

PLANNING DEVELOPMENT TODAY FOR A WORLD WITH LESS DISASTERS TOMORROW

Development at Risk



The relationship of development and disaster risk is not a new discovery. Many scholars and practitioners over the last decade have examined how disaster risk has accumulated through inappropriate development interventions and the extent to which disaster losses have set back social and economic investments directed at poverty reduction and human development in the areas of education, health, housing, drinking water and sanitation, environment as well the economic sphere. The 2004 Hurricane Season has been a sad reminder to this, with over 2,000 deaths in Haiti and immense socio-

economic impacts in Grenada expected to result in a decline of the country's economic growth rate of 1 percent in 2004.

Thus, it is worth reviewing the relationship of development and disaster risk, which UNDP has done on the basis of data produced for the Global Report *Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development*. The report states, while only 11 percent of the people exposed to natural hazards live in low human development countries, they account for more than 53 percent of total recorded deaths. Compared with the situation in high human development countries, these have 15 percent of people exposed, but only 1.8 percent of total recorded deaths. This demonstrates that countries with similar patterns of natural hazard exposure have highly varying levels of disaster risk, shaped by their development paths and processes.

Disaster risk can therefore be considered as an unresolved problem of development, *but* one that is not inevitable. Appropriate development policy and actions can considerably contribute to managing and reducing disaster risks. An incentive for rethinking disaster risk as an integral part of the development process comes from the aim of achieving the goals laid out in the Millennium Declaration setting forth the road map for human development agreed to by 191 nations. Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed upon containing cross-cutting themes in development and disaster risk policy, each tied to specific targets and indicators for progress. The Millennium Declaration also states the objective 'to intensify our collective efforts to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters'¹.

The MDGs direct development planning in a fundamental way towards agreed priority goals. It cannot be assumed that pursuing these goals will automatically contribute to a reduction of human vulnerability to natural hazards. It will largely depend on the process undertaken in meeting each goal that will determine the extent to which disaster risk is reduced. This can be illustrated with an example from the education sector. In disaster prone countries, schools exposed to natural hazards must be built disaster resistant, and people using them need to be

¹ United Nations 2000. United Nations Millennium Declaration, General Assembly Resolution A/RES/55/2, 18 September 2000, p.6.

adequately prepared to reduce loss of life and property before the impact occurs. Only this will ensure sustainable and long-term development gains within the education sector.

This clearly shows that disaster risk considerations must be factored into all development initiatives related to the MDGs, to avoid that well-meaning efforts to increase social and economic development do not contribute to disaster risk. In addition, capacities for disaster preparedness and response must be in place in the event of natural disasters protecting lives and livelihoods.

Achieving Sustainable Human Development despite Natural Disaster Risk



The UNDP emphasis on human development conceives development as being more than the rise or fall of national incomes. It is about providing people with the opportunities to develop their full potentials and lead productive and creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. Fundamental to human development is building human capabilities. The stress and shock felt by those exposed to natural hazards will impact in numerous ways on the capacity of people to achieve and enjoy human development gains. Also levels of human development will shape people's resilience in the face of hazard, stress and shock.

Thus, achieving a more sustainable human development that moves towards meeting the MDGs must meet the challenge of integrating disaster risk management into the planning and policy frameworks at all levels. The frequency with which some countries experience natural disasters (e.g. Bangladesh, Mozambique, Haiti and many more), should certainly place disaster risk at the forefront of development planners' minds. Bringing disaster risk reduction and development concerns closer together requires devising the tools that policy makers and practitioners need to perform the necessary steps in practice. UNDP recommends the following course of action in order to achieve closer links between disaster risk and development planning.

1. The first overarching issue is to improve governance for disaster risk management. Most countries (developed and developing) still deal with disaster risk through response focused *civil defence* type structures. These generally do not address risk considerations, often are excessively centralized and may be impervious to civil society participation. Improving governance, however, means more than just new legislation or new institutions. It means factoring risk considerations into all aspects and levels of government and society.
2. A key recommendation is to carry out disaster risk analysis for all new development. This not only means ensuring that new development is located and built in such a way as to be more secure but also to ensure that new development does not generate new risk. For example, new highways should not provoke deforestation that will then generate landslides.
3. Post-disaster recovery if not undertaken correctly, too often *rebuilds risks* and creates the conditions for further and worse disasters in the future. The post disaster period is, therefore, a unique opportunity to factor risk considerations into development that is usually squandered.
4. Climate change is and will alter the frequency, severity and intensity of hydro-meteorological hazards. While scientists are able to predict some general trends, it is still uncertain how these will affect climate in particular places and times. Climate change creates already a greater complexity and uncertainty for disaster risk management today. Integrated climate risk management is an approach that consists of increasing capacities

to deal with climate related risks as they exist now as the best way to adapt to future global climatic changes.

