

Recommendations

Disaster Risk Assessment Approaches

Gaza Risk Reduction and Mitigation (GRRAM)

Catholic Relief Services/Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza

1. Introduction

Several approaches used to assess and analyze vulnerability and capacities were reviewed in order to recommend an appropriate approach for the Gaza context. There are two elements that have to be considered here: the first is the approach itself, which should provide the necessary depth and quality of information to have a good enough understanding of the general context, and the vulnerabilities and capacities of the communities. The second is how well the approach has been documented; this is important if persons don't have experience in conducting disaster risk assessments. For these persons, the approach should be user friendly, requiring minimal external support.

There are many approaches that look at vulnerability and capacity. While there are some differences to approaches (e.g. more or less community-based, more or less extensive, more or less flexible in approach, integrating or not integrating climate change adaptation), in practice many are very similar, and use many of the same approaches and tools.

There are some basic requirements needed for a disaster risk assessment approach in Gaza:

- Much of what happens in communities within Gaza is caused by elements beyond the community; the approach should thus include an assessment and analysis that spans the local, national and international level.
- As natural hazards are not considered the most important/ urgent risks by the communities in Gaza, the approach should include risks beyond natural hazards (e.g. conflict, climate change).
- Gaza being mainly urban/ peri-urban, the approach should be adapted to an urban context. It should include a review of services (e.g. WASH, energy, transport, communication).
- Considering the role of women, and an often conservative outlook in Gaza, the approach should be sensitive to gender and social/cultural differences.
- As the local context and communities vary widely throughout Gaza, the approach should allow for adapting to different needs in scale and depth of assessment and analysis.
- The assessment should be easy to document and information presented in a comprehensive yet accessible way.

2. Review of several approaches

Four disaster risk approaches will be reviewed here:

- Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis - Oxfam
- Community-Based Disaster Preparedness - CRS
- Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment - IFRC
- Participatory Risk Assessment for Informal Settlements - UTC

Strengths and weakness of these approaches, according to the evaluator, are presented below and based on a study of the reference materials made available by the organization associated with the tool.

2.1 Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis - Oxfam (2012)

Supporting documents:

- Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis - A practitioner's guide
Link: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/participatory-capacity-and-vulnerability-analysis-a-practitioners-guide-232411>
- Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction - A training pack
Link: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/gender-and-disaster-risk-reduction-a-training-pack-136105>

Strengths:

- A guided participatory approach: a strong involvement of the community at all stages of the assessment, analysis and development of an action plan. The process is guided by facilitators who maintain the bigger picture and ensure high quality implementation.
- Includes climate change risks; it can quite easily be adapted to include other risks, such as those related to traffic and conflict.
- Gender is considered and integrated.
- The practitioner's guide presents the approach in a clear, practical step-by-step manner including specific recommendations for implementation and potential challenges.
- The approach recognizes the importance of a comprehensive assessment that includes analysis of the local, provincial and national context and external specialists.
- Links are made to other processes and sectors: e.g. post-disaster assessment, WASH assessment.
- The approach presented in the practitioner's guide includes clear guidance on planning and organization.
- While a practical approach, it does go into higher-level considerations: e.g. 'no-regret options', the 'precautionary principle', raising awareness and monitoring to inform future planning.
- The approach to assessment is organized around specific strategic questions and offers associated tools. It also points to other tools that may be used to triangulate results.
- The approach may result in considerations of mitigation and preparedness measures.
- Tools are presented in a compact, clear and often visual way.
- A compact guideline; around 40 pages.

Weaknesses:

- The approach, while complete, can be prescriptive, extensive, and geared to a specific community size. In some cases, it may not be possible/ necessary to go through all of the tools or steps presented. The approach may need further adaptation to the local context.
- The approach may be challenging to apply in relief and recovery settings or in a context where operational constraints exist.

- The guidelines are process-oriented and don't indicate specific measures to be taken. It is assumed that the community and facilitators will develop appropriate interventions and next steps.

