

Disaster risk management in post-2015 policy frameworks:

Forging a more resilient future

Key points

- A failure to include disaster risk management (DRM) in the international policy frameworks to be agreed in 2015 could undermine progress and squander investments
- Given the predicted wide-ranging impact of disasters by 2030, action is required to ensure that DRM is mainstreamed in these policy agreements and is supported by an international DRM mechanism
- This will require a stronger evidence base, greater political commitment and efforts across policy areas, from health and education to economic and fiscal planning

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Economic losses from disasters have topped one trillion US dollars worldwide since 2000, growing at a faster rate than GDP per capita in OECD countries over the same period (UN/ISDR 2011). Despite these escalating losses, more than 95% of humanitarian finance is still spent on responding to disasters and their aftermath, with less than 5% spent on reducing the risk of disasters (Kellett and Sweeney, 2012). Without a major increase in investment to reduce current and future risks, spending on relief and reconstruction is likely to become unsustainable.

Fortunately, disaster risk management (DRM) is firmly on the international policy agenda in 2012 – at the G20, Rio+20, Summit of the Americas and at the climate change negotiations – and is being voiced as a genuine concern for many governments. It was also the subject of the *Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (SREX) by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which highlighted the links between disasters, climate change, poverty and weak governance (IPCC 2011).

Now is the time to act. This rare alignment of international policy processes with national government, private sector and civil society interest is an opportunity to position DRM as a cornerstone in efforts to foster resilient and sustainable growth and development.

- Debate has begun on what follows the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when they expire in 2015 and how DRM might be incorporated into any new framework.
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been put forward in the run up to Rio+20 and will be further discussed over the coming years. DRM is a part of these discussions.
- The 'Durban Platform', agreed in December 2011, commits countries to negotiate a new climate change treaty by 2015, one with 'legal force'. The negotiations on this treaty



Municipal-level disaster planning in Mexico

include measures to reduce and transfer disaster risk and consider how DRM can deal with 'loss and damage' if climate change mitigation and adaptation are unsuccessful.

- The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA) expires in 2015 and a process is already in place to negotiate a new global agreement on disaster risk reduction.

The challenge for the DRM community is to ensure that risk management is prioritised in these policy frameworks and fully integrated in institutional and sector practices, to help save lives, protect livelihoods and reduce economic losses. This Briefing Paper considers what is needed to strengthen the management of disaster risk over the next two decades and strategies to embed DRM in the international policy frameworks to achieve this.

Strengthening Disaster Risk Management (DRM)

Consider the evidence and drivers of disaster risk up to 2030 and beyond

New policy frameworks need to address future challenges, not just those we face now. Despite concerted action under the HFA, the number of people affected by disasters and

the magnitude of economic losses is growing. The rising exposure of vulnerable people and assets to disasters, particularly in Asia and Africa, plus the growing impact of climate change on the frequency and severity of extreme weather events are likely to mean more loss of life and livelihoods over the next two or three decades (IPCC 2011). However, data on disaster impacts and risks vary considerably in quality and quantity, making it difficult to accurately evaluate the magnitude of the problem.

Extensive risk, characterised by small-scale and repeated disasters, is likely to have a much greater impact on communities than the intensive, mega disasters that make the news. But these daily disasters often go uncounted (UN/ISDR 2009). Greater consistency in the reporting and documenting of disasters, as well as evidence on the effectiveness of risk management measures, is crucial to establish baselines and track trends.

Reducing the risk of disasters depends primarily on reducing people's vulnerability. However, Priority 4 of the HFA, concerned with 'reducing the underlying risk factors', is the area that has seen least progress (UN/ISDR, 2011; GNDR, 2011). More studies are needed to determine the drivers of risk in key sectors, such as agriculture and urban development, as well as the processes through which risks are reduced and disaster avoided. More in-depth research is required on institutional frameworks and incentives for DRM, to understand which measures are adopted and why.

In addition to normative statements about what *should* be done, and recycled examples of 'best practice', a more meaningful analysis of what has already happened is urgently needed. One potential method for this is forensic investigations of disaster (FORIN), which uncover the root causes of disasters through in-depth investigations. The thorough analysis of cases using up-to-date scientific and technological knowledge and institutional analysis will help build an evidence base of how natural hazards become disasters (IRDR, 2011).

Enhance political commitment

Future policy frameworks need to enhance commitment to the management of risk across sectors and scales and improve implementation mechanisms. This could be achieved by adopting a human rights approach, in which states fulfil obligations to respect, protect and fulfil basic human rights including the 'right to safety' of vulnerable people exposed to hazards. Political commitment is likely to be strengthened when legal obligations are clearly defined. Although politically challenging, a legally binding commitment to DRM could be agreed, with specific goals defined and signatories held accountable for their achievement, as is the case with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol.

