

Introduction to Participatory Assessment of Disaster Risk

This section looks at how the Crunch and Release models can be transformed into a practical tool called Participatory Assessment of Disaster Risk (PADR). Components of the model (hazards, elements at risk, vulnerable conditions, pressures and underlying causes) form stages in the Assessment process.

The key steps are:

- preparation
- hazard assessment
- vulnerability assessment
- capacity assessment
- key informant interviews
- action planning.

Using this approach, disaster risk can be fully assessed by local people and effectively reduced through a range of activities. The key steps of PADR are outlined in Section 4. In this section, we consider two important issues which are essential to the PADR process:

- good facilitation
- understanding the categories of analysis, which form the basis of the vulnerability and capacity assessments.

3.1 Good facilitation

PADR requires good facilitation if it is to be owned by local people. This involves:

- identifying who should facilitate
- considering facilitation issues
- thinking about facilitation skills.

The facilitation team

The purpose of the facilitation team is to enable local people to carry out the Assessment. The team needs a minimum of three people:

- a facilitator who can lead the discussions
- someone who can make accurate notes of the discussions and plans
- someone who can make practical arrangements.

It can be helpful to have more than one facilitator so that different focus groups can meet at the same time. If the facilitators are members of staff of a development organisation, a translator may be needed.

The facilitation team should include both men and women. It is particularly important to have a female facilitator for meetings with women's groups to encourage open and honest discussion of issues.

The local church can serve local people in a practical way by engaging with this process. Where appropriate, church members who could be facilitators should join the facilitation team.

The facilitation team should have a maximum of six members. It is beneficial for some facilitators to be from the local area as it will help the community to engage with the process better. It will also help to address expectations which can be particularly high if too many outsiders are involved. Local people have a lot to contribute to the facilitation team – they will know which methods will work and which will not work.

Any local people who join the facilitation team should be willing to remain neutral during focus group discussions. Potential local facilitators may have already shown their ability to facilitate discussion. Other people may have the potential to become good facilitators, and could be trained during the PADR process. These people should be included in the facilitation team from the start. However, they may initially want to watch others facilitate the focus group exercises before doing it themselves. It is important that experienced facilitators give these new facilitators constructive feedback.

The note-maker will need to be literate. It is usually best to have a local person making the practical arrangements. They have local knowledge which can be helpful when deciding where and when to hold the focus group meetings.

Facilitation issues

The facilitators should take time to read this whole book through at least once, in order to fully understand the theory and the process of carrying out the Assessment.

It is important to be aware of two key issues which affect the success of the process:

- relief dependency
- managing sensitive issues.

Relief dependency

Where a high level of relief aid has been distributed after a disaster, 'relief dependency' may develop. This occurs if relief aid is excessive or is provided without recognising people's own coping capacities. Humanitarian agencies can treat beneficiaries as helpless victims and allow them little participation in decision-making, rather than treating them as survivors with strengths and abilities.

When people have become used to getting help from outsiders, they may exaggerate the scale of their vulnerabilities and minimise their capacities in order to get maximum support and resources. Information received from people that seems surprising could

therefore be checked by asking other local people or organisations working in the area. Findings can be compared and verified. The facilitator will need to be wise in the handling of the Assessment process. The facilitator should strengthen people's desire to develop without becoming reliant on outside help.

Managing sensitive issues

Exposing and exploring people's vulnerabilities is a sensitive matter. If there is not enough emphasis upon capacities, the PADR process can focus too heavily upon weaknesses. This can be dis-empowering and cause pain by bringing to mind past traumatic events. Discussions about the underlying causes of people's vulnerability can be very sensitive if they refer to specific people in positions of power and to traditional belief systems.

If not facilitated well, PADR can cause either one of the following reactions:

- a **fatalistic attitude** where poor and marginalised people start to believe their vulnerability has to be permanent. A Christian facilitator can share a different perspective – that poor and marginalised people are valuable to God, and all have abilities and potential. This creates hope for the future.
- **increased tension** between those who are vulnerable and people who are identified as creating or ignoring their vulnerability. The facilitator could help the group to think of situations where these people are or have been helpful and to consider what influences the good or bad decisions they make.

Facilitation skills

The aim of the PADR process is to increase people's understanding of their vulnerabilities and capacities, so that they can develop positive approaches to improve their situation. Facilitators should avoid the temptation to extract information from local people and make decisions for them. Facilitators should instead focus on enabling them to reduce their own disaster risk.

People can have very different perceptions of risk, depending on their gender, wealth, age, education, type of employment and position in society. Facilitators should have an open mind and avoid imposing their own views.

Key principles

By following some key principles, local ownership of the PADR process can be encouraged:

- The purpose of PADR should be made clear to, and agreed with, local people.
- The process should be carried out with respect and sensitivity.
- The process of assessment is as important as the product or outcome. Invest time in encouraging the process to be as participatory as possible.
- Where possible, focus groups should be made up of people with similar characteristics, such as age, sex, livelihood or ethnicity.
- Energisers or ice-breakers at the start of focus group meetings can help people to feel comfortable with the facilitators and with other people.

