

Case Study 17



REDEVELOPING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



RESOURCES



SUSTAINABILITY

INFORMAL



TIME

THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

APARTHEID

PREVENT XENOPHOBIA



POWER

AUTHORITY

SOUTH AFRICA



HAZARDS

VULNERABILITY WATER



POLITICAL

RESPOND

UNSAFE

SERVICE DELIVERY

YOUNG EMPLOYMENT CARE BOYS

RECOVER

RESILIENCE

POVERTY CAPACITY COMMUNITIES RAPE

SUSTAINABILITY

GENDER

PREPARE

SECURITY

OXFAM

CHANGE COLONIALISM

POWER

ILLEGAL



LIVING PREPARE TOOLS

DRR SQUALOR EXPERIENCES

CLASS + WHOONGA



APPROACH

PARTNERS

REFLECTION



PROGRAM

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



ACHIEVE



CREDITS

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ACRONYMS

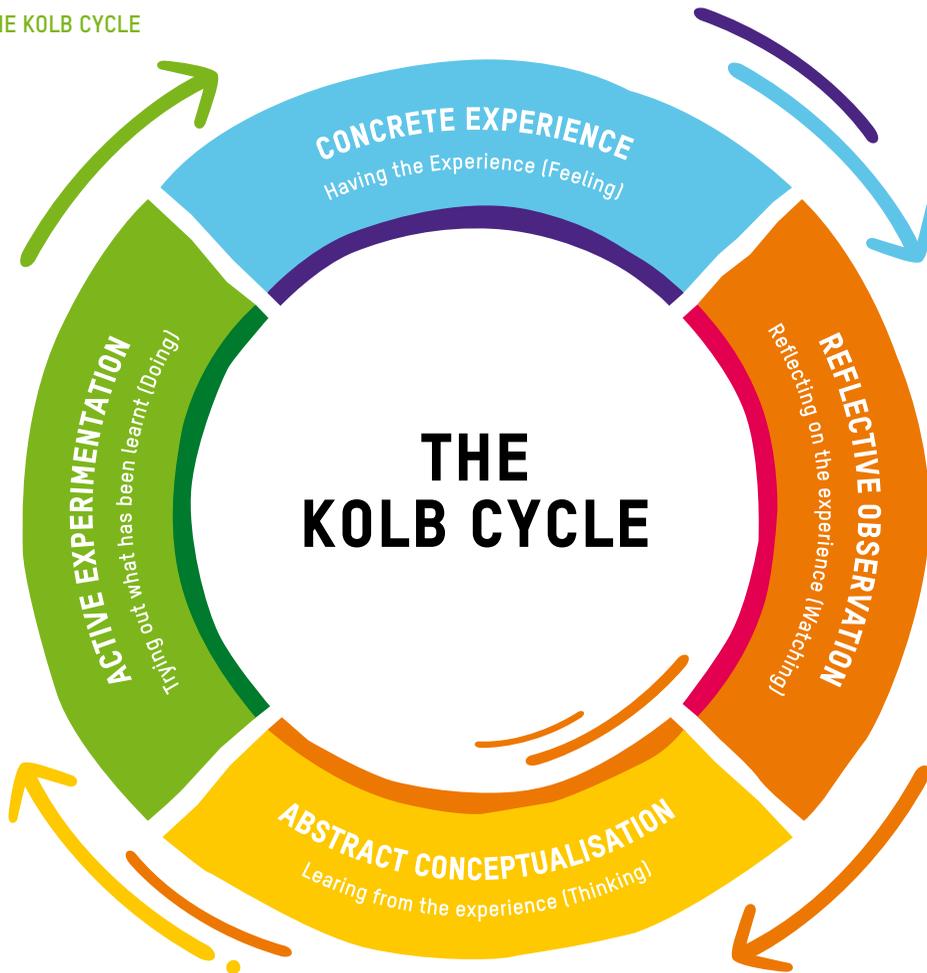
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OAU	Oxfam Australia
PCVA	Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment
PE	Project Empower
RiC	Rights in Crisis
RSS	Refugee Social Services
TB	Tuberculosis
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

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THE OXFAM IN SOUTH AFRICA DRR PROGRAM A TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH

FIGURE 1:¹ THE KOLB CYCLE



The Kolb Cycle was created by educationist David Kolb to illustrate the process of experiential learning, arguing that experience went hand in hand with reflection, followed by creating meaning, and experimentation. While his theory goes beyond this, the cycle has been adapted later in this publication to explain the Oxfam DRR Program.

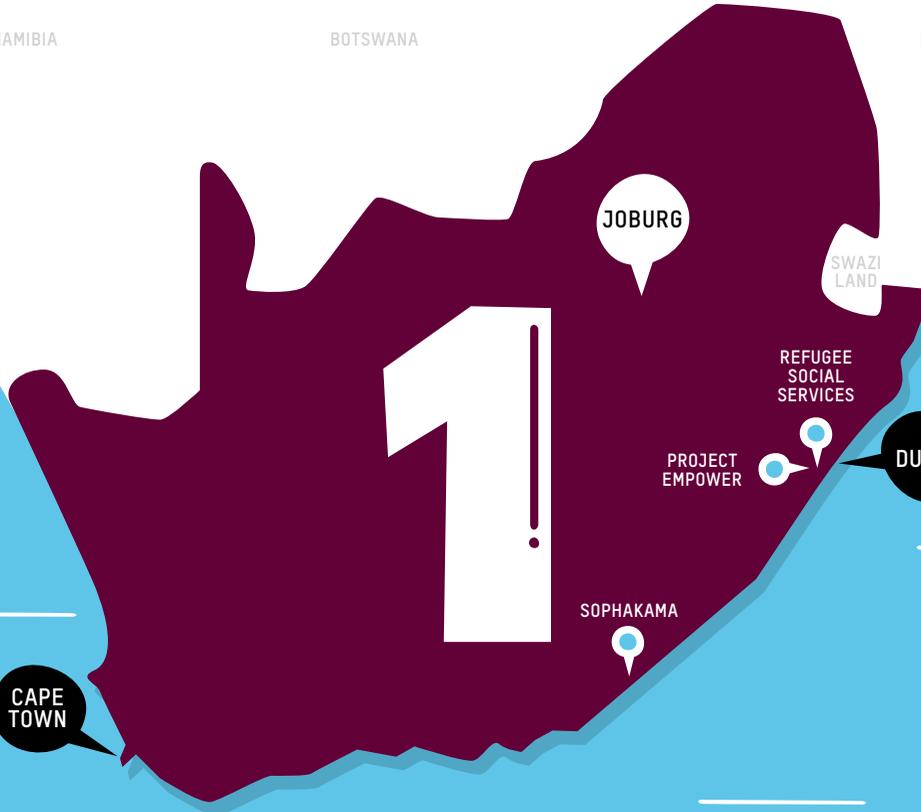
1. Kolb's Experimental Learning Theory and Learning Styles Model. 2013. http://www.jcu.edu.au/wiledpack/modules/fsl/JCU_090344.html

NAMIBIA

BOTSWANA

ZIM

MOZAM



CAPE
TOWN

JOBURG

SWAZI
LAND

REFUGEE
SOCIAL
SERVICES

PROJECT
EMPOWER

DURBS

SOPHAKAMA



UNDERSTANDING SOUTH AFRICA

A GENERATIONAL DISASTER



'It has been argued that the legacy of apartheid has bequeathed to South Africa a "culture of violence." This has been rooted in the notion that violence in South Africa has become normative rather than deviant and it has come to be regarded as an appropriate means of resolving social, political and even domestic conflict.' **GRAHAM SIMPSON**²

Almost twenty years into a legitimate government, South Africa continues to feel the effects of apartheid. The most obvious of these are racism and xenophobia, but there are also more subtle indications of the legacy left behind. Intolerance towards difference, abuse of perceived power – as evidenced by the high levels of violence against women – and other forms of violent crime are merely a few examples.

