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The role of local churches in resilience building: A literature review for Tearfund

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1. Introduction, aims and methods

Disasters cannot be separated from normal social conditions and processes, which include religion and religious practices. Religious actors can play an important part in local, national and international disaster risk reduction (DRR) processes (Bush et al, 2015). Over the years there has been considerable growth in the involvement of non-state actors in DRR and humanitarian actions. Policy and practice guidance generally encourages the involvement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders in all aspects of DRR (Twigg 2015).

This literature review focuses on the work of local churches in DRR and resilience building.[1] A church is essentially a body of believers with a specific nature and purpose. Churches take a variety of denominational and institutional forms, and they may own goods and property. They are part of a broader spectrum of faith-based organisations (FBOs) that are involved in social as well as spiritual activities, which may include aspects of disaster preparedness, response and recovery. It is now widely appreciated that FBOs can play an important role in DRR, with 'untapped potential' (Wisner 2010) and 'cultural proximity' enabling them to gain access to, and engage effectively with, co-religionists (Bush et al, 2015).

Responding to disasters and suffering has always been an important activity of Christians and the church (Chester and Duncan 2011) and many churches have established missions or operational arms for disaster response and related activities (Koenig 2006). Faith, religious beliefs and churches contribute strongly to disaster coping strategies. Faith-based systems and their interventions are part of social systems and can build resilience. Churches play a role in everyday community life as well as in emergencies, and they are a source of resources and volunteers (Fletcher et al, 2013). Their disaster work is an extension or expansion of their pre-existing social roles in supporting people living in poverty in their communities (Trader-Leigh 2008). Disaster-related activities can be on a very large scale: for instance, it has been estimated that about 2,000 churches (170,000 churchgoers) in South Korea took part in a clean-up operation after a coastal oil spill in 2007 (Ha 2015).

Nevertheless, disaster management guidance and planning still pays relatively little attention to the value and roles of religion and churches. Religious belief systems, value frameworks and associated social networks remain an under-utilised resource for DRR.

This literature review was commissioned by Tearfund as a short scoping exercise to identify and summarise published evidence of the roles played by churches across the different phases of the disaster cycle, analyse the enabling environment that may influence the role of the church in different contexts, identify gaps in the evidence and provide suggestions for further research. The review was expected to cover how churches support their members and their wider communities, and how they connect with other actors such as local governments, NGOs, other faith communities, civil society and the private sector in accessing goods and services or advocating for those vulnerable to hazards.

The review used Google Scholar to search for relevant documents, with search terms combining the words 'church' and 'disaster' with 'planning', 'mitigation', 'relief', 'response' or 'recovery'. The date range was open, there was no geographical restriction and all denominations of Christian churches were considered. The search identified 64 documents, mostly academic research papers, as being sufficiently relevant and substantial for analysis. These different studies used a variety of standard research methods, principally literature reviews, questionnaire surveys, qualitative interviews with key informants (in both formal and informal settings), participant observation and focus group discussions.

The main limitation in the sample was the geographical bias of research towards high-income countries, but many other countries were represented (notably those in the Pacific region). There was also a lack of useful

[1] Tearfund defines resilience as 'the capacity to cope with shocks and stresses without crisis, and to recover quickly'.

contemporary academic literature on churches, drought and famine, even though churches and church-based organisations are known to play important roles here (Marshall et al, 2018) and have done so for a long time (eg during the 1984-5 Ethiopian famine: Borton 1994). More importantly, many of the themes that emerged from the analysis were relevant across different geographical, institutional and social contexts. The focus was on disasters triggered by natural hazards (Tearfund is carrying out separate work on conflict) and on sudden-onset events; but some observations are made on other kinds of disaster, including technological disasters and terrorism.

The main findings and key themes identified by the research are set out below.

