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CASE STUDY

Utilising CDRTs in all phases of the Disaster Management Cycle.

Introduction

Gone are the days where the focus of disaster management rested solely on response. A more holistic outlook has been embraced and equal emphasis is rightly being placed on actions that should be taken to reduce the impacts of disasters before they strike as well as to building back stronger and better after such events. This new way of thinking has given way to the Disaster Management Cycle which comprises of the following phases: prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as a long-standing humanitarian organization regularly develops and updates tools and methodologies used by the National Societies to not only strengthen their capacity but to also empower communities to take ownership of their overall resilience. One such action is the training and formation of Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs).

Its location and status as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), has led to the Caribbean region being prone to a multitude of natural hazards and climate related impacts, from devastating hurricanes to even deadlier earthquakes. When these events occur, some communities may be cut off from others or may have to wait extended periods for assistance. These occurrences reiterate the importance of having community members trained with the knowledge to recognize and identify their risks and vulnerabilities and the skills essential to properly prepare for disasters and provide any initial aid needed after a disaster. It also underscores the need for community members to identify and determine possible solutions to any issues that may add to its vulnerability. This is the purpose of community response teams. CDRTs receive training in core disaster risk reduction topics with the aim of increasing their communities' disaster resilience. This case study aims to highlight if the CDRT approach towards community resiliency is effective in all phases of the disaster management cycle.

Methodology

Secondary data was collected via a literature review of all pertinent reports, documents, related case studies and CDRT training materials. Primary information was gathered from Suriname, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Belize, through the administering of two online surveys: one for CDRT trained persons and another for CDRT trainers. Additional information was obtained through interviews and one on one meetings as deemed necessary.

Findings

Training CDRTs

When trying to understand the effectiveness of CDRTs, we must first consider the type of training received as this sets the foundation needed to enable community members to take appropriate action to increase their disaster resilience in a way that is structured and meaningful. National societies use a CDRT Field Guide to ensure the standardization of the training within the Americas region. There are seven (7) core thematic areas in the Field Guide which will enable CDRTs to identify their risks and vulnerabilities, as well as quick and safe actions that can be taken to protect themselves, their homes, and their communities before, during and after a hazard impact. The following are the core topics:

- Fundamentals of Disaster Risk Management (EVCAs, Roadmap to Resilience, climate change and EWS)
- Fundamentals in Disaster Preparedness
- Basic First Aid and Health in Emergencies
- Damage Analysis and Needs Assessment (DANA) and Post-Disaster Assessments

- Fire Safety
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)
- CDRTs Roles and Structures

Additionally, specialized topics such as Communications, Light Search and Rescue and Shelter Management are taught. However, in Belize the National Society provided community members with knowledge on livelihood assessment and analysis, children and adolescents in disasters and violence and crime prevention.

Engaging CDRTs

The engagement process of CDRTs is not always initiated by the National Societies. Given the close relationship with their National Disaster Office (NDOs) counterparts, it is also important to note that even though CDRTs are trained by the National Societies, CDRTs are sometimes utilized by the NDO and therefore engagement is initiated by those organisations to assist with their response and rehabilitation efforts. In Belize, certified CDRTs are given equipment, and their names are shared with their national disaster office (NEMO/CEMO). In other cases, CDRTs are the ones to reach out to the national societies when their communities are impacted. When engaged by the national disaster office, CDRTs updates the Belize Red Cross on any Damage Assessment and Needs Analysis (DANA) conducted, which can help inform the national society's response. Figure 1 below shows the methods through which CDRTs are engaged.

