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Humanitarian challenges of urbanisation in Manila: the position of the Philippine Red Cross in a changing disaster and aid landscape

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Humanitarian challenges of urbanisation in Manila: the position of the Philippine Red Cross in a changing disaster and aid landscape

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Recognising increased vulnerabilities because of ongoing urbanisation, the Philippine Red Cross has embarked on a five-year programme to strengthen the resilience of poor settlements in the National Capital city of Valenzuela. The programme expands the organisation’s traditional response orientation to also address underlying causes of structural vulnerability, and as such puts the organisation ahead of many other Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. While this engagement fits the organisation because of its mandate, strategies and reach, the traditional strengths of the organisation increasingly emerge as challenging factors. Applying a ‘resilience approach’, particularly in Manila’s urban humanitarian arena, also puts pressure on how the Philippine Red Cross is able to be guided by its Fundamental Principles, especially in relation to donor obligations, working with non-Red Cross organisations, engaging with communities and taking a more critical role towards the government. The approach requires a transformation in mind set and activities that requires time to achieve.

Keywords: urbanisation; resilience; Red Cross; Manila; humanitarian arena; humanitarian principles

Introduction

Large-scale urbanisation, especially in cities in the Global South, is characterised by rising inequality and vulnerability, particularly for poor people settling and living in the cities’ informal settlements. Disaster risk is one of the many factors that characterise life and contribute to mortality and morbidity in these settlements. In this complex environment, disasters impact on inequality, poverty and vulnerability, and vice versa. Urban disaster risk has therefore become a concern for both humanitarian and development organisations. But the complex environments, with interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors, challenge these organisations’ way of working and reshape the aid landscape. In this context, the recent emergence of ‘resilience’ as a central focus for policy and practice could provide organisations with a framework to better understand local complexities and translate these in multifaceted programmes. Given the novelty and the comprehensiveness of the concept, it is yet unclear how the attention to resilience is translated into local programmes, and whether this leads to practices that better provide protection and ‘bounce-back’ capacity to vulnerable urban dwellers.

This article explores how the Red Cross, as one of the leading humanitarian organisations, shapes its urban programmes with reference to the resilience discourse (given its opportunities and also its limits), which is becoming increasingly prominent...
within the Red Cross Movement. In the context of flood-prone Manila, the organisation has embarked on a multi-year programme to reduce disaster risk and strengthen community resilience in several of the city’s barangays, small local administrative units into which the city is divided.\(^1\) After providing a brief outline of the trend of urbanisation and the transforming aid landscape, the article will turn to scrutinising the activities of the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) in this context, thereby exploring how the organisation is dealing with these transformations. The concept of the humanitarian arena will be applied as the basis for assessing the opportunities and challenges that working on resilience presents to the PRC. The article will describe how the organisation, given its history, mandate, reputation and resources, manoeuvres in Manila’s urban humanitarian arena, particularly in relation to an increased ‘resilience’ orientation.

**Manila as an example of urbanisation trends in South East Asia**

Several years ago the world passed two significant, though hardly noticed, milestones.\(^2\) First, and for the first time in history, more people were living in urban areas than in rural areas. The growth of cities is particularly manifest in the so-called *Global South*. In 2030 they will be home to almost 4 billion people, 80% of the world’s urban population, with Asia being the region that holds most urbanites (i.e. people who live in cities). Urbanisation brings benefits for countries as a whole and provides opportunities at individual level to increase income, mobilise for political action and provide access to health, education and public services.\(^3\) In most cities, however, (economic) opportunities are not provided equally to all citizens. Thus, large groups become and remain trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and vulnerability, and their deprivation can in fact be worse than in rural areas.\(^4\) The majority of people work in the informal sector.\(^5\) Their low income contributes to food insecurity and impacts on their health (particularly water-related illnesses\(^6\) and communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS\(^7\)) as well as their access to health care. Because of insufficient affordable land, city dwellers usually live in informal and non-durable housing with little or no tenure security.\(^8\) Their settlements, more commonly referred to as slums, are generally located in hazard-prone areas that are highly polluted and overcrowded. The prevalence and growth of these informal settlements (usually holding up to 40% of the urban population) presents the second milestone: the number of

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slum dwellers has passed 1 billion. As with the overall urbanisation trend, slum growth worldwide is expected to accelerate, and in less than 10 years from now cities are expected to be home to 1.4 billion slum dwellers. The weak governance in those cities increases this trend.

