

Alternative Futures for Disaster Risk Reduction - 2030 and Beyond

Advocacy messages from Geneva to the
2025 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Background

In the lead-up to the 2025 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP2025), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in Geneva convened a dialogue on the future of disaster risk reduction during the remainder of the Sendai Framework implementation period and beyond. The event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders from International Geneva acknowledging the city's long tradition of fostering cooperation, innovation, and multilateral diplomacy representing organizations working in the humanitarian, development, and climate change fields. Whilst not representative of the entire International Geneva, the dialogue offered a platform to jointly craft forward-looking messages to convey to the GP2025 which focuses this year on the theme '*Every Day counts, Act for Resilience Today*'. It underlines the urgency to "course correct" the trajectory of progress in the implementation of the goals of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), as articulated in the Sendai Midterm Review.

The group distilled **eight messages for shaping the future of disaster risk reduction**. The messages are grounded in the lived experiences of practitioners, and they are shaped by a shared commitment to accelerate progress and overcome common implementation barriers in the remaining five years of the Sendai Framework until 2030 and beyond. The messages serve as a foundation for advocacy efforts for all stakeholders with a stake in reducing disaster risk—not only those based in Geneva—and will inform the Chair's Summary of the GP2025.

The messages that emerged from the dialogue offer a roadmap for more effective, equitable, and sustainable disaster risk governance moving forward. They call for a renewed focus on simplification, localization, institutional reforms, practical solutions, financing, and accountability, while embracing the complexity of today's multi-risk environment.



Context

The GP2025 takes place at a critical juncture for multilateralism and in a context in which risks are accumulating, and the frequency, magnitude, and severity of impacts are on the rise when these risks are not addressed. In 2024, disasters affected approximately 167 million people, causing over USD 240 billion economic losses. Disaster-related displacement caused by weather and geophysical hazards was exceptionally high, with nearly 48.5 million people displaced—almost double the annual average of the past decade (IDMC/GRID 2025). Looking ahead, the global population faces a further increase in the frequency and intensity of natural hazard events, with a possible 40 percent rise in the number of disasters from 2015 to 2030 if the current trajectory of the drivers of risks are not effectively managed. There are also newly emerging risks that must be understood and managed effectively to avoid spiraling out of control.

As emphasized in the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework (2023) the window of opportunity to avoid unsustainable levels of risk that transcend national, planetary, and generational boundaries is now. Therefore, it is imperative to challenge the way we think, what we know and how we act, to push for practical and integrated solutions that can offer multiple co-benefits, and to build a common foundation that inspires and generates optimism for working together on reducing risk and building resilience. It is important to recognize that we have agency and that we can deploy transformative actions that lead us to more positive and sustainable outcomes for all. The following key messages intend to provide a pathway towards practical solutions for action.

Message 1: Champion continuity and simplify global guidance

We advocate for the continuation of the Sendai Framework principles beyond 2030, urging GP2025 to prioritize simplifying global policy guidance, closing implementation gaps, and enabling actionable, localized disaster risk reduction solutions without unnecessary complexity and jargon.

The Sendai Framework has proven to be a valuable foundation for disaster risk reduction by building on and advancing the core concepts of the 1994 Yokohama Strategyⁱ and the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Actionⁱⁱ. While acknowledging continuous learning and the evolution of disaster risk reduction and related concepts and terminologies since 2015, the core principles of the Sendai Framework remain relevant. The next five years and beyond should be used to deploy measures that allow course correction to bring efforts to deliver the Sendai Framework objectives back on track. Further, it should allow for foundational risk reduction capacities to be developed at scale in multiple sectors, disciplines, and domains with more emphasis on the local level. The focus from now onwards must be on (i) simplifying global policy guidance for enabling actionable solutions at subnational and local levels, (ii) addressing implementation gaps, and (iii) fostering greater convergence in disaster reduction, climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable development through a global risk management strategy that accompanies the SDGs to avoid overburdening local capacities.

The rapid evolution of terminology and approaches alienates local actors who struggle to translate new concepts—such as “anticipatory action”, “systemic risk”, or “adaptive governance”—into practice. Unnecessary complexity and new language should be avoided, and instead practical and accessible guidance should be developed with a focus on issues that have not yet received sufficient attention



such as economic barriers for disaster risk reduction, cost-benefit analysis, local resourcing, displacement, or multi-risk approaches that also include conflict and climate.

