

Managing Risk and Building Resilience in Humanitarian Action in India



Photo: AIDMI.

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A Toolbox for Assessing Loss and Damage

Loss and damage refers to impacts of climatic stressors that cannot be or have not been avoided through mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk management.¹ Between 1970 and 2012, a total of 8832 disasters, including droughts, floods, windstorms, tropical cyclones, storm surges, extreme temperatures, landslides and wildfires, have resulted in 1.94 million deaths and USD 2.4 trillion of economic losses globally.² Besides the havoc caused by sudden-onset events, there are enormous losses and damages from slow-onset processes, such as sea level rise and desertification.

While policy makers and governments formulate strategies and decisions on the basis of cost-benefit analyses for their country, not all impacts can be quantified or expressed in monetary terms. Existing disaster loss assessments do not adequately address non-economic losses and damages. As the IPCC³ puts it: "Disaster loss estimates are lower bound estimates because many impacts, such as loss of human lives, cultural heritage, and ecosystem services, are difficult to value and monetize, and thus they are poorly reflected in estimates of losses." Despite the emergence of the topic in the climate negotiations in recent years, comprehensive methods for assessing loss and damage are lacking.

The Toolbox

In 2014, UNU-EHS teamed up with LEAD-Pakistan, AIDMI (India) and IDS-Nepal to develop and test a

toolbox for assessing loss and damage at local level. The project will last two years and can be divided into three stages: 1) the development of the toolbox in Pakistan, India and Nepal; and 2) the testing of the toolbox in Pakistan, India and Nepal; and 3) fine-tuning, publication and dissemination of the final handbook, with lessons learnt from the test case studies.

Besides providing a firm theoretical basis, the handbook will include guidance on site selection, training of field staff, budget considerations, analysis of results, etc. Moreover, it will provide hands-on research tools, such as questionnaires and topic lists for focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

The Training

From 27 to 31 October 2014, a five-day training course was given by Kees Van Der Geest (Associate Academic Officer at UNU-EHS), who drafted the handbook. The training took place at LEAD-Pakistan, and was attended by the principal investigators⁴ for the three case studies under this project. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Familiarize the investigators with the conceptual framework and the methods;
- Introduce and justify the study sites where the toolbox will be tested, and the climatic stressors and impacts the studies will focus on;
- Refine the methodology, based on feedback and discussions.

On the first day of the workshop, a lively discussion took place on the objectives of assessing loss and damage and the question whether or not the focus should be on informing compensation for climate change impacts or on supporting policy and action to minimize future losses and damages. The former requires an emphasis on measuring and putting dollar marks on losses and damages and the latter requires a deeper understanding of adaptation limits and constraints. Considering that compensation is quite controversial and the science of attribution is still in its infancy⁵, it was decided that the main policy objective of the toolbox should be to support action to minimize future loss and damage in vulnerable communities.

The conceptual framework of the handbook distinguishes two types of losses and damages: 1) impacts that could not be avoided by preventive or adaptive measures; and 2) adverse effects and costs associated with the measures taken to prevent, cope and adapt. A key element of the toolbox is that it differentiates adaptation, disaster risk reduction and coping strategies, terms that are often used interchangeably but that have different meanings. Coping strategies are short-term measures to deal with impacts of specific events. By contrast, adaptation measures are more permanent and adopted in response to longer term climatic changes and their impacts. Preventive measures or ex-ante risk reduction are measures taken to

- Accurate Loss and Damage estimates are essential to formulate a relief and mitigation strategy.
- UNU-EHS with AIDMI, Lead Pakistan and IDS Nepal has developed a toolbox for this.
- How can this toolbox factor in the climate risk aspect in emergencies and disasters?

1 Warner & van der Geest, 2013

2 WMO, 2014

3 IPCC, 2014, p. 19

4 Anam Zeb, Arif Rahman (Pakistan), Bala Ram Mayalu (Nepal) and Vishal Pathak (India)

5 James et al., 2014

minimize impacts of future events (Warner & van der Geest, 2013). There are multiple linkages between the three types of responses. For example, when an actor's preventive measures change in response to climatic changes, we speak of adaptation. And when preventive measures are inadequate, it is more likely that coping strategies will fail.

Next Steps

The workshop focused mainly on capacitating the principal investigators on the proposed methods for assessing loss and damage in vulnerable communities. This will help them in the next few months to conduct high quality research in the selected sites in Nepal, India and Pakistan. Based on the site selection guidelines in the handbook, LEAD Pakistan decided to study impacts from floods in Rajanpur (Punjab); AIDMI will study impacts from cyclones in Puri District (Odisha); and IDS-Nepal will focus on loss and damage from a landslide in Sindhupal chowk District.

The lessons learnt from these case studies will contribute to the final toolkit for assessing loss and damage which will be published by late 2015. ■

– Kees van der Geest,
UNU-EHS and Anam Zeb,
LEAD-Pakistan

Sources:

IPCC (2014). Climate change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Summary for policy makers. <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/>

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RECOVERY

A Journey to Resilience: 10 years after the Tsunami

On December 26, 2004, the Indian Ocean Tsunami claimed more than 2,25,000 lives and wreaked devastation on a hitherto unprecedented scale in several countries. 2014 marks ten years to that human tragedy. Having elicited the collective grief of the world community, the ten years after this tragedy saw a lot of progress in disaster mitigation practices around the world. However, there still is a lot that needs to be done to safeguard the world from such disasters. Newer challenges like climate change have necessitated new modes of thought and planning in the area of resilience building.

In these 10 years, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) has been spearheading efforts to build the resilience of the vulnerable communities of South Asia against the detrimental impacts of disasters. Towards this end, AIDMI has aimed to protect the assets of such vulnerable communities. For, it is now unanimously acknowledged among humanitarian practitioners, that the essence of effective disaster management lies in not only reducing the death toll from disasters to zero but also in minimizing loss and damage caused by the interface of disasters and climate change.

Thus, all of India's capacity building efforts related to disaster risk reduction should be closely aligned with climate change adaptation to overcome from the contemporary challenges of sustainable resilience building as faced by practitioners, researchers and decision makers.

Further research is greatly needed on the economics of climate sensitive risk reduction. Important questions on economic incentives and behaviours, decision making, the value of information, and behaviour under uncertainty need to be raised and answered. All India's future efforts for risk reduction must be climate smart.

AIDMI has been in constant touch with authorities in Tamil Nadu to discuss tsunami recovery management in a broader DRR perspective.

The discussion explored the following six questions:

- How to make small businesses more resilient to future disasters?
- Who is best suited to embrace the invariable complexity of recovery in India? How can recovery profit from such complexity?
- What are the simple rules of recovery strategy that any coastal district administration can use?
- How to capture any ground breaking ideas coming out of recovery management? Are we bypassing them?
- How can disaster victims become leaders of recovery? What can be done to support this them?
- Are we better situated to make smart recovery decisions? Is the recovery administration well informed to make these decisions?

AIDMI is working to find answers to these questions to better address HFA2 related implementation challenges in India. ■

– ADMI Team