

# HOW DISASTERS DISRUPT DEVELOPMENT

## Recommendations for the post-2015 development framework

### Disasters derail development

According to the United Nations, over the past twenty years disasters from natural hazards have affected 4.4 billion people, claimed 1.3 million lives and caused \$2 trillion in economic losses. For the first time, disaster losses globally have topped \$100bn for three consecutive years (2010–2012), far outstripping humanitarian aid.<sup>1</sup> According to Ban Ki Moon, 'Economic losses from disasters are out of control.'<sup>2</sup>

Disasters have a devastating impact on development. Families lose homes, livelihoods and loved ones, communities lose businesses, jobs and services, children and particularly girls miss school and are at risk of early marriage – the list of impacts goes on.

Disasters can cancel progress on poverty reduction.<sup>3</sup> This was certainly the experience in the Philippines, struck in 2009 by tropical storm Ondoy and typhoon Pepeng. Rizal, one of the provinces hit hardest, saw the poverty incidence almost double, from 5.5 per cent in 2006 to 9.5 per cent in 2009. Six years later, recovery was still far off, with 7.6 per cent of families still below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> Typhoon Haiyan, which hit one of the poorest areas of the Philippines, is likely to have a similar impact.

The drive for economic growth can expose countries to more risk<sup>5</sup> – cities can be engines of growth, but unplanned urbanisation exposes many people to risk. Flood destruction in parts of Asia and Central America has been significantly exacerbated by major development – new hotels, roads, and dams – in fragile ecological systems. In this way, disasters can reveal the boundaries and limits to development.

The development challenge posed by disaster risks is starting to be recognised, with increasing reference to disasters across policy arenas, such as the [Busan partnership on aid effectiveness](#), the [Rio20](#) outcome document, the [G20](#) agenda in 2012, an [IPCC Special Report](#), the latest [World Bank report on Managing Risk for Development](#) and the [recent UNFCCC decision](#) to establish an international mechanism on loss and damage.

### Greater impact of disasters on the poor and marginalised

Whilst all countries suffer disasters, they have the greatest impact on poor countries. For example, 86 per cent of deaths from flooding occur in low or low-middle income countries, compared with ten per cent in upper middle and four per cent in high income countries.<sup>6</sup> And whilst absolute financial losses are higher in developed countries, they take a deeper toll in developing countries – the East Japan earthquake in 2011 was one of the most expensive disasters in history, costing around \$200bn, equivalent to three per cent of Japan's GDP; the 2010 earthquake in Haiti is estimated to have cost \$14bn, equivalent to 160 per cent of Haiti's GDP.

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*We must stop calling events like these [Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda] as natural disasters. Disasters are never natural. They are the intersection of factors other than physical. They are the accumulation of the constant breach of economic, social and environmental thresholds.*

Yeb Sano, Philippines' UNFCCC negotiator, 2013

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The concept of 'leaving no one behind' is a powerful one, and requires a focus on equality and specific investments for marginalised people. Disaster risk is not shared equally between rich and poor. **People are vulnerable because they are politically, socially or economically excluded, with little access to resources, influence, information or decision making.**

Poverty and inequality often push people to live on the margins, in places that are risky, such as alongside rivers, floodplains, marginal land and hillsides. This perpetuates a vicious cycle of disaster, debt and destitution.

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*We've only harvested four sacks of millet this year, compared with the 20 we can get in a normal year. But it's a long time since we had a normal year. Last year, the floods destroyed much of the harvest. We go from one catastrophe to another, either because of too much water or too little.*

Ramata Zore, Burkina Faso, 2012

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Women often face higher risks personally and also have to shoulder the burden of managing them on behalf of their families – eating last and least in times of food crisis, caring for injured and sick members of the family. Women do not always get the same access to early warning information as men, due to their caring role and lower levels of literacy. Other vulnerable people include the young, old, people with disabilities, and those marginalised by ethnicity or caste.

Their systematic marginalisation means they are often less able to participate in and influence disaster prevention or management of key processes, yet they often have major capacities and skills to support risk reduction. Indeed, where supported, women's groups have demonstrated their effectiveness in reducing household and community risks and vulnerability.