Message 2: Foster integrated and risk-informed development

We call on GP2025 to drive the integration of disaster risk reduction within sustainable development by strengthening institutional arrangements for risk-informed decision-making across all sectors and promoting truly multi-risk and systemic solutions.

Whether DRR should remain a distinct global policy stream or be fully integrated into sustainable development depends greatly on the country context and the prevailing governance arrangements.

The multitude of global policy frameworks that address overlapping and highly complementary policy streams related to disaster risk reduction, climate change, biodiversity, desertification, and sustainable development are overstressing already strained national and local capacities, especially in fragile and crisis contexts. Therefore, it could be argued that disaster risk reduction should be fully integrated into the sustainable development agenda. One global policy framework would be better equipped to foster integrated solutions that are truly multi-risk, address systemic issues, and can be adapted to national and local level needs, thus bringing enhanced impact and efficiency. However, it must be cautioned that risk is created by the very same development system that aims to reduce it—evident for example in rapid urban development whilst neglecting investments in rural areas. Reducing urban risk can be achieved by investing in rural areas, thus slowing down the urbanization rate and allowing more time for city planners to elaborate urban disaster risk reduction measures. Integrating or mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into the heart of development, therefore, requires a truly transformative approach.

There is also a rationale for keeping disaster risk reduction as a distinct policy stream and catalyst for risk-informed development and an important tool to achieve sustainable development. Having dedicated disaster risk reduction policy is particularly helpful in contexts with weak governance to compensate for any gaps in risk governance and to keep the issue high on the agenda of decision-makers. A dedicated policy could also provide more detailed guidance to planners, engineers, and practitioners on risk reduction, preparedness, and recovery. Both perspectives have the shared challenge in devising the most suitable institutional arrangements for reducing disaster risk (see also message 4).

Message 3: Inspire action through positive and accessible communication

We urge all stakeholders to adopt a positive communication approach at GP2025 and beyond, focusing on solutions, co-benefits, and successes in simple and accessible language that empowers communities and counters fatigue from "gloom and doom" scenarios.

The current discourse on disaster risk reduction must be replaced by a more positive narrative. Communication that emphasizes uncertainty, risk, crises, and catastrophic visions of the future are



disempowering, particularly for communities and youth. A shift towards positive communication—focusing on solutions, co-benefits, success stories, and positive tipping points—on the other hand can motivate action and counteract the mental fatigue caused by constant exposure to gloom and doom scenarios.

Communication needs to focus on what works, what is possible, how individuals and communities can contribute to resilience, and how disaster risk reduction can contribute to providing solutions to other existing (often more pressing) priorities. Young people can be instrumental in crafting messages of empowerment and impact. Showcasing successful local initiatives and co-benefits can inspire action and build momentum at the local level. For example, mangrove reforestation offers numerous co-benefits, including coastal protection, carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and improved local livelihoods. The benefits of reducing disaster risk and stories about *disasters that did not happen*, must be captured and communicated effectively, possibly through tools like an “impact calculator” to quantify avoided losses, co-benefits, and make the economic case of risk reduction investments.

Furthermore, the terminology related to disaster risk reduction must be simplified for ease of common understanding and actionable for a wide range of decision-makers and practitioners from around the globe. There are various examples of efforts for simplifying the disaster risk reduction terminology (e.g., see [UNISDR](#), [UN General Assembly](#), or [IPCC](#)). Overly technical or abstract terminology is hard to translate, especially into local vernacular. The proliferation of new terms and concepts without clear corresponding guidance creates confusion and undermines accountability; it waters down resources and limits focus on the many practical solutions available to achieve the goals of the Sendai Framework. It was argued that innovation and learning can happen without the constant introduction of new terminology but by building on what has worked and improving existing processes rather than continuously initiating new ones.

Message 4: Foster risk governance for locally designed and owned solutions

We advocate for a fundamental shift in risk governance by empowering local actors with the necessary authority, resources, and context-specific, simple tools to effectively design and implement disaster risk reduction on the ground.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to disaster risk governance. The governance arrangements for managing disaster risk must be carefully tailored to national and local political, institutional, and economic contexts. The institutional entry points for effective disaster risk reduction can vary widely—from ministries of planning, finance, environment, prime ministers/presidents office, national disaster risk management agencies (NDMA), to the water or agricultural sectors/clusters. Strengthening national coordination mechanisms and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration at scale are essential for effectively localizing risk governance. This is often not sufficiently taken into consideration when good practice solutions from some country contexts are transported into settings that operate under fundamentally different political and cultural norms.

