



22-26 MAY, 2017 | CANCUN, MEXICO

**2017 GLOBAL PLATFORM**  
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

## **ISSUES BRIEF**

### **Plenary**

## **A Risk-informed Approach to Sustainable Development and Resilience for Countries in Special Situations**

### **Rationale**

All recent international agreements, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the New Urban Agenda, have recognised that more frequent and intense disasters threaten to reverse development progress. International agreements focused on countries in special situations also highlight the impact of disasters on sustainable development, such as the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries, and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway.

Without concerted efforts the most exposed and vulnerable countries, especially countries in special situations, risk being left behind. A risk-informed approach in the implementation of these agreements is crucial. The Sendai Framework gives particular attention to least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and small island developing States (SIDS), as well as middle income countries facing specific challenges, given their higher vulnerability and risk levels which often exceed their capacity to respond to and recover from disasters.

This Issues Brief takes stock of current and emerging disaster risks faced by countries in special situations, and highlights solutions including entry points for implementing the Sendai Framework in coherence with the disaster risk reduction components of other inter-governmental agreements.

### **State of play and opportunities**

#### **i) Least Developed Countries**

The world's 48 LDCs face many obstacles to sustained and equitable economic growth and human development. Of the 48 LDCs, 17 are also classified as LLDCs and a further nine are SIDS. The development prospects of LDCs are greatly hampered by their limited productive capacity, high concentration of exports, large external debt, severe infrastructure deficits, insufficient scientific and technological capacities and investment in innovation, as well as limited opportunities for labour mobility as an additional source of revenue and high transaction costs of remittances. Some LDCs also lack adequate governance and institutional and human capacities, while others struggle to resolve protracted conflicts and associated displacement impacts. LDCs are also vulnerable to a variety of shocks, including food, fuel, and financial crises, as well as health pandemics.



22-26 MAY, 2017 | CANCUN, MEXICO

**2017 GLOBAL PLATFORM**  
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Challenges are exacerbated by high exposure and vulnerability to natural and man-made hazards; growing in intensity and frequency as the global climate changes. These include slow-onset hazards such as drought, and environmental challenges including land degradation, desertification, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and sea level rise, as well as sudden hazards including extreme weather events, floods, hurricanes, and seismic and other geologic disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes. In recent years, disasters have taken high human and economic tolls in LDCs.

While progress has been made in many social and economic indicators across LDCs, it has been slow, uneven, and too easily reversed. To build on gains and bolster resilience, the Istanbul Programme of Action underscores the need to strengthen the ability of LDCs to overcome the adverse effects of climate change, respond to the needs of the people displaced as a result of extreme weather events and build resilience to withstand natural hazards. In the Comprehensive High-level Mid-term Review of the Istanbul Programme of Action, Member States decided to undertake an in-depth analysis on crisis mitigation and resilience-building for LDCs and to take stock of various shocks and review existing capacities, for submission to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. Moreover, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda welcomes efforts in support of LDCs to build national capacity to respond to shocks, including disasters and public health emergencies.

Regional disaster risk reduction mechanisms provide guidance for LDCs to make the shift from responding to disasters to managing risk. The Programme of Action for the Implementation of the Sendai Framework in Africa provides guidance for the multi-hazard reduction and management of disaster risks in development processes at all levels and across all sectors, and seeks to integrate disaster risk reduction into policies of the African Union, Regional Economic Commissions, and Member States, in line with the Sendai Framework. The Asia Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework identifies regional priorities and activities to support national and local actions, promotes exchange of good practice, knowledge and information among governments and stakeholders, and aims to strengthening regional cooperation to support the implementation of the Sendai Framework in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

## **ii) Landlocked Developing Countries**

Thirty-two LLDCs face special challenges related to their geographical remoteness, isolation from world markets, and lack of direct territorial access to the sea. These challenges are compounded by inadequate infrastructure, cumbersome border procedures, and limited capacities to deal with external shocks, including natural and man-made hazards.

