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Feature Address

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Greetings…

Disasters are an opportunity. We do not welcome them – but addressing disaster through risk reduction and post-disaster response surfaces unmet development failures that have lain, accumulating over time. Disasters provide a focus and momentum to address these development gaps.

In 2014, in an introduction to Grenada's County Document on Disaster Risk Reduction, prepared by NaDMA, the Prime Minister of Grenada, Keith Mitchell puts his name to the words that "the sustainable development of Small Island States such as ours is intrinsically linked to climate change adaptation".

I want to argue that wherever disaster management work is placed outside everyday development policy and practice there is a missed opportunity for Sustainable Development. I will draw from global research and explore Caribbean examples: showing both constraints and successes where local empowerment has been delivered through disaster management work – with implications going beyond this to impact on wellbeing and sustainable development.

Before exploring these examples allow me to provide some context which helps to define the scale of the challenge for delivering a joined-up agenda for disaster risk management and sustainable development. I will lay out three components of an agenda, each already existing, but rarely brought together and seldom equally accounted for in policy development and practice: Root Causes, Resilience and Transformation.

1) Across the spectrum of disaster management activities there remains a consistent failure to confront the root causes of risk that lie in the political, economic and social systems of development. Perhaps more surprising is a continued failure to mobilise the motivating power of disaster risk and impact to strategically address these same roots that impact development chances more widely.

These are not new observations. In 1983, in his seminar work 'Interpretations of Calamity', Kenneth Hewitt, a Canadian Geographer, described disaster risk management as an archipelago, separated from the mainland of development policy and practice. Hewitt's work stimulated a reassessment of disaster risk causation with an appreciation that the vulnerability of people and their buildings is as important as an understanding of the physical properties of natural hazards to plan for disaster risk. Furthermore, this social turn in the understanding of disaster risk surfaced that vulnerability is an outcome of both individual perceptions and local acts intersecting with structural constraints imposed historically but remade everyday by legislation, economic relations and cultural norms.

So much is recognised.

Today, and in the Caribbean Region in particular, there are many initiatives seeking to tackle the structural and local causes of human vulnerability to natural hazards. The Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) is a global leader, created in 2007. Famous as a regionally financed tool supporting national risk management. The CCRIF is a grand experiment in the use of parametric insurance mechanisms allowing disbursements to be triggered by weather events, not damage. Payouts are quicker and come during reconstruction when they are most needed. Writing in the week Hurricane Irma passed over the Caribbean, the *Economist* reported the CCRIF was able to offer Turks and Caicos

$13.6m, and Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis and Anguilla $15.6m against Hurricane Irma.

The Caribbean Development Bank's programmes on Natural Disaster Risk Management and Community Disaster Risk Reduction also offer opportunities for addressing the roots of disaster risk that lie in government structures and relationships and provide support for local action. From some of my own experience working with low income, flood exposed urban groups in Guyana in the early 1990s I can attest to the significance of the Basic Needs Trust Fund as a trail blazing initiative that through its open approach to project selection was able to not only strengthen local capacity and leadership but allow local actors to define their own local pathways for improving local development opportunity and so gain a stake in local development. The core challenge for addressing root cause in development in the Caribbean and many other places is to find mechanisms to bridge the energies of local actors with top-down processes of representative government and policy making.

I wonder if there is not scope for the Caribbean Development Bank here in working to connect up its initiatives and those of others in the region. Bringing these initiatives together one has a sense of a real potential for joined up grassroots and structural action that can move from addressing risk management as a technical issue of early warning and preparedness to one that must also include more fundamental development processes – issues of gender and racial equity, local decision-making and leadership, accountability and integrated decision-making across government. Identifying examples where such underlying, root causes have been addressed as part of risk management interventions and lessons to be learnt about how to approach this challenge would have a ready audience.

As an aside, and one possible way forward, let me introduce the Forensic Investigation of Disaster, or FORIN approach developed by the international programme Integrated Research on Disaster Risk, with a lot of input from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Inspired by the kind of forensic investigations that follow technological disasters (plane or train crashes and oil spills), the vision of FORIN is to provide a transparent framework with which to generate lessons following natural hazard related disaster events. The understanding is that disasters are a result of the long-term accumulation of vulnerability as well as specific decisions. The location of houses relative to hazard will be an outcome of historical decision-making but also point to challenges in implementing land-zoning regulations. The aim is not to pressurize decision-makers, who work under multiple constraints, but to provide an open and neutral account of the root causes of disasters. The real opportunity from FORIN will come from its application to multiple events so that common causes can be highlighted as systemic concerns for addressing.