A single coordinating agency, such as for example an NDMA, may not be able to live up to what is required when it comes to steering national and local coordination and alignment of disaster risk



reduction with the work of sectoral ministries and planning bodies. To be effective, coordination needs to be at a higher strategic and policy level that is linked to central macro-economic management and planning. A multi-node system may be more appropriate in some contexts. Either way, there is a strong need for better institutional mechanisms and investment in enhanced risk assessment and management capacities and capabilities to support risk-informed decision-making, investment, and behavior across sectors and scales, which goes far beyond emergency management agencies.

Whilst there are pockets of progress in national risk governance, evidenced by the growing commitment to national disaster risk reduction strategies, there is still a considerable gap when it comes to empowering local actors with the authority, resources, and tools to implement these strategies. More resources need to be transferred directly to local actors, which may include governments and non-governmental actors (national and local) as well as community-based organizations and initiatives. Localization is not just about local implementation—it is about designing systems that reflect the realities and capacities of those on the ground. Solutions must be simple—but not simplistic—and designed to match local absorption capacities. There is already a large body of existing guidance and tools for community and diaspora engagement as well as local financing mechanisms, which could be further build upon.

Local solutions have tremendous potential to be transformative. When aggregated, they can drive regional and global impact. However, many local initiatives lack funding and technical support. The [UN80 Initiative](#) presents an opportunity to decentralize the UN's expertise and bring its risk management capacities closer to where it is needed most.

Message 5: Establish accountability for risk creation and reduction

We call for urgent action to develop transparent mechanisms at all levels that establish clear accountability for both risk creation and reduction, recognizing risk management as a shared responsibility across multiple sectors and stakeholders.

Achieving accountability for disaster risk reduction remains a persistent challenge. Global frameworks that cover a longer time horizon like the Sendai Framework provide a better foundation for tracking the commitment of nations, their progress, and where they falter. Considering that reducing disaster risk is an endeavor that may take decades, even 10- or 15-year frameworks may be too short. When novel frameworks with new goals and targets are introduced, invariably accountability shifts—another argument for the continuation of the Sendai Framework goals and targets.

Furthermore, risk accountability is hard to determine. While we understand much about risk, the power dynamics and the vested interests that shape risk often remain opaque. Those who benefit from risk creation often transfer it to other stakeholders or geographies who are unaware and suffer from the consequences without being compensated. Both, the risk creation and the risk reduction process are shaped by a multitude of stakeholders from national down to the local level, comprising different echelons of government, non-government organizations, the private sector, individuals, and even external actors in our highly globalized world. Current tracking and reporting mechanisms are not sophisticated enough to transparently disclose who is responsible for action or non-action alike. Accountability for risk generation, therefore, remains diffused. The challenge is not a lack of risk reduction solutions, but the political and economic interests that act as barriers to implementing them.



A more sensitive and realistic understanding of these forces is needed to design effective interventions and governance models. This is still a gap which needs to be filled in the remaining years of the Sendai Framework.

Against this background giving all responsibility for the management of risk to one individual agency as is currently the predominant practice appears absurd. Risk reduction must be a multi-entity responsibility, possibly requiring a risk management capability in every sector (see also messages 2 and 4). This must go hand-in-hand with setting stronger sectoral targets for reducing disaster risk which are ideally set nationally and locally but could benefit from global/ regional/ national support.

Message 6: Make a compelling economic case for reducing disaster risk

We urge GP2025 to prioritize developing and utilizing robust economic models and tools to systematically quantify the benefits of disaster risk reduction and avoided losses of development investments, making the compelling case for increased financing and commitment.

A major barrier to effectively implementing disaster risk reduction is the lack of understanding of its economic value. There is a pressing need for more nuanced, context-specific economic models that can demonstrate the tangible benefits of disaster risk reduction investments.

While the oft-cited “USD1 invested in disaster risk reduction, saves USD7 in recovery” is compelling, it oversimplifies a complex reality. The cost-benefit ratio usually spans between USD4 and USD15 or more depending on context and the specific risk reduction measures undertaken. Knowing and communicating the ratio more precisely, therefore, is crucial when advocating with decision-makers. Yet, conducting cost-benefit analysis in the context of implementing risk reduction interventions is still the exception rather than the norm. There is also additional outstanding homework when it comes to pricing and accounting for risk in all financial transactions—from asset values to credit risk ratings to financial reporting protocols and international accounting standards etc. The existing rules of finance and capital in macro- and microeconomics still allow the exclusion of the costs related to risk, probably again due to the prevailing political economy. It also indicates a continued dearth in economic and financial expertise in the implementation of the Sendai Framework which is to be addressed.

