

# Policy Challenges in Supporting Community Resilience

by

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## Policy Challenges in Supporting Community Resilience<sup>1</sup>

During the last decade, devastating floods, terrorists attacks, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and, unfortunately, anticipation of more to come have driven governments throughout the world to turn their attention increasingly to national resilience. Despite best efforts to protect citizens from disasters, governments are eagerly searching for ideas and strategies to bolster the capacity of public, private, and civic sectors to withstand disruption, absorb disturbance, act effectively in a crisis, adapt to changing conditions, and grow stronger over time. It's a tall order, to say the least!

The purpose of this paper is to foster and expand dialogue on how communities become resilient and, especially, how governments can support local and regional efforts that empower public engagement and leadership. Across rapidly expanding experiences with disasters, successful resistance and adaptation point to the value of local, self-organized efforts in preparing for crises, responding quickly, and recovering more effectively. Many of these local efforts arise because of perceived failures of top-down emergency management plans and an overreliance on central authorities.

In November 2009, government representatives from the Multi-National Community Resilience Working Group formed a policy subgroup to begin to explore new approaches. The intent was to identify experiences among local communities which might better inform the ways in which governments conceptualized emergency preparedness and support. In particular, the goal was to document examples in which local residents organized themselves before an incident, responded as groups during the apparent chaos of an emergency, and followed informal processes of negotiation and decision-making that enabled them to lead their own area toward stabilization and recovery.

This paper synthesizes some of the analyses conducted over the last 12 months to identify community experiences that address local action and public engagement in

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resilience-related activities. The focus is on identifying themes that will inform policy initiatives, including challenges to conventional wisdom on emergency management and domestic security. It also seeks to document barriers to effective public engagement, and highlight pathways and principles for effective, local collective action.

The six case experiences included in this discussion are from the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), but the paper is part of an expanding, multinational process in which other countries are joining in to identify, collect, analyze, and share policy insights from their respective, local experiences.<sup>2</sup> The analytical and policy themes highlighted here are meant to start and expand the dialogue, and to encourage others to broaden the parameters within which they examine local and government resilience initiatives.

With governments throughout the world facing dramatic financial burdens, and natural and man-made risks showing few signs of abating, this effort to think collectively across a wide range of emergencies carries a sense of urgency. As a multi-national community of policy officials, the desire is to identify promising experiences and practices that may save lives and property, stabilize and restore families and communities when incidents occur, and demonstrate a capacity to recover and rebuild even in the face of repeated disasters.

### A GLOBAL INTEREST IN RESILIENCE

The Multi-National Community Resilience Policy Subgroup thus far includes participants from the developed world.<sup>3</sup> Resilience, however, is a global interest and is perhaps even more important to those countries that can least afford the effects of repeated disasters. In much of the world, the impact of disasters has increased dramatically over the last decades due as much to unsustainable investments and economic growth strategies as to persistent poverty and infrastructure weaknesses. Promising economic

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<sup>2</sup> This expanding group now consists of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand. The group will likely expand further during the next year.

<sup>3</sup> The group's plans for 2011 include broadening participation to involve countries of all levels of economic growth.

growth has been set back and even reversed by the crushing burden of repeated weather-related disasters. Rapid, unplanned urbanization, environmental degradation, population concentration in disaster-prone areas, and increasing disparities of wealth have also weakened community-wide capacities to resist and recover from multiple emergencies.<sup>4</sup>

Developed nations of course have much greater capacities to prepare for and respond to emergencies. Yet, in the last decade local communities and regions have also faced rising systemic and structural uncertainties. Accelerated globalization has dramatically increased the complexity and perceived unpredictability of threats and hazards. From climate change that fuels the frequency and scale of natural events, to surprise terrorist attacks, to unpredicted financial meltdowns, governments and communities in the developed world now must consider the likelihood and realities of extreme events, maximum of maximum risks, and expanding complexities that exceed the scope and scale of most national plans.

These uncertainties and complexities have dramatically changed the context for policies and practices related to emergency management and domestic security, particularly over the last decade. Governments have sometimes stumbled through highly unsatisfactory responses to major disasters, despite best intentions and massive logistical responses. Part of the reason is that established strategies no longer fit the context of today's risks. Whether in the United States or the United Kingdom, government strategies until recently retained a Cold War, civil defense framework to handle disasters and prepare against attacks. The threat was extremely dangerous, but it was monolithic and, after decades of maturation, national systems had evolved to manage a fairly stable set of risks. While central government authorities had the authority, knowledge, and resources to protect citizens from potential dangers, citizens' roles were limited to what was popularly known in the US as "duck and cover."

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<sup>4</sup> Reflecting these concerns, in 2005 a group of 168 countries and organizations crafted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. See UN/ISDR, *Towards National Resilience: Good practices of National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction*, United Nations Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Geneva, Switzerland, 2008.

At the beginning of the last decade, then, preparedness frameworks were heavily concentrated within central governments, involved top-down management directives, and fostered widespread secrecy about the details of both risk and potential responses. Their shortcomings were revealed in the US after high-profile, critical after action reviews following the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks focused on difficulties in coordinating across multiple agencies, sharing information, and having sufficient flexibility to meet asymmetric threats. The 9/11 Commission concentrated on the perceived inability to "connect the dots" and a "failure of imagination" within strategic plans. Criticism of established frameworks intensified following the tragedy in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

In each case, strategic reform pointed to the shortcomings of top-down, heavily centralized emergency management plans. Emphasis was redirected toward interagency coordination and cooperation between federal, state, and local governments. New frameworks were called for that would increase flexibility, stimulate quicker responses by relying more on regional and local capabilities, and shift focus to address "all-hazards."