2. Capacities and coordination

2.1 Organisational capacities

> *'Local churches are strong – [they] provide shelter and food, supplies, psychosocial support. They are part of the social fabric of the island community.'*
>
> **Interviewee in a study in the Cook Islands, quoted in Gero et al, 2013**

Churches are community assets. They have a permanent presence in communities, with a tradition of coming to the aid of those in need. Their staff are trained to assist in times of loss and tragedy. They often have access to regional, national and international networks and funds (Koenig 2006). Their activities in the community and their social networks make them trusted and respected. They possess important contextual information with their knowledge of communities and of collective and individual needs, together with organisational infrastructure and resources, which enables them to respond quickly in a disaster (Trader-Leigh 2008; Carafano et al, 2007).

Disaster responders have been encouraged to engage with local churches in crises, particularly in meeting the needs of community members living in poverty. This can be effective even when churches do not have pre-existing emergency response plans in place, as in the case of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Louisiana in 2005. Here local churches, unaffiliated national voluntary organisations and others not traditionally viewed as emergency responders were serving disenfranchised groups which were stranded in places that traditional voluntary organisations did not reach (Trader-Leigh 2008; Joshi 2010).

In many Pacific Island countries, churches play an important role in community life, and the Council of Churches, or equivalent organisation, is active in disaster situations. Following a tsunami in Samoa, one local church was able to mobilise relief supplies and funds before Red Cross and government representatives arrived to carry out needs assessments (Fletcher et al, 2013). A 2008 Government of Vanuatu report identified the church as an important response organisation, responsible for providing counselling and support after a disaster, and the Vanuatu Christian Council subsequently received funding for community programming from the Australian government's overseas aid programme. The Samoa Council of Churches is also an important stakeholder in disaster response, playing a major role in distributing food, tools and money after the 2009 tsunami (Gero et al, 2013).

Around the world, community members often turn to churches for support in crisis. For example, during Hurricane Sandy in the USA in 2012, religious congregations became gathering places for those seeking aid and those able to provide it. In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, people also turned to their churches for food, medical assistance, shelter and support in finding lost loved ones (McGeehan et al, 2017). In the aftermath of the 1998 Aitape tsunami in Papua New Guinea, the national government lacked sufficient capacity and resources to respond effectively and local government was ineffective, which led to the Roman Catholic diocese taking the leading role in coordinating and delivering relief (Fountain et al, 2004). A study in Fiji found that 94 per cent of Fijian Christians were confident that their church would be able to help them recover successfully after a disaster, including reconstruction of housing, relocation, financial aid and household food and supplies (Gillard and Paton 1999).

Clergy provide religious leadership in crises. Ministers are important intermediaries, service providers and even case managers among the individuals and families in their congregations and communities. In disasters, they may also be survivors and victims. They often play multiple roles in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, including: holding and attending funerals and religious services; visiting victims in hospital; providing counselling and emotional support; raising and distributing money for victims; providing and delivering food and clothing; helping in mortuaries and medical clinics; opening churches to the homeless; liaising with official agencies; making referrals; and lobbying on behalf of affected people (Koenig 2006; Trader-Leigh 2008).

2.2 Networks, coordination and interactions with other agencies

> *'The church is clearly a critical recovery organisation. Ironically, this role is frequently unrecognised and unacknowledged by actors within the traditional emergency response system and is poorly integrated in disaster response planning frameworks.'*
>
> **Trader-Leigh 2008**

Churches and FBOs are part of local, national and even international networks that can provide substantial monetary relief, food, other supplies and materials, shelter and volunteers. After Hurricane Katrina, a church network provided 900,000 meals through three food kitchens and medical services for over 10,000 patients (Carafano et al, 2007). Churches can scale up their operations substantially by mobilising members from other congregations, calling on their structures at a higher level or establishing task forces: the Presbyterian Church of New York City was able to draw on such resources after 9/11, for example (Sutton 2003).

Such networks do not have to be professional or specialised. They may even be spontaneous. An example of this comes from the 1998 Aitape tsunami in Papua New Guinea, which saw the creation of the Combined Churches Organization: a semi-formal, emergent and explicitly time-limited network for relief, representing denominations and their pastors already working in the affected area whose members did not have training or expertise in disaster management. Group membership fluctuated over time and activities also altered according to needs (Fountain et al, 2004). Following 9/11, the NGO New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) was established to coordinate recovery services and resources. It created a communication network among FBOs, established a memorandum of understanding with the city's Office of Emergency Management, catalogued the capacity of local FBOs and developed a web-based data management tool listing churches and other FBOs, their assets, services offered, and expertise within congregations (Joshi 2010).

