

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POWERS FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION:

A Study on Local-Level Authority and Capacity for Resilience

Why should local governments care about disaster risk reduction?

Majority of the global population now live in urban areas. Local governments – local authorities and sub-national administrative units, such as cities, municipalities, districts, provinces and states – must focus their efforts, more than ever, on overcoming impediments to and taking advantage of opportunities arising from development.

Yet local development also comes at a price, as uncontrolled urbanization tends to increase vulnerability and exposure to disasters. Indeed, disasters have hit local communities the most, instantly compromising the benefits of development. The situation is expected to become even more challenging with the onset of both sudden and extensive impacts of climate change.

Unfortunately, many local governments lack financial and/or technical capacities to undertake disaster risk reduction (DRR) and ultimately build local resilience. In many instances, vested authority may be limited in accordance with existing laws and institutional set-up. As the important role of local governments in disaster

risk reduction is recognized, it is timely and important to seriously consider their powers (authorities and capacities) and responsibilities to address the problems of this new urban era.

For this reason, local governments have been recognized as one of the key actors for the implementation of the Post-2015 Global Development Agendas, namely, the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDG), Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework), Paris Climate Change Agreement, and the New Urban Agenda. These frameworks are integrated in a way to establish a roadmap for the development of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements. At no point in time, as now, have local governments recognized how significant DRR and resilience-building are to them as they are often at the forefront of disaster response and recovery. The Sendai Framework even more recognizes the important role local governments play in achieving the goal of substantially reducing disaster risk and losses.

The power of local governments in reducing disaster risk and building resilience

Governance is no longer defined by a rigid separation between the public and the private, but rather as a shared responsibility and authority in “the exercise of power and functions” (Borja and Castells, 1999). Vertical and horizontal cooperation amongst government agencies, public-private partnerships, and multi-stakeholder participation and awareness are now

deemed necessary to succeed in reducing disaster risk. Therefore, understanding the level of responsibilities and authorities that local governments have, in regard to DRR-related actions and to the types of partnerships they undertake, creates awareness about local disaster risk governance and will help find ways on how it may be improved.

Seven (7) Types of Authorities and Capacities of Local Governments vis-à-vis Disaster Risk Reduction

1. Authority to undertake action
2. Authority to develop plans, policies, and regulations
3. Authority to develop partnerships and increase capacity
4. Authority to develop and control the budget
5. Authority to access or build data
6. Capacity of technical staff to carry out DRR
7. Capacity to deliver services to reduce risk

13 Local Government Actions to Reduce Disaster Risk and Build Resilience*

1. Develop a City Vision or Strategic Plan that may include concepts of disaster resilience
2. Establish a single point of coordination for disaster resilience
3. Undertake risk analysis for multiple hazards
4. Develop a financial plan that allows access to, and enables allocation of, financial resources for disaster resilience
5. Develop and update urban plans with up-to-date risk information
6. Update building codes and standards and enforcing their use
7. Protect, conserve, and restore ecosystems for disaster resilience
8. Develop a critical infrastructure plan or strategy for disaster resilience
9. Strengthen institutional capacity (including governmental organizations, private sector, academic institutions, civil society organizations among others) for disaster resilience
10. Identify and strengthen societal capacity (such as neighborhood organizations, media and telecommunications reach, education and training) for disaster resilience
11. Develop disaster management and/or emergency response plan and protocols
12. Develop or ensure connections to relevant Early Warning Systems
13. Develop a strategy for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction that ensures building back better.

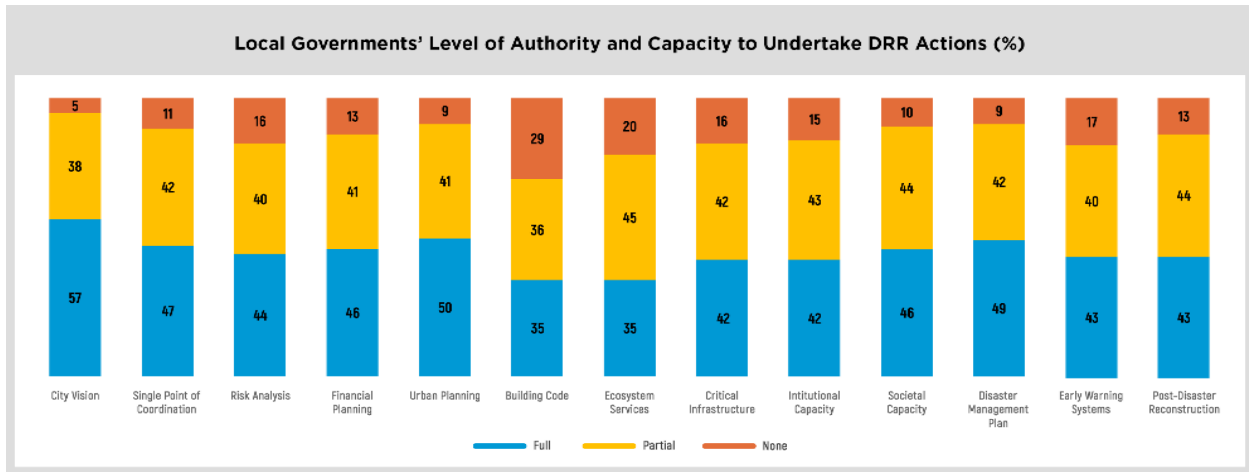
Current issues and challenges

The gap between powers (characterized by authorities and capacities) and responsibilities assigned to local governments regarding DRR, demonstrate the challenges local authorities face to implement DRR strategies. In the new urban era, the operationalization of international agreements, such as the Sendai Framework, is also expected to be undertaken by local authorities, which require adequate level of powers to conduct their activities. The execution of authorities, capacities and responsibilities at local level usually follow the national and/or regional institutional and sectoral development

patterns. This depends greatly on the level of decentralization (or devolution) provided to the local government. Where decentralization is limited, local administrations powers are also limited, requiring further the need to strengthen vertical governance and cooperation between sub-national and national governments. According to the study conducted by the UNISDR and CUDRR+R, local governments were found to have the highest powers (authority and capacity) in terms of undertaking the enabling action of developing a City Vision, and secondly for having authorities to undertake risk-informed urban

