

## POLICY BRIEF

# TOWARDS RISK-INFORMED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## OVERVIEW

*"Our goal, as captured in the Secretary-General's report on Our Common Agenda, is a healthy planet where people thrive. Disasters can destroy decades of progress in minutes. Therefore, being better prepared and taking measures to reduce disaster risk must be at the heart of all sustainable development efforts."*

Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina J. Mohammed, at the launch of the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022

Risk mirrors today's interconnected world, increasingly assuming a systemic nature, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate emergency. Actions in one system can create or reduce risk for another, and the impacts of hazards can cascade across systems. Addressing the challenge of systemic risk therefore necessitates integrating disaster risk reduction (DRR) into climate- and disaster-risk-informed policies and programmes and building coherence with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Risk reduction and resilience building are essential for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. Development and investments that are risk informed and prevention oriented underpin the sustainability and resilience of systems and societies. Risk is a function of hazards, exposure, and vulnerability, and tackling it requires addressing the root causes across economic, social and environmental systems.

The central tenet of DRR is that development policy and investment decisions taken today can reduce human and economic losses due to a disaster in the future. Risk-informed development with a long-term view and with a systemic and multi-hazard perspective is fundamental to safeguarding our shared future. Our Common Agenda presents timely recommendations to address major global catastrophic risk and the need for strategic

### KEY POINTS:

- Accelerating implementation of the Sendai Framework to reduce disaster risk is key for getting SDGs back on track.
- As risk is not always immediately tangible or apparent, it should be addressed proactively.
- Addressing systemic risk necessitates integrating DRR across all policies and programmes for sustainable development. Risk reduction must be integrated into the DNA of policies and investments if actions are to be sustainable and resilient in the face of current and future risks.
- Managing disaster and climate risk in a comprehensive manner is central to development planning. This entails that risk-centred approaches should be integrated into national adaptation plans, while at the same time adaptation and climate information should be integrated into national and local DRR strategies.
- Mainstreaming DRR into public and private investment across all sectors is essential. International development cooperation should be systematically risk informed, with support provided to developing countries to strengthen their capacity to manage and reduce risks.
- Investment in technology transfer, capacity development and interoperable data systems are imperative to build risk knowledge and strategic foresight.
- Developing risk communication tools, including taking into account how cognitive biases can shape risk understanding, is imperative to build trust in science and to promote a culture of risk reduction.

foresight, to turbocharge the 2030 Agenda in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Targeted pre-emptive investment has generated untold benefits across all SDGs from disasters that did not happen.

Global stocktakes of the Sendai Framework, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement and other global frameworks must

set the trajectory for full integration of risk considerations. Building coherence across these agendas makes a compelling case for the commitment and investment needed to achieve sustainable, inclusive, risk-informed and resilient development for the benefit of current and future generations.

## THE CHALLENGES

### 1. Demystifying risk across all dimensions of sustainable development

Pre-existing levels of risk in societies and systems become apparent during disasters. Reducing them through development actions requires applying a risk lens to our decisions and actions. Disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic or those caused by natural hazards expose fault lines in systems. We need to understand clearly that disasters are a product of the interaction of hazards with the vulnerability and exposure of people and assets, as well as the coping capacity of financial, environmental, social and political systems. We can avoid hazards from becoming devastating disasters by identification and anticipation of these fault lines before a disaster occurs. Ultimately, understanding the impacts of disasters is crucial for progress towards the SDGs.

*What does it mean to apply a risk lens to our decisions and actions, in other words to make risk-informed decisions?*

While some DRR measures, such as retrofitting existing and building new infrastructure to withstand shocks caused by natural hazards like earthquakes and storms, are tangible, other DRR measures may be less evident. These include for instance: addressing weaknesses in global supply chains, building disaster resilience through poverty reduction programmes or effecting behaviour change among communities.

Assessing the adequate combination of material and non-physical interventions to reduce disaster risk is a challenge that requires increased attention as there is no other way to build resilience in our societies and systems.

### 2. Advancing risk-informed decision-making and investments

Risk-blind investments and development choices exacerbate systemic risk. Governance systems are not currently set up for the inter- and transdisciplinary approaches necessary for managing complex, systemic risk. Specific challenges remain in coordination among all actors. Although progress is being made, there is room to advance integrated planning at the national level, including between national DRR strategies and other policies and strategies on sustainable development, financing and climate action. Another challenge is to fully mainstream DRR into United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

The long-term costs of not investing in DRR are often not factored into decision-making. Systematic medium- and long-term disaster risk assessments of all public and private investments, including mapping trade-offs that may lead to risk creation in the longer term, are necessary but lacking. Well-informed decisions from experience and the application of science and forward-looking approaches are also absent. A similar gap is evident in dedicated financing for DRR within budgeting

for SDGs. Financing for disaster risk reduction, remains a specific challenge for least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS), where financing and capacity for investing in risk prevention, reduction and resilience were already limited before the COVID-19 pandemic. While national and local budgets of these countries include a very small amount for provision of disaster risk reduction, in most instances, the enabling environment to facilitate the private sector investment needed to prevent and reduce risk and build resilience to disasters in these vulnerable countries is not evident.

