

Everyday Disasters and Everyday Heroes

How Frontline finds out from local
people what threats they face

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GNDR

Frontline



What is Frontline?



Finding out from local people what threats they face

Billions of people at the frontline of disasters face multiple threats, both extraordinary and everyday, that impact their lives and livelihoods. Many of these risks are poorly understood and undocumented. Local communities are often left to deal with disasters through self-organisation and self-reliance. They develop detailed knowledge of the threats they face, the consequences of these threats, communities' capacities to address threats, and the underlying factors that create barriers to this. This knowledge enables communities and individuals to protect and enhance their lives, livelihoods and assets. This local knowledge must be the starting point for action at all levels; whether it at the local, national or global. *Frontline* is a tool to gather and share this knowledge to be used at different levels.



How has *Frontline* been developed? GNDR and *Views from the Frontline*

The Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR) is the largest international network of organisations committed to working together to improve the lives of people affected by disasters worldwide. GNDR's purpose is to enable civil society to connect local to global and speak with a collective voice that drives action that reduces risk and increases the resilience of the most vulnerable. The growing network engaged in a shared action, *Views from the Frontline* (VFL), providing a local perspective of progress of the Hyogo Framework for Action on Disaster Risk Reduction by undertaking interviews with community members, civil society organisations (CSOs), and representatives of local government. It reported in 2009, 2011, and 2013, and gathered over 85,000 views based on the work of hundreds of civil society organisations. Reviews of the process highlighted that local knowledge is an important but missing component in understanding and strengthening resilience at the decision making, budgeting and policy levels. Drawing on the experiences of VFL, *Frontline* has been developed as a means of gathering and sharing local knowledge to strengthen resilience. *Frontline* supports all elements of GNDR's 'Reality Checklist', which outlines 10 essentials to ensure DRR has an impact at the local level.¹

Frontline:

- captures local **knowledge of all threats**, everyday and extraordinary;
- **collates data which can be analysed** by age, gender and other socio-economic factors;
- can be used to **inform** local, national and global policies, plans and projects;
- can be used for **local monitoring** of progress of all post-2015 frameworks, including for disaster risk reduction, development, and climate change adaptation; and
- supports and strengthens **local action and learning**.

At the frontline of disasters people face the everyday reality of multiple threats.



The need for a reality check

Forgotten: Everyday Disasters and Everyday Heroes

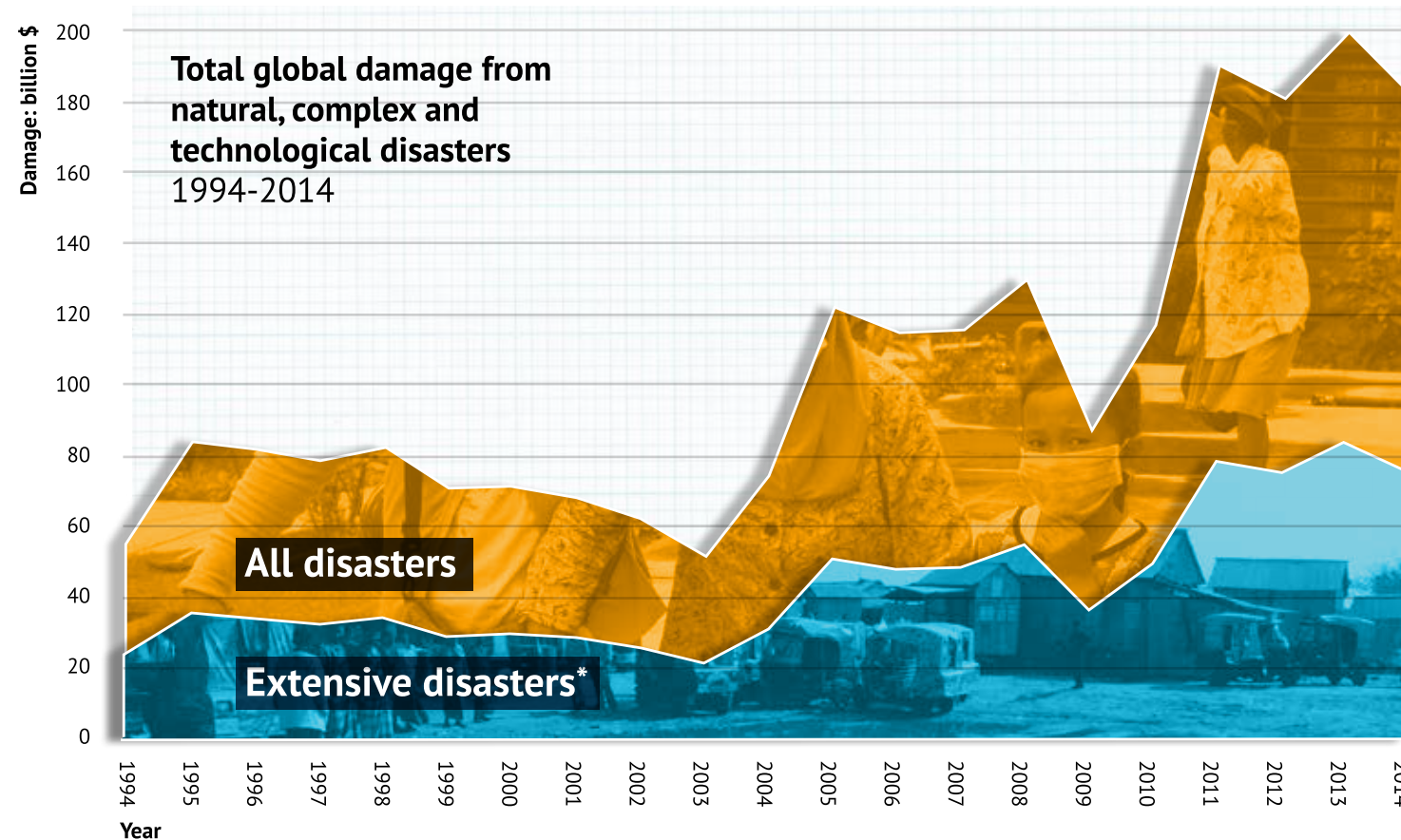
90% of disasters prioritised by respondents are everyday according to *Frontline*, a new study conducted by GNDR in Latin America, which asked communities about their perceptions of the threats and consequences faced at local level. These everyday disasters are small scale and recurrent, and result from environmental, economic, social and political threats. They are frequently unrecognised, unrecorded, and unsupported at national and global level.

