

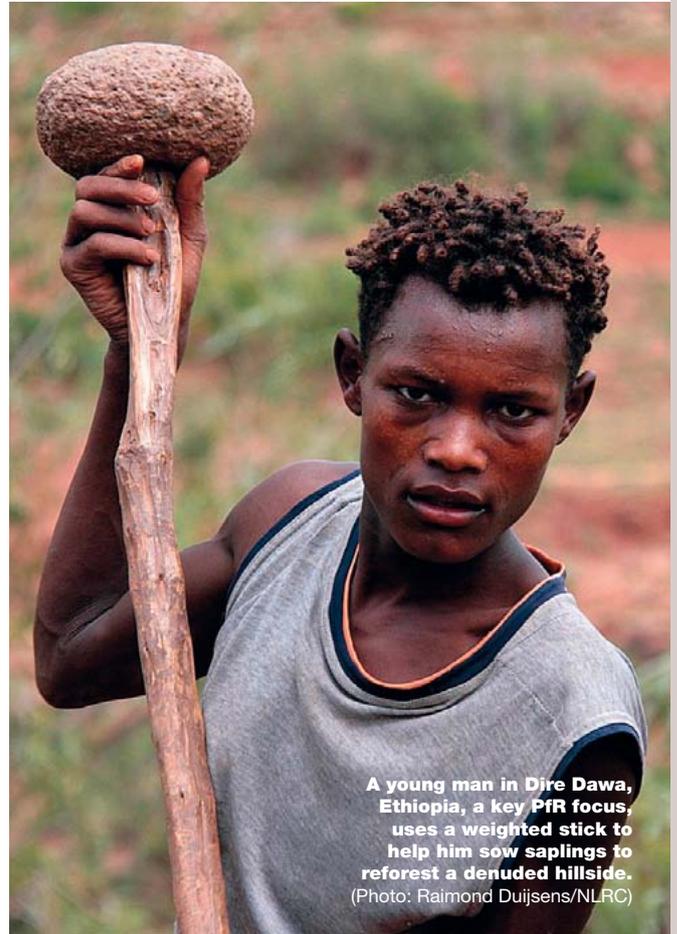
A new vision for community resilience

The case for change | November 2012

Disaster risk is rising rapidly. The poorest and most vulnerable people are hit hardest. Many hazards are becoming more frequent and less predictable as a result of climate change. At the same time, environmental degradation erodes nature's ability to regulate them, and to provide food and water. The result is that more people are caught in a vicious circle of poverty, risk and vulnerability, which drives mounting economic losses, and imposes ever greater costs of relief and rehabilitation on governments and agencies.

Strengthening resilience is increasingly recognised as the key to breaking this cycle. Current efforts to reduce risk or adapt to climate change are planned in separate sectors and add up to less than the sum of their parts. In addition, there is often a lack of engagement at the local level, where the disasters hit hardest and some of the most effective interventions to reduce risk could be made. Partners for Resilience (PfR) has recognised the need to change course, urgently. In the first-ever large-scale programme of its kind, we bring together our expertise in a truly holistic manner.

We believe our vision of resilience set out here is the way forward for a wide range of investments in disaster risk reduction. It puts communities at the centre by empowering them to to strengthen livelihoods; it connects disciplines by using the combined strength of organizations working in partnership; it expands their focus by encompassing wider ecosystems and considering wider timescales; it connects humanitarian and development focuses.



A young man in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, a key PfR focus, uses a weighted stick to help him sow saplings to reforest a denuded hillside. (Photo: Raimond Duijsens/NLRC)



The Agusan river, Mindanao, Philippines: restoring ecosystems

Each year disastrous floods occur along the Agusan river and around Lake Mainit – the direct result of large-scale unsustainable logging and mining that have denuded the land of its protective vegetation. Erosion caused floodplains and river tributaries to silt up, and the river system can no longer absorb floodwater during the monsoon. Humanitarian organizations have responded with emergency aid and longer-term assistance in adaptation; they have not addressed the environmental root-cause. The flooding gradually worsens. The PfR are working to establish a dialogue with natural-resource managers and representatives from the forestry and mining sector intended to promote sustainable development. The main focus will be to restore the regulatory role of wetland ecosystems and to stabilize hill slopes through reforestation.

