



# Disaster Risk Reduction and violent conflict in Africa and Arab states

## Implications for the Sendai Framework priorities

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### Key messages

- There is a moral imperative to delivering DRR in violent conflict contexts, where disaster vulnerabilities are high. Given the prevalence of violent conflict across Africa and the Arab region, this is not a marginal concern.
- Violent conflicts present acute challenges to designing and implementing strategies to achieve the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa and the Arab region. A more critical approach is needed to ensure that DRR measures do not inadvertently reinforce vulnerability to disaster and conflict risk.
- To understand and act on disaster risk in contexts of violent conflict, the inherently political nature of disaster risk must be taken into account. Insufficient attention has been given to adapting DRR policies, programmes and strategies to such contexts.
- Adopting a human rights approach to DRR can support social, economic and political change in ways that tackle inequality and inequitable resource distribution.
- The post-disaster space can provide opportunities for measures that alter the dynamics of peace and conflict and redress power imbalances.

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## Introduction

Natural hazard-related disasters ('disasters'), violence, conflict, fragility and insecurity affect developed and developing countries alike, though the impacts vary significantly depending on context. Common across all contexts, however, is that disasters are neither 'natural' nor conflict-neutral. Individuals and communities are vulnerable to disasters as a result of socio-economic and political decisions related to capacities and the distribution of resources (Drury and Olson, 1998; Peters, 2018; Wisner et al., 2003). This deeper understanding of disaster risk can be politically unpalatable for some governments because it implies 'moving away from the relative safety of apolitical and technocentric approaches to risk reduction to an approach where issues of power and politics come to the fore' (Peters, 2018: 7). Bringing the language of violence, conflict, fragility and insecurity into the disasters sphere may also be seen as an obstacle to progress where inter-governmental agreement is sought (Walch, 2015). However, in order to achieve the goals of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) effectively, this move is both necessary and inevitable: 58% of disaster deaths occur in the world's 30 most fragile states (Peters and Budimir, 2016); looking ahead, without significant action '80% of the world's poorest will be living in fragile contexts by 2030' (OECD, 2018: 7).

There is a moral imperative for focusing attention on how best to deliver DRR in contexts of violence, conflict, fragility and insecurity because it is precisely in such contexts that disaster vulnerabilities are highest. There is also a practical dimension. Standardised approaches in complex conflict-affected contexts often fall short, and can even directly or indirectly cause harm (Collinson et al., 2010). Failed or

short-lived progress is also not an effective use of financial or human resources. Finally, there is a political dimension. Only with concerted attention on how to deliver DRR in contexts of conflict will the collective ambition to achieve the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015) targets be realised in a way that genuinely 'leaves no one behind' (Peters, 2017).

While there is longstanding experience and an extensive literature on humanitarian responses to disasters in conditions of conflict (Hilhorst, 2013), little attention has been given to how to effectively adapt DRR policies, programmes and strategies to such contexts. Given the prevalence of violent conflict across Africa and the Arab region, this is not a marginal concern. Along with other types of violent conflict, civil conflict, communal and extremist violence and fragility in these regions all exact a social, political, economic and environmental toll. Finding ways to reduce disaster impacts in these contexts requires urgent attention, for the benefit of vulnerable people and national governments alike. Strategies to reduce disaster and conflict risk vary depending on the specific type of conflict being experienced in a given context (Detges, 2016), underscoring the need to develop context-specific policies, programmes and strategies, rather than stating general conflict-sensitivity principles (Walch, 2018).

Collecting and consolidating examples of effective DRR in difficult operating contexts will require concerted effort and financial investment, and a recognition that this is an issue warranting special attention. To move the agenda forward, politically palatable ways of discussing the issue must be found. This paper constitutes a step towards a deeper understanding of disaster risk by considering the role of violent conflict in disaster vulnerability and its impact on Sendai Framework Priorities 1, 2 and 4 (UNISDR, 2015).

## Box 1 Definitions

For all hazard and disaster-related terms used in this report, we adopt the UNISDR (2017) terminology guidance developed for implementation of the Sendai Framework. The term ‘disasters’ is used specifically to refer to natural hazard-related disasters.

There are multiple competing understandings of the terms ‘conflict’, ‘fragility’, ‘insecurity’ and ‘violence’ across different contexts, and how these conditions are experienced varies across communities and individuals. We primarily use the term ‘violent conflict’ according to the UN and World Bank definition (2018: 8). This acknowledges that: ‘Conflicts are inherent in all societies and are managed, mitigated, and resolved in nonviolent manners through, for example, political processes ... formal and informal judicial systems, local dispute mechanisms, or dialogue. But sometimes conflict may turn violent, causing enormous human and economic loss. Violent conflict can take various forms, including interstate war, armed conflict, civil war, political and electoral violence, and communal violence, and can include many actors, including states and nonstate actors, such as militias, insurgents, terrorist groups, and violent extremists’.\*

*\* The term ‘violent conflict’ is used here in line with the understanding that ‘social conflict’ is a natural part of human interaction, present in every society (Kriesberg, 2007), and that conflict is ‘natural, inevitable and often a positive part of development and other change processes’ (OECD, 2018: 141). However, ‘violent conflict’ refers to broader definitions of both violent conflict and armed conflict, wherein areas are often ‘identified by the presence of armed conflict, widespread violence or other risks of harm to people ... High-risk areas may include areas of political instability or repression, institutional weakness, insecurity, collapse of civil infrastructure and widespread violence. Such areas are often characterised by widespread human rights abuses and violations of national or international law’ (OECD, 2016: 13).*

## Trends in disasters and violent conflict across Africa and the Arab region

### Disaster impacts: Africa

Since the 1970s, the African continent has reportedly experienced over 2,000 disasters, with just under half occurring within the last decade (GFDRR and World Bank, 2018: 5). The most common form of disasters affecting the continent are floods and droughts (ibid). In 2016, more than 41 million people were affected by drought (Guha-Sapir et al., 2017: 4). Other forms of hazard affecting the region include cyclones, earthquakes, epidemics, volcanic eruptions and landslides (GFDRR and World Bank, 2018: 5). In addition to human impacts, disasters also have a significant economic effect (GFDRR and World Bank, 2016: 9). For example, during the 2008–2011 drought in Kenya, losses totalled an estimated \$12.1 billion, and the economy slowed by an average of 2.8% per year (ibid: 10). In