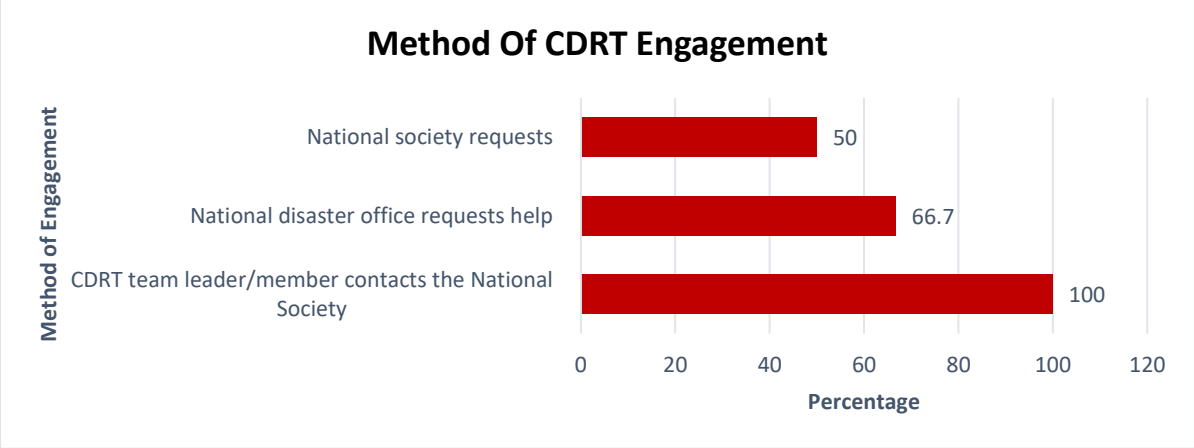

Figure 1: Method of CDRT Engagement.

CDRTs and Equipment

In Suriname and Belize, the national societies provide their CDRTs with equipment and even store equipment in some vulnerable communities. It is slightly different in Grenada as CDRTs are not given equipment, however, emergency equipment is stored in some communities. In Suriname and Belize, the equipment provided to CDRTs mainly falls under the category of protective gear such as raincoats, hard hats, headlamps, safety vests, goggles, dust mask, first aid kit, safety gloves, and COVID related personal protective equipment (PPE). In all three (3) countries, braided ropes, portable generator, handsaw, shovel, spade, pitchfork, megaphone, handheld radios, flashlights, hand wrench are examples of the equipment stored in the vulnerable communities. It is important to have emergency equipment stored in rural or interior communities that are very difficult to reach and therefore there

is a priority to empower these communities to be able to act quickly as first responders in times of emergencies as they await official assistance.

CDRTs and Preparedness

Preparedness can be defined as activities and measures taken in advance to help reduce the loss of lives and damage to property that results from a hazard impact or disaster. Preparedness primarily consists of developing plans and early warning systems, and it is the hope of the national societies that CDRT members would act as DRR ambassadors, assisting with the identification and maintenance EWS, implement systems to communicate hazard warnings to other community members, participating in emergency drills before a disaster and participating in Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCAs). Figure 2 below shows the expectations of CDRT trainers and the actual preparedness actions taken by CDRT trained persons. In addition to the actions seen in Figure 2, 91.7% of the surveyed CDRT members said that they also developed a Family Emergency Plan, while 88.3% stated that they developed an Evacuation Plan for their homes.

