12

Addressing fragilities: the growth of cities and the challenges for the Red Cross / Red Crescent in assuming a resilience-building role

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Introduction[1]

Spurred by trends like population growth, uneven access to resources and increasing hazards, growing numbers of people are living in fragile situations in which their livelihoods are eroded and opportunities to withstand and recover from shocks and stresses are limited. As the number of disaster-affected people is increasing[2] and development gains and opportunities are being reversed, a shift is visible with governments and civil society organisations alike to focus more on prevention and mitigation of disaster risks. Apart from the humanitarian consequences, this trend also puts a strain on financial resources to provide relief and help people recover and rebuild their livelihoods.

Nowhere does the trend of increased vulnerabilities and the links between relief and development become more apparent than in the fast-growing urban centres of the world, which are almost exclusively located in the Global South, and which are home to vast numbers of informal urban dwellers. Trends like climate change, but also misguided development investments, are compounding factors. In these informal settlements the increased disaster risks are widely visible. They not only illustrate the links between development and relief, but also highlight the need for humanitarian and development organisations alike to focus more on underlying causes of risks. To address this, the 'community resilience' approach is increasingly embraced as the way forward, making people themselves better able to cope with shocks rather than relying on (repeated) outside support. The Red Cross / Red Crescent, being the largest and longest-established humanitarian organisation and originally known for its reactive approach to disaster, is now likewise expanding its scope, bringing its emergency and non-emergency work under one umbrella, in both rural and urban settings. Embracing the resilience approach adds weight to this trend.

This chapter explores the reasons for the Red Cross / Red Crescent to focus on prevention and mitigation which complement the traditional role of provider of emergency relief. The need and relevance of this are particularly strong in urban contexts, where vulnerabilities are more complex and interwoven and where, at the same time, many agencies are present and where politics and the role of the government are rather pronounced. This chapter analyses the elements of the resilience approach that the Red Cross / Red Crescent applies, and argues how some of these pose a challenge to the way the organisation can apply its fundamental principles.

Urbanisation and the permanent crisis in slums

Urbanisation – the growth of population and economic activity in towns and cities relative to rural areas – has recently reached two largely unnoticed yet significant milestones. For the first time in history the majority of people worldwide is living in urban centres. And secondly, the number of people living in slums has passed one billion (UN-Habitat, 2006). Cities are often the motor of a nation's economic development, and cause and consequence of the generally large influx of rural-to-urban migrants in search of better opportunities. Especially in many cities in the Global South however neither governments nor the private sector are able to provide sufficient services and labour opportunities, leaving many urban dwellers living in informal settlements and holding informal jobs. The generally low pay, their informal status, and the absence of decent social provision leave them both poor and vulnerable. This 'normal' situation in slums resembles a crisis situation, albeit in a more permanent way – a situation that in more profiled cases would trigger a humanitarian response. Infant mortality in some of Manila's barangays, for example, or acute malnutrition in Djibouti's slums, surpasses thresholds that would normally justify humanitarian intervention (Duijsens, 2010). Generally, the substantial and interrelated poverty, vulnerability and marginalisation where formal governance is contested, renders many settlements fragile and prone to high rates of violence (Muggah, 2014): a situation that may be limited to the specific settlements but that holds the potential for political and economic destabilisation in the wider urban realm.

While states hold ultimate responsibility for ensuring appropriate infrastructure and services that not only protect people against adversities in their socio-economic and physical environment but also enables them to shape and secure their development, they often fail to provide these. One reason is a lack of means to do so, but in many situations the needs of the poor and vulnerable are often insufficiently considered. The level of investment in semi-formal or informal settlements can be a reflection of the overall political orientation, where neo-liberal governments tend to leave provision of services to non-state actors (Davis, 2006).

Climate change, due to its gradual temperature increase and extreme weather events, is an aggravating factor. More concentrated and intense precipitation in insufficiently drained informal settlements often leads to floods, while storm surges can wipe away non-durable structures. Diseases like dengue are increasingly an urban phenomenon in poor settlements because of climate change, poor water management, and insufficient means of protection from mosquito bites. Moreover, urban-rural dynamics, like dependency on rural-produced food also have an effect on slum dwellers' vulnerabilities. The lack of infrastructure, the absence of regulations and/or their enforcement, and the coping strategies of poor people create further disaster risks. These are manifestations of how hazards interrelate with interwoven and diverse vulnerabilities that are embedded in differing dynamics and create complex risk patterns.