2) Just as the academic literature points to the opportunity presented by DRR to address root causes if cycles of risk accumulation are to be broken, so too the 2015 global agreements make firm connections between disasters, their management and prospects for Sustainable Development.

The SDGs and Sendai Framework push risk management and development into a closer association. The SDGs do this using the language of resilience, the Sendai Framework also supports resilience, and the notion of 'Building Back Better'.

But what does resilience mean?

Resilience was voted the 'development buzzword' of 2012 according to devex.com. And as with most buzzwords it still lacks clear meaning. The consensus has perhaps moved from

resilience as the flip-side of vulnerability, to resilience as a desire for flexibility but with the aim of ensuring stability I the face of shocks and stress, to a more holistic view that regards resilience as seeking continuity in the goals of progressive development - a desire for development gains to be protected but also to maintain pathways for transformation towards sustainable development.

There are a growing set of indicator frameworks for resilience as a result.

For the SDGs, global collectability of data is the overriding concern so that such complicated questions as resilience are reduced to quite stake outcome indicators like: reducing mortality, morbidity, economic losses and people affected, and the presence of disaster management plans, by 2030. This does not capture the challenges processes and trade-offs within resilience programming but it does focus minds on these hard outcomes.

The SDGs also project a philosophy of 'leaving no one behind'. This is an evolution from the Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs suggest that simply raising those closest to a threshold of resilience is not enough, interventions need to bring those most at risk into conditions of resilience. We should focus on the most vulnerable first! This has significant implications for policy targeting, including for humanitarian actors.

In the world of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), The Sendai Framework has also grappled with the use of quantitative indicators to track resilience. Here inter-annual variation is tremendous as natural hazards vary year by year and absolute numbers may tell us little about national level progress given the difference in population and assets between reporting countries. This aside, resilience for the Sendai Framework includes a focus on Building Back Better. Building Back Better acknowledges the responsibility of response and reconstruction activity to go beyond the International Humanitarian Community credo of 'Do No Harm', and to work to overcome local and potentially structural barriers to wellbeing.

With resilience framed by these two agreements come two challenges, a call to target the most vulnerable first, and to build back better.

3) If Resilience was the development buzzword of 2012, transformation must have taken its place. Just like resilience, transformation has become a discursive battlefield. Introduced to DRR through climate change adaptation, transformation sets its sights high.

Transformation describes processes of fundamental change. I served as a Coordinating Lead Author for the chapter that introduced this term to the IPCC Working Group II (Impact, Adaptation and Vulnerability) through the Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation, 2012. It was impressive to see the IPCC community be as responsive to the literature as it claims to be. I recall a key figure for the Summary for Policy Makers that summarised the 'solution space' for extreme events as including well-trodden areas as reduce exposure; reduce vulnerability; prepare, response and recover; transfer and share risks – and – transformation. Fundamental changes to underlying socio-economic and technological systems! Perhaps SREX was ahead of its time, in presenting to IPCC governments at the SPM final plenary I recall approaching with trepidation a lunch-time session dedicated to transformation. In the end, the most exercised country was Japan, which had just passed through the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, and was indeed undergoing a transformative moment with reflection not only on disaster management but the role of science and citizen involvement in decision-making in general.

From this challenging but focussed introduction of the term to the IPCC, transformation was taken-up by authors of the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report published in 2014. But here the term became splintered, reflecting perhaps the challenging emphasis of the word. The AR5 used at least four interpretations of transformation:

Fundamental change to development drivers (as originally envisioned); fundamental change to DRM systems (progressive but limited); integration of adaptation and mitigation agendas (would be a fundamental shift but a deviation); fundamental changes to social and ecological systems as a result of adaptation actions (missing the point). The result is a watering down of the central contribution of transformation to adaptation. The term has I think recovered a little since, it is very present in the AR6 chapter summaries and as written implies the transition in development vision and underlying administrative and technical systems required for a coupling of adaptation to the goals of the SDGs.

Transformation then is presented by the international scientific community as needed to meet Prime Minister Mitchell's call for sustainable development of Small Island States to be intrinsically linked to climate change adaptation.

Can we see this happening in practice?

Are there examples where disaster risk reduction or response have allowed local and national actors to address root causes so that we can observe policies and practices that build resilience in ways that it can meet its current ambition of securing progressive development gains, whilst allowing scope for transformation where development is not delivering for the needs of the poorest or most vulnerable in society?

This is a tough challenge to set, and in response I want to take us on two different journeys, both with Caribbean destinations. The first is a reflection on the development outcomes of rising from DRR interventions in Guyana, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The second focusses on post-disaster recovery and reconstruction as part of a global review and some thoughts on experience from t marten, post Hurricane Irma.