Churches have strong links with their congregations and communities, but lack of prior relationships between formal disaster agencies and churches or faith-based groups may lead to disorganisation or confusion during and after disasters. Churches are often not included in the disaster plans of other agencies, who may be unaware of the important contribution that churches can make. There are few documented examples of ongoing church engagement with official emergency services, although this may be more common than it appears. For example, churches and emergency services in the Dandenong Ranges in Victoria, Australia were said to have worked together on committees in the 1990s, and church services were held to honour the work of emergency responders. The State of Victoria's disaster plan assigned a role for the Victorian Council of Churches (VCC) 'to provide support, counselling, information to affected persons and communities'. The VCC also had its own recovery coordinator, who was both a professional disaster manager and an ordained minister (Crawford 1998; Smale 1998). In South Africa, the National Consultative Drought Forum, established in 1992, was made up of representatives of government, church organisations, trade unions, and NGOs, and was said to have led to a policy shift from its previously exclusive emphasis on commercial farmers to a more comprehensive programme including rural farmers, farm workers, and rural people living in poverty (Wilhite 2000).

Official emergency services tend to focus on physical and material needs and overlook social, emotional and spiritual needs, both short and long-term. This may be particularly likely in higher-income countries with well-resourced emergency services that do not see the need for assistance from churches and FBOs (Koenig 2006; Trader-Leigh 2008). This was the case in the USA before Hurricane Katrina in 2005: that experience led to the establishment of a centre within the US government's Department of Homeland Security to develop strategies for including faith-based and community groups in government programmes and disaster planning (Carafano et al, 2007).

In other contexts, church involvement is more welcome. Churches are important agents for disaster response in a number of Pacific Island countries, with varying degrees of participation in national disaster planning. In Samoa, strong church, family and social structures have led to informal and formal rules of engagement: NGOs, churches and communities are involved in government decision-making processes for disaster response (Gero et al, 2013). In 1989 the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu produced a disaster plan and guidelines emphasising community preparedness, and its members were involved with other national NGO disaster management bodies (Ali 1992).

Coordination was a feature of the relief operation in the Dominican Republic after Hurricane Georges in 1998, where churches consulted and worked closely with civil defence, NGOs and humanitarian agencies (McEntire 1999). Following an earthquake in Indonesia in 2007, churches, mosques, local government and local army detachments collaborated in delivering relief assistance (Taylor and Peace 2015). In Honduras after Hurricane Mitch in 1998, it was observed that practical coordination was more effective at the local than the central level, with key actors including the mayor, church and community leaders. The small number of actors at the local level and the immediacy of the needs to be addressed facilitated such coordination (Telford et al, 2004). Churches can also help to relocate affected people temporarily to safe areas through congregational and private donations, using their networks and contacts with official agencies, as happened in the USA following Hurricane Katrina (Trader-Leigh 2008).

Collaboration among different organisational types is also common in Pacific Island states and is not confined to disaster response. The Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC) is an important element of Vanuatu's official disaster management system and acts as a link with provincial government and communities, forming an extensive network across the country through its partnership of five mainstream churches. It also has a strong partnership programme with Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA). DRR, climate change adaptation (CCA) and preparedness are the focus of many Vanuatu Government, donor, NGO and FBO ongoing DRR and CCA programmes in the Pacific, funded through Act for Peace (Gero et al, 2013).

The Samoa Red Cross Society's nationwide Community Based Health and First Aid (CBHFA) programme to reduce community vulnerability was implemented with the support of Samoa's influential church network at the village level. The church plays a very important role in Samoan culture and social life and is actively involved in helping the community to cope in times of disaster. Churches are hubs for communicating information and they provide volunteers to assist in disaster response. Project volunteers used vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA) tools to assess specific villages and develop targeted responses to increase risk awareness and strengthen coping strategies. The initiative was also linked to the work of government departments, including the Disaster Management Office, to reduce vulnerability at the community level (Gero et al, 2011a, b; 2013).