According to Jonathan Jansen and Nick Taylor, 'The post-apartheid government of 1994 inherited one of the most unequal societies in the world. Decades of social and economic discrimination against black South Africans left a legacy of income inequality along racial lines.'³

The new South Africa has been built on a strong foundation – unfortunately laid by apartheid and colonialism. While the insidious impacts of this foundation remain mostly unseen, they are felt at a very real level. The severe lack of service delivery is compounded in certain sectors, despite efforts by some government officials and many development workers. This is demonstrated by high levels of unemployment, abject poverty, and orphaned children forced to fend for themselves and their younger siblings. The problems are too huge to be easily rectified; these are the realities within which Oxfam partners work and in some cases live.

One of the difficulties for those working in community development is that reducing the risk of disaster in SA is far from straightforward. Vulnerability to disaster and the ability to build resilience is directly related to the complex, shifting context created by poverty and inequality, and to ignore the foundations, the shifting sands of development, would be to do a disservice to partners and the communities they serve. There is no 'one size fits all' checklist that works across communities. DRR is meaningless if it does not take into account the historical backdrop that has impacted on today's realities.

Tools of analysis can be useful, but by far the most important tools are the practitioners who listen, engage, reflect and learn, and who encourage those they work with to do the same. This is the context in which DRR in SA should be approached.

2. Simpson, G. 1993. 'Explaining Endemic Violence in South Africa.' Accessible from www.csvr.co.za

3. Jansen, J and Taylor, N. 2003. Educational Change in South Africa 1994–2003: case studies in large-scale education. Accessible from http://www.jet.org.za/publications/research/Jansen%20and%20Taylor_World%20Bank%20report.pdf/view



2

OXFAM IN SOUTH AFRICA'S URBAN DRR PROGRAM

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

As opposed to the traditional models of humanitarian response which were only activated *after a disaster occurred*, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) builds on the idea that it is better to take a proactive approach. Such an approach seeks to reduce the risk that vulnerable communities are exposed to and therefore mitigate, or at least reduce, the impact of hazards. Such action means not only that the losses experienced in disasters are reduced, but that quality of life can be improved.

A simple example of this can be found in the pre-emptive installation of waste management systems that are designed to withstand earthquakes. Not only would such action lead to a functional system that can withstand an earthquake should it occur, but it could also mean improved service delivery for that community regardless of whether the earthquake occurs.

WHAT OXFAM* SET OUT TO DO

Building on its experience in DRR and climate change adaptation, Oxfam hoped to further explore its understanding that contextual factors must be taken into account when undertaking DRR interventions. With the intention of drawing on the experiences of very different contexts in different countries, Oxfam Australia embarked on the program, 'choosing countries where it is the current or intended lead affiliate within the Oxfam confederation, and which are of particular strategic importance to the organisation.' The ultimate goal of the program was to reduce vulnerability and enhance the resilience of communities to disasters and climate change.

In order to do this, Oxfam set out to increase the ability of partner organisations and community members to analyse hazards and risks by:

- building their understanding of DRR;
- by supporting them to assess municipal DRR strategies and create DRR plans; and
- by offering training in assessment and risk mapping so they could monitor the implementation of the plans.

Oxfam worked towards:

- empowering communities to contextualise, identify, analyse, evaluate and treat short term disaster and long term climate change risks;
- testing project models, document and share lessons learnt
- raising awareness and providing support to targeted government agencies at provincial and national level in the design and implementation of their own DRR, CCA and response plans; and
- holding targeted government agencies and service providers in the countries accountable to deliver community entitlements and services to targeted communities.

THE ORGANISATIONS

DRR was a new area of work for Oxfam in South Africa. Knowing that the learning process would be one of reflection and feedback and that it would be necessary to have strong communicative relationships, Oxfam decided to work with partners with whom they had existing relationships. As such, all participating partner organisations had been partners for a number of years. While none of these organisations were organisations that specialise in DRR, all had experienced disasters – including small fires or floods – and could see the effects of disasters on the lives of the people with whom they worked. In South Africa the project focused on rural, peri-urban, and urban contexts. This report covers three urban based organisations, each in very different contexts:

- **Project Empower (PE)** – working with peri-urban informal settlements;
- **Refugee Social Services (RSS)** – working with refugees in the Durban inner city; and
- **Sophakama** – working within informal settlements in East London.

THE BROAD PROCESS

DRR was treated as part of the ‘normal’ program process. As such, partner organisations included DRR in their annual proposal and operational plans and reported on DRR as part of their biannual narrative and financial reports.

Within the period July 2011–June 2013, the DRR program process included:

- **an introduction to DRR** – partners were trained on how to use the Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment (PCVA) tool;
- **adaptation of the PCVA** – partners chose to adapt this tool to suit their circumstances if necessary;
- **a photography project** – in which participants explored their circumstances through the lens of a camera;
- **support and dialogue** – continued discussion with partner organisations; and
- **implementation** – partners applied DRR understanding in their work with organisations.

In addition, South Africa hosted an event to which partners, affiliates, DRR managers, and other country stakeholders were invited. This conference, titled ‘REZONE,’ allowed for sharing experiences, contexts and projects, and for people to engage in issues around their work on DRR.

This document was the product of a year-long process that led the reflection on the program. The author was present at REZONE and interviewed participating organisations and staff. As part of this reflection process, a feedback workshop was held in Port Elizabeth in October 2013 with the purpose of sharing with partners some of the key issues that had arisen in the process and allowing partners a chance to discuss and give further input on these issues. All DRR partners were invited to this process to broaden the discussion.

However, this document covers only the urban aspect of Oxfam Australia's South Africa DRR program; it is the result of individual and collective discussions with Oxfam South Africa and partners as well as the reflection workshop with DRR and other partners around its contents.

The document reflects on the experiences – ambitions, ideas, lessons, implementation, assumptions and possible ways forward – of the partners and the office staff in their journey exploring DRR in different South African situations and with very different approaches and programs.

According to Oxfam,⁴ DRR means ensuring that:

- vulnerable men and women understand the risks they face and direct their available capacities to make themselves more resilient;
- people and institutions manage the resources available to them in ways that do not increase, but reduce, risks to the most vulnerable. These include natural productive resources (such as land or water) and human resources (such as risk knowledge and education, organising community disaster management committees or advocacy groups);
- despite exposure to hazards, vulnerable people are able to break the cycle of poverty;
- people at risk can depend on early warning systems and regularly rehearse how to take action to reduce or avoid the impact of hazards. Early warning information must be accessible to all, especially traditionally excluded people such as those who do not speak the national language or are excluded from communal activities, such as women, older people or those with HIV and AIDS;
- effective institutional frameworks, policy, and legislation exist to reduce and manage disaster risk;
- organisations, institutions and governments who are responsible for reducing disaster risk exhibit good governance, transparency and accountability in their work; and increased funds are spent on activities that reduce vulnerability.

4. Oxfam Great Britain. 2009. Introduction to Disaster Risk Reduction: A Learning Companion





IMPLEMENTATION

'Vulnerable men and women understand the risks they face and direct their available capacities to make them more resilient'⁵

This DRR program sought to support contextually relevant, community based DRR programs. Subsequently, through the work of Oxfam and partner organisations, we ended up with five distinct partnerships. Below are the stories of three of these organizations.

CASE STUDY ONE

PROJECT EMPOWER: THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

My name is Nompumelelo. I live in an informal settlement called Bhambhayi. It's on the outskirts of Durban. Our settlement is close by the Ohlange River. It is a huge river that floods whenever we have heavy rains. Lately, we don't even know anymore, when those rains will come.

Most of us live in small rooms made of tin. All my possessions fit into my little room. When it rains, I can't go to work and we are torn between leaving our homes with our possessions for fear of them being stolen and staying back and risk drowning. We also risk our homes being taken over by others. Yes, that happens too.

