

Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM) Risk-informed decision-making for resilient and sustainable development

Context: Complex and systemic risks

Extreme natural events such as floods, earthquakes and hurricanes, as well as slow-onset hazards such as droughts and rising sea levels can seriously impact societies and infrastructures, particularly if the state and the population are inadequately prepared and there are insufficient preventative measures in place. In addition to these natural hazards, there are also man-made risks (e.g. technical accidents and conflicts) and hybrid risks (e.g. air pollution and deforestation). Climate change, urbanisation, inadequate health care, fragile statehood and violent conflict all exacerbate existing hazards and are liable to contribute to risk situations across borders.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** illustrates the vulnerability and global interdependencies of socio-political fields and economic sectors. To avoid systems being overloaded, it is necessary to foster the resilience of populations and infrastructures against simultaneous, interdependent risks.

Guiding principle: Risk-informed development

Achievements in terms of poverty reduction, combating illnesses and improving access to health care, education and services are fragile and are being undermined by new and emerging threats. An inability to understand and manage systemic risks is jeopardising the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030). **Disasters wipe out many years of development achievements and reduce the development opportunities of countries.**

PROJECT OBJECTIVE | The Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM) has the objective of strengthening the capacities and skills of selected decision-makers, regional organisations and initiatives in Southern Africa, Asia and Latin America in applying risk-informed development, taking into account context-specific fragility factors.

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In spite of the increasing awareness of the complexity of risks, they are still not always adequately taken into account in the planning of development measures, whether in the partner regions and countries or on the part of international donors. Current approaches frequently address just one threat at a time, typically a disaster, rather than considering several new global threats or multiple, simultaneously occurring risks. Disaster risk management is still largely focused on responding to disasters rather than adopting a cross-cutting, preventative approach to minimising risk. Decision-makers often lack the necessary skills and capacities to adequately deal with risks.

The debate around risk-informed development (RID) is becoming increasingly relevant at international level. It refers to an understanding of development that takes account of **a wide range of interdependent, dynamic, cross-border and, in some cases, simultaneous risks.**

Risk governance approach

GIDRM seeks to promote a risk governance approach in order to strengthen risk-informed development. Risk governance integrates short- and long-term risks into all decision-making and management processes as well as state initiatives. A comprehensive risk assessment records the vulnerabilities and coping capacities of individuals and systems, which can vary greatly depending on social norms, gender roles and structural power dynamics. Risks can be managed more effectively by employing a combination of skills, plans, guidelines, funding and cross-sectoral coordination. Measures for strengthening risk governance include taking account of climate and disaster risks in land-use, urban and budgetary planning, conducting comprehensive risk analyses for investment projects, and implementing safety standards in schools and for critical infrastructure such as hospitals and transportation systems. Comprehensive risk governance contributes to risk-informed development.

Good governance seeks to achieve a reliable supply of basic services through critical infrastructure (including health care, transport, energy and water). Risk governance must thus inform all critical infrastructure sectors and **all development policy decision-making processes on an ongoing basis**. To this end, it is necessary to elaborate (worst-case) scenarios, take account of a complex and changing risk landscape at all times, factor in uncertainties and design development processes to be correspondingly flexible. This requires coordinated, multi-level cooperation across ministries and sectors.

The risk governance approach is guided by the principle of leaving no one behind. In fragile contexts especially, marginalised population groups facing multiple discrimination are exposed to complex risks and tend to be

particularly affected by the impact of extreme events and disasters. Insufficient account is taken of their needs or they lack access to existing civil-society structures, social security systems and political participation.

Capacity development

It is necessary to develop a common and comprehensive understanding of risks in order to strengthen risk-informed development. GIDRM is working with three regional networks and selected member states to strengthen capacities and skills in assessing and managing multiple, systemic and unknown risks. The networks concerned are the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and the Latin American Network of National Public Investment Systems (Red SNIP).

GIDRM works with these regional organisations and other partner institutions to pool knowledge on risk-informed development. Dialogue is being encouraged between a large number of state, civil-society and private-sector decision-makers and experts from the scientific and research communities in order to foster the transfer of knowledge at international level. Risk-informed decision-making skills will be strengthened through the use of digital learning platforms, the development and piloting of gender- and conflict-sensitive guidelines, and the sustainable integration of RID principles into public-sector training concepts. This adds to safeguarding development achievements going forward and mainstreaming RID as a guiding principle for development cooperation in the long term.

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