In Manila the above trends and situations are not only particularly prevalent and stark, they also occur simultaneously. Large parts of the National Capital Region (made up of 17 cities including the city of Manila, but usually referred to as ‘Manila’) are frequently flooded and hit by tropical storms and cyclones, are widely polluted and have a high incidence of related illnesses. Income inequalities between and within Manila’s constituting cities are substantial. As is the case in slums worldwide, the dire living conditions constitute a permanent situation that bears many marks of a crisis – a permanent and multifactoral urban crisis. While slum dwellers can, to some extent, rely on (kinship and family-based) safety nets, they have to overcome mounting vulnerabilities that, given their nature, are increasingly recognised by humanitarian organisations such as the (Philippine) Red Cross as a concern that falls within their mandate.

New humanitarianism, resilience and the changing aid landscape

The aid landscape has been transforming concurrently. Over time, many humanitarian organisations have expanded their exclusive role of relief provision to also address underlying factors that make vulnerabilities structural and crises permanent, by taking actions to diversify livelihood options, to build local institutions, social structures and protection and to prepare communities for disasters. It is a manifestation of the increasingly blurred line between humanitarian and development concepts, still largely considered as dissociated, towards a ‘new humanitarianism’, and of an increased focus on local empowerment and ‘bottom-up’ approaches, which forces humanitarian organisations to move from a ‘supply side’ approach to a ‘demand side’ approach, where recipients have a stronger voice in expressing their needs and demands. This wider focus builds on the assumption that poverty and vulnerability are intrinsically linked. Unless livelihoods are robust and the resilience of people is strengthened, vulnerability will not be sustainably reduced. Moreover, against the background of increasing numbers of disasters, this wider focus complements an economic argument of the cost-effectiveness of prevention and mitigation with a moral one, i.e. that preventing loss of lives and livelihoods is to be preferred over taking action after disasters have taken their toll.

International movements in the field of disaster risk reduction (DRR) have stressed the moral and economic arguments. From the mid-1980s onwards, the United Nations has pushed for increased attention to reduce the human and economic losses of disasters. During the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in the 1990s and the successive International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in the 1990s and the successive International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, governments have agreed to commit themselves

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9 UNHabitat, *State of the World’s Cities 2006/7*.
10 See note 8 above, vi.
12 Ben Wisner et al., *At Risk – Natural Hazards, People’s Vulnerability and Disasters* (London: Routledge, 2004), 49–86.
to measures to reduce the effects of disasters or indeed prevent them from happening. While initially this implied a technology-driven focus that emphasised the importance of effective response structures, gradually the notion of ‘communities’ and the role they could play became more important, as well as those of NGOs and community-based organisations, and links with sustainable development.\footnote{UNEP, \textit{Global Environmental Outlook 3} (London: Earthscan, 2002).} This was reflected in the Hyogo Framework for Action (adopted in 2005), where ‘resilience’ was introduced into the strategic goals. The framework highlights that communities should be supported to live with change, and that authorities and organisations alike should strengthen their capacity to deal with this.\footnote{UNISDR, “Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disaster” (Conference Report World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, January 18–22).} It reflects the prior statement that disasters are increasingly regarded as part and parcel of development, and that, in line with the aforementioned ‘new humanitarianism’, response to disasters should be complemented with addressing the drivers of vulnerability that are shaped by development choices.

Especially in urban contexts, it is manifest that development and disaster risk are intimately linked. Vulnerability accumulates in cities, where it is intrinsically related to misguided (or even the absence of) development, where it is more substantially manifest and often more complex than in rural areas.\footnote{E.A. Gencer, “The Interplay Between Urban Development, Vulnerability and Risk Management,” \textit{Mediterranean Studies} 7 (2013): 1.} Events such as the earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince, Haiti (January 2010), and the aforementioned typhoon that hit Tacloban, Philippines (November 2013), put the spotlight on urban vulnerability, highlighting that outside interventions alone cannot adequately strengthen and prepare communities without a major contribution from communities themselves and local governance, in terms of the local knowledge and the ability to address vulnerability over the long term.\footnote{David Satterthwaite et al., \textit{Adapting to Climate Change in Urban Areas: The Possibilities and Constraints in Low- and Middle Income Nations}, Human Settlements Discussion Paper Series, Theme: Climate Change and Cities 1 (London: IIED, 2009).} Against this background, the concept of resilience is welcomed by governments, humanitarians and developmentalists alike and, given the ongoing trend of urbanisation, its arrival seems to be well-timed.

