Rebuilding Sustainable Communities for Children and their Families after Disasters

Rebuilding Sustainable Communities for Children and their Families after Disasters: A Global Survey

By

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INTRODUCTION

Disasters inflict massive suffering, and too little attention is accorded to societies' most vulnerable members—namely, the children. Children's special needs during catastrophic events are often neglected as the adults involved deal with their own anguish and trauma and the seemingly more immediate issues of responding to the disaster. The following are some dramatic data.

In the report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2007), the conditions of children worldwide portrayed a picture of concern that requires an immediate intervention. According to the report, an estimated twenty million children have been forced to flee their homes because of conflict and human rights violations. Many of them either are living as refugees in neighboring countries or are officially classified as internally displaced population. The UNICEF report shows that two million children have died as a direct result of armed conflict over the past decade, and at least six million have been permanently disabled or seriously injured. More than one million have been orphaned or separated from their families.

Records show that between 8,000 and 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines every year, and an estimated 300,000 child soldiers —boys and girls under the age of eighteen—are involved in more than thirty conflicts worldwide. Furthermore, the UNICEF report indicates that during the unprecedented 1994 genocide in Rwanda, many teenage girls aged twelve and above who survived the genocide were raped. Similarly, during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, over 20,000 females were reported to have been sexually assaulted. The overall effect of conflicts, like the ones in Rwanda and Yugoslavia, is the break-up of the families, and women in general are the ones who carry the additional economic and emotional burdens of the surviving communities. The UNICEF report concludes that children, who are very vulnerable to the aftermaths of conflicts, require special care and attention. Unfortunately, these children are often forgotten and left to take care of themselves until the next disaster (UNICEF, "The State of the World's Children", 2007).

Globally, millions more have suffered death, disease and dislocation as a result of such natural disasters as earthquakes, droughts and floods. Even in apparently stable environments—such as Boston, the site of this conference, where the murder rate is at a ten-year high—epidemic violence

endlessly harms lives and communities. And even when emergency relief is available, permanent human damage remains. Here again, all too often, families fall apart, women are assaulted and degraded, and children are left to take care of themselves.

An international conference with a focus on the creation of a sustainable, just, secure and disaster resilient community for children and their families. How can communities recover from disasters in ways that permanently protect and empower their most vulnerable members?

In order to attempt to answer this question, the Center for Rebuilding Sustainable Communities after Disasters at the University of Massachusetts at Boston convened a four-day international conference in November 2008. It was entitled "Rebuilding Sustainable Communities for Children and their Families after Disasters." The conference focused on five main objectives. These were:

- The role of gender equality in alleviating poverty and assisting children, their families and their communities after disasters;
- The status of children and women in various communities after disasters and the continuing need for superior research and appropriate data;
- The roles of governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations;
- The promotion of human dignity in the creation of sustainable environments that empower families in the aftermath of disasters; and
- Sexual violence in disasters.

The conference presenters and panelists came from all the continents of the world and from many different disciplines. There were fourteen panel sessions altogether, which addressed the following topics, amongst many others:

- Sociological perspective on disasters;
- A gendered human rights approach to rebuilding after disaster;
- Municipal emergency preparedness for special populations;
- Poverty as an ongoing disaster in the United States of America;
- The role of schools in rebuilding sustainable communities after disasters;
- Disaster and trauma: lessons from Katrina and elsewhere;
- When the Cameras Leave: Journeys of Recovery;
- Understanding the impact of disasters on children and helping them heal and thrive afterwards;

- Everybody's child: supporting children in emergency situations;
- Child participation: a concept to consider in (re)building sustainable communities in disaster prone urban areas: Lessons learnt from Ecuador;
- The impact of HIV/AIDS on children in Uganda: case studies from the work of the Family Support Initiative – Uganda;
- One drop of water: involving children in long-term disaster relief;
- Building community resilience;
- The Lebanese in post-conflict Liberia; female ex-child soldiers: case studies for East and West Africa;
- Women and national reconstruction: Eritrea after its thirty-year war of independence;
- War and misunderstanding: errors of judgment in Colombian job-training policies;
- Building communities after the Indian Ocean Tsunami: micro-credit self-help groups for widows and abandoned women;
- Rebuilding sustainable communities in the African context**;**
- Dilemma in reintegration of child soldiers in Nepal: an analysis from child rights NGO perspectives;
- Using songs as educational tools for teaching disasters to preschoolers;
- Rebuilding sustainable communities for children orphaned by the 2004 Aceh Tsunami;
- Disasters as a chance to implement novel solutions that highlight attention to human dignity;
- Lessons to learn: roles of government, private sector and NGOs in disaster reconstruction in fragile states and impoverished communities;
- The global food crisis and long-term food security;
- Trauma, war and disaster: recent advances in our understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder; and
- Sexual violence in disasters.

