

# STRENGTHENING DISASTER RISK GOVERNANCE



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Resilient nations.*



**UNDP Support during  
the HFA Implementation  
Period 2005-2015**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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**Citation:** UNDP, Strengthening Disaster Risk Governance: UNDP Support during the HFA Implementation Period 2005-2015 -Summary (New York, 2015)

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**Front cover photo:** A family evacuates their village in a flood hit area of Pakistan. © Abdul Majeed Goraya/IRIN



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Acknowledgements

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This report is the result of a joint initiative of 15 UNDP Country Offices, the UNDP Pacific Centre, the Fiji Multi Country Office and the UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) in New York.

The primary author of this report is Alexandra Galperin, who also developed the research methodology and covered research in Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The report was co-written by Emily Wilkinson from the Overseas Development Institute, who covered research in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Technical guidance for the project was provided by Angelika Planitz on behalf of UNDP.

**RESEARCH ASSISTANCE:** Thanks are due for research assistance and written inputs from Alice Guinan, Manuel Pastor, and Martin Ras from UNDP, and Eva Comba, independent consultant, and Virginie Le Masson from ODI.

**PROJECT COORDINATION:** The country studies could not have been undertaken without the guidance and support from UNDP regional colleagues Sophie Baranes, Geraldine Becci, Aliou Dia, Armen Grigoryan, Sanny Jegillos, Zubair Murshed and Krishna Vatsa.

**COUNTRY CASE STUDIES:** Sincere thanks are extended to the many government and other stakeholders who gave their time to participate in telephone interviews. The contributions of UNDP Country Offices, and in particular the DRR focal points who prepared the case studies and facilitated the telephone interviews, were instrumental. Thanks are due to Armen Chilingaryan (Armenia), Xavier Hernandez Ferre (Colombia), Georgina Micheleena (Cuba), Idriss Ahmed Hared (Djibouti), Nury Bermúdez (Ecuador), Dillip Kumar Bhanja (Ethiopia), Paolo Dalla Stella (Ghana), Kristanto Sinandang (Indonesia), Mukash Kaldarov (Kyrgyzstan), Claire Rahasinirina (Madagascar), Vasko Popovski (FYR Macedonia), Xavier Moya (Mexico), Titus A. Kuuyuor (Mozambique), Moortaza Jiwanji (Pacific Centre covering the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), Sureka Perera (Sri Lanka), Jose Neil A. C. 'Bong' Manzano (Uganda) and Viet Hien Bui and Jenty Kirsch-Wood (Viet Nam).

**PEER REVIEWERS:** Particular thanks are due to the external reviewers Ian Christoplos, Ailsa Holloway, Terry Jeggle, and John Twigg, who provided highly useful feedback to improve initial drafts. From UNDP Armen Grigoryan, Rajeev Issar, Sanny Jegillos, Kamal Kishore, Pradeep Kurukulasuriya, Zubair Murshed, and Kevin Petrini provided valuable comments.

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Impact of 2010 Tsunami in the Solomon Islands © UNOCHA Pacific



## ACRONYMS

<b>CBDRM</b>	Community-Based Disaster Risk Management
<b>CCA</b>	Climate Change Adaptation
<b>CO</b>	Country Office (UNDP)
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DM</b>	Disaster Management
<b>DRG</b>	Disaster Risk Governance
<b>DRM</b>	Disaster Risk Management
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>ECIS</b>	Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>GAR</b>	Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>HFA</b>	Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters
<b>LAC</b>	Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>NDMA</b>	National Disaster Management Authority
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme



Woman walking on road in flood prone area, Bangladesh © Salman Saeed/UNDP Bangladesh