Besides that, when it rains, I cannot go to work. This puts my job on the line. The rain has taken a lot from us. I lost two family members during the Irene rain. We were sleeping and they were wiped away by the rain in their sleep. Only one body was recovered after a few days. To date we have never been able to get help about recovering my cousin's body. The community members tried to search for the body but it was all in vain. In other instances we have seen helicopters helping search for bodies but in our cases, nobody cares.

I sell vegetables and if it rains and wipes away our gardens we cannot get vegetables and if we already have our vegetables, we cannot get to places where we sell.

There's this English saying, 'water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink.' That's what it's like for us sometimes – though we have all this water close by, it is not always safe to drink. We have had cholera outbreaks in the past.

These are all things that make you worry for your children. I can't always keep an eye on my little girl because I have so much to do to try to make a better life for her. Sometimes that just seems impossible.

5. Oxfam Great Britain. 2009. Introduction to Disaster Risk Reduction: A Learning Companion

I am so scared that something could happen to her because I can't watch her all the time. We have had fires in the past because of children playing with matches and paraffin. My child loves playing with the other children by the dump – the abandoned cars and furniture are so interesting to them. I guess they can pretend thereto be in another place and time.

But I have other fears – maybe even more than the rains and fires. Women and children, especially girls, are in constant danger of being raped. Rape is like something normal here. Women are not safe and can be assaulted walking home from a hard day's work. I am HIV positive and can you believe that this makes me even more vulnerable to being attacked? The Whoonga boys seek you out for your medication because they use this to smoke. It's hard to believe but it's true!

Some women think that being married makes you safer – it's just not true. Many of my friends are married but few of them are happy. Their husbands feel that because they are married they can beat them and force them to have sex whenever they want it. These same men get drunk and sleep around with other women too. As women we are at risk of the above disasters we are powerless and dependent on men. We also are not educated well to find better and stable jobs. The burden of care is on us and nobody cares about us. As a result we do not have time to take care and be in charge of our own health.

We shall always be at risk of all the above disasters because of our living conditions. The reality is that we will experience the same things over and over again as long as we live.

We do foresee disasters but we have no way of preventing them from happening because we do not have resources to better our lives.

We also know the dangers of living by the rivers or valleys but it the only land that we have access to. We stay there knowing well about the potential disasters, but "hope" keeps us going.

ABOUT PROJECT EMPOWER

Project Empower is a Durban based NGO focused on strengthening the response to HIV and AIDS. Their approach is to confront the unequal power relations that lead to vulnerability. As such, the organisation has a strong focus on gender relations that both influences and informs their approach to DRR.

For more than ten years, Project Empower has contributed to strengthening community responses to HIV and AIDS in KZN and other South African provinces. This has included working with a range of NGOs, CBOs and members of communities in increasing knowledge of HIV, developing understandings of the socio-economic drivers of HIV,

developing personal skills appropriate to mitigating the impact of the epidemic, and supporting community efforts to create more enabling environments for people vulnerable to HIV. This work involves making women and men aware of inequalities as drivers of HIV. These inequalities include gender and economic inequalities, but unequal access to services such as health care, policing, and water and sanitation also contribute to people's vulnerability.

In the last four years Project Empower has been working with young people in informal settlements to address the particular risks faced by this group. While this work was initially with both young men and women, more recently they have decided to focus on women. This decision was made based on the organisation's acknowledgement of the disadvantages experienced by young women at home, in relationships, economically, and at the hands of state service providers. These disadvantages create the circumstances through which young women experience heightened vulnerability to HIV.

Bhambhayi and Mhlasini are both informal settlements located on the outskirts of Durban, within the eThekweni municipality. Project Empower has worked with both these informal settlements for a number of years, supporting young, black, poor women to look at issues of sexual and reproductive rights with the aim of mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS and to reduce new infections.

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE VULNERABLE?

CONVENTIONAL HAZARDS

FLOODS

Heavy rains cause widespread damage, disruption and sometimes death to people living in both informal settlements: Mhlasini because it is close to the Riet River which is prone to flooding; and Bhambhayi because of the oHlange River which runs through the settlement.

Residents have to deal with losses, including the loss of personal possessions and homes; loss of loved ones; loss of income (as goods and livestock are washed away); and the loss of food gardens. Additionally, they may not be able to go to work because they are unable to get out of the rain locked communities; children are not able to attend school and movement is generally limited by the rains.

FIRES

Fires are another hazard which often, if not always, results in disaster. The living conditions of people in informal settlements mean that most rely on paraffin or candles as a source of light or fuel. Legal electricity is only available to those who can afford it. The shacks are built in close proximity to one another and many are made of chipboard. There are unsafe electrical connections made using cheap, thin insulation. All these factors combined are a recipe for disaster.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Communities don't always have access to clean water, and use the water from the river without purifying it. This can result in Cholera outbreaks – particularly in periods of flooding – and expose residents to other diseases.

NON-CONVENTIONAL HAZARDS

'In the minds and experiences of respondents there is no difference between the suffering inflicted by natural disasters and that experienced as a result of the abuse of women and children or as a result of illnesses such as HIV and AIDS and TB. The understanding of disasters presented by community members during the research should be respected, regardless of how it coheres to conventional understandings of disaster.'⁶

While conventional disasters have been widely documented, and their effects and causes broadly accepted and understood, Project Empower's research uncovered other experiences and perceptions of disaster. Laura Washington and Ntokozo Madlala of Project Empower recall their experiences of the DRR program:

'For a while it didn't feel like there was much integration and then it clicked at some time when we were doing the PCVA – we focused on young women and we asked them "what's your understanding of disaster and how do you define it?" and then it became clear that there is a young woman's perspective of disaster and we must work with that even if it doesn't link clearly with conventional notions of 'disaster'. At that point, that was the benefit of the project – because we could see this had relevance to the lives of our stakeholders.'

PROJECT EMPOWER'S PROCESS

After training around the PCVA, and after facilitating a workshop around the PCVA with partners (discussed later in this document), Project Empower conducted individual and group interviews with councillors and ward committees, young women and households in both Mhlasini and Bhambhayi. Project Empower wanted to understand disasters from the perspective of their beneficiaries and then design programming accordingly. As such, they aimed to:

- understand whether there were existing disaster risk reduction plans;
- determine what disasters the communities had already experienced;
- determine what disasters the communities anticipated; and
- discuss the steps people believed they could take to reduce the risk and impact of these disasters.

In addition to the interviews and focus group discussions, Project Empower participated in the photography project that OAU offered as part of the DRR process.

6. Washington, L., Madlala, N., Mhlambu, T., Ntshayinthali, N. 2012. Disaster Risk Reduction: A preliminary investigation in two informal settlements.



PROJECT EMPOWER'S RESPONSE

Project Empower's approach is to build consciousness and ability in communities so that people can advocate for their own rights.

Working with six groups of young women, Project Empower has begun discussions about their lives as young women, what they can do through supporting each other, and what kinds of advocacy they can engage in to make their lives easier.

LOOKING AT SPACES

Young women are the most powerless people in informal settlements. Acknowledging this, Project Empower has realised that the ability to make community-wide change is beyond their organisational scope. Instead they have continued their work by running a series of sessions encouraging young women to look at their personal spaces (more often than not their own rooms) from three angles. The rationale is that this is the space where a young woman cooks, looks after a child, bathes and sleeps, and thus there is a need to focus on making this space work optimally for her.

1. **Safety** – how do we make our homes safer?
2. **Functionality** – how do we make this work best for our needs?
3. **Aesthetics** – how do I make my personal space look and feel nicer – to suit my ideas of beauty?

Ultimately, Project Empower holds to the feminist principle that “the personal is political”. They believe that helping young women see that they can take some control over their personal spaces will make the transition to dealing with bigger issues that much easier to imagine and achieve.

