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Amaratunga, Dilanthi, Haigh, Richard and Hettige, Siri

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# **THE ROLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN DISASTER RISK GOVERNANCE**

Dilanthi Amaratunga<sup>1</sup>, Richard Haigh<sup>1</sup> and Siri Hettige<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Global Disaster Resilience Centre, University of Huddersfield, UK*

<sup>2</sup> *University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

*Phone: +44 (0) 148 447 1387, email: d.amaratunga@hud.ac.uk*

## **ABSTRACT**

During the decade that followed the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005, calls for greater public, private and civic accountability to reduce risk and vulnerability became increasingly vocal. It also provided guidance to the focal point on Disaster Risk Reduction at the central government level on how to improve leadership in risk governance, transparency, sharing of risk information, stakeholder participation and public awareness and encouraging and action on stakeholder feedback.

Accountability in disaster risk reduction is intended to enable scrutiny and understanding of actions taken at different levels, and of those responsible for such actions. Article 19(e) of the Sendai Framework articulates the principle that disaster risk reduction depends on coordination mechanisms within and across sectors, full engagement and clear responsibilities of all State institutions and stakeholders, to ensure mutual accountability.

In contributing to this agenda, a workshop on "Ensuring Accountability in Disaster Risk Management and Reconstruction" was organised as a part of a global, regional and national partnership. This workshop and the subsequent policy dialogue had the participation of disaster risk management experts and state and non-state stakeholders to deliberate on and develop a possible framework for social accountability to be considered for inclusion in a national disaster management plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

Natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more devastating in almost all parts of the world. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned that "growing global inequality, increasing exposure to natural hazards, rapid urbanization and the overconsumption of energy and natural resources threaten to drive risk to dangerous and unpredictable levels with systemic global impacts." (UN, 2015). The 2015 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR15) states that economic losses from disasters are now reaching an average of US\$250 billion to US\$300 billion annually (GAR15, 2015). GAR15 estimates that an investment of US\$6 billion annually in disaster risk management would result in avoided losses of US\$360 billion over the next 15 years. The report states that this US\$6 billion is just 0.1% of total forecast expenditure of US\$6 trillion

annually on new infrastructure.

This situation calls for better disaster preparedness and greater readiness to minimize adverse impacts of disasters. Once a disaster strikes, the prudent management of its aftermath can facilitate quicker recovery and restoration of normal life for the affected individuals and communities. Yet, all these depend on the actions of many stakeholders such as governments, various state institutions, national and international non-governmental organizations, private businesses and community groups. On the other hand, actual outcomes of various interventions depend on a range of factors such as resources, planning, coordination, quality control and monitoring. So, the life chances of potential and actual disaster victims depend on the performance of a whole range of institutions.

An important question that arises is how we could optimize performance of key stakeholders. In this regard, institutionalizing effective accountability mechanisms appears to be a one key ways to move forward. The accountability mechanisms are supposed to play a key role in different phases of disaster management cycle: response, recovery, rehabilitation, reconstruction, prevention, mitigation and preparedness. The absence of such mechanisms will reduce the effectiveness of interventions in many situations.

As is well known, accountability is an integral aspect of good governance. Yet, in many countries accountability rarely goes beyond financial accountability. While financial accountability is important to eliminate corruption and wastage of public resources, and ensure that benefits reach the intended target groups, the measures of financial accountability do not go far enough to ensure the satisfaction of the needs of disaster victims, both potential and actual. Some critics claim that the failure of accountability in collaborative working (collaborative accountability) is caused by the lack of communication. Others have stated that accountability cannot meet the criteria that have been set such as vertical and horizontal accountability and social accountability to the victims and civil society organizations (Taylor, et. al., 2014). It is this reality that calls for an enlargement of the scope of accountability to include the concerns of the beneficiaries. In general, what is necessary is develop bottom up accountability tools in order to measure the actual impact of external interventions in terms of their outcomes on the ground.

Any investigation of the outcomes of external interventions following a disaster will reveal the nature and extent of recovery in terms of relief, resettlement, livelihood, community building, and access to services, etc. According to Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (UNISDR, 2015), it is also important to look at related accountability issues within the pre-disaster phase as there is more emphasis now on disaster risk reduction, and what we could do to prevent disasters and/ or to minimize losses.

Many shortcomings that may be present might have been avoided if there were effective accountability mechanisms built into the intervention program. Moreover, a comprehensive social audit following the implementation of an intervention program could help rectify weaknesses of an intervention provided such a mechanism was built into the disaster management plan of a government or any other institution.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY AND ITS RELEVANCE IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

As the growing literature on the subject indicates, the relevance of accountability in DRR is increasingly recognized by both researchers and practitioners. In fact, accountability is perceived and observed as an important governance mechanism to minimize disaster risks.

