

Implementing disaster resilience policy: making it happen in a federal system

Susan Hunt¹

¹ Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU College of Medicine, Biology and Environment, ANU, ACT

Disaster resilience policy is being implemented via a range of programs and activities across Australia - effective implementation is critical for ensuring successful outcomes.

THE ISSUE

Australia, like many other nations has embraced resilience as an approach to preventing, preparing and facilitating adaptive responses to natural disasters.

Australia's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience aims shift the emphasis away from "picking up the pieces" in the aftermath of a disaster toward self-reliance and shared responsibility between all levels of government and the community to understand disaster risks and to take action to mitigate those risks.

While there appears to be a high level of agreement in Australia about what constitutes appropriate disaster resilience policy, there is a shortage of evidence about how to operationalise it across the system to achieve a more disaster resilient nation.

THE BENEFITS

Knowing that implementation is informed by evidence can encourage decision makers and practitioners to apply disaster resilience policy principles. In the longer term this has the potential to reduce loss and damage from disasters by shifting the focus of disaster management toward prevention, preparedness and mitigation.

THE RESEARCH

My research is examining how disaster resilience policy is being implemented in Australia with reference to the four domains of social capital, community competence, economic development and information and communication¹ and their corresponding policy objectives in TABLE 1.

My proposition is that achieving national disaster resilience also hinges on working effectively in the context of the multi-level governance system which is the Australian Federation. This includes a consideration of federal power-sharing and financing arrangements, co-ordination, sectoral roles, responsibilities and capability, and the opportunities and constraints they present for strategic and systemic disaster resilience policy implementation.

THE METHODOLOGY

The project uses qualitative methodology to review and analyse the literature to investigate disaster resilience policy implementation pathways, mechanisms and limitations in terms of each of the four domains and their related policy objectives. This is complemented by information from interviews with key personnel and documents from five good practice disaster resilience activities being implemented in Australia at federal, state, and local government levels and in the business and not-for-profit sectors. These are the National Flood Risk Information Project, the NSW National Partnership Agreement – Natural Disaster Resilience, the Lake Macquarie City Council Local Adaptation Plan for Flooding, the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience and Safer Communities, & the Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program.

REFERENCES

¹ Norris, F.H., Stevens, S.P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K.F. and Pfefferbaum, R.L., 2008. Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness. *American journal of community psychology*, 41(1-2), pp.127-150.

The findings indicate a 5th domain = SUBIDIARITY²

² The concept that decisions should be taken as close as possible to the citizens by the lowest-level competent authority' (Head, B., 2007. Taking subsidiarity seriously: what role for the states? In *Federalism and regionalism in Australia*. Chapter 10. eds Bellamy, J.A., and Brown, A.J., ANU Press, p.160 at <http://press.anu.edu.au/?p=52401> [accessed: 12 July 2018]).

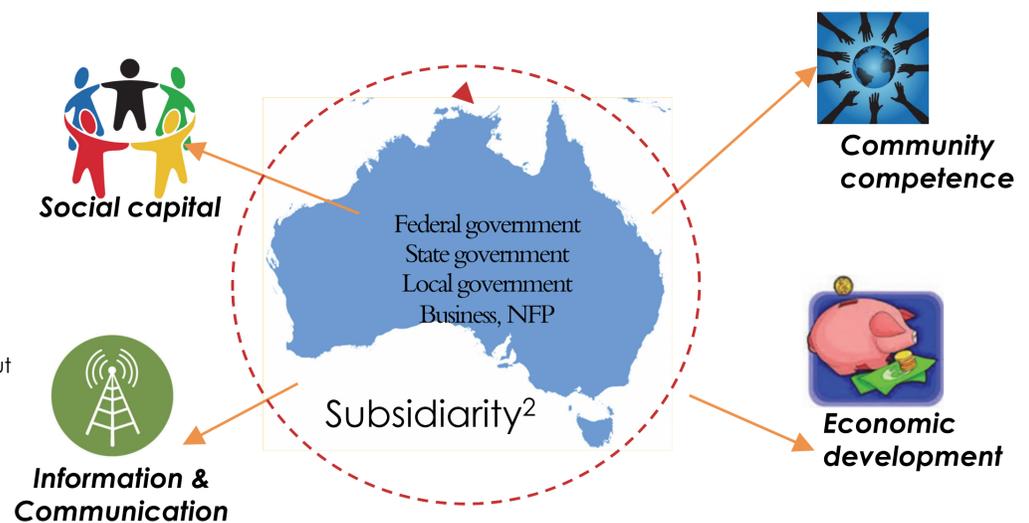


TABLE 1 DISASTER RESILIENCE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION DOMAINS & POLICY OBJECTIVES*

DOMAIN	Social Capital (Trust)	Community Competence (Self-efficacy)	Economic Development (Sustainability)	Information & communication (Learning)
Policy Objective	1. Networks 2. Non-adverse geography/place-based 3. Community engagement 4. Leadership (internally focused)	1. Political partnerships 2. Stakeholder engagement 3. Leadership (externally focused) & empowerment 4. Community participation	1. Security 2. Economic diversity 3. Equity of resource distribution 4. Shared (equitable) risk allocation	1. Narrative 2. Responsible media/access to trusted information 3. Skills and infrastructure 4. Information flow between sectors

*Adapted from Norris et al (2008); Australian Red Cross (2009); Handmer, J, Dovers, S (2013); Porteus, P(2013); Australian Productivity Commission (2003)

FINDINGS

- Ensure approaches to implementation are informed by evidence on good practice.
- Plan and design how to implement disaster resilience activities, including identifying the desired policy objectives and viable mechanisms for achieving these,
- Develop multi-directional information and communication channels in disaster resilience, policy development and implementation to create a more cohesive disaster resilience system,
- Clarify the various roles and responsibilities for implementing disaster resilience within the Australian disaster management system,
- Promote trust between levels of government, and between government and non-government and business to ensure better connectivity and free flow of ideas and information,
- Apply behaviour change theory and practice to risk communication,
- Support cross-training between government and community service organisations to build reciprocal knowledge and skills in community development and government administration,
- Capitalise on currently unexplored opportunities to enhance business participation in disaster resilience
- Encourage disaster risk mitigation by reducing perceived and legal barriers that restrict the open access and use of hazard information,
- Foster a commitment to authentic community and stakeholder engagement to implement all disaster resilience activities, including a willingness to learn together by engaging with conflict.