

Strengthening Local Capacity to Manage Shocks and Risk

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Why Local Capacity Matters

Understanding the Landscape of Shocks in Sierra Leone

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Sierra Leone's Exposure to External Shocks

1. Health Crises:

- Ebola (2014–2016): Over 14,000 cases, nearly 4,000 deaths
- COVID-19 (2020–2022): Lockdowns, economic strain, vaccine rollout challenges
- Recurring cholera outbreaks: Linked to poor sanitation and limited access to clean water, especially in urban slums

2. Climate and environmental Disasters:

- Regent Landslide (2017): Over 1,000 lives lost
- Freetown Floods (2022): Displacement and severe infrastructure damage
- Coastal erosion, sea-level rise, busfires, and droughts: increasingly frequent and destructive.

3. Economic Shocks:

- Global inflation (2023–2024): Rising food prices, currency depreciation
- Youth unemployment and food informal sector fragility: Exacerbated by external market volatility

4. Social and Governance shocks

- Political instability: disrupt service delivery and erodes public trust.
- Migration and displacement: strains local resources and planning systems

Why These Shocks Matter

- Disrupt essential services (health, education, sanitation)
- Deepen poverty and inequality
- Shocks reveal systemic weaknesses in infrastructure, service delivery, and institutional trust. Gaps most visible at the local level

The Local Government Imperative

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Local Councils are embedded within communities, understand cultural dynamics, and can mobilise quickly – making them vital first responders.

However, they face:

- Limited financial autonomy: 80%+ expenditure funded by central transfers; many transfers unpredictable/conditional
- Revenue gaps: weak cadastre, limited own-source revenue, poor data for planning
- Overlapping mandates with ministries and traditional authorities
- Shortage in technical staff, data systems (Limited access to disaggregated risk data) , and emergency planning tools

Subsidiarity: A Guiding Practice

Empowering Local Governments to Lead Resilience from the Ground Up

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What Is Subsidiarity?

- A governance principle that holds: *"Decisions should be made at the most local level capable of addressing the issue effectively."*
- It promotes local autonomy, efficiency, and community ownership of development and crisis response.

Subsidiarity in Sierra Leone

- Enshrined in the Local Government Act (2004, 2022) and decentralization framework.
- Ensures local voices shape local solutions, especially during crises.

Examples in Action

- **Ebola Response (2014–2016):** Councils enforced quarantines and led burial teams.
- **COVID-19 (2020–2022):** Local bylaws revived; chiefs and councils coordinated community surveillance.
- **Floods & Landslides:** Councils organized evacuations and distributed relief with CSO support.

The Critical Role of Local Governments in Managing Shocks and Risks

Proximity to Communities: Councils are embedded in the social fabric of their districts

Local Legitimacy: Elected officials and traditional leaders often enjoy higher trust than national actors.

