

## **Risk Interpretation and Action**

### **(RIA Working Group)**

#### **Introduction**

The focus of the Risk Interpretation and Action (RIA) project, under the umbrella of the Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR) programme, is on the question of how people—both decision-makers and ordinary citizens—make decisions, individually and collectively, in the face of risk. This is in furtherance of Goal 3 (understanding decision-making in complex and changing risk contexts) in IRDR’s **Strategic Plan (2013-2017)**, to which RIA’s activities are aligned.

RIA focuses on four priority areas:

1. Decision-making for uncertainty;
2. Early warning systems;
3. Adaptive management and resilience; and
4. Individual perceptions and risk behaviour.

Understanding decision-making in complex and changing risk contexts, risk governance and institutional development is the goal. Understanding how people interpret risks and choose actions based on their interpretations is vital to any strategy for disaster reduction. Decision-making under conditions of uncertainty is inadequately described by traditional models of ‘rational choice.’ Instead, attention needs to be paid to how people’s interpretations of risks are shaped by their own experiences, personal feelings, values, cultural beliefs and interpersonal and societal dynamics. Furthermore, access to information and capacity for self-protection are typically distributed unevenly within populations. Hence trust is a critical moderator of the effectiveness of any policy for risk communication and public engagement. RIA aims to make these concepts and theories more accessible to a range of disciplines and practitioners in the field of natural hazards and to promote better integration of behavioral and social sciences in disaster risk research, especially in regard to decision-making.

#### **Objectives**

The main objective of the RIA working group is to build a community of practice on risk perception, communication and decision-making. It is a response both to the mushrooming supply of science approaches to risk perception and communication and to three specific demands from the policy and science communities (mapping onto the agendas identified above):

1. The shift from deterministic to probabilistic risk forecasting requires close working between scientists and policy makers to improve modeled risk interpretation, communication and action.
2. Unresolved challenges of communicating risk through early warning efforts including science-society communication and emergency response planning.
3. Resilience capacity and action rest upon knowledge production, management and learning. Approaches are needed to better identify, understand, and model knowledge environments for those managing and living with disaster risk.

Strong scientific and practice communities associated with psychology, institutional economics, organisational sociology and risk communication largely operate in parallel. These rich, but independent knowledge resources offer a grand opportunity for learning and synthesis to reduce the duplication of research and overcome barriers to integrated risk management rooted in a multiplicity of disciplinary languages.

The RIA community will be interdisciplinary, international and integrative. It builds on an existing core network of internationally recognised scientists and practitioners active across the disciplines identified above, but the community will be open to all disciplinary traditions: natural, social, behavioural and from the humanities with interests in risk communication. The goal is to further develop this core group, expand into a self-organised community and promote the coordinated development of new approaches, methods and experiences in communicating risk and development between natural, engineering and social sciences, practitioners and those at risk.

Trans-disciplinary communication and integration of policy and academia will be facilitated through a series of connected international workshops and publications and policy briefs and through the practical implementation of RIA research and policy learning through independently funded research projects.

RIA benefits from the methodologies of AIRDR, DATA, FORIN and SERA, with each providing mechanisms for moving the RIA agenda forward. In this regard RIA members will contribute to the development of:

- FORIN guidance and contribute to FORIN reports to emphasise the role of science-policy communication in decision-making for uncertainty; in the success and failure of early warning; and in the extent to which adaptive management and learning systems have been embedded in disaster risk management and development action.
- DATA indicators for resilience that can capture the distribution of knowledge and learning as a determinant of adaptive capacity and action. The RIA team will be available to offer guidance in this task.

- AIRDR’s work on risk communication, resilience building and early warning where this has been undertaken using an integrated scientific approach. The RIA team will be available to offer guidance in this task.
- SERA’s interest in the communication and maximisation of social benefit from weather-related information and services. The RIA team will be available to explore distinct communication tools used by partners of the World Weather Research Programme (WWRP).

## Research Priorities

RIA’s four areas of interest are cross-cut by three work priorities.

1. ***Integrating new science with policy planning:*** Work focuses on facilitating the interaction of science with research-users. This can include workshops to bring humanitarians or development professionals together with climate science to explore how best information can be exchanged, or bringing risk managers together to consider risk communication strategies in different country and organisational contexts, or working with local stakeholders to examine science and other knowledge interactions and its effect on action.
2. ***Community building:*** Providing an international focal point for pure and applied research, and for risk management professionals working on risk perception, communication and governance including that associated with resilience building and assessment. Activities include maintenance of an open access online portal as part of the IRDR’s website, and workshops (especially those that can piggyback on existing international and national conferences)
3. ***Research leadership:*** Championing risk perception, communication and governance concerns through the research process. This includes providing expertise for integrated research activities and grant submissions and providing guidance to research funders.

For more information about RIA visit the IRDR’s website, [www.irdrinternational.org/](http://www.irdrinternational.org/), or contact the IRDR IPO via email at [connect@irdrinternational.org](mailto:connect@irdrinternational.org).

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