Malawi, it is estimated that drought and flood cost the equivalent of 1.7% of GDP per year. In extreme cases, this can be as high as 10.4% (ibid.). Future trends are concerning. Africa is already seeing the observed impacts of climate change and variability, and long-term climate projections indicate a rise in temperature and reduced precipitation over large parts of the continent, which are ‘expected to be substantial’ (IPCC, 2014: 1,202). Other ‘extreme events and disasters’ linked to climate change include anticipated heatwaves throughout most of Africa, droughts in East and Southern Africa and heavy precipitation in East Africa (IPCC, 2014). In part due to low adaptive capacity, high socioeconomic vulnerability and ineffective institutional capacity across the region, the effects of climate change will have cascading impacts on water stress, food production and (in) security and health, to name a few (IPCC, 2014).

### Disaster impacts: the Arab region

While globally disaster occurrence has reportedly doubled since the 1980s, in the Middle East

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and North Africa<sup>1</sup> over the same period it has tripled (World Bank et al., 2014: 6). The most common disasters affecting the region are earthquakes, floods and droughts (*ibid.*), followed by heatwaves, cyclones and sand and dust storms (ESCWA et al., 2017: 37). Long-term climatic trends indicate that droughts in some parts of the region will become more frequent, with average summer temperatures expected to increase between 1–2 degrees Celsius by 2030 (Jobbins and Henley, 2015: 23). An estimated \$13 billion of the region's GDP is lost every year due to the impact of dust storms on economies and livelihoods (ESCWA et al., 2017: 38). In 2012, the World Bank estimated that households in Yemen could see a cumulative decline in earnings equivalent to \$5.7 billion, representing a staggering 23.9% of national GDP by 2050 (World Bank, 2012: 22). While the region is perhaps more commonly associated with droughts, it also suffers from flood-related disasters (ESCWA et al., 2017: 37). Contrary to global trends, which have seen flood mortality risk decrease since 2000, in the Middle East and Africa it has increased (World Bank et al., 2014: 1). Saudi Arabia, for example, has seen recurrent flood events since 2009 (ESCWA et al., 2017: 37). The percentage of the region's GDP exposed to flooding has tripled between 1970–1979 and 2000–2009 (World Bank et al., 2014: 1). Floods in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia in 2009 caused damage worth \$1.6 billion (*ibid.*).

### **Trends in violent conflict in Africa and the Arab region**

Violent conflict is in a constant state of flux across Africa and the Middle East, and so is our understanding of it. Conflict can affect middle-income countries, including countries with functioning institutions and those not conventionally classified as 'fragile states', as well as low-income countries where capacity, resources and institutional functioning may

be lower. Global trends suggest that, since the 1950s, the number and intensity of violent conflict events have decreased, though this paused in 2007 and has reversed since 2010. Data from the UCDP shows that violent conflict between states has decreased, but has increased within them. This intrastate conflict often takes on a transnational dimension with the involvement of groups linked to regional and international networks and/or other international powers (World Bank and UN, 2018).

There is an emerging regional concentration of violent conflict in Africa and the Middle East (World Bank and UN, 2018): 24% of all violent conflicts in 2016 occurred in the Middle East (*ibid.*). In the same year, 63% of all violent conflicts in Africa and the Middle East were between non-state actors (*ibid.*: 19). While international media coverage often focuses on conflicts where fatalities are high, notably Iraq and Syria<sup>2</sup> since 2010, so-called 'minor' conflict can have a significant impact on individuals, businesses and governments, with lasting consequences for local security, peace and development.

Across both regions new dynamics are emerging, with more complex, multifaceted and multi-party dimensions. Prevalent categories include communal conflict, largely related to natural resources, land and political differences – as seen in Kenya in recent years – and control over power and/or the state – as in Iraq, South Sudan and Syria (*ibid.*). More specific episodes of conflict include the Arab Spring and its aftermath and the spread of violent extremism (*ibid.*). Changes in the nature of violent conflict are not being matched by the methodologies employed by conflict datasets, which have been criticised for failing to capture the plurality and dynamism of contemporary conflict (*ibid.*). There are also concerns around under- and non-reporting, suggesting that reported conflict fatalities and impacts may not be giving a fully accurate picture.

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1 World Bank and UN (2018) data describes the 'Middle East' region – see original source for composition of countries.

2 The term 'fatalities' refers to 'reported battle-related deaths'. Afghanistan also ranks highly in terms of fatalities.

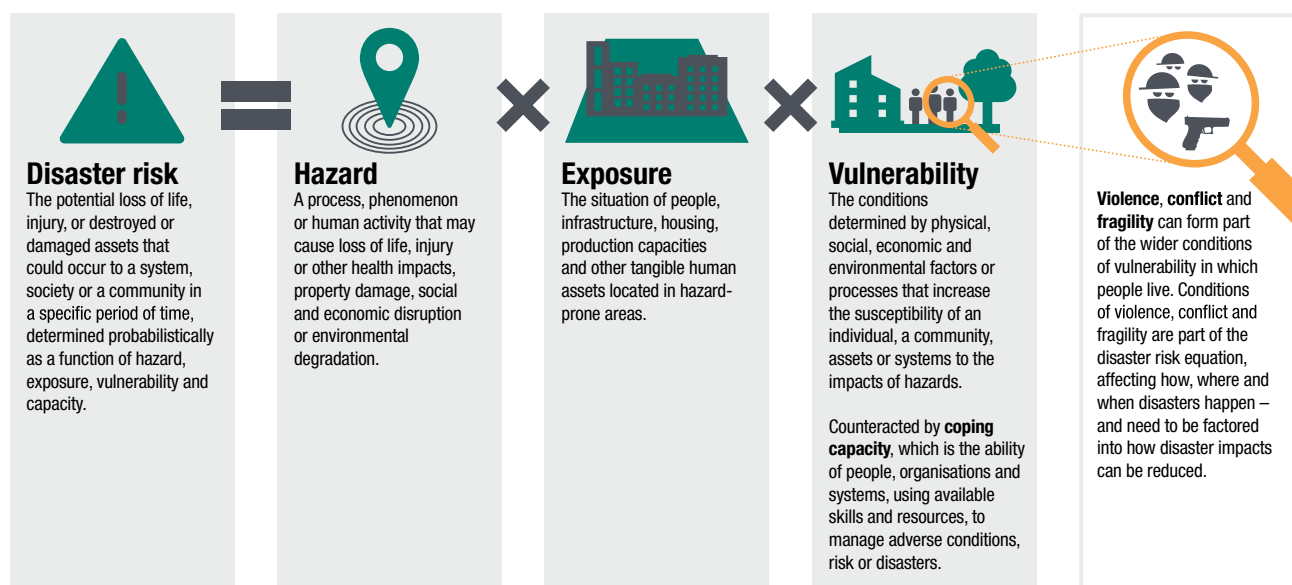
## What does violent conflict have to do with disaster risk?