Partners for Resilience – a collaboration of CARE Netherlands, Cordaid, the Netherlands Red Cross, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre, Wetlands International and 30 civil society partners in the global South – is integrating *disaster risk reduction (DRR)*, *climate change adaptation (CCA)* and *ecosystem management and restoration (EMR)*.

In our five-year, €40m programme, supported by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we help strengthen the resilience of more than 600,000 people. We work in nine countries (see map on front cover) where poor communities' livelihoods are affected by disasters and degraded

An integrated approach with different disciplines is the way forward for effective DRR



ecosystems. They struggle to cope with extremes, especially vulnerable groups. We support and empower communities to address the increasing and changing risks they face, in the realisation that poverty, risk and vulnerability are all inextricably linked with the way decisions are made and resources and power are distributed within a society.

We also foster local and national networks that implement and promote the integration of DRR, CCA and EMR. Seeing how inadequate development decisions often increase

the vulnerability of both human society and the environment, PfR also supports communities and civil society organizations to engage more effectively in policy dialogues with local, regional and national governments.

Operationalizing resilience

To strengthen community resilience, PfR combines disaster risk reduction with climate change adaptation and ecosystem management and restoration. But what exactly is resilience? In our partnership we use the UN definition: “Resilience is the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.”

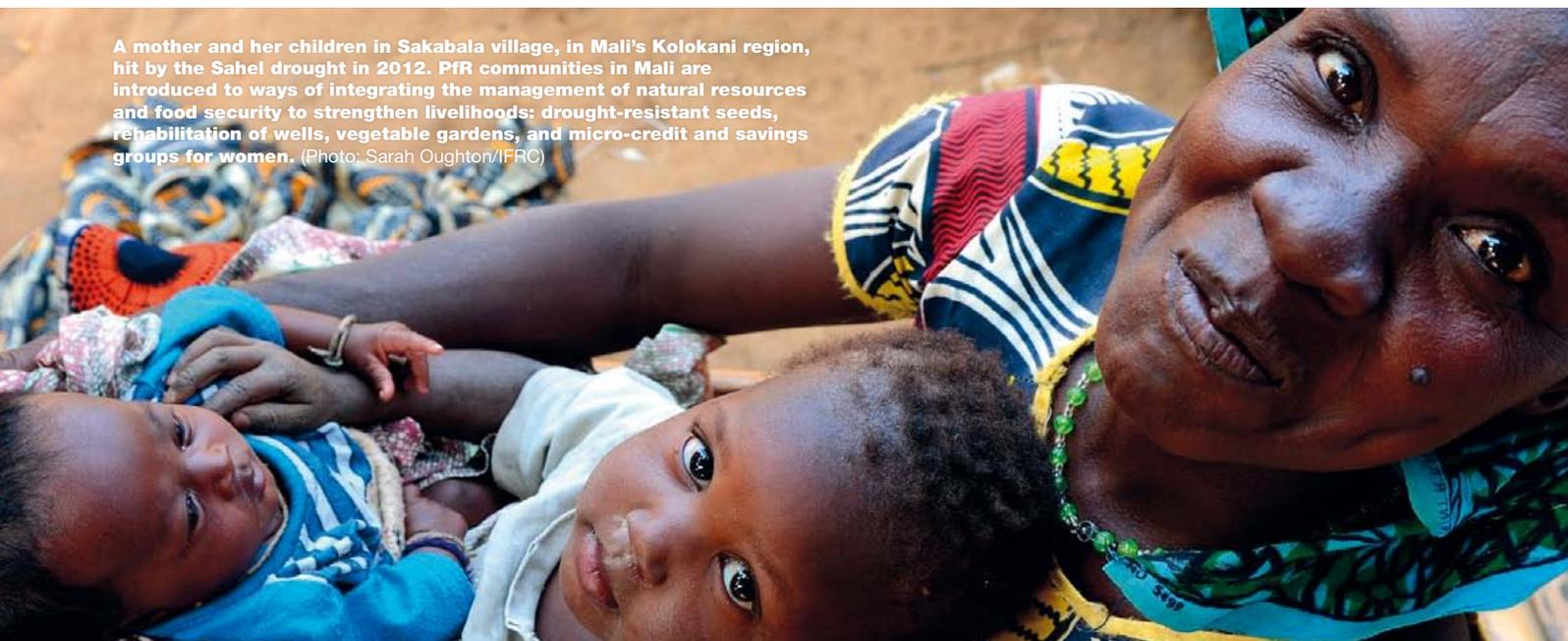
In this document we offer a new vision for translating resilience into practice. We do this by means of four building blocks that are central to our vision of resilience. Communities supported by civil society organizations *anticipate* the risks they face by building on existing capacities; they *respond* when disaster strikes, while maintaining basic structures and functions; they *adapt* to changing risks, and to the changing local situation and its livelihoods options; and they *transform* themselves to address underlying factors and root causes of risk, and be active partners for governments in implementing DRR.