This finding is reinforced by UNISDR which found that 99% of disaster records are attributed to extensive risks² and that these are responsible for 13% of mortality and 42% total economic losses across all disasters recorded.³

Frontline respondents referred to seasonal floods that impact people's businesses, health and education; pollution that damages their environment, farming and drinking water; and crime that threatens their livelihoods and welfare. Few of these everyday disasters are recognised and recorded in the official statistics, which require a certain level of impact before disasters are documented.⁴ As a result, these everyday disasters are rarely tackled in local, national and global disaster risk reduction and response plans, and external financial assistance is not unlocked.

Affected communities therefore have little choice but to take responsibility for the security and protection of their own lives, livelihoods and assets. These everyday heroes manage the wide range of inter-related environmental, social, economic and political threats they face and develop detailed experiential knowledge of local threats, their consequences, and local capacities and barriers to address these threats.

These forgotten disasters, not only those that make media headlines, must shape policy and actions, and the everyday heroes who are left to deal with them must be supported.



What is real life?

- **Disasters do not impact everyone equally.** 95% of people killed by disasters are from developing countries,⁵ and women, children and the elderly suffer the greatest disaster losses.⁶
- **Disasters take place in complex contexts.** More than 50% of people affected by natural disasters live in fragile and conflict-affected countries.⁷
- **Everyday disasters are dealt with by everyday heroes.** 99% of disaster records⁵ from natural hazards are attributed to extensive risks. These are often not acknowledged nor supported.⁸



Everyday disasters in Limbe, Cameroon

The coastal city of Limbe lies in the shadow of Mount Cameroon, an active volcano, and faces the possibility of a major disaster when it erupts. However, for the inhabitants of Lower Motowoh suburb, everyday disasters are a much more pressing reality.

The community lies at the foot of two hills. During the rainy season, undredged drainage canals frequently break their banks causing widespread flooding. Unrestricted construction has interrupted the flow of drainage canals, and when soil washes down from the hills it clogs the natural drainage paths further. As a result, people can be stuck in their homes for up to a week at a time. Children cannot attend school, adults cannot work, properties become damaged, and diseases spread. The market is inaccessible and many families go hungry.

^{*} Extensive disasters are defined by UNISDR as those resulting from localised, repeated or persistent natural hazards of low intensity. Everyday disasters take a similar localised focus to extensive risk but include a wider range of hazards that can be environmental, social, economic and political in origin.

^{2,3,8} UNISDR (2013) *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: From Shared Risk to Shared Values* ⁴www.emdat.be

⁵IPCC: https://www.ipcc.ch/news_and_events/docs/srex/srex_slide_deck.pdf slide 12 ⁶Saferworld: <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/16-integrating-conflict-prevention-and-civil-society-participation-into-national-development-strategies>

⁷Kellett, J. and Sparks, D. (2012) *Disaster Risk Reduction: Spending where it should count. Global Humanitarian Assistance. Somerset, UK: Development Initiatives.*

Risk and resilience

When faced with threats, both large scale and everyday, how do communities protect and strengthen their lives and livelihoods?

