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The Local Emergency Assessment and Response Network: Capacity-building and Collaboration for Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Response

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Abstract – The Local Emergency Assessment and Response Network (LEARN) aims to establish a network of individuals and organizations capable in emergency response, and in the longer term, provide a good backdrop to initiatives related to disaster risk reduction. Individuals belonging to different organizations are endowed with different core competencies and are located all over the island, making them strategically positioned all over Sumatra to respond to disasters. The approach itself is flexible and open to developments in all directions. It has taken note of what works, and has evolved accordingly. The project has opened up opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-sharing within and among like-minded non-governmental organizations, and has been engaging national and local actors. It is a clear example of how building a critical mass creates incentive to engage in other willing groups. The set-up also nurtures an atmosphere of continuous individual and organizational growth in capacities needed to work in the fields of emergency response and disaster risk reduction by keeping abreast in technologies and technical know-how.

Keywords – *Local Emergency Assessment and Response Network, capacity-building, networking and collaboration, disaster risk reduction, emergency response*

1. Introduction or Background

The Local Emergency Assessment and Response Network (LEARN) is a tool developed by Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz (HEKS) and carried out in Indonesia by a local partner non-governmental organization (NGO), Yayasan Holi'ana'a. The first phase involved three local partner NGOs, namely, Yayasan Holi'ana'a, Caritas-Medan and Lembaga Pengkajian Dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat. This phase consists of a series of capacity-building activities and collaborative activities in Sumatra, Indonesia in the field of disaster risk reduction and emergency response. It explores how the project evolved from training individuals from non-governmental organizations within Sumatra, to the creation of a self-sustaining and solid network of disaster risk reduction and emergency response professionals, and thereafter developing into a knowledge-sharing platform that has allowed for an exchange of disaster-related information and technologies. It has since encouraged the continuous practice of available skills and use of technologies, and

most importantly forged ties with other sectors working in the field of disaster.

2. The Case Study

Indonesia is highly prone to large and middle-scale disasters. The Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 and the earthquakes in Nias in 2005, Yogyakarta in 2006, and Padang in 2009 are only a few of the disasters which have affected Indonesia in the past few years (Verayanti, 2011: 27; Leitmann, 2007: 148). While earthquakes and tsunamis have caused major devastation in Indonesia, frequent floods and landslides that kill and push communities back into poverty affect more Indonesians every year (Bengkulu, 2010: 12; United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Secretariat [UNISDR], 2009: 2). While these smaller, more frequent disasters do not always make it to international news or require large-scale reconstruction efforts, they affect more Indonesians than the rare, catastrophic disasters which make headlines around the world (Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz [HEKS], 2013b: 4).

Evaluation on the humanitarian response to these frequent disasters in Indonesia shows that there is need for improvement on coordination and regulation, access, intervention, capacity, community participation, health support and monitoring and evaluation for effective response (Verayanti, 2011: 27). Principally, the need for proper and effective assessment in the first 24-48 hours is critical (de Ville de Goyet & Morinière, 2006: 5). Assessments are carried out in a short time, and the volume of precise information is needed during this period. (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [IFRC], 2008: 2). Specifically, there is a need for “immediate availability of up-to-date and credible information [on the ground] essential for assessing, monitoring (Leitmann, 2007: 148)”. The most daunting aspect of this type of assessment is how fast and efficient data needs can be collected on the ground for international humanitarian relief organizations to access and act upon. Other issues such as difficulty in providing good coverage, little known tools and methods to assess the validity of needs assessments, poor analysis in assessments, and mismatch of response to local needs and contexts are some of those that need to be acknowledged and addressed by key actors as well (de Ville de Goyet & Morinière, 2006: 6).