The humanitarian arena in an urban setting

The response to natural disasters, especially rapid onset ones, is usually characterised by an equally rapid phasing in and out. Depending on the scale of impacts, the level of the existing urban resilience system and resulting needs, response activities may be followed by engagement in rehabilitation and reconstruction. The Red Cross, established on basis of the humanitarian principles\footnote{Seven humanitarian principles have been designed to guide the activities of the Red Cross. They are ‘humanity’ (i.e. seeking to prevent and alleviate human suffering), ‘neutrality’ (not to take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies), ‘impartiality’ (to base assistance on needs alone) ‘independence’ (always maintain their autonomy), ‘voluntary service’ (the movement is not prompted by a desire for gain), ‘unity’ (only one national Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country, open to all and working throughout the entire country) and ‘universalism’ (all national societies have equal status and help each other). See IFRC, “The Seven Fundamental Principles,” http://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/vision-and-mission/the-seven-fundamental-principles/ (accessed July 12, 2014).} advocated by Henri Dunant, is expected to apply these principles in a full and uncompromised ‘Dunantist’ way. The centrality of the principles to its humanitarian action not only justifies and legitimises the Red Cross’ activities in crisis

19 Seven humanitarian principles have been designed to guide the activities of the Red Cross. They are ‘humanity’ (i.e. seeking to prevent and alleviate human suffering), ‘neutrality’ (not to take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies), ‘impartiality’ (to base assistance on needs alone) ‘independence’ (always maintain their autonomy), ‘voluntary service’ (the movement is not prompted by a desire for gain), ‘unity’ (only one national Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country, open to all and working throughout the entire country) and ‘universalism’ (all national societies have equal status and help each other). See IFRC, “The Seven Fundamental Principles,” http://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/vision-and-mission/the-seven-fundamental-principles/ (accessed July 12, 2014).
situations but also simultaneously prevents the organisation from becoming politically involved in these situations,\(^{20}\) enabling it to operate in a so-called ‘humanitarian space’.

Following the ‘humanitarian arena’ approach by Hilhorst and Jansen,\(^{21}\) in practice, humanitarian crises are usually characterised by a certain degree of chaos which creates the circumstances in which constant interaction and negotiation (in fact political processes) take place that enable all actors that operate in this situation to advance their aims. As not only the number and the diverse nature of disasters but also the multiplicity and diversity of organisations that wish to alleviate the related suffering is increasing, the humanitarian arena is occupied by a multitude of actors that each have their own mandate and priorities, and interpretation of each other and the context, and that operate in ways most beneficial to them. Next to pursuing humanitarian aims, all actors (donors, service providers, governments and beneficiaries alike) seek favourable positions in the light of their individual, communal or organisational interests. The resulting post-disaster humanitarian space is thus characterised by (some) disorder, and assistance is the outcome of constant interactions of different form and scale.

In the arena, services are delivered not purely in a Dunantist way, but rather are socially negotiated in terms of policies and practices. In this arena humanitarian action is not confined to exceptional situations, but rather acknowledges the continuities and discontinuities between crisis and normalcy. This implies that needs are not (only) triggered by disaster, but in fact are (partly) a continuation of normalcy, which is an indication that short and long(er) term focus interrelate. Consequently, to be truly effective, activities must address not only the consequences but also the underlying causes of structural vulnerability, poverty and powerlessness. Thus, the analytical timeframe should not be restricted to the period in which international humanitarian assistance is dominant, but, in fact, should cover much longer time spans and accommodate the application of different expertise (such as urban planning or sociology) next to the purely humanitarian.\(^{22}\)

As for the stakeholders involved in assistance, the ‘humanitarian arena’ approach focuses on their agency by attributing much more diverse roles, positions and interests to them. National and international providers of relief, as well as governments, other NGOs and aid recipients themselves, influence humanitarian actions and collectively shape the humanitarian space.

The theoretical approach of the ‘humanitarian arena’ informs this paper. While the ‘humanitarian space’ attributes clear and distinctive roles and responsibilities to actors (who moreover operate purely on the basis of humanitarian principles), the arena approach embeds their modus operandi in a dynamic context, where actors (also non-humanitarian) interact and negotiate, enabling them to advance their aims. It is applied as the framework to structure the various processes, positions and preferences that shape the PRC’s humanitarian assistance in the aforementioned context of Manila’s slums. The next section will discuss how the Red Cross manoeuvres in urban Manila by working through a resilience approach.