KEY FINDINGS

A range of combined factors make women in informal settlements especially vulnerable to what they consider to be disaster at a very personal level, in particular poverty, gender inequality and HIV. Poverty further entrenches this vulnerability, with women having little or no negotiating power within a range of relationships.

GENDER POWER RELATIONS

The fact that they are women makes them more vulnerable to physical abuse, to being targets of criminals, to rape and to psycho-social abuse. Women are in constant threat of being raped or attacked simply because they are women and are seen as easy targets. Women in informal settlements are particularly vulnerable. Their deep poverty causes them to be susceptible to promises that might lead them into danger; their homes might not be secure enough to effectively keep out those who could cause them harm, and criminal activities are rife in their areas.

It could be argued that married women are particularly vulnerable simply by believing themselves to be safe, or due to the fact that their partners abuse the right to enforce 'marriage privileges.' A women in Project Empower's survey responded: *'My husband beats me up every day as he drinks heavily. He demands food and sex every time he comes home. He knows that I do not work but expects me to be able to find 'nice' food for him. With the little money that he gets, he buys alcohol. It is a disaster because the children are traumatised and are scared of him.'*

HIV AND AIDS

A positive status causes a woman to be even more vulnerable. Mothers live in the constant fear of dying, or getting sick and leaving children to have to fend for themselves. Incredibly, women who are HIV positive are made even more vulnerable because of their status as Stochrin (an antiretroviral) is sought after by criminals and drug users⁷.

WORKING WITH AUTHORITY

Working with those in authority is not straightforward. Sometimes those who are meant to provide services withhold them or treat people badly who are seeking those services. A visit to the clinic can not only last an entire day, but can leave a women feeling further violated, as one young woman in PE's research relates:

'I have two children, aged 9 and 3. I sometimes do not have money to take them to the clinic but if I happen to miss the return dates, I am shouted at and told that I am an irresponsible mother who just "opens her thighs to a man" and cares less about the health of her children. I have decided to stop taking my children to the clinic. I just hope they do not get diseases but I try to give them healthy food because going to the clinic is a disaster.'

For Project Empower it is important that the current definitions of disaster are reviewed to reflect the very personal issues experienced by the people they work with such as:

- losing a loved one;
- being raped or having a loved one raped;
- being regularly abused;
- having possessions stolen;
- being accosted or ostracised because of HIV status; and
- being maltreated by those in power.

7. Antiretrovirals are believed to be used in a drug called Whoonga.

'people and institutions manage the resources available to them in ways that do not increase, but reduce, risks to the most vulnerable – this includes natural productive resources (such as land or water) and human resources (such as risk knowledge and education, organising community disaster management committees or advocacy groups)' ⁸

CASE STUDY TWO

REFUGEE SOCIAL SERVICES: AN ORGANIC APPROACH

'You know, when I came here in South Africa, I didn't know anybody, I didn't have a place where to sleep or any food to feed my children. I didn't even know how to write English or even to talk English. Even now [I struggle], but I think it's better now than the way I was before I came here. They helped me to learn English and home-based care. Something I never knew about children: how to play with children, I never knew about that – how to teach children, how to take care of children. You know, always we were just locking the children inside and going to work the whole day. The children we locked inside and we came back at night. But when we learnt about the home-based care they told us, "no, no you mustn't do that!"'

RSS offers initial support to asylum seekers through an orientation session to help them adapt to starting a new life in South Africa.

'The biggest challenge is around gender. Where we are come from, this problem of gender is high in culture – as a woman I can't say anything in front of my husband. What he says, what he does [goes], he can beat me, he can do what he wants with me. I just say no; he is my husband you see. But now I tell the other women they have to speak out for their own safety, for their own good. They say "no", they can't speak out because it goes against our culture. Many women in our community are being abused like this.'

Many refugee women accept this abuse because they don't have the means to take care of their children on their own. They are financially dependent on their husbands and have no family support systems in South Africa.

'When I stopped breastfeeding my second child I never know which food I can give her. My daughter she was very sick, sick. I was buying expensive food and giving her but, aye, I don't know but at the end of day I had to go to the hospital. My child was very sick. The doctor told me my daughter had kwash [Kwashiokor] I say no, no to doctor. I thought this doctor is a liar. ... I'm getting little money, but I'm buying expensive food, how come my child has kwash? But when I learnt about this community wellness [RSS's Community Wellness Program], we learnt about that how to feed the children, which food I have to give them, and I could see I was wrong.'

8. Oxfam Great Britain. 2009. Introduction to Disaster Risk Reduction: A Learning Companion

The Community Wellness Workers teach clients how they can buy nutritional food that is affordable. They cover pre- and post-antenatal care, maternal health, immunisation, hygiene, and safety of children and the household.

'When I came here it was difficult for me. I never know how to talk English, and I never know how to write English and now when I go there to the hospital, they are talking to me in their language, and I don't understand.'

RSS arranges English language classes as well as for an interpreter to accompany a mother to the hospital to ensure that she understands what is communicated to her, thus preventing death or illness.

'When you jumping taxi you not speaking Zulu language they are beating you, take everything from you, they say this is kwerekwere. They throw you out when the taxi is still going. After that, where I was staying there in Jumbo House, people were busy fighting at night. When they see you pass, if you kwerekwere, they beat you or kill you.'

Once, in a place we were staying, we were sleeping, and they came with petrol, paraffin and throwing matches in the doors where there were foreigners. At the police station they said "these kwerekwere cause a lot of problems, move from here." We waited for morning and came here to RSS and they helped us get a new place and with rent.'

RSS has developed a kit, 'Unity in Diversity,' which is used in schools and communities to promote integration, encourage peace and eradicate xenophobia.

'...Because, like if you a refugee, there is so much trauma because you see many people have been killed, your family members have been killed, you saw many people dying, you came here with nothing. When I was here I didn't have anything. Nothing, nothing! So you experience a lot of trauma and so as you expect to see a caring community, a caring family, so if you found that now it's different from what you expecting because mostly I can say that South African community is not very caring.'

But I understand because sometimes they don't know who is a refugee and why they came here, and also they have their own problems. You see that there was apartheid and then when they left apartheid they were thinking they can enjoy their lives. Instead there are those people who come to add the burden on what they have. So being a refugee in SA is not easy. You need to know that you have problems, you need to know that you need to work out those problems, and you need to be strong to get out of those problems.'

'Last time when I moved to St Georges, around Park Street, this guy – the South African – tried to rape my child, my daughter. He tried to rape my child but he failed because I just came quickly at home. I went to report him, but the police didn't treat me well because I'm a foreigner. They say what you coming to do here, you kwerekwere. Where are you from first? I said I'm from Burundi and they just say, "Ag".'

RSS Community Wellness Workers will counsel mothers and children on skills to prevent sexual abuse.

ABOUT REFUGEE SOCIAL SERVICES

Originally a project of the Mennonite Central Committee, Refugee Social Services (RSS) is a partner of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The organization, based in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, provides support services to refugees in South Africa. These services aim to replicate and develop the social safety nets lost when people are forced to flee their homes. Beyond these services, RSS acts as a bridge between clients and legal and health systems through an extensive referral system.

It could be argued that Refugee Social Services (RSS) was 'doing' DRR before Oxfam's DRR Program intervention as their work helps prevent disasters for refugees. All RSS interventions work towards alleviating the hardships that perpetuate vulnerability.

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE VULNERABLE?

APPALLING LIVING CONDITIONS

The refugees live in dismal conditions – flats are overcrowded and in many instances different families are separated by simple cardboard constructions. In one flat an old swimming pool lies disused and filthy, still filled with stagnant water. The hazard to children is manifest and the potential for disease rife. The living conditions contain many hazards that could lead to fires including open flames, poor electrical connections, and the materials used to partition the buildings. Overcrowded conditions exacerbate the danger and pose a threat to people being evacuated safely should a fire occur. In many buildings, there are no functioning fire extinguishers – they are either broken or non-existent. Burst water pipes mean dirty and unhygienic ablution facilities, which are often shared among many families living in close proximity. In some places broken glass poses a hazard to residents, particularly children.