One major weakness of the HFA is its failure to ensure that well-crafted DRM policies are actually implemented – a result, perhaps, of its voluntary

nature. However, mandates like those specified in the UNFCCC could be too restrictive for DRM: getting the 168 HFA signatories to sign up to a legally binding treaty would be a long and complex process and, even if it were possible, such an agreement would be difficult to monitor and enforce. There are also huge differences in regulatory quality and the rule of law between countries, and ensuring compliance may put more pressure on already overburdened bureaucracies.

An international policy statement is another option and one that would allow greater flexibility for contextually appropriate measures to be taken. Lessons learnt from experience on human rights and international humanitarian law demonstrate that concurrence on values, principles and targets is vital to sustain any agreement.

Improve risk governance and accountability across scales

Sub-national levels: More attention needs to be paid to the promotion of DRM at local level, with efforts linked across the national, regional, district and local scales. Even in countries with adequate legislation and national plans there is limited progress on the ground, especially in small, rural municipalities and informal settlements within large cities. More direct access funding streams are needed for local authorities, as well as technical support to develop appropriate legal instruments of their own, such as land-use planning regulations, to influence private sector investment (GNDR, 2011).

Inter-sectoral coordination: The HFA prompted the creation of national legislation and organisational structures for DRM, but the danger in creating new organisations is that the work of those that already exist is not acknowledged or strengthened. Government departments, such as Water Resources, Health and Agriculture may already be doing a lot to reduce the impact of hazards, without labelling it DRM, but their activities are rarely coordinated and often go unnoticed. Departments are not accustomed to working together on cross-cutting issues, but can be encouraged to do so through inter-sectoral planning and budgeting for DRM and wider efforts to make development progress more resilient.

Accountability: In most countries, accountability and evaluation mechanisms to monitor the HFA are weak. So, while a lot may be known and reported about the range of DRM policies in place, little is known about their implementation or their outcomes in terms of reducing disaster risk. The Hyogo Monitor, as reported in the Global Assessment Reports (GAR), tries to do this, but is based largely on government submissions that tend to be subjective and overly positive in many cases. The lack of national ownership of the GAR process is another problem. Targets and milestones for implementation should, therefore, be relevant and realistic for each country and agreed on through multi-stakeholder consultations. Discussions of targets could be handled from a regional perspec-

tive, as the risks – and views about their management – are often similar. Regional platforms and forums could be used to demonstrate methods and tools to achieve targets and to oversee reports on progress.

Embed risk assessments in comprehensive risk management strategies

Risk assessments are used to identify the extent of risks and are, ideally, based on data about hazards, exposure, vulnerability and capacity. They should be used to identify priorities for intervention and avoid risky investments, but they are often missing or disregarded in decision-making. Furthermore, agencies, governments and insurance companies have their own data and assessments; these are rarely shared because of the commercial value of their data and assessments or simply because there are few joined-up initiatives. This needs to be addressed.

The insurance industry is at the forefront of risk assessments methodologies but ways must be found to use risk assessment to create public goods, rather than just to inform catastrophic risk models and insurance products.

There has been a lot of enthusiasm recently within the DRM community about the possibility of transferring risk to the private sector. Nevertheless, insurance is not a silver bullet and should be used only as part of a broader risk management strategy (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Strengthen financial commitment through joined-up international financing

Insufficient commitments and poor donor coordination of funding for risk management makes it difficult for vulnerable countries and communities with low levels of technical, administrative and financial resources to deal with the risks they face. Political commitment needs to be matched by more funding and a joined-up global financing approach that

avoids duplication and seeks linkages between DRM and climate change adaptation measures. Here, the DRM community could learn from the example of other global campaign and resource mobilisation efforts, such as in health. Given that humanitarian and development finance both need to include commitments to DRM, the links between the two also need to be strengthened to tackle the fragmentation that is limiting progress at present.

