



SIERRA LEONE YOUTH LED COMMUNITY-BASED DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

In 2012, Y Care International supported the Sierra Leone YMCA to carry out a disaster risk reduction (DRR) pilot project in two urban slum communities of Freetown. The aim of this pilot project was to learn the best ways of reducing the risk of disasters such as flooding and cholera in urban slum communities of Freetown through involving young people in preparing for, carrying out activities to reduce the risk of, and responding to, such disasters. The project is a good example of youth participation in DRR, collaboration with other agencies, and learning through research on youth volunteerism.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE PILOT PROJECT

Youth participation

Existing volunteer-run Community-Based Disaster Management Committees (CBDMCs) in slum communities in Freetown had very little, if any, youth involvement.

Through the DRR pilot project this gap was addressed by the YMCA. Given that over 65 per cent of the population of these slum settlements is below the age of 30, young people's participation is critically important. Harnessing the motivation and energy of young people and their power in reaching out to their peers and families is key to making awareness raising campaigns and community-based activities effective.

with community-led actions. Young CBDMC members, volunteering from two urban slum communities Kroo Bay and Dworzack, shared a sense of community and a desire to improve their own communities. CBDMC members also wanted their committee to become better known and they had no shortage of ideas for increasing the awareness of DRR within their community.

Community awareness

Within a short timeframe, the CBDMCs in Kroo Bay and Dworzack have become the focal points for community members when there have been localised disasters such as landslides, fires and flooding.

DRR can really only be effective at the community level

(over)

Young CBDMC members said that community members approached them for support during these times, which is an enormous shift in people's perceptions of young people's role during crisis situations. The CBDMCs were also enlisted to support DRR and disaster response activities being implemented in their communities by other NGOs including in the cholera outbreak in 2012. These are both encouraging findings and show that the value of the CBDMCs has been recognised by community members and other stakeholders.

The linkage between the Dworzack and Kroo Bay CBDMCs has been beneficial in allowing volunteers to share learning, but also to understand the effects their actions have on communities nearby. For example, there is now an increased understanding that blocking drainage channels with waste in the hillside slum Dworzack increases the risk of flooding in the downstream coastal slum Kroo Bay when the channels overflow in the rainy season.

Youth volunteerism

Findings of the research on youth volunteerism and DRR highlighted that new young CBDMC members were already volunteering in other groups and committees in their communities. Opening up the opportunity to volunteer to a wider range of young people would likely achieve even better results.

Some volunteers appeared to be involved primarily due to financial incentives that they were receiving to cover their costs of attending meetings and participating in activities. When the financial incentives were reduced or ended, attendance and participation also declined. Engaging young people whose main incentive for volunteering is commitment to reducing the risk of disasters in their communities will make the activities more effective in the short term and more sustainable in the longer term.

Another finding was that a disproportionate number of young women were missing CBDMC meetings as a result of family and household obligations. However, project monitoring showed that there was an almost equal ratio of men and women for activities such as community sensitization and community cleaning. The timings of CBDMC meetings will therefore need to be more tailored to young women's needs to ensure their full participation.

DRR activities vs attitude and behavioural changes

Many of the young CBDMC members said that their impact on DRR in their communities would be increased if they had the funding to undertake activities that could address specific physical risks in their communities. This included, for example, disaster prevention such as breaking and removing large boulders in Dworzack which pose a threat to homes nearby from landslides and localised slipping.

However, there is a need to complement these actions with DRR activities such as clearing the existing drainage channels of waste, further raising the awareness of community members of the issues related to dumping waste here, and advocating the local authorities to support these efforts through waste collection services.

The need for more public water points and toilets in these slum communities became even clearer during the cholera outbreak, but the construction of these facilities needs to be complemented by awareness raising on hygiene and sanitation, supported by access to hygiene items such as soap.

KROO BAY AND DWORZACK

65+%

of the population is under 30 years old

PUBLIC WATER POINTS



29

USED EVERYDAY BY

8,000

PEOPLE

PUBLIC TOILETS



22

USED EVERYDAY BY

5,530

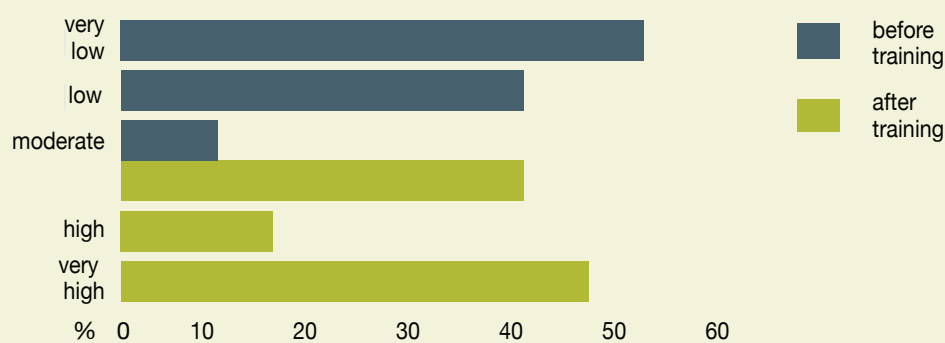
PEOPLE

CHOLERA

11,500+

CASES REPORTED

in Western Area where Freetown is located in 2012 outbreak



Knowledge level on disaster management before and after training amongst Community-Based Disaster Management Committee (CBDMC) members