The conference sought to contribute to and recommend future policy formulation and implementation processes by local, regional and national governments as well as multilateral agencies and grass-roots organizations. Specialists from various disciplines (health, education, social sciences, public policy, community planning, etc.) made many observations and recommendations on how to reconstruct sustainable communities that would be safe for children and their families after disasters. These included the following:

1) Meeting children's needs must be given a higher priority in disaster situations than is generally the case today.
2) Develop best practices for the development and implementation of comprehensive risk reduction or preparedness plans for schools. These should include involving children directly in the process in age-appropriate ways.
3) Work to increase awareness of the needs of children and families immediately after a disaster, including making shelters safe for children, both physically and psychologically.
4) Help communities prepare for their most vulnerable populations prior to a disaster.
5) If conditions are in place, child participation should be considered as a method for implementing child-centred community development in (re)building disaster-prone urban areas.
6) In the short term, create comprehensive programs for traumatized children that address the full-range of their basic needs. In the longer term, develop the capacity for the children to become contributing members of the community as they grow up.
7) Create policies for China such as realistic pricing that make people realize the true value of water as a scarce resource.
8) Work to improve the quality of education about the sustainability of scarce resources such as water.
9) Research the steps necessary to impact federal law in such a way that housing in disaster areas would be considered a right, rather than merely a product for profit.
10) Establish a public commission to enforce participatory principles so that major decisions affecting quality of life must factor in community knowledge and opinion.
11) Reach out to management at Boston's *MyTown* with the objective of investigating the feasibility of creating a similar teen-based walking tour organization in New Orleans.
12) The spirit of human rights (not just their legal aspects), namely the emphasis on human dignity, should be mainstreamed in disaster management, and in human intervention in general.
13) Strategies, approaches and methods for any type of disaster management have to adopt best practices for the promotion of human dignity for the creation or rebuilding of sustainable environments for communities after disasters. This approach must start from the conviction that any development cannot be sustainable unless disaster mitigation is built into the development process. The cornerstone of this method is "the part to whole" and

"the whole to part" approach along with a "multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral" approach that incorporates risk reduction in the developmental plans, processes and policies/strategies after disasters. This can be achieved through institutions and charitable trusts, such as Rotary International.

14) Disasters can offer a chance. When old solutions fail, space opens for new solutions. Solutions that were "unthinkable" before, solutions for which there was no political will earlier, become "thinkable." Disasters can open space for the implementation of novel solutions that highlight attention to human dignity. For example, victims of disasters can be encouraged to become co-creators of interventions, rather than merely recipients of help, thus counteracting the tendency that help can have humiliating effects. Since disasters disrupt established life, they even entail the potential to open more space for empowerment than was present prior to the event.
15) Not only economic but also ecological crises must be monitored and their damaging impact preventively mitigated or completely avoided. Institutions, rules, practices need to be put in place. Planners of nuclear power plants cannot afford to neglect foreseeing disaster, including disaster caused by human error or human malice. They have to put in place institutional structures, rules, and practices that continuously monitor the situation and prevent problems from arising.
16) To discuss reconstruction, we must embrace the community as a whole, including the ethnic, political, religious and other minority populations with rooted identities there. Like women and children, these groups' vulnerabilities are typically magnified by a disaster. Planners must fuse physical, social and political elements to create flexible, integrated planning frameworks for building capacities as well as objects. With a vision of community-led recovery, outsiders can play a role to facilitate—without dominating—fruitful relations (state-civil society, majority-minority) among adversaries to sustain rebuilding, especially in large-scale disasters. Accepting that planners are guests in others' communities, which ultimately control our shared success, is essential.
17) Very many disasters have global proportions, thus, merely local and regional responses are often inadequate in dealing with them.
18) In the absence of strong geopolitical countering, energy-related disasters will soon reach inexorable points-of-no-return. Indeed, disaster-responding institutions (and any other savvy leadership

cadre) should raise a hue-and-cry so as to increase the priority of heading off energy-related disasters.