The problem of providing ample assistance depends on how groups can come up with solutions and coordinate their responses accordingly. This topic receives high interest especially since this improves overall service delivery to beneficiaries. In a working environment that is stressful and whose players involve a myriad of differently-structured organizations, cooperation and coordination is considerably challenging. The most pressing coordination lies between the responders and the affected residents (Jaeger et al., 2007: 594). Take the case of Nias Island, an island off the coast of North Sumatra, after the 2005 earthquake. It was noted that there was a lack of cooperation among different stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, community leaders and international organizations. This problem was compounded with the problem of language barrier. This is why horizontal and vertical linkages must be created and sustained to be able to efficiently use knowledge in post-disaster interventions (Guarnacci, 2012: 74).

The Government of Indonesia has undertaken considerable efforts in improving the Disaster Management structures of the country in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the adoption of the Hyogo Framework of Action in 2005 (World Bank, 2009: 94; Partnerships for Disaster Reduction-South East Asia, 2008: 101). However, until today, the structures have not reached the lower administrative levels and communities are still left without effective disaster risk reduction measures (United Nations, 2011: 12). It is mainly NGOs that develop preparedness strategies at the community level, yet these NGOs often lack knowledge and resources to effectively do so (HEKS, 2013b: 2). Besides their engagement in ensuring disaster preparedness, NGOs also play a big role after a disaster occurs as they are often closer to the affected communities than the responsible government agencies (Takako & Shaw, 2012: 131; Verayanti, 2011: 67; NGO

and Humanitarian Reform Project, 2009: 7). To the people hit by a disaster it is crucial that help arrives in the first days after a catastrophic event. Therefore it is important that local first assistance and assessment teams need to be capacitated (HEKS, 2013b: 3).

The Swiss aid organization, Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz (HEKS), had been active in Indonesia with a development programme since the 1980s until 2004. Though all long term development activities were terminated sometime mid-2004, HEKS never fully phased out of Indonesia due to the disasters that took place shortly after. Through its partner organizations, Yayasan Holi'ana'a, Caritas Medan and Lembaga Pengkajian Dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, the Local Emergency Assessment and Response Network (LEARN) was set up to complement government and international post-disaster initiatives.

LEARN is a project that tries to address challenges brought about by disaster management and contribute to effective humanitarian response. In adherence to the Hyogo Framework for Action Priority 5, “strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels”, and at the same time recognizing that NGOs are logically the best to people to conduct first response, as they are intermediaries between government, communities, international actors, and other organizations (Sanval, 2006: 80; UNISDR, 2006; Benson: 214, Twigg, & Myers, 2001: 211), LEARN pools disaster professionals from across Sumatra, creating a network of actors able to contribute to disaster preparedness, and who are willing to be trained on emergency response. LEARN's main credo is to bring together a community of disaster specialists, trained to respond to their communities firsthand (Swiss NGO DRR Platform, 2013: 33).

The paper seeks to establish that there is value in building a network of well-dispersed local first responders that are conveniently located, and that in the long term, the set-up can contribute to disaster preparedness (Janssen, Lee, Bharosa & Cresswell, 2010: 261). These geographically prepositioned assets enhance efficiency in responding to disasters (Allenby & Fink, 2005: 1035). It also examines how LEARN has helped facilitate an atmosphere of longer term preparedness. In creating an atmosphere of interaction and knowledge-sharing about disasters, participants are more open to solving issues and gaps a disaster situation presents (Kupucu, 2008: 239). It discusses how partners have evolved from implementing development projects to conducting those whose components mainstream disaster risk reduction. These point to the critical role of capacity-building, networking and collaboration in creating an environment of long-term disaster awareness and preparedness.

2.1. *The Design and Method*

In order to respond effectively to a disaster, there is a need to create efficient ties that bind peoples' expectations and goals together (Jaeger et al., 2007: 595). Creating a core group composed of nongovernmental actors is thus seen as a critical measure to bridge information

gaps (World Bank 2003: 12). This group would undertake proper rapid needs assessment based on context and local knowledge. This approach is based on how "... 'sharing information, willingness to collaborate, and shared values' are vital bases of effective information sharing and communication in major disasters...(Jaeger et al., 2007: 594)." The LEARN approach is based on this premise. LEARN tries to bridge the information gaps right after a disaster takes place. In order to bolster the efforts in collecting data for the immediate needs of the affected communities, LEARN tries to capacitate local individuals and organizations with skills needed for emergency response. It would eventually evolve into a network of disaster professionals technologically able and with access to government and non-governmental networks (HEKS, 2013a: 4).

