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**Title of the Session:** How to address Disaster Risk Management (DRM) challenges by improving linkages between Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), DRM, poverty reduction and sustainable development and growth.

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## **Summary**

We live in a world where disaster events and corresponding disaster losses (in terms of assets and livelihoods) are on the increase. Most of these losses are due to low-intensity, high frequency (referred to as extensive) risks. Furthermore, most of this extensive risk arises from weather related events set to increase due to increase in both frequency and magnitude as a result of climate change. In addition, extensive risk affects low-income rural and urban areas, leaving the infrastructure, housing and livelihoods in a state of constant vulnerability. It should be recognized that poverty reduction efforts, when properly planned and executed, are directed at these same low-income rural and urban areas and at the households, livelihoods and infrastructure within them.

Yet, alarmingly, more often than not, extensive risk losses are not properly collated. Even more alarmingly, disaster risk management master plans and earthquake master plans do not always recognize that earthquakes and intensive hazardous events take place not in a vacuum but rather against a background of extensive risks leading to unequal distribution of exposure, vulnerability, risks and corresponding losses.

Indeed, as we approach the threshold date of 2015 it should be recognized by all that sustainable growth and poverty reduction can only be achieved by examining 1) collating the losses arising from extensive risks in low-income rural and urban areas, and 2) addressing exposure, vulnerability and losses corresponding to extensive risks in urban master plans, earthquake master plans, poverty reduction plans and climate change adaptation plans.

## **Context**

While examining current disaster risk losses, on a world-wide scale, it is possible to make the following observations:

- Scientific knowledge exists to prevent losses arising from a variety of hazardous events, including the destruction of schools during earthquakes, flooding of homes during rainy seasons, collapse of homes due to landslides amongst others.
- Yet, as our scientific knowledge on how to build livelihoods and infrastructure improves and the number of available solutions increases, so too do the losses arising from disasters.
- According to recent statistics (Views from the Frontline-VFL, 2013) 57% felt losses had increased over the last five years, compared with only 21% who felt disaster losses had decreased.

- The majority of disaster losses are due to small-scale recurrent disasters, primarily related to weather related hazards (VFL, UNISDR, 2013). (The fact that they are small scale implies that they are easily preventable).

Furthermore, while examining current Disaster Risk Management strategies, on a world-wide scale, it is possible to make the following observations:

- Risk has been accumulating over the past few decades due to a variety of reasons, including the fact that the development projects by the public sector and the investments by the private sector only recently started accounting for disaster risk.
- Vulnerability, due partly to development and investment initiatives, is not random. Indeed people are vulnerable because they are politically, socially or economically excluded, and hence have little access to resources, influence, information or decision making (OXFAM 2013).
- In most countries, especially poor countries where losses tend to be concentrated, most DRM efforts are targeted at response to disasters. Some effort is directed at developing laws and legislation to prevent disaster risk from accumulating in the future, even if this is not always properly enforced (e.g. seismic building codes, building in flood plains and on unstable slopes amongst others). Furthermore, the least effort is directed at reducing current levels of existing risk.

There is a need to understand the above phenomena in order to be able to devise realistic and practicable solutions to reduce disaster risk and corresponding losses to lives and livelihoods. This can only be done by looking beyond the physical factors (i.e. the strength of buildings, schools and infrastructures) and natural factors (i.e. the frequency and severity of hazardous events such as earthquakes, floods, storms, etc.) that contribute to vulnerability, and expanding our investigative lens to include the social, economic and institutional factors that contribute to vulnerability. Furthermore there is a need to understand the decision making process related to the use, production and distribution of resources, and the corresponding distribution of benefits and risks arising from these activities.

Indeed by addressing political economy and risk governance challenges in Disaster Risk Management practices we are able to answer questions like:

- Why is investment targeted at response to disasters more than at legislation against disasters or at reduction of high levels of risks?
- Why is it that risk and vulnerability are unequally distributed and significantly concentrated among the poorest of the poor in the world, and this includes the poor in prosperous societies.
- Why is it that in this day and age people still die or lose their livelihoods due to small scale hazardous events, whereas losses from these events can easily be preventable.
- What are the common pitfalls in some of the popular risk management strategies, including for example earthquake master plans?
- Why do children still die in schools due to a multitude of hazardous events including landslides, earthquakes and floods and how can this death and suffering be prevented?

While examining current disaster risk losses, on a world-wide scale, it is possible to make the following observations:

- According to recent statistics (VFL 2013) 57% felt losses had increased over the last five years, compared with only 21% who felt disaster losses had decreased.
- The majority of disaster losses are due to small-scale recurrent disasters, primarily related to weather related hazards (VFL, UNISDR, 2013).
- These small scale events are easily preventable and mainly and disproportionately affect low-income rural and urban areas. As a result, livelihoods, housing and infrastructure remain in a state of permanent vulnerability in these areas. This in turn makes low-income households, already disproportionately vulnerable to intensive risk due to their limited economic resources, even more so!
- Poverty reduction efforts, when designed and executed in a sound manner, aim at addressing the infrastructure, housing and livelihoods in these same areas.
- The state of “permanent” vulnerability referred to above significantly contributes to the failure of development goals and poverty reduction efforts thereby in some cases transforming poverty into abject and chronic poverty.
- When Millennium Development Goals and other poverty related goals fail, linkages to extensive risk are rarely captured.

Furthermore, while examining current Disaster Risk Management strategies, on a world-wide scale, it is possible to make the following observations:

- Vulnerability, due partly to development and investment initiatives, is neither random nor equally distributed. Indeed people are vulnerable because they are politically, socially or economically excluded, and hence have little access to resources, influence, information or decision making (OXFAM 2013).
- Risk has been accumulating over the past few decades due to a variety of reasons, including the fact that the development projects by the public sector and the investments by the private sector only recently started accounting for disaster risk.
- Exposure, vulnerability and risk are disproportionately concentrated in low-income rural and urban areas which are particularly affected by extensive risk.
- In most countries, especially poor countries where losses tend to be concentrated, most DRM efforts are targeted at response to disasters.
- Some effort is directed at developing laws and legislation to prevent disaster risk from accumulating in the future, even if this is not always properly enforced (e.g. seismic building codes, building in flood plains and on unstable slopes amongst others) where this is usually aimed at new developments which usually take place in middle to high income areas.
- Least effort is directed at analyzing current levels of risk (HFA priority area 2) and at reducing current levels of existing risk (HFA priority area 4) which are often mistakenly seen as “disproportionately” benefiting low income rural and urban areas.

By recognizing linkages between climate change, disaster risk management, poverty reduction and extensive risk losses we are prompted to ask and able to answer questions like:

- Why extensive risk is not sufficiently addressed in DRM, CCA and poverty reduction efforts?
- Is addressing extensive risk necessary for achieving sustainable development?
- What can be done from a DRM perspective to improve CCA, poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts?
- How should all the above be reflected in the post 2015 agenda?