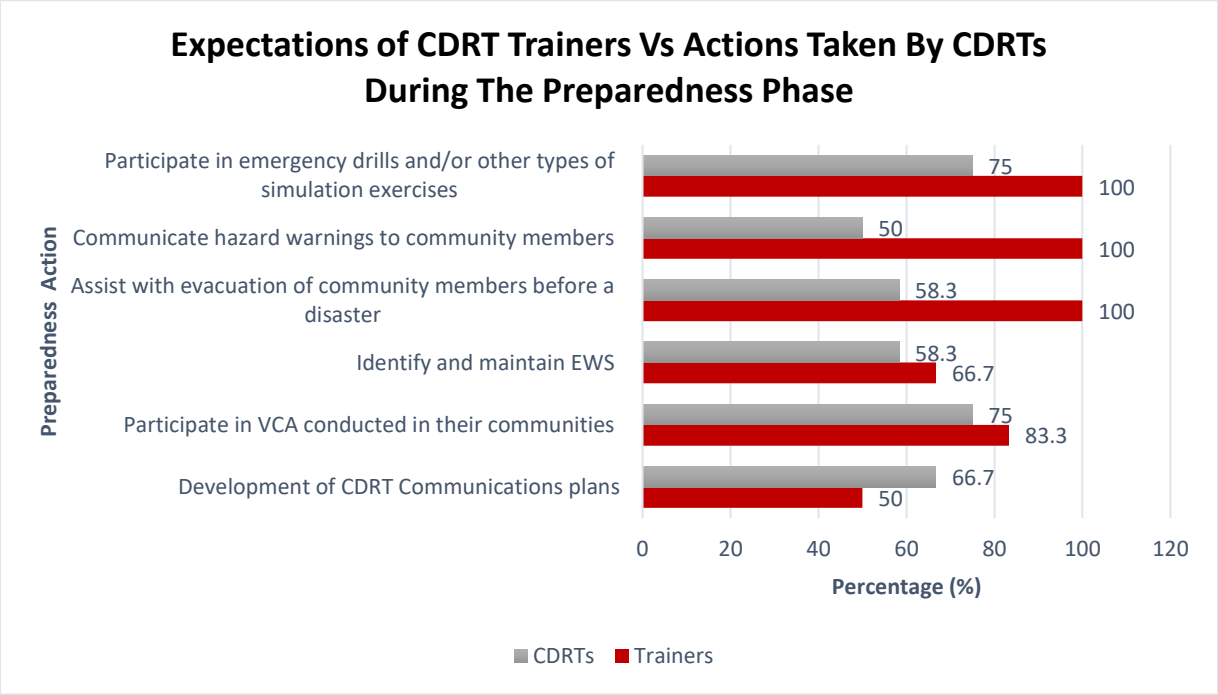

Figure 2: Expectations of CDRT Trainers Vs Actions Taken by CDRTs During the Preparedness Phase.

CDRTs and Mitigation

Mitigation is another phase of the disaster management cycle that is implemented before a disaster occurs and can be broken down into two types, structural and non-structural. Structural mitigation includes making structural changes to better protect property such as the use of hurricane straps or building a retaining wall. Non-structural mitigation involves increasing education and awareness. The expectation is that CDRT members would help spread the information received during their training to family members and community members, so that they can also be aware of their risks and vulnerabilities (see Figure 3 below). Some CDRT trainers (66.7%) also hoped that CDRTs would implement simple structural changes such as bolting heavy shelves to the walls and installing hurricane straps. A few CDRTs (41.7%) did make simple structural changes.

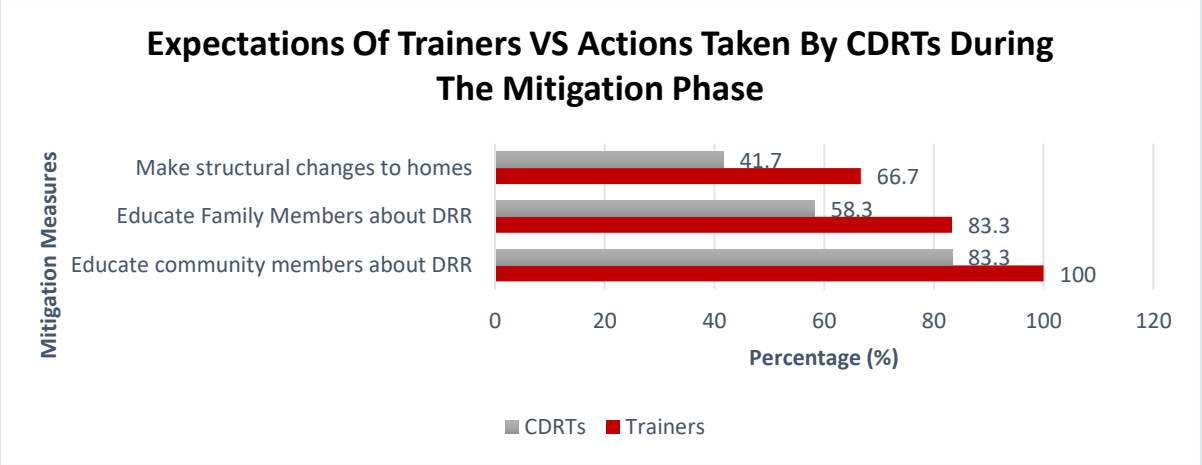

Figure 3: Expectations of CDRT Trainers Vs Actions Taken by CDRTs During the Mitigation Phase.

