



Summary

Disaster risk reduction in conflict contexts

A briefing for policy-makers

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Cover photo: A Canadian soldier frisks a contractor working in Forward Operating Base (FOB) Frontenac in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.
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About this report

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). The lead researcher is Katie Peters, Senior Research Fellow, ODI (k.peters@odi.org.uk).

Available in this series

Peters, K. (2018) *Accelerating Sendai Framework implementation in Asia: disaster risk reduction in contexts of violence, conflict and fragility*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11153-accelerating-sendai-framework-implementation-asia-disaster-risk-reduction-contexts-violence-conflict)

Peters, K. and Peters, L.E.R. (2018) *Disaster risk reduction and violent conflict in Africa and Arab states: implications for Sendai Framework Priorities*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11208-disaster-risk-reduction-and-violent-conflict-africa-and-arab-states-implications-sendai-framework)

Peters, K., Holloway, K., and Peters, L.E.R. (2019) *Disaster risk reduction in conflict contexts: the state of the evidence*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11340-disaster-risk-reduction-conflict-contexts-state-evidence)

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Siddiqi, A., Peters, K. and Zulver, J. (2019) *‘Doble afectación’: living with disasters and conflict in Colombia*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11414-doble-afectacion-living-disasters-and-conflict-colombia)

Peters, K. (2019) *Disaster risk reduction in conflict contexts: an agenda for action*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11408-disaster-risk-reduction-conflict-contexts-agenda-action)

Multimedia content

- Online feature including videos from Colombia, Lebanon, and Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction, Ms Mami Mizutori (www.odi.org/disasters-conflict)
- Podcast series: *When disasters and conflict collide* (www.odi.org/opinion/10507-podcast-series-when-disasters-and-conflict-collide)
 - Episode 1: *Conflict: the elephant in the diplomatic meeting room*
 - Episode 2: *The politics of disasters*
 - Episode 3: *A call to action*

All reports and content as well as information on the project can be found online: www.odi.org/projects/2913-when-disasters-and-conflict-collide-uncovering-truth

Acronyms

CADRI	Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative
DRR	disaster risk reduction
EU	European Union
GFDRR	Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery
GNDR	Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNDRR	UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

Introduction

Since the 1970s, an emerging body of work has sought to deepen and nuance understanding of the construction of disaster risk, and the intersection of natural hazards with violence, conflict and fragility. Today, it seems policy traction has finally arrived. For the first time, the 2019 *Global assessment report on disaster risk reduction* includes a substantive chapter on disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies in fragile and complex contexts, and a formal session on the topic was included at the 2019 Global Platform. This explicit recognition of the connections between conflict and disaster risk at the global level is reflected regionally, including through the inclusion of a special session on conflict at the Africa–Arab DRR Platform and Ministerial Meeting in Tunis 2018.

Yet responding to these emerging opportunities remains a challenge. Governments want to know what a DRR strategy adapted to conflict contexts looks like – but there are none; operational agencies want good practice guidance on integrating conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive approaches into DRR programming – yet these are few and far between; and donors want advice on where, when and how to invest in DRR in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence – and yet knowledge and evidence

