

Improving local capacities for seismic vulnerability reduction

Ruud Houdijk¹, Nico van Os², Hripsime Aghagulyan³

¹ *ITINERIS health & safety; Regentesselaan 56, 2281VH Rijswijk, The Netherlands, ruud@itineris.nl;*

² *Safety Region South-Holland South, Romboutslaan 105, 3312KP Dordrecht, The Netherlands, n.van.os@vrzHz.nl;*

³ *Ararat Municipality, 34 Shahumyan Street, Ararat 0602, Armenia, hripsime7575@mail.ru.*

Reducing risk and improving disaster resilience are common international challenges that should not only be addressed at national level, but even more so locally. To supplement the ongoing ‘top-down’ efforts to improve national and transnational resilience as part of the implementation of the Sendai Framework, also a ‘bottom-up’ strengthening of local competence and action is needed. Impacts of disasters are felt the first at local level. Local governments are the ‘first line of defense’, both in terms of prevention and preparedness.

The philosophy is that reducing disaster risks and increasing resilience requires a long-term local strategy that can outlast the short-term political agenda, as well as a local system of governance, capacities and resources that is realistic and sustainable. This starts from ‘understanding risk’ to inform a concrete and holistic DRM strategy. To reduce disaster risks, local governments have some of the most fundamental policy instruments, if multi-hazard Disaster Risk Management (DRM) can be effectively mainstreamed into local policies such as spatial planning, building code enforcement, economic development and local infrastructure investments. However, local governments across the world struggle with mainstreaming DRM, because of budget constraints and limited capacities and capabilities.

To be able to assess risks, to use this to develop a DRM strategies and actions, as well as to mainstream DRM in a participatory process with local stakeholders, cities need to develop their capacities and capabilities. This is a gradual process of acquiring skills and knowledge, using existing good practices and gaining practical experience by actually starting to work on a structured DRM cycle. The CapaCities project (www.drm-capacities.eu), funded by European Union Civil Protection, assists cities in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova with such a capacity development process. The project provides a curriculum to develop the competences of local ‘DRM focal points’, that is combined with actual local actions such as a self-assessment of current local capacities, a multi-hazard risk assessment and development of a holistic DRM strategy.

The local risk assessments and DRM strategies will include seismic hazards and vulnerabilities, because those are of great significance in all three countries. To reduce seismic vulnerabilities, implementation and enforcement of seismic building codes requires local action, in coherence with local efforts on risk communication, community resilience and preparedness of local

emergency services. The project shares its lessons on capacity development and mainstreaming and in turn hopes to acquire additional, practical insights from seismic experts. By bringing together local governments and seismic experts, a coherent and realistic approach can be devised for local seismic vulnerability reduction and resilience improvement.