LEARN promotes a modifiable and expandable training tool in first assistance and rapid assessment for local organizations. It provides the participant with practical skills to conduct immediate emergency response and qualified needs assessments. Following an integrated practice-oriented approach, the participants are trained in a broad variety of emergency-related skills. The combination of proven practices, trainings, tools, guidelines and their participants' own knowledge about local languages, geography, and local networks make the diverse group of participants an important element between the emergency responses provided by specialized search and rescue, medical, and emergency teams from outside the country. The LEARN modules provide a basic framework for the capacity-building of a local first assistance and assessment team. The modules are highly flexible and can be changed, extended, or shortened dependent on the respective hazards and local situations, as well as on the needs of the partners.

Staff from Yayasan Holi'ana'a act as the coordinating body and secretariat, as well as the trainers. They choose the participants of LEARN from non-governmental organizations, universities and outdoor-environmental groups within Sumatra. The secretariat seeks for individuals from organizations in less-represented regions and locations all over Sumatra. The participants must exhibit interest and ability to transfer their skills to their own organizations through action plans which are then evaluated by the core staff. Action plans may take the form of successive trainings to the organization which the participant belongs to, an entirely new project, or an updated project that imbibes the concepts learned in the training. Before starting the training, they must submit their action plans. After the training, they are invited to join the social media platform, and implement their action plans. Participants residing within close proximities eventually meet and brainstorm on inter-agency initiatives such as accepting invitations to act as resource speakers or collaborating with local governments in attending disaster-related activities.

2.2. *The Role of Capacity-Building*

The first component of the project is capacity-building. The training for representatives from non-governmental

organizations aims to combine standards in international emergency response and the local disaster risk reduction context; therefore embedding local knowledge and wisdom in its modules. The use of technology is a main focus in the training, and is facilitated in such a way that whilst participants understand the use of the technology, they must be able to use this within their own organizations afterwards. Topics on disaster preparedness and emergency response include the use of communication systems like radio systems, satellite phones, and global positioning devices. The training emphasizes and discusses extensively how communications systems are used to disseminate information for early warning systems, and is critical in the conduct of emergency response. The use of these technologies is used to notify and disseminate information, but should not be limited to government or emergency-related entities, but is available to communities.

LEARN recognizes that participants come from varied cultural settings, level of exposure to disaster-related work, and educational and work backgrounds. This is why before each training, the secretariat makes sure that flexible arrangements are undertaken before each training cycle. Feedback from each training cycle is reviewed and helps broaden the awareness of the trainers in relation to the response caused by individual and organizational nuances. Feedback is taken into consideration and helps the secretariat prepare for succeeding trainings.

The trainings consist of both theoretical and applied modules. Interactive group work, role play and simulation activities, and sharing of experiences are some of the methods that are used. Each module is self-contained or autonomous but is organized chronologically, as what should be done first, if a disaster should occur. Linkages prior and succeeding modules are also well-emphasized during the start and end of each module. Each topic should be linked with, and reinforce other topics taught. Tailored adaptations to the needs, skills and internal dynamic of each group promote the motivation and commitment of the participants. The modules are process-oriented and participatory, accompanying the participants step-by-step to provide guidance and build trust throughout the training. LEARN acknowledges that its participants come from a variety of fields and backgrounds, and chooses to conduct participatory approaches that aim to pique the interest and promote motivation among individuals in a heterogeneous group (HEKS, 2013b: 2).