These four building blocks show how humanitarian, development and environmental actors can complement each other and yield the best results in a cost-effective way. In the nine countries that we are working in, we put this into action. How this is done is explained in more detail on page 5, taking Kenya as example.

The focus is local, where hazards affect the people most at risk. But the communities in which they live do not function in isolation. They are connected with other communities, and with governments and agencies at three different levels, and they are embedded in a landscape that determines their livelihoods and vulnerability to hazards:

- At the household level, some options to increase resilience are livelihoods diversification, micro-savings, family-scale disaster-preparedness plans, and small-scale mitigation. Livelihoods derive from agriculture or

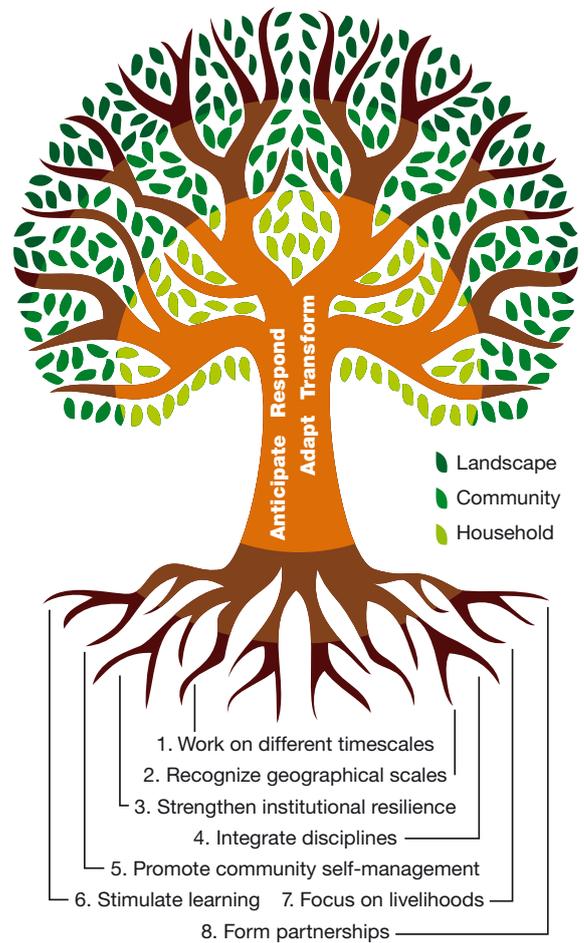
A mother and her children in Sakabala village, in Mali's Kolokani region, hit by the Sahel drought in 2012. PfR communities in Mali are introduced to ways of integrating the management of natural resources and food security to strengthen livelihoods: drought-resistant seeds, rehabilitation of wells, vegetable gardens, and micro-credit and savings groups for women. (Photo: Sarah Oughton/IFRC)



The PfR Vision Tree

The PfR vision is based on the **BUILDING BLOCKS** of encouraging communities to *anticipate* the risks they face by building on existing capacities, *respond* when disaster strikes while maintaining basic structures and functions, then *adapt* to changing risks, and to a changing location situation and its livelihoods options, and finally *transform* themselves to address underlying factors and root causes of risk and be active partners for governments in implementing DRR. These building blocks apply on several **LEVELS**, from households and the communities they form, up to the landscape in which they are situated and with which they interrelate. At all levels, policy dialogue is important to create an enabling environment.