Yet, despite the adversities, slums continue to grow, with higher growth-rates than non-slum areas. Consequently, related poverty and vulnerability remain a constant manifestation. They challenge development and present urgent humanitarian needs and thus remain a challenge both for governments

and for civil society organisations. While the increase in number and the effects of disasters pose an ever greater challenge to development and demand a corresponding increase in budgets for humanitarian assistance, it is the on-going urbanisation, with the concentration of vulnerabilities in cities and the greater effects of disasters in these urban settings, that makes a focus on risk reduction not only more urgent, but also increasingly complex.

Resilience in Red Cross / Red Crescent programming

As the above makes clear, humanitarian and development situations and considerations seem nowhere more interwoven than in informal urban settlements, and consequently the urge to address them simultaneously is particularly relevant there. The Red Cross / Red Crescent, stimulated and guided by its International Federation (IFRC), recognises this: at its 2015 international seminar on Urban Disaster Risk Reduction and Management the 'Tehran Call for Action' (IFRC, 2015) expresses the need to have a better understanding of urban vulnerabilities and related development processes. Moreover, it applies the concept of strengthening urban resilience in relation to risks as the key approach. To understand why and how the IFRC is structuring its urban work on the basis of this concept, it is important to explore the history of Red Cross / Red Crescent programming, and put it into the context of the international disasters discourse.

Disasters discourse in the international arena
Over a recent period of twenty years, debates under auspices of the UN have facilitated a shift in the ways in which governments perceive and address disasters and disaster risks. Under the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990-1999), member states considered disasters with a great amount of fatalism and focused on improved crisis management as the means to reverse the trend of increasing disaster losses (Heijmans, 2012). The subsequent International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR, 2000-2010)[3] recognised that disasters were hardly ever 'natural' but rather socially constructed. It also reflected the emergence of the notion of 'vulnerability'[4], commonly understood as 'the conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards' (UN ISDR, 2004). In fact, the application of the notion of 'vulnerability' can be regarded as one of the most salient achievements in the field of disaster studies during that decade (Alexander, 1997). In their key publication *At Risk*, Blaikie et al explain that 'vulnerability' is shaped by a combination of root causes (like power relations) and dynamic pressures (like rapid urbanisation) that constitute unsafe conditions (like physical environments) and that, when exposed to hazards, these conditions lead to disaster for the people involved (Blaikie, 1994).

The centrality of 'vulnerability' illustrates the increasing recognition that disasters and development are intimately linked: disasters were hardly ever 'natural', but rather socially constructed, and disaster (risk) can be managed by managing vulnerability. With poverty and vulnerability intrinsically linked, this placed disaster risk management more in the domain of development. Two World Conferences on Risk Reduction (Hyogo, 2005, and Sendai, 2015) provided frameworks to reverse the trend of rising

numbers and increasing effects of disasters – a trend, it was recognised, that is particularly prominent in urban settings. Disaster risk reduction was regarded as conditional for sustainable development, and as a responsibility not only of states but also of actors like civil society, communities themselves and the private sector.

In the years leading-up to the Sendai conference, 'resilience' assumed a prominent place in the risk reduction discourse: the ability to 'resile from' or 'bounce back from' a shock, 'The resilience of a community in respect to potential hazard events is determined by the degree to which the community has the necessary resources and is capable of organising itself both prior to and during times of need.' (UNISDR, 2009) While still focusing on hazards and appropriate crisis response, emphasis is increasingly put on the ability to live, and deal with, change. In fact, disasters, and risks of disasters, are regarded as inherent to development, rather than as external, unpredictable events that disturb this process.

Humanitarian organisations have embraced the concept of resilience, each with its own framework and tools[5], and have expanded their exclusive role of relief provider to address underlying factors that make vulnerabilities and crises persist. It is a manifestation of the blurring line between humanitarianism and development and as such a manifestation of *new humanitarianism* (Barnett, 2002). It places more emphasis on local processes that constitute risk, and on local empowerment and the strengthening of individuals' capacities to address them. It builds on the premise that, unless livelihoods of people are robust, vulnerability will not be substantially reduced and disasters will continue to undermine and undo development gains.

Unpacking 'resilience' and 'vulnerability'
Resilience approaches seem to have overtaken or incorporated the focus on vulnerability, even though there are marked differences between the two concepts: resilience essentially takes as its starting point the notion of equilibrium of a system, the conditions under which it normally functions. Resilience then assesses to what *extent* a system (or community) can be pushed and still absorb the disturbance, and then bounce back to its normal state: the lower the efforts and time that takes, the more resilient it is. Vulnerability, however, looks at the *impact* of the disturbance: a greater impact is a measure of greater vulnerability. In that sense, the two concepts can be considered as being each other's inverse: a vulnerable system lacks resilience, and a resilient system is not very vulnerable. Others (Nelson, 2007; Miller, 2010) also underline the strong link between the two concepts, stressing however their coexistence: a strong resilience will ensure that hazards will not lead to disasters when they impact on the community's vulnerabilities. Communities can thus be highly vulnerable and highly resilient at the same time. In this vein, Cannon describes resilience as 'the positive qualities that people and sometimes communities have that can counter their vulnerability.' (Canon, 2008).