The resilience circle diagram, right, highlights the interrelationships between the threats communities face, the actions that communities employ to build their own resilience, the underlying risk factors that create barriers to action, and the development pathways that impact how threats are experienced by communities.

Diverse nature of threats

Threats do not just result from natural hazards, but can be environmental, social, economic and political in origin.

Actions: The Ring of Resilience

Communities are often the first and only responders to many of the threats they face and employ different actions to protect themselves. For example, faced with repeated rural drought and famine, a wheat farmer may:

- absorb risk by selling assets to feed his family
- adapt by using more drought-resistant seeds
- transform their livelihood by switching to alternative forms of income such as carpentry

Communities' capacity to absorb, adapt and transform in response to threats is illustrated by a 'ring of resilience', which protects communities from the threats they face.

Community

Groups of people connected through formal and informal governance and organisational systems in villages, towns, cities and megacities

Threats

Communities face a wide range of threats. In South America they identify floods, storms, crime, drought, landslides, earthquakes, fires, traffic accidents, disease, cold spells, and alcohol and drug abuse as their priority threats.



Development

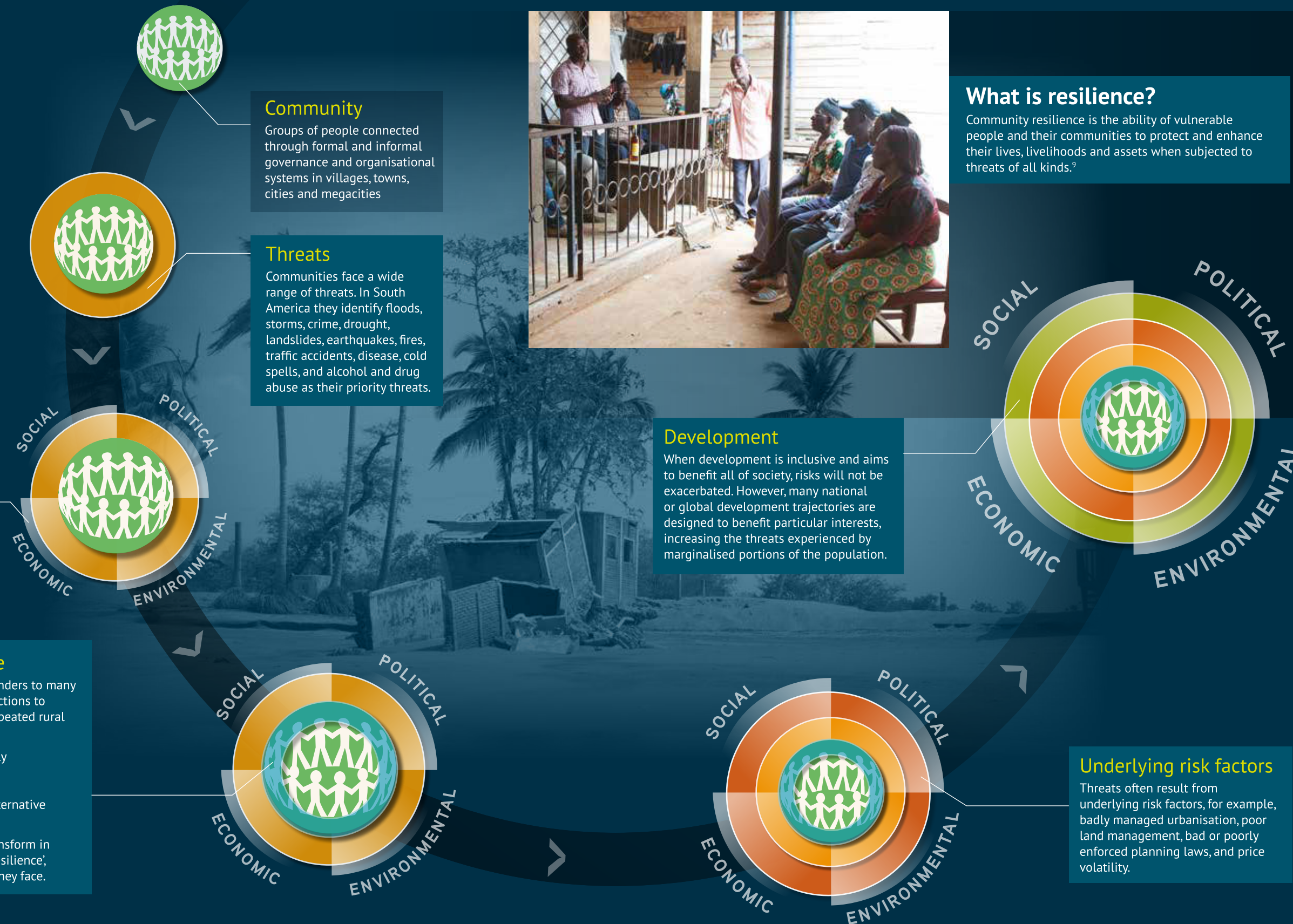
When development is inclusive and aims to benefit all of society, risks will not be exacerbated. However, many national or global development trajectories are designed to benefit particular interests, increasing the threats experienced by marginalised portions of the population.

