



Learnings from the Coalition Building in Cities Program: *Luganville, Vanuatu*



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What is the program?

The Global Disaster Preparedness Centre (GDPC) and the American Red Cross has tested an innovative approach to assist Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies and partners to increase city-wide collaboration around climate-smart resilience and coastal risk reduction. The program was piloted in Luganville, Vanuatu; Ternate and Semarang, Indonesia; and is currently underway in Myanmar.

Why work in cities?

Rapid and unplanned urbanization and climate change increases risk and vulnerability in cities; but means there are opportunities for organizations to prepare and reduce the risks; keep people informed; and help them have a voice in city policy and planning.

Vanuatu Red Cross Society have a strong background of rural disaster risk reduction work. However, recent events such as Tropical Cyclone Pam have highlighted the vulnerabilities in urban communities. These communities are often made up of migrants from different parts of Vanuatu, separated from their traditional village support network and resource base.

The Coalition Building in Cities Program was an opportunity for Vanuatu Red Cross Society to expand their work to the urban context. Luganville is the second biggest city in Vanuatu, with a population of 16,312.

The program has broadened the horizons of Vanuatu Red Cross Society. It helped staff realize the multiple shocks and stressors faced in the urban environment, and to see the connections between systems such as infrastructure, health, and economy, and their impacts upon urban communities.



Vanuatu Red Cross Sanma Province Branch - Luganville



Luganville's infrastructure is vulnerable to cyclones, coastal erosion and flooding

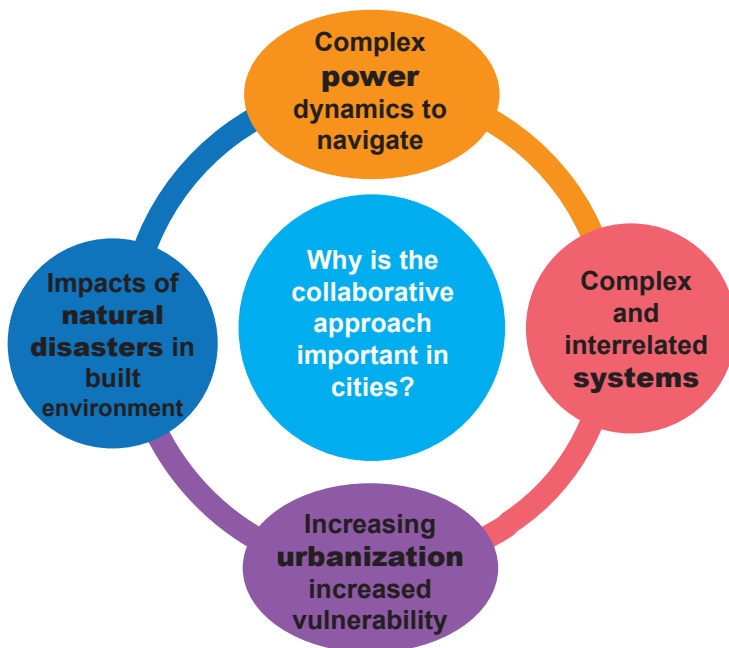
Work together as it cannot be done alone.

Cities are complex - systems are multifaceted, populations are diverse, power dynamics and vulnerabilities are magnified.

Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies do not have the resources or capacity to address urban resilience on their own. Local authorities, government departments, the private sector, academic institutions, other NGOs and the community sector are important partners in understanding and navigating the urban environment.

The program provided opportunities for Vanuatu Red Cross Society and for partner civic organizations such as Save the Children and World Vision, whose work is primarily rural-based. It helped them to expand their work into urban areas – understanding vulnerabilities and identifying areas for action.

“We learned that we can’t do it alone. We need partners to help us identify risks and vulnerabilities and support us with resources.”
– Jessica Binihi, Vanuatu Red Cross Society



See the full picture with a city-wide assessment approach

“The city-wide assessment showed the stakeholders that Luganville is not ready for a disaster. Seeing the city in terms of systems was new to them and showed them a bigger picture of Luganville.” Jeff Ngwele, Vanuatu Red Cross

The Luganville city-wide risk assessment process was foundational for VRCS staff and partner organizations as it informed organizational and project planning. The assessment process, the collaborative approach and cross-sector content provided a new way of approaching urban resilience for participants.

“It’s an awesome toolkit. It helped me realize the difference between the urban context and rural context, understanding the main systems and how they interact.” Shirley Johnson, Vanuatu Red Cross

“The information from the assessment has been a great help. It provides more information on resilience issues facing Luganville.” Pastor Johnson Vuti, Luganville Provincial Government



One of the partner NGOs had not implemented a project in the urban setting in Vanuatu before. The city-wide assessment showed them the need for a waste management project in Luganville and they worked with the municipality to identify communities for assistance.