Disaster risk, defined as ‘the potential loss of life, injury or destroyed or damaged assets’ within a specific locale and time period (UNISDR, 2017), is understood as the combination of hazard, exposure and vulnerability (Wisner et al., 2003). More recently, coping capacity and resilience have been included in this equation, in recognition of the role of individual agency, individual actions and organisations in reducing disaster risk. However, violence, conflict, fragility and insecurity are often still missing from interpretations of disaster risk – see Figure 1 (Peters, 2018: 9).

Violent conflict can significantly increase vulnerability to disasters and undermine the capacities of citizens and governments to effectively reduce disaster impacts; this is covered in other literature and is not repeated here (see Harris et al., 2013; Peters, 2018). In policy, practice and research, the connections

between vulnerabilities (including violence, conflict, insecurity and fragility) and disasters have been largely neglected in DRR discourse, though they been explored under the guise of other terms and in other domains, including conflict studies, humanitarian action, complex political emergencies, protracted crises, climate security, environmental peacebuilding and resilience. To date, there has been no systematic review to compile lessons from other disciplines to advance DRR ambitions.<sup>3</sup> There is also no robust understanding of what types of DRR actions are viable and appropriate in relation to which types of conflict, and no systematic collection and analysis of efforts to pursue DRR in conditions of conflict (Peters, 2017) – despite in some cases years of practical experience at sub-national and community levels. As a consequence, there is little guidance for policy-makers and practitioners on how to effectively pursue DRR in conditions of violence, conflict and fragility (Harris et al., 2013).

**Figure 1 The role of violence, conflict and fragility in the construction of disaster risk**



Note: definitions of key terms including ‘disaster risk’, ‘hazard’, ‘exposure’, ‘vulnerability’ and ‘coping capacity’ are sourced from the UNISDR terminology guidance ([www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology](http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology)) accompanying the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015).

3 A task the newly formed Science and Technology Advisory Group for the Middle East and North Africa – and African equivalent – could consider making a priority.

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## The disaster–conflict interface in Africa and the Arab region

The relationship between disasters and violent conflict is vastly under-researched in Africa and the Arab region, and the available evidence is often contradictory, for example on whether the post-disaster space constitutes an opportunity for peacebuilding, and the relationship between climate-related disasters and patterns of violent conflict. The scope is vast, covering everything from the relationship between disasters, climate change and water security and its influence on geopolitics in the Arab region (World Bank, 2018) to the links between disasters, climate resilience and sexual and gender-based violence in Chad (Le Masson et al., 2016).

Sendai Framework Target B is to: ‘Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower the average global figure per 100,000 between 2020–2030 compared to 2005–2015’. It is clear that conditions of violent conflict present acute challenges in designing and implementing strategies to achieve this in Africa and the Arab region. Violent conflict also makes it more difficult to monitor whether this reduction has been achieved. The under- or non-reporting of disaster impacts in contexts of violent conflict is compounded in the Arab region, where national disaster loss databases are limited – a challenge recognised in the League of Arab States’ DRR Strategy (UNISDR ROAS, 2018) – and mechanisms and technical capacity for monitoring disaster risk are insufficient (Eltinay and Harvey, forthcoming).

## Violent conflict in regional DRR strategies and declarations

This section traces the inclusion of key terms related to violent conflict (conflict, violence, fragility, security, peace) in African and Arab strategies and ministerial declarations. The review finds a number of references to key terms but overall a lack of substantive engagement on the intersection between disasters and violent conflict (this reflects regional trends found elsewhere, in Asia for example: see Peters, 2018). Where ‘conflict’ is included, it is primarily as part of a general description of the regional context, though in some instances the role conflict plays

in creating and exacerbating vulnerabilities to disaster risk, and undermining capacities to enact DRR, is made explicit. This is a positive sign, and though limited does provide an entry point for future action (see Recommendations).

## Regional strategies and declarations: Africa

In 2004, the African Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (AFBD et al., 2004) set out a series of objectives associated with increasing investment, policy support and knowledge of DRR. The strategy makes clear that vulnerabilities from disasters and conflict compound one another. To illustrate, the strategy acknowledges that ‘disaster risk results from the interaction between natural, technological or conflict induced hazards and vulnerability conditions’ (ibid). While no reference is made to ‘violence’ or ‘fragility’, the strategy notes that conflict resolution and peacebuilding are the domain of the African Union Commission on Peace and Security, but that the links between DRR and conflict should be recognised through institutional collaboration. This framing of the disaster–conflict nexus is echoed in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) policy for DRR (2006), which similarly makes explicit that ‘disasters and conflict are linked and are mutually reinforcing’ (ECOWAS, 2006: ii). The policy addresses only disasters, not interventions on conflict (ibid.).

