

Community-based disaster preparedness and climate adaptation: local capacity-building in the Philippines

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Community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP) approaches are increasingly important elements of vulnerability reduction and disaster management strategies. They are associated with a policy trend that values the knowledge and capacities of local people and builds on local resources, including social capital. CBDP may be instrumental not only in formulating local coping and adaptation strategies, but also in situating them within wider development planning and debates. In theory, local people can be mobilised to resist unsustainable (vulnerability increasing) forms of development or livelihood practices and to raise local concerns more effectively with political representatives. This paper focuses on the potential of CBDP initiatives to alleviate vulnerability in the context of climate change, and their limitations. It presents evidence from the Philippines that, in the limited forms in which they are currently employed, CBDP initiatives have the potential both to empower and disempower, and warns against treating CBDP as a panacea to disaster management problems.

Keywords: climate change, disaster management, social capital

Introduction

Climate change processes introduce an additional layer of complexity and uncertainty into disaster management planning and preparedness. Environmentally, countries such as the Philippines are likely to experience an increase in the frequency and severity of typhoons and flash-flooding incidents. Sea-level rise and global warming have the potential to affect settlement patterns, agricultural systems, fishing practices and other livelihood pursuits in many different ways. For instance, a slight change in sea temperature can devastate coral reefs, with significant implications for marine life and local fish stocks. Unpredictable weather patterns can play havoc with farmers' cropping cycles, resulting in increased food and income insecurity for farmers and the labourers they employ, increased risk of pest attack and increased uncertainty over which crops are most viable in a given environment. In the social arena, climate change predictions, discourse and processes of adaptation will influence the development of pre-existing or future institutions to manage vulnerability, as well as disaster management and development policy and practice.

This paper focuses on a specific form of local-level, social institutional capacity-building, namely community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP), the potential of such initiatives to alleviate vulnerability in the context of climate change, and their limitations. CBDP approaches emphasise community self-reliance, raising awareness

of vulnerability and the root causes of disasters and developing practical problem-solving skills. In this respect, CBDDP accords with the goals of increasing the ability of communities to respond promptly and flexibly to changing climatic and environmental stresses, with reference to local-specific circumstances and conditions.

The paper's findings draw primarily on research conducted in the Philippines during 1998 and 1999 on the CBDDP initiatives of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC). The research comprised two in-depth project case studies involving 173 semi-structured qualitative interviews with a broad cross section of community members and project participants, Red Cross staff and volunteers, community leaders, local government staff and other key actors. Subsequent updating communications with PNRC in 2002–04 have also informed the research results.

The outcomes of CBDDP are influenced by the interaction of a complex set of factors, including: the procedures and funding arrangements of supporting organisations; the divergent worldviews of the various players involved and their relative negotiating power; and the socio-economic and political context in which the initiatives operate. Thus, ostensibly similar CBDDP initiatives can differ radically in the extent to which they are able to address root causes of vulnerability (Bankoff and Hilhorst, 2004), such as those associated with poverty, and the 'development aggression' documented by Heijmans (2004). Heijmans finds that disaster response agencies are increasingly using *'the concept of "vulnerability" to analyse processes that lead to disasters and to identify responses'*, but at the same time, *'agencies use the concept in the way that best fits their practice—in other words, focussing on physical and economic vulnerability'* (Heijmans, 2004, p. 115). This paper supports the position of scholars like Blaikie et al. (1994), Heijmans (2004) and Winchester (1992) who claim that social and particularly political aspects of vulnerability will need to be addressed in order to make a lasting impact on overall vulnerability to disaster.

In theory, CBDDP approaches address forms of social and political vulnerability by engaging in capacity-building, both within local communities and in conjunction with government and other external actors. Social capital analysis is employed to demonstrate that CBDDP initiatives are likely to be most effective when viewed as key elements in much wider processes of disaster prevention, sustainable development planning and institution-building, rather than as stand-alone local projects concentrating on short-term disaster preparedness goals. This paper supports the use of CBDDP approaches but calls for more critical analysis of the implementation and outcomes of CBDDP in practice. In this context, it warns against treating community participation as a panacea to the problems of disaster management and climate change.

Community-based disaster preparedness in practice

CBDDP is an increasingly important element of disaster management. Historically, top-down, interventionist approaches have dominated the disaster management field. Initiatives have been characteristically technology-centred and driven by outside 'experts'. However, over the past two decades, increasing emphasis has been placed on, on the

one hand, community-based approaches, and on the other, pre-emptive approaches that focus on the root causes of vulnerability rather than isolated disaster events (Blaikie et al., 1994). Particular stress has been put on local capacity-building (Alexander, 1997; Benson et al, 2001; Christie and Hanlon, 2000; Rocha and Christoplos, 2001) as a means of increasing resilience to natural hazard events, preventing disaster and adapting to environmental and climatic change.