Topics on logistics, emergency shelter, water, hygiene and sanitation provide relevant skills in post-disaster situations and training must be handled dynamically so that learning is maximized. After discussing the rationale and background of the topics, the participants are tasked to design and construct a simple shelter and emergency toilet using locally available materials given a set budget. They have to purchase the materials, organise the transport, undertake price comparisons and finally, as a group, construct the emergency shelter and the toilet according to their designs. For the culminating activity, trainers come up with a disaster scenario in which participants must apply the knowledge they have acquired. Participants are di-

vided in the communications/base team, survivors and the rapid needs assessment team. The goal is to communicate clearly using radio and GPS to identify the location of the survivors, reach them, carry out first aid and assistance and evacuate them in the shortest time possible. This combination of theory and practical exercise combines several module goals and simulates a real post-disaster scenario (HEKS, 2013b: 2).

Not only do the modules cover the emergency response component of the disaster management cycle, it is also keen on emphasizing the importance of overall disaster preparedness, as well as introducing disaster risk reduction. Over the course of the first project year, a 13th module was developed to promote better understanding of flood events, which occur frequently in Indonesia and can take on disastrous dimensions. Focus is also now given to the topic of climate change as well as measures of adaptation and mitigation (HEKS, 2013b: 2).

2.3. *The Role of Networking and Collaboration*

The second component is networking and collaboration. LEARN promotes the use of physical and digital platforms for networking such as skills refresher trainings, exchange visits, and relevant social media. LEARN has been working with local governmental bodies to promote the improvement of the overall utilization of disaster knowledge in the information chain. The initiative involves key actors including non-governmental bodies, national government agencies, and local government units as represented by the trained disaster risk committees in the villages. A control centre operates as command and information hub, and access to information is open and accessible to all actors.

Creating networks of responders and collaborative initiatives in preparation for a disaster is critical (Fritz Institute, 2005: 10; Stephenson, 2005: 342; Carafano, 2003: 34). Telford and Cosgrave (2007: 8) discuss the essential role of networks and the critical involvement of non-governmental actors in creating more resilient communities. They mention how this type of capacity is developed in a bottom-up fashion, and in this regard, calls on participatory processes involving a multitude of organizations. Involving nongovernmental actors and creating inter-organizational initiatives consequently build the capability of communities (Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003: 325). Such organizations help foster involvement and ownership (Waugh & Streib, 2006: 24). Collaboration among non-governmental organizations, as well as with local government agencies is critical in LEARN. With regard to networking and collaboration, LEARN recognizes that the network is of value, but not everything is set on stone. Roles and responsibilities of individual members and organizations are dynamic and changing and that in order to efficiently respond to disaster, the network must realize this (Muhren & Van de Walle, 2010: 32; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2007: 128).

The Internet, mobile and radio technologies [and social media networks] provide easier options for communications for residents and responders (Jaeger et al., 2007:

596). Constant communication among different LEARN cycles facilitates collaboration and networking. Connections are maintained through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Members actively proactively engaging in these platforms become sources or recipients of information (Merchant, Elmer, & Lurie, 2011: 289; Yates & Paquette, 2011: 11). Afterwards, it is envisioned that these network are nurtured through three aspects: regular jamborees or meetings, refresher and exchange courses, and initiatives that allow LEARN members to act as resource persons in NGO or government-led symposiums and the like. This allows members to consistently update their knowledge, as well as network with other disaster-related organizations.

Maintaining relevant networks eventually leads to collaboration, in which NGOs contribute their capacities. Well-planned community-based initiatives are fully realized through successful collaboration with other non-governmental and government agencies. Community-based initiatives on disaster risk reduction have been implemented by a majority of NGOs worldwide, and are endorsed by international organizations (Izumi & Shaw, 2012: 48). The set-up of radio communication operations is an example of a collaborative initiative that has been made possible through the LEARN network (HEKS, 2012: 3).

Capacity-building, collaboration and networking are all utilized by the project so that disaster preparedness is inculcated among the network's organizations. By creating a learning environment of capable professionals, the project's longer term goal is to promote disaster risk reduction (HEKS, 2013b: 4). When organizations are able to assess which risks are present in their communities, deal with socio-economic vulnerabilities and environmental factors triggering disasters, they will be able to promote more resilient communities (Twigg & Bottomley, 2011: 34).