At the 2013 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the African Union (Timany, 2013: 3) stated that: ‘There is need to address the conflict dimension, as there is strong evidence that natural disasters can increase the risk of conflict and that conditions of conflict can increase the vulnerability to natural disasters, hence undermining resilience’. Also in 2013, the summary statement of the Fourth Africa Regional Platform outlining future regional priorities – created on behalf of all attendees – made no reference to violence, fragility, peace or security (with one exception, food security). However, the statement did recognise the need to reduce conflict risk in order to make progress on development and DRR (African Union and UNISDR AF, 2013: 2). African contributions to the post-Hyogo Framework dialogues restated the links between tackling disaster and conflict

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risk: ‘Violent conflict is closely associated with disaster risk and related efforts to prevent conflict need to be considered as part of overall efforts to build resilience to disasters’ (African Union et al., 2014b: 2). Links are also made to the cross-border challenges of population movements triggered by disasters and by ‘long-term violent conflict’ (ibid.: 3). Consideration was also given to the potential added value in linked responses: ‘Integrated and coordinated approaches to disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and related aspects of conflict prevention can reduce the fragmentation of resources and improve the impact of investments’ (ibid.: 3). In the Declaration resulting from the Third African Ministerial Meeting on DRR, the complicating impacts of terrorism and armed conflict are also mentioned (African Union, ECOWAS and UNISDR AF, 2014a: 3).

Following the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015), the Fourth High Level Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction produced the Yaoundé Declaration on the Implementation of the Sendai Framework in Africa (African Union, 2015). The declaration, which outlines ambitions to align Africa’s DRR to the global targets set out by Sendai, features none of the key words fragility, conflict, peace, violence or security. The Fifth High Level Meeting in 2016 produced the Mauritius Declaration on the Implementation of the Sendai Framework in Africa (African Union and SADC, 2016a) – a declaration of ministerial and heads of delegations responsible for DRR in Africa – but this again made no explicit reference to conflict, fragility, violence, peace or security. The declaration did, however, endorse a Programme of Action for Sendai Framework implementation in the region (African Union and SADC, 2016b), in which conflict is recognised as one of a number of drivers of vulnerability to disasters (ibid.: 5). It also noted that coordination is required to address complex risk drivers.

The lack of attention to issues of conflict did not go unnoticed, and was raised by some governments, the UN and civil society representatives at the meeting.<sup>4</sup> For example, the African Union and the South African

Development Community (SADC) (2016b: 24) called for the development of operational guidelines on ‘post-disaster response, recovery and reconstruction in settings of fragility and conflict’. The African Union Commission Programme of Action of 2016 made commitments to ‘Develop guidelines for DRM in settings of fragility and conflict’, and states that an intended ‘Output OR expected result’ was ‘Enhanced mutual reduction of disaster risk, fragility and conflict’ (African Union Commission, 2016: 20). More recently, at the 2017 Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Common African Position (Sacko, 2017) reaffirmed the continent’s commitment to delivering the Africa Programme of Action, though no reference was made to key terms related to conflict.

### **Regional strategies and declarations: the Arab region**

Our review of the nascent policy architecture for DRR in the Arab region found inconsistent inclusion of ‘conflict’ and related terms. A resolution adopted in 2009 by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment called for accelerated action on DRR, and for the development of an Arab regional strategic vision, set of priorities and coordination mechanism to support the implementation of a Strategy for DRR. In 2010, the League of Arab States developed the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2020. ‘Conflict’ is identified along with ‘population displacement, disease outbreak, pandemic influenza ... and civil unrest’, which are seen as posing ‘multi-fold challenges to the region, on a larger scale than ever before’.

Following an extensive consultation process and revisions to ensure alignment with the Sendai Framework, a further iteration of the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction was officially adopted through a League of Arab States Resolution on 15 April 2018. Organised around the four priority areas of the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015), the Strategy (UNISDR ROAS, 2018) aims to substantially reduce disaster losses across the region. The

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4 Author’s observations having attended the Fifth High-Level Meeting.

terms ‘conflict’, ‘civil unrest’ and ‘armed conflicts’ appear as part of the description of the complexities of the regional context. The specific relationship between vulnerabilities is not expanded upon, though under the ambition to strengthen disaster risk governance there is a priority focus on the most vulnerable groups and populations and security, including specifically in ‘conflict areas’ (ibid.: 20).

The First Arab Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2013, held in Aqaba, Jordan, recognised the vulnerability of Arab cities and towns to disasters, and in line with the UNISDR Making Cities Resilient campaign and Mayors’ Statement on Resilient Cities at the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the region agreed the 2013 Aqaba declaration on DRR in cities (ASEZA et al., 2013). This does not mention any of the key words, although the conference report, which also formed an input to the post-Hyogo Framework discussions, included reference to the risk of conflict over water and other resources, related in part to climatic changes.

The final declaration of the Second Arab Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, in 2014, included recognition that ‘conflicts and turmoil in the Arab region constitute multifaceted challenges that negatively impact the capacity of Arab States to reduce and manage disaster risk’ (LAS and UNISDR ROAS, 2014: point 5). Special attention was given to water and food insecurity, and the need to ‘[a]dopt and implement more effective measures to address drought and achieve a higher degree of water security and food security by devising and implementing integrated strategies and policies, informed by risk and vulnerability assessments, with a view to strengthening resilience to drought’ (ibid.: point 6). The Third Arab Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, in Doha, Qatar, in 2017, resulted in the Doha declaration. This refers to conflict as one of the factors affecting the ability of Arab countries to eliminate and manage the threat of disasters. The background document to the declaration acknowledged the impact of conflict as a driver of vulnerability to disaster risk: ‘Insecurity and conflict in Arab countries, coupled with poverty and weak risk governance have drastically

reduced the ability of communities to withstand shocks from natural hazards’ (LAS and UNISDR ROAS, 2017: 1).

In summary, an emerging discourse around violent conflict and DRR has not yet translated effectively into policy instruments. However, references to key terms related to violent conflict, though largely confined to descriptions of context, do provide an entry point for taking this agenda forward in regional convening spaces. Setting aside the not insignificant political obstacles that may arise in such a discussion, the continued prevalence of disaster impacts in areas of violent conflict may serve as motivation for action.