When comparing the two concepts, 'resilience' presents some features that make its application attractive:

- The framing of 'resilient communities' has a positive connotation and is remarkably intuitive and attractive (Cannon et al, 2010): where vulnerability describes the negative effects of a disturbance ('what is the problem?'), resilience describes the coping ability ('what can be done?'). This positive moral stance also has the ability to bring practitioners from different sectors together.

- A further key characteristic is the central place of livelihoods: the ability to cope with external pressure is a function of the assets people can apply to this. These assets, or 'capital', together make up the strength of their livelihoods: for example, their knowledge and labour, their income and savings, their house, their natural environment, and their social support networks.

- The systemic character of the resilience approach introduces a more holistic approach that better enables the assessment of situations where communities face multiple, often interrelated, threats. This is particularly relevant in the context of urbanisation, where, as stated, vulnerability is multi-faceted and risk patterns are increasingly complex. Moreover, the inclusion of rural-urban dynamics also indicates how the resilience concept is able to explicate socio-ecological links.

- The resilience concept as such is focused mainly on (maintaining and returning to) a status quo rather than seeking improvements, or in fact, development. It is not a scale at which structures can be more or less resilient, but a binary approach that exposes disturbance in resilience and coping mechanisms that have surpassed a critical value.

- The focus of 'resilience' is on entire groups rather than individuals and households. It only looks at the outcomes and symptoms of resilience, suggesting objectivity that makes the approach seemingly value-free and therefore attractive (Levine et al, 2012).

- Finally, the broader encompassing approach also relates to the wider environment. While the vulnerability approach traditionally focuses more exclusively on the community, the resilience approach regards communities as a component of a system that includes the landscape in which they are situated. Thus it more easily includes issues like land use and water management.

An appropriate definition of resilience that takes account of the above, is offered by Frerks et al, who state that 'resilience is the shared, social capacity to anticipate, resist, absorb and recover from adverse or disturbing events or processes through adaptive and innovative processes of change, entrepreneurship, learning, and increased competence.' (Frerks, Warner, Weijs, 2011).

While the above strengths have helped to make resilience a dominant paradigm in the disaster risk reduction field of humanitarian and development organisations, it also has several limitations. Despite its positive connotations, for example, 'resilience' in essence is neither positive nor negative. It can accommodate a *status quo* where change would be more desirable (Béné, 2012). In fact, there is no

direct link between poverty (reduction) and resilience (building): poor communities can be very resilient indeed, as slum dwellers demonstrate who have, for example, been living on river banks for generations. Van Voorst described such a community's resilience in Jakarta (Van Voorst, 2014). However, as stated above, the resilience discourse increasingly focuses on development with the inclusion of social structures and processes.

Due to its positive connotation it is put central in many policies and frameworks, including with donors. For funding and implementation of any project or programme it has become almost compulsory to refer to it as 'contributing to resilience', and consequently 'resilience' runs the risk of losing its meaning.

A further key limitation is the issue of measuring success. Twigg (2009) lists no less than 167 characteristics, and by default indicates how complex it is to plan for resilience. In contrast, the constant (re)shaping of 'vulnerability' implies there is no specific or absolute level of vulnerability that is desirable or acceptable. Its dynamic nature gives constant input to disaster risk reduction activities that need to be adjusted as pressures change.

Its holistic assessment makes the resilience approach less suitable for laying bare underlying power structures that render people vulnerable. Contrary to the 'vulnerability' approach, which focuses on the individual, it regards the functioning of an entire community, overlooking and thus disregarding the uneven distribution of vulnerability and risk (the above root causes and dynamic pressures that render some people more vulnerable than others) (Blaikie, 1994). While intended to address underlying causes of risk (often related to political processes and people's access to power), it in fact limits the opportunities of organisations to do this in a well-targeted way.

However, according to Béné (2012), the fact that when a system is disturbed beyond its coping level it fiends new levels of resilience, implies that communities have adapted or even transformed, and thus that pre-existing dominant (social, political and economic) structures are reshaped. Thus 'resilience' in fact can include elements like agency, decentralization, governance, power relations and participatory processes, making it an attractive concept for a wide array of organisations.