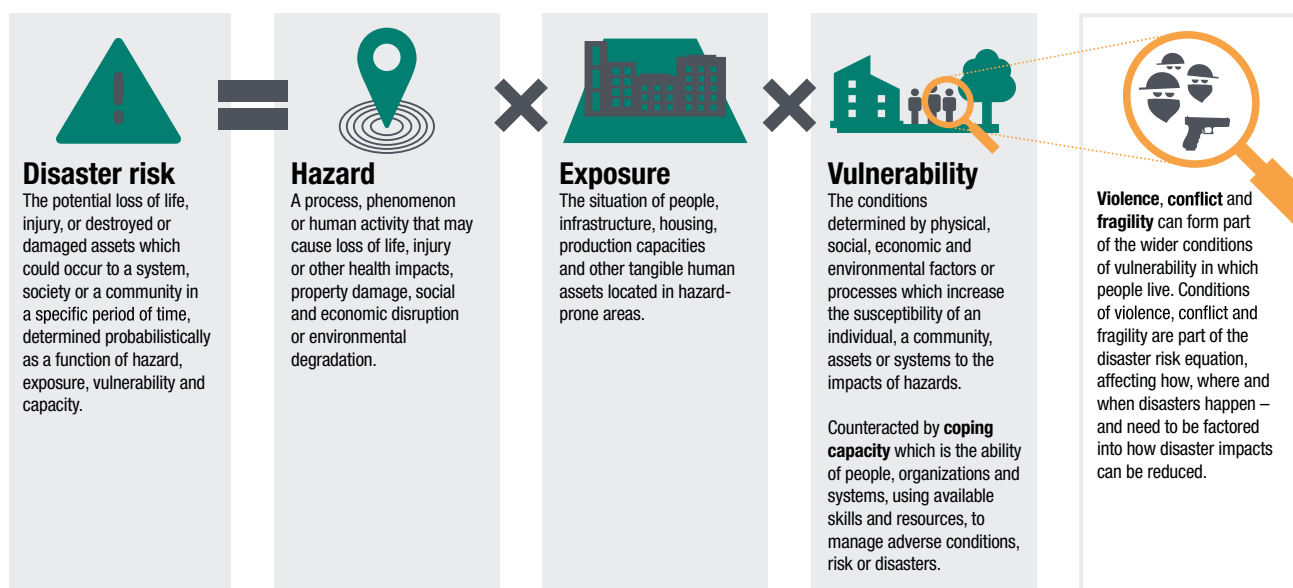
on what investments are appropriate and viable remain piecemeal and fragmented.

This briefing distils the key policy-relevant findings of a year-long project looking at DRR in conflict contexts. The project, a collaboration between the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and ODI, explored the current state of the evidence; reviewed international, regional and national DRR strategies and progress towards Target E of the Sendai Framework; and looked at specific cases of DRR in conflict contexts in Afghanistan, Chad, Colombia and Lebanon. This paper synthesises the key findings of this work, and provides a set of recommendations to advance this agenda.

Defining the problem

People typically live in hazard-prone areas because their circumstances leave them no other choice or because access to economic opportunities outweighs perceptions of hazard risk. Vulnerability to the impacts of a hazard, and the capacity to weather those impacts and recover, is a function of physical, social, economic and environmental conditions. Within this, violence and conflict act

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) accompanying the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015). Source: Peters, 2018: 9.

as multiplying or reinforcing factors. Beyond the immediate impacts of violent conflict itself, communities forced to flee violence are highly likely to have fewer financial or social assets and capital, increasing their vulnerability to hazards and reducing their capacity to cope with their effects.

While there is substantial experience and an extensive literature on humanitarian responses to disasters in conditions of conflict, little attention has been paid to adapting DRR policies, programmes and strategies to such contexts. The prevention of disasters and of conflict have largely been treated separately, governed by different frameworks, managed by different institutions and theorised and conceptualised in different ways. Disaster policy and practice have failed to make adequate links with conflict vulnerabilities or the practice of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In policy spaces, disaster risk management is often portrayed as an apolitical endeavour, while a discourse around disasters that normalises the factors that produce vulnerabilities effectively removes from consideration and action the political factors driving disaster risk.

The fact that it is difficult to bring a political perspective and analysis to DRR does not make it less necessary. There is a moral imperative for focusing attention on how best to deliver DRR in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence: 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. Given the prevalence of violent conflict across the globe, this is not a marginal concern. And there is a political dimension. Only with concerted attention on delivering DRR in such contexts will the collective ambition to achieve the Sendai Framework targets and contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development be realised in a way that genuinely ‘leaves no one behind’.