\(^{22}\) Ibid.
The Philippine Red Cross’ first experience in working on causes of disasters in Manila

The Philippine Red Cross, DRR and Partners for Resilience

Operating in one of the world’s most disaster-prone countries, the disaster focus of the PRC has until recently been predominantly preparedness and response-oriented, addressing disasters that manifest themselves as sudden shocks (fires, storms, floods, earthquakes) for which it has set up structures such as ‘143 Volunteers’. It has given no special priority to urban vulnerability other than establishing these volunteer groups in rural and urban barangays alike. The strategic reorientation to also address drivers of vulnerability (described above) has only recently been matched by engagement in ‘resilience-building’ activities in poor sections of the Metro Manila city of Valenzuela. The first steps in working on resilience in an urban context will be described here, through the application of the humanitarian arena framework, with particular attention to the way the organisation operates in this environment, how it builds its arguments vis-à-vis stakeholders, how its Principles can be a guide to activities in the urban context and how it supplements humanitarian action with humanitarian diplomacy. Findings are based on document analysis, and interviews, focus groups and observations with staff, volunteers, communities, government officials and other NGOs working in the same programme or the same barangays, carried out late 2011/early 2012, and mid-2013.

Globally, for the Red Cross, the expansion of its scope to address underlying causes of despair is complemented by a return to its Fundamental Principles, where ‘humanity’ relates to the need to ‘alleviate and prevent human suffering wherever it may be found’ (emphasis added). Prevention implies addressing underlying factors contributing to vulnerability. Throughout the Red Cross Movement, the past decades have shown a gradual expansion of disaster management to include an ever-greater focus on preparedness and risk reduction. The current guiding Strategy 2020 of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) reflects this, as it strongly promotes ‘safer living’, with prevention and mitigation being key, and an increased emphasis on the active engagement of vulnerable people. This comes with the realisation that activities may be beyond its humanitarian mandate. Hence, emphasis is put on complementing activities with humanitarian diplomacy, not only to ensure a conducive environment but also to engage in strategic dialogue to focus on the responsibility of all stakeholders, including the government. This strategic orientation reflects an overall increased focus of humanitarian organisations on the concept of resilience.
The engagement of the PRC in the Partners for Resilience (PfR) programme to address the disaster risk of poor and vulnerable communities in Valenzuela is a reflection of the above described developments within the Red Cross Movement. The PRC is at the forefront of translating ‘resilience’ into practice within the Movement, and its partners regard the organisation’s pioneering with interest. The programme simultaneously reflects how manifest urban disasters have become in the Philippine ‘disaster landscape’. Notwithstanding other disasters, the devastation caused by typhoon Haiyan (November 2013) in Tacloban is a proof in point. For the organisation, this engagement constitutes a shift from its traditional orientation, where it used to position itself primarily as organiser and provider of relief – both disaster preparedness and disaster response—towards working on structural disaster prevention and mitigation. About its Disaster Management Services the organisation’s website states:

The roles of the Disaster Management Services (DMS) are to provide relief in times of disasters and to carry on measures to minimize the suffering caused by them. Disaster preparedness is also a major component of its program that aims to prepare especially the vulnerable communities in the event of calamities… Whereas the Red Cross used to focus on what to do during a disaster, the DMS now [also] identifies hazard prone areas and makes vulnerability assessment of these areas.

For its disaster-relief activities the PRC, like any national Red Cross Society, holds an auxiliary status to its government. This implies that it works in close relation to and cooperation with government structures, on a given set of tasks and with attributed responsibilities, both legally embedded. Its tasks and capacity are to complement those of the government. For localised disasters the PRC has a vast network of trained volunteers at barangay level (Red Cross 143) who operate in the barangays where they usually live and work – in Metro Manila the PRC has teams in some 90% of the 1705 barangays. For large-scale operations the organisation has Disaster Response Teams for immediate deployment throughout the archipelago. However, in response to increasing disaster losses and in line with an evolving orientation to disaster management, congruent to that of other humanitarian organisations, the PRC has expanded its scope accordingly: ‘The DMS department has now adopted a two-pronged approach in dealing with disasters. The department’s work involves Disaster Relief Activities (DRA) and Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Preparedness (DPMP).’

As for the legal and political context, the PRC’s engagement in DRR is facilitated by the passage of a new disaster act in the Philippines in 2010, presenting a conducive institutional environment. This act, RA10121, takes a ‘holistic, comprehensive, integrated, and proactive’ approach to DRR and management. In contrast to its predecessor, the new act aims at addressing root causes of despair, reducing disaster risk and building resilience amongst communities, while including (local) stakeholders. The decentralised Philippine political system assigns a central role to local governments to operationalise the aims.