What is resilience?

Community resilience is the ability of vulnerable people and their communities to protect and enhance their lives, livelihoods and assets when subjected to threats of all kinds.⁹

Underlying risk factors

Threats often result from underlying risk factors, for example, badly managed urbanisation, poor land management, bad or poorly enforced planning laws, and price volatility.



Resilience in Real Life

What does resilience look like in real life?

Resilience is the ability of communities to reduce the impact of threats on their lives and livelihoods. This story of resilience provides a real example from Honduras of the different factors at play in the Resilience Circle diagram.

The Resilience Circle in Action

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, and reconstruction took several years. Today, the city economy and population is growing fast. Alongside its expanding formal economy is an equally fast growing informal economy, estimated to account for nearly 50% of all economic activity.¹⁰ Outside the city centre are informal settlements like Nueva Suyapa. They are beyond the reach of financial systems, city services and often even city laws. Nueva Suyapa was founded on a former landfill by migrants displaced in 1974 by Hurricane Fifi. It is home to over 40,000 people and its population is growing steadily on the unstable slopes.

Unlike the capital's city centre, basic services in Nueva Suyapa are very limited. Health and education services are inadequate, and water supplies are only pumped in once a month.

Julyssa Reyes has lived in Nueva Suyapa her whole life and has seen how the community has grown and changed. She sees not only the environmental threats, but also the social threats the community faces. Poor education and limited job opportunities mean many of the youth turn to drug dealing and crime. This has led to increased violence targeting people and livelihoods.

As these everyday disasters do not receive national attention, individuals must protect themselves. The community as a whole has also organised initiatives using its existing resources, to build the community's overall resilience. 'The Genesis Project', a local community organisation, has organised additional schooling to supplement lacking services.

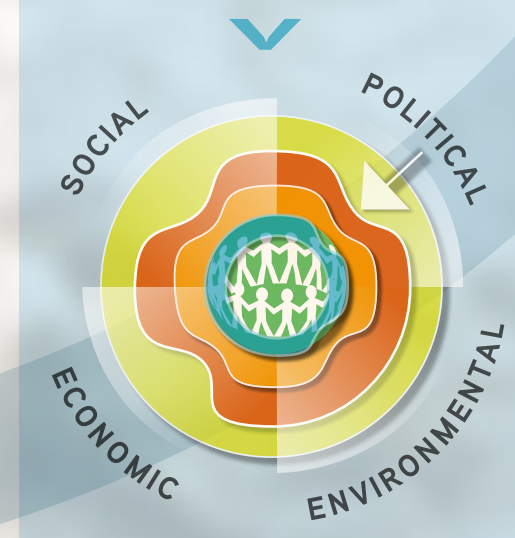
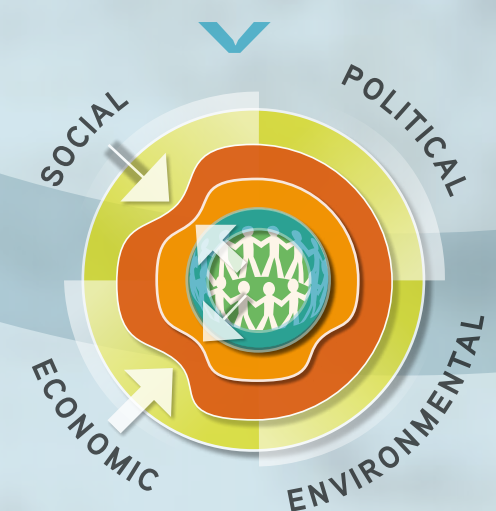
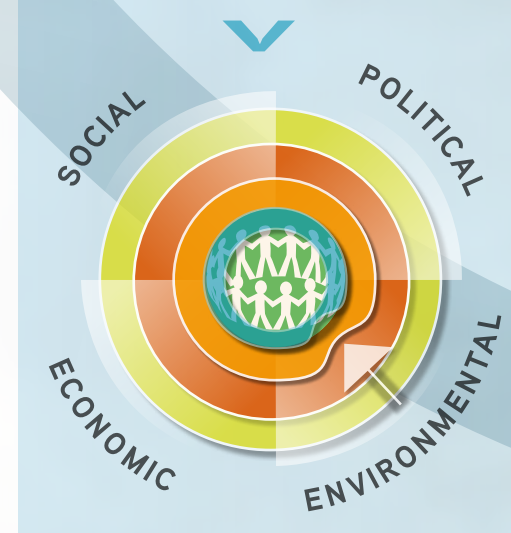