Advances in the above listed areas, however, are only possible with the necessary human resources and capacities in place. These, however, are still widely lacking in many poor and disaster prone countries.

Strengthening National Capacities for Disaster Risk Reduction



UNDP has a mandate to assist in its programme countries with the strengthening and development of national capacities in managing disaster risk in all its dimensions including preparedness. This includes: programming and policy advice to develop suitable institutional and legislative systems at the national and local levels; ensuring that risk considerations are factored into development programmes, such as decentralization, poverty reduction, environment; developing early warning and preparedness measures and supporting post-disaster recovery in a way that reduces future risks.

In most countries, embedding disaster risk management at the national and local level has been a process that requires years of sustained support and commitment from a variety of actors involved. The experiences of UNDP go back to the early 1990s and a recent review of the support UNDP has provided for institutional capacity building has highlighted a number of good practices, which have ensured the success and sustainability of these interventions.

At the local level, people are rarely at risk from a single but a myriad of natural hazards - traditional and newly emerging ones - in combination with everyday hazards and threats such as poor sanitation, environmental pollution, unemployment, chronic food insecurity, overcrowding and many more. Thus, in places where UNDP has supported multi-hazard approaches, for example in Colombia, these have proven to be better equipped to respond to the realities of vulnerable communities.

Dialogue and consensus building ensure the sustained commitment of all stakeholders involved from the government, the civil society and the private sector. The facilitation of ongoing and inclusive national dialogue processes with the assistance of UNDP proved essential for raising the awareness of the problem at hand and to build consensus on perceived levels of risk and the counter-measures to be taken. Private sector involvement was particularly successful in the Caribbean, where the tourism industry has made progress towards integrating disaster risk considerations into corporate social responsibility planning and where it was active in the recovery from major disasters.

Consensus building on national risk profiles was enhanced where multi-hazard national risk assessment processes were launched, as for example in Albania with the support of UNDP. Such assessments provided a baseline for disaster planning and created scenarios by looking at the main hazards that were most likely to affect the country at hand. Most importantly it was carried out in a collaborative effort including government, civil society, academia and the business community.

Another success factor was found in the area of strengthening institutional frameworks. These frameworks worked best, where UNDP was able to contribute to strong inter-sectoral or inter-ministerial collaboration and coordination mechanisms with clearly assigned mandates and roles and responsibilities for all actors involved, as for example in Mozambique and Sri Lanka. Closely linked to this was the finding that depending on the dominant cultural and administrative traditions, frameworks which followed a decentralized approach were able to raise the

effectiveness of local authorities in reaching vulnerable communities. Decentralization which links local, intermediary and national levels was also considered an effective vehicle for feeding back local risk reduction priorities into policy formulation making this process more meaningful and relevant.



Photo: Saumik De – UNDP India

Particularly good examples for integrating risk reduction into long-term development planning were found in South Africa and Vietnam. With a 20-year planning horizon, Vietnam bases its strategic plan on a truly long-term vision. In some cases the most innovative and effective examples for the inclusion of disaster risk reduction into policies and plans happen in specific sectors such as transport, or water management in the case of Mozambique and others, i.e. sectors that are amongst the prime bearers of losses in the case of

disaster but also key to national and local recovery.

Even though there have been successes and good practices, a number of key challenges and obstacles remain to be overcome when building institutional capacity for disaster risk reduction to ensure the long-term sustainability of present achievements. Firstly, the commitment of governments to fully embrace institutional and legislative systems for disaster reduction is not an easy accomplishment in an age where most still view disasters as unforeseen tragic events calling for immediate response when disasters occur. Secondly, disaster reduction is competing with a variety of other national priorities and development needs, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS or internal conflicts diverting attention to what appears to be more urgent every-day concerns. Thirdly, there appears to be an over-reliance on technical and scientific approaches, which may bypass existing local capacities, thus not utilizing these to their full potential.

A lot of global advocacy still needs to be done to convince governments of the need for supporting the development and implementation of national systems which facilitate the integration of disaster reduction concerns into development and support the collective involvement and input of the private sector, civil society in every stage of the process. This must go hand in hand with a major commitment by the United Nations System and the international community to strengthen the required national capacities to reduce vulnerabilities and pro-actively engage in disaster risk reduction.

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