XENOPHOBIA AND THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE: LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Refugees experience xenophobia – fuelled by high levels of unemployment, poor service delivery, and poverty – in their interactions with those in authority, neighbours or simply through random encounters. The inability to speak local languages leaves people who already feel like outsiders feeling even less welcome, and more ostracised. Through commemorating World Refugee Day and Heritage Day, RSS attempts to share cultural differences and similarities by sharing food, dances, music etc. RSS also offers English lessons to clients to help them to adapt.

GENDER VIOLENCE AND INEQUALITY

In addition to women having to care for children, very often on their own, they are also most vulnerable because of the gender inequalities that are accepted as the norm. Rape by outsiders and by intimate partners is accepted and women and their children are the easiest targets.

REFUGEE SOCIAL SERVICES' PROCESS

'People and institutions manage the resources available to them in ways that do not increase, but reduce, risks to the most vulnerable – this includes natural productive resources (such as land or water) and human resources (such as risk knowledge and education, organising community disaster management committees or advocacy groups).'⁹

Refugee Social Services has access to the refugee community and to enter the buildings through the range of services they offer (including community wellness work and an impressive child protection program of supporting small crèches). Refugee Social Services has a trained team of 14 DRR fieldworkers who continue to interview residents and monitor risks and hazards in buildings. Refugee Social Services have increased the number of buildings in which they work and they have identified residents in the buildings that can be trained as DRR educators. This includes supervisors and security personal who have already received some informal training in DRR. Given the living arrangements, it has become necessary that work be done on the household (rather than the community) level.

THE HOME-BASED CHILDCARE PROGRAM

RSS's support goes beyond simply awareness raising and education, to providing some form of income wherever possible. Where they see a potential solution, they explore its possibilities.

Refugees do not receive a start-up package when they arrive in South Africa. Because they have no source of income, they have to seek employment. Many families come with children. Women are forced to leave their children locked in flats in order to seek work. This has had disastrous consequences in some cases.

'We found that some of the women that came out were not formally educated and so finding work for them was difficult. And we had incidences of children falling out of windows and being in a flat that's burnt. So we looked at that and we thought we needed to do something because childcare is not cheap in South Africa. ... So we decided that we needed to work on a home-based childcare program which would benefit both the women that were not working as well as the children that were being locked in homes, because we tried to make it as affordable as possible.' Yasmin Rajah, RSS Director

Combining the need for childcare with the need for income, RSS trains unemployed women from the refugee community to offer home-based childcare. In this way, parents could leave their children in a safe space while the women looking after them earned a small stipend that contributed to both their households and to their sense of personal wellbeing.

These women are trained on childcare, safety, nutrition, and development, and then assisted with opening a home-based childcare centre.

9. Oxfam Great Britain. 2009. Introduction to Disaster Risk Reduction: A Learning Companion

COMMUNITY WELLNESS WORK

One of the programs RSS runs is a Community Wellness Worker program. Through it, 14 members of the refugee community were trained to educate and raise awareness on a range of issues including HIV, raising children, diseases and healthy eating.

It was years ago that a fire in the Durban inner city prompted the organization to respond by raising awareness around fire hazards. When Oxfam spoke to RSS about them being involved in the pilot DRR program they felt it was a good fit and would add value to the work they were doing already.

The 14 Peer Educators have been involved in the DRR program and are also called DRR Fieldworkers. They attended the initial PCVA training offered by OAU and the subsequent workshop run by PE to interrogate the tool and adapt it to suit the organisations' purposes.

Three buildings were targeted for the pilot and RSS approached the landlords to gain their support. Two of the landlords agreed to the peer educators entering the buildings and conducting their work while another refused. The DRR Fieldworkers worked in teams and visited people in the flats, helping them reflect on the potential hazards, their experiences of disaster and the possible hazards, and how to mitigate future disasters. The DRR work has been extended to 11 buildings – those which were deemed most hazardous. There is a high turnover of tenants in these buildings and thus the fieldworkers visit continually so that new arrivals can be educated as well.

KEY FINDINGS

POWER RELATIONS: WORKING WITH LANDLORDS

There is still a lot of work to be done regarding relationships with landlords and getting them to change the way they relate to the flat-dwellers. In essence they are slumlords and don't care about the people living in their buildings. This is one of the major challenges for RSS as they don't want to risk negative consequences for their clients. Refugees and asylum seekers always seek cheap and affordable accommodation. Many buildings in the city require criteria that the refugees and asylum seekers cannot meet such as identity documents, proof of salary, and rent deposits that they cannot afford. Many refugees do menial labour earning very little money.

REDEFINING COMMUNITY

Ideal DRR work implies or suggests a community. For RSS, the communities they work with are people from all parts of Africa with hugely varying degrees of education and experience, different cultural and religious practices, and different ideas about values and morals; all they have in common is their displacement and 'alienness.' They are thrown together not by choice but by lack of it. Organizing in such conditions is vastly complicated by this reality and it cannot be overlooked. As such, work in this area is slow and painstaking.

'People and institutions manage the resources available to them in ways that do not increase, but reduce, risks to the most vulnerable – this includes natural productive resources (such as land or water) and human resources (such as risk knowledge and education, organising community disaster management committees or advocacy groups).'

'Vulnerable people are prepared for hazards and get out of poverty in spite of them.'

*'People at risk can depend on early warning systems and regularly rehearse how to take action to reduce or avoid the impact of hazards – early warning information must be accessible to all, especially traditionally excluded people such as those who do not speak the national language or are excluded from communal activities, such as women, older people or those with HIV.'*¹⁰

CASE STUDY THREE

SOPHAKAMA: CREATING CHANGE THROUGH COLLABORATION

'My name is Noluthando and I am a community worker and activist. I live in Joe Slovo Settlement near Port Elizabeth. I also live in this community so I feel very strongly about what happens in it.

When we started this work on disaster, we were amazed at what we found out from people, and what we learnt about our own issues and concerns as a community.

Yes, we deal with natural disasters constantly – such as floods and fires. Our city is known as “The Windy City” in South Africa. This is another natural disaster we face constantly. In 2002 we had winds so strong they blew people off their feet. We also have heavy rains and our Joe Slovo is near a river.

We live with the threat of disaster every day. Some from natural causes and others that are quite different. When we did our PCVA study we found some interesting things.

If we say that disasters are “the serious disruption of the functioning of the community causing widespread human, material or environmental losses and impacts which exceed the ability of the community to cope using its own resources”, then these are the disasters that we face on a daily basis: Heavy rains and the threat of climate change, unsafe electrical connections, fires, heavy wind, drug and alcohol abuse, a lack of family planning, particularly among young people.

10. Oxfam Great Britain. 2009. Introduction to Disaster Risk Reduction: A Learning Companion



So we as Sophakama have a lot of work to do to try to help people cope and to educate them about the dangers of certain practices.

I hope that with the work we do we can continue to see changes for the better in our community.'

ABOUT SOPHAKAMA

Many informal settlements dot the landscape of South Africa. People come here from rural areas, seeking work and a better life, believing things will be better closer to the cities.

According to Afesis,¹¹ at least 10 percent of South Africans live in urban informal settlements. Sophakama Community Based Development Care and Support Programme (referred to in this study as 'Sophakama') is a not-for-profit organisation based in the Joe Slovo informal settlement in Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth). Although the organisation began working in Joe Slovo in 1999 it became formally registered in 2003.

Sophakama offers a range of programs in Joe Slovo community including home-based care, an orphaned and vulnerable children program, prevention and awareness raising programs and advocacy work. Sophakama's strength lies in its ability to collaborate with organisations and the government in providing services and increasing the living conditions for people living in the community. The fact that it is based in the community gives it credibility, as do the many changes it has brought about through its advocacy and program delivery.

