

# Developing the CSO case studies<sup>1</sup>

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*John Norton, Development Workshop France, Lauzerte, France,  
&  
Terry David Gibson, Inventing Futures, Macclesfield, UK*

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## Introduction

The original impetus for producing this collection of work was the opportunity to publish in a special issue of the International Journal of Disaster Prevention and Management in 2018 (<https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-07-2018-0210>) following the publication of a paper entitled “Let’s talk about you... Opening space for local experience, action and learning in disaster risk reduction” (Gibson & Wisner, 2016) (DPM journal 2016). From invitations sent out in late 2016 by the guest editors to more than twenty CSOs with past or ongoing collaboration with the Global Network for Disaster Reduction (GNDR)<sup>2</sup> “Views from the Frontline”(VFL) and “Action at the Frontline”(AFL) programmes<sup>3</sup> - which have often served as a catalyst to independent actions -, eleven of these CSO submitted draft proposals describing a wide range of aspects of, and issues around their work that they felt would best illustrate their practical experience of working with and encouraging community driven actions.

In all the cases the suggested material has subsequently needed refining so that they could develop into coherent papers that focus on issues, successes and barriers which in different ways have shaped the outcome locally and at times regionally or nationally. In doing so, the process has been enriched by considerable collaboration between authors and their peer reviewers and to some extent by the guest editors.

Over nearly a year since receiving the initial proposals in early 2017, of the initial eleven contributors from Africa, Asia, the Pacific islands and South East Asia, eight of the CSO authors have developed their completed case studies.

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## Telling it how it is

From the outset, the intended focus of the case studies was firmly on local reality, and not necessarily on “good news” outcomes. The editors encouraged the authors to write about their real experience, the good and the bad, and about the barriers they have confronted and how these experiences have helped them

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<sup>1</sup> An edited version of this paper was published in the Special Edition of the “Disaster prevention and management: An international journal” Vol. 28 No. 1. in August 2018

<sup>2</sup> Global Network for Disaster Reduction, (GNDR) is a regionally decentralised network of over 800 non-governmental organisations and other civil society organisations in 129 predominantly medium and low-income countries.

<sup>3</sup> See Paper N° 2 in this Journal on the « Frontline Methodology »

and, in turn, communities, to identify local issues, problems and priorities, and through this process, to collectively define actions to overcome or reduce the risks they face.

Based on the early drafts from each author, the editors began by preparing for each author some questions and suggestions on how to take their article forward, so that it will finally be able to highlight both the success and challenges/barriers the CSO had faced, in order that readers and other CSO facing similar situations would be able to learn as much as possible from such experience and appreciate the process and the effort that goes into this.

This began the iterative progression from reporting success stories to increasingly critically considered case studies.

Exchanges were initially in the form of individual internet communication, and at this stage there was no attempt to initiate a shared dialogue between all parties. However, a summary of all the case studies was prepared by the editors and shared with all the contributors.

It quickly became apparent from the revised draft cases that it would be helpful to channel basic information in each case into common themes or areas of interest or concern, and through this, to provide a degree of structure to the case studies without imposing a rigid template. A table was drawn up (Figure 1) and contributors were asked to present their case studies at this stage under headings such as “Threats”, “Consequences”, “Barriers” etc. whilst the same time being encouraged to expand or indeed ignore headings they felt were not relevant to their experience.

Figure 1.

Subject of your case study?	Overall context (social, environmental, material, etc.)	Threats	Consequences	Barriers	The resilience zone – who are the actors?	Actions, effectiveness	Important themes/issues	Future change & transformation – dreaming dreams
What is the subject of the primary case study and what secondary or supporting cases or examples are there?	What are the conditions in which the cases are situated?	What are the threats which local people face? They may come from many directions – economics, climate, other environmental hazards, political and social pressures and others. <b>Identify the top priorities</b>	What shocks and stresses do local people face as a result of these threats? <b>Identify one or more for each threat</b>	What is it that prevents something being done to reduce the effect of the shocks and stresses resulting from the consequences you identified?	Who are the different actors who have an influence on either <b>creating</b> barriers to change, or who are <b>taking action</b> to make a change to reduce the shocks and stresses resulting from the consequences you identified? This is a simple ‘stakeholder analysis’	What are the actual or potential actions that it is possible to take locally, and how can these be achieved? Where actions have been taken why have they been effective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local/non local knowledge sharing–receptiveness/reticence?</b></li> <li>• <b>Population stability/mobility/migration?</b></li> <li>• <b>Politics, power or powerlessness</b></li> <li>• <b>Collaboration and influence</b></li> <li>• <b>Decision making – passive or active actors – (gender/inequality)?</b></li> <li>• <b>Learning from each specific &amp; unique situation?</b></li> <li>• <b>Changing environments &amp; climate</b></li> <li>• <b>Using tradition and innovation....</b></li> <li>• <b>Cohesive or passive local populations?</b></li> </ul>	In many cases the actions that can be taken are about coping with the situation, or adapting to it. What would real ‘transformatory change’ look like, how would it be achieved, and what actors would be involved. Dream dreams!

The editors responded to the tables submitted individually by each author with comments and requests for elaboration or explanation, with the aim of teasing out even at this early stage commonalities and contrasts between the different cases.

As revised tables with comments were returned to the editors, only at this stage were they then also shared between all participants, inviting - albeit informally - a first form of peer review between the authors. Reactions to this were mixed. Understandably, authors were reticent about commenting publically on each other's submissions, particularly as each described experiences in contexts very different from their own. A sense of "where do we go from here?" crept into the now almost daily exchanges between the two editors. They had a strong sense that there was a need to draw out more detailed material related to these community experiences, and thereby to develop more depth and breadth to the draft case studies so that one could better understand the interaction of different issues and actors. To achieve this could only be done with difficulty at a distance by e-mail exchanges and sharing of draft texts. We needed to develop greater and freer exchange between all the case study authors and to facilitate if possible greater discussion.