The systemic approach also makes interventions multi-disciplinary and renders the application of 'resilience' more complex. While overall responsibilities for reducing disaster risks remain with states, as the Sendai Framework reaffirms, many other actors are pulled in as well. This broadening of the responsibility, by some regarded as a manifestation of an increasing neo-liberal agenda (Joseph, 2013), somehow takes the weight off governments and recognises the complementarity of each actor's expertise and capacities. In the context of rapid and largely uncontrolled urbanisation, this may be a welcome development given the apparent inability of governments to manage these processes, but on the other hand it requires them to exert more co-ordination. Where it is unable to do so – as is the case in many informal settlements – the called-on actors may be left more to their own devices. This means that adopting resilience frameworks may require a different way of working and hence may have

implications for the ways in which organisations define and organise themselves, including risks for competition and duplication or absence of activities.

Where the above shared responsibility in fact implies less responsibility by governments, the introduction of 'resilience' also brings the risk of de-politicising disaster risk reduction, especially as governments are then less inclined to address underlying causes of vulnerability. (Hilhorst, 2015)

Finally, when it comes to donor governments, the resilience concept, especially when embedded in disaster risk reduction, sits somewhat uncomfortably between relief and development. While potentially providing a bridge between relief and development approaches, the policy frameworks and related funding modalities often find it difficult to break out of silos. Applying a 'resilience approach' at a large scale remains a challenge.

How 'resilience' became a prominent approach in Red Cross / Red Crescent programming
The Red Cross / Red Crescent has a long history in the field of disaster management. It is globally the longest established humanitarian organisation, and also the most widely established, with national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 190 countries. At a global level the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) are guiding, co-ordinating and, often together with the National Societies, implementing projects and programmes that aim to prevent and alleviate human suffering. All activities are rooted in the organisation's Fundamental Principles, of which Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence give the direction for the organisation's choices on why, where and how to be active.

While humanitarian crises can relate to conflicts or to disasters (and in some situations these coincide), the focus of this paper is on the latter. To various degrees each National Red Cross and Red Crescent Society, based on the formal auxiliary role with its government, is active in disaster management. For policies and strategies, as well as international representation and support for capacity strengthening, the IFRC, through its Geneva-based Secretariat and its delegations in many places in the world, is the coordinating and guiding body. Therefore, rather than examining the many National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, focus will be on the IFRC for setting directions through policies, strategies, position papers and other publications. Below is an overview of various documents, all of them widely discussed, and where relevant adopted, at assemblies and dedicated forums and meetings. They show an increasing focus first on vulnerability and development, then on disaster risk reduction, and finally on building resilience, culminating, in relation to this paper's urban focus, in 'The Road to Urban Resilience'. This development mirrors similar developments within the UN, as presented earlier.

- *The period before 2000*. The IFRC's international strategies in the 1980s and 1990s were largely Secretariat plans with limited focus on National Societies. A highly influential report that underlies both is the *Tansley report*, a self-examination of the Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement (Tansley, 1975). It strongly discouraged the organisation from engaging in activities other than disaster relief, and for the first time introduced 'vulnerability' as a central focus ('improving the lives of the most vulnerable'), ahead of international forums. However, the absence of a clear guide

on how to incorporate this into disaster relief in fact led many National Societies over the years to broaden their scope with longer term activities in the field of health and welfare, drifting away from the Tansley-promoted focused approach rather than embracing it.

A review of the 1990s (IFRC, 1999a) revealed a shift towards more developmental work, with emphasis on local ownership, civil society participation and a priority focus on strengthening human and institutional capacities. This, it concluded, had made the IFRC more conscious of its potential in disaster preparedness, health and social programming, and of its role in strengthening civil society. The review also highlighted the blurring line between relief and development: relief not only had to be maintained over longer periods of time, but moreover 'solutions to many emergencies are most often developmental in nature' – a clear recognition of how the Red Cross / Red Crescent had begun regarding development as important for disaster management. The dramatic effects of the food crisis that ravaged Ethiopia in the mid-eighties also contributed to this changing perspective: a critical reflection questioned whether many more lives could have been saved through targeted prevention interventions rather than by coming to action after the disaster had unfolded itself and dramatic images triggered massive support (Hagman, 1984). The adoption of a dedicated Development Policy (IFRC, 1995) addressed this. It defines development as 'the process by which communities, families and individuals grow stronger, can enjoy fuller and more productive lives, and become less vulnerable', focusing on communities, agency of people, and their vulnerability. The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment tools, launched in 1999[6], asserted greater focus on people's agency. *Strategy 2010* (IFRC, 1999b) further builds on this, referring to 'structural vulnerability' that impedes people's socio-economic security and threatens their dignity. It places Red Cross work also in the socio-economic domain, de-facto referring to the need to strengthen livelihoods.