CDRTs and Response

Response is the main phase of the disaster management cycle where CDRTs are expected to provide the most support (see Figure 4 below for details). National societies would train CDRTs, however most CDRTs are utilized by the country's NDO. Whilst National Societies may expect CDRTs to support in various ways, CDRTs assisted mostly by conducting post-disaster assessments (66.7%), executing their communications plan (58.3%) and through shelter management (58.3%). While only 50% of CDRTs stated that they help with evacuations, they played an integral role in evacuating persons from the red zone (communities closest to the volcano) in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, before and after the La Soufriere eruption. Violence and crime prevention are not core subject areas in the CDRT curriculum, however they are areas in which CDRTs are trained and offer support in Belize.

CDRTs cited "assist with cash-based interventions" (33.3%) and "WASH support" (41.7%) as the activities that they are engaged in the least after a disaster. Only 50% of CDRTs indicated that help with psychosocial support (PSS), however this is an area that CDRTs wish to engage in more and therefore some indicated that they wish to receive more training in PSS.

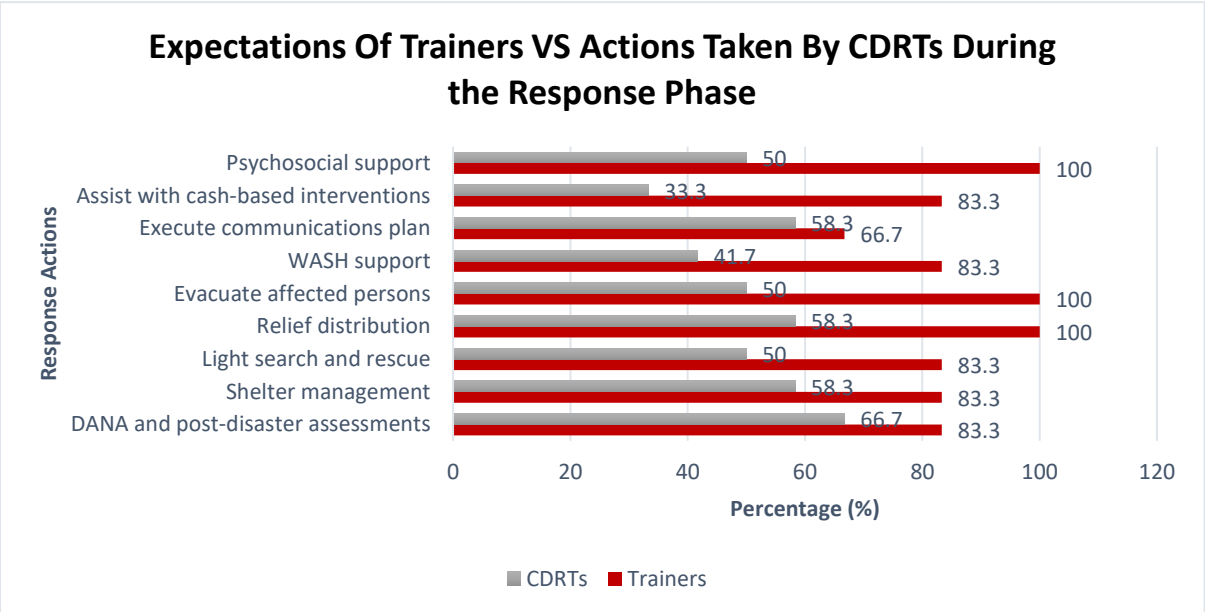

Figure 4: Expectations of CDRT Trainers Vs Actions Taken by CDRTs During the Response Phase.

CDRTs and Recovery

Recovery occurs after a disaster and is defined as the restoring or improving of livelihoods and health, as well as economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets, systems and principles of sustainable development and 'build back better", to avoid or reduce future disaster risk. From a CDRT standpoint as it relates to recovery, they are expected to help with clean-up efforts and 83.3% of CDRTs confirmed that they help with such activities. Unlike the other phases of the disaster management cycle, CDRTs have a very limited role when it comes to recovery since this may be beyond the scope of their training. Persons who undergo the National Intervention Team (NIT) and Regional Intervention Team (RIT) trainings may be more adept to assist with livelihood and health interventions.