At about the same time in the UK, the central government moved to restructure its national framework for managing emergencies. Under its 2004 Civil Contingencies Act, the Government formed a network of local and regional resilience forum designed to support decentralized resilience activities by setting standards and improving communication with local communities. In the Labour Government's National Security Strategy published in March 2008, a commitment was made to explore how Government could support the building of community resilience. Beginning in November 2008, the UK's Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) has been working through national consultation workshops to determine what the Government contribution should be to build and enhance community resilience across the UK. This concept was then reinforced in the Coalition Government's National Security Strategy published in October 2010.

Against the fierce headwinds of current financial stresses, the UK Government's "Big Society" governing framework continues these trends toward decentralization and local

empowerment. Community resilience is consistent with the emerging Big Society philosophy that holds out possibilities for a dramatic shift in the ways in which communities and central government authorities work together. As one UK blogger recently described this potential: [it] " ... involves the Government setting out a direction of travel and desired high-level outcomes and then enabling frontline professionals and communities to define the details in a way that best suits their local needs. Government can then respond by supporting the diffusion of emerging best practice. This is very different to the familiar top-down approach, which is usually driven by a small group of Whitehall policy advisors (with limited engagement of the front-line) and then imposed through legislation."<sup>5</sup>

National US leadership has also long recognized the core significance of decentralized, public engagement in preparing for and responding to both natural and manmade emergencies.<sup>6</sup> More recently, however, the U.S. Administration has begun to shift more aggressively its focus toward empowering communities and citizens to become a more integral part of its national strategy. In March, 2010, the current Federal Emergency Management Agency's Administrator, Craig Fugate, emphasized to a NATO audience the core value of involving people at the community level. Close collaboration between government, the civic sector and private enterprise, not just more government, forms the core of his "whole of community" approach to emergency planning and response.<sup>7</sup>

This strategic focus is now fully reinforced by the recently released 2010 US National Security Strategy. The Strategy explicitly refers to the need to "tap the ingenuity outside government through strategic partnerships with the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, and community-based organizations."

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Laird, "[The Emergent Nature of the Big Society](http://bit.ly/aLqjXC)", [#big society](http://bit.ly/aLqjXC), posted: 29 Oct 2010.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert L. Bach and David J. Kaufman, "A Social Infrastructure for Hometown Security: Advancing the Homeland Security Paradigm," *Homeland Security Affairs*, Volume V, No. 2 (May 2009), [WWW.HSAJ.ORG](http://WWW.HSAJ.ORG)

<sup>7</sup> Craig Fugate, FEMA Administrator, speech before SCEPC Meeting, 15 March, 2010.

## CENTRAL PROPOSITION

In their own ways, then, both the US and UK governments have come to a strategic realization that, if emergency preparedness and response are to be optimally effective, an overreliance on central authorities must end. Citizens must be more involved and even lead local and regional resilience activities. The UK government's guidance on resilience is unequivocal: "In times of need, individuals and communities often already help each other. Volunteering and spontaneously helping each other does not need to be organised by central or local government. Local people and communities who are prepared and who, working with the emergency services, are able to respond effectively and recover quickly from emergencies, show us how successful community resilience can work... By building on existing local relationships, using local knowledge and preparing for risks your community will be better able to cope during and after an emergency."<sup>8</sup>

The challenge for central authorities and policymakers in general, however, is to identify what this "local involvement" means, and how central government can redefine and transform its role to be supportive of public engagement. Resilience, according to both governments, is not meant to justify a new round of social programs, even if they have more of an outreach focus. Rather, community resilience involves a philosophical shift in relations between the state and civil society that changes the parameters of how local communities organize and act. It involves "communities and individuals, harnessing local resources and expertise to help themselves in an emergency, in a way that complements the response of the emergency services".<sup>9</sup>

This strategic shift involves policies toward community resilience that focus on and even rely on the everyday strengths and weaknesses of communities working under non-emergency situations -- or, as the UK National Framework so marvelously expresses it, community resilience is "the use of ordinary skills in extraordinary circumstances." In

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<sup>8</sup> See Cabinet Office, Draft Strategic National Framework on Community Resilience Consultation Document, and Civil Contingencies Office, National Guidance.

<sup>9</sup> Civil Protection Lexicon [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/cplexicon](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/cplexicon)

the US, this strategic focus is expressed as a core proposition: "Preparedness and resilience both depend on identifying and strengthening the people, processes, and institutions that work in a community under normal conditions, before an incident."<sup>10</sup>

Community resilience, by focusing on what works under normal conditions, and striving to strengthen those capacities, provides a common framework for local institutions and groups to participate in preparing and responding to a wide variety of risks.

The strategic foundation of all hazards resilience, therefore, involves engagement with neighborhood associations, businesses, schools, faith-based community groups, trade groups, fraternal organizations, ethnic centers, and other civic-minded organizations that have routine, direct ties to local communities. In a real sense, they are the community. Local collective action, by, with and for the individuals who live in local areas, becomes the leading edge of efforts to protect and sustain the nation.

The recent financial crisis in both countries offers an example of the potential importance of this shifting focus. The crisis highlights not only the national reliance on successful financial institutions "too big to fail." It also reveals the dependence of families and communities on the strength of local banking institutions, both in terms of the security of their assets and trust in their performance and integrity. These same local banks are the critical institutions involved during emergencies. Even in the earliest hours of a disaster, access to money, restoration of commercial activity, and continuity of essential services to government and workers rely on the viability of local banking institutions. If local banks are weak, communities are severely limited in their capacities to be resilient.

