

Disasters in the SDGs:

A first response to the Focus Areas proposed by the Co-Chairs

Disasters have a devastating impact on development. Families lose homes, livelihoods and loved ones; communities and nations lose businesses, jobs and services; children and particularly girls miss school, impacting a generation. Disaster impacts are already at extremely high levels - over the past twenty years, disasters from natural hazards have affected 4.4 billion people, claimed 1.3 million lives and caused \$2 trillion in economic losses – and will worsen by 2030, according to the IPCC SREX report.

Disasters have an overwhelming human, environmental and financial toll on development and poverty eradication efforts. This was clearly recognised in [The Future we Want](#) which called for ‘disaster risk reduction and the building of resilience to disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication’ (para 186).

This urgency requires two things: firstly specific targets to reduce disaster impacts and secondly embedding disaster risk management across the post-2015 framework.

What needs to change: Core disasters targets under a Poverty Eradication goal

The impact of disasters across societies and the natural environment is far-reaching, and the [Co-Chair’s document on Focus Areas](#) has identified the need to reduce these impacts explicitly and clearly in focus areas on sustainable cities and water and sanitation, as well as references to strengthening resilience under climate change and food security and nutrition. Whilst these references are welcome, the policy advantages of only focusing on water or climate-related disasters, or focusing separately on cities and food are not clear. These partial approaches may leave gaps or create overlaps in DRR implementation, either limiting national disaster efforts into particular areas, or leading to significant inefficiencies.

It is therefore proposed that core disasters targets be established under a poverty eradication goal, providing clarity in terms of profile and focus, as well as a comprehensive and well-defined approach to disasters. This would then be supplemented by indicators across a range of other goals and targets to reflect the impact of disasters across multiple aspects of development.

Why a poverty goal?

The Rio20 outcome document recognised that disaster risk reduction must be embedded in poverty reduction strategies if they are not to be derailed by shocks and stresses. The latest [World Development Report](#) states that disasters play a major role in pushing households below the poverty line and keeping them there, and evidence from Haiti, Pakistan and the Philippines has shown clearly that disasters can lead to an abrupt, systemic, intergenerational and long-lasting increase in poverty: poverty levels in Rizal Province in the Philippines nearly doubled due to Typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng, and were still elevated three years later; the 2000-2001 drought in Sindh province in Pakistan increased poverty by up to 15 percent; the Haiti earthquake pushed successful poverty eradication efforts back 10 years.

This note has been drafted as a contribution to the deliberations of the Open Working Group by Debbie Hillier (Oxfam) and Katherine Nightingale (Christian Aid), with input from Nicole Fassina (WSPA), Helen Stawski (Islamic Relief), Kelly Hawrylyshyn (Plan International UK) and Kate Munro (Global Network for Disaster Reduction).

While disasters can affect everyone, disaster risk is not shared equally between rich and poor. As the Co-Chairs' Progress Report notes (para 173), 'the poorest are most at risk from climate change and natural disasters.' Those marginalised – whether by sex, age, ethnicity, ability or other factor – bear the greatest burden. Poverty and inequality often push people to live on the margins, in high-risk places, such as alongside rivers, floodplains, marginal land and hillsides, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle of disaster, debt and destitution.

These extreme impacts of disasters on poor people necessitate that efforts to reduce disaster risk must deliver for them; poverty reduction must be at the heart of DRR. Hence governments must be held primarily accountable to a target for reducing the impact of disasters on poor people and on poverty eradication efforts – and therefore it must sit under a poverty alleviation goal.

Effective action to reduce disaster risk requires a range of efforts, policies and actions and limited funding may force governments to prioritise. There is a concern that such prioritisation may lead to entrenching inequality and poverty – whereby protecting assets is consistently privileged over protecting the poorest people. DRR efforts could not be deemed to be successful if, for example, 90 per cent of national assets were protected from disasters but these assets were owned by the elite minority – this leaves the majority of the population vulnerable to the shocks and stresses that can derail their own and their government's efforts to break free from poverty.

The post-2015 framework needs to measure what matters – a target to reduce the impact of disasters on poor people and poverty eradication efforts speaks to the heart of the framework and its core objective and therefore must sit under a poverty eradication goal.

Defining core disaster targets

Specific disaster targets are required to provide a platform to build, at national level, a strong legal and political mandate, robust leadership, adequate resources, clear lines of responsibility, technical expertise and analysis, and accountability.

It is difficult to find a *single* target that provides both political aspiration and the right incentive for effective decision-making across the three aspects of disaster risk reduction: risk prevention through development pathways that minimise risk generation; risk reduction; and fostering resilience by improving the ability to deal with shocks of all kinds.

It is therefore likely that several targets will be required and/or targets will need to combine several different aspects:

- **Reducing losses:** this needs to go far beyond simple national economic losses and mortality, to incorporate broader social costs and livelihoods. A broad range of indicators would be required, including reducing the percentage of household and productive assets lost or damaged; numbers of people harmed and displaced; and working and school days lost.
- **Reducing risk:** whereas a loss target is retrospective, a risk target is predictive. It combines measuring changes to hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity either through an index (such as the World Risk Index) or modelling.
- **Reducing perceived risk:** this people-centred approach allows top-down data collection to be ground-truthed with surveys of whether people feel safer or better protected from disasters.
- **Preventing impoverishment:** this target would measure how many people are pushed into poverty due to negative coping mechanisms (such as selling assets, taking out loans etc).
- **Reducing vulnerability:** this would be measured by composite indicators through indices such as the IDB Prevalent Vulnerability Index or the World Bank's Index of Preparedness for Risk.