## **Disaster Risk Reduction and violent conflict: implications for the Sendai Framework priorities**

With specific reference to the Africa and Arab regions, this section draws on a substantive review of literature on the disaster–conflict nexus to explore how insights from that body of work inform the Sendai Framework priority areas. The focus is on Sendai Framework Priority 1, Priority 2 and Priority 4, where this literature has the most to say. We recommend that future work explores the implications for Priority 3 (on public and private investment in DRR), which is currently a neglected area of analysis from the perspective of DRR and violent conflict.

### **Implications for Priority 1: Understanding disaster risk**

Priority 1: Disaster risk management needs to be based on an understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets, hazard characteristics and the environment (UNISDR, 2015: 36).

Understanding disaster risk requires understanding the role of violent conflict in the construction of disaster risk (see above), and of climate change – and the intersection between these components. Some of the most pointed manifestations of climate change include an increase in the frequency



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and magnitude of extreme events and weather disasters (IPCC, 2014). Combined with exposure and vulnerability (Wisner et al., 2003), these hazard events can lead to disaster. In recognition of the close links between climate change and natural disaster in Africa, the latest IPCC report (2014) calls for DRR as part of an integrated strategy to adapt to climate change, reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilient development across region. But adapting to climate change – as with DRR – is not a technocratic exercise, and is complicated by the links between climate-related disasters and incidents of violent conflict.

A growing body of work on climate security has raised questions about the extent to which climate change, manifested as extreme weather events and climate-related disasters, may increase the likelihood of violent conflict (summarised in Vivekananda et al., 2017). A systematic survey of literature on disasters and ‘social conflict’ between 1986 and 2013 found that almost 40% of the work reviewed concluded that climate change was an identified ‘trigger’ for conflict and social unrest (Xu et al., 2016: 44). In other work, Hendrix and Glaser (2007) found a significant relationship between climatic ‘triggers’ and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa.

It has been widely argued that ‘climate change can act as a “threat multiplier” for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world’ (Nordas and Gleditsch, 2007: 628; Nursey-Bray, 2017: 158; see also Verhoeven, 2011). This link has been ‘strongly embedded’ in the Arab region, ‘where the interaction between disaster risk, conflict and social vulnerability is distinctly outlined in the contexts of displacement, human rights violations and limited disaster risk management’ (Eltinay and Harvey, forthcoming: 1). In Africa and the Arab region, frequently cited examples of this interaction include complex risks in the Lake Chad region associated with social tensions, livelihood insecurity, natural resource conflict, climate and weather variability and armed groups (Vivekananda and Born, 2018); water security and climate change in the Arab region, including Syria (Gleick, 2014; Kelley et al., 2015; Selby et al., 2017; World Bank, 2018); and drought, natural resource management and recruitment into armed groups in Mali (Walch,

2018), Somalia (Maystadt and Ecker, 2014) and Burundi (Nillesen and Verwimp, 2009).

A report by Siddiqi and Peters (forthcoming) found that many studies seeking to identify relationships between disasters, climate and violent conflict have been criticised on methodological grounds; for failing to take adequate consideration of context or causal mechanisms (Buhaug et al., 2010); and for adopting a limited geographical focus – often concentrated on African countries, namely Kenya and Sudan (Adams et al., 2018). This is resulting in an unrepresentative sample of cases, which may be overstating simplistic links between climate change and conflict – and lends itself to a concerning narrative that some Sub-Saharan African states are ‘naturally’ more violent than others (Adams et al., 2018; see also Hartmann, 2014). Critics have argued that contexts affected by conflict and climate extremes reach far beyond those currently being researched (Adams et al., 2018; Siddiqi and Peters, forthcoming).

More recently, there has been a general understanding that the relationship between disasters, climate change and violent conflict is complex, multifaceted and context-specific. Moreover, there is no simple logic that disaster ‘A’ leads to conflict ‘B’, as disasters can also interrupt or reduce the likelihood of conflict, or create conditions for ‘disaster diplomacy’ (Nel and Righarts, 2008; Akcinaroglu et al., 2011; Kelman, 2011; Xu et al., 2016). Omelicheva (2011) and Nelson (2010) found that, should natural hazard events trigger political instability or conflict, this would most likely be in contexts already prone to conflict.

Proposals for DRR measures to prevent conflict rarely feature in the literature (Peters, 2018). There is a need for the DRR community to think through its contribution – and the framing of that contribution – to addressing climate-related disaster risks as potentially a form of ‘upstream conflict prevention’ (Stein and Walch, 2017). One research study in Sub-Saharan Africa found that the provision of road infrastructure and access to improved water sources reduced the risks of drought-related conflict (Detges, 2016). This finding underscores the importance of developing DRR strategies

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that correspond with specific disaster and conflict conditions.

Similarities between the consequences of disaster and conflict and shared underlying drivers of and interactions between disaster and conflict suggest that mitigation strategies considering disaster and conflict will help to reduce the risks of both (King and Mutter, 2014). However, relatively little is known about how to practically refine DRR ideas, tools and approaches so that they are appropriate and effective in conditions of violent conflict (Harris et al., 2013). This gap in knowledge is exacerbated by a dearth of real-life examples of disasters in areas experiencing violent conflict, despite a growing body of evidence on crisis management and disaster response (see Hilhorst, 2013). Existing analysis focuses on trying to establish causal links between disasters and conflict, or exploring how the post-disaster space either entrenches conflict or provides room for peace (Siddiqi, 2018), rather than documenting or identifying practical strategies for DRR in contexts of violent conflict. There is a creeping depoliticisation of disaster discourse in disaster studies – something a recent Special Issue of *Disasters* (Siddiqi, 2018) sought to challenge. It is beyond mainstream disaster studies that issues of conflict and security – and their relation to climate extremes and disasters – are emerging more prominently. Yet the DRR community has a lot to offer, both in deepening understanding of the construction of disaster risk – and the potential role of climate change and violent conflict in this – and in identifying potential means to address this challenge.