This core proposition -- that resilience depends on the success of collective action and local institutions before an incident -- is different from the "preparedness programs" approach that has dominated government strategy throughout the last decade. Preparedness programs, which are those that directly target emergency skills, have had limited reach, and have struggled to achieve broader collective engagement both to expand and sustain participation in their selected activities. In contrast, community-

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<sup>10</sup> This quote comes from an unpublished FEMA memorandum, 2010.

oriented resilience focuses on the strength of the institutions and social capital of a local community that are prerequisites for successful preparedness activities and response skills training. Earlier programs also presuppose types of organic leadership that understand and are able to mobilize the diverse elements of local communities.

This strategic shift toward local collective action, public engagement and neighborhood institutions also infuses both the UK and US approach to manmade threats, especially the rise of home-grown radicalization or violent extremism.<sup>11</sup> Countering violent extremism, like building resistance to natural disasters, depends upon the strength of local institutions and effective relationships among those who live normally within a community and interact within an area before an attack. Identifying abnormal or suspicious behavior often involves local vigilance and awareness, which in turn relies on communities that are sufficiently cohesive or stable to have a common understanding of what constitutes normal (and therefore, by contrast, suspicious activities). Social trust in local officials and institutions is also a key ingredient in these normal conditions and is essential to encouraging residents to report uncommon or suspicious activities to local authorities.

In April, 2010, the Secretary of the US Department of Homeland Security underscored the value of this broad engagement strategy when she called for exploring the value of concepts of community-oriented policing in addressing violent extremism. Community policing strategies have long advocated that individuals need to know and trust local officers if local residents are expected to report on questionable neighborhood activities.

## COMPARATIVE EXPERIENCES

If it is true, as the popular saying goes, that the worst time for emergency responders to introduce themselves to a community is during a disaster, then a new approach to resilience requires public engagement well before incidents occur. How, then, do central authorities transform current approaches to communities in a way that supports

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<sup>11</sup> The terminology differs between the US and UK for significant reasons. The UK will shortly announce a revised strategy toward radicalization that has implications for government engagement with local communities. Future comparative papers will include those new changes.

and stimulates collective local action? What lessons can be learned from communities where their residents have already faced emergency and/or security issues?

As noted at the outset, this paper highlights six community experiences.<sup>12</sup> Chart 1 shows a selection of "paired comparisons" among US and UK experiences to help clarify similar and contrasting lessons. The selection of these sites was purposive, reflecting interest in both the challenges facing policymakers and comparative community characteristics. The Chart shows the paired locations, the selected themes that emerge from each experience, and some of the analytical issues or questions to encourage further discussion. The following sections briefly describe each site and identify a few primary analytical themes that emerge from each cluster of experiences.

The first pair of experiences involves urban neighborhoods that survived devastating effects of flooding within the last five years. In the US, the selected area, Lakeview, New Orleans, experienced the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and, by some indicators, responded and recovered faster than neighboring areas. The area offers potential valuable insights into how local residents organized for community development before the catastrophic event, and subsequently took action and developed local processes to speed their return home. Through the observations of a leading activist in Lakeview, a multi-generational community center becomes a central social arena for understanding collective action before, during and after the flood.<sup>13</sup>

For comparison, we selected a neighborhood within Hull, a coastal city in Northeast England that, in 2007, also experienced a devastating flood. Through the work of a self-organized group of residents, who became known as the "diarists," leadership emerged as one of the primary themes, though with very different dimensions compared to the

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<sup>12</sup> In the November 2010 London meeting, a seventh case was added that involved a rural community in Suffolk, England. In the course of this comparative project, other rural experiences will be added to help draw insights from the Suffolk case experience.

<sup>13</sup> Paper delivered at the March 8, 2010, meeting of the International Working Group on Community Resilience, Washington, D.C. , excerpted here from Vaz and Bach, "Community Resilience in New Orleans," forthcoming 2011.

Chart 1: Sites and Themes

Site Paired Selections	Themes	Analytical Issues
<p>New Orleans, USA  Hull, UK</p>	<p>Social Capital before and after flooding  Leadership Dynamics  Local Government Barriers</p>	<p>1. Differences between embedded social capital - a multi-generational, several decade old community center, and efforts to institutionalize local participation through intermediate public authorities. 2. Predictable, but locally selected leadership vs. 'emergent' and even 'spontaneous' leadership. 3. Local institutional authority misaligned with residents' needs and interests. 4. Sustainability of effective community self-organization of social capital.</p>
<p>San Diego, USA  Birmingham, UK</p>	<p>Diversity by Nationality, Ethnicity, Religion, Class  Local Institutions  Community-Local Authority Relations</p>	<p>1. Civic culture at the roots of the challenge. Policy shaping community authority and relations. 2. Everyday issues overwhelm targeted emergency or anti-violence initiatives. 3. Understanding local risk cultures and aligning them with National risk assessments. 4. Priority: "Knowing the - Community" - complexity and context vs. one-dimensional attributes and capabilities.</p>
<p>Washington, DC, USA  London - Canary Wharf, UK</p>	<p>Private, Business Sector Preparedness  Leadership Challenges  Continuity of Operations/Continuity of Community  Local Authorities - Community Relations</p>	<p>1. Wealth matters in terms of social capital for preparedness. 2. Jointness of public and private interests in originating preparedness planning. 3. Working across class lines - protecting a business is to protect its customers. 4. Challenge of perceptions of privilege and business sector interests in support of resilience efforts when working across jurisdictional boundaries.</p>

role residents played in New Orleans. The self-organizing dimensions of these Hull residents' experiences also underscore the value of social capital embedded, latently, within relatively stable neighborhoods. What motivates these residents' actions is a key question for understanding the experience, including whether or not their self-organization can be sustained.