Julyssa Reyes

However, a number of underlying factors create barriers to the community's ability to build their resilience. Reviewing the response to Hurricane Mitch, a World Bank report found that in many communities, factors such as corruption and lack of social cohesion has meant that reconstruction has left the country as vulnerable to future disasters as before the storm.¹¹ Vested interests have led to poor urban development and land management, deforestation and marginalisation of certain groups.



Civil society action at the city level is attempting to address some of these underlying risk factors. Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa (ASJ), a Honduran civil society organisation that aims to overcome corruption and governance issues, has successfully lobbied for, and supported the adoption of transparent practices particularly around the provision of health, education, security, infrastructure, and tax administration.



Nueva Suyapa is typical of many communities around the world. In order to enhance their resilience, there is a need for local, national, and global actions to be better informed by the real life threats that communities experience, and to support the everyday heroes that address them.



Fragile housing in Nueva Suyapa

¹⁰ IMF: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2008/wp08102.pdf>

¹¹ TELFORD, J. ARNOLD, M. HARTH, A. (2004) 'Learning Lessons from Disaster Recovery: The Case of Honduras. World Bank. Disaster risk management working paper series no. 8. Accessed at: http://www.preventionweb.net/files/1595_honduraswps

Frontline: How it works

How does Frontline work to support everyday heroes tackling everyday disasters?

Frontline Central America Data Dashboard
www.gndr.org/tableau/ca

It starts with a conversation

The *Frontline* method starts with individual conversations with the holders of local knowledge: community members, civil society organisations, and local government officers. Each conversation is based on four basic questions:

Threats: What are the threats you face in your community?

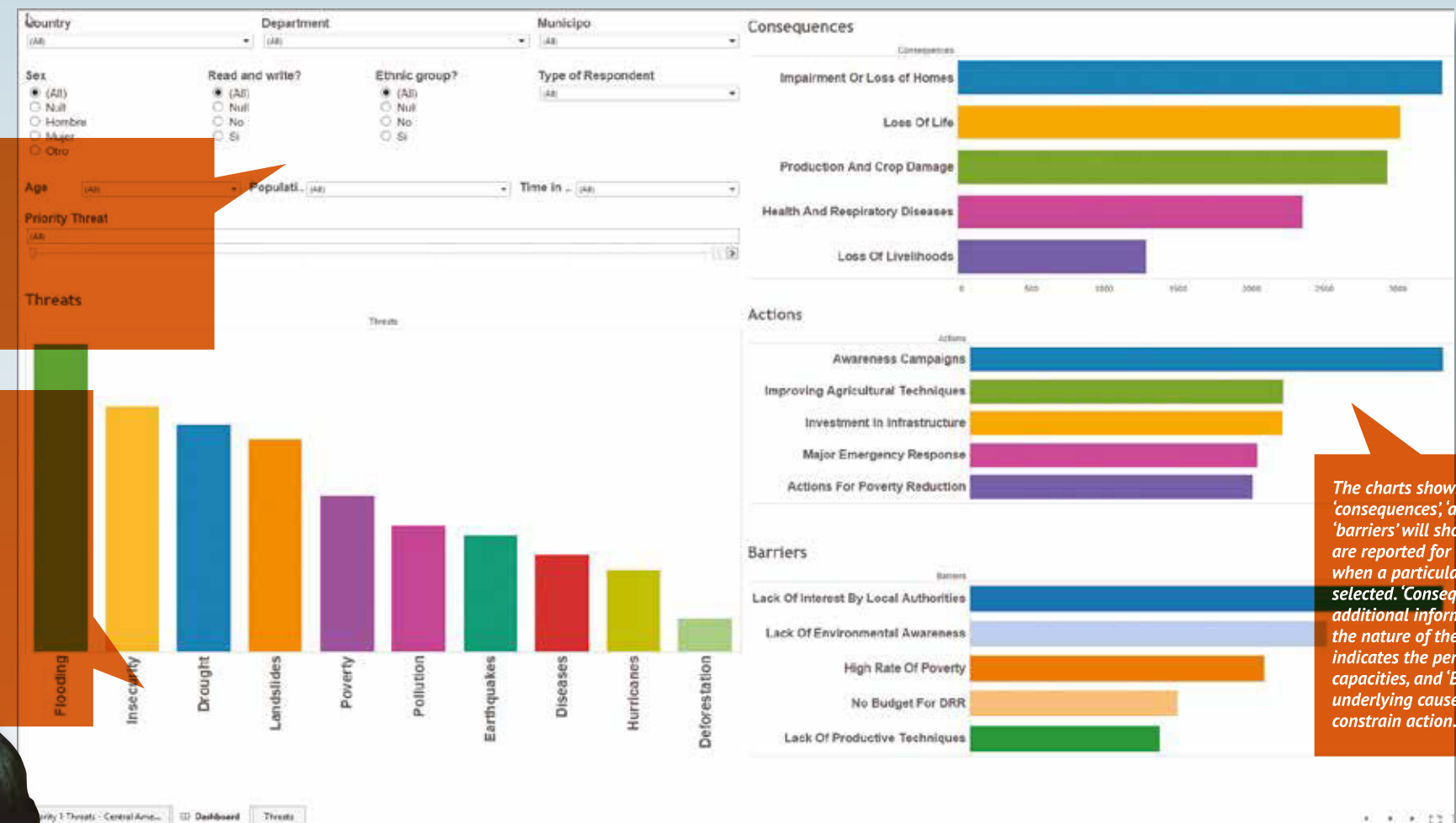
Consequences: What impacts do these threats have on the lives and livelihoods of you, your household and your community?

