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Reducing Vulnerability and Managing Risk

Pre-Consultation Briefing Note for the Europe and Others Group Consultation

The purpose of this pre-consultation briefing paper is to stimulate discussions at the World Humanitarian Summit Regional Consultation for the Europe and Others' group in Budapest on February 3 and 4, 2015.

This initial briefing paper has been prepared by the Regional Steering Group and will be followed up by a more detailed background paper closer to the regional consultation in Budapest. The discussions are expected to provide perspectives and recommendations in the lead up to the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016.

Small localized recurrent disasters ("extensive risk") account for the majority of damages and longer term losses experienced in the EOG region. The compounded impact of these recurrent shocks strains the affected populations' coping capacity, undermines development and reinforces poverty, while occasional major disasters result in significant setbacks in national economic growth.

The majority of low severity but high frequency disasters are triggered by weather events, with their impact amplified by high social, economic and environmental vulnerability. The frequency of weather-related losses is increasing and will likely continue to be amplified by climate change and environmental degradation, among other drivers. The majority of these losses are unaccounted for, uninsured and do not

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Key questions:

- When it relates to conflicts and man-made disasters, which role can the humanitarian community play to manage risks and reduce vulnerabilities?
- From the humanitarian perspective, what should development actors be doing differently to build resilience?
- What are the main barriers preventing improved coordination among all actors engaged in risks management and vulnerabilities reduction? How could they be overcome?

unlock external assistance and therefore have to be locally absorbed. Further, over time such extensive risk can concentrate into major disaster hotspots (“intensive risk”), which is even more difficult and expensive to efficiently manage.

Areas for discussion

Approaches to reduce risk must recognize and address the increased vulnerability resulting from poor governance and planning processes, inadequate – i.e. risk-blind – policies, structural inequalities, power imbalances between social groups or serious under-investment in resilience building. It is the poorest communities in developing countries and forgotten communities in middle-income countries, who have the least capacity and resources to manage risks that have reported the highest growth in disaster losses since 2005 . Conflicts and man-made disasters generate as well as epidemics, political and social instability a further increased vulnerability.

In light of these critical current and future issues and considering the composition of the EOG region, the following priorities and questions have been identified by the Regional Steering Group.

Priority 1: Institutional Capacity-Building and Enabling Normative Environment for Managing Risks and Reducing Vulnerabilities

Effective risk management and good governance is a task for all – governments, development and humanitarian actors. It needs to be matched with a robust analysis of vulnerabilities. In the humanitarian sphere, where vulnerabilities are at the centre, risk management also needs to be mainstreamed to the largest possible extent. Interventions need to be better coordinated among actors including in particular by ensuring that the perspectives of affected stakeholders are integrated and actioned. Better overall governance – including of humanitarian actors themselves, by working to build on fundamental principles of transparency, accountability, evidence of effectiveness and adaptability – will not only lead to a harmonized humanitarian response but, importantly, ensure the link with development and recovery actions towards resilience for a truly holistic response.

At the governmental level, disaster management in Europe has shifted in recent decades from a response-oriented approach towards an Integrated Risk Management (IRM) approach that includes prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. At the heart of IRM is a solid understanding of risk to inform decision-making and policy setting at all levels. Risk assessment must be multi-hazard in nature, capture more qualitative social issues, and be regularly updated to provide on-going and relevant decision-support. All actors should pursue activities based on the same fundamental understanding



of risk and context. Responsibilities for prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response must also be appropriately shared across levels of risk, including contingency planning for the “unexpected,” captured in joint strategic approaches.

A society can only deal effectively with particular hazards if it has an in depth overview of all risks and how they interlink with vulnerabilities. International interventions need to link to and promote more comprehensive integrated risk management approaches that governments increasingly use to manage a complex interplay of domestic natural, political, technical, economic and other hazards and threats (World Development Report 2014, World Bank)

An enabling legal and regulatory framework is indispensable for such a challenging mechanism. This was recognised in the Hyogo Framework for Action, which highlighted the importance of legal frameworks for disaster risk management within its first priority of action, and many States have been modernizing their laws with this in mind. However, there are still a number of gaps in existing legal frameworks and in the implementation of key regulations in many countries. The Humanitarian community and the WHS should make sure to capture lessons learnt from the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and the current discussions on the next framework to put in place.

International organisations need also to reflect upon their own governance and internal capacity to adopt a comprehensive risk and vulnerability assessment and ensure coherent operations, with adequate local participation. Reflection is needed around the issue of LRRD (Linking Relief and Rehabilitation to Development) as a continuum to provide an opportunity to further develop the capacity of the international community to contribute to the aid effectiveness demand. Multi-mandated institutions must seek to better coordinate internally between their humanitarian, development, climate change, human rights etc. departments and have a more robust dialogue with government actors.

Priority 2: Enhancing local capacity

Disaster risk and vulnerabilities cannot be effectively managed by one subset of society. It requires a ‘whole of society’ approach that builds on the value added of each actor. National and local government, the private sector and civil society all need to have a role in thinking, planning and deciding about disaster risk. In particular, unless civil society, including all marginalized groups, has a political voice their real life priorities get ignored. Views from the Frontline surveys uncovered that community participation in decision making was one of the indicators of the Hyogo Framework for Action that saw the least progress. Only when all actors start to work together will vulnerabilities be reduced.