This evolution of CBDP approaches has also been influenced by changes in international and national policymaking circles with regard to the respective roles of civil society organisations and state actors, especially in relation to the formulation and implementation of development strategies. Disaster management roles have often been passed to civil society actors as state expenditure is cut back (Benson et al., 2001; Rocha and Christoplos, 2001). However, emphasis has shifted from the role of civil society organisations as principal service providers and facilitators of local initiatives, which predominated during the 1980s and 1990s, to a less autonomous role for civil society organisations working in *partnership* with government (Devereux, 2001). This is taking place within the context of a '*new architecture of aid*', characterised in the development sphere by increased weight on government budgetary support and sector-wide funding, in association with a rise in the channelling of international donor funding through governments rather than directly to civil society organisations (Lister and Nyamugasira, 2003). The shift towards civil society–government partnership arrangements is an important feature of PNRC discourse in the CBDP context.

Potentially, community-based approaches are a fundamental form of participant empowerment and a compelling mechanism for enforcing the transmission of ideas and claims from the bottom up. In addition to the ethics underpinning community-based approaches, their growth is also attributable to their relative cost-effectiveness and the preference of many donors to fund initiatives with a community-based component. In the context of CBDP, though, there is a lack of knowledge of the long-term outcomes (as opposed to short-term outputs) of such activity in practice (Marsh, 2001; Midgley, 1986; Rocha and Christoplos, 2001).

Strengths and weaknesses of CBDP approaches

CBDP approaches are intended to strengthen coping and adaptive capacities at the local level where the primary impacts of hazard events and environmental stresses are experienced (Masing, 1999; Skertchly and Skertchly, 2001). Community-based approaches claim to build on existing local knowledge and experience, as well as the resources, coping and adaptive strategies of local people (Benson et al., 2001; Goodyear, 2000; Masing, 1999; Rocha and Christoplos, 2001; Tobin and Whiteford, 2002). Pre-existing local capacities and institutions provide a foundation for CBDP (Buckle, 2000; Masing, 1999). An overriding aim of CBDP is to 'empower' local people by supporting them to become increasingly self-reliant (Christie and Hanlon, 2000; Uphoff, 1991).

The primary weakness of community-based approaches lays in the relative lack of resources and decision-making, legislative and regulatory powers available to local-level

actors and institutions at the centre of initiatives (Lavell, 1994). Such localised projects should be viewed therefore '*as part of a wider and deeper process of [developmental] change*' and should not be considered in isolation from the social, economic, cultural and political context within which they are embedded (Eade, 1997, pp. 25, 22).

These points are expanded on below with reference to empirical evidence from the Philippines.

Understanding community structures and dynamics

Successful implementation of CBDP requires an understanding of the communities involved. In the literature, the term 'community' is used to describe a range of overlapping social units that serve as a '*focus of social activity*' (Dynes, 1998, p. 113), and/or of shared identity. In the context of adaptation to climate change, the community's most important attribute is its functional capacity to collectively identify problems, take decisions and act on them and to allocate resources (Dynes, 1998, p. 113). In CBDP, 'community' has tended to delineate the population living within the territorial bounds of a town or village administrative unit, which is considered to be exposed to a relatively high degree of environmental hazard risk. The projects studied in the Philippines context have engaged with *barangay* communities, which form the lowest formal tier of the decentralised local government system and approximate to villages in rural areas or districts of towns in an urban setting. Such communities therefore have an administrative identity and a formal leadership structure comprising an elected captain and appointed councillors, independent of CBDP. Community identity is reinforced at the *barangay* level by social events such as fiestas and prize-giving ceremonies, as well as by regular public meetings. Strong local social institutions are embedded in historical cultural norms and values concerning intra-community cooperation as well as in the more recent (during the 1990s) evolution of decentralised governance in the Philippines. In this respect, they provide a firm foundation for community mobilisation.

Yet, despite displaying high degrees of *functional* cohesion and mobilising capacity, local communities are heterogeneous. In one Philippines case-study community, an ethnic minority enclave of indigenous people employed a largely autonomous decision-making structure of their own and had minimal direct input to *barangay*-level affairs. Other less distinct and cross-cutting community subgroups, such as migrants, landless labourers and women, co-exist and at times display competing interests and priorities, although these tend to be subsumed by notions of the common good in CBDP discourse and practice. Community members clearly experience different degrees of access to community institutions and resources, depending on social status and particularly the social capital provided by family networks. This is reinforced by substantial social pressure to abide by rules and norms embedded in the community structure, which tend to stifle open expression of dissent. There is no question that *barangay* communities are an appropriate level for disaster preparedness intervention. However, policymakers do need to be aware of the propensity for 'consensus-based' local CBDP initiatives to reinforce already powerful vested local interests. This may sometimes be to the detriment

of more vulnerable community members whose interests are least likely to be represented in participatory processes (Boyce, 2000; Mohan and Stokke, 2000, p. 253; Lavell, 1994; Winchester, 2000). Tobin (1999, p. 19) has suggested, on the basis of research carried out in North America, that mitigation strategies that ignore social heterogeneity are unlikely to be acceptable to intended beneficiaries. It may be that consensus-forming pressures are more acute in the Philippines context so that such project weaknesses are more likely to be disguised as opposed to resulting in outright project failure.

It is clear from the Philippines case studies that community-level decision-making is a negotiated process that is coloured by local power struggles and politics as much as by more altruistic values. This point is illustrated by the following (paraphrased) extract from an interview with a prominent community leader:

It is important that participants in such schemes are selected from across the community. If any one person is alone responsible for the selection of participants, then their selection is bound to reflect their 'own biases and sympathies'. It is fairer for participants to be selected by all members of the barangay council. There are different allegiances operating within the community and questions would be raised if some of each councillor's 'people' were not selected for such projects.