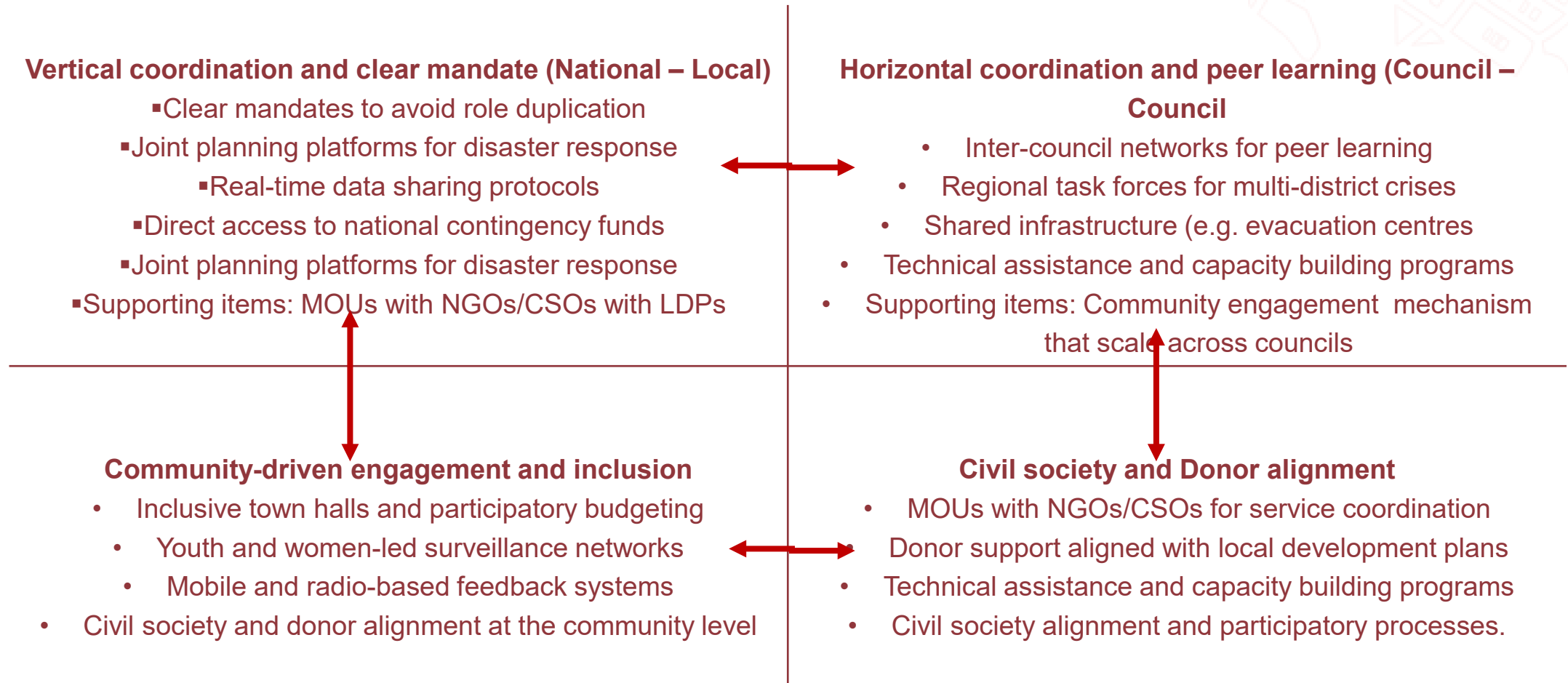
Contextual Knowledge: Councils understand local vulnerabilities, cultural dynamics, and informal networks that national agencies may overlook.

Function	Description	Example
Community Mobilization	Engaging residents in awareness, prevention, and response	Ebola burial teams, COVID-19 sensitization
Service Coordination	Aligning health, sanitation, and relief services	Flood response with NGOs and health units
Surveillance & Reporting	Monitoring outbreaks or environmental risks	Reporting cholera cases to national health systems
Enforcement of Emergency Bylaws	Implementing local rules to contain crises	Curfews, quarantine zones, market closures
Resource Distribution	Managing food aid, shelter, and medical supplies	Relief coordination during landslides
Public Communication	Disseminating accurate, timely information	Radio broadcasts, town hall meetings

Coordination mechanisms for local resilience

Empowering councils through strategic collaboration

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Strengthening Local Resilience: From Principle to Practice

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- **Recognise Local Leadership:** Affirm councils as frontline actors in resilience, not just implementers of national policy.
- **Empower with Resources:** Ensure timely, flexible funding and access to tools that enable rapid, context-specific response.
- **Legalise Subsidiarity:** Support reforms that give councils clear mandates to lead in crisis and recovery.
- **Invest in Capacity:** Commit to ongoing training, technology, and inclusive governance practices at the local level.
- **Foster Collaboration:** Build bridges between national agencies, civil society, and communities for coordinated action.
- **Promote inclusive governance:** ensure women, youth, and marginalized groups actively shape local decisions.
- **Commit to Act:** Let today mark a turning point—from dialogue to delivery, and from principle to practice.

