

Annual workshop 2021 of the Swiss NGO DRR Platform

The role of disaster risk reduction in the humanitarian-development-nexus: Linking concepts, connecting stakeholders, enhancing resilience

REPORT



Picture 1: A family standing in front of their partly reconstructed house after hurricane Matthew. Haiti 2016. Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation

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Why we need the humanitarian development nexus

The nature of conflicts, crises and humanitarian settings has seen an increase in duration and in complexity in the past years. Crises have become more protracted and layered, with an average duration of a decade¹. This fuelled a considerable increase in humanitarian needs, going far beyond what can be realistically funded. Further, climate change and its effects on the frequency and intensity of extreme events will contribute to even more harm and accelerate conflicts over resources, trigger displacement and increase humanitarian suffering. Humanitarian needs are projected to double in the next year compared to five years back. In this setting, the debate about better linking humanitarian response and development cooperation, to align outcomes and increase effectiveness, has been given a new momentum.

Since the commitment at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 to the Grand Bargain through the instruments of the New Way of Working and the development of Collective Outcomes², the way has been paved for more effectiveness and efficiency of aid instrument. While progress is slow beyond the conceptual level, empiric evidence documents that change is happening.

The humanitarian-development nexus describes the need for a mutual understanding and for complementary action from humanitarian and development actors to alleviate suffering, strengthen resilience for future shocks and offer potentials for development. From the viewpoint of disaster risk reduction (DRR), the debate around the nexus has much in common with the challenges that the DRR-community has dealt

with in the past decades. Some challenges remain, others have been overcome (see talk show key messages). In the nascent years of DRR, the concept of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

Similarly, next to existing operational challenges, the nexus is also viewed with scepticism, which is rooted in the humanitarian-development divide: it is feared that by integrating peace in the nexus, the risk of politization and securitization of aid may increase, risking to jeopardize humanitarian principles. On the other hand, investments in development may be diverted to short-term aid, covering immediate needs, if funding streams are joined.

Given the relevance of the topic, the Swiss NGO DRR Platform wanted to shed light on recent and ongoing developments at headquarter and in-country levels to bring forward the nexus in programmes and in institutional preparedness.

Next to contributions from Platform members, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the World Food Programme (WFP), Start Network and other organizations contributed to the enriching discussions among the 40-50 participants.

The aim for the three half-days was to:

- Increase understanding of the ***need for, potentials and challenges of the humanitarian-development nexus***

¹ UN OCHA <https://www.unocha.org/story/us219-billion-needed-2019-average-length-humanitarian-crisis-climbs#:~:text=Protracted%20needs,command%20the%20majority%20of%20resources>

² Collective Outcomes are jointly formulated by humanitarian and development practitioners and are supposed to yield measurable results over several years

- Discuss **concrete approaches and instruments** for more effective risk reduction, preparedness and response
- Analyse **how DRR and the humanitarian-development nexus are complementary and mutually beneficial**, both in operations and institutionally

The workshop series concluded one week later, on 8 April 2021, with a virtual talk show with partners and colleagues of the Swiss NGO DRR Platform.

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Session 1: DRR and the humanitarian-development nexus in different contexts

In order to identify possible pathways to deal with the challenges mentioned in the introductory presentation, three different contexts were presented:

- **Bangladesh**, facing recurring risks triggered by sudden-onset hazards (floods, cyclones), climate change, as well as large influx of refugees from neighbouring Myanmar
- **Ethiopia**, while striving to becoming a thriving nation in the Horn of Africa, is dealing recurrently with **slow-onset** hazards such as droughts, the ongoing locust plague and **conflict surges** in border regions, which request stakeholders to adapt programming and constantly shift between response and development interventions
- **Andes region** (Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador) facing a wide array of **natural hazards** (earthquake, floods, droughts, wild fires), often fuelled by **climate change impacts in the highlands** as well as ongoing social

tensions triggered by weak governance. Challenges are

Disaster risk reduction, particularly preparedness, can be an entry point for collaboration between parties with differing agendas and thus contribute to bringing stakeholders to a joint table. Therefore, it provides windows of opportunities to improve the status quo and to build back better (structurally and institutionally). Despite strong relevance of hazards and a diverse risk landscape, sensitization for the importance of risk-informed-development that is considering risks in all investments and striving to reduce structural vulnerabilities as one major factor in disaster preparedness still faces substantial challenges:

- Institutional divides between civil protection and (risk-informed) development authorities persist. Immediate response receives more attention, more accolades, and more funding than does prevention
- Collective outcomes, one major agreement stemming from the World Humanitarian Summit have not yet been defined or applied in all contexts. Based on joint analysis, humanitarian, development and peace actors are gradually learning to define collective outcomes to guide their respective programming. Such complex and systemic shift in programming is taking time as it affects the entire aid sector
- Consideration of disaster risks is still often seen as additional layer to projects and programmes, not as integral part and core benefit.

Further references discussed in this session:

- [“The graduation approach in migration settings”](#) – Thematic Paper Caritas Switzerland

Session 2: Anticipatory Humanitarian Action (AHA)

Only 1% of humanitarian funding goes into anticipatory action. As mentioned in the introduction, the cost for humanitarian response is rising and so is the number of people that are affected. Anticipatory Humanitarian Action takes on the rationale of disaster risk reduction: that prevention and anticipation is more cost-effective than response, that it can save lives and invest in resilience. The session presented some instruments of the innovative AHA approach – aiming at preparing and releasing funds for humanitarian action before the actual event happens. While not being entirely new for DRR-practitioners, AHA allows humanitarians to act not in response but in anticipation and provides the needed knowledge as well as instruments.

How to strengthen that awareness in the population and among decision-makers? Madhan Uprety from the RCRCCC showcased the example of impact-based forecasting, where instead of forecasting characteristics of an extreme (windspeed, water level, wave height), the focus is placed on the potential impacts (including when, where and how likely they are), easing decision-taking for stakeholders in charge (see Figure 1).

A number of presentations on concrete interventions (floods in Bangladesh and Uganda, cold wave in Mongolia) shared a lot of

insights with the audience – all accessible via the Platform website.

While AHA shows some promising results – increasing evidence, strong partnerships, growing donor base – there is still a long way to make AHA business as usual. The time and resource intensiveness of AHA systems-building, the need for flexible funding for scaling up AHA and mainstreaming it into national DRM frameworks, or the need of a strong evidence base to really changing mind-sets are just a few of the challenges that still lie ahead.

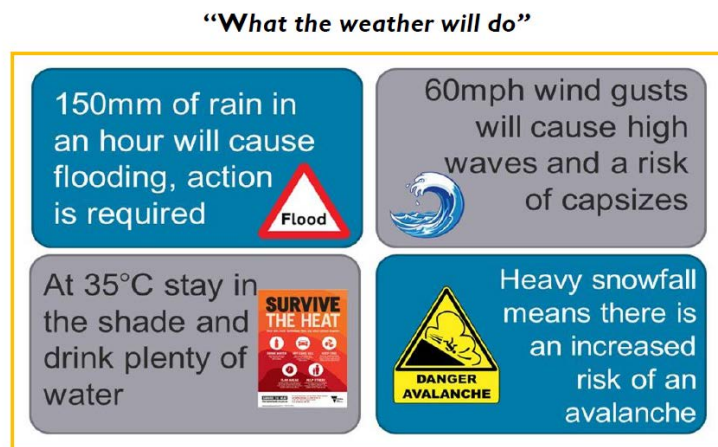


Figure 1: Example from Impact-based forecasting and warnings (Source: UK Met Office, extract from M.Uprety)

Further links relevant to this session:

- [Forecast-based-Financing Practitioners Manual](#), IFRC et al.
- [Anticipatory Action Task Force - Anticipation Hub](#)