*What is the backdrop of such a lack for financing for disaster risk reduction?*

Cognitive research shows the decision-making process on DRR is often influenced by short-term thinking or other motivated reasoning. In addition, decisions of policy makers are more than often bound by the electoral cycle. Another challenge to prevention and risk reduction is that people and institutions will either underreact to the potential consequences of novel risks or overreact to more familiar risks based on their recent experience of disaster.

### 3. Enhancing risk knowledge for an uncertain future and how to make risk-informed decisions for the SDGs

The uncertainty of the evolving risk landscape is a challenge to current approaches to sustainable development. A better understanding of the dynamic nature of risk, driven by the interdependencies of our society, the global economy and the environment, is essential for accelerating risk-informed action towards the 2030 Agenda by all actors.

Despite global technological advances in generating risk information, challenges remain in its accessibility and use

in a concrete and holistic manner to inform decision-making. The increasing frequency and scale of shocks calls for better application of risk analytics to guide and underpin national development plans as well as sector-specific plans, investments and resilience building. This will require access to and utilization of next-generation multi-hazard risk tools that can better account for and model cascading and systemic risks.

In this uncertain reality, the below graphic provides concrete examples of how we can apply the risk-lens to each SDG.



## Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through a disaster risk reduction lens



Promote and develop social protection systems based on risk-informed early action programmes, social safety nets, livelihood advancement programmes and inclusive policies to build the resilience of households and communities to disasters.



Transform food systems to improve food production and security through comprehensive disaster and climate risk management and planning for the agrifood sector. Promote crop insurance, climate-resilient food production systems, crop diversification including utilization of drought- and flood-tolerant crop varieties, and adoption of water and soil moisture conservation techniques.



Integrate health into disaster risk management and disaster risk reduction (DRR) into health planning to secure human health including mental health and well-being. Increase pandemic preparedness and response to enable early warning and manage diseases of the future. Promote risk-informed health infrastructure and systems to minimize disruptions in access to health services and provide life-saving assistance.



Promote a holistic approach to reducing risks from all hazards to the education sector through the inclusion of DRR in school curricula at all levels. Promote safe school environments, resilient infrastructure for education, and a multi-hazard perspective including conflict and child protection issues to reduce vulnerability and exposure.



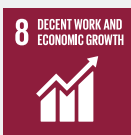
Address structural gender inequality as an underlying driver of risk in DRR laws, policies, programmes and governance. Increase investment in gender-responsive disaster and climate risk management. Promote and use sex-disaggregated data for systematic accounting of disaster losses and improvement of risk knowledge for policymaking.



Mainstream DRR strategies into rural and urban development planning, water management, preservation of ecosystems, and management of rivers, coastal flood plain areas, drylands, wetlands and all other areas prone to droughts and flooding. Promote the robust and sustainable management of water resources to reduce the impacts of water-related hazards.



Promote a diverse, risk-informed energy mix including retrofitting or rebuilding existing infrastructure, and create a culture of maintenance to secure safe, reliable, affordable and clean electricity necessary for resilient societies and economies, and continuation of energy provision when hazards strike.



Pursue risk-informed approaches across sectors and policies, including in the agricultural, manufacturing and tourism sectors. Promote risk reduction measures in business behaviour, including workplace safety, and just transitions away from industries driving risk creation to influence jobs-rich, pro-poor growth to and build the resilience of populations to hazards.



Apply principles for resilient infrastructure for risk-informed policy, investment decisions and systems in sectors including transportation, power, communications, water, health and education, and nurture a culture of maintenance for resilient societies.<sup>1</sup>



Integrate social safety nets with livelihood enhancement programmes to bolster the resilience of households and communities to disasters, and displacement in the design, financing and implementation of DRR policies and measures. Promote coherence across sectors and agendas, particularly among least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States affected by cycles of disaster and debt.



Mainstream DRR into land-use policy and urban planning, develop local DRR strategies supported by relevant legislation, infrastructure regulations and risk-informed land-use planning and updated with multi-hazard urban risk assessments to strengthen resilience as supported in Making Cities Resilient 2030.<sup>2</sup>



Reorientate consumption and production patterns to prevent overextraction of resources and environmental degradation. Promote risk-informed management of existing levels of waste to prevent creation of new risk, including technological waste.