An ambitious, even unlikely strategy was to try and organise a writers' workshop that would bring together in one place all the case study authors. The problem was how and where this could be achieved financially: the geographical spread of the authors seemed an insurmountable obstacle.

Then came a lucky break. Through a chance meeting, the editors turned to the Global Fund for Community Foundations<sup>4</sup> who agreed to fund travel and accommodation for a writers' workshop (or "write-shop") and who suggested this might take place in a centre known to them in Nepal. TEWA- Philanthropy for Equitable Justice and Peace, in Lalipur (adjoining Kathmandu) could provide ideal workshop facilities as well as bed and board. Within a month of the GFCF decision to award this grant, dates had been fixed and travel arrangements made that would enable us to bring together as many of the case study authors as possible for a few days in November 2017. In the event, eight managed to attend as did both editors, and a workshop administrator, whilst two authors were unable to participate but have nevertheless contributed to the journal. Coincidentally, Nepal provided rich local examples of communities and CSO working together to address the aftermath of earthquakes and the reduction of a variety of other local risks, creating a stimulating backdrop to the write-shop.

The write-shop was held from 30<sup>th</sup> October to 2<sup>nd</sup> November. To encourage each author to talk and express more about their case and experience, the write-shop was structured round peer reviews. This time, however, each case study was reviewed by two, occasionally three, fellow authors or peer 'readers', each reader being an author of another case study paper. Before arriving in Nepal each reader had time to prepare notes and questions on the cases allocated to them. During the write-shop each reader presented their comments, questions and suggestions to the author and to all the participants, and these were discussed in open session with the author providing answers and comments and ending with a collection of written suggestions and comments provided by all those present. These discussions were subsequently developed by the end of the write-shop into guidance notes to help each author further develop his or her case study. After the write-shop, all eight authors revised their case studies and these new drafts were exchanged for a further (and final) peer review by their 'readers' and by the editors.

This very participative write-shop and peer review process generated a rich body of reflection on both the experiences and how they could best be shared with a wider readership. For the participants the three days provided a wide ranging discussion that brought out detail, unexpected material and thoughts about the

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<sup>4</sup> GFCF: a grassroots grant maker working to promote and support institutions of community philanthropy around the world.

people and places and their problems they face and the work they have been doing. The effort of getting to Nepal from faraway places over several days had paid off.

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## Conclusion

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In developing the CSO case studies, the purpose has been to encourage the authors to critically explore their own example of “local experience” and to deepen our understanding of how communities actually assess and address *their* local reality and the challenges they face.

One could question whether the process of iterative development of the articles described here carried a risk of influencing the actual content of each contribution. And yet, with hindsight, given the goal of raising the profile of local knowledge and experience, and of the issues that communities confront but which are sometimes overlooked or ignored, the resulting articles would seem to justify the method. The eight CSO articles manage to shed fresh light on a diversity of – for a wider readership - sometimes surprising and often insufficiently reported local threats and risks identified by inhabitants with CSO encouragement. They are thus in many respects a too rare opportunity to read and perhaps learn about events, issues and barriers that do not get enough exposure, and written by authors who may not have enough opportunities to tell about their experience nor receive encouragement to do so. We would indeed argue that in a system that still largely overlooks everyday disasters and small but cumulative events which combined can have major impacts on the wellbeing and future of local communities, more encouragement and opportunity should be provided by practitioners and media to encourage communities and CSO bring their concerns, issues and experience to the fore.

We would therefore hope that the approach, if not the method itself, could encourage others to do the same. The steps in the process are set out in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2

Process for development of case studies	
Stage of process	Notes
1. Selection of case study contributors	A convenience sampling approach was adopted based on previous relationships of the edition editors with members of GNDR
2. Preparation of an initial case study outline by the participant	A challenge from the outset was moving from 'success stories' which are often required for funding bids etc. to a more critical approach which identified challenges as well as successes.
3. Feedback and questions from the editors	The process of feedback was intended to help identify key points of interest for discussion and learning
4. Production of a further draft by the participant	It was found difficult to 'take a step back' from the cases and this led to design of the step below
5. Invitation to use a table format to 'deconstruct' the case study and identify <i>the subject, context, threats, consequences, barriers, key actors, actions, Important themes and issues, Future change &amp; transformation</i>	In order to help contributors 'tease out' learning they were invited to populate a table which broke down the case into various themes (see figure 1)
6. Revision of case study in a common format drawing on the analysis in (4)	Material from (4) and (5) was combined in the rewritten case. This work was collaborative between the authors and editors
7. Peer review of each case study by other participants in preparation for the Kathmandu workshop, each case being reviewed by 3 or 4 colleagues who prepared questions based on the review	Each case study was allocated to three or four of the other authors for peer review so that discussion at the Kathmandu workshop was based on these trigger questions, avoiding lengthy presentations of the original paper, which was 'taken as read'
8. Discussion of each case study paper between all participants at the Kathmandu workshop, initiated by the reviewers' questions	The 'safe space' of the workshop and understanding and trust engendered by spending time together formally and informally allowed for rich, open and sometimes provocative discussion, which was recorded directly to flipcharts and also recorded to audio.
9. Recording of key points made by participants at the workshop	The records of the workshop were collated in text form in spreadsheets as a basis for qualitative analysis, and shared with all the authors
10. Further revision of the case study on the basis of the workshop feedback.	Authors completed a based on workshop feedback
11. Discussion and amendment of this paper by all participants.	Final revisions were made in collaboration between authors and editors

### Corresponding author

- John Norton can be contacted at: [john.norton@dwf.org](mailto:john.norton@dwf.org)