- *From 2000 to 2010.* The establishment of the Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre in 2002[7] served as a catalyst in the organisation's increased focus on disaster risk reduction by putting the need for climate change adaptation high on the agenda. In the same year IFRC's World Disasters Report made risk reduction its key theme, stating that, '[..] Where possible, measures to reduce the physical and human impacts of disasters must be taken [..] (R)educing the risks posed by disasters is not an optional extra – it is central to the very success of development itself', by which it effectively linked the humanitarian and development agendas (IFRC, 2002). The 2004 edition took this a step further with the explicit focus on moving from risk to resilience, '[..] everyday threats to livelihoods are a greater concern to most poor communities than 'one-off' disasters. [..] (A) more developmental approach to creating disaster resilience is needed, which puts communities in charge of defining their needs and crafting the right solutions' (IFRC, 2004).

The mid-term review of *Strategy 2010* set steps that were an early manifestation of 'community resilience' thinking, explicitly stressing aspects like the role of civil society, empowerment of communities, contributing to development, assessing drivers of vulnerability, integrating approaches, advocacy, and working in partnerships (IFRC, 2005). Also it stated that, despite progress regarding prediction, prevention, mitigation, risk reduction, National Societies remained

close to (organisational) response preparedness, probably because of unfamiliarity with the wider concepts and the absence of sufficient practical guidance. Consequently the review suggests that a vision statement of the Federation that was to be developed should include 'building real resilience in communities'. Issued shortly after the UN's Hyogo Framework for Action (see above), it reflected the growing attention to resilience. The subsequent Global Agenda (IFRC, 2006) set programmatic directions and expanded the organisation's attention to disaster response and health into areas of prevention and mitigation. Referring to 'focus on communities, and understanding and addressing underlying factors' it implicitly elevated 'resilience' to a central theme. The organisation's work was firmly placed in the context of delivering on the Hyogo Framework for Action as well as the MDGs, thus expanding the aim of Red Cross activities to also fostering development.

Two years later the release of the *Community Safety and Resilience Framework* (IFRC, 2008) made the Global Agenda's implicit focus on resilience explicit. The discussion paper, the first one focusing exclusively on resilience, was released at a time when also within the UN system 'resilience' became an increasingly dominant theme, and other prominent civil society organisations released similar papers. As a foundation for National Societies' activities it made Disaster Risk Reduction its central approach through which to increase community resilience (hence the reference to 'safety'), stating that, '[..] being safe and disaster resilient means that there is a greater chance of meeting development goals which, in themselves, will greatly add to resilience'. In effect it elevates the organisation's focus on Disaster Risk Reduction to being on a par with resilience building: reduced risks equals improved resilience. In this approach it regarded other fields of work as contributing elements (health and care, water and sanitation, shelter – but without further explication). Other core elements of a resilience approach, as described above, like being aware of risk drivers, collaborating with non-Red Cross / Red Crescent partners, and applying advocacy in support of interventions, as well as focusing on agency, are all mentioned, however without indicating how these could be applied in concert. In essence the framework mainly reaffirmed the importance of Disaster Risk Reduction, and enabled the Red Cross / Red Crescent to make itself heard in the resilience debate, but stressed the need and motivation more than the way and the rationale.

Underlining the importance of advocacy, or 'Humanitarian Diplomacy' as it is referred to within the Red Cross / Red Crescent, the Humanitarian Diplomacy Policy (IFRC, 2009a) indicates firstly that the decision to engage in it is not a choice but a responsibility. Furthermore, it states that Humanitarian Diplomacy should aim 'to persuade decision makers and opinion leaders to act, at all times, in the interests of vulnerable people.' It is aimed at protecting the organisation's Fundamental Principles, and the humanitarian space. It is recognised that '[..] its root is traditional intergovernmental policy [..]' (IFRC, 2009b) suggesting its origins are strongly related to addressing issues in relation to assistance in conflict situations based on International Humanitarian Law. The concept is increasingly embraced as a key element in overall Red Cross / Red Crescent work, complementing on-the-ground activities. The policy mentions several key stakeholders:

governments, decision makers, opinion leaders and NGOs, and places Red Cross / Red Crescent in a position to voice the concerns on behalf of vulnerable people.