Communities are best viewed as fluid spheres of social interaction, rather than as fixed or discrete entities (Mohan and Stokke, 2000, p. 264). In an increasingly globalised world, both national and international migration are commonplace. Continuity of individual involvement in CBDP cannot be guaranteed, and this is particularly the case for highly mobile groups such as students and young college or high-school graduates as well as for landless labourers in the agricultural sector or construction industry workers. For instance, in one case study, several of the 'Barangay Disaster Action Team' (BDAT) members trained under the CBDP project had migrated from the area within the first year of project implementation.

Migration has also provided increased opportunities for individuals and households within a community to cultivate ties with external actors. Such ties are most commonly associated with extended family networks, which both divide communities and cut across boundaries between communities. In the Philippines context, the family far outweighs government or civil society institutions as a provider of safety-net support to resist shocks and stresses. Family and cultivated kinship networks also frequently provide access to important resources and opportunities to improve an individual or household's standard of living or to support adaptation to change. Households are often reluctant to invest their own resources in community projects and this is a key factor undermining the capacity of community initiatives from developing independently of state or non-governmental organisation (NGO) support.

Prominent community members also develop potentially beneficial links where possible with local government and NGO actors. In the Philippines, this is a key function of the *barangay* captain. The role of key individuals in CBDP is of particular importance given that local government funding for the implementation of pre-emptive or adaptive initiatives in relation to environmental hazards is scarce.

Building local coping and adaptive capacity

Various mechanisms are employed to build coping and adaptive capacities at the local level. The CBDP projects studied focused on short-term project outputs including the construction of flood defences or emergency shelters and training in disaster management skills. Potentially, such concrete project outputs can distract from the *process* of identifying, planning and implementing. However, the PNRC emphasises that the skills and experience gained through this process have a long-term value, which is potentially far greater than the project outputs that result (Allen, 2004, p. 107). This is of huge importance in the context of climate change where local-specific impacts are hard to predict with certainty and successful adaptation is most likely to be achieved through a flexible and incremental approach.

In the case study projects, capacity-building can be broken down into four key areas:

- technical information dissemination and training role;
- raising awareness of risk and vulnerability;
- accessing local knowledge and resources; and
- mobilising local people.

Technical information dissemination and training role

First, CBDP creates a space in which information (for instance on possible funding sources or mitigation measures) is disseminated to local participants by disaster managers and other officials and in which technical knowledge and training can be provided, usually to a select group of local participants. In practice, initial training sessions have tended to follow an organisational blueprint, with additional training sessions provided to support subsequent project developments, such as livelihood initiatives or mangrove planting for coastal defence purposes.

Raising awareness of risk and vulnerability

Second, the CBDP forum is employed to 'raise awareness' of local hazard risks and the causes of vulnerability. In the cases studied, this was achieved primarily through local mapping exercises as well as vulnerability and capacity assessments involving the participation of local people. The latter method in particular is viewed as having the potential to unlock '*powerful forces from within vulnerable communities to address their own vulnerabilities*' (Davis, 2004, p. 142).

Community members who perceive their lives or livelihoods to be especially vulnerable to hazards are more likely to cooperate in relevant disaster preparedness initiatives than those who do not (Paton et al., 2001). Therefore, as well as fulfilling an educational function, awareness-raising also engenders participation in practical CBDP initiatives. Awareness-raising at all levels, has been found to be particularly important when addressing the complexities of climate change, including the likely impacts on local people and the causes of vulnerability (Red Cross/Red Crescent Centre on Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness, 2005). There is evidence from the Philippines case

studies that awareness of opportunities and strategies associated with CBDP initiatives has spread within communities to those who have not directly participated in project activities as well as to neighbouring communities and local officials (Allen, 2004, p. 107).

Accessing local knowledge and resources

Third, the CBDP forum allows disaster managers to access local knowledge and ideas, to build on local coping and adaptive strategies and to mobilise local resources. As funding is scarce, community resource inputs have tended to be limited to labour (often paid a basic rate) and freely available local materials like sand.

Mobilising local people

Fourth, in implementing CBDP projects, disaster managers engage in a process of 'community organising' or mobilisation. The implementation of project measures provides a focus for the introduction of new or adapted forms of local-specific planning and organisation. One example is the emergence of community-level early warning systems which are linked to regional or national information systems but which incorporate elements of local knowledge and whose functioning is not dependent on remote structures (Howell, 2003). In PNRC projects, local participants are organised into teams of volunteers and allocated long-term disaster management functions in addition to more short-term roles and responsibilities in relation to project outputs. Having a project, budget and expected output to aim for has helped to unite participants around a common goal. At the same time, institutions that have been newly established under CBDP initiatives sometimes overlap with pre-existing counterparts, such as the government initiated 'Barangay Disaster Coordinating Councils', in the Philippines.

The primary function of CBDP is to mobilise and motivate community members to engage in *long-term* disaster preparedness. '*One of the most common flaws of disaster preparedness planning is that it is viewed as a singular event which ends after a plan has been drafted*' (IDRM International, 2002, pp. 31–32). In practice, local CBDP institutions' capacity to continue to function and evolve following the implementation of the original project largely depends on the level of support provided by external facilitators as well as on the usefulness of these institutions as perceived by local people. A number of Red Cross staff and volunteers highlighted difficulties in maintaining appropriate levels of follow-up support. Such difficulties were attributed primarily to budgetary constraints and funding timetables, the latter particularly with respect to donor stipulations (Allen, 2003).