Actions: What capacity do you and your community have to take action against these threats?

Barriers: What factors beyond your control lead to these threats?

The data can be filtered to view results by gender, age, location, socio-economic group and other factors. They can also be filtered to show a region, country or locality.

The priorities given to threats are shown for the whole dataset, or after any filters have been applied the chart will then show priorities for particular respondent groups or locations. A particular threat can be selected and the charts for 'consequences', 'actions' and 'barriers' will then show those reported for that threat.



The charts showing 'consequences', 'actions' and 'barriers' will show how these are reported for each threat when a particular threat is selected. 'Consequences' provides additional information about the nature of the threat. 'Actions' indicates the perception of local capacities, and 'Barriers' indicates underlying causes which constrain action.

From one conversation to many

Frontline has the ability to gather thousands of individual conversations together into local, national or global databases combining all responses. This information can be analysed by gender, age, location, and socio-economic group, amongst other factors.

At the Local Level: The consultations facilitate community reflection, resulting in wider dialogue and partnerships, and provide valuable evidence to guide local budgeting and action plans.

At the National and Global Levels: *Frontline* data can be used to create more appropriate and effective national policies and plans, ensuring that local level realities are both understood and considered. It can also be used as a monitoring tool for measuring progress in the post-2015 frameworks, including those for disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and climate change adaptation.

Frontline in action: Learning from Central America

Frontline has been piloted in 14 Latin American countries and has collected the voices of more than 13,000 individuals. The results from these studies highlight the complex, multi-hazard, and insecure realities that people face at the local level, and the prioritisation of environmental, economic, social, and political threats associated with everyday disasters.

Headlines of the rich data from our pilot in four Central American countries are presented here. The findings from both of our pilots can be explored in more detail on an interactive data dashboard on the GNDR website.¹²



Learning from local reality

The *Frontline* data for Central America combines conversations from over 6000 people. They identify diverse threats – environmental, political, social and economic – and reveal that local reality is complex. The data provides a unique insight into how policies addressing threats of all types are translating into action;

and the priorities for action which local people identify. It shows that increasing access to knowledge and resources, enhancing local governance, maintaining law and order, mobilising the community, and reducing poverty are critical actions to address the diverse range of threats communities experience.

In Central America, 90% of disasters prioritised by respondents are everyday. The tables show the actions and barriers identified for the two highest priority threats from conversations in Central America. Potential learning from these findings is then highlighted.



FLOODS	Actions		Barriers	
	1	Increase awareness and knowledge	>	Lack of environmental knowledge
	2	Improved agricultural techniques	>	Lack of techniques for improved production
	3	Investment in infrastructure	>	Lack of available investment
	4	Improved response	>	Inattention and apathy from Local Government
	5	Poverty reduction	>	High poverty in the region



What can we learn from this local knowledge? **We need to:**
Support learning and sharing of knowledge
Strengthen local governance
Mobilise resources for local level budgeting

INSECURITY	Actions		Barriers	
	1	Compliance with laws	>	Inattention and apathy from Local Government
	2	Poverty reduction	>	High poverty in the region
	3	Strengthen security in violent areas	>	Limited local governance and policy
	4	Promote community organisation	>	Lack of laws and lack of control
	5	Increase awareness and knowledge	>	Weak community organisation



What can we learn from this local knowledge? **We need to:**
Implement social protection mechanisms
Invest in enforcing laws
Mobilise communities to demand protection