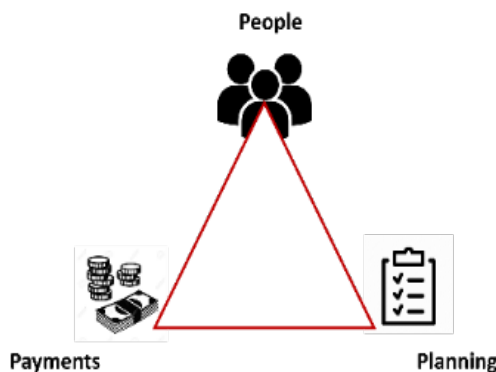
Session 3: Institutional Preparedness

The third session of the workshop focused on institutional preparedness that is the ability of (in our case) organizations, including head offices, delegations and partners, “to anticipate and respond effectively to the impact of likely, imminent or current hazards, events or conditions³”.

A discussion between representatives of Platform member organizations revealed a lot of interesting approaches to ensure that our organizations are prepared for possible shocks and stresses.

People, planning and funding are the three drivers of successful institutional preparedness, was one of the lessons learned of this workshop.

Achievements and good practices on institutional preparedness included:



Processes

- Break down institutional silos – integration of Humanitarian Response into regional programming
- Creation of ad-hoc crisis teams incl. a flexible roster of experts, both centred at head quarter and in regions
- Monitoring: Institutional early alert system proved successful to raise awareness on looming crises and make resources available to personnel
- Definition of Contingency Planning and Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) was perceived as important step to structure response

Regionalization and localisation

- Shift of responsibilities to country level towards localization: From global response team towards country-led emergency response, including national and local NGO representatives. This helped create trust. Linkage between country teams and HQ are country directors.

Alliances and network

- Tap networks and invest in strong alliances in times of peace to activate them and work jointly during crises

Challenges mentioned by participants reflect both the lack of a general willingness to change the mindset institutionally as well as too strong

steering from head offices. Donors tend to allocate funding merely to disaster response rather than to preparedness initiatives. Localization and regionalization of responsibility has high potential to define tailored responses in

exchange with local stakeholders – but requires openness from those in charge currently to redistribute power. More advocacy is necessary to convince partners and donors of the importance to invest and allocate more funding to preparedness.

³ Definition according to IFRC and ECHO

Key messages and conclusions

Participants formulated clear demands towards decision and policy makers that reflect the major discussion outcomes and identified gaps:

Localization: We must ensure that the discussion around the nexus involves country offices, partners and local stakeholders alike. Sharing and devolving roles and responsibilities is in the spirit of the localization agenda, but requires a mind-shift towards local-decision making and resource allocation. We encourage donors to allocate more funding to local implementers, we also encourage our own organisations to engage in localisation of programmes and decision-making.

Bridging function: The bridging function of disaster risk reduction gained renewed importance in the debate on the humanitarian-development-(peace)-nexus. DRR is an important entry point for both humanitarian and development work and indispensable if we are to accelerate progress of the Sustainable Development Goals. The standard integration of risks into development and investment planning is as important as the understanding of potential for risk reduction starting from response.

Funding: Innovative and promising funding instruments are being developed and tested, including but not limited to the AHA-initiatives. For them to reach scale, they require an enabling environment from implementers and donors alike, increasing flexibility and an open mind to new pathways to resilience.

Triple nexus: Adding the third dimension to the nexus increases complexity but becomes ever more relevant. We are not there (yet), to approach the three legs of the triple nexus on an equal footing, often shying away from engaging in peace-building activities, also linked to the fear of becoming involved on either one side of a conflict and jeopardize the principles of neutrality and impartiality that we all prescribe to. However, a minimal standard for any meaningful work along the humanitarian-development-nexus, which is increasingly taking place in fragile contexts, is to integrate conflict-sensitivity along the programme management cycle, through conflict-sensitive programme management.