19) It is necessary that a globalized response be undertaken to deal with global problems. In particular, a global response should be initiated using energy as the crux of the solution to our geopolitical problems; primarily to deal with climate change and peak oil.
20) In Niger, rated the world's poorest country by the UNDP Human Development Index in 2006, over 60 percent of the population lives on less than US$1 a day. To further complicate issues, the country has been wracked with several major droughts, locust swarms, famines, and rebellions over the past thirty-five years. It is necessary that the international community undertake the issues of ethnic reconciliation amongst the Tuareg people and the central government of Niger, in order to forestall a conflict that has the potential to mirror the Rwandan genocide.
21) The civil rights of all minority groups in the Sahel region should be guaranteed, with international observers making certain that the government of Niger upholds its part of the social contract.
22) Further, the food crisis has a direct impact on ethnic relations in the region, and should be considered a crux in any regional peace plan with the restive Tuareg people.
23) Perhaps the most important problem facing society is the food and water crisis. It is/will be the cause of civil disturbances and the collapse of societies.
24) Demand for food in the developing world is expected to double within the next twenty-five to fifty years.
25) One of the most important policy recommendations is to stop the use of farmland to grow biofuels, which puts upward pressure on the price of food.
26) Further, the world should return to a grain-based diet and use meat sparingly. In conjunction with a grain-based diet, farming efficiency should be increased in order to assist with world-wide rising food demand.
27) The US national energy grid is overly regional, inflexible and vulnerable to supply disruptions. It should be reformed through the incorporation of "smart" technology, such as advanced metering and energy efficiency measures. Further, decentralized energy assets (DEA) should be used to run parallel with the national grid; thus, in times of electricity disruption, DEAs should smoothly take over and ensure minimal disruption. Use of DEAs for critical facilities such as hospitals, military bases and police stations is

essential to make certain that a disaster does not spiral out of control through lack of energy to assist the first responders.

The conference presentations graphically illustrated that there were many diverse ways to meet children's needs effectively when disaster strikes, but that there were also common issues and themes that must be addressed.

Structure of the Book

This book is based on papers that were presented at the conference by academics and practitioners. It consists of five parts.

Part 1 examines cross-cutting themes and has nine chapters. In Chapter One, Russell K. Schutt presents five lessons gleaned from sociological research on disasters ranging from the 1927 Great Mississippi Flood and the 1973 Buffalo Creek mining disaster to the 1993 Chicago heat and 2005's Hurricane Katrina. These lessons highlight the role of social forces in shaping the causes, course and consequences of every disaster, the social factors that shape the interpretation of disasters, and the importance of informal social ties for community recovery.

In Chapter Two Elaine Enarson explores gender and human security concerns. She makes a case for gender-inclusive post-disaster recovery based on appreciation of the rights of women and children. She then offers a vision of sustainable recovery that ensures women's full and equal participation in creating a just, safe and disaster resilient community for themselves and for their children.

In Chapter Three Mindy Fullilove and Robert E. Fullilove examine the extremely injurious costs of the recurring dislodgment of minority and poor populations in the US as a result of public policies which are geared towards new development for the well-heeled rather than neighborhood solidity. They then present a multifaceted set of interventions which are necessary to turn around social breakup and re-establish broken communities in a sustainable manner.

In Chapter Four Jonathan Wortmann, Robert Bachelder and Paul Block examine the ongoing disaster of poverty through a qualitative study of three urban environments in the US. They argue that urban poverty is a disaster because it spawns "violence, homelessness, hunger and the resulting hopelessness that makes healthy families a dream and strong, educated children the exception." They then posit that the "three factors which facilitate sustainable environments for children and their families"

in the inner city are “consistent leadership, organizational partnerships and faith community involvement.”

In Chapter Five Myra Margolin documents how she uses participatory video—most recently in a project in Rwanda—as a tool to amplify the voices of those who do not have a say in issues and decisions that impact on their lives. She explains that in a participatory video project, the production process is placed in the hands of affected individuals whose voices are often unheard, so that the production process itself becomes a transformative experience. Used in this way, the video production process fosters communication within and between groups, challenges dominant narratives, and identifies needed policy changes. The video can serve as a tool for advocacy, reflection, documentation and investigation of the impact of disasters.

In Chapter Six Sonja Darai reviews challenges faced when initiating emergency preparedness outreach and education in a diverse population in a small, resource-challenged city in the United States of America. She proposes that municipal-level emergency preparedness for special populations requires “a community-wide approach based on confidence building, steady engagement and flexible outreach.”

