Policy brief

PARTNERS FOR RESILIENCE

Minimum Standards for local climate-smart Disaster Risk Reduction – *enabling integration of local capacities into national climate adaptation strategies*

This brief explores how disaster risk reduction (DRR) can go beyond business as usual to become 'climate-smart' and in the process make a worthy contribution to adapting to climate change and engaging local communities strongly in the process.

Climate change is increasing the risk of extreme events and disasters. Disaster risk reduction can make an important contribution to national and local level efforts to adapt to a changing climate.[1] Yet in many cases, these opportunities for reducing the risk of extreme events and adapting to climate change are not yet being used effectively in climate change policy and planning. To be effective, disaster risk reduction, at all scales, must consciously incorporate scenarios of changing risks, rather than simply responding to disaster patterns of the past.

Hence there is a need for identifying what is the *minimum* that communities should do to ensure their DRR activities are 'climate-smart' – and how governments and civil society can create an enabling environment to support and scale-up those efforts.

Pilot projects across the World have shown that addressing changing climate and disaster risks at the local level is highly effective for building resilience. Strong capacities and robust institutions at the community level can maximize the impacts of climate-smart disaster risk reduction; yet for this to occur, it is essential that communities, and the organizations supporting them, know how to integrate the changing risks into their activities.

Why climate-smart Minimum Standards?

This is the very reason behind the Minimum Standards presented (as a living document) in Annex 1: to set a standard to ensure that local action to reduce disaster risk is climate smart – in a way that does not aim for idealized solutions, but rather for practical approaches that are achievable by many communities with relatively limited support.

[1] IPCC, 2012: *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (SREX)* – SREX findings have been formally approved by all UN member governments

Key messages

The Minimum Standards:

- Will assist communities and civil society organisations in **defining what are the *minimum* actions** that community-level disaster risk reduction programmes need to consider in order **to be climate-smart**
- Will help ensure that local DRR action is climate-smart – in a way that does not aim for the idealized solutions, but for **practical approaches that are achievable by many communities** with relatively limited support
- Will **enable national and local actors** – policy makers and planners – better understand how to **support communities** increasingly at risk from disasters
- Can be widely **applied across contexts and sectors** where disaster risk reduction policy and programming take place
- **Reflect local needs**, and demonstrate how these can be **supported by partners, civil society and governments**
- **Provide guidance for how to build community resilience** across the key themes of: information flow and capacity development, project planning and implementation; monitoring, evaluation and learning; and awareness raising and policy dialogue

As such, these Minimum Standards serve as ***an essential bridge between national climate policy and local capacities for DRR***. Many national climate change adaptation plans already highlight the need to address the rising risk of extreme events and disasters. Many also acknowledge the essential role of local communities in addressing the changing risks.

Using these Minimum Standards, ***national actors*** can now effectively incorporate local community action on DRR into national adaptation strategies:

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- The standards provide assurance that DRR goes beyond business-as-usual and really addresses changing risks. If the Minimum Standards are met, the actions are climate-smart and contribute to climate change adaptation.
- Furthermore, the national strategies will be able to 'go to scale', knowing that these standards are realistic and achievable.

For ***local actors***, and their counterparts in local governments and civil society organizations, the Minimum Standards are intended as a practical tool, allowing them to integrate the changing risks into their work. Hence, ***the Minimum Standards also includes an accompanying "Guidance Note" for civil society and governments to support communities adopting climate-smart Minimum Standards for DRR***.

What are climate-smart Minimum Standards?

The Minimum Standards presented in Annex 1 outlines actions and processes at the community level that ensure their DRR actions are climate-smart.[2] They are based on ample local experience and consultation(Box 1), including lessons learned during the first years of the Partners for Resilience[3] programme, the largest programme of its kind focusing on local-level climate-smart DRR. programme, the largest of its kind focusing on local-level climate-smart DRR.

In the table outlining 'Minimum Standards for community', climate-smart actions are organized into four themes:

- *Information flow and capacity development.* This includes knowledge and skills related to climate risks and their link to disasters and development. For example, 'climate-smart communities know how to apply climate and weather information in planning local activities.'
- *Project planning and implementation.* This refers to conducting climate-smart risk assessments. For example 'vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCA), and national- to local-level risk-assessments are in place and incorporate changing patterns of climate risk.'
- *Monitoring, evaluation and learning.* Key actions required to evaluate progress towards climate-smart policies and practices and learn from this process are outlined here, for example 'meetings are held regularly to share lessons from the integration of climate variables into projects and programmes.'
- *Awareness raising and policy dialogue.* Strengthening collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders working on disaster management, climate change and development is central to this theme. In addition, actions by civil society are included to help government decision-makers at all levels reflect local needs.