Unpredictable rainfall patterns disproportionately expose LLDCs to drought, land degradation, and desertification. With an estimated 54 percent of land classified as dry land and 70 percent of people dependent on agriculture, impacts on economic, food, and health security are significant. Furthermore, vulnerable transit infrastructure and transit corridors that provide vital connections to global markets are at risk from seismic hazards, landslides,



22-26 MAY, 2017 | CANCUN, MEXICO

**2017 GLOBAL PLATFORM**  
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

torrential rains, and glacial lake outburst floods. The implications of being landlocked make recovery much harder. The rapid urbanisation in many LLDCs, which has nearly doubled since the 1960s also exposes large concentrations of people to disaster risk.

Due to their dependency on neighbouring countries for transit, trade, and telecommunication connectivity, LLDCs remain vulnerable to the impacts of disasters beyond their borders. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and overcoming the economic implications of being landlocked is contingent on building resilient infrastructure and reducing disaster risk.

At the regional level, one example that can support LLDCs to reduce their disaster risk is the 2016 Dushanbe Declaration on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience Building. The Declaration outlines commitments by governments in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, including a number of LLDCs, in collaboration with national and local authorities, private sector, and non-government organizations, to develop and implement disaster risk reduction strategies and action plans with national targets and indicators.

### **iii) Small Island Developing States**

The SAMOA Pathway reaffirms that SIDS remain a special case for sustainable development and face serious structural challenges and geophysical constraints to meeting the SDGs. Remote locations, limited resources and investments, small and undiversified economies, high debt-burden, low trade volumes, and poor infrastructure affect SIDS's competitiveness in the global economy, constrain long-term growth prospects, and exacerbate volatility to external shocks. Scattered across three of the world's most disaster prone regions, SIDS are among the most exposed countries in the world. With high concentrations of risk, and limited opportunities to move out of harm's way, they face the some of the highest potential losses associated with several hazards. For many SIDS, future disaster losses represent an existential threat.

Climate change is very likely to magnify disaster risk in SIDS due to rising and warming seas as well as storm surges, increasing hurricane intensity, floods, coastal erosion, and droughts. Both rapid and slow-onset disasters can result in population displacement and concentration in vulnerable and poorly planned urban areas, where 59 percent of SIDS's populations already reside. These exacerbate existing social and economic challenges, including food security, health, water quality, infrastructure, poverty reduction, and sustainable tourism, which burden already limited national budgets and present additional hurdles towards the SDGs. For SIDS to attract sustained and inclusive economic growth, disaster risk reduction and climate change should be mainstreamed across all sectors and by all stakeholders.

The SAMOA Pathway promotes greater technical assistance and financing to build resilience, strengthen monitoring and prevention, reduce vulnerability, increase preparedness, support early warning, and expand risk-informed land use planning. It



22-26 MAY, 2017 | CANCUN, MEXICO

**2017 GLOBAL PLATFORM**  
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

advocated integrating and mainstreaming policies and programmes related to disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and development. In the Pacific, this approach is supported by the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific 2017-2030.

## **Way forward**

### **i) Understanding exposure and reducing vulnerability**

New risks are being generated and accumulated faster than existing risks have been reduced. At the same time, many countries in special situations face evolving risks and changing hazard behaviour associated with climate change. A risk-informed approach is needed to ensure that investments in critical infrastructure, such as transportation networks, telecommunications, renewable energy, and agriculture, among others, are resilient and do not create new risk. Social safety nets, including insurance schemes for disasters, particularly in the agricultural sector, can also support those affected.

Reporting on the indicators of the Sendai Framework global targets as agreed by the Open-ended Inter-governmental Expert Working Group will be key to better understanding and measuring the effectiveness of disaster risk reduction strategies. Support to developing new and building on existing national disaster loss databases and information, suitable to national capacities and contexts, can improve understanding on the impact of disasters and can support risk-modelling of future scenarios and risk-informed development investments.