Intersecting disaster and conflict risk in Colombia, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Chad

Four case studies explored the intersection of disaster and conflict risk in Colombia, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Chad. Each illustrates different aspects of the disaster–conflict nexus: Colombia provides examples of the politicisation of disaster events, and the extent to which the experience of intersecting disaster and conflict risk can permeate people’s lives, whether that be increased exposure to landslides because conflict-related displacement forces families into high-risk areas; severe trauma from repeated cycles of vulnerability and violence related to disasters and conflict; or inadequate responses to disasters, reinforcing perceptions of an ‘uncaring’ state. Afghanistan shows how operational agencies are integrating conflict analysis tools into DRR project design and delivery, revealing a shift away from hazard-focused infrastructure projects towards a more holistic approach to risk. Here,

Box 1 DRR strategies and Target E

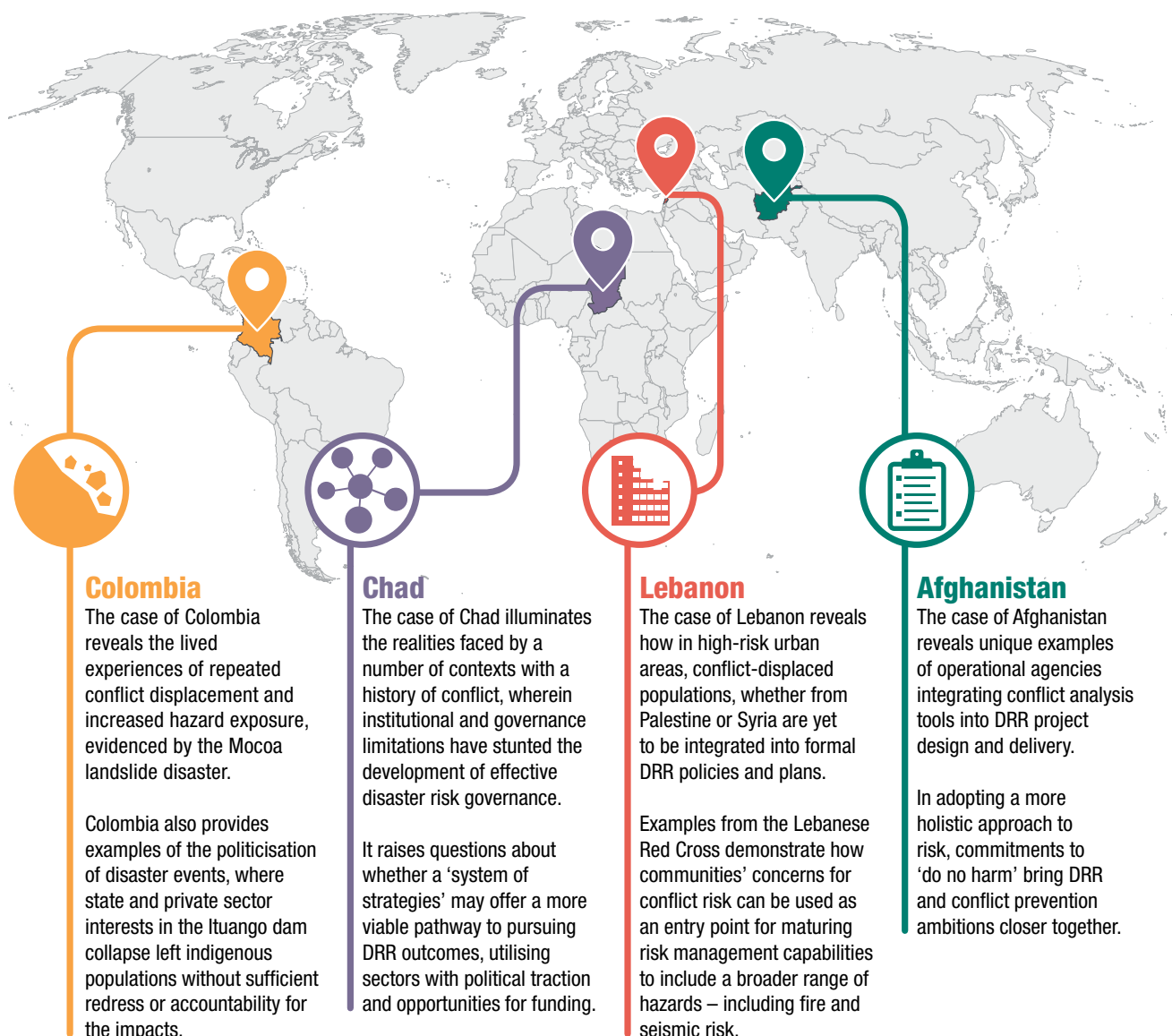
DRR strategies are the cornerstone of formalised action for reducing natural hazard-related risk, including in contexts affected by violent conflict. National DRR strategies provide a means for governments to lay out how they plan to protect their citizens against current and future disaster risk, and act as an instrument for holding governments to account for their actions (or inaction). Under Target E of the Sendai Framework, governments have committed to increasing the number of national and local DRR strategies globally by 2020. This in itself would be an important first step in institutionalising DRR, and is in sharp contrast to the previous Hyogo Framework, which focused on institutions and processes, rather than national strategies and plans. While baseline data is scarce and disputed, it appears that coverage of DRR strategies across scales in conflict and post-conflict contexts is low, and these contexts are least likely to have DRR strategies. Where DRR strategies exist, there is a disconnect between people’s lived experiences of intersecting disaster and conflict risk and recognition of the dynamic conditions of conflict in policy documents.

