

Rapporteurs' notes

Suva Expert Dialogue – Risk reduction roundtable discussion

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the Suva Expert Dialogue, 18 submissions from parties, groups of parties and organisations were summarised in a [synthesis paper](#) that were introduced by the session facilitator. Within risk reduction, approaches described in the submissions entailed structural measures, as well as non-structural measures such as policies and legislations, for example related to land-use planning, early warning systems, building social awareness and community-based approaches to reduce risks associated with floods, droughts and those posed to coastal zones.

DISCUSSION

Participants described a variety of existing or emerging approaches to support the reduction of climate and weather-related risks listed below. In addition, participants highlighted a number of cross cutting needs including, but not limited to financing for risk reduction, data and technology, and development of human capacity from local to national scales and different types of actors, including local and national authorities and local communities.

Existing or emerging approaches to support risk reduction:

1. Convergence of conversations and activities on risk reduction across different policy communities

Barriers, gaps and challenges related to the approach: In particular, the example was given of how national level implementation of the 2015 global frameworks (Sendai, Paris, SDGs) is typically spearheaded and delivered by different personnel in completely different national agencies. Participants also highlighted that the Sendai Framework identifies the UNFCCC as the body to address climate impacts, which offers an opportunity to address slow onset events that were previously ignored, extreme weather and slow onset events that go beyond adaptive and coping capacity, and a focus on the polluter-pays principle.

What are the organisations that can help support implementation and scaling up of approaches to meet needs in developing countries? UNISDR is doing a lot of work currently on frameworks and indicators for streamlining national level planning and implementation approaches across the Sendai targets and the SDGs. The 'area that needs more work' is the integration of the Paris Agreement with this. IFRC also offered that they were doing a lot of practical convening of personnel, particularly in the Philippines, to integrate the differing perspectives of disaster risk reduction, sustainable development, and climate change adaptation professionals, and get them working in a more complementary and mutually supportive way.

2. Community-based approaches to risk reduction

How should the approach be designed and implemented? It was widely recognized in the room – via multiple interventions – that communities have an instrumental role in defining and assessing risks and they are vital partners in generating solutions to ensure that these are adequate to local and cultural contexts. Examples included the Philippines, which were mentioned as a case where this is already achieved in practice.

Barriers, gaps and challenges related to the approach: Participants underscored that community members are not necessarily fully aware of the scale of the future risk, nor do they necessarily have the full complement of skills and capacities to innovate adequate solutions alone without external sources of information and ideas. There is a role for awareness raising and it is important to translate information to communities from the bottom-up, rather than trying to impose technology solutions from the top down.

Solutions for overcoming these barriers, gaps and challenges: Participants stressed the importance of having demonstration projects that showed communities how risk reduction approaches are feasible and can, with careful design, deliver ongoing development benefits and enhanced quality of life as well as reducing risks associated with climate-related extremes. Two key points were: (a) power of persuading-by-showing and (b) selling communities on ‘what they can gain from risk reduction measures in their everyday lives’.

What are the organisations that can help support implementation and scaling up of approaches to meet needs in developing countries? Here the Partners for Resilience programme, implemented by the Netherlands Red Cross and partners was mentioned as working from national all the way down to local levels in the Philippines and in other Asian and African countries.

3. Vertical integration of risk reduction policy design and its implementation from national to local authority level

Barriers, gaps and challenges related to the approach: The need for support to local authorities in order to enable them to take action on risk reduction was underscored throughout the discussion. A participant highlighted that due to the “sheer pressure” and a lack of adequate expert personnel at local government level, local authorities are often not able to implement the highest level of risk assessment and management.

Solutions for overcoming these barriers, gaps and challenges: The Global Covenant of Mayors on Climate and Energy is developing a solution to support risk reduction, which can also be used as a vehicle for scaling up successful approaches. This aims to be applicable by cities of all sizes and can be integrated into their plans for sustainable development. Data and technology-based initiatives such as the European Earth Observation System COPERNICUS, risk management services, resilience initiatives in cities and partnerships with mayors to work on methodologies for assessing risks and vulnerabilities and allowing local authorities to take adequate action were mentioned as solutions for addressing some of these needs.

4. Child-centered approaches to risk reduction

Design and implementation: This is an approach that was described as in the early stages of adoption in Bangladesh and with the rationale that children are particularly vulnerable to suffering losses from extreme and slow onset climate change phenomena which cannot be immediately classed as ‘economic losses’ and therefore tend to be overlooked, but which have profound impacts on their individual development, e.g. loss of schooling, and so can have collective societal impacts in the future.