### **ii) Shift to managing the risk of disasters**

The Sendai Framework guides countries in special situations to apply a risk-informed approach to development and shift from managing disasters to managing the 'risk' of disasters. The Framework emphasises the need to address the underlying drivers of disaster risk in order to increase the resilience of households and communities, as well as national economies, to external shocks. To this end, the Sendai Framework underscores the importance of "building better from the start" through proper design and construction, and of "building back better" in the wake of a disaster. This approach can help build resilience for the future and reduce diverting limited resources to recovery and reconstruction that are needed to implement the SDGs and other inter-governmental agreements.

At the same time, strengthened disaster risk governance is needed to improve the accountability of public and private sectors to take action and address disaster risk across all sectors. To be effective and sustainable, national and local disaster risk governance structures should include defined roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders and should be adequately resourced. International support for disaster risk reduction must be accompanied by support to national and local risk governance to promote cooperation, accountability, and investments in disaster management by the public and private sectors.



22-26 MAY, 2017 | CANCUN, MEXICO

**2017 GLOBAL PLATFORM**  
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

### **iii) A mutually re-enforcing approach to implementation**

LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS can benefit from an integrated and holistic approach to sustainable development and disaster risk reduction. The Sendai Framework puts forward a disaster risk management paradigm to be applied across all relevant plans and agendas. Coherence, effective linkages, and mutual re-enforcement between the implementation of the Sendai Framework and the other inter-governmental agreements can avoid overlap and duplication, reduce competition for limited domestic resources, and reduce the reporting burden. It can also support countries in special situations to build resilience to external shocks in a comprehensive and multi-hazard manner. This approach is supported by a number of regional Sendai Framework action plans.

The Paris Agreement provides a useful example. With an established goal on climate adaptation that considers enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing risk and vulnerability to climate change, signatories to the Agreement recognize that disaster risk reduction tools can significantly reduce loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change. In this regard, coherence between the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement in terms of aligning tools and metrics, leveraging partnerships and initiatives for implementation, and integrating disaster risk reduction into adaptation strategies in Nationally Determined Contributions can greatly contribute to climate change adaptation and sustainable development.

### **iv) Financing and technical assistance**

Official development assistance remains a major source of financing for many countries in special situations. Bilateral and multilateral development cooperation should focus on integrated and mutually re-enforcing technical, financial, and capacity building support for disaster risk reduction based on comparative advantages. Financing for climate and disaster resilience, including concessional lending, remains a challenge for countries in special situations. Finance should be less fragmented, easier to access, predictable and long-term. This requires a coordinated financing architecture that is better tailored to the needs of these countries. Likewise, governments can create an enabling environment to ensure an effective use of funds that is climate and disaster resilient. The Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility and the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative are examples of how some countries have created innovative regional risk financing mechanisms.

Technology transfer, such as early warning mechanisms, information communications technologies, and infrastructure, has a crucial role to play in disaster risk reduction and can be facilitated by relevant international mechanisms. Countries in special situations require support to invest in data collection and analysis to enhance decision-making abilities and effectively manage risks. In many cases, investment in telecommunication networks and information and communication technologies for disaster risk reduction, especially early warning systems, could improve monitoring, preparedness, and response and reduce critical

losses. Bridging the digital divide while strengthening traditional methods to reduce risk and build resilience can allow countries in special situations to comprehensively strengthen their risk management efforts.

**v) Partnerships and participation**

Countries are already benefitting from a regional approach to disaster risk reduction including South-South and triangular cooperation. Many LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS have best practice examples tailored to their capacities, resources, and contexts. Regional disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation action plans can facilitate this approach in addition to regular channels for building partnerships and sharing good practice, lessons, and innovative technologies.

Disaster risk reduction also requires an enabling environment for public and private investment. Partnerships with the private sector are needed to ensure investments are risk-informed. At the same time, the Sendai Framework promotes decentralizing risk management to enable local governments and communities to participate in disaster risk assessments and decisions on resilient infrastructure and services as well as the implementation of community risk reduction strategies drawing on their knowledge of local needs and traditional methods.