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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A changing climate and rapidly growing exposure to disaster risk presents the world with an unprecedented challenge. Over the past decade, more than 700,000 people lost their lives, over 1.4 million were injured and approximately 23 million were made homeless as a result of disasters. Overall, more than 1.5 billion people were affected by disasters in various ways. The total economic loss was more than US\$1.3 trillion.<sup>1</sup> Recurring small-scale and slow-onset disasters predominantly affect communities and households, and constitute a high percentage of all losses. The challenge is particularly severe in developing countries, as they are both more likely to be affected and less able to cope with the impact of disasters. Poor governance and the substantial growth of population and assets in areas exposed to natural hazards are the major causes of increasing levels of disaster risk.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recognizes governance as a key unresolved issue in both the configuration and the reduction of disaster risk. With the aim of protecting development investments and ultimately building people's resilience, UNDP has made strengthening disaster risk governance (DRG) a cornerstone of its efforts to understand, reduce and manage risk for the past two decades.

Since 2005, UNDP worked with national governments, communities and development partners to support DRG in 125 countries. A significant proportion of this work focused on strengthening institutional systems and legal and policy mechanisms to govern the reduction and management of disaster risk, as well as providing support for the processes that lead to the establishment of these arrangements and facilitate their effective implementation. With the global framework on disaster risk reduction (DRR), the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* (HFA), coming to an end, and a successor framework to be agreed in March 2015 at the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, it is time to take stock of UNDP's progress in promoting more effective DRG over the last 10 years. UNDP commissioned this report in order to:

- Provide a snapshot of the overall progress achieved in DRG since 2005;
- Analyse UNDP's role in, and approaches to, supporting DRG in 17 selected countries since 2005;
- Provide policy and programmatic guidance based upon key findings;
- Constitute a resource for the implementation of the HFA successor agreement and the post-2015 development agenda.

This report presents detailed findings from a selection of 17 countries in Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific (Asia/Pacific), Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS), and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), where UNDP worked on DRG. It also provides an overview of UNDP's portfolio of country level DRG projects. This report examines the strategies and methodologies employed by UNDP over the last decade to promote an enabling governance environment for DRR. In particular, it presents an analysis of UNDP support for getting DRR on the political agenda as a cross-cutting development priority, and facilitating the translation of DRR policy frameworks into action at the local level.

The report's findings draw on a number of sources of information, including: a global thematic review of DRG commissioned by UNDP for the 2015 *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction* (GAR)<sup>2</sup>; 17 country papers prepared by UNDP country offices (COs) including general information on DRG and UNDP's pro-

gramme in each country; more than 70 interviews with government officials, academics, local consultants and UNDP regional and country office staff in 17 countries; a review of relevant primary, grey and secondary literature; and a portfolio analysis of UNDP's country level DRG programmes from 2005 to 2012. Two international consultants prepared the report, with support from UNDP staff at global, regional and national levels.

## 2. KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

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The report focuses on recent UNDP experience in supporting governance arrangements that promote DRR at the local level. This is a growing area of UNDP's engagement in DRG. An analysis of UNDP's DRG portfolio demonstrated that a total of 32 percent of DRG projects focused on local and urban DRR. Since the adoption of the HFA in 2005, formal HFA progress reviews noted that there has been little overall progress towards developing policies and practices to reduce risk below the national level. Similarly, UNDP has faced challenges in promoting DRG at the local level.

Nonetheless, this analysis of UNDP DRG programmes in 17 countries identifies many promising initiatives and some significant, consistent and relevant engagement in DRG processes. These initiatives include working with individual sectors to incorporate DRR into sectoral policies and legislation; the adoption and refinement of legal instruments that support DRR at the subnational level; analysis of decentralization processes and identification of entry-points for DRR; promotion of civil society involvement in disaster risk management (DRM) coordination bodies; and initiatives to promote and harmonize community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) programmes. The report also found evidence of recent engagement in supporting the integration of DRR and/or CCA measures into development planning. These initiatives are encouraging signs of CO commitment to DRR, despite significant external obstacles including capacity and resource gaps at the subnational level, and the continuing tendency of many government authorities to prioritize emergency response over DRR.