Although broadly supportive of the programmes, some local participants questioned the value of specific aspects of CBDP initiatives. For example, one interviewee claimed to have attended so many training sessions under various government and NGO initiatives that her memory was 'blurred' and she could not remember the content of the CBDP training she had undertaken a few months previously.

Participants in the Philippines were often selected or recruited by *barangay* officials, rather than coming forward as independent volunteers. Several interviewees cited

agricultural work as a reason for not participating in project implementation. Others spoke of their lack of faith in the selected mitigation measures or of the additional problems that they had caused, for example coastal defences that made it harder for fishermen to take their boats out to sea.

CBDP provides notional space for airing local viewpoints that may contradict disaster management perspectives and opportunities for emerging issues to be addressed. In practice, it is often difficult for disaster managers to incorporate local priorities that differ from accepted disaster management strategies. For instance, local concerns may be deemed 'too political' to tackle under a CBDP initiative, or fall within the sphere of 'development' and not 'disaster management' (Allen, 2003; 2004). Such pressures to conform to external notions of CBDP frequently stem from donors and/or managers who have to balance project goals with strategic programme objectives and the wider good of the facilitating organisation.

Yet, the usefulness of CBDP capacity-building may be judged according to changing levels of institutional capacity to influence policymakers and to raise the profile of local issues and concerns, as well as by more tangible benefits of adaptation, including the protection of life and livelihood security. Such benefits (or their absence) will emerge over time, and any attempt to evaluate projects in this respect in the short term must be based principally on conjecture. This article limits itself therefore to providing comments on the potential 'empowerment' of local people, drawing on early research findings.

Empowering local people

Empowerment is concerned not with the technicalities of capacity-building, but with *realising* its potential. Yet, in practice, CBDP approaches have been associated with dependency of local actors and institutions on supporting organisations (Christie and Hanlon, 2000; Rocha and Christoplos, 2001).

Role of existing structures and institutions

The role of existing structures and community institutions may be overlooked by agencies engaged in local capacity-building because they have multiple functions or are inconsistent with recognised formats for CBDP. In the Philippines, local associations have been created or adapted to provide members with a supporting safety net during times of stress. For instance, in one of the case study communities, a farmers' cooperative offered its members access to seeds and other agricultural inputs on credit to replant rice fields where flooding had destroyed crops. Yet Red Cross CBDP initiatives have so far operated independently of other local-level private, NGO or government initiatives. Nevertheless, there was evidence of cooperation between Red Cross and government actors in local initiatives outside the scope of formal CBDP projects, such as in clearing rivers and irrigation channels. As a rule, though, CBDP activities or strategies operating under the 'Red Cross project' have remained distinct, both in the minds of community members and in practical terms, from other institutions or related activities being implemented at the local level, for example in areas of public safety or sustainable agriculture.

Building autonomous capacity

Community empowerment requires that locally based institutions have the capacity to take decisions and to act upon them *independently*. As well as mobilising the required human and material resources, community institutions need to be able to sustain the legitimacy of their decisions against both internal and external challenges (Leonard, 1982, p. 24). In practice, effective self-reliance often entails enhancing the capacity of local institutions to access and maintain control of funds held by hierarchically higher authorities within the government system, or by non-governmental or other private actors. In many contexts, the propensity for disempowering cooption of local initiatives is extremely high (see, for instance, Gilbert and Ward, 1984, on mechanisms of state control in Latin America). In addition, unless they can become part of a wider network, community institutions do not operate at an appropriate scale to address issues concerned with, for example, provincial development planning or watershed management.

Symbolic value and confidence building

There is evidence that concrete project outputs have significant *symbolic* value, which may contribute to empowerment by illustrating the achievements of participating community members. Community empowerment is also associated with the public recognition by disaster managers of vulnerability in the community concerned and with the heightened profile of local issues raised through the implementation of micro-projects (Allen, 2004, p. 107). CBDP initiatives also have the potential to empower individuals and groups within the community by providing access to a forum for public discussion of local concerns, priorities and possible solutions to local problems, and to community members who would not ordinarily be involved in such discussions or decision-making processes. During one CBDP initiative in the Philippines, local participants described experiencing forms of individual ‘empowerment’ following a training session. This was expressed as ‘*increased confidence*’ and being ‘*convinced of the power that individual BDAT and community members have*’ to change their situation (Allen, 2004, p. 108).

Potential for disempowerment

Disempowerment occurs where local knowledge, institutions and understandings are neglected. To the extent that the underlying message is that organisational forms and knowledge introduced to the community by outside experts are ‘best’, such processes undermine community self-reliance and may damage existing community institutions.