Scale up risk-informed climate action to reduce vulnerability and exposure to disasters and evade maladaptation. Integrate risk-informed planning, programmes and financing, and promote comprehensive disaster and climate risk management.<sup>3</sup>



Promote maritime nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches for DRR and promote risk-informed integrated coastal zone management. Develop and strengthen multi-hazard and impact-based early warning systems for anticipatory and early action to mitigate the risks of ocean-related hazards.



Scale up implementation of and investment in terrestrial nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches for DRR, and step up efforts to tackle desertification, land degradation, erosion, drought, flooding and biodiversity loss.



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies through strengthening the capacity of State structures and social systems to commit to and scale up agile and comprehensive risk governance. Strengthen the ability of institutions to prepare for and respond to disasters, to reduce humanitarian needs and strengthen trust in government. Incorporate DRR into programming across sectors, particularly in conflict areas. Strengthen risk communication systems to provide timely access to adequate disaster risk information and engage citizens to think about resilience.



Promote and engender all-of-society engagement and partnerships for DRR and a culture of risk reduction and resilience. Scale up capacity-building for data collection and technology transfer. Develop DRR financing strategies across sectors for sustainable development. Promote investment in prevention and build the evidence base for investment in DRR. Strengthen the oversight of and overhaul the regulatory environment, and foster development of new and innovative financing models.

1 <https://www.undrr.org/publication/words-action-guideline-man-made/technological-hazards>.

2 <https://mcr2030.undrr.org/who-we-are>.

3 <https://www.undrr.org/publication/policy-brief-disaster-risk-reduction-and-climate-change>.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Shift to anticipation, prevention and risk reduction

Transition to proactively managing existing and emerging risks from the reactive management of disasters is essential for achieving SDGs. Systems should be recalibrated to prevent and reduce risk and build resilience through enhanced risk communication and comprehensive governance approaches that incorporate

lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bridging the gap at the science–policy interface and taking an all-of-society approach are critical for the transformation necessary in the practical, political, and personal spheres.

## 2. Integrate and align risk reduction across the Sustainable Development Goals

Long-term political commitment, agile and comprehensive risk governance through integrating DRR into sustainable approaches, and cross-sectoral planning tailored to country and regional contexts, are essential to address current and future risks. Establishment and/or strengthening of multisectoral and inter-institutional risk governance mechanisms and promotion of coherence at the national, local and sectoral levels should be prioritized.

Comprehensive climate and disaster risk management should be scaled up, while raising and achieving climate ambition through enhanced financing for and support to adaptation and resilience. Advocacy of and communication on the multiple benefits of DRR for all sectors, as well as capacity-building and clear articulation of roles and responsibilities for risk reduction, are essential.

A culture of risk reduction and resilience should be promoted to advance risk-informed decision-making. Policymakers must take a long-term view to the impacts of trade-offs among development choices, and embed DRR across SDGs to advance risk-informed thinking for resilience in the consciousness of current and future generations (see the table on Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through a disaster risk reduction lens).

Risk reduction should be integrated into economic, environmental and sustainable development policy, including through structural transformation, productive capacity development, commodity diversification, harnessing the demographic dividend, and risk-proofing national development plans and policies.

## 3. Invest in disaster risk reduction at all levels

Investment should be made in risk reduction, strengthening the oversight of and overhauling the regulatory environment, building the evidence base for investing in DRR, and developing new and innovative financing models.<sup>4</sup> An enabling environment should be created to attract international and domestic private sector investment, with an understanding of the different dimensions of risk and resilience. Allocation of resources and innovative financing mechanisms focused on disaster prevention and risk reduction should be increased, especially in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

Synergies between financing for climate action and DRR should be increased. Risk considerations should be integrated into budgets and plans across SDGs, including within Integrated National Financing Frameworks, and

incentives should be made for private investment in risk reduction and investment in quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

Innovative approaches to financing for DRR in accordance with national contexts should be developed and operationalized. These include the use of risk and resilience bonds, tracking financing for risk reduction in all sectors, and incorporating disaster risk within taxonomies for sustainable and green investment.

International development cooperation should be systematically risk informed to include specific and direct support to developing countries to strengthen their capacities at national and local levels to manage and reduce risk.

4 <https://www.undrr.org/publication/policy-brief-accelerating-financing-and-de-risking-investment>.

#### 4. Develop strategic foresight for transformational change

Strategic foresight capabilities for future shocks and stressors should be built, including through a networked approach to modelling and interoperable data sets and tools.

The science–policy interface and commitment to measuring what we value should be strengthened, to overcome short-termism and build systemic risk into financial and planning systems. Efforts to define common terminologies and provide open access data across

disciplines to create shared knowledge, encourage lateral collaboration and speed up the pace of learning will enable this approach.

Trust in science should be enhanced through investment in two-way learning processes, provision of qualitative data, and increased use of local and indigenous knowledge to create agile, flexible systems necessary to build resilience in today's complex world.