2.3 Advocacy, influence and public debate

Churches can play an important role in alerting authorities to disaster needs, in awareness raising, and in holding disaster decision makers and managers to account. For example, during an extensive and severe drought in Northeast Brazil in 1997-98, the Catholic Church was active in drawing public attention to the severity of hunger and lack of official support. This stimulated the national government to respond by providing emergency food supplies and instituting public works projects (Bond 1999). In the Pacific, some churches play a leading role in climate change communication, with representatives visiting communities on outer islands to present biblical and scientific information about climate change. The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) runs advocacy and awareness programmes on climate change through its network of church leaders, women and youth organisations (Noske-Turner et al, 2014). Churches also provide physical spaces for public debates about local disaster threats (Caporale 2000). Churches in the Pacific have a strong community presence and influence at higher levels: their representatives can be invited to participate on National Disaster Councils (or similar bodies), as was the case in Samoa following the 2009 tsunami, when the Samoa Council of Churches was invited to be part of the national Disaster Advisory Committee. It has been suggested that external agencies working in the Pacific need to show greater respect for, and recognition of the capacity of, FBOs and the Church in general (Gero et al, 2013).

Church involvement in disaster response and recovery can also turn into longer-term advocacy and influencing. Following the discovery that 22,000 tons of chemical waste had been buried unofficially in the suburban neighbourhood of Love Canal, USA, a local church coalition, the Ecumenical Task Force (composed of a variety of denominations and churches, with experience of responding to natural hazard events), took a leading role in response efforts, initially providing assistance to meet medical, housing, relocation and other basic needs; but its focus subsequently shifted to addressing more fundamental issues of environmental and social justice relating to the disposal and treatment of hazardous waste, which included litigation to establish liability (Hay 2009).

2.4 Inclusion, exclusion and social capital

Disasters take place in increasingly pluralistic (ie multi-cultural and multi-religious) societies. This requires churches to take an inclusive approach to pastoral care in disaster response and recovery (Dahlberg et al, 2015). Disasters generally stimulate mutual assistance and collaboration, but they can also generate competition and division, and churches are not immune from this. Koenig's guidelines to faith communities and organisations on how to provide services in times of crisis identify the potential for competition and conflict between different congregations over who will lead or co-ordinate relief efforts. Resistance to collaboration makes partnerships less effective or can even lead to churches working in isolation (Koenig 2006).

Competition between different religions or failure to collaborate over disaster assistance and management has been observed: for example, in South Korea (Ha 2015). Fear of proselytisation is often a cause of tension or conflict after disaster and can limit humanitarian space, although this is more likely to be directed

at external FBOs and NGOs than local churches. After the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, there was short-term inter-religious collaboration (eg housing homeless Catholics in Buddhist temples), but this was only a temporary truce in local Buddhist suspicion of foreign Christian evangelical groups (Hertzberg 2015). Morolica, a town in Southern Honduras swept away by the floods caused by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, subsequently saw a significant conversion from Catholicism to Evangelicalism. Several Evangelical missions were involved in the distribution of goods, relocation and reconstruction. These conversions generated tensions within the community, although neither Catholics nor Evangelicals seemed to consider disaster management or vulnerability reduction as a top priority (Ensor 2003).

Allegations of favouritism in relief distribution are common during disasters, whether or not they are justifiable. For example, following the 1998 Aitape tsunami in Papua New Guinea, allegations of favouritism in relief distribution were made against the government and the Roman Catholic church (Fountain et al, 2004). However, a study in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami found that many aid recipients expected their religious leaders to give priority assistance to them, rather than to victims in other congregations or religious communities; and they were concerned that their ministers were neglecting them (Korf et al, 2010). Attention has also been drawn to the sometimes blurred boundaries between meeting material needs (which is welcome) and providing spiritual support (which will also be welcomed by some but may cause concern to members of other or no faiths) (see eg Kraft 2016). One example of gender bias was found in the literature, in Papua New Guinea, where the Combined Churches Organization, a network involved in disasters and other activities, was almost entirely dominated by men, with women playing minor and peripheral roles. This was said to reflect the wider socio-cultural environment which tended to exclude women from all levels of the political system (Fountain et al, 2004).