Effectiveness of CDRTs

As seen from the information collected, with the training received, CDRTs can and are expected to be able to guide and lend support to their communities in all the phases of the disaster management cycle. Also seen from the information gathered, is that CDRTs do in fact play a crucial role in all phases of the cycle. But what do CDRT trainers and CDRTs think about the effectiveness of the programme and the work done by CDRTs? Can they both be improved? When asked to rate the effectiveness of CDRTs in the various phases, trainers and CDRTs thought that they were most effective during the preparedness phase (see Figure 5). Trainers believed that CDRTs were the least effective in the response and recovery phase, while CDRTs felt that they were least effective during the recovery phase (see Figure 5 below). Since the purpose of CDRTs are to be able to act as first responders in their communities after a disaster, their effectiveness in the response phase must be increased. Both CDRTs and trainers felt that more guidance, practice and training are needed to increase their ability to better help their communities.

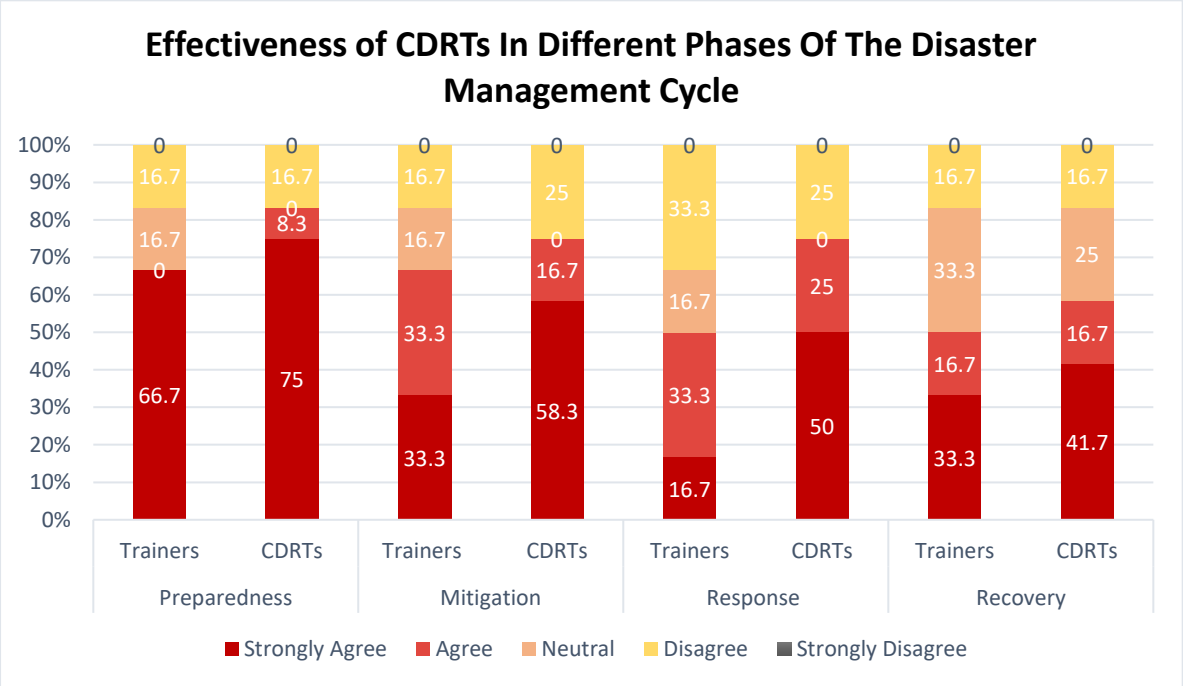

Figure 5: Effectiveness Rating of CDRTs in All Phases of the Disaster Management Cycle.