**Key message/implication:** While consensus is lacking on the links between climate change, disasters and conflict, there is strong evidence that climate-related disasters and conflict share both underlying vulnerabilities and mitigation strategies. The DRR community has a lot to offer to the rapidly growing climate security discourse, in theory and in practice, including refining DRR strategies to contexts of violent conflict and compiling a body of evidence based on real-life examples. Addressing climate-related disasters

through such strategies has the potential to serve as a form of conflict prevention.

## Implications for Priority 2: Strengthening disaster risk governance

Priority 2: Disaster risk governance at the national, regional and global levels is vital to the management of disaster risk reduction in all sectors and ensuring the coherence of national and local frameworks of laws, regulations and public policies that, by defining roles and responsibilities, guide, encourage and incentivize the public and private sectors to take action and address disaster risk (UNISDR, 2015: 36).

Disaster risk governance is not a neutral activity in any context, but there are particular considerations that need to be taken into account when designing and enacting disaster risk governance frameworks, mechanisms and institutions in violent conflict contexts. By understanding violent conflict as a product of social relations, actions to manage or reduce disaster risk in such settings must be understood in terms of the intended and unintended, direct and indirect impacts they may have on those social relations, and on the presence and potential for violent conflict (Ensor et al., 2018). In practice, this means consideration of how deep-rooted systematic inequality and marginalisation can be (unintentionally) reproduced in the design and delivery of DRR programmes (Ensor et al., 2018). To address this, Ensor and Matin (2018) argue that a human rights approach is needed, ‘first, recognising and responding to the deep-rooted narratives and procedures that normalise inequality and marginalisation at different scales; and second, allowing for transformation towards more equitable political and social arrangements as a part of resilience practice’ (Ensor et al., 2018: 287).

The call for a human rights-based approach to DRR is not new. Ferris (2010) suggests that

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incorporating a human rights perspective into disaster response is important in affirming the rights of vulnerable people and preventing subsequent conflicts. For example, disasters can affect ongoing conflict through displacement, create hardships for hosting communities and result in additional challenges for relief agencies. As an input to the 2015 Global Assessment Report, da Costa and Pospieszna (2014: 3) argued that ‘regardless of various ambitious policies on natural disasters ... if such basic issues like the human rights protection and empowerment of local community is missed, this impedes the efficiency and effectiveness of efforts to reduce or manage disaster risk’.

Consideration of the social nature of conflict and a human rights-based approach raise questions for Target E: ‘to deliver a substantial increase in the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020’. Through a human rights lens, national and sub-national DRR strategies could or even should be crafted to transform rather than perpetuate existing inequalities. This same lens enables us to see that those frameworks, while necessary foundational documents, will not in themselves deliver the desired positive impacts. In practice, a human rights approach emphasises the means and quality of delivery and decision-making, including consultation, transparency, representation, accountability and justice (da Costa and Pospieszna, 2014).

Consideration of the context and the incidence of violent conflict in relation to DRR raises fundamental questions, not only about how disaster risk governance should be delivered, but who should be delivering it. While the roots of disaster management – in civil protection command-and-control structures – have lent themselves to state-centric models of operation for disaster risk management and DRR, ‘there is a growing concern that narrowly defined state-driven DRR policies and practices are simply not relevant and/or appropriate for ... complex, informal and uncertain local risk realities’ (Peters, 2017: 22). Even community-based approaches are situated within a normative frame of DRR, meaning that they assume that state structures exist and will eventually take on the responsibility for protecting citizens from

disaster impacts (see Peters, 2017). This framing is particularly problematic when governance structures may be a driver of vulnerability for some individuals and communities. There is increasing awareness of the importance of integrating local and indigenous forms of knowledge into DRR (Hiwasaki et al., 2014; Mercer et al., 2010; Shaw et al., 2009), as well as the imperative to affirm the human rights of vulnerable people and address inequalities and marginalisation. There is work to do to bolster meaningful partnerships between national governments, local governments and communities (where appropriate), or to find alternative models of operating where this is not viable or appropriate.

The lens of DRR and violent contexts has implications for disaster risk governance. One way to explore this is through the ‘social contract’. This refers to the implicit agreement between a state’s government and its citizens, wherein citizens give consent to be governed in exchange for security and services; in the aftermath of disaster, a government’s response (including the timing, amount and types of services and support delivered) can either support or weaken the state’s legitimacy depending on the degree to which the social contract is perceived to be upheld. This exchange becomes more complicated when considering that citizens’ expectations of state responsibilities are heterogeneous and shaped by historical, cultural and socio-economic-political conditions, and these expectations may fall alongside or even entrench social cleavages in disaster- and conflict-affected contexts. The social contract may be limited, undermined, deliberately abused or exploited in conflict and post-conflict contexts (Siddiqi and Peters, forthcoming; Peters, 2017) by one or more groups in order to achieve political objectives. This is an area that would be well suited to future research in African and Arab contexts, and may help provide insights for Priority 2 in these regions’ violent conflict contexts.

Finally, ‘alternative models for enabling effective DRR’ have been called for (Walch, 2018) – including but not limited to working at the sub-national level, and engaging with a plurality of non-state actors. This is crucial in

any context, not just those affected by violent conflict – particularly when state structures are either not in place or not delivering the protection or recovery support vulnerable groups need. But non-conventional ways of doing DRR, and alternative entry points to those currently in existence, have been slow to materialise (Peters, 2017: 22). In the context of violent conflict, in reimagining the actors that can or should be involved in DRR, there is a need to challenge assumptions about what viable institutions and stakeholder groups exist (ibid.). This may include a combination of state and informal institutions ‘where multiple normative systems prevail and hybrid institutions evolve’ (Hilhorst, 2013: 10); Di John (2008) refers to this as ‘institutional multiplicity’. Humanitarians are starting to rethink some of these aspects through the localisation agenda, and there is growing interest in informal institutions in disaster response (see Twigg and Mosel, 2018), which may offer interesting insights in the future.

**Key message/implication:** A more critical approach is needed to ensure that DRR measures do not inadvertently reinforce systemic drivers of or vulnerability to disaster and conflict risk. Delivering DRR in contexts of violent conflict may require looking beyond state-centric approaches, with greater consideration of the role of non-state actors (Peters, 2017). Adopting a deliberate human rights approach to DRR opens up the possibility of exploring how DRR actions might support socio-economic-political transformations in ways that tackle inequality and inequitable resource distribution.