In both experiences, a strong analytical theme of special interest to lessons for government lies in the mixed relationships between the residents and local authorities. Although local authorities in both instances were able to offer some assistance, they also faltered and fumbled. In each case, the residents' collective actions evolved through opposition to local authorities as well as cooperation. Apparent barriers to effective communication and cooperation may have motivated residents to band together informally for collective self-help.

A second paired comparison focuses on the complexities of communities and the difficulties they raise for government policy. In the United States, the Linda Vista neighborhood in San Diego, California, has been the site of a multi-year study of community development within the context of rapidly changing demographics.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, a few local residents were directly harmed by two firestorms in the region caused by immense wild land fires. Many more, however, were involved in evacuations and assistance to relatives, friends and coworkers who were directly in the line of the disasters.

The focus on San Diego, however, has less to do with its specific emergency preparedness or response capabilities than the underlying conditions of local communities which governments must face in looking to work with residents to foster empowerment, self-organization, and disaster preparedness. San Diego, like so many other large urban areas, is a patchwork of fragmented communities, some defined by geography, others by wealth or occupation or other shared interests. Side-by-side are relatively wealthy, educated neighborhoods coexisting with large, excluded and

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<sup>14</sup> See Robert Bach and Jorge Riquelme, *Public Safety and Security in a Time of Uncertainty*. forthcoming, 2011.

struggling areas. Social veins of class, ethnicity, racial and nationality diversity crisscross the many formal boundaries demarcated by electoral rules, neighborhood school districts, and urban planning zones.

San Diego also highlights how the complexity of the internal organization of local communities affects relationships between residents and local government, and the willingness and ability of groups to engage in collective social action. For example, despite sweeping claims that the residents of this and similar communities are not interested in preparedness, especially when related to security risks, discussions with local residents reveal a keen interest in the broader context. Their actions, however, are concentrated on the demands of daily survival that are routinely ignored by central and even local authorities.

Birmingham offers another look into a complex, fragmented urban area, divided along race, religion, nationality, and class. How these dimensions intertwine and are organized geographically generates an array of challenges for any government effort to support, let alone, guide and shape local actions. In Birmingham, responses to recent storms combine with concerns about radicalization to highlight the various ways in which local and national authorities attempt to work with nationality or religious-based groups and institutions.

Urban neighborhoods, like those found in San Diego and Birmingham, are often envisioned by government planners as either idyllic images of what used to be, or represent hopeful dreams of what some would like communities to be. In contrast, in each location, residents, local activists, institutional leaders point out the difficulties of relationships between local communities and larger organizational partners, regardless of whether they are state-run or established civic organizations. In both areas, an intermediate level of organizations has emerged -- often referred to as "mediating" institutions or "middlemen minority" -- that claim to represent the local minority community. These institutions are often large churches, social service agencies or clubs that have become the favorite stakeholders for programs sponsored by central or local authorities. For instance, their value to authorities may be because they appear to

be the most fiscally capable organization within an area and therefore able to satisfy the financial accounting rules required to receive central government grants.

Their representativeness, however, is incomplete and often contested within the community. The benefits they receive from participating with government programs may support only their own activities, making them larger and more successful but less representative and authentic. In Birmingham, some of this institutional division overlaps with generational differences among immigrant groups that have arrived at different times and with dissimilar social origins.

In San Diego, these intermediate organizations are often former community agencies that have become bureaucratized service providers for large government distribution of public assistance. They stand "in between" government agencies and community residents. Government agencies, including those involved in emergency management, turn to these mediating institutions to help reach the general public. However, rather than public engagement, this channel of involvement reinforces a patron-client relationship that drives many citizens away. When a crisis does occur, residents may be more trusting of alternate, informal institutions than of the larger, more established organizations thought to be representative of the community.

A third paired comparison shares experiences related to private sector, corporate wealth. Each is a special area within the capital city, Washington, D.C., or London, where the concentration of corporate wealth dominates the area. In many ways, both areas are more like daytime business neighborhoods than multi-dimensional urban communities. Community resilience in these situations is focused on continuity of business operations, although in each case efforts are underway to mobilize private-public sector partnerships to expand the involvement of smaller businesses and local residents.

In Washington, D.C., a timely start-up project financed by local government stimulated a small non-profit organization to begin organizing among the large hotel and commercial

building owners in the area.<sup>15</sup> Realizing these businesses were located within a sensitive security area -- several blocks from the White House -- a small public-private initiative emerged that motivated the owners to participate in emergency planning activities, exercising plans together and reaching out to small businesses in the neighborhood who could also benefit.

In London's Canary Wharf, with its skyscrapers housing a cluster of the world's largest financial institutions, security and emergency preparedness officials also concentrate on business continuity operations. The corporate occupants' wealth ensures resilient physical infrastructure, including redundant systems and the latest interoperable security equipment. Its highly professionalized security departments also organize and exercise plans throughout the neighborhood. Canary Wharf business leaders, though, also have large, much poorer residential neighbors with whom they have learned to work to increase security on the commercial enclave's perimeter. The Wharf also relies on London's public fire and police services to provide first responder assistance in case of a major event.

