



Insights from the Frontlines of Disaster Risk:

Ten Key Recommendations by Experts from South Asia on the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction¹

The pre-zero and zero drafts of the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) have now been released and the process to forge this global agreement in March 2015 is fast gaining momentum. It is therefore increasingly important to ensure that the views of policy makers and practitioners from countries at great risk of suffering disaster losses are considered adequately.

This short document communicates key recommendations of experts working on DRR in Nepal, Pakistan and India on the issues that subsequent drafts of the Post-2015 Framework for DRR must contain. Insights were collected in the context of the pre-zero draft, just before the release of the zero draft and this note considers both to provide suggestions for points to be included in forthcoming drafts of the Framework.

The views of experts were garnered using interviews and at a workshop organised by All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), with support from the Climate and Development Knowledge Network, LEAD Pakistan (CDKN), IDS Nepal and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), in Kathmandu in October 2014. Discussants included senior government policy makers as well as prominent members of civil society who have shaped debates on DRR in South Asia (see acknowledgements). They provided the following 10 recommendations on key issues to be included in the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

1. **Greater role for communities in monitoring progress:** Experts highlighted the importance of communities in monitoring the progress made with risk reduction. Experts felt that the existing HFA monitor did not stipulate the importance of communities enough. While tools such as the Local HFA Self-Assessment Tool mandate the involvement of diverse stakeholders in the monitoring process, they stop short of chalking out a process through which the most vulnerable can be involved in monitoring progress being made. This can be

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addressed by mandating that community groups must be formally consulted and feed into progress reports prepared by countries through a structured dialogue process. The absence of vulnerable communities from the section on the 'role of stakeholders' in Zero Draft was also identified as a glaring gap, and one that needs to be bridged in subsequent drafts of the framework.

2. **National and sub-national peer reviews:** The Zero Draft highlights the importance of 'voluntary and self-initiated peer reviews.' The experts wholeheartedly supported this call for a more objective approach to reviewing progress than the current system of having an HFA monitor that suffers from many usual problems of self-reporting mechanisms such as a high degree of subjectivity. While experts acknowledged that peer reviews had worked well in Europe, they felt that certain regional sensitivities would need to be taken on board; for example, an India-Pakistan peer review was almost certainly an impossibility due to geopolitical dynamics but a Nepal-Bangladesh, India-Mauritius, Pakistan-Maldives review would work well. While the current Zero Draft merely mentions peer reviews among local governments, experts felt that a greater emphasis was needed on peer reviews between states/provinces/counties in order to ensure a higher degree of objectivity. Experts from India felt that this could work well in the country as many of its states have State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA), and a national system of SDMA leading reviews in other states would provide a clearer picture of subnational progress with the Post-2015 framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Interestingly, the idea of conducting city to city and subnational peer reviews between countries was also tabled, this would mean urban or provincial agencies could monitor progress in cities and provinces of other countries. Point 26 E in the Zero Draft could be amended to include this point better.
3. **Mandating climate compatible DRM:** The experts believed that the mitigation of greenhouse gases needs to be part of the discourse on disaster risk reduction. The Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (SREX) provided the evidence for the link between global warming, climate change and disasters and this evidence has gained traction in the region. However, in South Asia the experts believed that this push needs to be framed very carefully as the need for mandating climate compatible disaster risk management. More specifically, the experts believed that the Post-2015 Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction should highlight the need for disaster response and recovery activities to take place with a view towards minimising emissions. Some discussants highlighted that there is a some experience in the region on undertaking recovery in this way and that governmental and non-governmental organisations need to do a lot more to collate and share this experience. There were

numerous places in the Zero Draft where this issue could be accommodated including the 'Guiding Principles' (Section C) and Priority 4.