### **Implications for Priority 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to ‘Build Back Better’ in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction**

Priority 4: Experience indicates that disaster preparedness needs to be strengthened for more effective response and ensure capacities are in place for effective recovery. Disasters have also demonstrated that the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, which needs

to be prepared ahead of the disaster, is an opportunity to ‘Build Back Better’ through integrating disaster risk reduction measures. Women and persons with disabilities should publicly lead and promote gender-equitable and universally accessible approaches during the response and reconstruction phases (UNISDR, 2015: 36).

Disaster preparedness and response, despite the humanitarian imperative of neutrality, are not immune to what Hilhorst (2013) calls ‘everyday politics’. This refers not to official politics, though these do play a role, but to the politics of everyday life between individuals and organisations. Born from empirical evidence on crisis response, consideration of ‘everyday politics’ is relevant for Priority 4 as it aids in understanding how to achieve effective response from both a technical stance – involving ‘protocols, mechanisms and logistics’ (ibid.: 2) – but also from the perspective of its inherently political properties – choices and decisions related to how risks materialise, which are prioritised and how they are managed. Disasters themselves, alongside choices around preparedness, disaster response and recovery, are ‘social phenomena’ (ibid.: 3), which necessitates asking ‘who defined the crisis and how its response came about’ (ibid.: 3) – no more so than in the context of disasters in settings of violent conflict.

These questions have prompted the idea that ‘different actors “see” disasters as different types of events and, because they perceive them as such, they prepare for, manage and record them in very different ways’ (Bankhoff and Hilhorst, 2009: 687). This can have a political as well as a historical dimension. In Ethiopia, over four decades of famine and food insecurity have led to what some argue has been a normalisation of protracted food insecurity – what some term ‘de-disasterisation’ – which may actually impede critical changes that would improve the situation (van Uffelen, 2013). Reframing food (in)security and responses to it as a developmental challenge provides for greater attention on and opportunity to address the structural causes of crisis conditions, at least in theory (ibid.).

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Although rarely a feature of discussions on Priority 4, a conflict lens to disaster reconstruction and preparedness raises questions about the social and political impacts of disasters and disaster responses in relation to processes of social change. Just as criticism has been directed towards state-centric models for DRR (Peters, 2017), so state-based models for conflict prevention, peacekeeping and mediation are being challenged by current and changing patterns of conflict (World Bank and UN, 2018). So-called ‘transition moments’ (ibid.) have been identified as a possible space where shifts in power and changes in wider conditions and incentives enable social and/or political change. These moments can also occur in the aftermath of disasters, creating ‘critical junctures’ (Gawronski and Olson, 2013). This is often referred to under the banner of ‘disaster diplomacy’, which investigates how disaster-related activities influence conflict resolution, cooperation and peacebuilding, though the scope of work in this area warrants expansion in Africa and the Arab region: most case studies have looked at the 1999 earthquake in Greece and Turkey and the impact of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami on the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Ker-Lindsay, 2000; Gaillard et al., 2008; Kelman, 2011; Klitzsch, 2014; Koukis et al., 2016). Notable examples in Africa and the Arab world focus more on missed opportunities for disaster diplomacy, for example between Ethiopia and Eritrea in the early 2000s (Kelman, 2006).

It has been argued that shocks such as disasters ‘can paradoxically reset dynamics for prevention [of violent conflict] by altering incentives and shaking up entrenched positions’ (World Bank and UN, 2018: 185). Although the effective use of ‘transition moments’ can have positive effects and lead to disaster diplomacy and peacebuilding, ineffective use can have negative repercussions, and disaster relief and response, even when it is delivered with a view to encouraging positive political change, does not necessarily lead to such favourable outcomes (Venugopal and Yasir, 2017). Decisions made in times of ‘transition’ as well as times of crisis can have long-term implications for the ability to manage and address the underlying causes

of vulnerabilities (World Bank and UN, 2018: 185–86). Short-term solutions in post-disaster situations can also complicate attempts to find and implement long-term efforts towards vulnerability reduction – as when humanitarian responses do not consider anticipated future conditions brought about by climate change (Erikson et al., 2017).

In Kenya, Mosberg et al. (2017) argue that resources are still controlled by existing power structures, leading to a resilience agenda that does not address marginalised groups’ vulnerabilities to climate shocks and stressors. The Kenya case echoes Pelling and Dill (2006), who argue that disasters predominantly result in the consolidation and reaffirmation of political power-holders and structures that advantage some groups over others. Similarly, in Mozambique historical disaster management and responses to disasters can be understood as part of state formation and a function of the choices of vested interests (Artur, 2013). While disaster response may entrench power, failure to respond effectively can also create space for social and political change – or where ‘states are contested, disaster events can become the platform for contesting parties to gain legitimation and constituency’ (Hilhorst, 2013: 4).

Because of the added complexities of violent conflict contexts, integrating DRR into disaster response and reconstruction must be conflict-sensitive, ensuring that systemic risk and vulnerabilities are not reproduced. Surveys and data collection methods used in assessing post-disaster needs should be conflict-sensitive and inclusive, as groups of people who feel left out, disadvantaged or marginalised are more likely to resort to violence (World Bank and UN, 2018). Mitchell and Smith (2011) argue that conflicts and disasters can be mutually reinforcing, as insecurity erodes people’s resilience to disaster, which in turn leads to further conflict and increased risk of natural disasters, which in turn fuels still more conflict. This relationship has been explored elsewhere (see Harris et al., 2013; Peters, 2018), and remains relevant for implementation of the Sendai Framework in Africa and the Arab region.