Accountability, rather than being a bureaucratic or legal term, is about improving democratic processes, challenging power and claiming citizenship. It is best claimed from below by citizens themselves, rather than only being provided by the state. Supporting citizen-led initiatives is important as they address accountability failures in very direct ways (Mahendra, 2007). Accountability in terms of Disaster risk reduction is more social than political. Ensuring social accountability can address the disaster risk management in many ways than it does with political accountability. When the social accountability is present, as stressed by Polac, Luna & Bercilla (2010), it ensures that citizens keep an eye on the process of governance persuading governments to fulfil its obligations.

As they further stressed, "accountability in emergency contexts has advanced, with a number of significant initiatives to develop voluntary and legally binding standards and mechanisms to improve transparency and accountability of humanitarian agencies and States operating at all levels. These have improved the tools available to civil society in times of disasters. Developing an approach to accountability in DRM as a whole has been a challenge, with a lack of a legally binding international agreements and the high initial costs to governments of investing in risk reduction, but also those associated with tackling widespread underlying vulnerability to disasters."

It is significant that the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015) highlights the importance of identifying and addressing policy gaps, reducing exposure and vulnerability and in so doing, minimizing the risk of economic, social and human failures and the costly losses for countries and humanity that these involve. As highlighted in the Sendai Framework, ensuring clear accountability and transparency, and avoiding the creation of new and unnecessary risks will help open opportunities for a safer and more resilient future. Further it emphasizes the importance of accountability frameworks that transcend central government, relevant national and local authorities, as well as different sectors and stakeholders. The

enhancement of clarity in responsibility, accountability and monitoring of implementation will benefit from moving from a framework based on concepts and activities, to one structured around specific and strategic public policies, which can be complemented by stakeholders' commitment (Bahadur, 2014).

## **POLICY RELEVANCE**

The year 2015 presented an unparalleled opportunity to align landmark UN agreements through the convergence of three global policy frameworks: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (March 2015), The Sustainable Development Goals (September 2015; SDGs) and the Climate Change Agreement (December 2015: COP21).

The Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015) emphasizes the pivotal role of the states in ensuring the development and implementation of evidence based policies. It highlights the need for an improved understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of exposure, vulnerability and hazard characteristics with a view of strengthening disaster risk governance. States also have reiterated the commitment to address disaster risk reduction and the building of resilience to disasters with a renewed sense of urgency within the context of sustainable development.

To put this into action, in terms of the Sendai Framework, it requires integrating both DRR and the building of resilience in to planning, plans, programmes and budgets at all levels. DRR is a cost effective instrument in preventing future losses. Eventually, effective DRM contributes to sustainable development. This is particularly important in developing countries where financial and other resources are of limited supply and they are disproportionately affected by disasters.

It is important to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risk in order to effectively protect persons, communities and countries, the livelihoods, health, cultural heritage, socio-economic assets and eco system, and to strengthen overall resilience of societies and communities.

As is widely acknowledged, unplanned urbanization, poor land management, weak institutional arrangements, non-risk informed policies, lack of regulations and incentives for private disaster risk reduction investment, limited availability of technology, unsustainable use of natural resources have raised the vulnerability to disasters and disaster risk. In order to address these issues, strengthening of good governance is key. In this regard, some DRR strategies, a build back better policy, a more people centered preventive approach to disaster risk (Multi hazard, multi sectorial) can be followed.

The overall aim of the Sendai Framework is sustainable reduction in disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of person, business communities and countries. On the other hand, the realization of the outcome requires strong commitment and involvement of political leadership in every country at all levels in the implementation and follow up of the present framework, and the creation of the necessary condition and enabling environment.

In other words, the states have the overall responsibility to reduce disaster risk, but it is a shared responsibility involving governments and many other stakeholders. This however, cannot be a simple moral responsibility but a statutory obligation. The stakeholders having responsibilities in DRR have to be made accountable to citizens and communities that they serve.

Disasters continue to undermine efforts to achieve sustainable development. UN initiatives in sustainable development call for disaster risk reduction and building resilience to disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Sustainable development knowledge platform,2016), are an intergovernmental set of aspiration Goals with 169 targets, which set out quantitative objectives across the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development—all to be achieved by 2030. The goals provide a framework for shared action “for people, planet and prosperity,” to be implemented by “all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership.”