Our eight **PRINCIPLES** for moving beyond “business as usual” are these: work on *different timescales* to ensure adaptive planning; recognize the broader *geographical scales* on which the drivers of vulnerability express themselves; strengthen *institutional resilience* to changes in disaster risk, climate and ecosystems; *integrate disciplines* in the attempt to analyse an environment that encompasses many different risks; promote *community self-management*, boosting empowerment and creating local ownership to put communities in the driving seat of development; *stimulate learning* by combining traditional knowledge with scientific assessments to understand climate trends and data; *focus on livelihoods* – the first and most important element affected by disasters, seeing the natural dimension as key; and finally *form partnerships* among communities, government agencies and civil society organizations, traversing different sectors.



fishing and depend on soil, water and climate. Healthy ecosystems are crucial, as well as good human health.

- At the community level, natural resources can be managed sustainably and effective mitigation can be facilitated by strong community organizations with clear responsibilities. Also provision of safe water and sanitation is crucial.
- At the landscape level, it’s important that all stakeholders jointly assess hazards, vulnerabilities, capacities and root causes of risk. Poor quality of water in one place can be directly linked to harmful practices in another.

Actions are complemented by policy dialogue. Authorities at different levels contribute to an enabling environment through sound risk reduction policies, legislation and institutions. Approaching these communities in a holistic way, connecting the different levels and offering integrated solutions represents a fundamentally different way of working.

Key principles

An integrated approach including different disciplines is the way forward for making effective DRR investments. The integration of sectors and disciplines and the application of different interventions aid success, but are not easy to achieve. Here we identify principles for understanding and operationalizing integrated climate- and ecosystem-smart risk reduction. In other words, how to move beyond business as usual.

Work on different timescales

Willingness to work across timescales enables adaptive planning. For many climate-related hazards, especially at

the most local levels, we do not know precisely how their frequency, intensity and predictability will change over time. However, we can design measures robust enough for the changes we can anticipate *and* that can be adjusted over time. We can also make better use of climate science on shorter timescales to manage rising uncertainties.

Advances in science and technology offer a wide range of early-warnings, but it is essential that we invest in the “last mile” up to the end-user to turn early warning into early action. Regional centres of expertise, national meteorological offices, local field reports and community observations all allow us to understand (*early warning*) what is happening and what may await us across a range of timescales. This allows us to better anticipate (*early action*) short-term, mid-term and long-term threats.

Recognize broader geographical scales

The drivers of vulnerability express themselves on multiple spatial scales: from household or community to landscape level. For instance, the water cycle connects people along the upper reaches of a river with those who live further downstream.

But interests among stakeholders may be conflicting; the construction of water harvesting structures in a highland area, for example, may cause scarcity downstream. These trade-offs are well mapped and where possible resolved.

Strengthen institutional resilience

Institutions (traditions, social norms, laws, policy and power structures) regulate the behaviour and power relations of

individuals or groups, but are themselves also influenced by these actors. They determine participation, exclusion, knowledge development and who has power over whom. If institutions can adapt to the changes in disaster risk, climate and ecosystems, then vulnerability is decreased.

Through policy dialogue, empowerment of communities and access to knowledge, institutional arrangements can be changed to the advantage of vulnerable groups. These arrangements themselves can over time be made resilient in relation to hazards, and consequently contribute to stronger and lasting community resilience. As a result programmes are better integrated into the local context and focused on long-term sustainable results.

Integrate disciplines and approaches

Local communities face manifold vulnerabilities that have various underlying causes. Addressing these effectively requires a combination of disciplines to analyse risks at all levels and draw up plans and implement activities to reduce risks and strengthen resilience. This implies not only linking humanitarian and development perspectives and integration with climate adaptation planning, but also integrating different disciplines like health, disaster management, environmental care and considering the interaction of ecosystem services and “livelihoods capital”.