commitments to ‘do no harm’ are bringing DRR and conflict prevention ambitions closer together. In Lebanon, the work of the Lebanese Red Cross shows how communities’ concerns for conflict risk can be used as an entry point for establishing long-term relationships which, over time, can be harnessed to include a broader range of hazards. Lebanon also shows how even relatively stable and peaceful societies can be affected by a turbulent undercurrent of inter- and intra-community tensions. Finally, Chad illuminates how a history of conflict and institutional and governance limitations can stunt the development of effective disaster risk governance. Chad currently has no DRR strategy, and technical and financial capabilities are insufficient to deal with

the risks facing the country. At the same time, important progress has been made on response and risk management in relation to drought and food insecurity, raising the question whether DRR outcomes could be pursued through sectors with existing political traction, rather than starting with a blueprint for DRR.

Findings from the case studies echo experiences from more peaceful or stable societies. Across all contexts, dedicated support to national disaster management agencies is required to design, deliver and report on national to local DRR strategies in ways that are cognisant of issues of fragility, conflict and violence. The findings also point to new opportunities and entry points for advancing DRR in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence

Figure 2 Key insights from the four country case studies



that are specific to those contexts. A strong theme across the case studies is the need to find ways to strengthen the social contract through DRR actions (or, as a minimum, not undermine or aggravate relations between the state and citizens through DRR and disaster response). Protection also featured heavily, and the need to strengthen protection against disaster risk for conflict-displaced populations – particularly in urban areas – and marginalised or excluded communities more broadly through intersectional approaches to linked disaster and conflict vulnerabilities. Curbing risk creation featured prominently, linked to rapid urbanisation, population growth and the need for sustainable, risk-informed development processes. Finally, the studies collectively highlight the need for better collaboration between stakeholders and agencies across the disaster, climate, conflict and peace specialisms. Only by establishing better working relationships will it be possible to create space in which to trial joint technical teams, linked programme and investment design and, for example, the integration of DRR into post-conflict reconstruction and recovery processes, and conflict sensitivity and conflict prevention into DRR ambitions.

Key findings

Operational and policy interest in disaster resilience in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence has to confront the reality that DRR has a long way to go to build the foundations to deliver on these ambitions. Drawn from our research across the study and outlined below are some of the most pressing limitations that need to be addressed if we are to collectively take forward this agenda for action.

