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Successful **disaster resilience** policy relies on **effective implementation** enacted through governance arrangements informed by the **Subsidiarity[1] Principle.**

Implementing disaster resilience policy in the Australian Federation

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Disaster resilience policy is being implemented across Australia via a range of programs and activities. However, even the best policy can falter without effective implementation. To optimise the success of disaster resilience policy in Australia, all levels of government and the community need to ensure that evidence about how to enable disaster resilience is applied to implementation practice.

Introduction

Australia, like many other nations has embraced resilience as a national approach for disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Australia's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR), adopted in 2011, aims to shift the emphasis away from 'picking up the pieces' after a disaster toward self-reliance and shared responsibility between all levels of government and the community. Importantly, this requires an understanding and awareness of disaster risks and what actions we can take to adapt to, or mitigate those risks. Given the longevity of the NSDR there appears to be a high level of acceptance of resilience as the basis for disaster policy in Australia. Notwithstanding this, there is a lack of evidence about how to operationalise resilience across the whole system to achieve a more disaster resilient nation.

Methods

This research investigated how disaster resilience policy is being implemented in Australia with the aim of identifying pathways, mechanisms and limitations to good practice. A literature review revealed the determinants of disaster resilience which informed the development of a Provisional Disaster Resilience Policy Implementation Framework consisting of four good practice policy domains: Social Capital, Community Competence, Economic Development and Information and Communication, each of which were associated with a number of operational-level objectives.

The theory and practice of Australian Federalism was also examined in order to consider the national context for policy implementation, This supported the proposition that achieving national disaster resilience hinges on working effectively in the conditions created by Australia's federal arrangements. These include federal power-sharing and financing arrangements, coordination mechanisms, sectoral roles, responsibilities and capability; and the opportunities and constraints they present for strategic and systemic disaster resilience policy implementation. These concepts were incorporated into the Provisional Framework. The Provisional Framework was tested using interviews and the study of documents from five good-practice disaster resilience initiatives being implemented at federal, state, and local government and in the business and the Not-for-Profit sectors.

Results

The major project outcomes were the development of a Disaster Resilience Policy Implementation (DRPI) Framework and the identification and inclusion of a 5th Policy Domain, Subsidiarity. Subsidiarity captures the significance of federal governance and its implications for disaster resilience policy implementation.

Going forward, the DRPI Framework is a tool that can be used to incorporate evidence about how to implement disaster resilience into everyday practice. Other research findings suggest that policy makers and practitioners at all levels of the system:

- Identify and democratically assign roles and responsibilities for the design and delivery of disaster resilience initiatives with an appreciation of the system-wide context.

- Promote trust between all levels of government and between government and the non-government and business sectors to ensure better connectivity and the free low of information and ideas,

- Apply behaviour change theory and practice to disaster resilience programs, including risk communication.

- Support cross-training between government and community service organisations to build reciprocal knowledge and skills in community development and government administration.

- 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.

- Encourage disaster mitigation by working with stakeholders to reduce financial barriers and perceived and actual legal risks that restrict open access to, and use of hazard information.

- Capitalise on under-explored opportunities to enhance business participation in disaster resilience.

Table 1 Disaster Resilience Implementation Framework

Policy Domain	Social Capital	Community Competence	Economic Development	Information & communication	Subsidiarity
Theme	Trust	Collective-efficacy	Sustainability	Behaviour change	Power-sharing
Policy Objectives	Networks	Political partnerships	Security	Resilience narratives	Capacity-building
	Place-based attachment	Stakeholder engagement	Economic diversity	Trusted information	Open access to information
	Community engagement	External Leadership	Equitable resource distribution	Skills and infrastructure	Negotiated roles and responsibilities
	Internal leadership	Local risk awareness	Shared (equitable) risk allocation	Multi-directional information flow	Coordination
		Community participation			Stakeholder engagement
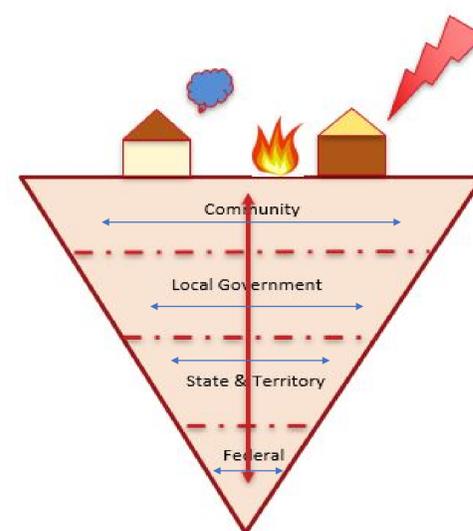
Figure 1   Multi-directional policy implementation
An authentic application of subsidiarity will reflect a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Subsidiarity can also be three dimensional rather than being confined to a vertical decentralisation or centralisation interpretation.

[1] 'Subsidiarity – 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 https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p52401/pdf/book.pdf [accessed: 11 July 2020]).