Research in many different countries and contexts has demonstrated the importance of social capital and social networks in supporting quicker and better response and recovery. Churches and their memberships can be expected to have high levels of social capital (especially ‘bonding’ capital between members, but also ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ capital connecting them with other communities and external actors). Coordinating with local social networks and community groups enables state resources to be used more effectively and to address a wider range of needs: for example, local residents may regard restarting a school or local church as a critical ‘anchor’ in the recovery process, which might not be apparent to official agencies (Aldrich 2012).

Church-based social capital can be very powerful. In a Canadian town hit by flooding in 1997, where 95 per cent of the population was Mennonite, over 80 per cent of local organisations engaged in flood action were church or church-related organisations. Mennonites in Canada have a strong tradition of mutual aid and communal living (Buckland and Rahman 1999). However, as Aldrich (2011) points out, strong in-group social networks may prevent others from benefiting from assistance, as in parts of rural Tamil Nadu after the 2004 tsunami, where minorities, outcasts and other non-members were often excluded from organised relief efforts due to discrimination and lack of connections. Parish priests and councils worked as intermediaries between villagers and relief organisations, but in some areas residents complained that only families active in Catholic Church activities and/or attending church-run schools benefited from the economic, social and educational opportunities made available.

3. Churches and the disaster cycle

3.1 Response and relief

Most of the literature reviewed discusses churches' roles in disaster response and relief. There is much less evidence of preparedness and other DRR activities. Churches are involved in disaster response as a humanitarian mission and their humanitarian assistance takes a wide variety of forms, according to local needs and capacities. The focus is typically on short-term aid and meeting basic needs. The most common resources provided by local churches (and other community faith-based groups) and their members are material or physical, such as food, clothing, temporary shelter, financial assistance, transportation and medical care. Social support includes child care, establishing long-term care systems for displaced people, helping survivors and caregivers to cope emotionally and restore a sense of community, monitoring response and recovery processes, and advocating on behalf of marginalised groups (Trader-Leigh 2008; Joshi 2010). Churches may also carry out needs assessments in their communities, passing the finding to emergency services (Smale 1998).

The use of religious buildings as emergency community shelters is mentioned many times in the literature. Churches often serve as centres where displaced families and individuals can sleep or receive food and clothing. Volunteers also gather there to organise and carry out relief activities, and churches may even provide places for relief workers to stay (eg Smith et al, 2000; Trader-Leigh 2008; Taylor and Peace 2007). After the 1992 Bijlmermeer air disaster in the Netherlands in 1992 there were several spontaneous initiatives to provide shelter by local schools, churches, community centres and private individuals (Kroon and Overdijk 2008). A staff member of World Vision International observed that 'in many responses in the Philippines, when we do not have a prior presence in the area, we use the local church or church-related facilities as our base and in one case our staff stayed in and functioned from a convent for months.' (quoted in Finney et al, 2015: 24).

3.2 Preparedness

Disaster preparedness does feature in guidance to churches and faith-based organisations, although it is not clear how often this is taken up in church action planning. For example, Ha (2015) notes the extensive mobilisation of Christian congregations in South Korea in response to disasters, but acknowledges that less attention is given to prevention, mitigation and preparedness. Preparedness planning is clearly a feasible exercise for churches, who are in a good position to assess what expertise they can access within their congregations and communities (eg medical professionals, carpenters, electricians, engineers and professional counsellors). Churches can also identify who would be willing to host displaced people, deliver food or relief packages, volunteer time and provide transport (Carafano et al, 2007).