In Chapter Seven John Barbee shares lessons from his experiences in community development and conflict mitigation after disasters in countries ranging from Afghanistan and Tajikstan to Iraq and Malawi. He highlights the importance of building community after natural disasters and military conflicts. Because he has observed frequent post-disaster polarization between groups, he emphasizes the need to bring people together to identify shared needs. Similarly, because he has witnessed provision of “technical expertise” by outside organizations without regard to local context, he stresses the importance of developing solutions grounded in the lived experiences of local residents.

In Chapter Eight Philippe Régnier uses two field case studies in Aceh (Indonesia) and Tamil Nadu (India) to investigate the issue of post-tsunami livelihood recovery through economic rehabilitation. He illustrates how post-tsunami promotion of micro-entrepreneurship activities led to the generation of employment and income among the affected populations.

In Chapter Nine Richard Williams and John Drury review the definitions, nature of and theories for resilience, the very variable prevalence of mental disorders after major incidents and the distinction between distress and disorder. They examine the implications of the concepts of personal and collective resilience, their theoretical

underpinnings, and evidence from research on recent major incidents for managing mass emergencies, disasters and major incidents.

Part 2 focuses on rebuilding sustainable communities for children and has six chapters. It begins with Chapter Ten by Diane Levin. She explores the many kinds of violence and trauma in the daily lives of children growing up in today's world and how these experiences affect their behavior, development and needs. She suggests that the global community must deal with the root causes of the increasing levels of violence and disaster in many children's lives. She also notes that by working with families, promoting more positive development and behavior when disaster strikes, and

> creating a safe and respectful environment where children can directly experience the alternatives to the disasters in their lives, we will be helping them learn about peace and nonviolence in the way they learn best.

The authors of Chapter Eleven are Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires. The August 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes were some of the most dramatic and traumatic events in the nation's history, the effects of which are still potent more than three years later. For children and families, the principal impacts have been in the areas of health, housing and schooling. This chapter details these impacts and their causes—in particular relating them to the structural issues of race and class that created disparate impacts for different population groups in New Orleans.

In Chapter Twelve, Beryl Cheal observes that destructive events that we call "natural" disasters are, in fact, natural events of nature. They only become "natural disasters" when the effects of those events collide with human activities. It is possible, therefore, for communities to mitigate these powerful events and reduce their impact. She then proposes that schools can play a major role in that mitigation by going through the process of preparedness with children and adults at school as well as by participating with the larger community in developing risk reduction plans. Children participating, actually taking the lead, in the process of risk reduction strengthens protective factors that "protect" them against the effects of a hazard, both in the short and longer term. Children of all ages can help in this process with age-appropriate activities. Beryl Cheal concludes that such activities help children become more confident in their own capabilities and can lead to the feelings of a young girl in the Philippines when she declared, "I'm not scared of any disasters anymore, because I already know what to do."

In Chapter Thirteen, Cecile de Milliano and Pat Gibbons share an example in which "child participation" was a central element in (re)building a sustainable community in a disaster prone urban settlement.

The study on which this chapter is based took place from June 2007 until February 2008 in Guayaquil (Ecuador). It aimed to assess how child participation was understood by and meaningfully implemented with the members of a community in a disaster prone urban area of Guayaquil. This chapter concludes by identifying that child participation positively impact children's wellbeing on a personal, family and community level and that it allows children, their families, the community and social organizations to build a community in which they, as one adolescent stated, "can realize their dreams and ideas in practice."

In Chapter Fourteen, Sanjaya Aryal examines the armed conflict in Nepal from 1996 to 2006 in which thousands of child-soldiers were involved in both the government armed forces and non-state armed groups, namely the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal. They analyze the causes of the conflict, the recruitment and (ab)use of child-soldiers, as well as the NGOs' efforts to reintegrate the child-soldiers into their communities after the conflict.

In Chapter Fifteen, Yasamin Izadkhah and Mahmood Hosseini examine how audio-tapes are used for educating children about disasters including recommended preparatory measures such as sheltering during earthquakes and recovery activities after an earthquake. The tapes present safety recommendations to be applied during an earthquake in the form of a song, accompanied by lively music. Among the issues analyzed in this chapter are the content of the "Earthquake and Safety" song, how to simplify the scientific terms and statements to be included in the song, the rhythm to be used, the consideration of cultural and pedagogical issues, and how to produce the song in a way which can communicate with the children and teachers effectively. Since the number of studies that have been undertaken in using songs for teaching about disasters to preschoolers in the world is insignificant, Izadkhah and Hosseini propose that the novelty of their work can encourage other researchers to carry out further investigation in this area.