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30 Ibid.
In practice, guidance by the national authorities is often weak, and local governments tend to lack experience and training in the field of mitigation, hence falling back predominantly on preparedness and response measures they are acquainted with. In line with the aforementioned decentralisation, the national budget for DRR is subdivided into smaller locally owned funds. As a result the budgets for mitigation and preparedness (70% of the total disaster budget, as per the act) tend to be too small to meet ambitious prevention and mitigation projects, and is predominantly used for preparedness: to acquire rescue material, including lifeboats and trucks, and provide training. Consequently, for the paradigm shift from reactive to proactive measures, civil society organisations (PRC and NGOs) are looked at to fill this void that is left by barangay governance. To avoid a local governmental substitution process, the resilience approach, with more expectations regarding initiatives by civil society organisations and communities themselves, on the one hand helps the government to mobilise more partners and external resources – a wider engagement that may in turn also lead to a greater demand for government actions. On the other hand, it also opens up a debate as to where responsibilities lie, and what people may expect from their government in terms of safety and security.

The organisation’s orientation and concerns, and the new legislative and political environment, present the motivation and the boundaries for the PRC’s engagement in its first major programme in the field of prevention and mitigation of urban disaster risk for semi- and informal settlements. With the PfR programme, the organisation aims to increase the resilience of selected local communities in the Philippines.\(^{35}\) It attempts to reduce the disaster risks they face though strengthening and diversifying their livelihoods strategies, alongside preparations for effective disaster response. The organisation has thereby broadened its focus, through the incorporation of the increased risk resulting from climate change and with regard to wider ecosystems, both enabling more prominence to be given to the underlying causes of vulnerability. In the PfR programme, resilience is defined following the UN definition as:

The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.\(^{36}\)

The urban focus in the programme is on the city of Valenzuela, where the PRC works in five communities. The programme, through its focus on the formation of partnerships, connects the PRC (both its national headquarters as well as its chapter of Valenzuela) with a variety of external stakeholders: from government institutions at multiple levels, communities, NGOs and civil society, to the private sector and media. The figure representation of the stakeholders involved in it indicates the multiple links that make up the institutional framework of the programme and indeed also exemplifies one of the key elements of the humanitarian arena approach, namely that all stakeholders co-shape humanitarian action. It also exemplifies the potential complexity of working this way.

The findings of the PRC’s experiences in the urban resilience-building programme are assessed below, using the ‘Humanitarian Arena’ approach. The elements of this approach

\(^{35}\) See also [www.partnersforresilience.nl](http://www.partnersforresilience.nl). In the Philippines, the local partners are the PRC (partner of the Netherlands Red Cross), Accord (local partner of CARE Nederland) and IIRR (local partner of Cordaid), while the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and Wetlands International provide support through their regional and global networks of technical specialists.

are grouped into a section related to the needs of the target population and the actions taken to address these, and a section on the actors who are engaged in the programme and their agency. Some findings relate to more than one element.

**Needs and actions**

The Meycauayan River, along which the city of Valenzuela is located, regularly floods many barangays, some even permanently. This seriously affects people’s daily lives: it impedes the carrying out of their day-to-day activities and many therefore encounter difficulties in making a living – in a city which is among the poorest in Manila.\(^{37}\) This is one of the reasons for the Red Cross to work in the city of Valenzuela. However, congruent to the aforementioned normalcy of crisis situations, many community members regard the flooding as a natural event. Those who can afford it build extra storeys onto their houses, and accept that the ground floor has become uninhabitable. When flood warnings are put forth, people developed a habit of tying their belongings to the ceiling or bringing them upstairs to prevent damage. Contrary to conventional interpretations, for some members, flooding even creates economic opportunities: people who own boats offer their transporting services in exchange for money and/or goods, and peddycab drivers increase their prices, following a rising demand. Community members jokingly indicate that the floods bring fish literally to their doorsteps. However, with the Meycauayan River being one of the most polluted rivers in the world,\(^{38}\) people spend days surrounded by polluted water, which poses a severe risk to their health, and which makes the aforementioned fish an unhealthy diet. Despite these incidental benefits, floods hit people with least (financial) resources hardest by disproportionally disrupting their abilities to earn a daily income.

While in Malabon (see Figure 1) people put crime and security highest on their list of vulnerabilities, the Valenzuela programme sites, located on the outskirts of the city and displaying at some places a more peri-urban character, are characterised by relatively strong community ties and low levels of illegal settlers and street dwellers, and little petty crime and domestic violence. Consequently, the Valenzuela barangay staff consider floods as their most pressing problem.

A second reason underlying the selection of Valenzuela for the PfR programme relates to organisational preferences. At city level the Red Cross maintains strong ties with the municipal government of Valenzuela. The city mayor (at the time of developing the PfR programme) has put DRR high on the city government’s agenda, and has enabled the Valenzuela chapter of the PRC to manifest itself as an important player in this field. The Mayor also holds a position at the PRC’ Board of Governors, which, in line with the organisation’s focus, has contributed to his support for DRR.