In addition, a companion table defines Minimum Standards for how civil society and government can help communities become climate-smart in their DRR. Taken together, ***these tables can help policy-makers determine when a community-level DRR intervention will be effective in addressing changing climate risks***.

Next steps

The Minimum Standards are not just aspirations. Over the coming years they will be applied and tested in wider PfR programming, and used in policy dialogues with national government and other partners.

The *Minimum Standards for climate-smart local disaster risk reduction* remains a living document. We invite others – practitioner and policy makers – to comment and contribute, use them in their work, and share experience at climatecentre@climatecentre.org.

References

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Twigg, J. (2009) Characteristics of a disaster resilient community: A guidance note.

IFRC (2012): The road to resilience - Bridging relief and development for a more sustainable future. IFRC discussion paper on resilience – June 2012.

UN/ISDR (2005) Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.

Oxley, M. (2009) Views from the Frontline 2011 - Adaptation Working Group: Revised Local-level Resilience Indicators (1ST DRAFT)

Mitchell, T. *et al.* (2010) Climate Smart Disaster Risk Management, Strengthening Climate Resilience, Brighton: IDS

[2] Many effective community-based climate-smart DRR activities relate to the management of the local ecosystems. The PfR programme acknowledges these crucial linkages and is developing a complementary set of "ecosystem-smart minimum standards" – developed by the PfR partner Wetlands International – which will supplement the climate-smart standards for community implementation of ecosystems-based DRR activities.

[3] In 2011, five humanitarian, development and environment organizations, with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formed the "Partners for Resilience" (PfR) alliance to reduce the impact of hazards on vulnerable communities in nine countries around the world and generate lessons on best practices for strengthening community resilience.

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Box 1: How were the Minimum Standards developed?

Faced with increasing pressure to deliver at scale and wishing to empower communities and local organizations to become "climate-smart" in their delivery of DRR, practitioners working on DRR and CCA around the world sought realistic standards that would guide these efforts. They also sought to provide clarity to policy-makers on what standards to set for local adaptation to climate change – increasingly acknowledged as a crucial component of national adaptation planning.

The Partners for Resilience consortium – the Netherlands Red Cross, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, CARE Nederland, Cordaid, and Wetlands International, and their local counterparts in nine developing countries[2] – was the ideal testing ground for such concepts. An initial draft of Minimum Standards was developed in 2011, based on ideas and experiences in a range of prior initiatives. [3] That draft formed the basis from which the current version of the Minimum Standards was developed.

In May 2012, a workshop was held in Kupang, Indonesia, to further develop the Minimum Standards. Over 40 participants attended, including global and regional PfR staff and decision-makers as well as representatives of the Indonesian government. The current draft of the Minimum Standards also reflect the recommendations of the 5th South-South Citizenry-Based Development Sub-Academy (SSCBDA)[4] held immediately prior to the workshop on Minimum Standards and attended by over 160 people.

During the one-day workshop, participants discussed:

- Why the Minimum Standards are needed, their purpose and objectives.
- What they would include.
- How they would be organized and presented for easy access and use.
- How they would be further developed.
- How to test and refine the Minimum Standards through PfR.

After presentations to set the Minimum Standards in context, participants revised the existing draft standards. They focused first on developing Minimum Standards at the community level, and then standards to support the resilience of communities by civil society and governments. Discussion points included how to: represent the key themes in the standards in a way that was applicable in multiple contexts, integrate different elements like the management of ecosystems, and strengthen community resilience

The Minimum Standards remain a "work in progress", updated regularly based on inputs from others and PfR experiences, and shared among organizations and in different policy arenas to support effective and sustainable policy and programmes for community resilience in a changing climate.

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[2] Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Uganda

[3] e.g. the 'Strengthening Climate Resilience (SCR) Climate Smart Disaster Risk Management (CSDRM) initiative, the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA), and the annual International Conferences on Community-based Adaptation.

[4] The primary aim of the SSCBDA is to provide capacity development support to organizations engaged in citizenry-based development-oriented disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region so that they can share, learn and exchange solutions and options.

Acknowledgements

This Policy Brief and the Minimum Standards has been developed through a collaborative effort between many individuals and organisations, including the local PfR partners in Indonesia and Philippines (see logos at the back cover).

ANNEX 1:
Minimum Standards for local climate-smart Disaster Risk Reduction

Climate change is increasing the risk of extreme events and disasters.[4] Disaster risk reduction can make an important contribution to national and local level efforts to adapt to a changing climate.