2.4. *The implementation of capacity-building and networking*

2.4.1. *Capacity-building*

It was envisioned that LEARN members closest to an area hit between 24-48 hours can immediately activate the network as well as tap the necessary governmental institutions. They are responsible for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction within their organizational structure and programs. LEARN I was set up to pilot-test this approach. It was seen as the initial training of trainers, and it is considered the pilot-test of the training component of the project. Thirteen participants from 3 NGOs were chosen and capacitated in 7 three to six-day courses.

LEARN II is composed of 8 training cycles and sixty-five Sumatra-based organizations were selected for a condensed version of the module based training curriculum. A total of 8 twelve-day training cycles were held in Nias Island. The syllabus during the second round of trainings was further fine-tuned according to the evaluation of the first LEARN round of trainings. Pre-test and post-

tests were conducted with all the participants before and after the training. Emphasis in providing quality relief and response is provided in the module on rapid needs assessment and reporting. Also, all conceptual and practical skills were applied in the final simulation activity, which was concluded in the second week. To date, 120 staff members from 65 different NGOs have participated in 8 trainings. The participants come from 8 out of 10 provinces in Sumatra and hence, represent almost the entire island. The NGOs which have so far participated in the trainings are active in a broad spectrum of work such as environment, social issues, women and children, health, psychosocial, media, development, disaster risk reduction, legal issues, and indigenous peoples. The wide range of participating organisations represents an immense potential of local knowledge and different backgrounds which make the network even stronger in terms of experiences, exchange and local wisdom.

The modules are comprised of the following topics:

- Module 1: Introduction to the LEARN approach and topics on disaster risk management;
- Module 2: Preparedness and mitigation measures;
- Module 3: Safety and security;
- Module 4: First aid in disasters;
- Module 5: Risk analysis;
- Module 6: Rapid needs assessment and reporting;
- Module 7: Communication, technical know-how and equipment use;
- Module 8: Emergency water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and shelter;
- Module 9: Basics on coping with stress and trauma;
- Module 10: Logistics, distributions and proposal-writing;
- Module 11: Evacuation; and,
- Module 12: Design and implementation of disaster management trainings and community-based disaster management plans.

2.4.2. *Networking and Collaboration*

All LEARN members are proactively networking amongst each other and the local authorities as well as within Indonesia in all relevant forums on disaster risk reduction and emergency response. There have been regular exchanges between the LEARN members in the 1.5 years coordinated by the HEKS-LEARN coordination office. This is also enhanced with the use of popular social media platforms for public information exchange and the setting up of a web based semi public platform for the exchange of internal network information (files, manuals and documents). There is regular exchange between LEARN members and the regional governments concerning risk analysis, early warning and preparedness strategies. LEARN members attend and share their experiences in international conferences like the 5th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, seminars and meetings all over Indonesia (HEKS, 2013b: 3).

Shortly after the project launch in 2012, a Facebook site was launched serving as the networking platform for

the LEARN project. The decision to use Facebook as web-based platform was based on several factors - experiences, studies and conclusions. Indonesia is a country with a high rate of regular use and access. Most participants can access the internet via their mobile phone which makes it easy to manage. The development of the network is also easy in terms of technical know-how because it is embedded in an already existing and widely used exchange platform. Furthermore, it is free of charge and sign up procedures require no special knowledge. Facebook is very popular within Indonesia; 98

The LEARN project runs 2 pages within Facebook: an internal "closed" group and a so-called fan page. The internal "closed" group can only be accessed by invitation of the administrator. Moreover, the running of a closed community allows for a certain control where inappropriate comments can be deleted. The "closed" group is limited to the participants of the LEARN I and LEARN II projects, associated members such as the Yayasan Holi'ana'a management, student volunteers and other project related persons. The project proves that a constant motivation and stimulation is not only based on thematic issues but also on socialising possibilities. In the LEARN internal page the participants receive sound information on disaster risk reduction topics of a wide range from international to local issues. The LEARN participants share experiences of their local context such as local disasters and response, on trainings conducted in their respective organisations or on the community level. The socialising factor of the page provides a high incentive for regular visits, which could be proved by a first evaluation survey. The team is able to stimulate new discussions or new activities by simple posts. This proves to be highly efficient in terms of resource input regarding time, labour and costs. The open LEARN fan page (<http://www.facebook.com/LEARN.Site/>), distributes more general information about the LEARN project and tries to inform a broader public about the LEARN project and DRR topics (HEKS, 2013b: 4).