Two key tendencies of disaster managers and donors have disempowering implications in the context of CBDP approaches. These are: 1) the well-documented propensity to focus on physical hazards rather than on people’s experiences of vulnerability (Hewitt, 1983; Watts, 1983; Winchester, 1992); and 2) the inclination to concentrate on isolated small-scale local projects with little discussion of wider issues, and particularly the root causes of vulnerability (Allen, 2003; 2004). ‘Disempowerment’ takes place when disaster managers distort local people’s ‘stories’ in line with their own understandings and expectations, effectively devaluing local perspectives in relation to those of outside

‘experts’ (Bhatt, 1998). This is reinforced at a more fundamental level by the imposition—albeit unconscious—of a dominant framework for understanding disasters and disaster management that is rooted in Western culture, across the globe (Bankoff, 2001). Disempowerment may also occur where participants are steered away from linking the bigger, more politically contentious issues (including land-use planning) to the coping and adaptive capacity agenda of a project (Allen, 2004).

Depoliticising vulnerability

In this respect, Adger (2000) places considerable emphasis on analysing institutional adaptation of the ‘*processes that prevent issues from becoming political*’ in the first instance. This ‘non-decision-making’ ‘*can be carried out both by appeal to cultural norms, and by the agenda-setting promotion of less important issues*’ (Adger, 2000, p. 741). In the Philippines context, many disaster management actors and institutions more easily accept ‘depoliticised’ forms of CBDP, facilitating improved channels of communication and access to resources. So for instance, provincial and municipal governments support small-scale mitigation measures, such as constructing sea walls and planting mangroves, particularly as these were presented as activities for which the communities themselves took primary responsibility. In the CBDP context, such strategies have tended not to be framed in any meaningful debate of government responsibilities with regard to, for example, coastal protection and development. The main thrust of CBDP to date has been to cultivate mechanisms by which communities can collectively ask for help, not demand rights or attempt to influence policy concerning the allocation of resources.

Although politically contentious issues like government plans to strip coastal mangroves to make way for urban development or clandestine upland logging by well-connected individuals are recognised both within government and Red Cross circles, CBDP as currently practised provides little space within which to discuss, much less attempt to address, such issues. Given the complexity and the political nature of the debate surrounding the causes and impacts of climate change, this is of particular concern.

CBDP viewed through a social capital-building lens

Capacity-building does not begin and end with NGOs, or with donors. Nor is ‘civil society’ independent of ... the state. Rather, capacity-building involves the whole network of relationships in society (Eade, 1997, pp. 22–23).

CBDP approaches seek to strengthen and shape social capital, both within civil society and between civil society and state actors, for the purpose of vulnerability reduction. Social capital is an asset, potentially providing opportunities for low-income individuals and communities to access the resources they need to improve security and to reduce their vulnerability through coping and adaptive mechanisms (Pelling, 2002, p. 61). However, gauging the effectiveness of exercises to build social capital is inherently difficult because it is: 1) organic and therefore constantly evolving independently of such initiatives; and 2) multifunctional in a way that does not allow for neat categorisation of

social capital forms according to function. For the purposes of this paper, social capital is broadly defined as the package of social networks, reciprocal ties and the rules and behavioural norms that govern them. These rules and norms may facilitate cooperative or collective action by promoting mutual understanding, shared values and goals, and by providing informal mechanisms for sanctioning behaviour deemed to be socially undesirable within the context of the network.

Building social capital at different levels

Role of facilitating organisations

As a facilitating organisation, the PNRC sought a degree of integration in local networks. This process of integration through the sharing of knowledge and establishing bonds of trust between the different groups of actor involved in CBDP is ostensibly a functional aspect of local capacity-building. However, integration has also increased the potential ability of the PNRC to influence community-level decision-making and strategic thinking in a more long-term capacity. In essence, the process is concerned with social capital building. In addition to altruistic aims to benefit local communities, it is important to recognise that external agents also engage in social capital strengthening to satisfy self-serving goals. These include legitimising their policy and approach, building up political support bases (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 100) or, as in the case of the PNRC, fortifying and adding to the membership of affiliated volunteer networks.

A by-product of the integration of external supporting or facilitating organisations into community networks is that, at the same time as developing community-level social capital, dependency ties with supporting agents may also be cultivated. There is a danger that the disassociation of an external agent with a CBDP network at the end of a project, even if gradual, will precipitate network erosion. This is particularly true where supporting agents have acted as the primary rule and/or agenda setter of the network and CBDP outputs. In the Philippines case studies, the PNRC addressed this trend by maintaining contact with project communities during the post-implementation and evaluation phases. Ongoing support and funding for follow-up activities has to be earmarked in planning and budgeting exercises.

Local association building

Another social capital strengthening approach has been to facilitate periodic meetings of groups of PNRC-trained *barangay* 'Disaster Response Teams' from different communities to share CBDP ideas and experiences, beyond the initial project implementation phase. The inclusion of CBDP project participants in provincial and national affiliated volunteer networks of the Red Cross is a strength of the PNRC approach in this respect. There remains scope for greater integration into networks independent of the Red Cross movement, such as the Philippine Disaster Management Forum, although other studies have shown that coordination between civil society organisations can be marred by competition over access to funding or due to political rivalry (see, for example, Pelling, 2002, pp. 70–71).

Incorporation of local institutions into wider networks

The literature tells us that community institutions can strengthen in response to environmental shocks and stresses, but that they are also themselves vulnerable to the impacts of shocks and stresses (Eade, 1997, p. 186; Tobin, 1999). This is of particular importance in the context of adaptation to long-term change where there is greater pressure for social institutions to evolve rather than simply resist transitory shocks. The incorporation of CBDP institutions into wider networks is likely to provide a key source of support.