In both locations, cooperation across sectors entails reaching beyond traditionally organized community boundaries, both socially and geographically. It also involves managing activities between jurisdictions with different local authorities and with service agencies (fire, police, emergency medical, etc.) that provide assistance across those boundaries. How national governments can support local action to increase preparedness and resilience in these complex clusters of wealth and special risk raises valuable questions about how political leverage and issues of equity and fairness are organized in resilience strategies.

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<sup>15</sup> The Golden Triangle Project was reported on by Leona Agouridis and Phil Palin at the March meeting, 2010, of the Policy Group.

## ANALYTICAL THEMES

For present purposes, the following section highlights four categories of themes drawn from a review of these six experiences.<sup>16</sup> These themes are listed in Chart 1 for each related paired site, along with several analytical issues that point to areas of further discussion and analysis. Other themes exist, of course, and the project will continue to explore an expanded list of themes, adding new ones as well as deepening the understanding of those described here.

### 1. Understanding Community Complexity - the "DNA" of Local Areas

Although discussion of community resilience often revolves around debate over the meaning of "resilience," the collective experiences of the six cases examined here highlight the problematic nature of the use of the concept of "community". An understanding of community resilience presupposes a clear understanding of the type of community in which citizens, institutions, and the government propose to engage. Understanding the structure of local social experiences is the starting point for both supporting local collective action and finding opportunities for policy engagement.

A prevailing assumption is a rather old one. Communities are thought to be relatively small, easily definable geographical areas that contain a homogeneous population and a narrow range of social institutions. Drawn from industrial era patterns of manufacturing and residence, a broad sense of "neighborhood" substitutes image for reality. Community is identified by local electoral bodies, social institutions, pubs and a neighborhood bar, close multi-generational families, and an identity that combines place with personal experience.

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<sup>16</sup> A fifth category was added during the discussions at the London workshop. It will focus on "meaningful exchanges," reflecting the crosscutting essential importance of how diverse residents perceive, interpret, and communicate about various issues. Future papers in the project will include this theme. It is intended to help move the discussion beyond the current governmental focus on "messaging" and "outreach," which in many instances reinforces a top-down managerial and planning style even if it adds a well-meaning intention to work with local residents.

This traditional notion of community gives a premium to the belief that social cohesiveness was once prevalent and that it is this togetherness that makes for successful local action. Face-to-face primary social relationships are believed to dominate these neighborhoods, which in turn supports expectations of shared interests, quick communication, trusting advice, and easy group mobilization.

Policy expectations to stimulate social resilience activities through finding or re-establishing this cohesive core, however, face strategic misalignment from the outset. There are certainly communities in both the UK and the US that have these characteristics, but even they may not have the scale and capabilities to generate sustainable, self-organized social action.

The massive shifts in residential patterns during the last two decades, fueled by economic restructuring, immigration, and housing mobility, have rendered far more complex the alignment of social relationships and geographical proximity.

"Communities" are very different than they were before and vary widely when compared to each other. Even close-knit social relationships among friends and families may involve people who live miles from each other. Institutions, such as churches and social clubs, may be the centerpiece of collective organization only for particular instrumental purposes and for specific periods.

Communities also form around generic identities, often imagined, or even constructed artificially through official labeling. Urban planning zones, for example, define communities in terms of shared transportation routes or commercial activity clusters. Close social connections may also cross geographical and jurisdictional boundaries, creating novel social maps of how people organize themselves. The large-scale circular migrations of recent decades have also created so-called transnational communities. These communities, characteristic of the accelerated globalization of recent decades, consist of strong social networks that extend far beyond national boundaries yet hold similar degrees of influence over a family's or group's behavior as if they were living in the same city. In the last decade or so, electronic, virtual communities have become

powerful social influences, as have professional communities or communities of practice.

Community resilience in each of these social realities is organized in very different ways. These different communities may also be extensively intertwined, their diversity and entanglement a source of strength and weakness. In an emergency, for instance, geography-based communities (parish councils, residents associations, etc.) may interact with communities of interest (sports clubs, professional groups, etc.) to accelerate and strengthen a capacity to respond and recover. Yet, different communities may also be very fragmented, driven apart by economic and social inequalities that make it hard to bridge group interests, needs, and capabilities even before an emergency.

A suitable starting point for both analysis and policy development for community resilience may be in how local social activity is organized on a 'normal' basis, well before emergency events. The goal would be to understand these social patterns, how decisions are made, the possibilities for actions and support, and potential sources of new collective action. In short, long before anyone claims to be looking at "community resilience," much more needs to be known about local realities and what makes local groups and institutions successful.

## 2. State-Civil Society Relations

A fundamental challenge for policy officials and social leaders alike is to comprehend the significance of community complexity. For government authorities, in particular, an assumption that there is alignment between local authorities and communities in terms of interests, power and energy can be strategically and operationally misleading. In the United States, for instance, Federal programs designed to support "local efforts" may be required by law to work through state or local governments. Yet, as even these three US experiences show, there is considerable social distance and even antagonism between local authorities and the interests of residents.

The relationships between local governments and communities are mixed. In several of the experiences discussed here, support from local authorities sparked the formation of civic groups that grew into sizeable preparedness efforts. In others, the inability of local authorities to follow through on commitments to local neighborhood groups created or reinforced barriers that short-circuited any subsequent outreach effort. Identifying and acknowledging the social legacies of successful cooperation and damaged agreements appears to be an essential ingredient in establishing opportunities to engage meaningfully with local groups.