Strategies, projects and understandings of vulnerability

- Conditions of conflict are largely treated as an externality to the disaster and DRR context.
- Efforts towards effective DRR in conflict contexts are overly projectised and piecemeal.
- Insufficient attention is given to understanding the role of fragility, conflict and violence in disaster vulnerabilities.
- Claims that DRR tools and frameworks adequately consider fragility, conflict and violence are not substantiated with evidence.
- Do no harm and conflict sensitivity are currently under-utilised in DRR intervention design, delivery and monitoring processes.
- Collaborations between the DRR community and peacebuilding and conflict prevention specialists are yet to be established.
- Conventional arguments for investing in DRR may not gain traction with governments typically labelled as fragile or conflict-affected.
- No financing mechanisms exist which specifically target financial support to DRR in conflict contexts.

Investment

- Financial and technical support to national disaster management agencies is urgently needed in conflict contexts.
- Risk management interventions not labelled as DRR are routinely disjointed or discounted from discussions on progress in DRR.

Evidence and learning

- Little is known about individual risk tolerances and how they shape individual decisions in contexts of intersecting disaster and conflict risk.
- Individuals' roles in disaster and conflict risk creation are often downplayed or overlooked.
- Intersectional approaches to DRR in conflict contexts are negligible.
- There is vast undocumented, uncollated and unverified experience and evidence on how to enable DRR outcomes in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence.

An agenda for action

Governments, donors, policy-makers and practitioners are increasingly being encouraged to consider the complex interactions between natural hazards and conflict, as well as displacement, food insecurity and political instability – spaces where broader humanitarian, development and peace needs and ambitions converge. There are also increasing calls for

cross-sectoral and long-term engagement in contexts where complex risks manifest, increasing the need for systematic approaches to address interlinked disaster and conflict risk. Deeper understanding of the implications of fragility, conflict and violence for DRR policy, financing and practice is necessary, not only to lay the foundations for achieving Target E of the Sendai Framework, but also to meet the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals to which Target E contributes.

Current evidence on the disproportionate impacts of disasters in contexts affected by fragility, conflict and violence should be sufficient to prompt immediate and urgent attention by governments to do more to protect at-risk populations from known and preventable risks of natural hazards. Whether this happens, and at what pace, will be determined by how radical governments, donors and agencies are willing to be to act to reduce disaster risk and curb risk creation. Here we propose a range of possible options, from the minimal to the maximal: (1) business as usual; (2) adjusting conventional approaches; (3) new and innovative approaches; and (4) actively seeking solutions beyond the current system.

The default is to continue with business as usual approaches, extending current DRR policy, finance and practice to conflict contexts. Where these are sufficiently mature to take account of conflict dynamics, this may be effective in tackling disaster risk. Where they are not, ill-adapted approaches may produce unintentional negative impacts on conflict dynamics within a society.

Conventional DRR can be made fit for purpose in contexts affected by fragility, conflict and violence. This would require tweaks to better reflect societal and operational realities. For example, as a minimum we can begin doing things that are ‘no regrets’, such as integrating do no harm principles or embedding conflict analysis into DRR planning cycles. This would have the effect of encouraging conventional approaches to DRR to closely examine the context-specificities of fragility, conflict and violence, and encourage strategies and plans to achieve DRR outcomes in ways that recognise disaster and conflict risk as a product of their context – and DRR interventions themselves as part of that context. This is the basic assumption underpinning conflict

sensitivity, and some agencies are exploring the value of embedding conflict-sensitive approaches into DRR processes. One limitation of this option is that the DRR community may remain relatively parochial, although ideally such approaches could be pursued in a collaborative manner, linking with conflict specialists – leading on to more innovative approaches.

