

PARES Case Study of Engagement & Involvement for Resilience

Case Study Title: Madagascar, Cyclones, Social Capital and Collective Action

Country/location: Madagascar – five municipalities in Ambanja District

Crisis/challenge type: Cyclones and cyclone-related flooding

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PARES Domain illustrated by this case study

Social Relations and Structures: pre-existing social networks & mutual support systems can be supported by NGOs/government to enhance impact & resilience.

Recommended Actions

Communities: Contact locally present NGOs to ask for support for local actions and structures that can help build long-term resilience.

NGOs and health program implementors: Be led by community needs and engage with local knowledge, structures and resources to maximise your impact.

Consult community members before any programme implementation; work to ensure community ownership.

Government: Work with local knowledge/resources and community social networks; encourage other agencies to do so.

Funders: Encourage & incentivise grantees to engage with, harness and augment the social capital that exists within communities.

Data for this case analysis

Primary data from respondents in five villages in five different municipalities: 20 key informant interviews, 5 focus group discussions

Key Message

Communities contribute substantial social capital in the form of knowledge and social networks and labour that NGOs can harness and support to build crisis resilience.

Case study summary

Communities are the custodians of important knowledge and understanding– a form of social capital – that stakeholders could utilise to inform their interventions in the response to cyclone-related crises. When this knowledge is harnessed to ensure any interventions are appropriate (in this case choosing locations for wells) this leads to better outcomes (in this case improved water security during a cyclone). When this knowledge and understanding is ignored, interventions risk being less effective and resilience is less likely to be built. Harnessing this social capital to facilitate local ownership of any programme or new resources leads to sustained positive impacts of any intervention. Strong community relationships and a willingness to support those in need, another form of social capital, can also be harnessed to ensure equitable distribution of resources and support in a crisis, as well as to help facilitate collective action.

Detailed Explanation of engagement mechanisms

Context that provides the conditions in which the observed actions work

In the coastal northwest of Madagascar communities rely heavily on marine resources, mangrove forests and fisheries. There are limited livelihood alternatives and high levels of poverty. Cyclones, which are becoming increasingly frequent and severe, regularly cause serious destruction of property and loss of life. They also flood fresh water supplies (wells) and latrines, leading to infectious and water-borne disease spread. Additionally, progressive over exploitation of mangroves and overfishing has led to depleted fish stocks and reduced mangrove forest cover, increasing their vulnerability to the effects of strong winds during cyclones. Lack of resources prevents villagers from being able to take action on their own, such as building defence walls or flood-proofing wells and latrines. No technical or financial support is forthcoming from either central or local government for such actions, and communities are aware of the need for self-reliance. Communities have a clear understanding of their needs, even if they are unable to meet these needs for themselves, and enjoy strong social relationships with each other.

Several NGOs have worked in the region, some of whom enjoy a long-term presence and good community relationships, some of whom come into the region for short term interventions.

The actions (mechanisms) that were observed to lead to resilience outcomes

Numerous NGOs have noticed that people did not have access to clean water and have decided to construct water wells in response. However, some of these NGOs consulted local communities to understand local norms, where would be the most appropriate place to construct new wells and how best to ensure wells are maintained and continue to function in the long term. Armed with this understanding, some NGOs approached building and maintaining wells in a contextually appropriate way. Others did not. Some communities were engaged in the long-term maintenance wells and the financing of well maintenance and others were not.

During one cyclone, village C was severely flooded, completely blocking people's ability to search for food. People living in neighbouring villages decided to help them, travelling from their village in their traditional wooden boats they brought food to help them get through the period of flooding.

Observed outcomes

In areas where communities were consulted and engaged in well construction and maintenance, communities enjoyed good water security. In areas where communities were not consulted, the constructed wells were damaged or destroyed, leaving communities to drink flood water, resulting in water borne diseases.

Case evidence

Vignettes #2, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 21 in Madagascar – Cyclones – Supporting Evidence document

Related Case Studies

Operational Systems

Madagascar – Cyclones – Communication and Information Systems

Learning and Capability

Madagascar – Cyclones – Embedded and Equitable Partnerships

Other Relevant Case Studies on Flood Response

Uganda – Flood – Knowledge systems Integration

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Multi-stakeholder Coordination

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Social Capital and Collective Action

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Embedded and Equitable Partnerships