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Climate Change, Local Governance and Resilience in the UK

Geoff O'Brien

Sponsored by:



The Japan-UK Disaster Risk Reduction Study Centre

Presentation Outline

- 1) Overview of UK Resilience
- 2) Climate Change and UK Response
- 3) Disaster Management and Climate Change

UK Resilience

Events (Y2K, Floods, Fuel Blockade, Foot and Mouth) around 2000/1 persuaded UK Government that major reform of UK Emergency Planning was needed

Reform process started in early 2001 - terrorist attack on September 11th 2001 focused reforms on responding to terrorism, with a particular focus on London (O'Brien, 2006)

Though UK is no stranger to terrorism, the nature of the new terrorist threat was alarming

Reform process led to new legislative framework:
Civil Contingencies Act, 2004

Structurally the system was centralised through the Civil Contingencies Secretariat

UK Resilience

New regional layers were introduced – Regional Resilience Forums, but they lack democratic representation

Locally – discretion was replaced by duty

More funding was made available – at local level spend for Emergency Planning doubled – but this is small compared to funding allocated to intelligence and preparedness for terrorist attacks – some £160m compared to £2bn up to 2007/8 (O'Brien and Read, 2005)

The outcome is a focus on institutional resilience – little effort was made in engaging public in the reform process

Public involvement has been limited to an information booklet to every UK household (Preparing for Emergencies) – its focus is mainly on what to do in the event of an attack – this is about public reassurance not engagement

Despite constraints much evidence of innovation by local responders

UK Resilience and Climate Change

Though the reforms were needed and welcome there is concern that the focus is too narrow

The heat-wave in 2003 and more recent weather events has reminded government that climate change is a major and ongoing threat

We have two ways of reducing climate risk

Mitigation to reduce long term risk

Adaptation to reduce risks from current and future greenhouse gas loadings

So what is the UK response?

UK Climate Change Response

Mitigation – Kyoto target unlikely. UK energy policy is supply-side focused. Little effort on demand management except for efficiency campaigns - experience shows that these do not work

Adaptation – many studies but little implementation – still develop in climate vulnerable areas – though some good practice – Heat Wave Plan of Health Service

The problem lies in the governance structures of the UK

The UK is a centralised system – we have no effective Local Government – it is an administrative arm of government – much policy enacted through agencies with little democratic input

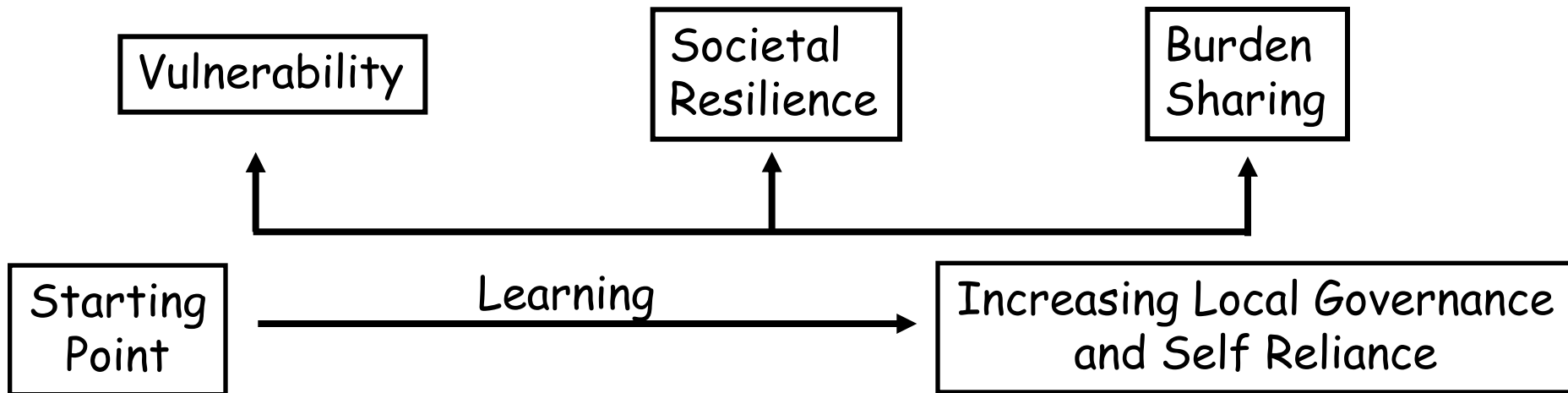
But much evidence that at the local level people are willing to change.
The challenge is finding a mechanism to enable this.

UK Climate Change Response

Climate change response needs a people focus – it is our behaviour that needs to change

Partnership between government strategies and individual behaviours is needed for effective preparedness
(Bermann, Redlener, 2006)

Linking Concepts for Climate Change and Disaster Management



Are Current UK Disaster Management Approaches Sufficient to Deal with Climate Change?

The short answer is NO!