The capacity-building efforts of CBDP initiatives have a dual focus. First, they aim to strengthen the social capital of collective community institutions and actors within civil society. Second, they seek to strengthen social capital at the interface between local civil society and hierarchically powerful institutions, including (but not exclusively) those of the state. These two areas are explored below.

CBDP as a mechanism for change within civil society

‘Communities’ are entities—albeit fluid ones—characterised by a degree of sharing of norms, values and patterns of reciprocity, capable in principle of cooperative behaviour. Ostrom (1990, pp. 232–233) has demonstrated that they tend to develop institutional arrangements for managing common resources and resolving conflicts independently, as the need arises (see also Adger, 2000, p. 739). The role of outside actors in the CBDP case studies has been to promote the use of local social capital to fulfil specific functions (such as local hazard risk mapping) and to develop new and existing local institutions to this effect.

Even in what may appear to be a fairly limited field of CBDP, social capital building entails laying the foundations for increased or altered forms of cooperation in everyday community life as well as in extreme circumstances (Christie and Hanlon, 2000; Marsh, 2001; Uphoff, 1991; 1992). Involvement in CBDP initiatives entails short-term costs for local participants in terms of time, energy and lost opportunities, which have to be weighed against potential (often long-term) benefits (Allen, 2004, pp. 108–109; Bryant and White, 1984; Johnston and Clark, 1982). The benefits in terms of strengthening local social capital are likely to be minimal where CBDP initiatives have concentrated on creating social institutions to fulfil specific disaster management functions, formulated primarily by external actors. This is particularly so when the CBDP focus is on functions that local people regard as principally a responsibility of government agencies (Lavell, 1994; Luna, 2000; Morris, 2003).

As social capital is rooted in existing social systems and the political economy context, the capacity for social capital building of any form to bridge community divides and promote social cohesion should not be overestimated. Establishing new or tailoring existing community-based institutions, and gaining a consensus as to the forms that initiatives will take, is a slow and laborious process (Cernea, 1991). Johnston and Clark (1982) suggest that local institutions often seek to limit the costs of participation by actively reducing the communal obligations at play between their members. This may be compatible with a purely functionalist CBDP approach, but is problematic where

the primary objective is to strengthen social capital with a view to underpinning long-term adaptive capacity.

In engaging in social capital building, supporting agents can contribute to processes of exclusion and marginalisation in community networks and initiatives. Balance must be struck between on the one hand, enabling a given community to introduce change while at the same time maintaining '*a sense of integrity and continuity*', and on the other, resisting the reproduction of structures and practices that serve to oppress subgroups within the community (Eade, 1997, p. 186). Reciprocity and trust may have a social levelling function, particularly where they are associated with shared interests and the potential for mutual benefit. However, social sanctions and accountability mechanisms can still impact unequally in spite of community-level social capital. Prominent local actors who are connected to several different networks are less likely than others to be greatly affected by the sanctions of one network. In addition, the relative uniqueness of other members' ties to a given network can make their will to hold the network together stronger than their desire to sanction fully a powerful errant member, leading to inequities in the treatment of different members.

Consequently, local institutions cannot be assumed to be strong enough to bend more powerful members of the community towards the goals of the most vulnerable (Midgley, 1986; Oakley, 1991). However, there is evidence that community institutions can make use of public debate and group pressure to overcome some of the obstacles to collective action for the common good, even where reciprocal ties founded on trust and shared values are relatively weak (Christie and Hanlon, 2000; Uphoff, 1992). In the Philippines context, community leaders maintained a high degree of control over decision-making processes concerning issues like which mitigation measures to implement under the CBDP project. Yet, the discourse of community leaders, and particularly *barangay* captains, presented personal responsibility for upholding equity in decision-making and resource allocation as a key component of their role as elected representatives. Evidence from the project case studies suggests that, although community members by no means had an equal say in decision-making processes, community institutions were capable, with PNRC support, of selecting and implementing a measure that specifically and uniquely addressed the vulnerability of a marginalised group within the community. Nevertheless, the group in question appeared to have gained little in social capital terms from the CBDP initiative. It continued to be portrayed as holding back *barangay* development via the presentation of 'problems' that community leaders would have to tackle, rather than as autonomous actors with valuable contributions of their own to make.

Linking social capital vertically across the state: civil society interface

CBDP initiatives have rightly focused on the capacities of local communities. Nonetheless, we should not forget that governments, NGOs and donors also play a vital role, not just in providing funding and disaster management knowledge, but also in setting the agenda for vulnerability reduction. As Kaufman and Alfonso (1997, p. 10) put it, '*the community is one of several critical loci of organization and change*'. Yet local communities

are often distanced from key decision-making powers and processes (Tobin, 1999). Many measures to reduce vulnerability and avert disasters, fall outside of areas over which local people have control, or even a great deal of influence, such as urban development patterns, prevention of upland deforestation or the destruction of mangroves. If such issues are to be addressed, it is imperative that civil society institutions are able to engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue with state institutions. Behind the rhetoric surrounding local coping and adaptive capacity-building lies an implicit assumption that strengthening local civil society organisations will engender more productive, participatory relations with government agencies (McIlwaine, 1998, pp. 417–418). In reality, the quality and nature of social capital at the interface between civil society and powerful external agencies, especially of the state, are fundamental to realising the full potential of community-based initiatives. To achieve their goals, community-based institutions need to cultivate and carefully define linkages with broader social networks (Johnston and Clark, 1982; Rocha and Christoplos, 2001).