- Questions should be open-ended in order to encourage discussion. However, make sure that discussions do not stray from their purpose.
- Analysis of the information collected should be done with local people.
- Literacy should not be assumed. Participatory Learning and Action tools enable people who are not literate to participate in information gathering and analysis.
- Sensitive issues should be dealt with carefully and appropriately.
- The process may identify low-cost ways to reduce vulnerability. Communities can be empowered if they are encouraged to start with these after the action planning step.

When facilitating meetings with community members, the following ideas could be helpful:

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow time for introductions and explanations ■ Show respect ■ Watch, listen, learn and show interest ■ Be sensitive to feelings and culture ■ Be prepared, but flexible ■ Be creative ■ Show humour ■ Be willing to allow community members to take the lead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Teach ■ Rush ■ Lecture ■ Criticise ■ Interrupt ■ Dominate ■ Look bored ■ Ignore cultural norms ■ Laugh at people's ideas

3.2 Categories of analysis

PADR uses five 'categories of analysis'. The five categories relate to different types of assets. An asset is something that can be used to improve well-being. These categories recognise that hazards affect different aspects of life. By using these categories we can ensure that all aspects of vulnerability and capacity are assessed. It means that the facilitator's preferences, or those of powerful people, do not dominate. For example, it may be tempting for a facilitator who is experienced in social work to ignore structural or physical strengths and weaknesses. Someone with an engineering background may not pay adequate attention to indigenous skills or local knowledge.

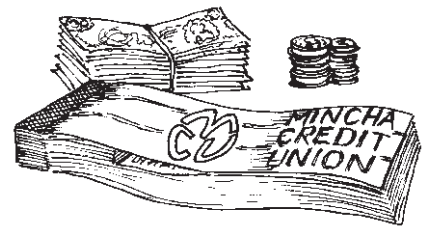
The facilitator may find it useful to start discussions with focus groups in the order given here. However, while this order is logical and discussions can flow quite naturally from one category to the next, the facilitator may need to be flexible and respond to the direction of the group’s discussions. This is partly because the categories are connected with each other. The facilitator should be focused upon the overall aim of the process – to find ways of reducing disaster risk – rather than necessarily following the exact sequence of the process itself.

The five categories of analysis

ECONOMIC	NATURAL	CONSTRUCTED	INDIVIDUAL	SOCIAL
such as income, savings, loans	such as soil, forests, water	such as housing, wells, tools	such as people, knowledge, health, skills	such as relationships, committees, networks

Economic assets

These relate to household income and expenditure and possessions that can be turned into money. For example, in some countries, jewellery is an economic asset which can be traded or sold when the household needs cash. Cattle are also a saving mechanism in some countries. At local level, savings and credit opportunities are economic assets. Discussion about economic assets often sets the context for the other categories, because people will naturally begin to discuss them.



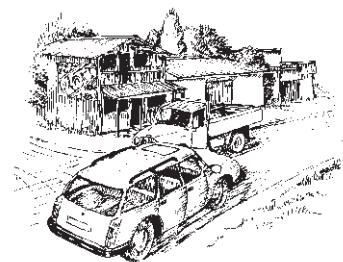
Natural assets

These include forests, rivers, grazing areas and wild fruits. Discussion should be about whether these assets exist in the local area and who has access to them. Trends in quality and availability, such as deforestation or lowering of the water table, should be assessed.



Constructed assets

Constructed assets are man-made. These include basic infrastructure such as houses, roads, schools, hospitals, electricity cables and wells. They also include tools and equipment that people use to be productive such as a plough. Infrastructure is often directly managed by the government, while tools and equipment are usually privately owned and managed.



Individual assets

These include people's skills, knowledge, ability to work and physical health. The size of a household may affect these assets. For example, a household with many small children may have fewer adults able to work because of childcare responsibilities. People often draw upon their individual assets to make the best use of assets in other categories. For example, they may have traditional knowledge of agricultural methods or edible wild plants, which increases use of constructed or natural assets. Individuals will have their own spiritual beliefs which may affect their own or other people's vulnerability or capacity.

**Social assets**

These consist of relationships and networks that exist in the community and with people outside. They have an important influence on levels of vulnerability and capacity, but are often neglected. The extended family is an important asset in this category, followed closely by issues of leadership and ability to settle disputes. Membership of networks can expand an individual's ability to access information, such as a farmers' co-operative providing access to details about market prices. Good relationships can lead to co-operation and the sharing of resources.

Social assets can contribute to people's well-being by strengthening identity, pride and a sense of belonging. However, exclusion from groups can be a powerful pressure which affects vulnerability. Individuals' spiritual beliefs can influence their relationships.