Through integrated assessments and support from other stakeholders, communities can assess risk, vulnerability and capacities, and address issues in an integral way. They can complement and even supplement preparations for disaster response with initiatives for sustainable development. Thus they fully understand the way in which they impact and depend on nature, and how they evolve with and adapt to a changing environment on which, among other things, climate change has an impact. Knowledge about these socio-ecological interrelationships forms an essential element of planning for risk reduction.

Promote community self-management

The resilience of a community is determined by its resources and its knowledge, and whether it can organize itself to mobilize local resources equitably. Empowerment and the creation of local ownership are essential for communities to be in the driving seat of the development process.

The Niger Delta, Mali: holding back drought

Communities in the Inner Niger Delta of Mali are highly vulnerable to drought. Food-security crises occur on a regular basis. PfR partners in Mali work to increase communities' resilience – through food banks, by diversifying income generation, and by setting up micro-credit and savings facilities. And a major threat is looming: foreign investors plan to install large-scale irrigation programmes far upstream which may reduce water flows in the Niger river by a third. This will have a disastrous impact on millions of people in the delta; the land available for rice farming will decrease and wetlands may be lost. Community-level work is complemented by a scientific study to explore these issues on a river-basin scale. Cost-benefit and environmental-impact assessments are being undertaken to demonstrate the effect of the proposed interventions. Through extensive lobbying with water managers and land-use planners, it is hoped water will be allocated fairly and safeguarded for both people and ecosystems downstream.

Building on pre-existing capacities and promoting equity in organizing resources is crucial. Gender is especially important: women are often the driving force in their families and communities while facing substantial challenges in dealing with risk.

Stimulate learning

Traditional knowledge plays an essential role in designing DRR interventions that fit their context. But local knowledge is rarely enough to fully understand the changing risks. Traditional knowledge and experience need to be combined with scientific assessments and other knowledge systems to incorporate climate trends and data. These might come from outside the local area, take time to emerge, or only be visible on a landscape scale.

Building institutional memory is also important to avoid continuous reinvention of the wheel and to enable different actors to respond to changing environments. A strong learning culture is crucial to enhancing community resilience.

Focus on livelihoods

Disasters not only take lives, they also impact on livelihoods. And through unsustainable practices that harm the

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PfR uses innovative methods like video training to raise awareness and empower communities. A community member in Nahuala, Guatemala, does a 'piece-to-camera' explaining how degradation of ecosystems and erratic weather contribute to increased disaster risk.
(Photo: Charlotte Floors/NLRC)

Ewaso Nyiro river, Kenya: the building blocks of life

In the north of Kenya the Ewaso Nyiro river is a lifeline for thousands of pastoralist communities. During droughts, they bring livestock to the river basin for water and pasture and stay until normality returns. Flash floods are common, striking villages along the river with increasing frequency and intensity. Over the past decade especially, climate change may be to blame, since rains have been heavier. Human interventions such as deforestation along the river banks causing intense water run-off into the river and houses, exacerbating the impact. Often the river changes from one extreme to the other in such a short time that traditional warning signs prove inadequate. PfR aims to improve this situation by focusing on anticipation, response, adaptation and transformation. Read on for more on this part of the PfR vision...

Anticipate | It's more and more widely accepted now that we can save lives and reduce more suffering if we can act before disaster strikes. PfR staff and volunteers and local government staff are being trained to carry out participatory risk assessments that encompass ecosystems and climate change. They facilitate a community-managed approach to assess risk, vulnerability and capacity. A landscape assessment is being carried out to raise awareness on the connectivity between villages in the watershed, showing how interventions upstream can have an effect downstream. The assessment includes pastoralists, farmers and teachers, government officials, men and women, youth and elderly, and others. People will draw risk maps and discuss changes in their environment over the past 30 years.

An action plan is developed with clear roles and responsibilities, including contingency plans for which a DRR committee is established to manage implementation. To anticipate approaching flood risks, a community-based *early warning* system for floods is developed, consisting of mobile communication links with communities on rainfall or floods upstream. Villagers will use mobile phones, whistles and flags to sound the alarm. There are shelters and (rehearsed) evacuation procedures – *early action* measures that shape response.