### **Trends since 2005**

Evidence shows that during the HFA implementation period, a greater number of UNDP's programmes have addressed DRR and engaged in processes to promote DRG at the national and subnational level. In many countries, UNDP broadened its support from an almost exclusive focus on national disaster management authorities (NDMAs) to engaging with a wider range of ministries, as well as development planning and budgeting apex agencies such as ministries of planning and finance. Furthermore, the report identifies evidence of UNDP engaging more systematically with civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

However, defining indicators to measure progress in DRG has been a challenge, as has the monitoring of risk reduction plans and activities. Although the *UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017* strongly endorses the systematic integration of DRG with UNDP's other development activities, this is still in the early stages of operationalization.

## ***Successes as a Convener and Broker***

The DRG programmes in the 17 countries reviewed were most successful when UNDP used its convening and brokering capacity to facilitate cooperation between development partners (i.e. governments, civil society organizations (CSOs) and international agencies). This engagement resulted in the adoption of common methodologies and the pooling of DRG resources based on a set of agreed objectives. This approach helped generate momentum for DRR, and unlocked the potential and resources to support DRG processes at national and subnational levels, including work with communities. The role of broker and convener is also more suited to the typically limited funding<sup>3</sup> of UNDP's DRG programmes, compared to other development actors, including most national governments.

## ***Partner of Governments***

As a partner of governments and - in 90 percent of all reviewed DRG programmes - of NDMA, UNDP was not always able to resist pressures to prioritize the strengthening of lead agencies over the DRG system as a whole. Nevertheless, the report finds that UNDP uses several strategies to provide support more widely and to promote broader participation and cooperation in DRG. Helping lead agencies to engage in multi-agency processes was particularly common (mostly through assessments and plans). A few COs engaged closely and systematically with CSOs although this was usually aimed at the joint implementation of local level activities rather than at strengthening the capacity of the CSO itself. Significant engagement with private sector actors in any role was rare.

## ***Long-Term and In-Depth Engagement to Promote Horizontal and Vertical Integration***

Mainstreaming DRR into development planning was immensely challenging, especially where there was only limited experience of intersectoral cooperation. Experience from UNDP programmes in 17 countries suggests that repeated multisectoral engagement can lead to incremental progress in planning by identifying mutual and dynamic tasks rather than individual and static roles. Underlying organizational and bureaucratic cultures and incentive systems must change in order to reward cooperation and achieve sustained progress. UNDP's long-term engagement at the country level gives it a clear comparative advantage in supporting governments to navigate such long-term change processes. UNDP has provided continuous support in many countries, sometimes going back to the 1980s. However, developing a long-term planning horizon is difficult, given that DRR is often funded from emergency budgets.

In a number of countries, particularly in the LAC region, UNDP helped to clarify roles and strengthen relationships among different levels of government. In some countries undergoing decentralization processes, UNDP was able to provide the central government with a local government view on the particular constraints in implementing decentralized DRR mandates. In other countries, UNDP's engagement at the community level sometimes added to the number of unsustainable pilot projects rather than feeding into vertical governance processes.

## **DRR and Decentralization**

In some of the 17 countries studied, the obstacles to accountable and responsive governance and DRG institutions are immense. It may not always be wise to decentralize DRR decision making; for instance, when local level governance is marked by patronage politics and/or institutionalized exclusion of certain groups. If capacity is very low, certain DRR roles may simply overburden local governments. Likewise, relying on decentralization cannot resolve the interconnected nature of certain risks. Some of the 17 COs opted for a more measured approach, working only with higher layers of subnational government (provinces or federal states) and increasing capacity at these levels to support lower level governments within their jurisdictions. Careful targeting is especially necessary where many subnational and local government entities exist in high-risk areas and direct investments will only ever represent a drop in the ocean. There are also some promising examples of peer mechanisms and support to horizontal cooperation between districts or municipalities (centred on shared risks, for instance).