**Key message/implication:** Care is needed to ensure that ‘Build Back Better’ measures do not

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reproduce systematic risk and vulnerabilities. The post-disaster space can provide opportunities for (as well as limitations to) measures that alter the dynamics of peace and violent conflict, though greater understanding is needed to ‘exploit’ these opportunities in ways that redress power imbalances.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Consideration of DRR in conditions of violent conflict challenges assumptions about how to pursue DRR effectively (Peters, 2017). It also challenges preconceived ideas about the everyday functioning of lives and livelihoods in such contexts. After all, ‘there is much continuity and normality to be found during crisis’ (van Dijkhorst, 2013: 253). Moreover, as Peters (2017) has argued, it may not be the conditions but DRR actors’ preconceived ideas about how DRR should be enacted and what is viable that require challenge. The tacit belief that peace and security are preconditions for DRR has discouraged greater consideration of what DRR could look like in conflict-affected settings where long-term humanitarian programming is feasible and development projects often operate (ibid.).

New initiatives and approaches are being trialled, and these warrant further attention. For example, a UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNISDR community resilience programme in Mauritania integrates the concept of human security into the DRR approach – one of the first of its kind (Eltinay and Harvey, forthcoming). In another example, the Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) consortium implemented a conflict-sensitive programme as part of its drought and flood mitigation work; through combined responses to conflict-related displacement and drought, the programme sought to ensure that the shock of the conflict did not increase vulnerabilities to drought impacts (Peters, 2017: 34).

## Recommendations

This paper has argued that the disaster–conflict nexus sheds new light on what we think we know about the construction of disaster risk, and therefore what measures may work in reducing disaster impacts. It has highlighted a need to

develop our thinking and action in ways that can be considered ‘technical’ – adjusting tools and approaches, setting up new mechanisms, gathering new and different types of data. It also reveals a set of highly political questions about vulnerability, the construction of disaster risk and the opportunities that the post-disaster space could afford. Outlined below are ideas leaning towards the technical rather than the political, though the latter should not be overlooked in discussions at the national and sub-national level where ‘everyday politics’ play out in people’s lived experiences.

Organised around the Sendai Framework’s priority areas 1, 2 and 4, the recommendations are largely aimed at deepening our understanding of the complex, multifaceted and dynamic relationship between disasters and conflict, be that through challenging normative assumptions about what effective DRR looks like, better documentation of what works in reducing disaster impacts in contexts of violent conflict and using existing convening spaces to highlight, challenge and discuss new ideas. In reality, the conditions in which disasters play out – and therefore the recommendations for DRR policy and practice – in conditions of violent conflict are highly context-specific. The recommendations outlined below will therefore necessarily need to be developed and tailored to suit individual contexts.

Additional recommendations on how to advance understanding and action on DRR in contexts of conflict can be found elsewhere (see Peters, 2017; Peters, 2018): using Target E and Sendai Framework Guiding Principle (i) as policy entry points to pursue the agenda; to integrate DRR in conflict contexts into existing monitoring processes tracking progress against national and global targets; to build a robust evidence base and lessons on how to adapt DRR tools and approaches to different types of conflict contexts; to establish and formalise a community of practice and group of political champions to drive the agenda forward in national, regional and global convening spaces; and to use existing convening spaces to fast-track the agenda, including but not limited to the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva in May 2019 (Peters, 2017; Peters, 2018).

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### **Implications for Priority 1: Understanding disaster risk**

- Future status reports and Regional Assessment Reports assessing the pace of progress against the Sendai Framework goals and targets should include chapters dedicated to understanding disaster risk in contexts of violent conflict. Contributing evidence should be spearheaded by the respective regional Science, Technology and Advisory Groups (STAGs). The STAGs – particularly the social science cadre – should seek to support and challenge normative DRR research, policy and practice, and make the disaster–conflict–climate nexus a more prominent theme in future research.
- Assessments of vulnerability and capacity should be reviewed and adjusted where necessary to enable greater consideration of the dynamics of violent conflict, and related disruptive social conditions. Conflict and peace should be treated as a dynamic element of the context in which DRR policies, programmes and projects are enacted, and duly (re)considered in routine monitoring processes. The Global Network for Disaster Reduction is well placed to convene a process to support the integration of conflict into vulnerability and capacity assessments. This should be done as part of a collective learning process drawing on the experiences of NGOs, civil society organisations and UN agencies.

### **Implications for Priority 2: Strengthening disaster risk governance**

- UNISDR should continue its work to demonstrate to governments the added value of multi-stakeholder participation in DRR processes – especially in the Arab region – in line with the belief that DRR requires a ‘whole-of-society’ approach. Noting that the concepts of ‘society’ and ‘community’ are not a politically neutral or static construct, dedicated space should be given to discussion and action on how to enact DRR by alternative, underrepresented and marginalised groups, and through untraditional (perhaps even unconventional) means where required.

- The space and independence afforded by the 2019 Global Assessment Report should be exploited to collate and assess where new and innovative approaches to disaster risk governance are being trialled – including showcasing examples that run counter to state-centric models of DRR. For example, specific attention should be given to showcasing DRR efforts by a diversity of actors in violent conflict contexts.

### **Implications for Priority 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to ‘Build Back Better’ in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction**

- The integration of conflict sensitivity and/ or Do No Harm approaches into recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction measures can be trialled, ideally with an intersectional lens, recognising the diversity of vulnerabilities to violence and disaster impacts. The World Bank is doing work to integrate conflict sensitivity into post-disaster needs assessments, and this could be shared and built upon.
- In seeking to promote more far-reaching changes to social conditions, agencies should take time to carefully consider the extent to which their planned response operations are likely to reinforce inequitable power structures, and whether adjustments could be made to challenge or alter those conditions in order to create positive and longer-lasting change. Independent evaluations and research should be harnessed to assess the current implications of ‘Build Back Better’ efforts, with lessons feeding into future preparedness, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction plans.
- Finally, to drive the agenda forward a consultation should be held on the margins of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction 2019 to design a global conference on DRR in contexts of violent conflict, to be convened in 2020. UN agencies such as UNISDR and UNDP, and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), would be well placed to convene such an event.

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# About this project

This report is part of the project ‘When disasters and conflict collide: uncovering the truth’, a collaboration between the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). If you have evidence, data and stories to share on disaster risk reduction in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, please contact the Principal Investigator, Katie Peters (k.peters@odi.org.uk)

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