Within Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies it is not uncommon that members of the governing board also hold or pursue political positions. Close ties with governments are largely based on the formal auxiliary role of National Societies to their governments. In the Philippines such links are traditionally prevalent, given the country’s thriving civil society and the preferred position that has been allocated to NGOs under the post-Marcos constitution.\(^{39}\) For the Red Cross, these ties provide relatively easy access to government

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institutions and enable better embeddedness in government-led contingency plans as well as better alignment with formal development plans. However, as has become clear under the PfR in Valenzuela, the close relationship with the municipal government can also challenge cooperation of the chapter with barangays headed by elected officials from a different political colour. Unease and distrust leads officials to maintain a distance and can even slow down programme implementation and force the PRC to explain and defend its independence, one of its Fundamental Principles that it regards as undisputed.

The dense volunteer network as discussed above, capable of running a large-scale programme with long-time engagement, was a third contributing factor to the selection of the barangays. Especially for a first programme of its kind, management put much emphasis on smooth implementation as a condition for PRC engagement, and the presence of a well-established pool of ‘143 volunteers’ was expected to greatly facilitate this.

A fourth reason to start implementing the PfR programme in Valenzuela is the international support offered to the PRC for engaging in an urban resilience-building programme. Although the organisation is well capable of raising funds, management indicates that the budget of €1.2 million is difficult to raise domestically. At the same time it is recognised that urban disaster risk is increasing and that the organisation needs to develop its expertise in this field. Engaging in the PfR programme offers both financial resources and the opportunity to increase understanding of the broader notion of disaster resilience, and to develop a base from where urban interventions can be scaled up.

While the need to address underlying factors of vulnerability is expressed in relevant strategies and policies of the organisation, corresponding actions remain still largely
response-oriented. A main reason seems to be that resilience-focused work is new to the organisation, and developing expertise, scale and visibility in this field, given the organisation’s mandate and tradition, requires time. Especially at lower levels within the organisation, where staff and volunteers work at positions closer to ‘the field’, there is a felt need that the organisation, to remain relevant, should indeed expand its scope and that doing so requires tools and resources (including knowledge). At higher levels, the importance of a more resilience-based orientation is also recognised, but the focus seems still predominantly to be relief, the organisation’s niche area. Such activities, it is recognised, are also more beneficial for profiling the organisation than the crowded organisational field of resilience, prevention and mitigation.

**Actors and agencies**

The PRC recognises in the PfR programme that involvement of beneficiaries in programme activities in urban areas is more challenging than in rural areas. Staff members indicate that where in rural areas usually at least one family member stays at home and is potentially able to participate in Red Cross activities, the reality in urban areas is that practically all adults work, sometimes far away from the neighbourhood. Moreover, although most dwellers agree on their most pressing needs, it appeared more difficult to establish a feeling of shared responsibility to address these. Backgrounds of urban inhabitants are usually widely varied, and habitat is motivated by proximity to workplace rather than family or community bonds. While the selected barangays are more coherent than many other urban contexts, staff still experience lower community coherence than compared to rural areas.

Proximity of a different kind, i.e. the closeness to the government, appears a tough issue in the engagement with PfR. There is unease on two sides for the PRC. On the one hand, the organisation is reluctant to engage in actions that may put it at odds with the government. This is especially visible in relation to strengthening the housing security of informal settlers, for example by providing services to them. When it comes to the relocation of settlers, the PRC rather positions itself as an advocate that works with the government. Although it recognises that good health contributes positively to livelihoods, it chooses to stay close to what is considers its core area of responsibility: disaster management. On the other hand, as indicated above, the proximity to the (city) government can also put a strain on cooperation with barangays with different political affiliations.

Within the organisation, different levels hold different perceptions on the definition of ‘resilience’. Especially at higher levels, the concept is regarded as enabling communities to possess the capacity to bounce back, and quickly overcome the adversities of a disaster. Following this definition, the role of the Red Cross should primarily be to provide emergency relief, and to do so as effectively and efficiently as possible. At the organisation’s (lower) management level, the view is first that much of this ‘bouncing back’ should come from communities themselves, and that Red Cross should therefore help strengthen these capacities. This interpretation automatically brings about fields of activities that are not traditionally part of the Red Cross’ expertise (and which partnerships may overcome). Furthermore, at the management level there is a developmental orientation towards communities’ dual capacity to avert disaster situations and to ‘bounce back better’, recovering in such a way that their proneness to disasters reduces. These different perceptions translate into differing expectations regarding the most appropriate
or preferred activities, whereas the discourse or vocabulary is similar. This has obvious implications for programme coherence and possibilities for monitoring and management.