- There is a need to strengthen local participation and decision-making. When local communities are given the chance to have their say and empowered to work in partnership with others, resilience can be built to the everyday risks people have on the ground and their vulnerabilities better addressed. Inclusive community-driven approaches therefore need to be supported.
- There is also a need for humanitarian initiatives to support local level knowledge, good practice and capacities. Appropriate humanitarian programmes that respond to emergency needs, are risk-informed and developed thanks to the knowledge of the realities on the ground that local communities, authorities and the private sector have. Local actors working on longer term actions to strengthen community resilience are often best placed to contribute to short-term disaster response and recovery. But these capacities need to be built before disasters, aiming to reduce risks and address vulnerabilities in a way that simultaneously builds capacities.
- National and international systems and actions should complement and reinforce local capacity. For example, for early warning of extreme weather events, global forecasts inform national forecasts, which are then translated into early warning information that must reach the last mile

at local level. At the same time the collection of sound and comparable data on disaster losses, hazards and vulnerabilities – crucial for advocacy on resilience - is only possible if it is fed by reliable local input.

- Local solutions and good practice can in many cases be replicated in a wider geographic area in which communities face similar risks and vulnerabilities. Therefore the sharing of good practice and “success stories” should be fostered, in particular at regional level.

Priority 3: Recognize disaster risk and vulnerability as a development issue and adopt a holistic approach for effective risk management and reduction of vulnerabilities

Donors and policy makers have in the past dealt with disaster risk reduction, conflict prevention, climate change adaptation, vulnerabilities and sustainable development via separate policy frameworks and funding channels. Such separate approaches can lead to duplication of efforts, inefficient use of funds, and most importantly, failure to address lack of development as a driver of risk and vulnerability, as well as disaster risk as an obstacle to peace and sustainable development. We live in an increasingly interconnected world where social, economic, environmental and geo-political risks interact and do not fit neatly into separate conceptual frameworks. These complex realities are reflected in the approaches that households adopt, which tend to be designed to protect and enhance lives, livelihoods, household and productive assets across a range of risks.

- There is a need to approach risks and vulnerabilities in a more integrated manner (as explained within the priority 1). Complementarity of actions across a range of disciplines and sectors are needed in order to ensure comprehensive risk management and adequate addressing of vulnerabilities.
- Political leadership and financial, legal, social, political and administrative incentives are needed for integrated approaches across humanitarian, peace-building, climate, development and government actors. This also requires discipline for each actor to recognize the role and mandate of each other relevant actor, their area of competence and added value, and to plan (as appropriate) exit strategy from the beginning to ensure transitioning of caseloads when core mandates have been achieved (especially in protracted crises).
- There is a continued need to take advantage of the recovery period as an opportunity to mainstream DRM into development policy and planning and properly address vulnerabilities. This critical period highlights development deficiencies, garners political and media attention, and injects significant financial resources into the at-risk area.
- Coherence is needed with the post-2015 DRR Framework as well as the definition of the Sustainable Development Goals to strengthen linkages between risk reduction, development and humanitarian aid. Adopting complementary objectives, indicators and accountability mechanisms is critical to improving policy coherence.

Priority 4: Ensure sufficient, predictable and timely funding in order to effectively reduce vulnerabilities and manage risks.

The humanitarian landscape is undergoing change, with the number and type of organizations involved in responding to humanitarian events growing and evolving rapidly. Development actors are becoming more interested in focusing on vulnerabilities and disaster risk management. National governments are taking a more active role in disaster management and prevention, creating a central role for the nations and regions affected by humanitarian crises and increasing the role of these governments as



donors and providers. As a result, large international NGOs are increasingly outsourcing their response to local partners – a transference of risk which presents both opportunities and challenges for the humanitarian agenda.

At the same time, funding needs have risen dramatically – by some estimates, by over 700%. This has created new opportunities for private sector actors to step in as donors (also in-kind) or as repositories of expertise. However, these developments also exacerbate certain risks. In particular, the unpredictability of funding streams hampers the effectiveness, coordination and coherence of the humanitarian response and leads to the absence of a systematic and systemic link with government and development actors. Managing these risks in financing and resourcing as well as identifying a systemic solution to enhance coordination between all stakeholders will be key to ensuring the continued progress. The World Humanitarian Summit represents an invaluable opportunity to tackle these issues through innovative solutions and a system change. Innovative solutions could help point towards strengthening cross-sectorial work, and ease the predictability of funding through non-conventional partnerships and channels.

On financing for disaster risk management, the need is first and foremost for existing funding to be allocated more with a resilience lense. For development funding in particular, it is crucial to build in some flexibility for timely resilience building actions through “crisis modifiers”. To further unlock financing for disaster risk management, governments need to prioritize it for investment.

In order to advocate for appropriate and timely funding for managing risks and reducing vulnerabilities, it is important to solidly build the evidence of the return on investment in disaster risk management. To this end, a systematic collection of information – based on a standardized format – and its presentation through the corresponding governance fora is required.

Some of the issues likely to be explored in greater depth in the Europe and Others consultation include:

1. What are some of the new humanitarian risks that are emerging in the countries of the Europe and Others grouping and what changes should be made to address these?
2. Participants to the WHS regional consultation for Eastern and Southern Africa called for joint risk assessment, planning and financing between humanitarian, development and climate change communities, including through linkages with post-2015 development and disaster risk reduction processes. With this in mind, what steps must be taken and incentives introduced to make a major step change in how the humanitarian and development communities collectively assess risk and prepare for response?
3. What lessons does this region’s shift to an integrated risk management approach have for countries in other regions as they consider how to reduce and manage risk? What opportunities exist to better link the domestic (civil protection) and international (aid) experience of countries in this grouping?
4. How can the use of science, data and modelling be improved in order to enhance preparedness and response? What new partnerships can be formed between expertise within this region and that in other regions?