## **Disasters are an increasing problem**

The incidence of disasters from natural hazards is increasing in every region of the world; reported weather-related disasters have tripled in 30 years.<sup>7</sup> The numbers of people exposed to floods and tropical cyclones have doubled and tripled respectively since 1970.<sup>8</sup> In the Sahel region of West Africa, a food crisis used to strike once a decade; but there have been three major food crises in the last 10 years, so people have had little time to get back on their feet, let alone develop buffers, before the next one hits.

One very important driver of disaster risk is climate change. The latest [IPCC report](#) is clear that the climate is changing, with serious consequences. Another driver of disaster risk is population growth and migration. In particular, cities concentrate risk through high population density, inadequate urban planning, and poor infrastructure. Problems are particularly acute in slums, where around one billion people currently live, and this number is projected to double by 2030.

International focus is often on major disasters that hit the headlines. But the reality is that – for poor

people – it is the relentless attrition of frequent small-scale disasters (called 'extensive'), such as localised floods, landslides and storms – that damage livelihoods, houses and assets and drives people further into poverty. They are responsible for a very significant proportion of total disaster impact: 54 per cent of houses damaged, 80 per cent of people affected, 83 per cent of people injured, yet people receive little or no government support or external assistance.<sup>9</sup>

## **DRR is an investment in sustainability**

Disasters are not inevitable. The way that governments manage and regulate both public and private investment will determine the degree of hazard, exposure to those hazards and vulnerability of people and property. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures are proven to be both highly effective and highly cost effective.

Cyclone Phailin, which hit the Indian state of Odisha in October 2013, provided a clear example of successful DRR: 12 million people were affected, nearly one million people were evacuated, and there were 27 casualties. The small number of deaths is testament to good government planning and response. Other countries that prioritise disaster management have had similar impressive results. Casualties in Bangladesh have been greatly reduced by an effective early warning system, a nationwide programme to build shelters – from only 12 shelters in 1970 to over 2,500 in 2007 – coastal protection and raising awareness at community level.<sup>10</sup>

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*In 1992, all our houses were completely destroyed.... This time the houses weren't all destroyed, even though the level of floodwater was higher, because we were prepared. This year, we were more careful... we kept all our assets and carried them to the emergency shelter, and we made embankments around the houses to stop the water from coming.*

Syeda, South Punjab, Pakistan, 2010

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And it is no secret that reducing the risk of disasters is cost-effective too. While it is too simplistic to assume an overarching cost benefit ratio (often quoted are 1:4 or 1:7), many studies have shown that appropriate prevention pays. For example, improving weather forecasting and public communication systems to provide earlier

warning of disasters in developing countries could yield benefits 4 to 36 times greater than the cost.<sup>11</sup> Studies of flood defences in India and Samoa found that **people-centred interventions** – such as raised houses and fodder storage, early warning, flood shelters, community seed banks, self help groups etc. – were better value for money than costly embankments.<sup>12</sup>

## DRR benefits are not being reaped

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) – a global commitment made in 2005 to reduce disaster losses – has encouraged a more systematic and pre-emptive approach to disaster risk management. But addressing disaster risk separately from core frameworks like the MDGs has perpetuated its isolation and limited its impact.

In most governments, disaster risk management is undertaken by a standalone agency. It is therefore divorced from mainstream concerns, such as stimulating economic growth, boosting employment and managing food prices, or in the case of local governments; supplying water, power, transport and waste management. Yet these activities are not risk neutral; done well, they can reduce disaster risk, but undertaken with little consideration of risk, they can exacerbate vulnerabilities.

The failure of governments to adequately prioritise and invest in good risk management of disasters – whether from natural or man-made hazards – across all areas of work is the biggest driver of disaster risk.

Disaster risk reduction is often poorly funded. Whilst some governments – including Indonesia, Mexico, Guatemala, and Bangladesh – have made considerable investments, many countries struggle to find sufficient resources and capacity. This is partly because the deep extent of losses is not understood, as disaster losses are not properly accounted for, as well as lack of political visibility for DRR measures.