At the implementation level the focus is predominantly on disaster response and preparedness, hence reflecting again a more traditional understanding of disaster management. The Valenzuela chapter, for instance, views itself predominantly as the number one provider of blood services in the city. Moreover, it mainly focuses on disaster preparedness and response, i.e. the lifeboat is the pride of the organisation, the top-deck of the office serves the storage of relief goods and its task is to disseminate information. That is, increasingly, the city chapter provides training and awareness raising events to the community of Valenzuela. It comprises of 143 volunteer teams in 20 of the city’s 33 barangays, including those where it implements the PfR programme. However, climate change adaptation and ecosystem management and restoration (which are key to the PfR programme) are hardly discussed as intrinsic elements of DRR, let alone practiced as such. The chapter’s staff consists predominantly of nurses,40 with wide experience in the field of emergency response and health-related issues, but who are less trained in the field of DRR. The chapter’s volunteers are predominantly educated in preparedness and response and less in mitigation and prevention. As a consequence, while both programme management and implementing staff and volunteers subscribe to the notion of strengthening resilience, the focus has been predominantly on the response side and strengthening organisational capacities, and less on mitigation and strengthening the communities’ capacities.

The programme not only challenges the PRC’s role and orientation, but also the vastness of its network and its abilities to connect simultaneously with multiple government entities and stakeholders. A key feature related to PfR’s ecosystem focus is a broader landscape approach to also address the drivers of risk. Upstream land claims and deforestation in the Cordillera Administrative Region, for example, result in frequent flooding in barangays along the Meycauayan River in Valenzuela. In such situations where cause and origin of disaster risk are often situated in different constituencies, various chapters of the organisation need to engage with different local governments.

Discussion and conclusions

With its humanitarian orientation that expands beyond relief, and with its engagement in poor settlements in Valenzuela, the PRC recognises the dire humanitarian situation in these settlements that deserves the attention of humanitarian organisations. In its programme in Valenzuela it works with a multitude of actors who, each with their own aims and interests, co-shape the humanitarian space. As the PfR programme addresses underlying causes of disaster and disaster risk, it forces the organisation to step out of its traditional relief-oriented way of working, thereby being congruent with the organisation’s strategic and policy orientation. Addressing underlying causes, applying a long-term focus and engaging with communities to strengthen their resilience put the PRC ahead of most other national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and in fact make the organisation one of the first to experiment in a field rather unfamiliar to most National Societies. In practice, however, the inclusion of activities that address underlying causes, either by supporting infrastructure-related mitigation measures or by strengthening coping mechanisms of communities, at

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40 In the Philippines, many people, especially women, are educated to be nurses, to find their way out of poverty. With the economic recession, and a boom in graduating nurses, many graduates have to find employment in other sectors. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18575810 (accessed April 2, 2013).
times appears to be a challenge. It points to several institutional and organisational
difficulties for the PRC that have become manifest in this programme.

First the organisation traditionally has a strong focus on actions that are close to its
mandate and its legally embedded role as a provider of relief. Although its policies and
strategies present an ambition towards a wider DRR orientation, it remains a challenge for
the organisation to shift its actions accordingly: disaster preparedness actions and
contingency planning, including the purchase of relief materials and the organisation of
community drills, still appear most dominant. One important reason for this is that it is
mainly the middle management that is in close contact with the overall PfR alliance
members who promote the resilience approach. However, this middle management staff is
neither decision-maker nor implementer on the ground and has therefore limited abilities
to enforce the inclusion and implementation of more mitigation and prevention-oriented
activities. Especially the volunteers in the barangays are still predominantly relief-oriented
and consequently focus on related activities.

The traditional relief orientation, in combination with the organisations’ auxiliary role,
has enabled the PRC to build an efficient organisation that is capable of implementing relief
operations quickly and independently, which is indispensable in a country so often plagued by
disasters. While beneficial in times of crises, this orientation challenges the PRC in situations
of longer-term developmental activities, where it needs to engage with other organisations for
the required expertise. However, for long-term partnerships the PRC traditionally focuses
exclusively on other Red Cross organisations rather than with non-Red Cross partners. Such
engagements with non-Red Cross partners need time to firmly establish.