Partnership with government actors

One means of promoting the type of synergistic, ‘mutually supportive’ state–civil society relations described by Evans (1996, pp. 1120–1124) is for civil society organisations to seek to implement CBDP initiatives in partnership with government agencies. Such an approach is increasingly favoured by government agencies themselves, in accordance with neo-liberal principles of multi-stakeholder alliances or civil society–government partnership arrangements (Luna, 2000). Less popular in mainstream capacity-building discourse is the notion that in order to address fully the needs of vulnerable people, both collaborative and adversarial state–civil society relations may be required (Jalali, 2002, p. 120). This dual approach has been adopted by CARE–Bangladesh and its civil society partners, ‘Uttaran’ and ‘Water Committee’, in the ‘Reducing Vulnerability to Climate Change’ project, in response to complex problems. These include monsoon flooding, rising sea levels and the increasing scarcity of potable water, caused by human activity as well as climatic factors. Local civil society strengthening and advocacy of the rights and needs of vulnerable people are key elements of the project. *‘At the same time, politicians have to be involved through workshops and orientation programs because until the movement is transformed from a greater social movement to a greater local and political movement the NGO- and civil society-led social movement will not succeed’* (CARE–Bangladesh, 2005, p. 3). Yet, doubts have been raised in other contexts concerning the capacity of civil society organisations to undertake simultaneously a partnership with government institutions and to maintain a meaningful advocacy role (Lister and Nyamugasira, 2003).

The implementation of CBDP micro-projects can provide an opportunity to open new communication channels and generally strengthen community–government links, particularly with the support of a powerful external agency such as the Red Cross. PNR CBNP approaches are underpinned by the premise that local people have the motivation but generally lack the capacity to implement more ambitious disaster management strategies, while government agencies have the capacity, and with some

support, can be motivated to act by aware communities (Allen, 2004, p. 110). There is a danger, though, that politicians will use CBDP projects to deflect attention away from what many would perceive to be principally government responsibilities for vulnerability reduction and disaster prevention (Allen, 2004, p. 110). In a Bangladeshi context, for instance, Warner (2003) finds evidence that recent plans to increase local participation in flood management without providing funding for the use of local actors may be '*a case of offloading (responsibilities) rather than seriously involving the grassroots in operating and maintaining flood defences*' (Warner, 2003, p. 194).

In some circumstances, the institutionalisation of state–civil society relations may have served as a mechanism by which civil society activity can be regulated and controlled by state institutions or political actors (Constantino–David, 1992; Desai, 2002, p. 117).

The relationship between local people and government institutions is an unequal one, which can in practice be characterised by the cooption of local community leaders and/or exclusive and often deep-rooted, clientelistic relations (see, for example, Sidel, 1999, on the emergence of 'Bossism' in the Philippines). Indeed, elements of cooption and clientalism are inherent in all political systems, although these differ substantially with regard to the existence and effectiveness of checks and balances and in the forms in and the degrees to which these elements are manifested (Desai, 2002, pp. 119–120). CBDP institutions are particularly vulnerable to cooption by external actors where initiatives have focused on working with single, isolated communities. Therefore, formal incorporation into a wider network of CBDP institutions may help to dissipate clientelistic ties and promote more effective civil society mobilisation.

Importance of understanding the nature of political capital

Community-based approaches that promote partnerships of local and government actors in planning and/or implementing initiatives are concerned with 'political capital' building (Desai, 2002, p. 117). The term is employed to describe the form of social capital, or 'informal institutional arrangements', located at the state–civil society interface. Political capital largely determines the nature of relations between civil society and the state, and in particular the degree to which governance is characterised by 'effective representation, accountability and participation' (Harriss and de Renzio, 1997, p. 933). Political capital is a major factor in determining the abilities of different civil society actors to press their claims to resources through state institutions (Baumann and Sinha, 2001). However, where political capital is not conducive to constructive dialogue between local actors and the state, community-based approaches will be unable to challenge effectively key tenets of policy discourse. This is important because government-sanctioned projects will often separate coping and adaptive strategies from the political processes and struggles that have defined official discourse and shaped policy (Allen, 2003, p. 180). In the Philippines context, for example, the ability of local communities to oppose by engaging with the state the interests of commercial loggers who are entrenched in local power structures, should not be overestimated or romanticised.

Negotiating differing agendas

Government actors (and equally non-governmental donors) have their own policy guidelines to follow, which set out funding priorities and targets to meet. Government involvement in CBDP initiatives must therefore be consistent with government policy objectives, and not interfere with other initiatives or drives to meet specific government targets. These are some of the understandings with which government agencies entered the negotiating arena in the Philippines context.