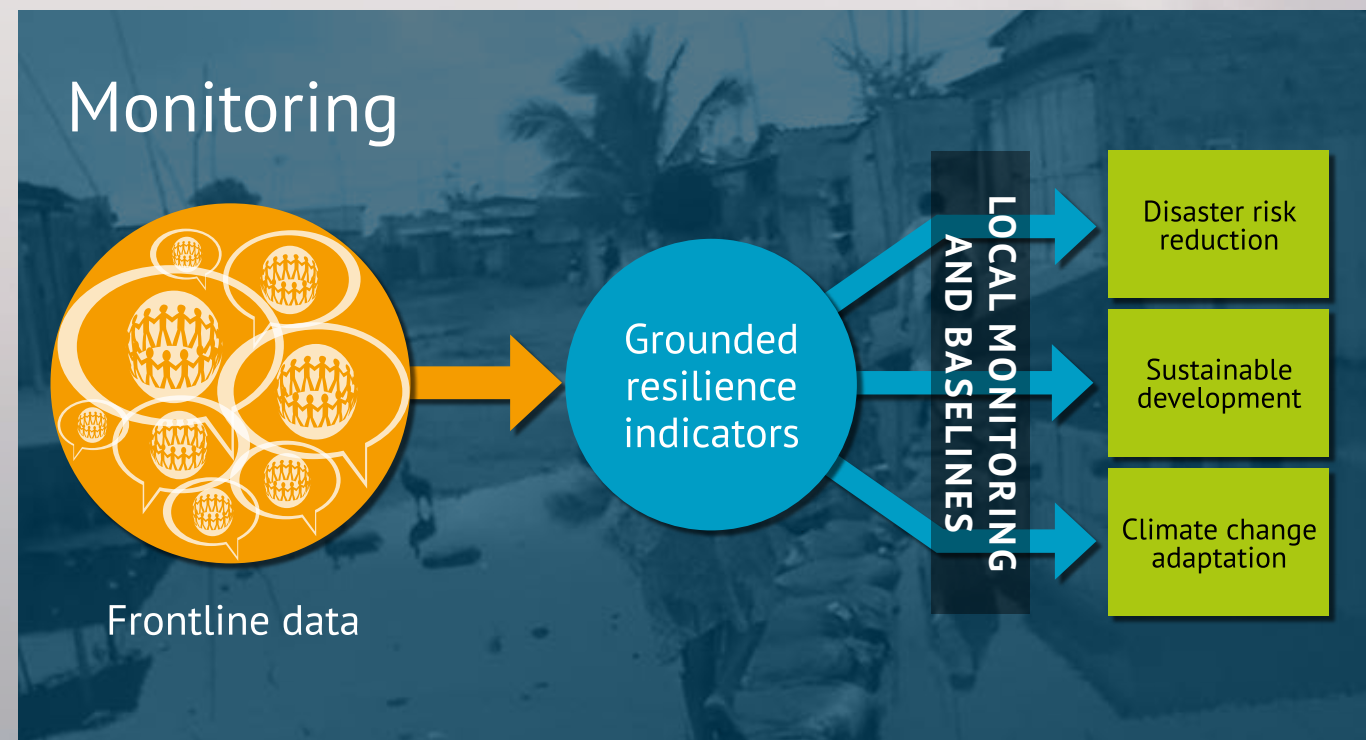
Beyond 2015: Local monitoring with Frontline

Data from *Frontline* can provide local perspectives on the extent to which frameworks, policies, and plans are being translated into change at the local level. Local knowledge of the threats that affect communities, and the capacities that they have to deal with them, is a vital component of measuring local level progress in the achievement of all the Post-2015 frameworks. This includes those for disaster risk reduction, development, and climate change adaptation. *Frontline*'s national and global databases provide local level 'grounded indicators', meaning that they are drawn from real life. These indicators can be used to assess the resilience of respondents at local, national and global level.

Frontline data can also be used to establish accurate risk and resilience baselines for the year 2015-2016, to inform ongoing monitoring of these frameworks.

"Indicators for the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction need to show what is happening locally as well as globally . . . Such good risk information is vital for improved decision making to strengthen local resilience"

(The July 2014 technical session of the UN Preparatory Committee of the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction)



Frontline: Get involved

***Frontline* is an open source and so can be used by everyone. GNDR encourages all institutions and networks to make use of it.**

Civil society organisations, ranging from community organisations to national and regional networks, can participate in *Frontline* to build local partnerships and strengthen local learning and action. Many organisations are already involved, and more are invited to join as *Frontline* extends its scope in 2015 and beyond. The work of civil society organisations will contribute to national and global databases which can be accessed by all interested groups. National and regional networks have already used the methodology for their own programmes and extended the *Frontline* dataset for everyone's use.