## **Capacity Development**

In several of the 17 countries, UNDP went beyond the traditional training approach by focusing on conceptual and often individual learning. This involved building the capacity of local institutions to continue sharing information with others, so that capacity can be maintained and improved over the longer term. By encouraging a more active role and the sharing of expertise across actors from different backgrounds, UNDP generated encouraging results (e.g. in **Armenia, Colombia, Cuba and Mexico**). Formal, theory-based training courses were less successful in strengthening capacity than practical exercises that involved work



Community members help prepare risk maps to identify local hazards and vulnerabilities. © UNDP Bhutan

on assessments or planning. Capacity development activities that mobilize and build upon existing expertise can be sustained and scaled-up more easily. Substituting government capacity with UNDP personnel occurred in a number of sample countries, but is an investment that is easily lost and an approach that only seems to work in very rare cases.

## **Legislation**

UNDP played an important role in helping to design legislation - including legislation to promote local level DRG, especially in the LAC region. However, the adoption of legislation does not automatically result in reduced levels of disaster risk. Many plans are not implemented, and legislation goes unenforced. The implementation of law often requires additional capacity and resources. Therefore, in some contexts UNDP efforts to take stock of existing legislation and analyse the roles and capacities of stakeholders in their implementation may hold more promise than helping governments design new laws.

# **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Based on the findings of the review, specific recommendations are made for UNDP in four areas: (i) conceptual clarity and refinement of approach; (ii) transforming current programming approaches to be more aligned with the current state of knowledge on DRG; (iii) an engagement strategy at the country level that goes beyond programme/project time frames; and (iv) advancing DRG at the local level.

Some of the proposed measures have already been applied in some of the reviewed country programmes, while others point to gaps that have yet to be addressed in UNDP policy and programme support.

In addition recommendations of a more general nature are provided on the future direction of DRG for national, regional as well as international policy makers and practitioners. It may also be of relevance for the implementation of the post-2015 agreement on DRR.

## **Recommendations to UNDP**

### **Clarifying UNDP's Conceptual Approach to Disaster Risk Governance and Internal Capacities**

- **Devise a DRG policy and further refine the current definition of DRG. The policy should emphasize the intersecting and dynamic nature of DRR policymaking and situate this process more clearly within a political economy analysis.<sup>4</sup>** It should also highlight the added value that UNDP offers in strengthening DRG - based on its own structure, capacity and working modalities - emphasizing its role as a 'partner of government'. An important element is the need

to reach out, learn from and exchange with other UNDP programme areas, such as democratic governance, conflict prevention, social protection, biodiversity, CC, or urbanization. In addition, UNDP's role in strengthening financial services for DRR needs to receive more attention in DRG policy and programme support.

- **Build on existing UNDP experiences with integrating DRR and CCA in order to identify further conceptual synergies between these highly complementary areas.** The *UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017* and the subsequent organizational restructuring paved the way for a more consistent and organization-wide integration of policy and programme support for DRR and CCA. The implementation of the Strategic Plan would greatly benefit from applying the findings of this report in the context of a more unified approach to DRR and CCA.
- **Assess and further strengthen internal UNDP capacity to support complex DRG processes and prioritize support where it yields strong benefits.** DRG change/reform processes require time and sustained engagement that need to be realistically assessed in view of UNDP's existing capacities and resources. Working with too many actors at too many levels could dilute and weaken impact, and UNDP should consider being more selective about where and how to focus its efforts in order to maximise results.