In addition to the web-based networking platforms, 2 "physical" exchange platforms were established upon the initiative of the LEARN trainer team and the training participants. One is hosted in Medan for North Sumatra and the other one in Padang for West Sumatra and the Mentawai Islands. In an initial meeting at both locations the participants agreed on a common routine of meetings as well as the tasks and structure of the respective local group. In North Sumatra, the group is carrying out a joint intervention since October 2013 in the refugee camps to the evacuees of the Mount Sinabung Volcano. The intervention focuses on the situation for the most vulnerable and continuous advocacy in order to improve the situation in the camps regarding WASH, protection and education. In Padang, the group agreed on the name Action Forum for Emergency Response and consists of 10 NGOs which have been part of one of the training cycles. The group meets on a regular basis every 2 months. The group is hosted through a rotating system by one of the member organisations. Apart from the meetings and knowledge-sharing, a small deployment of aid supplies and set-up of a community kitchen was coordinated by the group as a re-

sponse to the flooding in Mentawai Islands last April 2013 (HEKS, 2013b: 2).

An important aspect of networking and collaboration lies on how LEARN members are utilized as resource persons by government and private organizations. In terms of information sharing and networking with government agencies, two informal and one official meeting with the provincial Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) have taken place so far. A follow up to these first meetings and regular exchanges need to be organised during the second project year. To date, the agency has promised support for LEARN. Members have also been already invited to conduct trainings by government bodies. Also, Medan-based LEARN member NGOs were called to host a radio show which was broadcasted several times, focusing on disaster-related topics. The aim of the radio shows is to sensitize the broader public on disasters. The radio broadcasts are currently under revision for re-launch. The project was covered by Sumatra-based newspapers, sharing information about the project to the wider public.

A particular organization that has thrived in the environment that LEARN has strived to create is the Lembaga Pengkajian Dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat. It is an NGO based in Padang, Sumatra, and is one of HEKS' partner organizations. It has had several community-based projects focusing on economic and livelihood rehabilitation after the earthquake in 2009. Several of their staff have been trained in the first and second LEARN training cycles. They have gained support in a separate HEKS project, which they have incorporated disaster aspects for community-based disaster committees in the form of regular training sessions conducted during the whole project, like in first aid, logistics, public kitchen, safety and security, evacuation, rapid needs assessments and radio communication (F. Dinasti, personal communication, October 4, 2013).

One component of the Lembaga Pengkajian Dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat's project is to set up radio communication operations. This was seen as a critical initiative as radio communications can withstand blackouts but is able to provide wide coverage (Hibino & Shaw, 2014: 409). To facilitate this, a community centre was set up in every village to serve as multi-purpose infrastructure for disaster preparedness. These serve as both storage for the radio equipment and meeting place for the Clean Water Management Agency, Clean Water and Sanitation Management Team and Disaster Preparedness Committees (DPC). It also serves as a general meeting place for groups and communities. It is important to note that these community centres, both buildings and premises, are community assets which are open and accessible to everybody. Additionally, radio communication equipment was set up in each village so that weather updates and early warning issuances could be accessed by communities. A pair of handheld radio transceivers was distributed to all the DPCs, while radio base stations are set up in the Lembaga Pengkajian Dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat's office and a four-wheel drive vehicle. These stations function as a coordination hub among DPCs for disaster risk reduction efforts and emergency response (HEKS, 2012: 3).