2.2 Community Based Disaster Preparedness - CRS (2009)

Supporting documents:

- Community Based Disaster Preparedness
Link: <http://www.crsprogramquality.org/publications/2009/11/20/community-based-disaster-preparedness-a-how-to-guide.html>
- Various resources that supplement the approach described in the How-To Guide
Link: <http://www.crsprogramquality.org/emergencies/>

Strengths:

- A phased approach is used, providing guidance on tools and resources for specific phases and back-ground information.
- Gender is considered and integrated.
- Links are made to international standards.
- Some guidance is provided on potential measures that can be taken to increase the resilience of communities.
- A link is made to relief and recovery.
- Participatory M&E receives attention in the guideline.
- Tools in the guideline are presented in a clear and illustrative way.
- Links are made to sectors (e.g. WASH), techniques (e.g. how to be a facilitator, interview techniques) and approaches.
- Lessons learned are integrated in the document.
- Attention is given to planning and organization.
- (Brief) case studies are integrated for illustration.
- Focus is on preparedness, but mitigation is mentioned.
- The approach is flexible and can easily be adapted to the scale and depth needed.

Weaknesses:

- The link to different levels (e.g. provincial, national) is not clear.
- Study of secondary resources (e.g. documents, internet, external specialists/stakeholders) doesn't get much attention in this approach.
- Actual action planning and analysis get relatively little attention.
- Climate change isn't addressed.
- For less experienced users, the liberty the approach allows may make it more challenging to design an approach that is 'good enough'.
- For less experienced users, the number of tools presented may be overwhelming.
- A rather large document (135 pages); though much of the document is tools and annexes for reference.

2.3 Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment - IFRC (2008)

Supporting documents:

- Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment - several documents addressing the approach, and providing supporting information
<http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/preparing-for-disaster/disaster-preparedness-tools/disaster-preparedness-tools/>

Strengths:

- A comprehensive set of documents that include background, “how-to”, training guidance, toolbox and lessons learned.
- A lot of attention is given to organization and planning.
- The approach is presented in a step-by-step approach going from planning and training to analysis.
- The approach encourages the identification of underlying causes of vulnerability; potentially leading to more holistic programming.
- Climate change is mentioned, but not extensively covered.
- A clear and extensive toolkit is provided with illustrations.
- Key messages and useful tips are provided throughout.
- M&E is covered to some extent in the resources.

Weaknesses:

- The approach is geared to the IFRC system.
- For less experienced users, the number of tools presented may be overwhelming.
- The set of documents linked to the VCA are quite extensive, which may overwhelm users; however, the documents are organized in a clear and practical manner.

2.4 Participatory risk assessment for informal settlements - UTC (2008)

Supporting documents:

- Weathering the Storm: Participatory risk assessment for informal settlements - Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (University of Capetown)
<http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/publications/v.php?id=4163>

Strengths:

- Very comprehensive approach, although this is also a weakness.
- A lot of attention is given to organization and planning, including risks and how to address these, as well as logistics of activities.
- The approach is presented in a step-by-step approach going from planning and training to analysis.
- Adapted specifically to urban contexts.
- Many tools are presented with example results and templates to use.
- Links to general informal settlements information, environmental health and other services are made.
- Very comprehensive bibliography. However, considering that the guideline is from 2008, it is outdated.

Weaknesses:

- Adapted to Cape Town/ South Africa context.
- Information is hard to find.
- The approach doesn't seem to allow for much flexibility.
- Climate change is mentioned, but not developed further in the guidance.
- The number of tools and information presented can be overwhelming.
- At nearly 200 pages, with a very high level of detail scattered throughout the guideline, the document is not an easy, “how-to” reference that is accessible to practitioners.

3. Discussion and recommendations

There are many more approaches and tools used by organizations for disaster risk reduction. Most of these approaches would yield similar results if implemented well. There is not one approach that is best for the Gaza context; each approach has its strengths and weaknesses. Ideally, a combination of the different approaches would be used and adapted as appropriate for the context.

The approach from Oxfam—basing the assessment on key questions—seems to be a good entry point for designing a solid disaster risk assessment. It has several advantages: it is participatory, requiring community involvement throughout the assessment and analysis of risk; climate change is included and considered; there is attention to different levels – provincial and national; and the approach is presented in a concise and clear format. The approach however could be more flexible and scalable than presented in the guideline, and it is here that other approaches can complement. Specific tools are associated with specific questions, but a broader range of tools could be used to obtain the same information.

Most approaches are biased to the rural contexts, so the participatory risk assessment for informal settlements is a useful addition. This guideline may help users better understand some of the dynamics of the urban context and how to deal with these.

There are no mainstream disaster risk assessment approaches that look at the influence of climate change on risks outside of the realm of natural hazards (e.g. conflict, industrial hazards). Thus, no recommendation is readily available.