Benefits of the city-wide assessment:

- It enabled participants to see the city from a systems perspective – understanding the interconnectedness of infrastructure, health, the economy and their vulnerabilities to hazards.
- It highlighted the key resilience-related issues facing Luganville. Partner organizations improved their understanding of risks and vulnerabilities and some have incorporated this knowledge into their project planning.
- It created a shared understanding of responsibilities amongst partners, including each other’s capacities, gaps, and the challenges faced.
 - It provided a risk-informed basis for targeting vulnerability in the city, as it can be difficult to know where to focus your efforts in the urban environment.
- It provided tools that have been used by partner

organizations to analyze organizational capacity for risk management and disaster preparedness.

- It identified a need for disaster planning in Luganville. This led to the municipal government and Red Cross working together to create a Standard Operating Procedure for emergencies.

Suggestions for National Societies

- Make sure stakeholders participating in the assessment process have enough background to understand the concepts in the toolkit.
In Luganville, the toolkit was less useful for community groups and representatives who did not have background knowledge around climate change, resilience and city systems and structures and struggled with the city-wide nature of the assessment.
- Allow plenty of time in trainings to go through all the tools in the toolkit with attendees.

Be prepared for challenges and open to new ways of working.

- Maintaining stakeholder engagement throughout the program was a challenge.

"It's like the partners are sitting on the side-line saying 'yeah go Red Cross! And no one wants to come inside the field. They all have a skeleton staff and their own projects and programmes to run.'" Vanuatu Red Cross Society staff member

There was strong initial interest in the Coalition Building in Cities Program and stakeholders found the city-wide assessment process informative. However, VRCS struggled to keep the stakeholders involved as active partners due to the partners other commitments. Agencies were supportive but for the most part did not use the coalition as a platform to initiate action. This could be due to limited resources, inexperience working in the urban or resilience-building context, or a need for stronger facilitation from VRCS.

Other commitments meant that various staff members attended the coalition meetings and this slowed progress in agreeing upon actions.

- The private sector is a key stakeholder in city resilience and the VRCS and partners need to find effective ways to engage with businesses.

Suggestions for National Societies

- Share as much information as possible with partners from an early stage and involve them in project visibility activities
- Discuss funding and time limitations of the program with partners and how collaboration and action can continue after the program ends
- Involve local representatives of the national Government throughout the program as many issues need their input.

From one-person shops to multinational corporations – climate change, shocks and hazards impact the operations of sections of the private sector, and their ability to operate affects urban systems and communities.

The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments carried out in communities as part of the program highlighted the important role that small grocery stores play in Luganville community resilience. These stores are closely connected to communities and allow people to buy on credit, which provides a safety net for low income households. VRCS engaged with these business owners and developed a preparedness training course but most did not complete the training.

Project staff found it difficult to engage with the business sector. Small businesses didn't relate to the climate change or resilience language used, did not have the time or capacity to engage, or see the value of working cooperatively since they



Luganville businesses didn't understand how climate change resilience relates to their operations. They are accustomed to being asked for donations rather than working together with organizations like Red Cross.



"Luganville is a difficult place to be a business owner – the economy is low, unemployment is high – so business owners are focused on day to day operations." – Jeff Ngwele, Vanuatu Red Cross

are in competition. Vanuatu Red Cross Society may have had more success if it had targeted their efforts towards larger businesses.

Suggestions for National Societies

- Small businesses are focused on day-to-day survival and can struggle to find the time to participate. Talk to them about what is realistic and how they want to engage
- Modify your language. Luganville's small businesses struggled to relate to the language that Red Cross and other agencies use around resilience, risk reduction, climate change, coalitions etc
- Involve a wide range of businesses. The business community have a variety of skills that they can bring to a resilience network. Do not be afraid to approach bigger businesses and have clear messaging of how they can contribute to city-wide resilience planning
- Use industry associations to reach business owners – e.g. publicity via newsletters

- The city-wide risk assessment was interrupted for several months in Luganville while the coalition partners responded to the influx of evacuees after volcanic eruptions on neighboring Ambae Island. It was difficult to regain momentum quickly after this event.
- VRCS and partners felt the project timeframe was too short to fully realize the project's potential. It takes time to build relationships, embed new concepts and build confidence and capacity.

Suggestions for National Societies

- Utilize coalition partners in response activities, if appropriate.
- Work with coalition members on a plan for continuing coalition business in case of unforeseen circumstances.
- Ensure the project timeframe allows for unavoidable disruptions and the time needed to build relationships, develop new ways of working and implement activities.

- Awareness and training activities had a positive impact for communities but led to a need for 'hard' tangible solutions (e.g. mangrove planting, livelihood activities, drainage, stronger housing).