This mosaic of social relations within communities makes it difficult to capture a single, uni-dimensional collective 'self-interest' with which government authorities can interact. This complexity puts a premium on understanding the relationships within a community but perhaps more so the processes of negotiation, discussion, and decision-making that govern local residents. In each of the six experiences examined, some awareness of and even appeal to concepts of equity or fairness were common themes. In particular, residents, advocates and officials alike referred to the value of "fair process" in discussing how they self-organized and/or opposed government rules and actions.

Recognition of equity in process and governance in particular goes to the heart of state-civil society relations. As reflected in the national strategic documents discussed earlier, efforts to foster community resilience will require a substantial reformulation of relationships between state and local authorities, on the one hand, and a wide variety of institutions, groups and the general public on the other. It is unclear in the six experiences highlighted here, however, how this deeply engaging reformulation will work. Community resilience is not simply a more aggressive or even more effective outreach or communication strategy. It appears to go to the heart of the nature of democratic processes throughout the US and UK.

### 3. Social Capital and Leadership

Social capital is of course a widely understood asset that helps individuals and groups achieve economically and politically. Extensive research from diverse disciplines has

documented the ways in which specific forms of social capital, organized through various networks, become key sources of social mobilization and collective action. These capital assets involve concrete interactions and sharing of information, material support, and common norms and values. An individual's or group's access to social capital, which is largely influenced through a position or role within networks, also determine behavior and decision-making within both normal and emergency circumstances. In short, people act differently depending on where they are in a social network, and the collective behavior of different types of social networks are much different than the activities of independent decision-makers.

Social capital is only partly a deployable, material asset. It is also "constructed" through sustained interactions among community members within particular contexts. Its value and meaning varies with the complexities of local conditions and requires detailed knowledge and active participation in these networks to understand, help shape, and certainly to guide toward desired outcomes.

To prepare for an emergency, then, requires knowledge of and participation in these social networks, especially as they change and adapt to varying circumstances and contexts. The UK's guide for community members highlights the premium to be placed both on knowing local communities in some detail and on engaging in relationships as they exist in everyday, normal (pre-incident) settings.<sup>17</sup> The Guide begins, for instance, with the following advice:

**"1. Begin by considering who your community is and which communities you belong to.** Geographical communities are the obvious choice for, and primary beneficiary of, community resilience however many people do not recognise their community as the people they live near. As such, other communities should be considered as valid groups within which to prepare for emergencies. Community resilience is not about creating or identifying a new community or network; it is

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<sup>17</sup> Cabinet Office, Community Resilience. Guide for Community members HM Government. Preparing for Emergencies. What do you need to know.

about considering what already exists around you, what you already do, who you already talk to or work with and thinking about how you could work together before, during and after an incident or emergency.

**2. Get in touch with existing local networks you can work with.**

Many community groups already work to support and enhance life in our communities; e.g. flood wardens, Scout leaders, Parish Councils, Residents Associations and Neighbourhood Watch. Think about how you could use their skills, resources and expertise to make a more resilient community."

A dilemma, though, is that social capital is also deeply stratified and unevenly distributed. The social networks that produce tangible and intangible assets may also be limiting and even dysfunctional in certain situations. During the floods experienced in two of the sites for this study, local collection action was directly organized through social connections among neighbors. Yet the conditions and timing that gave rise to these actions varied considerably.

In the Lakeview, New Orleans, experience, the social capital accumulated within a vibrant community center over several decades was deployed effectively and perhaps predictably to help local residents re-establish social connections after the flood. Pre-incident social capital was also useful to organizing political and financial support to recover from the damage. In particular, the community members who led the neighborhood recovery were long-term, active participants in the area's social institutions.

In Hull, neighborhood residents banded together after the flood began and in response to the gaps that emerged between government capabilities and local needs. No pre-existing community center had organized neighbors for collective action, no clear set of pre-recognized leaders existed, and no general experience of working collectively with and against local authorities provided a tested plan on how to receive assistance.

Leaders in the neighborhood emerged from residents spontaneously solving their own and others' problems. Sharing a computer connection, watching a neighbor's home against pilferers, using professional contacts to get complaints to a more sympathetic authority, all served as informal pathways to generate the social capital that residents used to get attention and resolve their problems. In the process, leaders emerged both because of their central involvement in the exchange of services and their capabilities for problem-solving as individuals and small groups. Most of these leaders knew each other before the flood and that previous knowledge and familiarity became a source of strength. Once collective steps to find solutions began, others became involved because of the shared legitimacy they had in facing similar problems.

Diverse trajectories of leadership, which can be found in most local experiences both before and during emergencies, represent a critical element in understanding and supporting community resilience. Residents often tell a familiar refrain about these leaders: "if it wasn't for [insert leader's name], none of this would have happened." Yet, someone frequently does step forward, and in different situations the characteristics of those emergent leaders are often quite distinct. A crucial theme for policy discussions of how to support community resilience is to better understand how to identify potential leaders, the circumstances under which emergent leaders arise, and how leaders who are formally established ahead of an incident can be supported to become more successful.

A thematic focus on social capital also has a way of identifying sources of effective action, innovation, and even power and privilege that lie beneath the local community dynamics which will affect resilience. In the New Orleans and San Diego experiences, for example, the importance of recognizing so-called vulnerable populations had less to do with acknowledging community members with special physical or functional needs (though that is crucial) than in understanding how groups are excluded from the strong social networks that encompass others.