First then, to Guyana, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Between 2003 to 2010 Oxfam GB led projects aimed at reducing local urban vulnerability to flooding, with funding from the Department of Humanitarian Aid of the European Commission (DIPECHO) and the World Bank. These were amongst the first funded urban DRR projects worldwide and were constrained by short-term funding inherited from humanitarian budget design.   Still the outcomes were impressive and did hit some of our ambitious targets.

In Santo Domingo the project worked with eight low-income informal settlements along the banks of the Rio Isabella in the city centre. The settlements are long-stand, with continuous occupation from the 1960s but remained poorly serviced with residents living exposed to river flooding on the banks of the Isabella and in steep sided gullies prone to landslides. Well organised community groups were active in local primary and microcredit, solid waste management, family health promotion, youth leadership and advocacy, providing an implementing partner for Oxfam's DRR interventions.

In Georgetown, Guyana, Oxfam's intervention followed flooding in 2005 leading to a national emergency being called. Oxfam worked in 20 settlements along the coast road. Implementation was through two national NGOs.

In Haiti, Oxfam worked before the earthquake in Cap Haitien and Port au Prince. Cap Haitien, northern Haiti, is a rapidly growing regional centre with flooding associated with

inadequate infrastructure provision. Oxfam collaborated with local government to form Neighbourhood Civil Protection Committees that worked on drain cleaning and small infrastructure projects as well as aiming to strengthen local capacity and collaboration with local government. In Port au Prince, work followed major flooding in 2004, five municipalities were targeted for capacity building with infrastructure provision and emergency response equipment and training.

In each project Oxfam's approach was broadly similar: a lot of time spent on pre-project sensitisation with local government and stakeholders; the bulk of project delivery had three components: local organisational restructuring; community based disaster risk awareness raising and skill training and professional DRM training; transfer of leadership to community actors was then supported by permanent NGOs or local government agencies. The scope of work was impressive, awareness raising deployed local radio shows, street parades, secondary school fairs and in Guyana where a challenge was to engage male participants – local cricket matches were the solution.   The resulting number of residents contacted through outreach in Guyana 25,000, Santo Domingo 18,500 and Haiti more than 1,000. In addition, raising awareness through secondary school systems engaged 3,000 and 850 children respectively in Santo Domingo and Guyana. Community groups were formed in each project – 24 in Santo Domingo, 18 in Guyana and 6 in Haiti. So far so good.

One year after the projects had closed Oxfam commissioned my review for internal learning. Two key findings are of interest to us:

First, the number of groups describing themselves as active: Guyana 5 of 13; Santo Domingo 7 of 7, in Haiti 5 of 6. This an indication of enhanced resilience in both locations. The new organisations themselves, are the key outcome of the interventions. Differences in the number of active groups reflecting the extent to which an already existing architecture of civil society organisations was able to support and cultivate groups.

Second, if we delve more deeply into the experiences of these projects the link between development and DRR really does stand out.

To do this let me take you to the Barcena family: Maria mum, Jose dad and a teenage son, Cesar and daughter, Conchita, both still at school and living in Los Manguitos one of the informal settlements partnering the Oxfam project in Santo Domingo.

The Barcenas have lived in Los Manguitos for seven years, both children attend secondary school in the neighbouring community of Los Guandules. They live in a concrete house, in two rooms on the steep sided ravine separating the two communities. When it rains the path out of the community turns to mud and can be impassable, during storms they stay inside and would not leave for a shelter because of stories of police harassment, and in any case leaving the house would likely invite thieves. Infact, for Cesar and Conchita attending school can be difficult, the ravine is impassable. In addition to environmental hazards crime is a top priority, in particular, living close to Los Guandules Maria fears drug gang violence.

As an outcome of community consultations two interventions were proposed: a bridge across the ravine separating Los Manguitos and Los Guandules and concrete steps providing an evacuation route.

These proposals were not received well by Jose and Maria.

- Months of disruption caused by stair building would hardly be justified by evacuation routes, when the family would stay at home anyway.

- Building a bridge would only encourage gangs from Los Guandules to cross into Los Manguitos.

In the end these works were completed, and to the satisfaction of the Barcena family.

- Stairs were most useful in daily movement up to the main street, one neighbour set up a leather belt workshop at home, for those who owned their homes values increased with this new access
- By involving the police in community meetings both sides built up some trust, enough for the Barcenas to be more inclined to use the shelter.
- Most tricky was the bridge only made possible because of the time spent on community trust building. Pivotal was a weekend camps for teenagers from across the communities, parents were reluctant at first but once they agreed and there were no problems mistrust began to break down. The bridge has not led to increased crime but it has improved school access, and emergency evacuation.