Hard components were difficult to deliver due to limitations of funding. This resulted in the coalition delivering only 'soft' activities such as disaster preparedness, WASH and first aid training. These were appreciated by communities, but there was frustration at the inability to progress the mitigation ideas that had resulted from the Vulnerability and Capability Assessments and follow-up sessions with communities. Avoid over-assessing and under-delivering.



Olivier Baba shows a Vanuatu Red Cross volunteer areas in the Chapois3 community that often flood during rainfall. Community members have attempted improvements to the drainage system following the Red Cross Water Sanitation and Hygiene training.

Suggestions for National Societies

- Do necessary homework regarding donor requirements when you are planning a project. Make sure you will have the resources to meet these and deliver potential activities
- Act as a connector - pass on the information regarding needs and potential actions to relevant agencies or organizations that might be able to do capital-intensive projects
- Think long-term. Partner planning cycles mean it takes time for partners to be in a position to act on the assessment information. Work to keep communication channels open
- Use the coalition to brainstorm ways to overcome the barriers to delivering activities. Get creative. Which other organizations, businesses, academic institutions could help? Bring in new people with fresh ideas

Contextualize your messaging

- The program aimed to enable communities and the private sector to have a voice in city resilience work but many people in Luganville did not have a base knowledge of climate change or resilience issues and couldn't relate to the language used. VRCS had to take a step back to simplify and contextualize the concepts so they were relevant and understandable for the community and the private sector. .

The language used is alienating for some potential stakeholders – 'climate change, resilience' etc. People don't understand what it's about or don't see a connection with their work or lives. Jeff Ngwele, Vanuatu Red Cross

- Facilitating multi-stakeholder projects requires a lot of project management.

The program involved new processes for Vanuatu Red Cross Society, such as working in the urban environment, convening a multi-stakeholder network and carrying out the city-wide assessment. It was difficult to find technical, in-country support for the program team from the wider IFRC/ Partner National Society network. Delegates and consultants deployed in-country helped with specialist aspects such as strategy development and a communications campaign, but it may have been beneficial for National Society capacity if this could have been done more collaboratively with National Society staff.

While difficult at times, the program has resulted in growth in both the overall technical capacities and confidence of Vanuatu Red Cross Society staff and volunteers, and external recognition of National Society's ' role and capabilities.

"This project has been able to push us - the project team, the National Society and the American Red Cross do concepts and activities that are totally new – It has motivated us to come out of our regular business of Community based Disaster Risk Reduction and demonstrate that we can do much more." Colin Fernandes, American Red Cross

Suggestions for National Societies

- Avoid jargon. Terms such as 'coalition-building' can create a roadblock for working with stakeholders. The question is, 'how concepts can be simplified so they are approachable and relevant to stakeholders?'
- Customize approach for the local context. Use appropriate language to talk about building resilience and link to tangible risks in communities.

Vanuatu Red Cross Society worked with Sanma Provincial Government's pre-existing structures such as the Technical Advisory Group and formally established the coalition as a subgroup of the Provincial Disaster Management and Climate Change Committee. This ensured the project had government support to this initiative and provided credibility.

The community disaster preparedness activities carried out by VRCS have now been recognized within the Provincial Government's 10-year plan

"You have to be on the same page. As a government we gave Vanuatu Red Cross Society the space. We want to assist them facilitate work because the government cannot do everything."
– Pastor Johnson Vuti, Sanma Provincial Government

Suggestions for National Societies

- Ensure the support of local authorities for the program/project. Their support can make convening, facilitating, and implementing easier and more sustainable.
- Talk to local government authorities about the resilience and disaster management initiatives and committees that they have in place, and ask how these could be utilized or expanded

Sustainability - plan for the long term

The coalition is no longer active now that external project funding has come to an end. It was difficult to maintain coalition momentum after the assessment process and community activities. The partner organizations still continue to coordinate, communicate and work together through provincial disaster management stakeholder groups but there is no clear direction at present on how the learnings from the city-wide assessment and systems or resilience focus can be maintained.

“Clearly explain the exit strategy and the responsibilities of the partners for the end of the project, we want them to take it forward but they rely on Vanuatu Red Cross Society.” Augustine Garae, Vanuatu Red Cross Society

The presence of other civil organizations in the city coupled with the continuous growth of the city in terms of population and services creates the possibility of having urban resilience discussions and actions still continuing. The project has been able to create the awareness and understanding on the importance of putting in place systems and mechanisms that can make the city further resilient to the shocks and stresses identified.

Even though the project has concluded, the National Society role has changed - from implementor to facilitator for the urban resilience discussions and advocate for actions.

Suggestions for National Societies

- Work with coalition partners to agree upon a long term, sustainable way for the coalition to continue to collaborate on the assessment issues, e.g. a means of communications, or a pre-existing meeting that can take forward the key focus areas of the project.



For more information about the Coalition Building in Cities Program, visit: www.preparecenter.org/activities/coalition-building-coastal-cities

