BRIEF ON DARA'S RISK REDUCTION INDEX WEST AFRICA PHASE

The background

DARA's extensive experience in evaluating interventions and international responses to disasters globally has led us to launch the Risk Reduction Index (RRI), an **action-oriented research programme that aims to shed light on how to improve risk management within most vulnerable countries across different regions of the world**. A first pilot phase of the RRI was carried out in seven countries in Central America during 2010 (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic). DARA is now preparing a second phase in West Africa, where some of the world's poorest countries are targeted.

The RRI provides in-depth analysis, carried out within geographically well-defined risk prone areas, of existing conditions and capacities that either prevent or enable local and national actors to carry out effective risk management. The RRI has sprung from a need to understand how and why risks are generated, and ultimately what can be done to reduce them.

The challenge

Disasters often grip the imagination and while many of them do not go un-noticed, others are of a 'slow' (or 'hidden') character that they hardly attract attention from the international community – mainly donors and media. Some are of a more low recurrence, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti or the 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan, while others are of a more recurrent nature, such as droughts in the Horn of Africa or floods in West Africa or Pakistan. What many of these recent disasters have in common is that while much could have been done to save lives and economic resources, few initiatives have had sufficient time-span and sectoral breadth to adequately prepare populations to face disasters or to help prevent the occurrence of significant losses.

At the same time disasters cause ever more severe economic losses (even in OECD countries) and for some vulnerable countries disasters may even hamper economic progress and erode hard-won development efforts. While mortality rates associated with low recurrence weather-related hazards have decreased globally, extensive losses are increasingly concentrated in low-income countries, where risk management capacities remain low. Evidence shows a correlation between low-income countries and low governance capacity to deal with risk management, amongst other risk factors. The result is that many of these vulnerable low-income countries only have very limited resources to mobilise in order to prevent hazards from turning into disasters.

Vulnerable populations are those that suffer the most from these events, particularly women and children. Recurrence of events means that coping mechanisms are often stretched and social safety-nets - be that clan- or ethnic relations or community support structures - can no longer support those affected.

Responses to such challenges are complex and there is a growing recognition that effective risk management is most successful when interventions are designed to include multiple sectors and cover a geographical scope that is sufficiently wide and accurately defined in terms of risk. There is nonetheless a tendency that many interventions are either focused on a specific sector or a limited geographical area (i.e. municipality or district administration). Often they also remain uncoordinated, and thus may not address the multiple factors that are often related to risk.

These challenges are to some extend captured in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA), a framework adopted by 168 countries at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005. Under its fourth priority for action, the HFA highlight the need for more integrated actions to address the so-called underlying risk factors. While this is a recognised challenge among a wide range of organisations working in the field of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA), the vast majority of field interventions have yet to employ more integrated approaches.

Recently, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction's (UNISDR) 2011 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR) highlighted the crucial importance for governments to address underlying risk drivers and to integrate DRR into their development agendas. The report further pointed to the difficulties countries continue to face with regard to tackling vulnerability and underlying risk drivers, and the need to strengthen government capacities around DRR. Indeed, of the HFA's five priorities for action, number four showed the least progress since 2007 (when the first GAR was published as Disaster Risk Reduction Global Review), and continues to receive the lowest overall scores according to numerous country-led HFA progress reviews. Unless the underlying risk factors are addressed and taken into consideration in more comprehensive risk reduction interventions, natural hazards will continue to be a threat to many countries' development efforts – particularly those of the West African region.

The RRI

It is on this basis that DARA decided to focus the RRI on those factors that contribute to the generation of risk. In order to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the underlying risk factors or risk drivers, the RRI uses a two-pronged approach. Firstly, the analytical point of departure is to map the dichotomy between capacities and conditions. Capacities are understood as human resources available to manage risks, while conditions are the frameworks (including norms, laws, legislations, codes and agreements) within which actors perform. These frameworks can be both enabling and disabling. Effective DRR is determined by the (dialectical) relationship between capacities and conditions.

Secondly, capacities and conditions are analysed through four risk drivers within a determined geographical area. These drivers represent sectors where underlying risks mostly are represented. The RRI has identified four risk drivers, each with a respective system of indicators:

1. Environmental degradation and natural resources.

2. Socioeconomic conditions and livelihoods.
3. Land use and built environment.
4. Governance.

By linking the mapping of capacities/conditions with the four risk drivers, the RRI provides a complete and comprehensive analysis of underlying risk drivers for certain geographical areas. Through the use of participatory methods, furthermore, the RRI enables local, regional and national stakeholders to identify what measures are needed to address the underlying risk drivers.

Under the FOREWARN initiative (Facilitating Enhanced Organisational Responsiveness for Effective West African Risk Reduction), the RRI will examine three countries in West Africa, namely Ghana, Cape Verde, and Senegal. This research is financed by AusAID. There is commitment from other investors (donors) to include additional countries – targeting still needs to be determined.

The objectives

The purpose of RRI is to generate knowledge in West Africa region that will help local administrations, national governments, and ECOWAS (regional body) to address the underlying risk drivers, make risk management more effective and, thereby, contribute to an increased resilience of most vulnerable populations. The RRI project has three main objectives:

1. To inform and guide practitioners and policy-makers about underlying risk drivers and how they influence or contribute to the generation of risks within determined geographical areas;
2. To define specific actions that will improve risk management at local, national and regional levels;
3. To generate baseline data for measuring progress (or setbacks) of how underlying risk drivers are addressed over time.

The RRI aims to influence development processes and promote better integration of DRR into development and poverty reduction strategies and policies.

The outcomes

By analysing the conditions and capacities for DRR according to the four risk drivers identified, their specific influence on risk reduction will be determined and specific steps can thus be identified in order to define more effective policies and initiatives related to DRR and medium-term and longer term adaptation to climate change.

In its initial study in Central America, the RRI has proven significant for the following reasons:

- It promotes a multi-stakeholder and inter-sectoral angle to risk management;
- It highlights the root causes of risks by identifying underlying risk drivers;
- It offers a comprehensive overview of capacities and conditions and steps needed in order to pursue more comprehensive DRR strategies;
- It identifies aspects of development processes and institutional structures that need to be addressed in risk management.

How we do it

The RRI methodology focuses on measuring stakeholders' (i.e. government, civil society, communities, private sector and NGOs) perceptions of the underlying risk drivers. It comprises an analysis at the sub-regional level – or within the so-called Representative Territorial Unit (RTU). An RTU is a geographical area defined in terms of hazards and patterns of vulnerability, and not necessarily according to administrative divisions or boundaries.

Findings from research and consultation processes conducted in the RTUs, which include policy recommendations and concrete action points related to existing capacities and conditions, are validated through multi-stakeholder seminars that take place at RTU, national and regional levels. Our three-tier approach (bottom-up) ensures that local-level risk drivers are brought to the attention of both national and regional decision-makers and policy implementers.

Our partners

The RRI will build on partnerships with regional and local entities, including multilateral organisations and international NGOs, national civil society networks, and local and national governments. In the West Africa phase, the RRI is being carried out in a strategic partnership with the Humanitarian Futures Programme and the African Leadership Centre, under the auspices of the FOREWARN Initiative. FOREWARN is implemented in close collaboration with ECOWAS and regional networks.

Formalised agreements have been made with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), where partnership will focus on HFA monitoring, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). By partnering with IFRC, DARA ensures that the RRI makes use of partners' local knowledge throughout the research process and that RRI findings are incorporated into future risk related activities in the region.

Further information

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