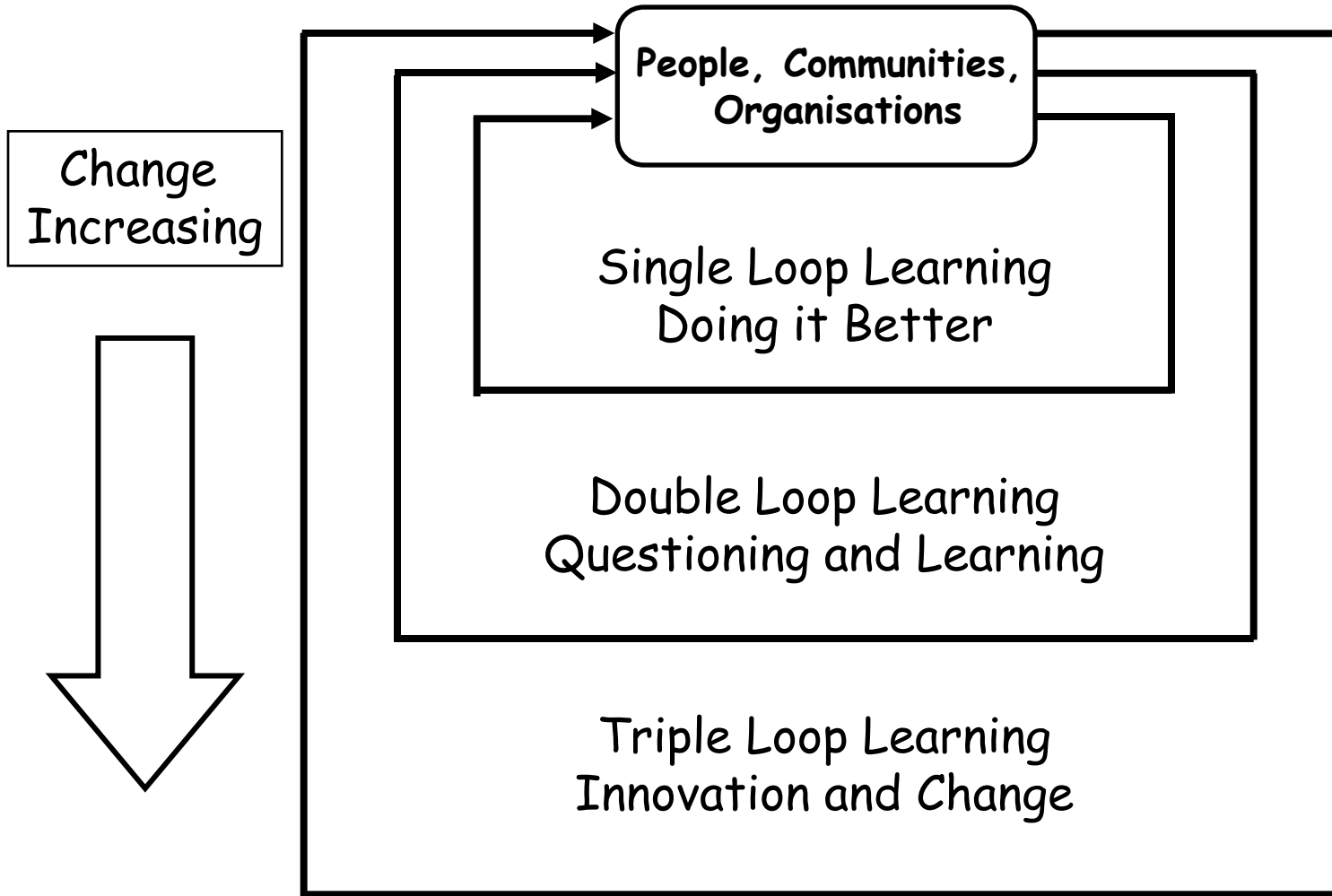
Preparing for climate change needs partnership
– both bottom up and top down!!

The emphasis must be on preparation and planning and integrated with the way we develop.

DOMINANT PARADIGM	NEW PARADIGM
Isolated Event	Part of Development
Risk Not Normal	Risk of Disaster/Conflict
Techno-legal	Social Capacity
Centralized	Participatory
Low Accountability	Transparent
Post Event Planning	Predisaster Plans
Status Quo Restored	Transformation
Cross-Cutting Theme: Public Education	

Source: O'Brien, 2006

But how? By Learning



Underpinning this approach must a be new way of looking at Disaster Management

Pre Disaster Planning Principles

Sustainable Development

Risk Avoidance

Embedded in Policy and Practices

Distributed to the appropriate level

Shared responsibility

Learning from scientific evidence, indigenous knowledge and experience

Adjusting to changes

Institutional Development, Organisational and Social Learning



“There is a reason native people have been able to survive for centuries in the harshest of conditions, in the strangest of times; it is because of our resilience and our adaptability.

And it is that strength from within that our communities now have to rely upon as we face an uncertain future.”

Patricia Cochran Executive Director of the Alaska Native Science Commission and chairwoman of the Inuit Circumpolar Council

Conceptual Considerations for Disaster Management and Climate Uncertainty

Resilience – the ability to recover from disturbances

Adaptability – the capacity to change in response to changing conditions

Strength from within – self reliance and community cohesion

Overall Objective - Societal Resilience

Starting Point - Vulnerability

Method – Empowerment through Learning

Thank You

Any Questions?