To reduce disaster risk; assessing and understanding DR, sharing information, strengthening disaster risk governance and coordination across relevant institutions and sectors and the full and meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders at appropriate levels are important. These objectives are re-affirmed under Goal 11 of the SDGs - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Making cities safe and sustainable means ensuring access to safe and affordable housing, and upgrading slum settlements. It also involves investment in public transport, creating green public spaces, and improving urban planning and management in a way that is both participatory and inclusive.

At the Paris climate conference (COP21) in December 2015, 195 countries adopted the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. The agreement sets out a global action plan to put the world on track to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C. Within the context of transparency and global stocktake, Governments agreed to track progress towards the long-term goal through a robust transparency and accountability system.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Experience of researchers as well as practitioners in the field of Disaster Risk Reduction and Reconstruction has pointed to the need for developing, validating and institutionalising social accountability mechanisms and tools as part of intervention programs of both governmental and non-governmental organisations. This could be done more effectively if the relevant authorities develop appropriate policies regarding accountability. Accordingly, an international workshop and a policy dialogue was organised in December 2015 in Colombo with the participation of disaster risk management experts and state and non-state stakeholders to deliberate on and develop a possible framework for social accountability to be considered for inclusion in a national disaster management plan. There were 38 invited experts representing a cross section of important stakeholders attended the workshop and the composition of the workshop participants included academics, UN (e.g. UNISDR and UNDP) representatives, NGO representatives (e.g. Red Cross), Dept. of Meteorology, National Building Research Organization, National Water Supply and Drainage Board, and Ministry of Disaster Management. 10 selected papers were presented under two thematic sessions : Accountability of government and other institutions for their conduct , performances in preventing and managing disasters and accountability in the built environment after major disasters, and Contextual and cultural appropriateness of the accountability tools , tools of accountability and access to information and Role of the organised and capable citizen groups in establishing social accountability.

The workshop was focused on key aspects of accountability, but was not entirely on the government but looked at other stakeholders and a wide range of DRR settings. It is hoped that incorporating social accountability into disaster management would improve significantly the outcomes of external interventions leading to an improvement of life chances and quality of life of potential and actual victims of disasters. It culminated on the theme with a view to determine the scope of accountability in DRR within a public policy framework.

The 10 Papers presented dealt with the following empirical issues in the context of social accountability in disaster management.

- a) The role of government agencies, NGOs and public/citizen groups in pre and post disaster situations.
- b) The possibilities of developing culturally and politically suitable strategies and programmes to promote the institutionalisation of social accountability in disaster management with reference to disasters such as tsunami, floods, landslides, cyclones, etc.

- c) The role of accountability in facilitating collaboration among the government agencies, civil society organizations, NGOs from being passive recipient of relief to active partners in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)
- d) To understand the accountability tools that can be used to monitor the disaster management priorities, implementation of policies and programmes and the outcomes.
- e) Mapping of institutional responsibilities and tasks in disaster mitigation and prevention.
- f) Developing social accountability tools that can be used to measure the impact of DRR interventions in the context of built environment

The panel discussion that too was held as part of the workshop was expected to come up with evidence-based recommendations as to how effective accountability mechanisms could be built into intervention programs in different but interrelated fields. Panelists were expected to approach the issue from the point of the organisations they represent and the subject areas that come under their purview. Particular attention needs to be paid to specific accountability tools that might be developed and institutionalised, and their contextual and cultural appropriateness. Panel discussion provided a basis for the formulation of a draft policy outline and a set of accountability tools dealing with both prevention and management of disasters. An underlying assumption has been that incorporating social accountability into disaster risk reduction and management will improve significantly the outcomes of external interventions leading to an improvement of life chances and quality of life of potential and actual victims of disasters.

## **DISCUSSION**

One of the most important lessons has been the lack of accountability on the part of many state and non-state institutions and agencies involved in the above processes. Major findings to emerge from the papers presented and from the policy dialogue were summarised by means of a policy brief (Haigh et al, 2016). Following are key highlights arising from the workshop (adapted from Haigh et al, 2016) :

### **What is accountability?**

Obviously, it is an integral aspect of good governance. But what is important to emphasise here is that accountability has several important dimensions, namely, financial, legal and social. Given the increasing significance of DRR today, accountability needs to be defined in broader rather than narrower terms in order to ensure that state and non-state actors live up to public expectations with regard to vulnerability reduction and preparedness improvement at all stages of disaster management.



### **Disaster cycle and accountability**

Disaster risk reduction is a long term process covering pre-, during and post disaster situations. So, accountability issues are also related to all three periods. In other words, accountability in DRR begins before a disaster occurs. The same applies equally to the other two stages.

### **Better governance of mitigatory processes**

The lived experience of disaster victims and the findings of researchers who conduct assessments of recovery processes point to the fact that better governance of mitigatory processes including pre-disaster risk assessments and risk reduction measures can not only save many lives but also reduce or minimise losses in economic, social and psychological terms.

