

Defining Disaster Resilience: What does it mean for DFID?

Building disaster resilience is the term we use to describe the process of helping communities and countries to be better prepared to withstand and rapidly recover from a shock such as an earthquake, drought, flood or cyclone.

Why is disaster resilience important?

In 2010 natural disasters affected more than 200 million people, killed nearly 270,000 and caused around \$110 billion of damage. In 2011 we faced the first famine of the 21st Century in the Horn of Africa, multiple earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters around the world.

Over the coming decades it is expected that both the frequency and intensity of disasters will continue to increase as a result of climate change, urban migration, population growth and increased scarcity of natural resources.

The development challenge

The challenge is how to prepare to cope with the effects of this trend. How can we help countries prepare themselves to withstand the shocks of natural and man-made disasters? How can we help people recover as quickly as possible? And can anything be done to help communities 'bounce back better' to ensure that development progress is not reversed?

In short, the challenge is to help make countries and communities more disaster resilient. It's not only about saving lives but about preserving livelihoods.

So what can be done? Ways of improving resilience include:

- Investing in infrastructure, such as building hospitals and houses that are earthquake proof, and schools that can be used as cyclone shelters;
- Developing skills to diversify income sources;
- Improving systems that provide an early warning of shocks and stresses, and making sure these warnings lead to early action; and
- Using insurance providers to minimise the impact of a disaster and transfer risk away from vulnerable governments and communities.

And when a disaster - an earthquake, cyclone or flood - strikes, a country or community should be able to recover in a way that puts them in a stronger position to deal with the next crisis. In Bangladesh, for example, homes hit by flooding are rebuilt on raised plinths that will protect livestock and vegetable gardens from future flood waters.

Ultimately, it is a country government's responsibility to help protect its own population's capacity to resist and adapt to shocks. But the international community has a critical role to support national and local governments, civil society and other partners to help build resilience to future disasters. By doing so, we also safeguard our broader aid investments and the progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.



Nepal: barriers to disaster

Nepal is prone to natural hazards, of which flooding is both the most common and most damaging. Building flood barriers from local stones, reeds and wood helps communities control the extent to which floods affect their lives.

Picture: Shradha Giri Bohora/Practical Action

Why build disaster resilience?

Building the resilience of countries and communities can limit the effects of a disaster and the devastation it causes. In 1970 a cyclone in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) killed nearly half a million people. A cyclone of similar strength in 2007 killed 4,000. In the intervening 37 years Bangladesh had become more resilient through the development of disaster resilient infrastructure and better disaster risk management strategies.

There is also growing evidence that building community resilience to shocks and stresses saves money as well as lives. For example, analysis of Disaster Risk Reduction work in Malawi⁽ⁱ⁾ found that for every dollar invested net benefits of \$24 were delivered to communities - helping them to overcome food insecurity while building their resilience to drought and erratic weather.

The independent Humanitarian Emergency Response Review, commissioned by Secretary of State Andrew Mitchell and led by Lord Ashdown, highlighted the importance of resilience as a key theme: 'The more resilient a nation, the less lasting damage disasters caused and the quicker they can recover'. Building resilience **before** a disaster strikes clearly has the potential to save more lives and guard against future crises.

The UK Government Response to this review presented disaster resilience as 'a new and vital component of our humanitarian and development work.' Building on this, the UK Government's Humanitarian Policy, 'Saving lives, preventing suffering and building resilience', has put resilience at the centre of our approach to addressing both natural and man-made disasters. This includes commitments to embed resilience-building in all DFID country programmes by 2015, to integrate resilience into our work on climate change and conflict prevention and to improve the coherence of our development and humanitarian work.

The UK Government has committed to make resilience a central element of our work. DFID will take a leadership role, developing ideas into practical action and committing resources to its implementation. This requires us to ensure our humanitarian responses 'do no harm', support long-term resilience and development work, and deliver the right results for affected people, along with value for money for the UK taxpayer.

Putting disaster resilience into practice

The UK is already helping to build resilience to disasters. Following the catastrophic Pakistan floods of 2010, for example, we are helping communities and national authorities prepare for future events. This includes: developing safety plans in schools and communities; helping farmers to use crops that can cope with flooding; and providing communities with the skills and tools they need to maintain their food self-sufficiency.

But building disaster resilience needs to be systematically and thoroughly integrated with the full spectrum of development issues. It needs to link with our action on climate change and conflict prevention, and our general development work. Stronger connections between our humanitarian response and development work are being made – to enable communities that escape from the threat of disaster to build better lives and futures.

More information

To support the UK Government's commitments we have published an approach paper to provide a starting point for partners and Country Offices to assess how well operations will build disaster resilience, and consider what additional action may be needed. 'Defining Disaster Resilience: A DFID Approach Paper' is available online at [DFID - Disaster resilience](#)



Bangladesh: small changes make a big difference

The women in this photo are trained in how to feed, house and prevent disease among their ducks. Small changes, like rearing ducks instead of chickens, will help families to maintain a livelihood during the monsoon season.

Picture: Zul Mukhida/Practical Action

⁽ⁱ⁾<http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/publications/v.php?id=16866>