## **Transforming Current Disaster Risk Governance Programming Approaches**

- **Develop a contextual theory of change for each DRG programme and/or reform process and identify key benchmarks, indicators and a well-defined M&E system to monitor progress.** The development and implementation of effective DRG processes requires in-depth consideration of the context, since no universal theory of change can be applied to all DRG processes. Therefore, such theories of change and supporting M&E frameworks need to be developed individually for each country, and DRG interventions designed accordingly in a flexible, dynamic and innovative manner. This will require a thorough analysis of the risk context, as well as capacity and political economy assessments, in order to gain an understanding of the changes required to strengthen the enabling environment for DRR, along with familiarity with why and how actors might buy into that change.
- **Expand DRG and capacity development support from a still-predominant focus on national DM authorities to also include the development system more broadly and address obstacles in the way of effective horizontal and vertical integration of DRR.** This includes practical support for integrating DRR more systematically, through co-operative goal definition, planning and action rather than a 'tick box' approach to mainstreaming. This ambition is a long-term, incremental process towards risk-informed development that requires strengthening incentive systems to cooperate with others on shared tasks, transecting organizational and hierarchical borders. However, since the role and functioning of many DRR institutions established over the past decade is still diffuse (reducing their focus and effectiveness), UNDP continues to have a role in supporting their consolidation and strengthening their legitimacy and accountability.

- **Ensure that UNDP advisory support for the preparation or review of disaster risk-sensitive policies, plans and legislation is not a default intervention for advancing DRG, but carefully selected to overcome existing bottlenecks.** Since in many countries, ineffective implementation of policies, plans and laws is an issue, it is important to also pursue flexible and informal arrangements or complementary activities (to drafting a plan or law), as these may be more effective in promoting change. When support to formal DRG instruments is considered essential, it should be accompanied by the necessary DRG processes (i.e. participation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness etc.) that promote implementation, resourcing and monitoring of progress.
- **Move beyond traditional training approaches and develop DRG capacity by encouraging sharing of expertise and learning across actors from different backgrounds through joint analysis of challenges.** UNDP plays an important role in helping establish and strengthen the cadre of officials who can support DRG. Capacity development activities that mobilize and build upon existing expertise can be sustained and scaled-up more easily. Capacity substitution should be employed very selectively and in a way that ensures the transfer of skills and knowledge. An institutional-functional approach to DRR capacity development should have a clear focus on the coherence of institutional structures, clarity of mandates, rule of law, and adequacy of resources and capacities.

## ***Engagement Strategy at the National Level***

- **Assist governments in widening and deepening the horizontal integration of DRR processes and stakeholders and help to unlock existing capacities in government, civil society and/or the private sector and academia.** Many disaster-prone countries in which UNDP operates (especially middle-income countries) have the relevant capacities and resources to substantially reduce the risks they face. These resources are often overlooked, or actors work in isolation. Good practices and lessons can be shared in finding a strategic niche for UNDP to help broker partnerships, scale up scattered initiatives of development agencies - NGOs in particular - and foster cooperation between government and civil society.
- **Intensify engagement in developing and strengthening vertical linkages between levels of DRG.** Decentralization and DRR do not always go hand in hand. There can be strong disincentives that prevent local level officials from promoting DRR. These constraints have been observed in some countries and it would be useful to analyse these lessons and document and share possible solutions among UNDP programme staff.
- **Support the development and/or adaptation of existing tools, guidelines and methodologies (e.g. on risk assessment, DRR/CCA mainstreaming, policy and legal reform processes etc.) to promote risk-informed development and overcome risk governance deficits.** This will help facilitate the translation of DRG policy guidance into practice and accelerate appropriate focus on risk governance aspects in UNDP programmes.

## ***Advancing Disaster Risk Governance at the Subnational Level***

- **Examine the feasibility of applying a political economy analysis in each country before or as a component of DRG programming.** Without a careful consideration of the role of (local) elites, local-central government relations (including the distribution of power), and the consultative and decision-making processes that underpin local development planning, it is difficult to identify an effective role for subnational governments in risk reduction and hence for UNDP to support them.
- **Establish an in-depth understanding of existing local capacity and access to resources when further developing local capacities.** Support to the development of local level DRG capacities should form a principal focus of UNDP programmes. It is important to work with elected representative bodies and community-representative institutions. An analysis of the roles and relationships among various levels of government from the national to the very local level should be part of this understanding.
- **Carry out further analysis of dominant approaches through which UNDP engages in CBDRM in order to increase their long-term sustainability.** Efforts to provide support to CBDRM need to result in sustained risk reduction outcomes, ensure scaling-up by establishing vertical linkages with local government, and inform and influence policy decisions.
- **Seek opportunities to learn from and build the support for decentralized DRR on UNDP experiences within its democratic governance programme.** Where feasible, closer linkages should be established between the decentralization of DRR and overall decentralization processes pursued by governments with UNDP support.
- **Strengthen downward accountability by supporting feedback channels from the community and civil society to subnational and even national government to articulate local needs and preferences.** This implies opening up opportunities and forums that bring practitioners, civil society and NGOs closer to the DRG system. Such mechanisms could also be used to gauge satisfaction with officials' performance.



