

Re-shaping policy and institutions for integrating climate and disaster resilience



Summary

It is clear that positive policy action is needed to build the resilience of citizens and the state to changing climate and disaster shocks and stresses. What is not so clear is why there is a lag in re-shaping policy to reflect the changing climate and disaster context.

Evidence from across Africa and Asia signifies that shifting seasonal patterns and high intensity extreme events are already eroding community and household resilience to a wide set of external shocks. Investing in integrated and flexible institutional and policy frameworks is a first step towards creating a policy environment that can build resilience to climate and disaster risks.

Two years of action, dialogue and research with partners seeking to strengthen climate and disaster resilience across Asia and Africa provides a strong knowledge base to inform this process.



Policy brief

Climate Smart Disaster Risk Management

If organisations, policies and practices do not take climate change into account, development interventions and disaster risk management will become progressively ineffective at reducing poverty and vulnerability to disasters.

The Climate Smart Disaster Risk Management (CSDRM) approach takes a unique first step in providing policy makers and practitioners with a means to identify the processes needed to build resilience to climate and disaster risks. The three pillars of the approach (see below) recognise that dynamic sets of risks emerge from physical, environmental, economic, political and social sources, and that multiple and often simultaneous shocks and stressors are part of the lived reality for many communities and households.

The CSDRM approach is supported by three 'pillars' of actions.

Uncertainty

Improve information on how hazards are changing with detailed risk assessments from diverse sources of knowledge (e.g local, climatology, social science).

Adaptive capacity

Enable institutions and networks to develop new skills, knowledge and resources needed to enhance capacity to adapt to climate change.

Poverty & vulnerability

Empower and support communities to address the root causes of vulnerability through challenging injustice, increasing access to resources and services and through environmentally sound development.

At the national and international level, policy, plans and funding often remain focussed on single issues and disconnected from local 'risk realities'. Such separation limits the potential for integrated policy, programmes and action which could contribute to building the resilience of communities where the impacts of disasters and climate change are felt.

Build flexibility for learning and change



Developing the right institutional and policy environment to respond effectively to changing disaster and climate risks requires greater focus on how different sectors, programmes, policies and interventions relate to one another. This reveals both complementarities and trade-offs. In the process of gaining awareness of how action in one sphere may increase risk or be maladaptive in other spheres, tensions may arise.

Without recognition of these tensions, short-term project gains may jeopardise action towards building long-term resilience of communities and households to a range of shocks and stresses; whilst interventions designed for increasing longer term resilience may not always reduce short term risk.

Two years of collaboration and research reveals a need for both horizontal and vertical partnerships that can better understand and engage with such complexity: partnerships can vertically link knowledge and skills *between* scales - from the household to global - and horizontally promote shared learning through cross-disciplinary dialogue on a wide range of issues *within* scales.

Designing policy and programmes based on multiple knowledge sources requires policy frameworks and institutional norms that promote collaboration, embed reflective practices and which support continual learning to allow for adjustment in plans and strategies. Such processes contribute to building institutions that are capable of responding to changing knowledge, changing hazards and wider stressors.

Regular monitoring is an essential part of this process, increasing the opportunities for identifying situations where trade-offs may be, or become, apparent between disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation and development objectives. Becoming adaptive through learning and adjusting means both short-term responses and longer term plans are more likely to remain fit for purpose.

Localise national policy



Every risk context is unique, therefore it is important that national policy and strategies for integration provide a framework for action which resources and empowers local level institutions. Building resilience requires development that is responsive to the specific challenges and opportunities that local communities face.

In some respects the elements of a policy environment for strengthening climate and disaster resilience are not new; the enabling environment will require transparent, equitable and accountable forms of governance. However there is a renewed need for mutual learning and knowledge exchange within policy spaces and for transparency in decision-making processes. It will be essential therefore to build capacities at state and citizen level and to build partnerships *between* citizens and the state.

Engaging policy and decision makers directly in community programmes can be a key strategy for enhancing governance capacity, skills and awareness to build a better understanding of the complexities of risk and development. Meanwhile, linking communities to government institutions is critical for informing and shaping policy frameworks that are responsive to community realities and supportive of local action. What is more, enabling citizens to be actively involved in decision-making spaces through good governance processes can enhance community cohesion.

Further reading

Harris, K., Seballos, F., Silva Villanueva, P., and Curmi, P. (2012) '*Changing Climate, Changing Disasters: Pathways to Integration*' Strengthening Climate Resilience, Brighton: IDS

Silva Villanueva, P. (2011) '*Learning to ADAPT: monitoring and evaluation approaches in climate change and disaster risk reduction – challenges, gaps and ways forward*' Strengthening Climate Resilience Discussion paper 9, Brighton: IDS

Connect knowledge for integrated responses



More efforts towards vertical and horizontal integration are needed to effectively triangulate different forms of knowledge in ways that can support the processes of planning for future risk and uncertainty. A lack of action in this regard is due in part to inappropriate or inadequate forms of knowledge – particularly in relation to the availability of down-scaled climate data – but also due to a lack of technical capacity and skills needed to access and translate scientific knowledge on disasters and climate risks. This can constrain efforts towards integration.