Many national climate change adaptation plans stress the need to address the rising risk of extreme events and disasters and also acknowledge the essential role of local communities in addressing these changing risks. Yet in many cases, opportunities for reducing the risk of extreme events and adapting to climate change are missed.

The **minimum standards climate smart disaster risk reduction serve as an essential bridge between national climate policy and local capacities for DRR**. The standards are not idealized solutions, but rather practical approaches to implementing climate-smart DRR activities in a way that is achievable by many communities with relatively limited external support.

Using these minimum standards, **national actors** can now effectively incorporate local community action on DRR into national adaptation strategies. The standards provide assurance that DRR goes beyond business as usual and truly addresses changing risks. If the minimum standards are met, local DRR actions are climate-smart and contribute to climate change adaptation. What is more, the national strategies that consider these standards will be able to go to scale, knowing that they are realistic and achievable.

For **local actors**, and their counterparts in local governments and civil society organizations, the minimum standards are intended as a practical tool, allowing them to integrate changing climate risks into their efforts to support communities reduce risk to extreme events and disasters.

The minimum standards are based on ample local experience and consultation, including lessons learned during the first years of the Partners for Resilience[5] programme, the largest programme of its kind focusing on local-level climate-smart DRR. Notably, **the standards are a living document** that will be discussed, tested, revised and validated through activities in nine countries of the Partners for Resilience program throughout the remainder of 2012 and into 2013, and hopefully beyond**.**

We welcome your feedback on the structure, content and overall utility of the minimum standards at climatecentre@climatecentre.org.

[4] Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation. SREX findings have been formally approved by all UN member governments. Available online at http://www.ipcc-wg2.gov/SREX/

[5] In 2011, five humanitarian, development and environment organizations, with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formed an alliance called “Partners for Resilience” (PfR) to reduce the impact of hazards on vulnerable communities in nine countries around the world and generate lessons on best practices for strengthening community resilience.

Minimum Standards for local climate-smart Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

Part I: Community level

This table presents standards that are intended to help *communities*[6] define how to make their community-level disaster risk reduction activities 'climate-smart'. In the table, actions listed as "climate aware" can be thought of as *first steps* to incorporating climate risk in DRR policy, planning and implementation. Actions depicted as "climate-smart" are the *minimum actions* that can be realistically expected to ensure disaster risk reduction efforts at the community level address changing climate risks.

The table in Part **II** offers guidance for civil society organisations (CSOs) and government agencies to *support communities and create an enabling environment* for adoption of the Minimum Standards.

Theme	Minimum standards for community level	
	Climate aware	**Climate-smart**
Information flow and capacity development	• Community is aware that climate risks in the future are likely to be different from the past • Community is aware of and understands locally available weather and climate information, including short-term and *seasonal* forecasts (where relevant) • Community understands the risks it may face as a result of climate variability and climate change impacts, and the linkages to other external factors such as environmental degradation • Community can identify its capacity development needs in relation to climate-smart disaster risk reduction	• Community can interpret relevant early warning information to develop early warning systems and action plans, and advocate its needs to key policy and decision makers • To better manage climate-related disaster risk, community complements local practices and traditional knowledge with short-term and seasonal forecasts (where relevant) • Community's disaster risk management strategies are informed by training received on managing potential impacts of climate variability and climate change
Project planning and implementation	• Community carries out vulnerability/risk assessments that reflect changing climate and disaster risks, and use the information to influence or develop local development and disaster preparedness and contingency plans	• Community regularly updates its risk assessments, baseline surveys, development plans, and disaster preparedness and contingency plans to ensure they reflect new climate-related forecast information and potential future climate conditions • Community has an effective early warning system in place, or have rigorous plans for how to make use of publicly disseminated seasonal forecasts and warning messages • Community members can identify ways to adapt or change existing livelihood practices to build resilience to changing climate risks

[6] 'Community' refers to local groups selected/mandated by community members and leaders to facilitate local resilience building (in some cases groups initially trained by (I)NGOs etc.)

