From Sendai to Paris: risk-informed development

Lifting vulnerable communities out of poverty will require a shift in thinking away from managing climate-related and other disasters and towards addressing the underlying risks of development

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By **Jo Scheuer**, Chief of Profession, Director, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

After a year that has been replete with global agreements and processes that focus on sustaining development gains, we have an opportunity to truly transform how we address disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate risk management. Doing so, however, requires ambition, a willingness to tighten the bonds between processes, and a concerted effort to scale up best practices, including disaster risk governance and the concept of 'build back better'.

Over the last 20 years, disasters affected 4.4 billion people, killed 1.3 billion and resulted in economic losses of $2 trillion.[1] Between 1980 and 2012, extreme weather accounted for 87 per cent of all disaster events.[2] As climate change worsens, the incidence of climate-related disasters is expected to rise even higher. Poor countries and poor communities – the most vulnerable to disasters – stand to be hit hardest, and decades of development gains are in danger of being erased. The big events we hear about in the news are often only the tip of the iceberg. The frequently recurring small-scale disasters that affect communities and households year in, year out constitute an even higher percentage of disaster losses.

We live in a time of environmental degradation and unprecedented urbanisation, with development plans lacking an adequate understanding of risks. In the case of Africa, for example, its population is expected to reach 2.4 billion by 2050,[3] with half of the population living in cities by 2030. Urban areas are often centres for growth and economic assets, but that also makes them epicentres of risks, even more so with climate change. Rising sea levels mean that highly populated coastal cities are prone to cyclones, coastal floods, coastal erosion and higher storm surges.

◀ **The eruption of Mount Sinabung on Sumatra, Indonesia, as viewed from the village of Pintu Besi in June 2015. More than 10,000 people, from 12 villages, living around the slopes were evacuated to refugee camps**

Integrated approach

Advances have been made, but efforts to reduce disaster risk do not match the magnitude of the challenge. The institutional and funding arrangements in place are not conducive to comprehensive and integrated approaches across sectors and levels. Work on DRR, climate change, energy and environment is often pursued in silos, despite the fact that these issues are intimately connected. Donor funding for DRR tends to be fragmented and is sometimes not well aligned with national priorities. International financing for DRR is overly focused on middle-income countries, leaving least-developed countries without the support they so desperately need. DRR is also predominantly funded from emergency budgets, which inhibits longer-term efforts to build resilience.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will require innovative approaches to

managing and reducing the risks associated with climate change and natural hazards.

We must shift our thinking away from managing 'disaster events' to addressing the 'underlying risks' that are inherent in the development process. With this shift in mind, UNDP has been championing the concepts of 'risk-informed development' in its DRR and adaptation programmes, and 'build back better' in its recovery operations.

Risk-informed development requires a functioning risk governance system. 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 for the past two decades.

Effective risk governance is difficult to achieve and needs extensive collaboration and ownership from many partners, including multiple agencies within governments. It requires long-term and in-depth engagement to connect national/local plans and legislation to real-world impacts. It also requires capacity development beyond the traditional training; we need to strengthen local institutions so that they are eventually able to coordinate, solve problems, involve communities, share information and train others.[4]

Scientific and multi-disciplinary analysis combined with local knowledge and risk-informed programming can provide practical solutions for today's challenges. Enhancing the understanding and monitoring of disaster/climate risks – as well as learning from past disasters – is also integral to building societal resilience.

UNDP's approach

UNDP has contributed to the social and economic recovery of disaster-affected communities and helped develop capacities through a two-pronged approach. First, we support national governments to assess recovery needs and plan and implement the recovery process. Second, we support communities to restore their livelihoods and carry out local risk reduction and adaptation measures. Both approaches embody the 'build back better' principle, which ensures recovery is not just an opportunity to restore what was lost during a disaster, but an opportunity to build resilience and for government and society to transform and strengthen infrastructure and capacities.

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▲ A child walks to school in Bhaktapur, Nepal a month after an earthquake ravaged the country on 25 April 2015. The 'build back better' principle is key to creating resilience and saving lives in the future

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, endorsed in March 2015, calls for a more holistic and systematic approach to DRR – one that emphasises the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships. UNDP's newly developed DRR flagship programme '5-10-50' is dedicated to taking up this challenge.

5-10-50 supports the implementation of the Sendai Framework by enabling 50 countries to move towards risk-informed development over a period of 10 years through five mutually reinforcing interventions (risk assessment and communication, inclusive risk governance, urban and local-level risk management, preparedness and early warning–early action, and resilient recovery). 5-10-50 is a vehicle for moving from piecemeal international support towards harmonised and coherent programming at the country level. This will require mobilising the right partners to bring about catalytic change on the ground by leveraging every partner's comparative advantage.

During this time of unprecedented challenges, we also have an unprecedented opportunity to align the agendas of the Sendai Framework, the post-2015 development agenda and an international climate change agreement. Global partners must listen to the growing number of voices that are calling for development to be addressed through a risk-informed lens. If they heed this call, we will be in possession of a powerful tool that can help people, communities and whole countries rise from poverty. ●

1 UNISDR, 2013, Global Assessment Report, www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/gar/2013/en/home/index.html

2 World Bank, 2013, Building Resilience: Integrating Climate and Disaster Risk into Development, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/11/18513435/building-resilience-integrating-climate-disaster-risk-development-world-bank-group-experience-vol-1-2-main-report

3 United Nations, 2015, World Population Prospects: Key findings & advance tables (2015 revision), http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/publications/files/key_findings_wpp_2015.pdf

4 For more information, see UNDP's report, Strengthening Disaster Risk Governance: UNDP Support during the HFA Implementation Period 2005–2015, www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/strengthening-disaster-risk-governance.html