Recommendations on Improving the CDRT Programme

What steps can be taken to bridge the gap between trainer expectations and reality? The answer might seem complex but there are some simple ways in which the CDRT programme can be improved. CDRTs genuinely care about their communities, and many chose to be become volunteers (50%) because they wanted to be able to help their communities. However, most CDRTs (91.7%) wanted to be engaged more, and this can be done through additional training or through the participation in simulation exercises. Some areas in which CDRTs wanted to assist more with included DANA collection (75%), participating in VCAs (66.7%) and emergency communication (58.3%). The following are some additional ways in which the CDRT programme can be improved:

Additional training or refreshers

CDRT members seem to be enthusiastic and willing to help their communities and their countries, however CDRT members and trainers identified the need for refresher trainings. It is recommended that refresher trainings should be conducted every two (2) years. Additionally, to keep abreast of new information and to increase their knowledge and skillset, national societies can direct CDRTs to the IFRC's e-learning platform, where they can learn about various DRR topics and obtain certificates. CDRTs who are passionate and would like to further assist their countries more can also be directed to participate in upcoming National Intervention Training (NIT) where they can gain more in-depth knowledge and experience in more specialized areas of response such as providing livelihood interventions, WASH support and assisting with logistics to name a few.

Different areas that CDRTs can receive training to help them become better leaders, can include management skills, conflict resolution and coping with a pandemic. Volunteering and the way of conducting operations have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and CDRTs can gain knowledge and experience in engaging communities and persons impacted through volunteering during the pandemic. CDRTs also identified the need for additional training in mental health and psychosocial support since many persons were affected by the pandemic and knowing how to show empathy and support persons emotionally can be improved.

More hands-on practice

Though CDRTs have the knowledge, one trainer suggested that they may second-guess the actions that they take. Therefore, structuring trainings to be even more participatory to include more field work and/or field visits can help provide more context to the theoretical information being taught during the training. Furthermore, practice is also needed post-training. Whilst trainers and CDRT members stated that they participate in drills, drills are not performed as often as they should. Simulation exercises (tabletop exercises or simple evacuation drills) should be implemented once a year to allow CDRTs to better understand the response system as well as their role. Participating in simulations more frequently will also help to build the confidence of CDRTs who may second-guess their actions as well as keep them engaged.

On the other hand, while CDRTs are willing to help, personal safety is the top priority and CDRTs should be able to recognize situations that are too dangerous and, in those cases, should wait for the authority to respond. Simulations and drills can also assist with this.

Creating a space to share lessons learnt

CDRTs from different communities or even from different countries within the region can also learn from each other's experiences not just from the perspective of assisting with a response but also on how to set up the structure of their CDRT teams. Each CDRT team should have a set structure and should have a functioning communication plan that not only outlines how to communicate with each other but also how to get pertinent information to other community members as well as to the most suitable persons within the national society or national disaster office. A system whereby CDRTs can share their best practices or be able to reach out to each other for support should be established. CDRTs can increase their level of engagement and knowledge by creating a peer-to-peer learning system or platform.

Access to suitable equipment

In some countries, emergency equipment is stored in communities, however, due to funding constraints, not all vulnerable communities have access to the type of equipment that they need. One solution posed was to have CDRTs register as an official community support group so that they can conduct their own fundraisers and access funding to obtain equipment, set up early warning systems or to implement mitigation measures that can help reduce the community's overall risks and vulnerabilities.

CDRTs should also be encouraged to work with other community members to identify and document persons who own tools that can be used in emergency situations as sometimes the resources needed can be found within the community.

Guidance needed in establishing team structure

Every community response team should have an established operations structure with a designated team leader. Only 50% of the CDRTs indicated that their team had an assigned leader. In some cases, CDRT members do not always have defined roles, therefore, more guidance may be needed from the national societies to help establish the team structure in a way that is sustainable. CDRT structures typically consist of a team leader, a chair, a secretary and a communications liaison, however, not all CDRTs are organized this way. Best practices on setting up CDRT structures that are suitable to the type of community they live in should be shared with CDRTs so that they can play to their strengths increase their capacity to function as intended.

Conclusion

CDRTs are a great resource that are not only effective during a response but can also be relied upon to bolster the overall preparedness levels in communities. They can be seen as their community's backbone as it relates to DRR, however most require more guidance, training and practice, in order to become more effective in all phases of the disaster management cycle. It is clear to see that CDRTs are quite passionate and willing to learn and improve their skillsets and capacity to help their communities. Through conducting refresher trainings, alerting CDRTs to further training and frequently executing simulation exercises, national societies and national disaster offices can help to improve the CDRT programme.

For more information, contact CADRIM via out helpdesk at: https://www.cadrim.org/helpdesk

All CDRT training materials can be found on CADRIM's website at: https://www.cadrim.org/cdrt