Immigrant single mothers in San Diego, for instance, discussed during a series of focus groups about how much they were interested in learning about emergency and security

risks to their neighborhood. But when asked whether they would report suspicious behavior to local authorities, they talked about not knowing any local authorities in their area. No police officer, they said, watched over their elementary school child walking to school past teenage gang members consistently trying to recruit them. No one they knew told them how to react during the pandemic flu scare when their child's school first closed, reopened, then closed again.

In these and other experiences, residents were not socially isolated or complacent about accepting responsibility for their own preparedness. Rather, they had very different forms of social capital upon which they relied for everyday decisions about work, family, and community activities in general. The challenge for government policy that attempts to support local resilience is to both understand this complexity and find ways to support different networks that complement residents' interests and assets well before they are needed under extraordinary circumstances.

#### 4. Opportunities for Supporting Local Action

Whether the context is state-civil society relations or social capital and leadership, a recurring discussion of "social trust" appears throughout each of these six experiences. Theoretically, trust is a key element in the workings of complex adaptive social systems, like communities. It links separate groups and sectors, and strengthens and sustains the bonds of in-group solidarity that supports collective action. It is the "glue" that stabilizes and helps to order the myriad social interactions evident in local areas.

Attention to social trust, however, seems more often to highlight its absence than successful efforts to build and expand it. In both the US and the UK, public opinion polls show, in particular, how government authorities are losing the trust of diverse segments of the nations' residents. In the US, for instance, a recent PEW public opinion poll shows that public trust in all levels of government has reached its lowest levels in over 30 years.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Liz Halloran, "Pew Poll: Trust In Government Hits Near-Historic Low," National Public Radio, April 18, 2010, [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org).

Ironically, these poll numbers, which are widely used to lament the loss of faith and confidence in government, also point to clear opportunities for policy initiatives that could improve public engagement. When the respondents in nationwide polls are asked if they had had direct contact with a government official within the previous few months, those who had had such encounters reported significantly higher levels of trust in authorities and a willingness to work together.

In each of six site experiences, engagement helps to build trust. Local residents reported numerous examples of initiatives that, once they had overcome various barriers and made direct connection on cooperative activities, trust in collective action increased. In corporate Washington, D.C., for example, once several building owners agreed to participate in a small emergency preparedness exercise, other owners volunteered to join in and offer material support. In flooded New Orleans, an entire adjacent District overcame years of disagreement and distrust to formally incorporate with the Lakeview area once cross boundary recovery work showed the positive impact of improvements on the property values of households in both neighborhoods.

Efforts to build trust, however, require more than increased communication and outreach from authorities to local organizations. In a recent project in North England designed to explore relations among local community residents and their local Council authorities, the organizers learned that general discussion about trust or social cohesion had little positive results. Indeed, their report concludes that dialogue about trust and community cohesiveness was not generally favored.<sup>19</sup> Rather, social trust resulted much more from joint activities designed to address specific local problems. Apparently, what people do together matters more than what they say to each other.

The trust generated through joint efforts to attack local problems offers an opportunity for authorities to support community resilience. Preparedness education, for instance, can be made more effective if it merges with local problem-solving activities. In San

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<sup>19</sup> Sally Hole, Building Communities of Trust: Community Cohesion in the North. Event report, August 2009. Institute for Public Policy Research North, 2009.

Diego, during the worst of the housing foreclosure crisis, a community center offered pro bono legal advice to local residents in financial trouble. Following the consultation, residents were also offered information about basic household emergency preparedness. Interest was surprisingly strong and local residents who until then had been uninvolved in emergency or security-related activities sought additional information and volunteered for local events. The community center was able to create a voluntary database of these interested residents which it uses to organize problem-solving meetings on both a range of local needs, such as gang problems, and specific emergency-related issues.

Naturally, the challenges to building social trust within and between the complex segments of the communities profiled in these experiences are daunting. The underlying conditions for social trust -- transparency, reciprocity, interaction -- are absent in many places. In a recent study of social ills in the UK, one of the most frequent public concerns was the prevalence of weak communities.<sup>20</sup> Like in the US, communities are more fragmented than they have been in decades, making it extremely difficult to build the trust across groups and with local institutions that becomes the social capital needed for effective resistance against emergencies. If it is true that the strength of resilient communities lies in the social capital that exists before a crisis occurs, both the US and UK face a steep climb ahead to improve preparedness, response and recovery.

### TOWARD A DISCUSSION OF POLICY OPPORTUNITIES

Governments clearly face an array of opportunities for promoting and supporting social resilience at local and regional levels. They also need to recognize and overcome numerous obstacles. On the optimistic side, just in these brief comparative experiences we find some local residents and their organizations poised and capable of taking leadership to mobilize the assets and social support networks to improve their preparations for an incident and respond and recover from it. Local governments can

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<sup>20</sup> Alice Mowlam and Chris Creegan, *Modern-Day Social Evils. The Voices of Unheard Groups*. Qualitative Research Unit, National Centre for Social Research. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008.

stimulate non-governmental action through small, timely investments in these groups and projects.

Local authorities can also help organize, especially across jurisdictional and social boundaries where, as a larger entity, they have wider influence and capacities. Local authorities continue to be much in demand by local residents when it comes to protective services and assistance. Lessons learned from decades of community policing initiatives, and from successful community organizing efforts that have defined a collaborative role for state authority, offer familiar ideas for supporting local neighborhoods.