Respond | Living in flood prone areas of the Ewaso Nyiro river means that disasters are inevitable, even if DRR measures are in place. Effective anticipation and preparation take time. Villagers may not be able to affect what happens upstream. Response needs to be part of contingency planning.

DRR committees will organize evacuations and search and rescue, provide first aid, and assess damage and prioritize needs. And houses can be rebuilt in safer areas, and villagers rehabilitate degraded riverbanks. Thus building resilience through response and recovery is a worthwhile investment. In the long term, however, it is also more effective to help farmers find alternative options for livelihoods than to provide food aid when the harvest has failed or the livestock has perished.

Adapt | PfR staff and volunteers, villagers and local government all realize that flooding is recurrent, and this is a window of opportunity to start working on long-term adaptation solutions in a changing environment. Restoration of the ecosystem is crucial – especially environmental degradation, disputes over land around Lake Ol' Bolosat, and unsustainable use of upstream water, all need to be addressed. Also it is suggested to communities that their traditional pastoralist livelihoods are actually making them more vulnerable, and that farming – long considered the livelihood of the poor – is actually a viable alternative. With support from PfR, community members now grow, consume and sell vegetables.

Transform | Successful DRR committees cooperate closely with government, local and national, and municipal bodies. DRR action is included in government plans for villages. DRR committees are transformed into community-based organizations, recognized as government partners. Through joint field visits, communities show the authorities the work being done and this motivates the government to discuss and support DRR action like improved weather forecast, small irrigation measures, flood barriers, reforestation, and contingency planning.

A regional forum stimulates cooperation involving both upstream and downstream communities. Best practice and lessons learned are shared with national government, NGOs, other communities, and even other countries. National disaster and water management authorities are encouraged to adjust strategies and planning using input from communities.

A pastoralist in newly cultivated fields in Merti, Kenya. Some pastoralists have diversified, moving to crop farming along riverbanks. Settled agriculture can bring some stability to families.
(Photo: Raimond Duijsens/NLRC)





A woman in a coastal town in India's Mahadani river delta stands in front of a protective tree plantation, established recently by her community. Ecosystems and helping communities protect them are a key element of PfR work. (Photo: Astrid van den Berg/Cordaid)

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protective capacity of the environment livelihoods themselves may even contribute to slow-onset disasters. Therefore, all dimensions of resilience are considered through links with essential livelihoods capital in its human, social, physical, financial, natural and political dimensions – the “sustainable livelihoods framework”. Diversification can strengthen resilience by enhancing livelihoods capital multiplying options. This promotes human well-being and, through sharing of benefits, incorporates equity issues.

The natural dimension is one of the key aspects, as environmental degradation reduces basic ecosystem functions and inflicts new hazards and exacerbates vulnerability to existing ones by weakening people’s ability to cope and recover. It also implies knowledge and capacity for these functions, and investing in community organizations and networks, infrastructure, financial savings and political competence.

Form partnerships

Individual agencies, not to say entire sectors, usually have single-issue mandates and their strengths are confined within a subset of the four building blocks outlined here: anticipate, respond, adapt, transform. To yield maximum impact and operate cost-effectively, partnerships are

formed, involving humanitarian and development work, ecosystem management and climate change adaptation.

The main focus is at local level. There, partnerships are established with communities, government agencies, private sector enterprises, and civil society organizations that are active at local levels, in different disciplines and with different approaches. Through these partnerships, risk reduction is

The PfR vision lays out a much-needed change for making DRR investments

fostered in both the private (community or household level) and public (the wider landscape) domains. Private actors can be fully engaged in programme work, while universities and knowledge centres provide technical back-up from assessment and implementation through to monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion

The PfR vision, rooted in practical experience at various levels in nine countries, lays out a much-needed change in the way DRR investments are made. This way of approaching risk reduction is urgent because of rising and increasingly unpredictable disaster risk and mounting economic losses that communities face. It is unique because it brings together previously unconnected fields of expertise which need each other to be truly effective in the short and long term. Finally, it is relevant if we are to protect livelihoods and safeguard and enable further development.

Joining forces, encompassing different timescales and wider ecosystems, putting communities at the centre, and uniting humanitarian and development focuses are the best way forward for risk reduction.

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