Symposium Summary

As part of Lund University's 350-years Jubilee celebration, the "Disasters Ever More: Past, Present and Future Risk in an Uncertain World" was held at Lund University 7 March 2017. The objective of the symposium was to raise awareness amongst the public, political leaders and civil servants regarding changing global and local disaster risk, associated challenges and potential solutions.

Welcome Message

The symposium began with a welcome message by **Professor Mo Hamza, Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety, Lund University**. Prof. Hamza suggested that when considering the question "is the world becoming a better place?" the emphasis was on "the world". The prevailing tide of inward looking populist rhetoric is a threat to dealing with global risks, which require high levels of collaboration. Climate Change, as well as security, are prime examples of why non-local issues matter. In this context, six guest speakers were invited to share their individual perspectives on disasters and crises in an uncertain world.

National and international perspectives

Margareta Wahlström, former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, opened by asking 'what world do we want to live in?' Disasters have been a major development challenge and constraint. Twenty-five years ago, the thinking on disasters was only from a 'humanitarian' perspective. Following a series of international disasters, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the paradigm shifted with The Hyogo framework for Action in terms of establishing and outlining what governments should do. The Fukushima disaster provided the next paradigm shift, prompting increased understanding of governance and risk safety with global consequences. Finally, Margareta noted that disasters always leave people poorer; and ultimately it is the poor who disproportionately pay for disaster events. Margareta proposed that disasters are a development challenge by: 1) understanding what governments are doing; 2) breaking down the barriers between development and disaster risk management; 3) measuring progress, using international standards; and 4) involving all affected sectors when forming agreements: business, academia, and women. In summarising, Margareta prompted attendees to consider pressing the issues in advance since it was not enough to wait for disasters to prompt governments to change. Indeed, nothing they achieved at a global level was done from behind a desk; it was achieved talking with people at a local level, and responding to what they need.

Dan Smith, Director, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), took the discussion to the topic of security uncertainties. He pointed that the drivers of international conflict risk could be grouped into climate change, resource competition, rising inequality, mass urbanisation and shifting world power patterns. From the height of the cold war, there was a reduction in global conflicts from 1990's to 2010, including disarmament of nuclear weapons and other positive trends. However, much of these gains have been lost since 2010, with global conflicts rising again to their cold-war levels, with national political responses shifting with protectionism and 'me-first-ism'. In addition, geopolitical rivalries are on the rise at a time when global cooperation is needed more than ever. Dan highlighted an increased need for counter-trends, for example, urging the UN Security Council to take on climate change , confronting inequality and showing solidarity. He highlighted that it is those outside government systems, including academia, business and the public, who must be the source of such a counter trend.

Following the previous speakers' discussions on international trends, ***Sara Myrdal, Head of EU and International Affairs, Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB),*** brought the focus onto national and regional responses in Sweden and abroad. MSB acknowledges that trans-boundary risks and vulnerabilities know no borders, and are putting increasing pressure on national systems. In response to evolving risk patterns, national systems must adapt in terms of: finding ways to strengthen cross-sectoral and multi-level cooperation on risk management; and supporting the development of more

joined-up systems for prevention and response, at sub-regional, European and global level. MSB contributes through work at home and abroad, addressing the four main priorities in the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. While the previous efforts and advances of MSB were acknowledged, Sara also discussed areas for improvement including: inter-disciplinary knowledge base on risk and impact on society; do more with less, develop generic coping tools, resource sharing; and empower citizens resilience. A large focus was put on improving engagement with the private sector, which has typically been reluctant to become involved with public agencies from a perceived risk of over-regulation. Sara then summarised MSB's solid performance, but with a strong call for continual improvement.

Academic Evidence

Professor Henrik Tehler, Director, Lund University Centre for Critical Infrastructure Protection Research, highlighted the risks to the critical infrastructure and technical systems in our society, such as electric power systems and transportation systems in the context of disaster risks. Even though most systems started as local systems, they have now grown into bigger systems overlapping and inter-linked across and between nations. Furthermore, Henrik indicated that in the case of a crisis, the inter-connected characteristics of the systems might contribute to spreading the consequences and cause transboundary crises with a cascading effect. An example of this was the blackout of the northeast US in 2003, where many other systems failed because of their dependency on the power grid. In addition, critical Infrastructure can be technical (e.g. power and transport) but also non-technical (e.g. food supply). Based on the above evidence, Henrik suggested that it is a challenge for traditional methods of risk management since they are often designed for one organization focusing only on a limited number of hazards. The practice of risk management needs to focus more on collaboration between many different actors and acknowledge the importance of humans within these systems.

Reader (Docent) Johan Bergström, Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety, Lund University, discussed the risks to human and societal systems, arguing that this is no longer a technical but a social problem. As risk management has become more social, so has the research as three trends indicate. The first trend is that safety and security has become the same thing. Hurricane Katrina and 9/11 were not only disasters in themselves, but also big game changers. We see a global emphasis on preparedness for the unexpected. The safety and risk management field has grown too big through securitisation that decentralisation then becomes the next push, which leads to the second trend. The second trend is that resilience is celebrated as the solution. Resilience is the emphasis on the individual to get ready to oncoming crisis. The third trend is that risk management is no longer only a technical or management process but is now a matter of governance. As there will be "winners" and "losers", we must study the power relations and the normative values in which risks are negotiated. As academics, we need to highlight this with critical eyes.