THE WAY FORWARD

Continue working in collaboration

A key lesson learned from the DRR pilot project was the value of collaborating with a variety of communities, agencies and organisations working in Freetown, as well as an academic institution in the UK. Working in collaboration with the CBDMCs, communities and young people was essential for the success of the project, as were the linkages between the CBDMCs. Additionally, partnerships with organisations (Concern Worldwide and Sierra Leone Red Cross Society) and government agencies (Disaster Management Department of the Office of National Security; and Freetown City Council) involved in DRR in Freetown were key to the project's success. Research on young people and DRR as a result of the partnership with King's College London, UK was also valuable for everyone's learning.

Follow on activities needed

For the CBDMCs to maintain momentum, they need to be supported to conduct activities which they have identified as a priority. These include further training on disaster management, First Aid, basic fire fighting, and search and rescue. Other suggestions included the provision of radios for use in monitoring early warning messages such as for heavy rainfall or storms, and tools such as wheelbarrows, rain gauges, loudspeakers and First Aid kits to support them in the important work that they do.

By making positive changes in their communities, the CBDMCs will be able to raise awareness of disaster risks more effectively and support community members to change their attitudes and behaviour to reduce disaster risks.

Advocacy requirements

Along with tangible changes to the slum communities in relation to DRR there also needs to be an investment in and support for advocacy, for example advocating to the Government to provide services such as waste collection,

and construct facilities such as public toilets and water points. This will be supported by the partnership which has been fostered between the YMCA and the Freetown City Council. Young people are already involved in advocacy groups in these slum communities in other YMCA initiatives so there is capacity for this activity. Advocacy for Government approval of the Disaster Management Policy is also important which is still awaiting validation.

Attracting and retaining volunteers

There is a need to ensure that young volunteers are recruited from a wide range of young people in the community to become CBDMC members. Efforts should be made to ensure equal participation of men and women in CBDMC meetings; provision of childcare during meetings and events may support this.

Managing expectations of the CBDMC volunteers is also important to maintain membership and momentum. The advantages of volunteering should be made clear at recruitment stage so that volunteers' main incentive for volunteering is a desire to improve their community. Explaining the resources available for activities at the beginning and allowing the CBDMCs to manage some of the funds available will help to manage expectations and foster a sense of ownership.

Expanding to more slum communities

It is clear that there is an appetite and a need for DRR activities in more slum communities across Freetown. Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments should be carried out, stakeholders consulted, young volunteers recruited and CBDMCs established in more slum communities across Freetown. A network of CBDMCs should also be established to link existing CBDMCs with new ones so that experiences and learning can be shared.

CASE STUDIES

The stories provided by young people and YMCA staff during the project highlight the importance of disaster risk reduction activities in these slum communities. They also show increased understanding of disaster risks as a result of the project.

“I liked the [disaster risk reduction] training because it allowed me to understand how to prevent disasters in my community. My favourite activity the CBDMC have done was community cleaning. It was fun, I enjoyed it! I also liked the community sensitization activities, using megaphones, showing posters, and going door to door to explain about disasters. It was funny going to the homes of my neighbours that I know from my community; but they were happy to see us! I would like to be a CBDMC member for a long time and I want Kroo Bay to be improved.”

(Young female CBDMC member, Kroo Bay)

“I like being part of the CBDMC as I am part of the community and I like doing the activities the most. I like the community cleaning and the community sensitization best; I like using a megaphone!”

(Young male CBDMC member, Dworzack)

“Before, I never knew how to identify early signs of disaster and how to develop a contingency plan for emergency response in the community I work in. I am now confident to speak about disasters in any gathering; at community meetings, workshops and inter-community engagement”

(Community Development Worker, Sierra Leone YMCA)

PROJECT DASHBOARD

REDUCING THE RISK OF DISASTERS IN TWO SLUM COMMUNITIES IN FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

Aim

To reduce the impact of disasters on vulnerable slum dwellers in two slum communities in Freetown, Sierra Leone through increased youth participation.

Implementing partners

Sierra Leone YMCA



(in collaboration with Concern Worldwide Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone Red Cross Society, Office of National Security, and King's College London, UK)

Funders

Y Care International, Sierra Leone YMCA



Total cost

£17,800

Duration

9 months: January – September 2012

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Y Care International and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of any of our funders.

FIND OUT MORE

The full report Youth Volunteerism and DRR is available from Y Care International.

www.ycareinternational.org