- *The period from 2010.*With 'resilience' having taken up a central place in the disaster risk reduction community at large, and following the publication of the above Framework, IFRC's *Strategy 2020* (2009c) echoes the resilience approach throughout. It displays a stronger focus on long(er) term programmes, with activities related to, '[..] preventing and reducing the underlying causes of vulnerability'. Additionally it highlights the need for, '[..] greater openness and flexibility in partnership and collaboration [..] outside the Movement' and calls for stronger advocacy to influence policies and to act on underlying social, behavioural and environmental factors. It resembles a call to take more systemic approaches and address drivers of risk. Livelihoods are explicitly mentioned and community empowerment actions are stimulated, taking an actor-agency approach.

A second discussion paper on resilience, *The Road to Resilience* (IFRC, 2012), again makes Disaster Risk Reduction the key approach to enhancing resilience, making its preventive and mitigating effects a consideration in disaster response and recovery. Moreover, it considers resilience as, '[..] a critical part of development'. Without explaining how this can be achieved, it states that development activities, '[..] must do no harm' and that '[..] credible implementation of the resilience approach demands of the Red Cross / Red Crescent to make – within [its] means and expertise – significant contributions to eradicating poverty, reducing inequality and achieving equity and dignity, while respecting the limits of [its] resources'. Applying existing rather than new expertise, and not stretching or eating into (current) resources, it puts developmental activities as a function of disaster management activities, rather than attributing equal weight and attention to it.

However, a major step forward is that it unpacks the concept of resilience. Next to defining resilience and explaining the components of it, the document also lists seven characteristics of what a resilient community is, and what it is capable of. Throughout the latter, livelihoods are presented as the anchor to which the Red Cross / Red Crescent can make significant contributions. Thus, implicitly, it does present ways for the Red Cross / Red Crescent to put more weight to developmental activities. At the same time, it also states that the Red Cross / Red Crescent will not be able to address all aspects and that working with external partners is crucial if resilience is to be achieved and sustained. Moreover, the document places the Red Cross / Red Crescent much more in a facilitating role. However, while the 'implications for policy and action' section mentions many aspects where Humanitarian Diplomacy can be a means to achieving greater resilience, it does not present Humanitarian Diplomacy specifically.

The timing of this first major focus on resilience, coinciding with the 'Rio +20' conference on Sustainable Development, may also have had a function in strengthening engagement with (donor) governments, at a time when 'resilience' was quickly becoming almost the *lingua franca* of governments and international agencies.

With the above discussion papers and *Strategy 2020* it was felt that there was need for further explanation as to how resilience thinking can be translated into resilience actions. The *IFRC Framework for Community Resilience* (2014) presents three key elements, '(1) assisting communities as they adopt risk-informed, holistic approaches to address their underlying vulnerabilities, (2) regarding community resilience as demand-driven and people centred, and (3) being connected to communities by being available to everyone, everywhere to prevent and reduce human suffering'. It applies seven resilience characteristics with expected outcomes, indicators and examples of National Society actions. Although the framework acknowledges that measuring community resilience, and especially IFRC's impact on it and contribution to it, remains a challenge, the elaboration and presentation of practical examples makes it valuable for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, for it is by them that concepts are to be translated into practice.

Alongside this framework the IFRC launched the *One Billion Coalition for Resilience*. (IFRC, 2015a) This call to reduce disaster risk by strengthening community resilience aims to involve one billion people by 2025, by engaging with individuals, families and communities, as well as with governments and humanitarian actors and NGOs. It explicitly reiterates the governments' obligation to protect the safety and livelihoods of people, and calls on National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to develop their auxiliary role by engaging with and influencing related policies of these governments. While it is a highly aspirational call, two more implicit intentions are to move beyond conceptualisation, and to better position the Red Cross work with potential donors who are key stakeholders in bringing the approach to scale.

Following the establishment of the Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre, the Livelihoods Reference Centre[8] was created in 2010, offering a wide array of knowledge support for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that plan to become, or already are, active in strengthening livelihoods of vulnerable people. Most support is for activities in the field of agriculture and income generation, often linked to post-disaster recovery of communities. This focus is a reflection of the IFRC's overall focus on food security and nutrition when addressing livelihoods.

Finally, the 'Tehran Call for Action' (IFRC, 2015b) provides an urban lens to IFRC's resilience work. It urges the IFRC and its member Red Cross and Red Crescent societies to have a better understanding of urban vulnerabilities and related processes, as cities are increasingly the locus for many accumulating risks. In line with some key 'resilience' principles, it encourages collaboration with non-Red Cross / Red Crescent actors to build community resilience in cities and urban areas. The Call also urged the adoption of specific Red Cross Red Crescent policy and guidance on risk reduction and strengthening resilience in urban contexts. Being the first time such a seminar was held, and that a specific need for policy and guidance was expressed, the significance of this Call should not be understated.

