What resilient communities look like.

Introduction

There is no doubt that disasters have long term, complex and costly impacts on people and communities. Those challenges are considerable and complex, but they're also covered in detail in documents like the Red Cross Pre-budget Submission, Red Cross research reports and policy submissions. It can be tempting to fixate on the risks, deficits and dangers, but fear is not an effective driver of long term change or action. It is important at times, to pull back and remind ourselves that there is hope, and strength and capacity in people and communities. It can be useful to consider what success looks like, so we know what we're striving for.

Importance of measuring resilience

When we talk about damage and loss in disasters, we often use economic terms. While this is of course important, intangible value is more difficult to quantify, and has arguably greater significance. How do you assess the cost of a divorce or a lost job or a suicide or a sleepless night or a loss of identity or even an increase in anxiety? Most intangible damage and losses cannot be measured in monetary terms but are critical elements in building true resilience. It is important to factor these intangibles in when considering what disaster resilience might look like.

Learning from First Nations resilience

Without expecting First Nations people to solve problems driven by colonisation, it is important to acknowledge that there are practices, traditions and ways of being, inherent to First Nations communities that embody the resilience needed to overcome the challenges of climate driven disasters. Strengthening connection to country is a compelling example. Country is the term used by First Nations peoples to describe connection to the lands, waterways, and seas. Connection to country is critical for Australia's First Nations people's health and wellbeing. First Nations peoples recognise the reciprocal relationship with the land and water around us: look after Country and Country will look after you.[i] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had this connection to country disrupted through dispossession of traditional lands, assimilation policies, and systemic racism[ii] but have maintained important cultural and family system in the face of these destructive forces. Connection to country contains complex and insightful ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family, and identity.[iii] Learning from these ideas may have meaningful applications in looking at how to build resilience in a society that has largely lost connection to country.

A psychosocial approach

Red Cross focuses on providing psychosocial support before, during, and after disasters, based upon the five pillars of psychosocial support: safety, calm, self-efficacy, social connection, and hope.[iv] We focus on actions that strengthen peoples' psychosocial wellbeing to ensure they feel safe, calm, connected to others, able to help themselves, can see a positive pathway to recovery and have access to the services and support they need.

Building disaster resilience

Resilience is a process, rather than a fixed outcome or goal. Resilience is not about 'bouncing back' or the immediate ability to respond to negative events, but a process of positive adaptation before, during and after adversity. Like any adaptation process, it requires a long-term commitment. A focus on resilience includes an emphasis on strengths rather than on needs and deficits. Red Cross defines resilience as: "the ability of individuals, communities, organizations or countries exposed to disasters, crises and underlying vulnerabilities to anticipate, prepare for, reduce the impact of, cope with and recover from the effects of shocks and stresses without compromising their long-term prospects."[v]

Resilience is strengthened by bringing community members together to understand their collective risks, existing networks, strengths, and resources. Inclusivity is key; the more people that are involved in activities that foster a sense of community, efficacy and problem solving, the greater their resilience to adversity.

Resilience capacities

There are four indicators that we look for when building disaster resilience. If a community or person has all four elements, they likely have a high disaster resilience.

- o **Knowledge** relates to having access to, and the ability to act on appropriate information, communal knowledge, and local wisdom.
- o **Wellbeing** relates to a person or community's health and wellbeing status, including psychological coping ability.
- o **Security** relates to having adequate shelter, safety, and the capacity to maintain financial protection of assets and livelihoods.
- o **Connection** relates to the amount of support people can draw upon (social capital) to achieve goals or shared objectives. This can be through formal or informal links such as family, friends, local groups, and colleagues. It also relates to a connection to place.

Characteristics of a resilient community

In addition, Red Cross has identified 11 dimensions of a resilient community. These are drawn from the International Federation of the Red Cross *Roadmap to Resilience*. You will observe there is overlap with the resilience capacities above:

1. Risk management: A resilient community knows and manages its risks.
2. Health: A resilient community is healthy – mentally and physically.
3. Water and sanitation A resilient community can meet its basic water and sanitation needs.
4. Shelter: A resilient community can meet its basic shelter needs.
5. Food and nutrition security: A resilient community can meet its basic food needs.
6. Economic opportunities: A resilient community has diverse economic opportunities.

7. Infrastructure and services: A resilient community has well-maintained and accessible infrastructure and services.
8. Natural resource management: A resilient community has access to, manages and uses its natural assets in a sustainable manner.
9. Social cohesion: A resilient community draws on formal and informal community networks to act for the good of all in the community.
10. Inclusion: A resilient community fights exclusion on any basis, including gender, ability, ethnicity, religion, political view etc.
11. Connectedness: A resilient community has strong and supportive relationships with local government authorities and other external organisations, as well as access to information.