Theme	Minimum standards for community level	
	Climate aware	**Climate-smart**
Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)	• Community understands the importance of monitoring, evaluation and learning in relation to changing climate and disaster risk	• Community monitors and evaluates the impacts of climate variability and climate change on disaster patterns, livelihoods and health over time, and influence/revise local plans accordingly • Community updates community action plans based on the result of monitoring and evaluation activities (linked to implementation)
Awareness raising and policy dialogue	• Community is able to identify advocacy needs towards appropriate climate-related authorities and stakeholders (e.g. farmer groups, agricultural extension services, meteorological services, water management and health authorities, policy makers etc.) • Community members participate, where possible, in capacity building events with local government and relevant institutional authorities • Communities have a functional and representative system of community organisation that takes into account the special needs of different at-risk populations/groups	• Community has an active channel to enable a relationship with their meteorological office and relevant institutional focal points responsible for early warning systems and message dissemination • Community representatives can clearly and effectively communicate support needs (e.g. access to information, capacity building, etc) to climate change networks and government representatives/focal points at various levels • Community systematically collects evidence on climate-smart community disaster risk reduction practice, so that such evidence can inform improved future practice as well as advocacy • Communities are aware of funding opportunities related to climate-smart disaster risk reduction

Minimum Standards for local climate-smart Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

Part II: Guidance note for civil society and governments

This table aims to guide to *civil society organizations* on how they may best support communities to make their DRR programmes climate-smart. In addition, it outlines how *government authorities may help create an enabling environment* for adoption of the Minimum Standards at the community level. Both actors are essential for supporting community level resilience.

Theme	Role of civil society organisations (CSO) supporting communities implementing climate-smart DRR	Enabling environment requested from authorities
Information flow and capacity development	• Knowledge on changing climate risk is integrated into the CSOs' relevant planning processes • Staff and volunteers at national and provincial levels are able to facilitate dialogue on how natural climate variability (such as El Niño and La Niña, where relevant) and climate change affects their work and can explain the basic causes, trends, projections and impacts of both on the organisations' activities and community programs • Training on the interrelationship between climate change, disaster risk reduction, and the linkages to ecosystem management is provided to all relevant staff and volunteers • CSOs help developing locally relevant information and education material, incl. on impacts of climate change and practical approaches to climate smart DRR • Civil society organizations have an active climate change focal point (at least at HQ level) responsible for organisational capacity building in climate change adaptation and DRR	• Relevant authorities strive to provide, and continuously improve, weather and seasonal forecast information in locally relevant, easy to understand formats based on end user needs – taking into account local perceptions of risk and uncertainty, and the value of local practices in managing risk • Authorities undertake public awareness activities (including within the formal education system) on the links between climate change and disaster risk reduction (CSOs may assist in developing key messages) • Authorities have an active climate change focal point (at least at national and province levels) for capacity building in community-based DRR and climate change adaptation
Project planning and implementation	• Civil society organizations provide guidance to facilitate integration of seasonal forecast information and climate risk into community risk assessments and contingency plans • New programs consider a level of "acceptable risk" in project design (incl. physical structures) and incorporate projected trends in climate change – including increased weather variability and shifts in seasonal patterns • Standard Operating Procedures for different timescales (days to decades) are defined and promoted to support appropriate community response to changing climate and risks patterns • Community captures and organizations help disseminate successful community level climate-smart, innovative interventions for replication, where appropriate	• Local planning and development authorities partner with relevant CSOs to support the development and implementation of climate-smart community DRR plans • Government disaster management agencies, together with CSOs with a disaster management mandate, prepare Early Warning – Early Action contingency planning (emergency response planning) at all levels and coordinated across levels and organisations

Theme	Role of civil society organisations (CSO) supporting communities implementing climate-smart DRR	Enabling environment requested from authorities
Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)	• Organisations (with relevant government agencies) hold regular review meetings to evaluate the integration of climate risk factors into various community-based activities (e.g. risk assessments); lessons learned are used to inform local development planning efforts and documented for wider use (linked to Project planning above)	• A mechanism for reviewing disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation policies are in place, and results are shared with communities and civil society (ideally, communities and CSOs should be invited to participate in policy review and/or hearing processes)
Awareness raising and policy dialogue	• CSOs provide support to build community skills and confidence to link/collaborate with authorities and other stakeholders responsible for planning and adaptation to changing risk patterns • CSOs and communities make use of dialogue opportunities (e.g. meetings, national days for actions, conferences) to inform relevant authorities and agencies of community adaptation needs, and to help shape adaptation policies and resource allocation etc. • Partnerships and multi-disciplinary teams of experts in DRR and climate-change adaptation are established (or strengthened) to improve understanding and coordination between these policy areas and to ensure they reflect communities' needs • Civil society organizations adopt the 'Early Warning – Early Action' approach to promote forecast-based contingency plans at the community level and beyond	• Authorities (and CSOs) organise venues/forums where community, civil society, government and knowledge centres can meet and learn from one another regarding climate change adaptation policy development and local disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation needs • Support and planning mechanisms are *flexible* and adaptive in order to respond to changing risks, changing governance structures, and future planning needs