Opportunities and challenges of applying a resilience approach for the Red Cross / Red Crescent

The above historical overview clearly illustrates that the 'resilience' approach, which has become a dominant approach within the Red Cross / Red Crescent, has evolved over time - a process that was described by some as developing a medicine for a target that kept mutating. It reflects the Fundamental Principle of Humanity ('to prevent and alleviate human suffering') and focuses predominantly on disaster risk reduction. This orientation presents opportunities for the organisation in terms of budgets, sustainability, greater effectiveness, and closer engagement with communities, thus capitalising on its unique auxiliary role. In the greater realm of humanitarian trends, it more firmly positions the organisation as not only responding to immediate needs, but also, through its work, reversing (or at least weakening) the trend of increased disaster risks. Under the resilience banner such preventive measures will take pressure off budgets that are then available for life-saving relief.

A key trait of a 'resilience' orientation is that it addresses multiple sources of risks, and as a consequence brings various disciplines, which are to be applied simultaneously, closer together ('breaking down silos'). As a consequence aligned interventions make effects more sustainable.

Linked to this is the need to put greater emphasis on the way these interrelated risks play out in communities. This requires a role that puts more emphasis on people's agency, for it is the felt consequences on the part of the community itself rather than the observed risks from the outsider that determines which risks are to be addressed, and how. The Red Cross / Red Crescent, with its vast network of community-based volunteers, seems ideally placed to establish such links and assume this role.

Another key feature is the application of wider spatial scales, particularly in relation to socio-ecological relationships between communities and the wider landscape[9]. These landscapes provide resources (for example through agriculture) and can act as buffers if well managed (for example, regulating water run off), but can be a source of risk if not well maintained (deforesting hill slopes and increasing the risk for landslides, for example). Including ecology, and its longitudinal character (cause and effect of risks can be spatially wide apart), is a novel approach that greatly contributes to a better (more holistic and systemic) understanding of 'risk'.

Finally, the position of the Red Cross / Red Crescent, as auxiliaries to their government, places the organisation in a unique position to engage in dialogue with governments on issues that contribute to risks for communities, and for which the governments hold a responsibility to address and remedy. Where the resilience approach stresses the need for civil society organisations to understand and speak out on communities' risks and the related causes, the Red Cross / Red Crescent has made its advocacy role explicit through Humanitarian Diplomacy policies and tools.

However, these above elements also hold challenges. The need to simultaneously address many the factors that contribute to strong livelihoods, implies that disciplines need to be brought together and that internal co-operation should be fostered. The documents discussed, however, go little beyond

acknowledgement, and do not address, for example, issues like measuring results. When also regarding factors that are outside the Red Cross / Red Crescent traditional fields or work, there is a risk that this may lead to a proliferation of responsibilities and related activities for which there is relatively limited knowledge. Being an organisation that largely relies on its own structures, the Red Cross / Red Crescent may be inclined to self-develop expertise rather than seek collaboration with other civil society organisations. This proliferation may in fact constitute 'mandate creep'. Moreover, 'external' collaboration will likely challenge established ways of working. Here the strength of the diversity and extent of its network in fact turn into a weakness: the different contexts, histories and accents of the individual organisations prevent the organisation, from taking a global view and moving beyond conceptualisation with tools for implementation and measurement. If it appears difficult to find and demonstrate practical proof of effectiveness, it is yet more difficult to access major donors and bring the approach to scale however well the concept resonates.

Contrary to disaster response, the place and scope of 'resilience' building work is based on Red Cross / Red Crescent initiatives and assessments. The considerations underlying such choices are obviously related to financial means and also to access, as a function of available volunteer network, systems and structures, and relationships with decision makers. This may put pressure on how the principle of Impartiality (making no discrimination as to whom to help, prioritising those in greatest need) can be applied. The accumulation of (especially urban) risk makes this increasingly important. As for the financial resources which may come from more development-oriented streams, there is the possibility that donor requirements may also challenge the selection of communities with which to engage in relation to the strength of the organisation's network for delivery.

While the organisation may be well situated to assume close links with communities, 'community empowerment' may at the same time not be a feature that many local branches can deliver, as they are often used to working as external providers of assistance rather than as internal facilitators. Moreover, an assigned role to address power structures may conflict with a volunteer's position in his/her community. Finally, the Humanitarian Diplomacy suggests the organisation speaks on behalf of vulnerable people, rather than organising them to take up this role.