Koenig (2006: 83-86) suggests eight aspects of preparing for disaster response that FBOs, churches and congregations need to consider:

1. Developing a disaster plan
2. Partnering with other disaster response organisations
3. Disaster risks in their area
4. Their roles during disasters
5. Their assets/resources and those of other response groups
6. The importance of being flexible during disasters
7. Setting up community meetings after disasters to coordinate response efforts
8. Being prepared to act as spiritual guides and counsellors

Many churches and associated organisations in a number of countries have produced plans and guidelines for their members and congregations.[2] Some of these are wide-ranging and detailed, addressing the needs of churches and their communities, although the focus is generally on preparedness, emergency response and short-term recovery. Most have been developed for specific church communities in a single country, although Pastors and Disasters: a Toolkit for Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction & Management (published by Episcopal Relief & Development and a group of 12 international partner agencies in 2014) was the outcome of three years of collaborative effort involving partners from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the United States.[3] Tearfund has also developed its own comprehensive guidance.[4]

3.3 Recovery

Churches and religious organisations are permanent parts of the community and remain active in supporting disaster-affected people after government relief agencies and other emergency responders have left. This permanence is vital to communities' physical and psychosocial recovery (Carafano et al, 2007). It may be supplemented by emergent church- or faith-based groups and associations, but these tend to be short-term and response-focused. There is very little documented evidence of churches' involvement in recovery. One example is the reconstruction of a school and first-aid station by the Combined Churches Organization in Papua New Guinea after the 1998 Aitape tsunami (Fountain et al, 2004). Following the 1976 earthquake in Guatemala City, some neighbourhood leaders, in cooperation with missionaries from the Calvary Church and university students, organised a land invasion of over 1,000 families onto safer, more stable land. The National Housing Bank was persuaded to buy the land and the church's emergency committee agreed to build 1,500 houses (Oliver-Smith 1991).

One of the best known examples of church-stimulated recovery is that of the Vietnamese-American community surrounding the Mary Queen of Vietnam (MQVN) Catholic Church in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Although the MQVN neighbourhood was amongst the hardest-hit communities, it recovered more quickly than many more affluent neighbourhoods with similar flood damage. By the summer of 2007, 90 per cent of MQVN residents had returned (the rate of return in New Orleans overall was 45 per cent) and nearly all of the Vietnamese-owned businesses in the neighbourhood were up and running. The MQVN church was the hub around which spiritual, social and commercial life revolved, and it was a major influence on recovery. Immediately after the hurricane, it was the physical site where people could obtain necessities, including clothes, blankets, water, food and cleaning products. It housed a wide variety of social service organisations and helped to create an informal bridge between residents, insurance companies and government relief agencies. It also stimulated social cooperation by providing: Vietnamese-language religious services and training; weekend markets for selling Vietnamese produce, arts and crafts; spaces for socialising and for religious and non-religious groups; community leadership that

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[2] Examples are: Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, Southern Baptist Convention (undated). *Church Preparedness for Disaster Relief* https://sbdr.org/resources/church-preparedness-plan/; and Church of England (2012). *Disaster management plans guidance for churches*. London: Church Buildings Council https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/CCB_Disaster-management-plans-for-churches_May-2012.pdf

[3] Episcopal Relief and Development et al (2014). *Pastors and Disasters: A Toolkit for Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction & Management for members and partners of the Anglican relief and development community*. https://www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/55994 Jointly published with: Anglican Diocese of Colombo, Sri Lanka; Anglican Church of Burundi; Anglican Episcopal Diocese of El Salvador; Anglican Diocese of Niassa, Mozambique; Church of the Province of Myanmar; Anglican Church of Melanesia; Episcopal Church of South Sudan & Sudan; Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil; Anglican Board of Mission, Australia; The Amity Foundation, China; Anglican Alliance, United Kingdom.

[4] *Disasters and the local church: guidelines for church leaders in disaster-prone areas*. Teddington: Tearfund (2011).

provided a focal point for community action; and ethnically appropriate aid (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009).

Post-Katrina recovery initiatives also included partnerships between Habitat for Humanity (a large NGO specialising in housing, with experience of disaster response and reconstruction in the USA and internationally) and local churches and other housing- and poverty-focused non-profit organisations in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, to rebuild or repair damaged homes and construct new ones in large numbers (Storr and Haeffele-Balch 2010).

3.4 Psychosocial support and recovery

Ministers and congregations play an extremely important role in responding to the social, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs of disaster survivors by providing counselling and psychosocial support to survivors and affected families and responders (Koenig 2006; Fletcher et al, 2013; Gero et al, 2013). Disaster-affected people are often more comfortable talking to a religious leader, or others in their church, than a professional counsellor (Carafano et al, 2007). The fellowship of fellow church members also provides emotional support (Smith et al, 2000).