Sophakama's staff sits on the community forums and Sophakama acts as liaison between community needs and government services. Because Sophakama has legitimacy, government must collaborate with the organisation in order to work with the community. While the Metro struggled to get disaster work going in Joe Slovo, Sophakama has easy access and credibility and so is able to assist with implementation.

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE VULNERABLE?

For Sophakama the PCVA helped them realise they were already engaging in DRR work without being aware of it. As a responsive organisation, Sophakama takes note of the experiences of its people and tries to find ways to learn from those experiences, making changes and advocating for improved services. Residents of Joe Slovo are vulnerable to:

FIRE

Fires are a constant threat because of unsafe electrical connections. In Joe Slovo these can quickly raze an entire community because of the strong winds associated with this region.

¹¹. A New Response to Informal Settlements. <http://www.afesis.org.za/index.php/sustainable-settlements/45-sustainable-settlements-articles/772-a-new-response-to-informal-settlements->

FLOODS

Flooding is a constant threat as the settlement is built on the banks of Slovo River.

UNSAFE ELECTRICAL CONNECTIONS

Unsafe electrical connections are a fact of life in many informal settlements and townships in South Africa. Many simply cannot afford legal electricity and even those who can are at risk of it being 'stolen.' Unsafe electrical connections pose a constant danger to residents – particularly children.

WIND

Strong winds in this area fuel fires and are responsible for damage of homes and property, often leaving already poor families destitute.

FAMILY PLANNING

An ongoing concern for Sophakama is the high rate of teen pregnancy. Young women receive a meagre child support grant of R280 a month, provided they are not working. Instead of alleviating poverty it simply increases it, thus contributing to the cycle. The overwhelming number of unwanted and orphaned children is a disaster (according to Sophakama). These children are left with no family structures, no money, and no means of support other than from NGOs like Sophakama and perhaps kind neighbours.

SOPHAKAMA PROCESS

Specifically, in relation to the DRR program, Sophakama has made the following inroads:

- Liaising with the Fire Department who has offered fire fighting training for volunteers and community members. Additionally, they are working together with the Fire Department to motivate for the establishment of a fire station in Joe Slovo.
- Unsafe electrical connections have been a constant concern and have resulted in the death of children and community members who have walked across live wires lying on the ground. The unsafe connections have also been the cause of shack fires – increasing vulnerability of already desperately poor families. Initially, Sophakama's response was to argue for simply removing the connections. Through discussions with Inger Harber of Oxfam Australia (Durban office) and other Oxfam partners, they have relooked at this strategy, acknowledging that in fact people in their community have no other recourse. The focus has shifted to educating people about safety; for example, instead of having wires lying on the ground where they can be stepped on, community members are advised to ensure that they are wound around a pole, inaccessible to people. The organisation is currently in negotiations with Eskom to provide safe new globes and to provide more electrical connections in the community.

EXPERIENCES OF WORKING WITH THOSE IN AUTHORITY

In Joe Slovo 'chief engineers' have become responsible for connecting electricity. These community members are taking safety into their own hands.

- Linked to the above is the continued effort to get residents to move from unsafe areas, which are not zoned and therefore cannot receive electricity, to areas to which Eskom is willing to provide electricity. In other areas, the electricity supplier is installing new cables in preparation for electrification.

Sophakama is working with the Red Cross to develop educational material and to ensure that when there are disasters; Red Cross will work with Sophakama's volunteers and DRR committee.

- Sophakhama is centrally involved in ensuring that housing provision is improved and that service providers are held accountable and have meetings with the Housing Development Agency and contractors.

DEALING WITH DISASTER MITIGATION

Sophakama's plans around DRR include:

- Running workshops on how to build stronger shacks, with higher foundations for those close to the river;
- advocating for the municipality to ensure that builders and engineers adhere to proper specifications when building houses in the settlement;
- encouraging people to dig trenches around their homes, thus redirecting the water
- educating people on how to be safer with electricity
- assisting the fire department in training volunteer fire fighters in the community, and ensuring that there is firefighting equipment present and visible in the community; and
- running advocacy and education programs around family planning, alcohol and drug abuse and fire prevention and response.



**PARTNERS' EXPERIENCES
OF THE DRR PROGRAM**

THE PARTICIPATORY CAPACITY AND VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT (PCVA)

The PCVA was developed as a tool to be utilised to gather information about risks and hazards affecting communities. The process is thorough and inclusive and requires approximately 3–5 days with community members. The general response to the PCVA in its current form was that it was impractical to implement as it required a lot of time.

Subsequently, while the PCVA does offer useful guidance for the types of information that organisations should include in their DRR work, the process should be adapted to suit the individual organisation. Following a workshop on how to use the PCVA, partner organisations in this program adapted the tools and went on to implement the PCVA process in ways that suited them. In one instance, this included a door-to-door survey that captured key information. In another instance, partners used the questions that would be answered through the PCVA process to facilitate a series of focus group discussions.

THE PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

Following feedback from the first year of DRR programming, Oxfam offered partner organisations a photography workshop series that aimed to build basic photographic skills of fieldworkers while supporting them to gather information about risks and hazards in their various communities. It was envisioned that the emerging images could be used for future awareness raising exercises and as materials for advocacy. The workshop consisted of a 6 week series of weekly meetings (with one group meeting in the morning and the other in the afternoon). At the meetings, participants learnt photographic skills and were each given a disposable camera with an assignment list. Each week, the photographs from the previous week were discussed with the consultant drawing out key photographic and DRR information.

Partners had different experiences of the photography workshop. For Project Empower, it was seen to be somewhat invasive and participants have yet to see the benefits for them – ‘who do they benefit?’ ‘How do any of these exercises serve to empower the people they are about? That is the critical question that cuts across all our work – and we don’t understand how.’

On the other hand, RSS participants found it a useful exercise in honing in on issues. RSS participants would like to make use of this tool over the long term as a tool for advocacy and for tracking change.

One of the partners expressed concern that these kinds of interventions could lead to expectations by their constituencies that something would be done to alleviate their conditions.

There was also an impression that there was a lot asked of partners over a short time and that a lot of money was spent on related matters other than implementation – almost like an overbalance towards conceptualization as opposed to practice.

THE REFLECTION WORKSHOP

Shortly before the completion of this review, a workshop was convened for DRR partners and a few others with an interest in the work. The purpose was to share with partners the emerging issues and to allow them an opportunity to share their views and experiences.

This workshop generated a lot of discussion, some of it unrelated to DRR, but nevertheless important.

COMMON THEMES FOR THE THREE ORGANIZATIONS

DEALING WITH AUTHORITY

While each of the organizations had different issues related to authority figures, this was a recurrent theme.

FOR PROJECT EMPOWER

DRR work brings the organization closer to those in power, with the likelihood of confrontation more present. As a service organization from outside, this is not ideal. There is also a concern for the wellbeing of the young women from communities, that they might be victimized. Project Empower recognizes, also, that sometimes those in positions of authority – such as councillors – have little power to change the material conditions of the people they serve. This complicates their relationships further.

FOR RSS

RSS's main difficulty is in changing the mindsets of landlords so that they can treat their tenants with dignity. This is compounded by the fact that there is no regulation of landlords in the urban slums in which many refugees and migrants live.

FOR SOPHAKAMA

Sophakama has a good working relationship with government but this is not always without complications. There is a constant give and take and decisions always require negotiation.

UNSAFE ELECTRICAL CONNECTIONS

Given that the three partners all work with those most marginalized and who experience extreme poverty, the issue of 'illegal' electricity connections is constantly present.

'This is a hard one because I cannot survive without electricity and neither can I afford legal electricity. I will use illegal electricity as long as I live. I will always be in danger. The best thing that I can do is to have the connection neatly tucked away so that children do not trip on them.'