Community engagement is a critical component of emergency management and action to reduce disaster risk and strengthen resilience. The provision of information alone will not prompt many people to take preparedness action.[vi] Disaster resilience cannot be developed for, or on behalf of, communities. Rather, it relies on the sharing of information, understanding, decision-making, responsibility, and resourcing within and between communities and partners.[vii] Community preparedness programs must be grounded in community development and focus strongly on supporting existing networks and encouraging trust between community members, partners and government agencies.[viii] Our Disaster Resilience Program is underpinned by these principles and based on best practice and evidence from our work and internationally.

Some examples of the Red Cross human-centred, strengths-based approach include our work with people experiencing homelessness in South Australia, through the Out of the Storm project, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in Northern Territory with the Reimagining Resilience Project, and with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in Queensland.

Enablers of action
There are a number of factors that may prompt people to prepare for disaster:
- **Proximity**: Someone who has experienced a disaster or near miss (risk experience) may be motivated because they can see the threat is real, and its impact would be a problem (risk perception).
- **Capacity**: A key part of behaviour change theory is recognising that something can be done about it the change (response efficacy), and that an individual can do something about it (self-efficacy). It is also important to recognise that people have innate capacity to deal with adversity (coping capacity).
- **Personality Traits:** A range of pro social personality traits are important in promoting preparedness action, these include:
  - I value safety
  - I like to help (participation)
  - I trust my local government and local institutions (trust)
  - I do the right thing (social norming)

- **Connection**: Connection to country, place, community, and social capital is important. The longer a person lives in a place, and if they live in a house and own it, they are more likely to take preparedness action.
- **Demographics**: Several demographic indicators are correlated to higher levels of preparedness actions. These include people who have responsibility for others, are educated, living with someone, are healthy and are older. Both men and women take preparedness action, but they are different forms of action with men focussing more on the practical, and women focussing more in the psychosocial.

Psychological sense of community

There are four elements critical for creating a sense of community or belonging – a feeling that people matter to one another and to a group, and enjoy a shared confidence that needs will be met by belonging to the group:
- membership
- influence
- integration and fulfilment of needs
- shared emotional connection.

Membership relates to a feeling of belonging and identity within a community. It means that they invest time and effort in the group. **Influence** is a two-way concept. Members of a community can have influence over what a group does and as well as the group having some influence over its members. **Integration** and fulfilment of needs relates to a person being rewarded for their participation as well as being able to satisfy a broad range of needs from the community. A shared emotional **connection** relates to a shared history of the community.

Social capital

Social capital is a helpful concept for understanding the social networks, norms, and trust, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. It can be described as the networks and support that people rely upon in their daily lives, the trust that they develop, with each other and institutions, and the degree to which people are prepared to help each other without obligation (called reciprocity). It is seen as a type of capital, like financial and human capital, that can be invested in and drawn upon.[1] The presence of strong social bonds within communities and access to social networks are social capital features that might improve people's preparedness.[1]

People who feel a greater sense of connectedness, belonging, and sense of social responsibility in what they perceive to be their community, have higher levels of preparedness for hazard events.[11] A stronger sense of community may increase a sense of responsibility for others and thus "spills over" into preparedness activities (calling others, stocking up supplies, and related activities), and cohesiveness of communities can increase the odds of effective communication and coordination during a disaster[11] as well as increase preparedness initiatives.[1]

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Key Takeaways for disaster resilience

- All people have capacity to manage disruption from disaster, some will need a little more assistance.

- Strong social connection is the key to resilience building. If you get asked, what is the one thing you should do, it is swap phone numbers with your neighbours, not buy three litres of water.

- Resilience building is long term, change happens slowly but reducing the psychosocial impacts of disasters will be worthwhile.

[i] Hunter, S (2020) *Triggering Trauma: The Bushfire Crisis*. Indigenous X, Williamson, B, Weir, J and Cavanagh, V (2020) *Strength from perpetual grief: how Aboriginal people experience the bushfire crisis*

[ii] Aktinson, J (2002) *Trauma Trails: Recreating Song Lines*

[iii] Queensland Studies Authority (2008) *Relationships to country: Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people*

[iv] Hobfoll S, Watson P, Bell C, Bryant R, Brymer M, Friedman M et al. 2007, *Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence, Psychiatry, vol. 70, pp.283–315.*

[v] International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (2014) Framework for Community Resilience, Geneva

[vi] Paton, Douglas & Mcclure, John. (2013). Preparing for Disaster: Building Household and Community Capacity.

[vii] Australian Institute for Disaster (2020) *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience*

[viii] ibid