Integrating disaster risk management in international policy frameworks

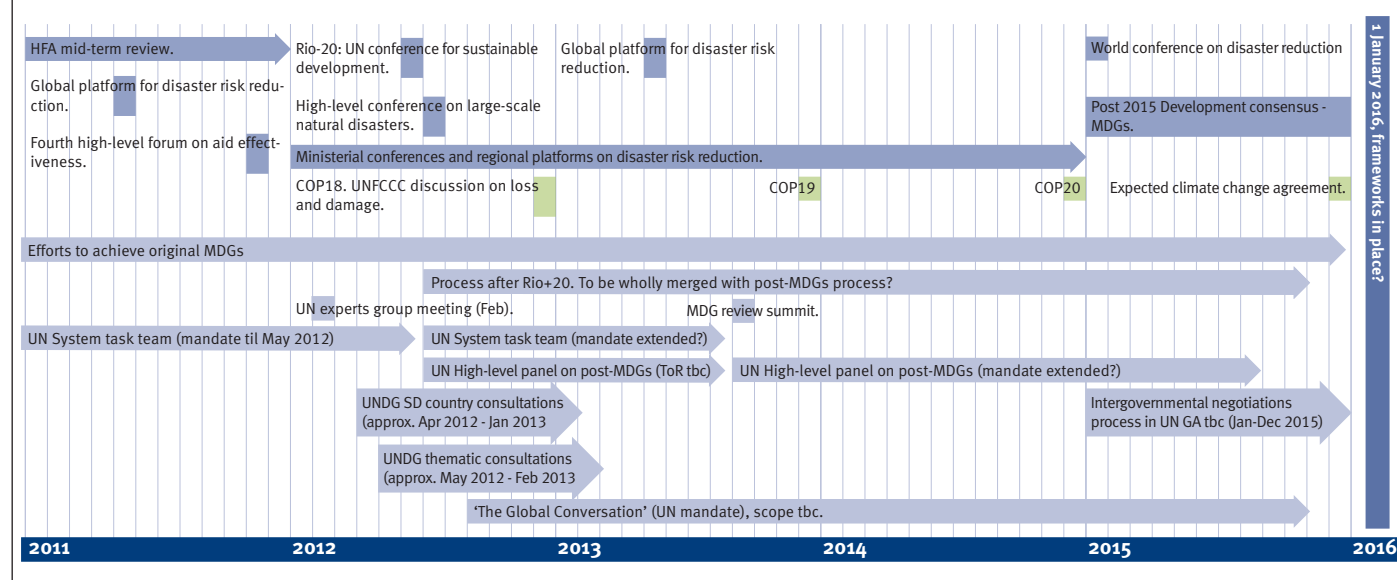
Work simultaneously on multiple tracks

Given that DRM cuts across development sectors, ministries and economic policy – involving multiple stakeholders at all scales – it should be both mainstreamed into a broad range of development activities *and* supported by a dedicated, technically sound and efficient coordinating instrument. The post-2015 policy architecture needs to reflect this, with the post-MDGs, SDGs and climate change agreements offering the ‘mainstreaming’ opportunity; and the post-HFA agreement highlighting its links to other frameworks while providing a strong hub.

This will require simultaneous work on multiple tracks. For example, attempting to secure ‘mainstreaming’ without a coherent post-HFA agreement risks DRM being mainstreamed out of existence. Equally, too strong a focus on the post-HFA agenda without dedicated engagement on the post-MDGs framework and the climate change agreement could see the continued marginalisation of DRM as a development and sustainability issue.

Fortunately, the timelines for agreeing the various components of the post-2015 package could be favourable to DRM (see Figure 1). The 3rd World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which is likely to produce a post-HFA agreement, will probably happen

Figure 1: Timeline for post-2015 DRM and MDG agreements





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in January 2015, with deliberations to agree the post-MDG framework expected to culminate in September 2015, and the climate change agreement scheduled for December 2015. Many factors will shape these outcomes and the timetable is still tentative, but there is a chance that, with the right politics, an agreement on a follow-up to the HFA might prompt the inclusion of DRM in other frameworks.

Marshal and amplify the evidence base

Making the case for the inclusion of DRM in international development and climate policy agendas requires strong intellectual arguments, a coherent evidence base and the ability to deal with counter arguments as they emerge. Evidence needs to be strengthened on the relationship between hazards and disaster, including disasters related to climate extremes. The SREX makes a good start on climate-related risk, bringing together published material on changes in the magnitude and frequency of some climate extremes in some regions and the likelihood of increases in the future, along with studies on vulnerability and exposure (IPCC, 2011). There is a need for further, more granular work at this level to convince treasuries and ministries of finance to allocate more resources to DRM. Similarly, data on the relationship between complex hazard scenarios, disasters and key sectors such as health and education need to be collated, analysed and disseminated.

Finally, while the broad economic case for DRM has already been made, there is little information on the relative costs and benefits of different options to reduce risk across sectors and scales of governance and for diverse hazards. Further, key lessons learned in over 20 years of DRM practice include the importance of recognising and supporting the autonomous efforts of communities to reduce risk, of developing projects that reach the most vulnerable and of engaging civil society in decision-making processes to improve accountability. These participatory principles should be embedded in all international policies to foster resilient and sustainable growth and development.

Governments, however, are faced with the challenge of selecting measures that reduce the overall level of risk, protect the most vulnerable, gain political credibility and that are – at the same time – economically efficient. These outcomes may not all be compatible (Wilkinson, 2012). Any economic assessments of risk must take account of environmental costs and a full appreciation of the range of costs and benefits of effective risk management for the most vulnerable groups.

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