

Strengthening community preparedness; bridging theory and practice

Communities are often the first to respond and the last to recover from disasters and other disruptive events, including weather-related disasters and public health emergencies. Strengthening community preparedness shifts humanitarian action from reactive aid to proactive, locally-led resilience. This session explores what community preparedness means and how humanitarian professionals can help strengthen it in contexts with prevalence of acute crises.



Community preparedness refers to a community's ability to anticipate, withstand and recover from disruptions, by building on local capacities, relationships, and knowledge. It is about supporting communities to act before a crisis hits, by investing in resilient local systems, supporting inclusive local governance, and enabling people to make informed decisions about the risks they face and cope with a rapidly changing environment. A key principle of community preparedness is the active involvement of all local stakeholders—such as residents, local authorities, and businesses—in strengthening community resilience. It is undesirable to place the entire burden of preparedness on the plate of communities, as they rely on contextual political decisions that define the extent to which disasters happen and will affect them.

In the context of unstable humanitarian funding, strengthening community preparedness could be one of the most effective safeguards. In order to achieve this promise, it is key to unpack for what communities are preparing exactly. Livelihood deterioration, climate change effects, impact of disasters, violence or conflict, the acute lack of social systems in place in times of crisis; each have different agendas and require different approaches. Also, 70% of people in places of crises are not directly affected by the crisis, but by the effects of the crisis leading to a lack of functioning of their societies and social protection systems. These issues are usually treated separately, but they are linked, which is why a system-approach is vital.

This may sound overwhelming, but it is very possible to act while including the systemic level, without having to address all facets. For example, risk assessments with communities serve to understand what the systemic links are, whilst making decisions on what can and also on what cannot be done. By supporting communities to develop preparedness plans and risk assessments, and take preventive measures, community preparedness not only enhances resilience but also reduces the human and financial costs associated with disasters.

Objectives of the session:

- *raise the understanding of community preparedness by bridging theory and practice through insights from scholars and practitioners*
- *explore actions that help strengthen community preparedness and their opportunities and risks*
- *discuss how to ensure that preparedness efforts are genuinely locally-led, without over-responsibilising communities.*

Speakers:

- *2 practitioners working on community preparedness (TBC)*
- *academic (TBC)*

Programme

9:15h	Arrival
9:30h	Welcome and introductions
9:40h	Speaker contributions and Q&A
10:30h	Group reflections
11:15h	Ways forward
11:30h	End of session