As an issue of principle, partners have chosen to use the term 'unsafe' electrical connections rather than illegal. The fact is that people in these communities need electricity but do not have affordable access to it. They are faced with using either paraffin and candles or unsafe electrical sources. Sophakama's initial focus was on curbing 'illegal' connections. The work and approach of other partners around this influenced their thinking, causing them to question the illegal connections.

Ultimately, they changed their focus to making the unsafe connections safer so that people would not be harmed by badly connected electrical wires and cables lying on the ground.

THE POLITICS OF POVERTY

A recurrent theme is that people living in poverty are made responsible for their own wellbeing. South Africans are constitutionally entitled to safe living conditions, food, education, and wellbeing. In reality, the poorest of the poor must fend for themselves, often being treated as lesser beings. They have limited to no rights and seemingly no recourse. Black women are the ones who bear this burden the most.

The Oxfam Humanitarian Strategy captures this succinctly; 'Poverty is eroding livelihood systems, is pervasive and is driven mainly by unemployment. Despite a significant investment in social services, the country faces criticism for not meeting its development responsibilities as conditions in some communities continue to deteriorate.' (Humanitarian Strategy for Oxfam in South Africa (2013–2016)).





FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THEORY AND PRACTICE: PUTTING PRACTICE FIRST

'When we went into this project we were thinking at a higher level than on the ground and this has been a big learning; when we conceptualized the work we spoke about dealing with legislation but it's only now, 18 months later, that we may even look at it.' INGER HARBER, OAU STUDENT LIAISON AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION OFFICER.

For Oxfam, realities on the ground are far different from the ideal. Initially, Oxfam planned to work with those in authority, but partners' experiences dictated otherwise. Working with landlords and those in authority has been frustrating for partners, with their work constantly blocked by belligerent or uncaring landlords and those in other positions of power. For Project Empower, as an example, their work around DRR placed their relationships with the ward councillor in jeopardy. Those in power sometimes feel threatened by this work because it highlights their own failings. Going forward, Oxfam will explore these, but with a strong sense of having learnt from the experiences of partners and putting those experiences and concerns at the centre of the response.

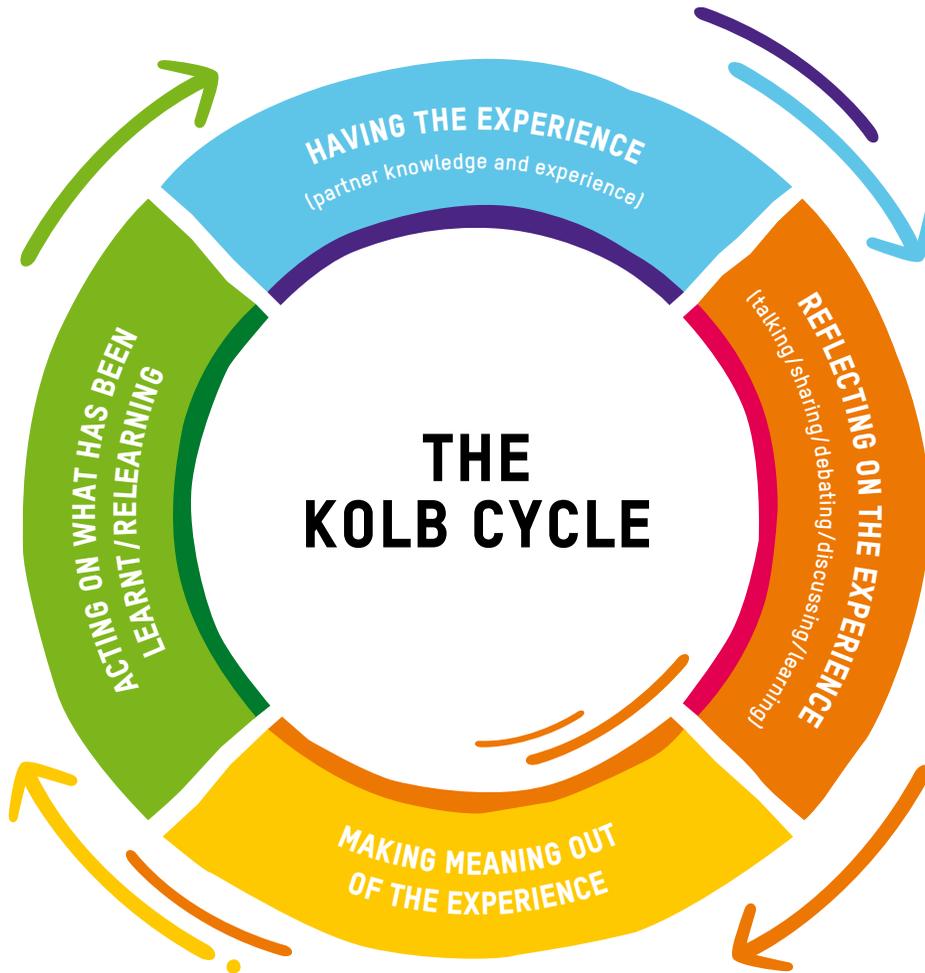
This reflection process, in conjunction with the DRR work, has highlighted:

- the importance of learning from experience and using that as the benchmark for future learning;
- that learning in this work is continuous and ever changing; and
- that the solutions cannot be found in theories but rather in the experiences of partners.

The process has also validated Oxfam's approach – of listening, of being willing to learn, and of allowing partners the space to learn from their realities. For the office the term 'organic' is not a buzz word but a commitment to allowing learning from experience and using that learning to inform the creation of future theories. Two years into the program, there has been a shift in the understanding of DRR. The reality is that DRR is about long-term work and a deliberate, considered approach to development.



FIGURE 2: OXFAM IN SOUTH AFRICA'S DISASTER RISK REDUCTION PROGRAM¹²



12. Figure 2 is an adaptation of the Kolb Cycle which has been altered slightly to address the needs of Oxfam's DRR program.

AN APPROACH TO PROGRAMMING

'Are we there to change what people are doing to suit the DRR objectives or are we there to aid people in building on what they've done?' PUMLA MABIZELA, COUNTRY PROGRAM MANAGER

The DRR work validates the principles of slow, considered programming that makes few assumptions about lived experiences. For Oxfam, the answer to successful programming, including DRR work, lies with the people doing the work – people who rely on their experience, their willingness to listen and their respect for the people they work with. Likewise, the Durban office is guided by these principles in its work with partners.

The office works with the belief that building relationships and trust takes time and that there are no quick-fix solutions to development issues. The program has reinforced the need for, and effectiveness of, integrated programming – emphasising that issues do not stand alone. For instance, in the case of the introduction of DRR, an invaluable lesson has been that partners found they were already working in the field without having defined it as such.

The work of RSS is a fitting example. Confronted with incidences where young children were being left unattended in locked-up flats while parents went in search of work, RSS saw the opportunity to both provide income for some of their unemployed clients and provide childcare for those having to leave their homes daily. The Childcare Program involved training women in early childhood development and on how to run crèches, equipping them with basic skills and resources to provide safe spaces for children to spend their time, while preparing those children for formal schooling.

Even partners who do not have DRR programs are doing DRR work.

'Woza Moya is an organisation in Ixopo, rural KwaZulu-Natal. The organisation is based in the community and responds to a range of community issues. One of those needs is for a crèche facility. Alongside this is the need for fresh and accessible water.

Woza Moya installed "tippy taps" – contraptions made by hand from recycled plastic – from which children and their carers could have access to water. Along with the installation of the tippy taps, children were educated about handwashing and hygiene, including keeping their spaces clean and clear of dirt and waste. The children are taking these lessons they are taught and in turn educating their families and carers at home.

In rural areas such as Ixopo, services are far, many homes are inaccessible by car, and clinics and hospitals few and far between. The risk of infectious waterborne diseases is a constant threat.'



Through simple responses, Woza Moya is making inroads into disaster mitigation.

In essence, **DRR is not a program but an approach to programming**. It has become increasingly apparent that DRR is what people have always unconsciously been doing; it is part of their everyday work.