Children looking at a poster on the impacts of and adaption to climate change during the World Environmental Day 2011 in Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia. © UNDP Cambodia

## **Recommendations for the Implementation of the Post-2015 Agreement on DRR**

- **Devise a systems approach to DRR that spans multiple disciplines and stakeholders.** DRG is an all-government concern that must be owned by stakeholders beyond national DM authorities and DRM departments, and become part and parcel of multisectoral governance arrangements. This requires having authority and legitimacy for DRR clearly assigned, with access to sufficient capacity and resources in relation to the country's risk profile. Key nodal departments/agencies (not necessarily the national DM authorities that act as champions for disaster and climate risk management) can help establish risk governance as a cross-cutting priority and facilitate integration across all development sectors.
- **Emphasize the identification and strengthening of incentive systems to promote the integration of DRR and CCA into governance processes at national and subnational levels.** This offers new and innovative avenues for risk governance that are of equal importance in low-, middle- and high-income countries.
- **Recognize legislative and regulatory frameworks as instruments for establishing clear mandates, as well as accountability and transparency mechanisms for organizations and key stakeholders in DRR. Also acknowledge their normative and standard-setting functions.** Laws can be instrumental for alleviating the many inequalities that give rise to disaster risk. However, they must be accompanied by resources and implementation arrangements that foster compliance through innovative and flexible solutions.

- **Overcome the notion of DRR as an ‘add-on’ to development.** Considerations of disaster risk and its prevention or mitigation need to be inherent in the very definition of development. Since development itself is recognized as contributing to disaster risk, it is necessary to reframe or redefine development modalities to achieve truly risk-informed development. Unless this happens, DRR measures will fail to yield their full benefits.
- **Bridge the gaps between national, local and community levels in an effort to build resilience.** Bestowing local government with clear roles and responsibilities matched with necessary resources and implementation capacities will be key to achieving sustainable risk reduction outcomes.
- **Promote greater vertical and horizontal integration of actors, policies and financing, to establish mutual roles and linkages across stakeholder groups and sectors.** This should also encompass informal institutions and NGOs as central elements of DRG. A critical step in this direction is the ability to generate networks and mobilize around issues of common concern in ways that motivate social demand for change. Recognizing the political dimensions of disaster risk will be an important requirement for ensuring the effectiveness of such an approach.
- **Seize the opportunity that post-disaster situations provide for implementing institutional as well as policy reforms.** Time and again, the impacts of disasters have revealed vulnerabilities and gaps in DRG that provide governments with entry points for embarking on comprehensive policy and institutional reform processes. Inclusive policymaking processes have great potential for achieving sustained risk reduction outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> Draft Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, dated 28 January 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Aysan, Y. and Lavell, A. (2014). Disaster Risk Governance during the HFA Implementation Period: Global Thematic Review. Background Paper prepared for GAR15, commissioned by UNDP. New York.

<sup>3</sup> Unless in the aftermath of some large-scale, high visibility disasters.

<sup>4</sup> The new DRG concept may cover other types of risks, such as those induced by climate change.



UNDP recognizes governance as a key unresolved issue in both the configuration and the reduction of disaster risk. With the aim of protecting development investments and ultimately building people's resilience, UNDP has made strengthening disaster risk governance a cornerstone of its efforts to understand, reduce and manage risk.

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