Meeting again: the public event and talk show on 8 April 2021

Together with 70 participants, five guests joined the Swiss NGO DRR Platform for the concluding event of the virtual annual workshop, on 8 April 2021: a virtual talk show, moderated by Ms. Rupa Mukerji, Director Advisory Services with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation under the title of: *Disaster risk reduction in the humanitarian-development-nexus – how can it contribute to sustainable humanitarian impact and resilient development?*

The following distinguished speakers participated:

- **Mr. Xavier Castellanos**
Vice Secretary General, IFRC
- **Ambassador Manuel Bessler**
Deputy Secretary General SDC, Head Swiss Humanitarian Aid
- **Dr. Barbara Dietrich**
Regional Coordinator Bangladesh, Myanmar, Lao, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
- **Mr. Beat von Däniken**
Country Director Mozambique, Solidar Suisse
- **Mr. Ernst Lüber**
Head of Programme Department, Swiss Solidarity

The discussion revolved around questions of biggest achievements related to the nexus, institutional preparedness as well as remaining challenges to bring humanitarian and development objectives closer together, with a specific focus on disaster risk reduction.

The talk show and ensuing discussion brought forward the following key messages:

- The representative of IFRC, Mr. Xavier Castellanos, urged the audience to put themselves into the shoes of the people affected, who are not differentiating between the silos of humanitarians,

development cooperation and peacebuilding, “they are **living in the triple nexus every day**”. What counts for them, are the results and the effectiveness of aid and the support delivered to them in dignity.

- To bring development cooperation and humanitarian aid closer, **working with and in recognition of risks is key**: For humanitarian aid, including the objective of reducing risk into their planning and implementation can provide the needed linkage to longer-term development cooperation and vice-versa. DRR a key door-opener to include this perspective on risk both into development cooperation and humanitarian aid
- Speakers are convinced that **localization** is a key investment to be done in order to strengthen local capacities and overcome the politics of aid, thus bringing the nexus to the operational level where it currently still struggles. However, speakers also note a risk-aversity of donors and international implementers to share responsibility, funding and strategic considerations with local stakeholders. In that sense, the pandemic brought to light the tremendous importance of first response and coordinated support for people by local organizations and actors. It is on us to make use of this recognition for humanitarian aid and development cooperation beyond the Covid-19 pandemic
- Asked about one big nut that was cracked in bringing the nexus to effect, speakers emphasized the **increased relevance of DRR in development planning and in humanitarian response** (foremost through building-back-better approaches), acting as a **bridge** between the two. This increased relevance came at the price of

major investments into mainstreaming efforts and in lobbying for DRR.

- Particularly in multi-mandated organizations with traditionally separated development and humanitarian departments, the process to bring these closer together is challenging. What helps are joint missions to jointly work in a context on a common issue, and recognition of specific competences that can complement each other. While “nexus” tends to be an overused term in policy papers, we should not lose our respect from its implementation – the reality is more complex than any strategy.

Way Forward

Through the annual workshop series on the topic of the humanitarian-development nexus, participants were able to connect concepts with case studies and link established with cutting-edge knowledge to improve working practice at the interface of humanitarian and development work. Exchange and group works that illustrated the presentation were much appreciated. Participants wished for even more inputs from colleagues and partners directly from the field and thus make localization also a reality in international workshops.

To continue this thematic journey and follow the participants’ demand, the Swiss NGO DRR Platform foresees a series of webinars and/or learning events that integrate even more practices from Platform members and beyond, open up more towards the triple nexus and share how-to-guides of how to put the nexus into practice. Stay tuned via www.drrplatform.org for upcoming events and publications.

About the Swiss NGO DRR Platform

The Swiss NGO DRR Platform is a network of 20 Swiss-based non-governmental organizations working on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) and is dedicated to work towards enhancing the resilience of women and men, communities and governments in partner countries. The Platform was founded in 2011 and focuses its work on (i) knowledge sharing and capacity building (ii) conceptual and technical support and (iii) advocacy and policy dialogue.

To learn more about the Swiss NGO DRR Platform, its members and work, please visit www.drrplatform.org.

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