Going further, new and innovative approaches to DRR could involve establishing new collaborations between diverse technical specialists, creating linked processes for risk assessment and intervention design and new approaches to implementation and monitoring. Examples include linking DRR with peacebuilding and conflict prevention specialists to articulate and achieve joint outcomes in contexts where disaster and conflict vulnerabilities are linked. At its fullest extent this would require, for example, mandating disaster and conflict expertise in all post-disaster and post-conflict response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction technical teams. Such collaborations may create space and political traction to explore whether and how DRR can be considered part of a process to build social cohesion and strengthen the social contract in conflict and post-conflict societies, and over time to interrogate the place of DRR in conversations around diplomacy and security (including climate security).

But normative approaches to DRR which adopt state-centric ideals may not be viable or appropriate in some contexts. In contexts where the state is complicit in risk creation for marginalised or excluded groups in society, or where non-state armed groups control territory, or where individuals such as undocumented migrants are unaccounted for in official records, there may be a need to go further ‘outside the box’. One size will not fit all, and a multiplicity of ideas and approaches will be required to enable DRR to mature to the level of contextual specificity required to deal with granular differences that contexts of fragility, conflict and violence present to achieving DRR outcomes.

To genuinely ensure that ‘no one is left behind’, the DRR community will also need to learn about and trial unorthodox approaches to DRR in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence. This

is the area we know least about. By gathering evidence on historical and current lived experiences of disasters and DRR in conflict contexts, it may be possible to garner ideas for solutions beyond the current system. This could involve pushing the boundaries of what DRR stakeholders think they know, how they act and who they collaborate with, to achieve disaster resilience in complex and dynamic conflict contexts, for example working with non-state armed groups on disaster prevention and preparedness, or providing legal support to indigenous groups to protect their rights where state and private sector interests are increasing their exposure and vulnerability to disaster risk.

Exactly what constitutes a bold or innovative solution will vary depending on the context, and on the appetite for change. For some, integrating conflict analysis into programme design processes is, or should be, standard practice, but for others this may be highly innovative in itself; likewise, engaging in a dialogue with non-state armed groups around DRR will be feasible in some contexts and

politically unpalatable in others. How bold governments are willing and able to be will depend on a range of factors, including the specific conflict and hazard context, ability to leverage financial resources and technical capabilities and the willingness and political appetite to tackle the reality that disaster risk is inherently political, as are the ‘solutions’.