Whilst we have made good inroads with assessing the direct and indirect loss and damage of disasters, there is still a long way to go when it comes to reporting avoided losses. Good practices are rarely captured systematically if at all. Recording and communicating them through a standard methodology would resonate with both, policymakers and local communities, and provide a powerful rationale for more risk-informed investments. Tools like the above mentioned “impact calculator” or standardized economic modelling frameworks have several benefits in that they (i) help to quantify avoided losses and the co-benefits of disaster risk reduction investments, (ii) make a good investment case for disaster risk reduction that is context-specific and actionable, and (iii) unlock greater financing and commitment at all levels. The computations of Annual Average Losses (AAL) and Probable Maximum Losses (PML) are useful for long-term risk planning. Indirect losses estimates remain a challenge.



Message 7: Unlock national and local risk financing

We advocate for scaling up and diversifying financing for disaster risk reduction by building national and local financial systems, actively engaging the private sector, and leveraging innovative domestic mechanisms to mobilize resources for resilience beyond international aid.

The need for financing solutions needs to go beyond international aid. National systems must be equipped to finance disaster risk reduction both as a standalone activity and as an integrated part of sustainable development planning. Debt, often seen negatively, can be reframed as an investment in resilience if structured appropriately. The private sector, especially small and medium enterprises, should be engaged as key partners in implementing national disaster risk reduction strategies. Governments can incentivize private sector investments in resilient infrastructure and other risk reduction measures by offering tax credits or deductions. There have also been promising experiences with dedicated tax funds or levies dedicated to financing disaster recovery efforts such as in the Philippines. Innovative financing mechanisms—such as municipal bonds, diaspora investments, insurance models, and co-investment models—offer promising avenues for sustainable funding. These approaches must be tailored to local contexts and supported by tools that enable communities to access and manage their own financing effectively. Unlocking local financing is essential to building long-term resilience and reducing dependency on external support.

Message 8: Placing greater attention to emerging risks

We call on GP2025 to ensure that disaster risk reduction frameworks and strategies proactively address the evolving risk landscape by understanding the role of human agency in influencing emerging hazards, and by integrating climate change impacts and the complexities of fragility and conflict contexts with flexible, multi-hazard, multi-sectoral approaches.

The risk landscape is evolving as a result of human activity. These new risks can emerge from slow onset hazards (creeping hazards), natural-technological hazards, or tipping points, or be associated with environmental decline and climate change. There are emerging risks related to new chemical hazards, plastics, extreme heat, massive deforestation, ecosystem collapse, biorisks/zoonoses, and other new infectious diseases with new and previously unknown and compounding effects. In addition, climate change has transformed and continues to shape hazard and vulnerability characteristics and with inequalities propagating. Their collision impacts are felt most keenly and devastatingly by an increasing proportion of populations that are most at risk but will soon result in challenges for those who were not traditionally thought to be at risk. They all require new approaches and new thinking which needs to be brought under the umbrella of the Sendai Framework.

Conflict and fragility may not be included among the hazards addressed by the Sendai Framework, but they are an integral part of the lived reality for some of the most vulnerable local communities and displaced populations in greatest need of disaster risk reduction investment and action. Countries classified as highly fragile are particularly vulnerable to disasters, and risk reduction measures can help bridge the gap between humanitarian, development, and peace efforts to reach vulnerable communities and leave no one behind. The future of disaster risk reduction must embrace these intricacies and foster multi-hazard, multi-sectoral, and multi-level strategies without being overly



complex or complicated. This includes a rethinking of the intricate relationship between sustainable development and risk management frameworks so that they are more synergistic and flexible enough to embrace new and dynamic operating environments.

Contributors

This paper reflects the views of the participants who attended the Geneva dialogue event “Alternative Futures for Disaster Risk Reduction – 2030 and beyond”, which took place on 6th May 2025 at the International Environment House. They include participants from the following institutions: *Alliance Biodiversity CIAT & CGIAR, Board of Higher Education of Canton Vaud, Connecting Business Initiative (CBI), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), NDR Consulting GmbH, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva, Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) Secretariat, Skat Consulting Ltd., United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*.

ⁱ Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation and its Plan of Action (1994).

ⁱⁱ Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