A considerable proportion of the key project negotiations involving government actors revolved around material inputs to CBDP initiatives. Government agents were broadly enthusiastic in their support for CBDP initiatives. However, civil society organisations, such as the PNRC, or community associations were expected to approach government actors with evidence of their ability to provide appropriate levels of funding, organisational capacity and human resources for local initiatives. Local government agencies did not expect to be approached by civil society organisations seeking significant sources of funding. Nevertheless, some local government units did agree to offer limited support where project outputs fitted with government objectives, and provided opportunities for political gain, which outweighed the costs of involvement. However, this was achieved with significant support from the PNRC in negotiation processes.

Hierarchical structures and practices

Hierarchy was found to be an important defining factor of social relations and decision-making processes across the interface between powerful external and civil society actors. Local initiatives were in many respects largely shaped by negotiations that took place within the higher echelons of government or non-governmental agencies or with external donors. Actors who had little (if any) contact with the communities concerned thus retained a high degree of control.

It was commonly understood that where government agents had provided input to CBDP initiatives, then these same actors would claim a substantial degree of credit for project outputs. This process can be seen as a form of co-option, and was reinforced by local participants who publicly expressed gratitude, and treated government inputs as key to project success. The same public endorsement occurred with regard to Red Cross inputs and involvement. Public acknowledgements of community achievements by external actors was somewhat overshadowed by the norms and attitudes governing hierarchical social relations.

Scarcity of funding for local-level initiatives

The biggest constraint to productive relations between civil society and local government institutions, and hence to the realisation of CBDP goals, was connected to a shortage of funding within local government. In the PNRC case studies, innovative attempts have been made to incorporate CBDP planning into the local development plans drawn up by local officials (Allen, 2004). Although this approach has enormous

potential, in its early phases integrated CBDP planning has tended to take the form of a 'wish list' of local projects for which funding is rarely forthcoming in practice (Luna, 2004). Viewed in this way, there is a danger that CBDP could become an added burden for community institutions and actors, especially when not matched with increased access to resources or decision-making powers (Allen, 2004, p. 111).

Conclusion: big issues, small steps

Innovative CBDP approaches have the potential to make a significant and long-lasting contribution to reducing local vulnerability and strengthening adaptive capacities. By increasing the emphasis on disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction in the realm of climate change, CBDP approaches provide scope for understanding and addressing a much wider variety of forms of local vulnerability than has previously been the case in disaster management contexts. CBDP approaches also encourage deepened understanding of local-specific vulnerability issues. Such initiatives are associated with a policy trend that values the knowledge and capacities of local people and builds on local resources, including social capital.

The impacts of climate change processes will be diverse, yet more far-reaching than would be anticipated for an isolated event such as a typhoon. Therefore, CBDP initiatives are best viewed as part of a much wider system needed to support climate change adaptation and sustainable development, requiring action at the regional, national and international level, as well as at the local level.

However, there exist substantial hurdles in practice to achieving these goals, which warrant serious critical analysis. In unpacking the messy, real-life process of implementing CBDP initiatives, this paper has presented evidence that CBDP approaches have the potential to disempower in certain respects as well as to empower vulnerable people in particular contexts. The initiatives studied were in many ways successful and empowering for participants. But they also highlighted the potential for unintended forms of disempowerment to creep in—a fact of which practitioners participating in the research were all too aware.

In practice, there is a danger that community-based initiatives may place greater responsibility on the shoulders of local people without necessarily proportionately increasing their capacity to formulate initiatives according to community understandings and priorities. CBDP approaches can sideline vulnerability issues by placing much of the responsibility for implementation on those who do not have the jurisdiction or political power to address wider factors and processes that contribute to vulnerability. Furthermore, civil society–government partnership arrangements may make it easier for those who do have the capacity to tackle bigger issues, such as deforestation, to content themselves with supporting small-scale disaster management initiatives, and with reaping the political benefits of such involvement. This is particularly relevant in the context of climate change.

On the evidence presented above, the degree to which social capital across the community–government interface has been strengthened in reality is unclear. It is

important to recognise that different groups of actors bring different sets of understanding, values and expectations as well as competing agendas to the negotiating table when they become involved in CBDP. The eventual outputs of such initiatives nearly always entail a compromise. Community actors tend to have the least bargaining power in this sphere, and the most vulnerable community members often have least of all. Yet, also in a Philippines context, studies such as that of Delica-Willison and Willison (2004) present a more optimistic view that progressive community-based approaches can be employed to develop social capital to an extent that would allow CBDP institutions to claim government support *autonomously* in the long term.

It is likely that changing policy frameworks in national and international arenas will have a significant impact on this relationship. For instance, increased government prioritisation of sustainable environmental management options and of efforts to counteract degradation of upland and marine resources, has led to the mainstreaming of public criticism of activities seen as having negative long-term environmental ramifications. Furthermore, as issues of public safety (arising, for example, from landslides and flash flooding) are increasingly linked to environmental management practice in policy and political discourse at higher levels of government, it is likely that these issues will be increasingly effectively aired in local negotiation forums. This changing political context, reinforced by uncertainties surrounding the likely effects of climate change, could provide suitable conditions for the development of more vocal and influential CBDP institutions in the future.

Social capital cannot be created or shaped independently of structural inequalities and the political agendas of local and external actors. However, local capacity-building *is* an important part of the process of empowering vulnerable people not only to cope and adapt, but also to shape social institutions and contribute to policy. CBDP capacity-building may best be viewed not as a panacea but as a few small steps, albeit on a path of enormous potential.

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