All DPCs were provided with the necessary knowledge and skills to operate and maintain the radio communication system to ensure that equipment is properly used. All radio systems have solar-powered back up system to ensure adequate functioning also in cases of power cuts. Participants of the radio trainings learned to familiarize with themselves with the phonetic alphabets of radio communication crucial for operating the system. They were also taught about fundamentals pertaining to radio base stations and high transmission radio infrastructure, antenna power based on the type used, as well as communication techniques among individuals, individuals with the relief centre, and among relief centres. A particular achievement from establishing a radio communication structure is the operationalization of an early warning. In case of rainfall in the mountain areas the respective DPC reports to the governmental control centre for disaster management operations. The control centre informs all respective communities and provides them with information about strength and possible impact communication (F. Dinasti, personal communication, December 28, 2013). Appropriate actions can be taken (e.g. evacuation, warnings to the affected areas).

Several lessons have been learned since the inception of LEARN in 2012. For the trainings, there are still instances wherein trained participants transfer to another line of work and are not able to incorporate what they have learned to their own organizations. In terms of project implementation, there is some difficulty in coordination with governmental disaster risk reduction institutions. The agency in charge of disaster risk reduction for North Sumatra, the Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) is still in a consolidation phase and focuses on governmental internal structures, while the participation of civil society and NGOs is still low. Contacting and information sharing is always initiated by the LEARN trainer team and information flow is still very unilateral. There is still minimal initiative from the government bodies to approach LEARNs. In the second project year, the LEARN team will strive for more interactive exchange with government agencies (HEKS, 2013b: 5; HEKS, 2012: 2). Last but not the least, it is acknowledged that the approach is consistently evolving, and must adapt to changes.

3. Conclusion

LEARN tries to promote inclusive humanitarian response through capacity-building, networking and collaboration. The LEARN Project pools the skills of nongovernmental organizations and uses these capacities to facilitate efficient response to disasters. Capacity-building of individuals and organizations are thus honed through practical means. The training tries to ensure that knowledge transfer is explained conceptually as backdrop, but should be demonstrated and reinforced through exercises and simulation activities. LEARN acknowledges that building a nongovernmental initiative must work around with existing government structures. Organizations that have participated in the training cycles have had community-based development projects involved in different advocacies.

To capacitate a diverse group of disaster professionals, capacity-building must be conducted in such a way that participants are fully able to understand why skills contained in modules are being taught, and how these can directly benefit the communities that their organizations serve. Capacity-building at the local level on disaster risk reduction and emergency response can only reach sustainable levels if participants are able to apply their skills within their own organizations, as well as through the conduct of regular meetings among organizations to discuss updates, new tools and techniques, and prospects for government engagement.

During disasters, the network ultimately provides a rich pool of geographically dispersed individual and organizational assets. These capacitated professionals act as first responders. The social media platform acts as an avenue to exchange quick information on what communities need, and what organizations can offer. In status quo, networking is the preliminary occurrence before collaborations take place. After participants receive the training, they become members of LEARN. Social media helps facilitate the continuous interaction among previous and present training recipients. Knowledge-sharing, updating, and even calling out for assistance are some of the activities that can take place in these platforms. Connections are maintained through actual networking activities among organizations within close proximities. This allows members to brainstorm initiatives for their areas, which may take the form of collaboration with government and private entities, or integrating disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction in already existing development projects or programmes. This allows organizations to volunteer and exhibit their core competencies.

Collaboration is most ideal, as its goal is to provide maximum support to afflicted communities. The network's objective lies in engaging all levels of government so that communities can receive the information they need to avoid disasters and calamities from taking place. LEARN facilitates this type of collaboration through the participatory introduction to the use of appropriate technologies, such as radio communication and early warning systems, and through continuous training of end-user communities and local governments. LEARN is poised to grow its network through regular meetings and refresher activities, and increase collaboration with government agencies.

LEARN acknowledges how the approach must maintain flexibility and openness. It recognizes how it must adapt to the consistently evolving needs of its partners and stakeholders, but at the same time provide and maintain quality training services to its members. The LEARN project is currently undergoing monitoring and evaluation. In the near future, the approach is envisioned to be replicated in regions or countries with similar contexts.

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