



Local Level Risk Management: A Case Study from Albania

In 1999, as a result of the war in Kosovo, a massive number of refugees from Albanian ethnic background fled into Albania, prompting the country to develop a more comprehensive system for the management of disaster risks. A national law "On Civil Emergencies" was adopted in 2001 and a "General Directorate for Civil Emergency Planning and Coordination" was created within the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization. As of 2002, UNDP provided substantial assistance to this process via a Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Program.

The Intervention

The program set ambitious objectives which included the strengthening of Disaster Risk Management in the so-called "qarks" or regions, an intermediary administrative level between central and local authorities. Since the program had no direct physical presence at the sub-national level, the Albanian Red Cross was brought on board, in close consultation with national counterparts. The Albanian Red Cross had substantial experience in DRM, particularly in the areas of preparedness and response within branches in all regions throughout Albania.

Positive Impacts

A 'partnership' agreement between UNDP Albania and the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization became the cornerstone of the cooperation that was to develop over the next three years. More comprehensive agreements were later on concluded at the regional level, including several areas where active participation of the Albanian Red Cross (ARC) was sought. These areas included training, public awareness, local vulnerability and capacity assessments and disaster management planning. The purposes of these agreements covered the:

- Clarification of roles and responsibilities between a major civil society organization and the government;

- Promotion of a more proactive approach of the Albanian Red Cross to DRM at the community level; and

- Identification of certain common goals and objectives within the framework of the ongoing DRM program.

As a result of the agreement, the ARC participated actively in the elaboration of a DRM training curriculum and eight manuals for regional and local actors involved in DRM. The ARC also served as the main sounding board for the development of adequate public awareness messages on flood and earthquake risks and also on risks from everyday emergencies such as gas explosions and electricity fires at home. In several locations the local media was fully involved in sensitizing communities at risk, and spots were aired on television and radio.

In 2003, the first newly developed disaster risk management training manuals for key government service providers and other actors were piloted in initially three regions. This piloting process was combined with a contingency planning exercise. The draft manual on "disaster planning" was used to introduce basic ideas on contingency planning and participants were trained in various steps of the contingency planning process. At the same time, these workshops served to test the manuals and to determine to what degree participants and local facilitators found them useful.

In late 2003, the ARC started to implement the Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment for which it had been sub-contracted by UNDP Albania. An earlier national risk assessment supported by the UNDP program and implemented by the Albanian Academy of Science had calculated the likely physical impact from six natural hazards on people and the built environment.

The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) selected priority locations for further analysis based upon the results of this national risk assessment. The

risk assessment generated fascinating insights into the construction of risk in a transitional society that is undergoing unprecedented changes in the management of property and in social and economic organization. The report contains dozens of recommendations for communities, local and central governments, the Albanian Red Cross and international organizations.

At this stage, the UNDP program was instrumental in supporting the development of contingency plans in all twelve regions of Albania. In the data-collection process for the planning exercise many discoveries were made regarding local risks and vulnerabilities. Information collected also proved to be very useful for developing the national disaster management plan which was finalized in November 2004 with UNDP assistance. Subsequent to this national plan all regions will develop comprehensive disaster management plans that include prevention and mitigation measures in early 2005.

Challenges

This case study was drafted at the end of 2004, just a few months before the UNDP program in Albania will come to an end. The question is what capacity has been built to take the results beyond project time-

frames and also to what degree the government will continue to support progress in this area. The first national DRM Plan in Albania is certainly a promising indicator. It sketches out the following medium term goals:

Strengthening of the national civil emergency system through preparation of disaster plans by all line ministries and institutions;

Establishment of a National Training Center in 2005;

Establishment of an Inspectorate for Civil Protection (overseeing prevention and mitigation);

Much still needs to be done and local level risk management is still at an early stage of development. The future will tell to what degree a sustainable capacity in DRM has been built through this program, however, a number of significant steps have been accomplished.

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December, 2004