Furthermore, in the resilience-oriented programme, the PRC at times finds itself in a
quandary between its Fundamental Principles and humanitarian diplomacy as a
programme strategy. The organisation clearly intends to draw on its respected position,
backed by neutrality, impartiality and independence. However, with respect to the long
tradition of collaboration, the organisation at times is hesitant to bring in issues that the
government may regard as confrontational. As a consequence the PRC seems to be more
comfortable with the core of its activities, i.e. disaster relief and preparedness.

The relationship with the government impacts in other contexts as well. The strong ties
at the branch level with the government of Valenzuela (where the mayor was also a
member of the National Board) contributed significantly to its decisions regarding the
project location. This plays to the logic that for the implementation of a programme that in
direction and scope is new to the organisation, and which many Red Cross partners follow
with great interest, a conducive political environment would be a major beneficial factor.
In addition, Valenzuela traditionally has a strong focus on DRR as well. This constellation,
with a challenging new topic, with new partners and in an urban context largely unknown
to the organisation, requires a holistic vision and an adaptation of the humanitarian
paradigm and the organisation’s principle of impartiality.

Moreover, the close ties with the mayor, which facilitated implementation, also has
created some opposition to the programme at barangays with a different political
affiliation. This necessitated extra negotiation and efforts by the PRC, including the mayor
as a Board member, to persuade these barangays that no politics were nor should be
involved in the setting-up and implementation of the programme. It forced the
organisation to understand how to intervene in an urban context without being
manipulated by elected officials and to preserve its principle of independency.

The programme at times also seems to challenge the PRC’s principle of neutrality.
While usually the Red Cross is distinct from other organisations (both physically and
perceptually) because of its auxiliary role and highly profiled Fundamental Principles, the
organisation realises that under the PfR set-up, with collaboration in activities and policy dialogue with (other) NGOs, this distinctive characteristic becomes somewhat blurred.

Finally, its traditional relief orientation implies that the PRC naturally has limited experience in community development and empowerment. Even though its structure of ‘143 Volunteers’ presents the organisation with a strong and vast basis in barangays, the orientation remains predominantly as a provider of outside relief rather than as an organisation that works from within communities, with community members, on longer-term issues that underlie their vulnerability. As the PfR programme builds its programme to a considerable extent on community involvement, the organisation finds itself forced to reorganise, changing its organisational culture, developing expertise among staff and volunteers and altering its external image. While at the outset of the programme five years seemed to provide ample time, in reality this turned out rather modest to bring about a change in mind set, and in translating that into changed activities.

Together these observations highlight several emerging challenges now that the PRC, with its expertise mainly rooted in relief and preparedness, engages in longer-term urban programmes that aim to address underlying causes of vulnerability, particularly prevalent in the mostly informal settlements in Manila. It appears that applying the comprehensive resilience approach puts pressure on how the organisation is able to be guided by its Fundamental Principles, especially in relation to issues such as fulfilling donor obligations, working with organisations outside the Red Cross family, taking a more critical role towards the government and embedding communities in its approach.

Also, for an established provider of relief the expansion into more development-oriented activities provides organisational challenges. While the PRC’s given mandate, as formulated in policies and strategies, may be relatively easy to expand to align with developments inside the Red Cross movement, the subsequent and conditional adaptation of organisational activities proves equally important but more difficult to achieve. In a sense, resilience-building appears to apply equally to the organisation’s internal matters: staff and volunteers need to become acquainted with more and more diverse pressures that appear in programmes aiming to address underlying causes of disaster risk. This requires an amalgam of resources, which partially need to be provided by external partners. Externally the organisation is confronted with boundaries of its own capacities as well as those of the implementing environment, where other actors, including the government and local experts, are to various degrees unfamiliar with the notion of resilience, specifically urban resilience, despite the profound place given to it in RA10121.

With its engagement in long-term programmes that aim to address underlying causes of disaster risk, and in which it engages closely with communities, governments and NGOs, the PRC is a leading organisation within the Red Cross Movement in a process that is expanding the Red Cross’ scope in line with the international Strategy 2020. While the engagement in building community resilience fits the organisation because of both exogenous and endogenous reasons, its traditional strengths in terms of organisation, modus operandi and Fundamental Principles emerge, to various degrees, as challenging factors to the organisation’s expansion into longer-term work. While adaptations in strategies and policies are relatively easy to achieve, the concurrent transformations in mind-set and activities appear more challenging to bring about, and hence require time to be achieved. The increasing need to address drivers of vulnerability, that appear because of ongoing urbanisation, and the growing notion of the complexity of disasters and the concurrent notion of resilience are critical issues for the Red Cross Movement, NGOs and donors alike to acknowledge and address in research, strategic development and organisational structure.
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