- 4. Highlighting institutional arrangements for integrating DRR and climate change adaptation (CCA):** While the Zero Draft acknowledges the need for integrating DRR and CCA in light of the 2015 Climate Agreement, it does not present a roadmap or mandate tangible steps to achieve this. Suggestions on issues that the subsequent drafts should touch upon included, first, the need to recommend that national climate change authorities/agencies acknowledge the complementarities, synergies and linkages between DRM, adaptation and mitigation in their charters or high level policy statements. This would prevent the current tightly defined silos in which national institutions working on the two issues operate. At the same time, it was also felt that a range of international institutions such as the UNFCCC and UNEP that engage with climate change adaptation and mitigation need to do the same. Second, another suggestion viz a viz institutional arrangements was around the need for the Post-2015 Framework to stipulate a mechanism to facilitate the sharing of best practices on the integration of DRR and CCA. Experts discussed the manner in which countries have a lot to learn from each other in this regard but that this knowledge was not shared. For example, the expert from Pakistan highlighted the manner in which the National Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan has a 'roadmap' to link the country's approaches to DRR and CCA, and the representative from India discussed the way in which the National Disaster Management Authority of India has a unit focused on the same issue. At the same time, the experts felt that there were inadequate formal mechanisms to share this know-how between countries in a structured way. Discussants felt that 'regional institutions' such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could be tasked more clearly with running such a mechanism and this could be highlighted in section E (Role of Stakeholders) of the Zero Draft.

- 5. More attention to the value of environmental buffer zones for risk reduction in urban areas:** Experts agreed that land use is one of the biggest drivers of risk in South Asia. This is because South Asia suffers from high population density of 350.6 people per KM² and is experiencing a very high rate of population growth rate of 1.44% ³annually. Moreover, the region is rapidly urbanising with over a third of its population living in cities and by 2015 South Asia will account for 5 of the world's 12 biggest urban agglomerations.⁴ Along with

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Asia

³ <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-asia/population-growth-annual-percent-wb-data.html>

⁴ http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Urban_Growth_and_Governance_in_South_Asia.pdf

pressures of population, the cities in region also suffer from weak planning and the improper enforcement of land use regulation and construction by-laws. This has led to rampant development and settlement of 'environmental buffer zones' in towns and cities- these are areas that are critical to the maintenance and regulation of ecosystems (e.g. flood plains). In India a staggering 93 Million people are estimated to be living in informal settlements, almost a fifth of Nepal's 23 Million⁵ people live in slums, and the situation is equally poor across the other countries in the region. Many of these settlements are located on environmentally sensitive zones that are either low lying/flood prone, situated on unstable soil or situated on/near polluted sites. Almost all have deficient services that leads to a high accumulated vulnerability. While the Zero Draft touches upon the importance of land use planning, experts felt that subsequent drafts of the framework should provide greater visibility to the issue of urbanisation, land-use, environmental buffer zones and the risks of those living in informal settlements. This could be effectively in the 'Guiding Principles'.

6. Need for fuller engagement with vulnerability and inclusion: The current draft of the framework clearly outlines a number of vulnerable groups such as children, women, persons with disabilities, the elderly and indigenous persons. The experts however felt that while these groups are important, in South Asia it was also important to recognise groups marginalised due to religion and cultural reasons such as those belonging to lower caste communities in India, Nepal and other countries in the region. The marginalisation of these groups in the region is acute and the absence of any language in the current draft that highlights the need for their inclusion needs urgent correction in subsequent drafts. Experts also felt that due to centuries of structural deprivation, these groups had a high amount of accumulated vulnerability and therefore the importance for language that highlights their needs is all the more acute. Some also called for a clearer articulation of the need to put individuals from economically and socially marginalised groups in leadership positions viz a viz DRR. As part of this, the Post-2015 Framework must provide an added thrust on gathering disaggregated vulnerability and risk data for particularly vulnerable social groups and also push for the adoption of focussed indicators of social vulnerability in any monitoring framework. Guiding Principle 6 could be amended to include this point better.