DRR actions and policies: whilst input targets such as these are probably not appropriate for targets (which should primarily be based on outcomes), these may be appropriate at indicator level – for example, the percentage of the population covered by effective early warning systems and social protection systems which can scale-up in the event of a disaster, or existence of development plans/strategies which incorporate disaster risk reduction measures and budget.

In order to ensure that disasters targets reduce risk for the most vulnerable:

- Targets would need to apply to all disasters, including recurrent smaller-scale events, which are often chronic at local levels and have a disproportionate impact on more socially and economically vulnerable populations.
- Data would need to be disaggregated for sex, age, ability and by socio-economic grouping, and targets would have to be met for each group.

What needs to change: Integrating disaster risk across other goals

The primary purpose of this paper is to make the case for disasters targets in the poverty reduction goal. The text above represents the agreed position of all organisations associated with this paper. We have also put together some initial proposals for indicators in relation to other goals. These do not reflect the views of all organisations that have signed up to this paper, but are a positive contribution to the forthcoming discussion on indicators in the post 2015 framework.

Although not proposed in the Co-Chair's Focus Areas document, several states have proposed a goal to '**Reduce global threats to sustainable development**' or its inverse '**Build resilience of communities and nations,**' which could include targets on climate change, disasters and conflict. This offers real advantages in highlighting risks to the achievement of the SDGs and the need for risk management across the framework which currently is totally absent (goals on, for example, economic growth and industrialisation could be severely constrained by disasters). It also reflects the daily reality of communities who experience multiple risks, and provides a conceptual link between these mutually-reinforcing issues without constraining policy responses.

As stated above, risk analysis and disaster risk reduction need to be strategically integrated across the spectrum of development policy, planning and practice, to be considered in all policy and spending decisions, in order to reduce rather than exacerbate risks. This was reflected in government statements at OWG7, which referred to the need for DRR to be mainstreamed across poverty reduction, gender equality, education, health, food security, governance, cities, peace and security, agriculture, water and sanitation, energy, ecosystems, and technology transfer.

Food security and nutrition (focus area 2): This includes a welcome range of useful targets to build resilience and prevent the creation of new risk (including land tenure, reversing land degradation). The reference to 'strengthening resilience of farming systems and food supplies to climate change' should be broadened to cover 'climate change and variability' (as attribution of weather-related disasters to climate change is not yet possible, or indeed necessary for the purposes of this goal). Further targets are required on ensuring food security for all during and after disasters as well as stronger natural resource management. Indicators should include

- the percentage of underweight and malnourished children, and those below a minimum dietary consumption levels, following disasters and during periods of drought
- numbers of people with vulnerable livelihoods – people located in highly hazard-prone areas who are reliant on land for their livelihoods, who do not have resilient crops or livestock and are not protected through participatory disaster planning.
- investments on natural resource and agriculture management

Health (focus area 3): Health services are vital for post-disaster recovery and hence additional indicators are required for infrastructure (see below) and: Percentage of population served by healthcare facilities which have undertaken disaster risk assessments, and developed preparedness and response plans in a participatory way with communities to enable delivery of post disaster health services including sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial care and services for people with disabilities.

Education (focus area 4): Additional indicators are required for educational infrastructure (see below) and: Percentage of schools that undertake evacuation exercises, have contingency plans, and integrate DRR into their curriculum.

Gender equality and women's empowerment (focus area 5): A recognition that disasters have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, but also that they have significant capacities which are often not utilised. Additional indicators are required for:

- Percentage of municipalities with genuinely participatory disaster risk reduction ensuring the engagement of women and girls.
- Percentage of municipalities with mechanisms in place to prevent and respond to gender based violence in emergencies.

Water and sanitation (focus area 6): Additional indicators are required for water and sanitation infrastructure (see below) and:

- Percentage of people suffering from water-borne diseases following disasters.
- Percentage of population served by water and sanitation systems which have disaster risk assessments, preparedness and response plans developed in a participatory way with communities.

Infrastructure of all kinds – health, education, energy, communications, urban, transport, housing (focus area 10, but also 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 13). Additional indicators are required for:

- Percentage of infrastructure (healthcare, educational, water and sanitation, energy, communications, transport, ports, housing) which is built to locally and nationally appropriate hazard-resistant standards.
- Number of days of function lost due to disasters.
- Percentage of at-risk population that have access to adequate emergency shelter during disasters.

Promoting equality (focus area 12): A recognition that the most marginalised are those most impacted by disasters of all kinds, with locally contextualised indicators for the percentage of at risk-communities on targeted programmes of support such as livelihood protection measures for all and other forms of social protection to prevent and respond to disasters (eg cash transfers) for all.

Sustainable cities and human settlements (focus area 13). Additional indicators are required on land use policy, planning and investment to reduce risks such as increasing the number of urban development plans that include elements of disaster risk management as well as on protection of natural resource management and on the effective and voluntary relocation of at risk communities.

Climate change (focus area 15): This includes very useful references to 'building resilience and adaptive capacity in developing countries' and 'developing low-carbon, climate resilience development strategies and plans.' Additional indicators are required to capture the dissemination of accessible and practical climate change information for farmers, fisherfolk, students, and wider communities at risk.