Part 3 studies how to rebuild sustainable communities after wars and has three chapters. In Chapter Sixteen, Shelby Grossman presents a framework for understanding Liberian government policies toward the powerful Lebanese community in the country since 1980. She explains the relationship between current President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's administration and the Lebanese community, and discusses the role the

Lebanese have played in rebuilding Liberia since the war ended. She argues that the Lebanese community in Liberia

> are both promoting reconstruction and further investment, while simultaneously hurting Liberian businesses and decelerating development. (p. 256)

In Chapter Seventeen, Grace Oyebola Adetula provides an analysis of rehabilitation and reintegration processes for female ex-child soldiers in Uganda, Liberia and Sierra Leone, with emphasis on their special needs in post-conflict situations. She also examines the importance of social control in reintegrating them into the mainstream of the society in order to ensure community safety and wealth.

In Chapter Eighteen, Alvaro Gallardo and Humberto Garcia examine the institutional and social constraints which former child-soldiers face in the process of reintegrating them into the labor market in Columbia, a country that has been at war for more than five decades. These underage populations are basically those children, teenagers and young adults who were captured in combat by the Colombian Military Forces or who have escaped from irregular armed organizations (guerrillas or paramilitary) and who have also agreed to join in a government-funded project for their social and productive insertion into society.

Part 4, with two chapters, studies issues involved in rebuilding sustainable energy infrastructure. Chapter Nineteen, by Justin Dargin, considers the role of decentralized energy assets in a disaster area, and shows how their practical use may increase the speed at which a devastated community returns to normal. It concludes by illustrating how the incorporation of a decentralized energy matrix in the United States of America's national energy policy will serve to protect the country from the brunt of large-scale man-made and natural disasters.

In Chapter Twenty, Michael Donlan argues that global society today faces an historic/apocalyptic, self-inflicted foursome of calamities: a full financial disaster, climatic natural disasters, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and a permanent decline in global oil supplies. He suggests that many, if not all, of these accelerate the disastrous impact of each other. He uses energy-related disasters as a point of focus and a point of entrée to penetrate into some of these interrelated, self-inflicted and far-reaching disasters. It describes the unfolding of major energy-related disasters and urges strong geo-political responses.

Part 5, the last section of the book, proposes some innovative solutions to disasters. It consists of two chapters. In Chapter Twenty-One Evelin Lindner analyzes how the sustainability of social cohesion and ecological

survival for humankind requires a focus on human dignity, implemented with a mindset of cooperation and humility, rather than disrespect and humiliation. After disasters, communities are prone to suffer violations of dignity in numerous ways. However, disasters can also open space for the implementation of novel solutions that highlight attention to human dignity. Since disasters disrupt established life, they even entail the potential to open more space for empowerment than was present prior to the event—this can occur, for example, when women are given more visibility than they had before. The chapter concludes by recommending that international organizations, accustomed to responding to emergencies and developmental needs, need to develop concepts of efficiency and practicability that nurture inclusive and dignifying diversity. Today the term "mainstreaming" permeates many discourses: The spirit of human rights, the emphasis on human dignity, needs to be mainstreamed also in disaster management.

Finally, Chapter Twenty-Two focuses on Nichole Fiore's research work from her Fulbright Fellowship in Budapest, Hungary. While in Budapest, Nichole researched the social and economic mobility of the Roma population in Hungary by looking at governmental welfare programs offered by the Hungarian government and the European Union. She observes that while many groups in Hungary have benefited from economic modernization and development, others, such as the Roma, have not benefited as much from these advances. The Roma are the largest minority in Europe and in post-communist countries, such as Hungary, are known as the biggest "'losers" of the change from communism to capitalism because of the loss of governmental welfare programs. Currently, in Hungary, the Roma face obstacles and challenges in access to healthcare, education, employment, and adequate housing. However, over the past decade the EU and the Hungarian government have taken steps to promote anti-discrimination legislation and social programs focusing on equality and diversity. Additionally, international NGOs have also played an important role in minority rights in Central and Eastern Europe providing advocacy, resources, and policy development.

PART I
CROSS-CUTTING THEMES