Barriers, gaps and challenges related to the approach: None were explicitly discussed in this session, although the implicit suggestion was that this is a new and emergent area of theory and practice which will take some time to garner recognition and ‘bed down’ in practice.

What are the organisations that can help support implementation and scaling up of approaches to meet needs in developing countries? Relevant organisations include the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS), a Bangladeshi think tank, who works with other Bangladeshi institutions to trial this approach.

5. Forecast based early action

Design and implementation: A participant highlighted the opportunities that exist to prevent or reduce risks in the run-up to an extreme event that can be captured by forecasts. Forecasting hazards and potential impacts on the population can be a way to deal with risks where longer-term risk reduction has not yet been employed.

6. Probabilistic risk assessments

Design and implementation: Participants highlighted that out of the existing tools, approaches and strategies, countries need to choose what is appropriate to their national circumstances, taking into account their implementing capacities and wishes of actors. In the Philippines, an example includes the probabilistic risk assessment approach, which is multicriteria and applicable to all sectors and government levels.

Barriers, gaps and challenges related to the approach: High capacity requirements related to the approach are a significant challenge. For example, in the Philippine experience, there was a shortage in experts to undertake specialist tasks at the assessment level. The process also experienced data challenges in the form of an absence of real-time data regarding people and their social support systems as well as sectoral and other data that would support probabilistic risk assessments.

Solutions for overcoming these barriers, gaps and challenges: Participants highlighted that investment in capacity is needed to better apply the approach. This capacity has to be comprehensive – institutional, social and supporting a national process.

7. Holistic assessment of social, environmental and economic impacts of risk reduction measures

Participants highlighted the importance of this approach with regards to impacts on ecosystem services and their link with human wellbeing, so that risk reduction interventions do not inadvertently create new risks.

Design and implementation: A participant described the risks of interfering with, or severely damaging the provision of ecosystem services by taking ‘hard’ engineering approaches to risk reduction. In Cuba, for example, it was due to the assessment of these broader risks to ecosystem services, particularly in

coastal areas, that the Cuban government had steered away from hard approaches to nature-based ('green') ones such as planting mangroves.

8. Decision-support tools for prioritizing risk management investments

Barriers, gaps and challenges related to the approach: A participant highlighted the need to better support decision making and budget allocations to different components of risk management, as in some cases risk transfer mechanisms such as insurance were tending to 'crowd out' potential risk reduction activities in developing countries. There is not yet a diagnostic or decision support tool to help governments and other actors determine the optimal allocation of resources (people, money, training, etc) but this could be useful. To ensure that risk reduction activities also address the needs of the poorest and are not biased towards the higher level of assets owned by wealthier people, it was suggested that prioritisation of risk reduction should not only be based on economic considerations.

9. Multi-pronged financing approaches for different types of complementary disaster risk reduction activities

Design and implementation: An example for this approach was offered in relation to the Seychelles, where means for climate action and risk reduction in the context of sustainable development over the recent years were innovated by tapping into bilateral, multilateral, philanthropic and private sector sources and instruments for financing risk reduction, including debt swaps and debt relief or bonds guaranteed by the World Bank and GEF. Some of these mechanisms can support risk reduction and be re-directed to communities to address climate related action. Furthermore, mechanisms such as the Insurance Compensation Consortium, which is a public private mechanism in Spain to support pay-outs after catastrophic events, including those related to natural hazards such as strong winds or tornadoes were mentioned by participants. Finally, participants highlighted initiatives such as the R4 Rural Resilience initiative or the African Risk Capacity, which integrate risk reduction with other risk management components such as risk transfer

Barriers, gaps and challenges related to the approach: The significant challenges highlighted in relation to these approaches were the private sector's frequent lack of interest or aversion to exposing themselves too much to financial risk in the face of uncertainty about the magnitudes of future extreme events. A further concern was related to the challenge of indebtedness of many developing countries: if there is no answer to address loss and damage beyond adaptation under the UNFCCC, then this may be a disincentive for certain countries to step aside and look for other mechanisms and sources of financing for risk reduction that exist outside of the UNFCCC process, because they may add to the financial burden when a disaster strikes.

Solutions for overcoming these barriers, gaps and challenges: Participants cited the open letter published on Climate Home on 2 May by ministers and ambassadors of the Seychelles, Vanuatu, Dominica and Bangladesh calling for finance mechanisms integral to the UNFCCC to address loss and damage, and specifically, international funding based on the 'polluter pays' principle.