Professor Emily Boyd, Director, Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies brought the focus of the disaster discussion from global risks down to local livelihoods and ecosystems. She started by framing the global climate change risks, including the consequences of a 1.5 degrees rise in temperature, linking extreme events and climate change and limits to adaptation. Emily suggested that climate risk is now a matter of sustainability. In addition to the technical side, it also has the softer side of social and ecological effects. Across the globe, areas of the world previously affected by disasters, are now being compounded by the effects of climate change, leading to food shortages. As at individual level, 1 billion people may be trapped in poverty by 2030. It is important to link disaster risk reduction thinking back to how we can tackle poverty, inequality and vulnerability. Emily then advocated that there is a need to tackle the risks of global climate change with a new "human security framework" where the responsibilities for security needs are embedded across scales. To achieve this, more action is encouraged across all sectors including research and governance.

Panel Discussion

The speakers were engaged in a panel discussion on the "***interconnectedness***" and "***interdependencies***" of crises.

On thinking ahead on the consequences of the consequences

In adapting to climate change, we need to consider the long-term impact for human habitations in areas where livelihoods are declining and to develop scenarios that we previously thought were implausible (e.g. a change in natural conditions elsewhere caused rising food prices in Egypt, which led to a change of government). This changes the framework we use to discuss security, risk, ecology and disasters. It requires a more holistic approach to put this framework into practice and avoid isolating these issues. The international system will never stop helping people, nor should it, but we need to better allocate resources and be more forward thinking and imaginative.

On how to deal with the interconnectedness and interdependence of risks

We need to start with a better understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependencies. There is a tendency to narrow our focus and solve everything one at a time, which we need to avoid. We can only begin to work on the issues correctly if this is approached from a holistic perspective.

On developing resilient systems

One aspect of resilient systems is to have system that can learn, predict and adapt to the unknown challenges associated with disaster risks and climate change. In the case of MSB, it becomes more demanding to get the attention of political leadership for worse case scenarios that have not yet happened when they seem so unrealistic. As in Katrina, 9/11 or the Indian Ocean Tsunami, if crises are

pushed beyond what the system has planned for, it puts everything under stress in simply attempting to respond or limit further escalation or cascading effect. MSB takes a view to develop and test a common set of capabilities such as crisis communication and necessity provision.

Q & A Session

Following the discussion, the panellists fielded questions from the audience.

What is the role of business in crisis planning?
Business engagement is essential, but we are not working enough with the private sector. The business sector has potential to offer valuable insights on disaster risk reduction, as well as research innovation. Another angle is to find common grounds with businesses to protect common interests. UN spent an enormous amount of time just to get into the office of CEOs to discuss the concepts of risk management (e.g. what could happen to you, how would you pay for, how would this turn up into your financial reports). Japan is often held up as a good model of business-private collaboration. This is an opportunity, but it is also an ongoing struggle. One challenge is that business is reluctant to get too close or involved because they do not want to be (over-) regulated.

How can we promote preparedness planning for infectious diseases so that governments will take the issue more seriously?
MSB has preparedness planning as a result of H1N1 risk, including stockpiles to be in place, for example. But it is a constant struggle for resources. Sweden, by comparison, has a reasonably high level of preparedness in this area. In the case of the Ebola outbreak, if governments have a functioning public health system they would have absorbed and managed the crisis and might have even mitigated against a full-scale outbreak. Furthermore, from a critical systems perspective, the ability to compartmentalise can help stop infectious diseases from spreading to other systems. Another resilience factor is the governments' willingness to adapt their responses and policy, and reach the public with adequate information in time.

How to turn reluctance to disaster risk reduction or climate change into support?
Personal experiences change the way we conduct our causes, and in one case, perception related to "community involvement". In one visit to a community affected by earthquake, local people revealed that the post-recovery livelihood projects were "really useless because we were just selling things to each other". In addition, the community was eager to find ways to urge the highest level of governments to deal with climate change. In the case of Kobe, the economic dis-empowerment of the people was very clear since some never got their jobs back. Personal experiences help us understand that disasters are not just physical, but primarily social and economic.

Final Reflections

In conclusion, the panellists were requested to share their thoughts briefly on the "Disaster Ever More" symposium:

Emily: We are all heroes in our own story, so we must acknowledge that all stories are important, and need to be heard.

Johan: We need new ways of requisite imagination to prepare the societies before disasters strike. Embracing cultural activities is one way to incite our imagination for what is possible.

Henrik: In a world where everything is connected to everything else, we need to collaborate.

Sara: It is about social networks. We need to cherish and strengthen these networks.

Dan: There is no 'must' about preparedness. It requires a conscious effort among people.

Margareta: Participants are now beginning to say "acceptable risk", but it is also important to examine who decides what is acceptable and what is not.

This event was live-streamed and the video is available on Lund University YouTube channel. For enquiries about the event, please contact Mo Hamza (mo.hamza@risk.lth.se), Magnus Hagelsteen (magnus.hagelsteen@risk.lth.se) or Jenny Iao Jörgensen (jenny.iao-jorgensen@risk.lth.se). This summary note was provided by Peter Norris and Shu Liang, Master's students in Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation at Lund University.