowerment and societal inequalities produce vulnerability and limit resilience building. Transformational resilience requires tackling these root causes and the power structures that enforce them. The most effective way to approach this is by advocating for protection and human rights directly after a crisis.

v. Psycho social support

Wellbeing and mental health are essential components of individual, household and community resilience. The emotional, spiritual and mental impact of crises significantly limit the ability for communities to bounce back better after a crisis.

vi. Livelihoods and savings

Lastly, crisis survivors stressed the importance of capacity building on livelihoods and savings. A focus on sustainable livelihoods is often missed in humanitarian response. Communities cannot bounce back better unless they can independently earn enough to save a surplus of money and resources as a safety net in the event of a future crisis.

It is important to note that this set of six core themes come as a package and should not be viewed independent of one another. Therefore, when putting the LPRR approach into practice, we recommend all core themes be included.

Ultimately this paper argues that if these six core principles are integrated into future humanitarian responses, this will allow the gap between short term and longer term programming to be addressed and create the conditions required for transformational resilience building.