Each of these outcomes – the stairs, shelter management and the bridge have DRR drivers but their main contributions are arguably in everyday development gains. This moves the outcomes beyond resilience into transformation. The key contribution not being the physical structures, but the improved social relations between families, community leads and local government that have allowed these investments to be useful and used.

Ownership of the project by community groups served to strengthen these ties and even included local government and police. It is through the social investments that technological interventions paid off for risk reduction and development. Truly an example of the positive synergy of DRR with progressive development – not just development as status quo.

If interventions to reduce disaster risk can build the foundations for sustainable development, is this also possible in response and reconstruction? I hardly need to describe the challenges of response and reconstruction to the current audience.

The potential for leveraging post-disaster good will and financing to address underlying development challenges is undeniable. Experience is less sanguine. Too many response and reconstruction efforts and constrained by the interests and pressures of development and fall short of meeting their potential, too often reconstruction is incomplete with temporary shelter becoming permanent, inadequate, with relocation in particular seldom resulting in enhanced life chances. For the Caribbean region, if the SDGs are to be achieved then truly response and reconstruction are an important element of this.

The challenge is considerable – to move globally from a pretty unimpressive record on response and reconstruction but there are many ways forward. The lessons I would like to share have come to be described as a vision of Survivor-led-response and reconstruction. This is not to romanticise local leadership, but to help redress the balance of control post-disaster.

This vision is built on the views of survivors from eight disasters. Data were collected through a consortium of nine humanitarian NGOs led by Christian Aid, with funding from DFID. All the disasters studied required international humanitarian assistance. They range from typhoons and cyclones in the Philippines and Bangladesh; tsunami in Indonesia, flooding in Pakistan, food security in Kenya and conflict in DRC and Colombia.

The experiences of response and reconstruction were that:

Most respondents relied on their own resources to cope (evacuation) and adapt (new livelihoods or spending savings) to shock impacts, even in the midst of humanitarian action; where transformation was recorded this always built on external facilitation.

Transformation post-disaster was reported from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines where local survivors described a strengthening of ongoing processes of social change (women and the elderly having more voice for example). Elsewhere local actors reported feeling unable to act because of a lack of resource or support to advocate for change. Here is an opportunity for humanitarian actors to support local processes of Building Back Better and to challenge the default setting for reconstruction of an Accelerated Status Quo.

When asked, survivors identified six priorities that they felt would enhance the ability of response and reconstruction to open spaces for building back better:

1. *Include psychological support*

   Here the priority is not for specialist external trauma counselling but for providing spaces for everyday conversations and community-centred support, re-establishing schools, providing resources for local counselling and listening. The aim is to bring the community to the centre of response and reconstruction, not simply to re-tool external actors.

   As one local responder said:

   "a big problem is the community feeling they have no power, no hope. Help them run the response. We need to inspire them to realise they do have power over their situation. They need to motivate each other to raise each other out of their situation".

2. *Include livelihoods and savings from the start*

   As one survivor put it:

   "allow us to economically thrive and to live in peace and we will look after ourselves".

   The secondary impacts of disaster were consistently felt to be the major challenge for survivors. As professionals we perhaps focus too much on tracking direct losses, including in the SDGs – but for survivors it is too late to avoid direct impacts. Where livelihoods are not protected or cash not made available survivors enter a downward spiral of expending saving and productive resources and find it difficult to re-establish themselves and their sense of identity with place.

3. *Enable a greater level of community participation and cohesion*

   Social cohesion was vulnerable to both the event impacts and external interventions, survivors saw this as a strategic priority and almost described external interventions seeking to undermine local capacity and supress local leadership. The response from survivors was a demand for externals to support local actors to take control if the post-disaster space is to have transformative ambitions, and to build back better. As one respondent put it:

   "we are stronger together. Organise, organise, organise for everyone to come together and work together as a unit. Only then can you rise up and change your circumstance".

4. *Strengthen two-way communication between NGOs and community members.*

This goes beyond a call for improved dissemination of information from responders to the community, to asking also for improved collaboration with local actors so that difficult decisions during response and reconstruction can be informed by local insights.

5. *NGOs should work closer with the government to raise awareness of risk, advocate for community needs and build government capacity.*

   Collaboration between the community and government has not been a priority for humanitarian interventions but is essential for building back better, which requires local perspective coupled with the weight of government action. Effective coordination has challenged the humanitarian sector for decades, as is often said everyone believes in coordination but no one wants to be coordinated. The key opportunity here is for external facilitation to strengthen long-term relationships between local actors and government.