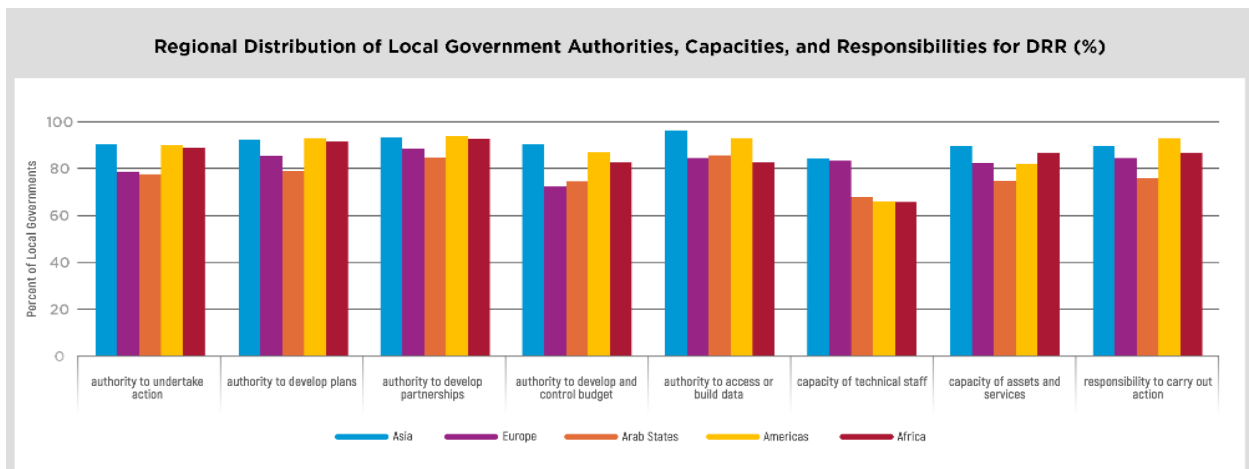
planning and developing a disaster management plan. On the other hand, they have the lowest powers for updating and enforcing the use of

building codes, one of the most critical DRR activities.



Amongst the local governments that participated in this study, those in Asia followed by the Americas reported to have the highest level of powers (authorities and capacities) to undertake DRR; whereas the ones from the Arab States and lastly, those from Europe revealed to have the lowest powers. European cities reported below average in regard to having the authority to develop and control a budget related to DRR; whereas they reported higher than average in terms of having adequate and capable technical

staff to carry out DRR. Indeed, overall, there is a fundamental gap between levels of responsibility and adequate technical capacity in local governments. This was most apparent in cities in Africa, the Americas and the Arab States. In addition, local governments in the Arab States reported to have the least powers for institutional and societal capacity development for DRR - two actions essential to strengthening local disaster risk governance.



For specific DRR actions that are commonly part of the long-established municipal activities, such as developing urban plans, local governments have high levels of legal authority;

whereas in activities such as ecosystems preservation and restoration that are traditionally responsibilities of the environmental and/or regional authorities, legal authority is limited.

Similarly, authority to strengthen institutional and/or societal capacity and developing relevant partnerships have legal basis in regions, such as the Americas, where civil society participation has

long been part of the development agenda; whereas in the Arab States, where traditionally there is little or no participation by civil society, such authority is limited.

What must be done to strengthen local government action for disaster risk reduction and resilience-building

The following actions need to be taken in a more resolute manner:

1. For the implementation of the Sendai Framework at local level, vertical governance need to be strengthened with adequate level of authority and capacity provided to local governments.
2. While adequate technical capacity is indispensable for the employment of these critical DRR actions, local governments can increase their capacity through vertical and horizontal alliances (an indicator of good disaster risk governance) such as developing institutional partnerships with other government agencies and/or academic, research, and private sector. Among other DRR actions, such partnerships can help undertake risk analysis, or develop educational and awareness programs such as those involving the construction and the civil society for the proper use of building codes.
3. Cities can develop their capacities through continuing education programs and other innovative capacity building activities delivered through multi-stakeholder partnerships including those with academic and private sectors. City-to-city exchanges and partnerships with regions such as Europe, where technical capacity is strong, can help enhance capacity in regions, where it is most needed.
4. As the different tiers of government recognize the significance of disaster risk governance and the need to allocate authorities and responsibilities for undertaking local level DRR action, capacity development necessarily follows, as local empowerment promotes DRR action. Such empowerment is essential in the implementation of the Sendai Framework at local level.

This advocacy brief is based primarily on a baseline study undertaken by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) in partnership with the Center for Urban Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience (CUDRR+R) between November 2015 and November 2016. A total of 151 local governments and Making Cities Resilient Campaign Partners located in different parts of the world participated in the study.