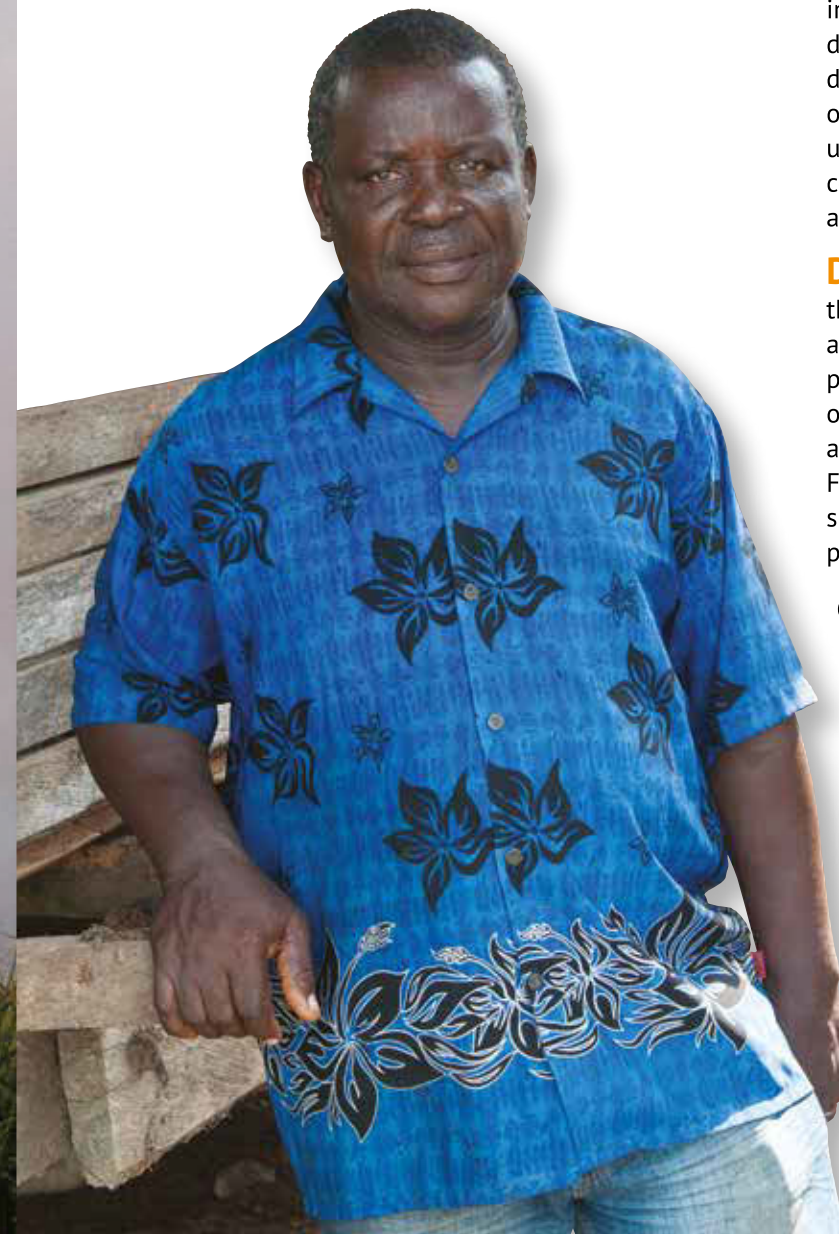
Local and National Governments can collaborate with civil society organisations to use *Frontline*. They can use the data collected to inform policies, plans and resource allocation, ensuring they address the clearly identified threats which households and communities face, and build on the capacities they have. The data can also be used to measure progress in the country's implementation of different international frameworks.

Private enterprise can draw on existing *Frontline* data, or financially support implementation of *Frontline* in specific locations, to inform their strategies for sustainable operations.

Academic and research organisations can implement *Frontline* to support research across a range of disciplines. Researchers can also access the open *Frontline* databases of local knowledge to deepen understanding of risk and resilience. GNDR already collaborates with universities in the UK and South Africa and invites further collaborations to make use of this unique source of risk and resilience knowledge.

Donors and UN agencies can financially support the implementation of *Frontline* in a range of countries and communities. *Frontline*'s ability to capture real life perspectives and disaggregate data by gender, age and other socio-economic factors can help ensure projects are effective and enhance accountability to communities. Further, the data collected will help strengthen and support other programmes and projects in donors' portfolios.

Get involved by supporting *Frontline*, by participating in it and by making use of the local knowledge of risk and resilience it provides. For more information and to discuss implementation and support please email info@gndr.org.





USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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