After a disaster, communities face a range of challenges which may require pastoral support. A study of the post-disaster activities of pastors following a tornado in the USA identified a variety of such actions: visiting hospitals and mortuaries; performing the last rites and conducting funeral and other services; counselling; raising and distributing funds; opening churches to people made homeless by the disaster; distributing food; and preaching (Chinnicci 1985). Churches play an important role in organising and supporting collective mourning activities and commemoration (Koenig 2006; Eyre 2007; Carafano et al, 2007).

The range of church-based psychosocial support actions is revealed by a study of congregations affected by the 9/11 attacks. Their support actions included: opening the church as a sanctuary for prayer services and silent meditation; offering crisis counselling to congregants and others in the neighbourhood; pastors making calls to every church member to assess needs and offer counselling; setting up support groups; producing and distributing educational materials addressing issues such as how to talk to children about death and the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder; and conducting memorial services for members of congregations who had been killed. Over 500 local clergy were given training to provide ongoing spiritual care at various disaster assistance centres and a hospital mortuary (Sutton 2003). The need to link spiritual support, through churches and ministers, with trained mental health professionals and their practices, has been advocated, and a model for doing this has been developed in the USA (Aten et al, 2010, 2013, 2014).

In some contexts, where trained professional counsellors are unavailable, the church may be the only institution treating post-traumatic stress. This was said to be the case in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch in 1998, for example, and in Samoa after the 2009 tsunami (Telford et al, 2004; Gero et al, 2013). These tasks can put a heavy burden on local churches and the assumption that the church will be able to provide psychosocial support can be problematic where churches lack the skills and capacity (and church leaders themselves may be in need of support) or those who are not members of congregations feel excluded (Fletcher et al, 2013; Gero et al, 2013). Research in four Pacific Island states showed that there was a heavy reliance on local NGOs and the church community to assist with meeting psychosocial needs in disasters. There is a strong Christian faith and abundance of faith-based support systems in Pacific Island countries, where the church is a ready source of spiritual comfort and counselling. However, their capacity to deal with acute mental health and psychological issues arising from disasters is limited (Gero et al, 2013).

4. Evidence gaps, further research

Although the literature review provides a limited evidence base for understanding the role and contribution of churches to DRR and resilience building, it provides many examples of churches' capacities and effectiveness. It shows that churches, through their congregations and networks, play an important role in many countries in counter-disaster activities, particularly in disaster response. They are firmly rooted in communities, sensitive to local needs and can mobilise congregations effectively in crises.

The study indicates that much more detailed empirical and critical case study research is needed, looking across the disaster cycle in different contexts, at different types of disaster and at major knowledge gaps: for example, on church involvement in drought and famine relief and mitigation and on the activities of African churches in DRR, where there is very little published research. The accumulation of case study material over time will enable comparative studies and synthesis of learning. Research to date has focused on what can be learnt from disaster events, but this can be supported by studying processes of church-based DRR/resilience planning and capacity building in 'normal' times, and in understanding how churches link with other actors.

The literature did not provide much insight into enabling environments for church engagement in DRR. In many cases, churches appeared to be filling gaps in public service provision or supplementing the limited capacities of official agencies (notably regarding psychosocial support). There is clearly a need for more formal, structured collaboration between formal disaster organisations and churches at all levels.

The literature does not indicate any meaningful difference between different Christian denominations in their approach to disaster assistance: variations appear to be much more influenced by local contexts and experiences of disasters. However, a study of faith communities in Hawaii did find members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to be strongly influenced by prophecies of 'latter days' and disasters that would foretell the second coming, leading to a strongly embedded culture of disaster preparedness, including stockpiling food and water, having flashlights and first-aid kits to hand, and keeping a financial reserve (McGeehan and Baker 2017). In Samoa, this culture supported a rapid and effective response after the 2009 tsunami, providing shelter, food, clothing and psychosocial support (Gero et al, 2013).

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