This approach is neither paternalistic or welfarist; it is:

- **rights based** – the bottom line is a focus on the rights of citizens – justice, equality, access to resources;
- **integrated and holistic** – nothing is in isolation. For programs to work they need to take into account a myriad factors which work collectively to create and influence situations. Programing must reflect the entirety, or take it into account;
- **respectful** of what works in local context;
- **consultative** – partners and their constituencies inform the way work happens;
- **careful** about raising expectations; and
- **facilitative** – creating conditions for information to be shared, and for work and development to take place.

Perhaps there is a need to look deeper at the links between DRR and other issues such as gender, youth, people with disabilities and vulnerable children. The questions to ask are: is DRR a cross-cutting issue? Should it be an approach to programming, or should it be mainstreamed into all other areas of work? Perhaps the solution lies in focusing on the crux of the matter – **vulnerability**.

VULNERABILITY: THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

Vulnerability is at the core of DRR work. It could be argued that all development work in South Africa is working towards DRR. Work around mitigating the impacts of HIV and AIDS were and are about preventing disaster; work on gender based violence is aimed at making women stronger and men more aware; work with children in a rural area creating awareness around (and access to) safe water is about reducing vulnerability and ultimately preventing disaster for the community.

Oxfam's Rights in Crisis (RIC) framework argues that 'Oxfam has redefined its perspective adopting a "vulnerabilities framework" and a people centred approach that focus on DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) and building resilience – where "resilience" is seen as the capacity of the system (communities and Government) to be innovative, flexible and responsive to the unplanned economic, political and social changes associated with a "transformation process"'.



LAYERS OF VULNERABILITY

In conducting this reflection it became apparent that one could not look at reducing risk without taking into account vulnerability. But vulnerability is a difficult concept to absolutely define. Who or what causes people to be vulnerable? What makes some more vulnerable than others?

There are layers and degrees of vulnerability – while women in general may be more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, is a white woman living in a previously white suburb more or less vulnerable to environmental harm, or starvation, than a black man living in a black township? Does he have access to resources? Education? Employment? How does previous disadvantage lead to the continuation of vulnerability?

There are many layers of vulnerability and the more of these issues that affect a person, the more vulnerable they are. While the issues cannot be separated, the following is an attempt at describing or beginning to understand vulnerability:

- **Personal** – poverty, gender, living in an informal settlement, unemployed
- **Physical** – poverty, gender, single, young (or married and older), living in an informal settlement, disabled,
- **Environmental** – near a river, living in an informal settlement, climate change, smog
- **Political** – government apathy; civil society apathy; unrest; corruption
- **Historical** – apartheid; anger; poverty; poor education; lack of access; cycle of oppression

Agency can be argued to be the flipside of vulnerability; at the least, having agency makes one less vulnerable. Agency is the ability to act on one's own behalf.

The work done by Project Empower tries in some small way to work towards the otherwise vulnerable young women having some degree of agency. By getting them to think about the functionality, aesthetics, and safety of their personal spaces, they are providing them with agency over at least some, very significant, areas of their lives. Being able to create a safer space for themselves and their families give a sense of agency – and in a country like South Africa, simple actions such as these go a long way towards empowerment and changing mindsets.

What are the issues that are controllable or not:

- at a personal level;
- at a community level;
- at the level of organisation; and
- by Oxfam?

The level of control one has over that which causes vulnerability is key.



WORKING WITH THOSE IN POWER

Working with those in authority is a major theme that emerged from this reflection – a relationship that requires constant care and negotiation on the part of the partners. For Project Empower, their advocacy work can put their clients in jeopardy and damage relationships with those in authority; and for RSS doing advocacy goes beyond their mandate and their means. On the other hand, Sophakama’s relationship with the municipality has been developed over a long time and has been crucial in the effectiveness of their work.

While Project Empower sees that a lot of the solutions to these problems lie in engaging with government, the questions for them are, ‘Is this practicable? Is it our responsibility?’ Clearly the response lies in service provision, better and safer housing, better roads and water access, and reducing poverty. How does one then try to work towards resilience and building better lives without compromising government’s responsibility to do so?

At the workshop in Port Elizabeth partners raised a range of concerns about working with those in authority, in particular, government. Knowing who the gatekeepers are, understanding where the power lies, acknowledging patriarchy, and being aware of corruption and abuse are just some of the issues that need to be taken into account.

Patriarchy is strong and hierarchies are important. Women have little to no power in certain situations.

REDEFINING DISASTER

By far the most important principle emerging from the exploration of DRR in urban settings is the need to redefine our understanding of what constitutes a ‘disaster’. For Oxfam and its partners, continuing to do traditional DRR without taking into account partners’ and their partners’ experiences and perceptions of disaster would be a disaster of its own. By recognising both conventional and non-conventional disasters and appreciating how these pressures intersect in a context of vulnerability, we can move towards a holistic program that addresses issues of rights, responsibility and fundamentally, dignity.



MOVING FORWARD



'In time, we shall be in a position to bestow on South Africa the greatest possible gift – a more human face.' STEVEN BANTU BIKO

PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE WORK

GENDER JUSTICE: ACKNOWLEDGING THE MULTIPLE OPPRESSION OF BLACK WOMEN¹²

At the heart of DRR response is the acknowledgment that in South Africa, poor black women are the most vulnerable to disasters – conventional and otherwise. Many factors may intersect to make this so, including class, race, culture, HIV status, gender, employment status, and place of residence.

SAVING LIVES: UNDERSTANDING VULNERABILITY AND BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH AGENCY

The DRR work accepts that it is about reducing vulnerability and strengthening agency. It is also about engaging with those in power to bring about desired change.

OPENING THE INNER EAR: MAKING A DISTINCTION BETWEEN LISTENING AND HEARING ('THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD')

Those working in communities rely on the principles of listening, working together and continually building people's individual ability to respond. DRR that does not take into account the historical backdrop which has impacted on today's realities is meaningless.

What has emerged very clearly as a principle in the DRR work is that partners' experiences should dictate the program agenda and actions.

OXFAM IN SOUTH AFRICA'S RESPONSE

It was important to Oxfam that there should be less obfuscation and more clarification, even if it took a lot of discussion to get there. All these questions were deliberated over time.

Importantly, the reflection challenges orthodox approaches to DRR. The experience of partners clearly indicates the need to deliver DRR programs that:

- are thorough, deliberate and long term;
- take into account those who have the most to gain or lose – the recipients of support;
- involve working with partners (and partners with their clients/constituencies) and being led by those needs;
- acknowledge the many layers and levels of vulnerability and respond accordingly; and
- are context specific, taking into account the rich history and current conditions of South African society broadly, and each community specifically.

More questions have arisen out of this work, but also more clarity. In keeping with the cycle of learning and reflection, the program will continue to consider, act, learn and make meaning out of its experiences.

¹³. 'Gender Justice,' 'Saving Lives' and the 'Right to be Heard' are three of Oxfam's 'Change Goals' – thematic areas that have Oxfam teams working on them within the country.

RESOURCES



SUSTAINABILITY

INFORMAL



TIME

THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

APARTHEID

PREVENT



XENOPHOBIA

POWER

SOUTH AFRICA

DRR



HAZARDS (VULNERABILITY)



POLITICAL RESPOND

UNSAFE RESILIENCE

SERVICE DELIVERY

WATER

YOUNG EMPOWER

RECOVER

GENDER

CARE BOYS SUSTAINABILITY POVERTY CAPACITY COMMUNITIES RAPE

SECURITY

OXFAM

PREPARE



POWER

ILLEGAL



LIVING PREPARE

TOOLS

PEOPLE

COLONIALISM

CLASS + WHOONGA



DRR SQUALOR EXPERIENCES

APPROACH

PARTNERS

REFLECTION



PROGRAM

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



JOBLESSNESS AUTHORITY

ACHIEVE





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