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Community-centred Disaster Risk Reduction: Experiences from “Our Flood Mural” in Beira, Mozambique

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Based on the notion that Flood risk communication contributes to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), a novel community-centred approach called “Our Flood Mural”/“Nosso Mural de Cheias” was tested in Beira, Mozambique. “Our Flood Mural” centres around the co-creation of an interactive mural painting that highlights local experiences of past flood events, informs on the existing flood risk in the area and suggests possible risk-reducing measures. The mural brings together local knowledge and arts, and modern information technologies. “Our Flood Mural” can easily be upscaled and adapted to the local context in various settings.

A key part of “Our Flood Mural” was active engagement with the local community. Survey results and plenary community sessions were held and showed that the people of the targeted community have a broad understanding of what they can do to reduce flood risk, such as strengthening of rooftops, moving to higher ground, and freeing drainage canals from clutter. These shared experiences were incorporated in the design of the mural which was made by a local artist. Also, two interactive QR-codes were included on the mural to offer additional (online) information: one linking to local weather forecasts and giving background information on the development process of the mural. The location of the mural was mutually decided to be at a local market where it is exposed to a wide audience on a daily basis.

During the implementation of the mural, festivities were organized with local leaders present to draw attention to the purpose of the mural. Local leaders, community members, and aid organisations expressed ownership and pride as well as the desire to expand the idea to other locations and to address societal issues other than flood risk. It was also noticeable that the linkage of the mural to online information drew attention in the community, showing the mural’s potential as a means of introducing new technologies and information channels to reach a target audience.

Lessons-learned from our community-centred approach include the importance of organizing plenary sessions and carrying out local surveys to assure accurate representation of the

communities' flood risk situation, and to assure adequate use of imagery and/or text. The visibility and accessibility of the different steps in the co-creation approach can help communities, technical experts, aid organizations, and officials interact constructively and identify potential improvements in each other's actions.