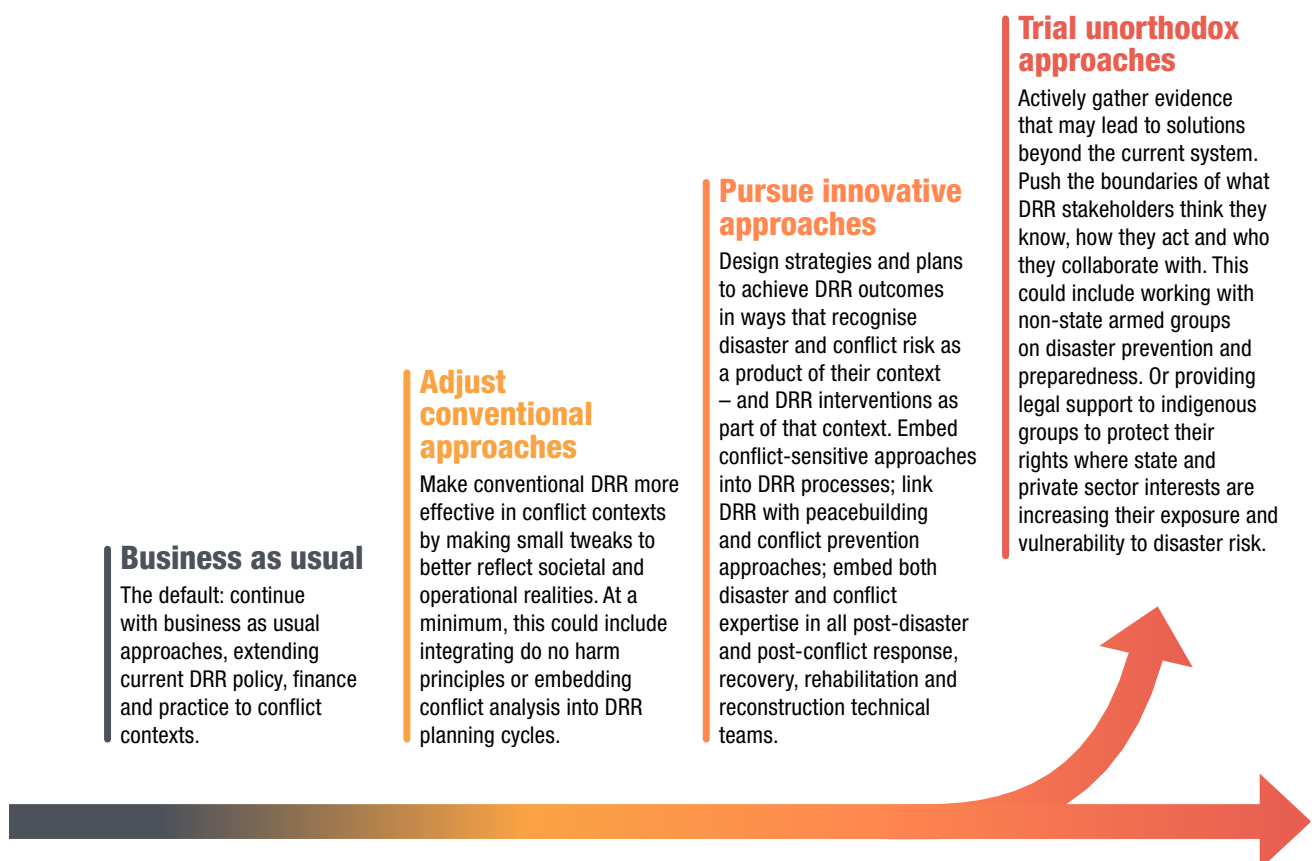
Recommendations for actionable approaches

Strategy and financing

Integrate conflict considerations into DRR strategies

- DRR strategies which do take conflict into account should be documented and analysed to act as a reference guide for governments wanting to consider conflict in DRR strategy design. UNDRR should be supported to respond to government requests for guidance on DRR policy design to reduce disaster risk in conflict contexts.

Figure 3 The continuum of options for action



- Where ambitions to link DRR with conflict prevention aims have already been written into strategies, these should be capitalised on to develop a body of work on what joint programme design and delivery could look like in practice. Priority should be given to the African DRR Strategy through an accompaniment process to help the African Union fulfil its commitments to link DRR and conflict prevention. A technical advisory group with call-down capacity will need to be established to support governments to take the lead in this field.

Invest in DRR activities in contexts affected by fragility, conflict and violence

- Donors should conduct a review of DRR investment portfolios, undertaking systematic assessment of prior, current and planned DRR interventions and investments in conflict-affected contexts. Reviews should aim to provide donors with recommendations for enhancing investment opportunities in DRR, as well as new or additional safeguards for ensuring that investments do not exacerbate societal tensions. Reviews could be undertaken independently by donors with bespoke guidelines tailored to the donor in question, or collectively through a shared methodology and generic set of recommendations convened by an independent group, or via existing mechanisms such as the OECD risk and resilience group.
- Earmarked funding for DRR in conflict contexts is required, from enhanced bilateral arrangements to committed finance to the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)'s newly established Disaster Risk Management-Fragility, Conflict and Violence Nexus Programme. Donors such as Germany and Switzerland and others can lead the way by offering dedicated financing to programmes that explicitly address the intersection of disaster and conflict risks. Donors can design and institutionalise guidelines and minimum standards to ensure conflict analysis is systematically integrated into project design and monitoring processes.
- To accelerate action on DRR in conflict contexts to reflect the scale of the challenge

and the high levels of need in contexts where disaster and conflict vulnerabilities intersect, a multi-donor pooled fund for disasters and peace could be established. The fund would provide financial and technical advisory support to governments on policy design, build the capacity of national disaster management agencies, implement projects with improved monitoring processes that link tracking of changes in disaster and conflict risk and pursue independent research to plug evidence gaps.