The re-interpretation of scientific data by end-users lacking the necessary technical skills can lead to flawed outcomes. But this is not just a challenge of better ‘translation’.

Utilising scientific knowledge alone produces only partial solutions - unless informed by knowledge of observed changes, emerging and perceived trends and the socio-economic context of the local level. For example, without adequate awareness of the role culture plays in community perceptions of climate change and disasters, such knowledge cannot be sensitively and effectively used to aid integrated planning.

Knowledge brokers and intermediaries are needed to connect technical and scientific sources with community knowledge; to enhance the accessibility, relevance and credible translation of knowledge; and so build the capacity of policy makers, disaster risk reduction practitioners, civil society organisations and citizens to become more effective in planning for uncertainty and change.

Further reading

Bahadur, A., Ibrahim, M., and Tanner, T. (2010) *The Resilience Renaissance? Unpacking of Resilience for Tackling Climate Change and Disasters* Strengthening Climate Resilience Discussion Paper 1, Brighton: IDS

Harris, K. (2012) *Why people don't behave as we would expect: the role of emotions, unrealistic optimism and previous experience in disaster preparedness* Strengthening Climate Resilience, Brighton: IDS

Changing contexts require innovation



Building resilience to climate-related disasters suggests there will be no ‘final solution’ but a continuous process within which learning, development and adjustment takes place. Such processes necessarily require space for innovation and experimentation (a central part of the CSDRM approach).

Innovation in integrated policy and programming is limited by wider institutional constraints, for example through siloed international dialogue and policy frameworks, and limited funding opportunities to directly support integrated approaches.

This in turn impacts on governmental and organisational structures, behaviour and cultures, reinforcing sector based projects and multiple, compartmentalised policy frameworks. People need to begin talking the same language about disasters, poverty and adaptation, and identify where the overlap and potential trade-offs lie.

Yet a broader concern lies in the ability of organisations and communities to take risks – to experiment and innovate, or for successful interventions to be scaled-up. The notion of ‘risk’ implies a potential for failure and a lack of (intended) ‘results’ or ‘impact’, whilst scaling-up previously successful interventions implies doing the same thing again, albeit in a new context. Donors are often risk averse with a tendency to prefer new and innovative programmes. A contradiction is exposed when innovation is stifled through the fear of failure, or scaling up success is constrained due to a desire for ‘new’ approaches.

Recognising a state of ‘non-equilibrium’ i.e. that climate change means there is no steady state, means engaging in a continuous process of learning and change and necessarily requires space for innovation and for sharing good practice where it exists.

Policy implications

The following recommendations for national policymakers and donors have emerged from two years of action, dialogue and research with partners seeking to strengthen climate and disaster resilience across Asia and Africa.

- National agencies should facilitate horizontal integration through cross-government collaboration and engagement with civil society, business and citizens, to develop integrated policy and action on disaster risk, climate change and poverty reduction.
- National agencies and international donors should provide incentives for collaboration between the different communities of practice, recognising that bringing different sectors together to develop a common language, understanding and coherence takes time.
- Political leadership on integration at the national level should be backed up with clear guidelines and resources to support action and implementation at all levels. Integrated efforts to improve impact and effectiveness over the longer term require substantial investment in the short term.
- Systems and structures should be established to facilitate vertical integration. Improving information flows between the national and the local level can ensure local realities associated with climate and disaster risk inform high level policy and decision-making.
- Ensure that technical and specialist knowledge is integrated into processes at the local level, leading to more informed and coherent strategies for managing change and uncertainty.
- Accountability mechanisms should be strengthened between communities and local government to enable more informed disaster and climate risk action. Mechanisms for engaging and building the capacity of local stakeholders to engage in decision-making should be strengthened.
- Donors should allow for adjustments in programme design which are responsive to new and emerging external knowledge and changing local conditions. Accepting non-equilibrium means having the flexibility to respond to changing contexts at the point of intervention and is a crucial way of managing changing risk.
- Donor funding should invest in programmes that support both technological experimentation and provide safety nets for community experimentation for building local climate and disaster resilience mechanisms. Such programmes can contribute to building an evidence and knowledge base for improving integrated policy and practice.

For more information on the Strengthening Climate Resilience programme: www.csdrm.org

This policy brief was written by Fran Seballos, Research Officer for SCR at IDS and Katie Harris, who was the Programme Manager for SCR and is now a Research Officer at ODI. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS, ODI or consortium partners or donors.