The facilitating role towards communities will probably inevitably engage the Red Cross in the articulation of communities' concerns with policy makers. While 'vulnerability' conceptually puts more emphasis on development than 'resilience' (which is essentially making structures more robust rather than seeking changes), it is the embrace of the resilience concept that made the organisation more aware of repercussions in its relationship with decision makers if it is to take up this role. Although the non-political nature of the Fundamental Principles provides trust and access to policy makers and is thus a key asset for the organisation, it may at the same time conflict with its facilitating role in strengthening community resilience if communities' interests collide with those of governments. Research on early community resilience activities in the Philippines discusses these challenges (Duijsens, Faling, 2014). Many Red Cross / Red Crescent Societies will probably be less comfortable, or at least less familiar, with this role.

Finally, the wider spatial scale in understanding risk also constitutes a more complex and difficult issue, certainly in the multiple interrelated processes in cities, including the latter's links with its rural hinterland. With its vulnerability-dominated tools the traditional focus of the Red Cross / Red Crescent is usually limited to communities and their direct environment, and environmental links are hardly addressed in its resilience-oriented policies and strategies.

Conclusion

Being confronted with increasing vulnerabilities the Red Cross / Red Crescent recognises the need to complement its relief orientation with a longer-term focus on vulnerability and risk reduction, and on the role communities can play in this. It embraced 'resilience' early on as a concept that enables it to address many underlying causes and consequences in a holistic way. Especially for urban contexts, with multiple, complex and strongly interwoven processes that aggravate risks on a major scale, the approach seems fitting. However, putting the concept into practice provides not only opportunities in terms of effective prevention, profiling and positioning, but also presents challenges that will hold the organisation back if not addressed. The main issues relate to:

- the need to overcome the diverse nature of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and to move beyond conceptualisation towards making its interventions effective and accountable;
- the necessary access to funding opportunities;
- working in a more integrated way and combining disciplines;
- working in a more holistic way and linking up with non-Red Cross partners.

While the above issues are, to a large extent, of an organisational nature, two issues stand out that challenge the organisation's fundaments. Both are related to addressing the underlying causes of risk. The first one is to work within communities by assuming a facilitating role and working to empower local structures. This is a different role from the traditional relief provider which is mainly active in response, and in short-term interventions. While the organisation's volunteer base provides an unmatched basis, volunteers need to be well oriented and equipped to take up this role.

Furthermore, Humanitarian Diplomacy needs to be become firmly embedded in the organisation's culture. Activities to address drivers of risk, and issues that more broadly affect people's livelihoods, should be taken up widely and consistently. Reconciling the Fundamental Principles, notably on neutrality and independence, together with voicing the needs of affected communities (applying a 'needs-based approach' rather than a 'rights-based approach') is a matter of concern for many National Red Cross / Red Crescent Societies, especially where they want to protect their access to governments based on their auxiliary status.

The Red Cross / Red Crescent, with its vast network, long expertise in many sub-fields in the humanitarian domain, and a high degree of trust with all stakeholders, is ideally placed to strengthen the resilience of at-risk communities, including those in urban areas. At the same time the positioning also puts substantial and fundamental challenges on the organisation. The diversity of its network, the

positioning in relation to governments and politics, the reliance on predominantly internal structures and tools – all of these need to be approached differently and urgently if the organisation is to capitalise on its network, expertise and access. When taking up a central role in the resilience domain, these are substantial and inherent challenges that must take full account of the organisation's Fundamental Principles – the foundation of its work.

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Notes

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[2] Statistics show that the average number of disaster-affected people has slightly decreased over the past two decades, and stands at 189 million per year (albeit with great variation) (UNISDR *The Human Costs of Weather Related Disasters 1995-2015*, p. 9, available at
 http://www.unisdr.org/2015/docs/climatechange/COP21_WeatherDisastersReport_2015_FINAL.pdf). However, it can be expected that the mentioned trends, together with increasing effects of climate change and El Nino-events, will retain (possibly even increase) rather than decrease this number.

[3] The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction is built on the documents 'A safer world in the 21st century' and the 'Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a safer world' (1994).

[4] A key publication in this respect was that of Ben Wisner, Piers Blaikie, et al *At Risk* (Routledge, London, 1994)

[5] The mere fact of the existence of the 'Resilience Navigator' database that facilitates the search for a specific application of 'resilience' is proof of how densely populated the resilience landscape has become and how widely the application of the concept has proliferated. The Navigator has been developed by ODI can be found at
http://bwa-presentation.co.uk/odi_reviews/index.php

[6] The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment tools and guidelines have been revised several times since. See for the most recent publications (2007) for example http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/vca/vca-toolbox-en.pdf

[7] www.climatecentre.org

[8] www.livelihoodscentre.org

[9] One prominent example within the Red Cross / Red Crescent is the Partners for Resilience programme (see www.partnersforresilience.nl)