The challenge for policymakers, however, is not simply to proliferate good programs. As several of these experiences demonstrate, even the best intended programs can be misaligned with local residents' interests and needs during an emergency or in situations of great social diversity. Looking for policy opportunities to support local residents' action needs a different strategy. It calls for a shift in state-civil society relations where public participation leads, not follows, in identifying priorities, organizing support, implementing programs, and evaluating outcomes.

These general observations, of course, are just a start. In Chart 2 below, we have arrayed a core set of questions about how authorities can support local action along with the themes and selected analytical questions that emerge from these six community experiences. These are not necessarily the most significant questions in the long-term -- those will be identified as more analysis and expanded dialogue occur. Rather, they represent examples of urgent questions motivating government officials in the quest to engage communities to organize differently. The hope is that these questions and observations will help generate discussion on specific ideas on how authorities can improve their practices.

Chart 2 also offers an invitation to readers. Add questions, identify more themes, and especially offer ideas on how community and government may seize upon opportunities

Chart 2: Policy Opportunities

Project Questions	Themes	Policy Opportunities and Issues
1. What are the best and smart practices among government and private sector agencies and social sector organizations in listening to, learning from, and engaging with community groups (including the general public) in local neighborhoods?	Understanding Communities  Social capital development  Leadership	Participation in community success before incidents  Trust-sustaining activities, including familiarity with local and regional authorities  Knowing the 'DNA' of local areas
2. What experiences at the local level activate and sustain local residents' interest and involvement in resilience activities? What information do they need to motivate behavioural change and trigger preparedness activities? How are these activities organized? How do these resilience-oriented activities compare with insights from other research and policy literature on why and how communities engage in non-emergency, non-security related activities?	Social capital development  Leadership	Combining local problem-solving activities with preparedness dimensions  Local risk assessments and discussions  Connecting 'exercises' to everyday activities
3. What specific barriers do diverse communities face in participating in resilience activities? What types of support do communities need once they have decided to 'do something,' including access to sources of expertise (people and guidance documents) or equipment and other assets? Who do they think this should come from?	Understanding communities  Social capital  Leadership  Sustainability	Social cohesion of communities  Demonstrated ability to address everyday difficulties  Participatory planning initiatives  Local social capital assessments  Participatory after action reports
4. What 'entry points' exist for building an effective exchange between communities and national governments on resilience policies?	Understanding communities  'Mediating' institutions	Who are the 'natural' communicators in an area?  Local institutions investing locally  Finding opportunities to participate with people outside of established networks  Alternative ways of generating dialogue with action (e.g., social media, street-level activities)
5. In what ways is each country working to build support for action on community resilience among various levels of society and policy makers, ranging from officials and political leaders to citizens and local responder organizations?	Understanding communities  Leadership  Sustainability	Who is mobilizing for this agenda and why?  Is this simply cost-cutting, delegation of responsibility from national to local authorities?  Transition: programs to collective action

that result in saving more lives and property, stabilizing a region more quickly after a disaster, and recovering through sustainable local processes and designs.<sup>21</sup>

### End Remarks

More than any other purpose, this paper is intended to invite the reader to participate in a continuing dialogue about government challenges in support of social resilience at local and regional levels. The experiences reported on here and more to come validate many existing views on what needs to be done for a community to be more resilient. They also point to tensions, difficulties, and neglected opportunities to dramatically increase the involvement of local residents.

Public engagement is hardly new, and has always been an integral part of emergency responses. But for the model of state-civil society relations that has dominated emergency management and security for decades in both the US and UK, the emphasis on local collective action, non-governmental groups, neighborhood institutions, and public participation is a significant strategic shift. Regardless of the political philosophy of central administrations in either country, this shift is evolving because of the changing context of natural and man-made risks and the realization that community resilience is essential to national and local survival. The fundamental belief is that the lead role must be played by society — individuals, groups, organizations and communities — who can understand and respond better to the complex risks. A recent report in the US, for instance, shows that 80 percent of foiled terror plots has resulted from the vigilance of the public and local police.<sup>22</sup> The activities that arise from diverse, complex local efforts must be governed, but they cannot be managed by central authorities. Government authorities need to find better ways to focus on and support local engagement.

The core policy insight in this continuing discussion, therefore, goes far beyond emergency preparedness programs, education, and communication outreach, which are the usual tools of government help to communities. Rather, the focus is on the

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<sup>22</sup> Kevin Strom, John Hollywood, Mark Pope, Garth Weintraub, Crystal Daye, and Don Gemeinhardt, "Building on Clues: Examining Successes and Failures in Detecting U.S. Terrorist Plots, 1999-2009", Institute for Homeland Security Solutions, October 29, 2010.

evolution of, and improvement in, relationships between state and citizen -- the essence of democracy. With globalization, climate change, terrorism, and other large scale societal changes, the task is to identify and strengthen the core capacities and relationships that bind us together, that make us, in whatever specific form, better able to resist dramatic events, respond quickly when they happen, and to leap upon the occasion, as tragic as it may be, to build a better way to live together at a local level.

We find amidst the hardships revealed in every experience we review elements of an optimism among those affected by disasters that humbles the sometimes tortured calculations of governments trying to figure out what needs to be done. No one who has experienced a real tragedy is naive enough to believe survivors do not need help - and often massive help. But communities find ways to succeed in normal times and they are persistently effective during the worst moments of emergencies and their aftermath. It would come as little surprise that the best policy opportunities for authorities promoting resilience consist of finding ways to become part of these local, neighborly activities.