Operations

Develop an integrated cadre of DRR and conflict specialists

- Significant investment in upskilling disaster expertise in issues of conflict, peace and security is required, and vice-versa. Existing manuals and training materials – used by the DRR and conflict prevention cadre – will need to be adapted and tested with intended users (be they civil servants, practitioners or others), from which e-learning courses and training programmes can be rolled out to help build capacities and share expertise and approaches.
- There is a need to establish collaborative teams with disaster and conflict expertise working together to explore and exploit opportunities for linked DRR and conflict prevention outcomes. Priority could be given to capitalising on opportunities afforded by the post-disaster and post-conflict space, with teams comprising both sets of expertise. One entry point could be using an integrated cadre of DRR and conflict specialists for early action and preparedness programmes around disaster and conflict risk in contexts such as Haiti, Myanmar and the Horn of Africa. Over time, disaster and conflict expertise should be made mandatory in all stages of intervention design and delivery in contexts where hazard and conflict risks are high.

Adapt DRR decision-making processes, tools and approaches to include greater consideration of conflict conditions and indicators

- DRR programmes, projects, investments and approaches require revision to systematically

consider conflict dynamics, as a minimum to avoid unintentionally exacerbating social tensions, exclusion and inequalities. Efficiencies can be made by like-minded agencies working collaboratively to make necessary revisions and technical guidance notes, for example NGOs through the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR), UN agencies via the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI) or donors via the GFDRR Consultative Group. Adapting tools and approaches is as relevant for individual NGO projects as it is for large-scale investment processes, including for example multi-million-dollar post-disaster reconstruction investment processes.

Convening and representation

Formalise a community of practice and establish annual conferences on DRR in conflict contexts

- There is a need to formalise a ‘DRR in conflict’ community of practice, a network managed by a secretariat and overseen by an advisory board. As a minimum, this should involve convening interested actors to share ideas, knowledge and evidence on how to pursue DRR in conflict contexts.
- An annual international conference, an ‘Action agenda on disasters, conflict and peace’, should be convened to provide space for sharing lessons, ideas and expertise across government, non-government, academic and private sector actors. Making the conference a dedicated day ahead of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction could serve to link it to the existing DRR convening cycle.
- Better sharing of existing knowledge and practice is required. The secretariat should oversee a process to scope options for an online platform or adaptations to existing knowledge hubs, for example creating a dedicated online

space within PreventionWeb for publications and events specifically on the intersection of disasters and conflict. A quarterly newsletter should also be produced, to share stories, events, job opportunities and new developments on the topic.

- Building on the *Global assessment report 2019* chapter on this topic, the 2020 edition should feature issues of fragility, conflict and violence through dedicated chapters exploring progress in attaining the goals of the Sendai Framework in such contexts.

Evidence

Harness operational learning to deepen understanding of the benefits and limitations of DRR in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence

- A systematic review of evidence should be undertaken to catalogue and synthesise practical examples of DRR interventions, alongside a typology of conflict. Existing networks such as GNDR could be utilised to gather examples, while independent research may be required to verify claims by individual agencies about the positive impacts DRR interventions have had on conditions of peace.

Learn from affected people’s experiences and coping capacities and how they deal with linked disaster and conflict risk

- Research into the choices people make in response to intersecting conflict and disaster risks could provide a more grounded starting point from which to design policy, investments and interventions that complement people’s coping capacities and respond to their self-articulated visions for how to cope with disaster and conflict risk. Longitudinal studies and life histories in particular could help develop a deeper understanding of vulnerability over an individual’s life course.



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