In terms of international aid, DRR spending is extremely low; only 0.4 per cent of total aid. Only three donors have reached or surpassed the commitment made in 2009 to spend one per cent of development aid on DRR: Australia, Canada, and Japan.<sup>13</sup> A recent report finds that much DRR funding is focused on a few countries, with very little funding for drought, it is often available only post-disaster, and with greater volumes of financing available where the *economy* is at risk; whereas volumes are often low when predominantly *populations* are at risk.<sup>14</sup>

## DRR in the post-2015 development framework debate so far

The [Millennium Declaration](#) included a somewhat indistinct commitment to ‘resolve to intensify cooperation to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters’ but this did not translate into a disasters goal, target or indicator in the MDGs, thereby divorcing disaster management from broader development goals.

Disaster risk reduction was a strong feature in the [Rio20 outcome](#) document. This called for “disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and, as appropriate, to be integrated into policies, plans, programmes and budgets at all levels and considered within relevant future frameworks.” The document also called for stronger action on DRR: in urban contexts; in relation to food security; for small-island developing states particularly affected by climate change; on early warning systems and comprehensive hazard and risk assessments; and in terms of increased funding and stronger integration into public and private investment and the aid sector.

Almost all key inputs to the development of the post-2015 framework have recognised the role of disasters on poverty, pointing to disaster risk reduction as an important objective. The [High Level Panel report](#) on the post-2015 development agenda includes a target to ‘Build resilience and reduce disaster mortality by x per cent’ under Goal 1 to End Poverty; the UN [Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#) report to the UN Secretary General includes DRR in urban and rural goals; and the [Secretary General’s report](#) on the MDGs identifies disasters in the 15 ‘transformative and mutually reinforcing actions’ required, in relation to poverty, climate change and environment.

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*We know that every time a crisis hits, 80 per cent of the most affected come from the 20 per cent poorest, most vulnerable people; these people with the least access to the corridors of power.*

Kristalina Georgieva,  
EU Humanitarian Commissioner, 2012

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## Recommendations for DRR in the post-2015 development framework

Ending absolute poverty should be the priority for the post-2015 development goals and this requires a strong commitment to reduce disaster risks, otherwise development efforts for the poorest will be unsustainable. Unaddressed, the impacts of climate change and disasters will place local and national progress against development goals at risk.

**Member States negotiating the post-2015 development goals must ensure that the framework:**

- **Clearly addresses the role that risk and disasters play in undermining development, particularly for the vulnerable;**
- **Includes a specific target to reduce disaster risk;**
- **Incorporates risk management indicators across relevant goals – for example, ensuring food security for all during and after disasters; ensuring access for all to resilient healthcare infrastructure.**

A DRR target in the post-2015 goals should:

- **be based primarily on outcome** (such as measurable reductions in risk or losses), rather than only inputs (such as existence of legislation). This is because input targets do not guarantee a reduction in risks; outcome targets have more political traction; and detail on inputs fits better in the post-HFA.
- **measure the impact of extensive disasters** as well as intensive ones, as recurrent small-scale disasters are a key driver of poverty.
- require states to report data disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, age and other relevant criteria **to ensure that risk is reduced for the most vulnerable**. At a minimum, targets must be met for the lowest income quintile.
- require states to report data **disaggregated to sub-national and community levels**, to ensure that discrepancies are not hidden by national averages.
- Stimulate **greater action to reduce underlying vulnerabilities** (anticipatory or prospective risk management, such as active ecosystems and land use management) as well as corrective risk management and disaster management (early warning systems, contingency plans etc.).

## The need for a coherent response across policy arenas

Sustainable and significant reduction of disaster risk can only be achieved by working across policy frameworks. The development of the post-2015 development framework, the successor to the Hyogo Framework for Action, and a new international climate change agreement, all in 2015, offer an unparalleled opportunity to go beyond the incremental progress to date, to significantly reduce risk for vulnerable and marginalised people all over the world.

As 2015 draws nearer and we enter the final phase of consultations and negotiations, it is more important than ever that disaster reduction is included in key frameworks in a meaningful and mutually-reinforcing way, in order to deliver coherent DRR funding and action.

At the **UNFCCC**, governments should agree strong commitments to reduce carbon emissions, scale up adaptation financing and action to ensure future development is climate-proof, and address the loss and damage incurred by affected states.

The **post-HFA** DRR framework should be strengthened and made fit for purpose in a world of increasing risk, underpinned by principles of equity, accountability, community-based resilience and integration, and collaboration across sectors.

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