### **Institutions and authorities that can be held accountable**

How to identify and define preventable adverse impacts? This naturally is a vast and complex area for study, as the likely impacts can vary widely depending on a whole range of factors such as the nature and scale of disasters and social, political, economic and spatial context. So what is equally important is to identify the institutions and authorities that can be held accountable. This also needs to be carefully examined in order to apportion responsibility, both legally and morally, for various aspects of DRR. This includes establishing a clear understanding of the state's legal and moral obligations and capacity to deliver all components of Sendai Framework.

### **Stakeholder involvement**

However, accountability for risk reduction is an obligation on the part of many stakeholders from central government downwards and include state institutions, business organisations, various professional groups, local government, media institutions and civil society organizations. Availability and accessibility of data and timely information can create an enabling environment to promote accountability on the part of many actors.

### **Joint responsibilities and collaboration**

Given the diversity of potential actors and institutions involved in DRR, accountability is often a joint responsibility. In the case of slow onset disasters like sea level rise and pollution, scientific data can be critical for planning but sharing of such information is not common. Collaboration between actors, including effective communication mechanisms, is vital. An accountability systems approach, emphasises the need to move beyond a narrow focus on supply-side versus demand-side accountability support, or a focus only on formal institutions, and instead to look more closely at the linkages among actors and how these can be strengthened over time.

### **Lack of accountability**

The lack of accountability on the part of governments, state institutions and public officials, as well as diverse private sector stakeholders, tends to magnify material and human costs of disasters. While it is necessary to find effective ways to ensure accountability, these may include both penalties as well as incentives. Accountability is not about pinning responsibility on one centralised body like a national disaster management agency but enlisting multiple actors to take responsibility, both individually and collectively. It is important to ensure that their failure to do so is not inconsequential, in terms of both penalties and rewards.

### **Regulatory bodies**

The role of regulatory bodies, in particular those relating to coastal resources, human settlement, construction and social and physical infrastructure, is critically important to ensure accountability on the part of many stakeholders such as land developers, industrialists, construction firms and state institutions.

### **Characteristics of the community and enabling environment**

It is important identify the characteristics of the community and characteristics of the enabling environment, including how to encourage broad-based participation, strengthening the political involvement of citizens in decision-making processes, and in mechanisms for legitimacy and control. There is also a need to strengthen downward accountability by supporting feedback channels from the community and civil society to subnational and even national government to articulate local needs and preferences.

### **Supporting infrastructure**

There is a need to support citizens, particularly those most vulnerable to disasters, to understand relevant rights, policies and possible accountability pathways. This includes citizen involvement in monitoring DRR progress based on locally conceived priorities at every scale, including policy formulation and implementation.

### **Monitoring**

Monitoring processes are needed. This includes the need to provide indicators, providing clarity on components of monitoring, focusing on data management, improving systems to track and gauge disaster risk.

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of relevant public, private and civil society organization in DRR cannot be overemphasized. Their contributions encompass the entire

process of disaster mitigation commencing from pre disaster situations to post disaster intervention. Though various institutions, groups and stakeholders have played a vital role in disaster mitigation, in many situations, there had been no sense of accountability for their actions and inactions. On the other hand, a sense of accountability on the part of various stakeholders can be critically important to ensure that they can be held accountable for their actions and inactions that have direct bearing on DRR. Strong accountability mechanisms will lead to better planning and budgeting, and better coordination. They can also lead to more effective political oversight and greater assurance that relief and recovery efforts will continue until recovery is fully achieved.

The development of policies, norms, rules and regulations, standards and tools reacting to DRR is critically important to prepare a sound institutional basis for institutionalizing accountability processes. Accordingly, accountability systems and effective rules concerning stakeholders' responsibilities and opportunities for engagement are necessary. Ultimately, sound accountability mechanisms can only be rooted in a strong acceptance of personal responsibility and commitment to behavioural change. In this regard, the governments at all levels have a major responsibility. But, other stakeholders need to fit into a wider accountability framework. Since they cannot be left to voluntary action it is necessary to lay a normative and legal foundation through legislation.

Many countries emphasized that regulation and law at the national level can essentially set out an accountability framework for DRR which led to the strong positioning of accountability within Sendai Framework. During the consultations and negotiations that led to its finalisation, strong calls were also made to develop practical guidance to support implementation, ensure engagement and ownership of action by all stakeholders, and strengthen accountability in disaster risk reduction - 'Words into Action'. This provides a way forward in implementing sound accountability principles within the DRR context.

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