7. Thrust on knowledge and data management: The experts agreed with the views of the ODI and CDKN's emphasis on the need to 'manage' scientific knowledge as opposed to a singular focus on generating new knowledge. While many are calling for a 'data revolution' to transform the manner in which risk management takes place, a concurrent thrust on

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/apr/10/slum-cities-south-asia-planning>

knowledge and data management is needed to ensure that this data is gainfully employed in plans and processes to reduce risk. Experts recognised that 'learning' was a key component of building resilience as it was important to glean lessons from recovery processes so as to reduce vulnerability to the same hazards should they occur again. This learning, according to them, was only possible through establishing the right protocols for knowledge management along with knowledge generation. Discussions also highlighted the need to 'demystify' and 'democratise' risk management knowledge to firstly, ensure that policy makers were able to employ it in effective decision making. Secondly, experts felt that as South Asian countries suffer from major governance deficits and inadequate risk management infrastructure, it is the vulnerable communities that are on the frontlines of the battle against disaster risk as they are usually the 'first responders'. Therefore, it is critical that effective knowledge management take place in order to communicate and translate the latest knowledge and data on risk management to vulnerable communities.

- 8. Clarity on leadership and emphasis on technical expertise:** For the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to learn from the shortfalls of its predecessor, it must articulate the types of leadership needed at different levels to deliver effective DRR. The experts suggested that the framework must set out that leadership at the national level needs to be of a strategic nature so that planning takes place comprehensively for the entire country and is aligned with regional and international commitments. Leaders at the sub-national and district/local level need to be clearly charged with implementing actions. Also, strong lines of communication need to be developed between these levels of governance to ensure that there is no disconnect between strategic direction and implementation. Along with political leadership, subsequent drafts of the Framework must also underline the critical importance of those in leadership positions having some understanding of the technical aspects of DRM. This was because experts felt that currently many of those holding key posts within organisations/departments/ministries charged with DRR and DRM in the region do not have an adequate grasp of the field. This problem is further exacerbated by the frequent transfers of these officials at the whim of politicians that makes it even more difficult to retain institutional knowledge. While experts acknowledged that the Post-2015 Framework cannot be too prescriptive, they underlined that a strong directive for providing technical immersions for those in leadership positions would support more effective DRR in the region. These points could be included in Section E (Stakeholders) as well as Priority for Action 1 (Understanding Disaster Risk).
- 9. Mainstreaming DRR in national budgets:** While the Zero Draft clearly puts National Governments in the driver's seat viz a viz action on DRR, it fails to directly urge governments to make provisions for DRR in domestic national budgets and instead only mentions the

importance of leveraging finance from 'all sources'. Experts discussed how countries such as India and Bangladesh have recorded moderate to high economic growth rates (5% and 6% respectively 2009-2013⁶) and are starting to devote increasing amounts of resources to large development programs. For example, India's nodal social protection policy- the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has a total outlay of USD 18 Billion and significant gains could be made if there was legislative support for a portion of these funds to be spent on risk reduction activities. The current language in the Zero draft on the need to "Review existing financial and fiscal instruments in order to support risk-sensitive public and private investments" clearly does not go far enough. Consequently, the lack of this thrust on mainstreaming DRR in the national budgetary instruments could lead to National Governments solely looking to international institutions for funding DRR.

10. **Role of Local Financial Institutions:** Experts felt that South Asia was home to a plethora of innovative Local Financial Institutions (LFIs). While Bangladesh's experience with Micro Finance Institutions (through institutions such as the Grameen Bank) was very well recorded; India, Pakistan and Nepal all have vibrant institutions providing finance for various types of investments at the local level. In India the government has instituted a number of provisions to enable small scale lending from public sector banks to 'self-help groups' for livelihoods purposes. For example, the Self Employed Women's Association of India is a network of a large number of such groups that includes over a million women across the country. Experts felt that these institutions present a vast reservoir of untapped finance for investments in risk reduction at the local level and the Post-2015 Framework for DRR needs to urge government to provide the right incentives to such institutions to ensure flows of finance for building resilience. Discussants argued that Local Financial Institutions should be included in Section E (Role of Stakeholders) in the subsequent drafts of the Framework.

Further Reading

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⁶ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>

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