6. *Tackle root causes of vulnerability.*

   Survivors were not naive to root causes nor to the reality that current response and reconstruction working fails to deliver change on this level. As one survivor put it:

   "Look at the causes, why are we facing this disaster? Start addressing these issues with us and with the government". Crisis Survivor.

Of course, each of these six priorities is reinforcing. A rapid return to economic stability helps psychological healing, enabling individual to participate in community decision-making. If there was one most fundamental priority, for Survivor-led response and reconstruction, it was that local leadership should be prioritised and that from this should come strategies to include psychological support, livelihoods etc.

That survivors place so much emphasis on capacity and control is key to enhancing resilience and transformation and to building back BETTER. This is a lesson which is very hard for humanitarians to hear and provides an important role for national and local government, working to support communities at risk to prepare them not only for disasters but for leadership in response and reconstruction – in the context of overwhelming external intervention. Can we train local actors in how to manage humanitarians?

How might these six elements of a survivor-led response work out in the Caribbean? The region is diverse so insights from a single study might not be taken too far but over the last two months we have been working in Sint Maarten – a Dutch constituent country to assist in reconstruction post Hurricane Irma. The result is quite impressive. Even with the apparent economic, technological and administrative advantage of St Maarten, our field researcher describes survivors' views overlapped with our initial study by about 80%.

Sint Maarten felt the full force of the force of Irma as a category 5 Hurricane, with winds approaching 295 km/h. Some 70% of Sint Maarten's structures were damaged and their crucial tourist industry decimated, with losses estimated at upwards of $2billion.

Sint Marten's survivors identified three priorities:

1. *Livelihoods*

There is no social safety net in Sint Marten so that those without private insurance – the elderly living on pensions and migrant workers, were most in need to economic support to prevent knock-on impacts eg to health. Pensioners reported eating less to cover repair costs. In the absence of public transport, these groups struggled to access aid, some had none for 2 weeks.

During reconstruction female and migrant workers were struggling, female single-headed households worst of all. Because many workers are outsourced on short term contracts they had no legal claim on employers or income post-disaster.

2. *Two-way communication between NGOs and community members*

There was no formal information system for aid disbursement, leading to rumour, time wasted queuing, a lack of transparency on disbursements eroding community cohesion and trust in government and civil society. Hardly sowing the seeds for Building Back Better.

3. *NGOs work closer with the government to raise awareness, advocate and build government capacity*

There was no culture of partnership between CBOs nor with government pre-disaster making any close working post-disaster very difficult. Where local community councils existed on paper they were dormant in practice.

In short, the message from Sint Marten was a surprisingly close alignment with wider global concerns in large events, especially around the advantages of functioning civil society with links, but independence to government pre-disaster to advance building back better. There was though no desire for a Survivor Led Response. This may be a key characteristic of smaller societies with limited social capacity and close functioning relationships with government, compared to a continental country with remote populations.

This said, local action in St Marten was evident, for example a group in the St. Peters district of the island is organising the local community to prepare for the upcoming hurricane season, in the face of a non-functioning community council – they are formulating preparedness plans and reaching out and sharing information with other districts.

The priority for strengthening capacity with government was clear. It was telling that as one participant said, "We know what we have to work on now – we need to get together as organisations and go to government."

So, what does this mean for social resilience – for the progressive joining of disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and sustainable development?

I have tried to present the importance of balancing a desire for stability seeking through disaster risk management with the opportunity that BOTH risk reduction and response and reconstruction open for addressing root causes and building back better. In short for a more serious engagement with the potential for transformative actions and new relationships between communities, civil society and the government.

I will leave you with three possibilities for taking the opportunity of disasters to support sustainable development:

1. Review the coherence of focussed and general CDB investments for resilience building. Building resilience requires action at local and national levels, with real value added when these can be seen to join-up, even if serendipitously. For

example, the Basic Needs Trust Fund, though not targeted at risk reduction surely builds capacity for social resilience.

2. Partnerships, partnerships, partnerships. These are key and need to have room for disagreement if development policy is to take root causes seriously. This will likely require some change in development model requiring consensus and strong leadership. Investing in community councils, schools as focal points for communities, community natural resource management groups, even sports clubs – these are the backbones of civic action that sustain society post-disaster if survivor led response or building back better is to be achieved.

3. Train local actors in how to manage humanitarians. Work to support communities and governments to prepare not only for disasters but for leadership in response and reconstruction – in the context of overwhelming external intervention.

Thank you.