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Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM)

Community-Based Approaches to Risk-Informed Development in Georgia

CONTEXT

Extreme natural events such as landslides, slow-onset events such as droughts and sea-level rise, and technological or human-induced hazards often have disastrous impacts on the resilience of people and infrastructure. As urbanization continues, coupled with inadequate health care, environmental degradation, fragile statehood, and violent conflicts, disaster risks become more acute, complex, and increasingly interdependent. Climate change amplifies these factors.

Disasters impact various areas such as public health, economy, governance, tourism, critical infrastructure (e.g., hospitals, transport, water, communication) and can have devastating effects in already fragile contexts. The pandemic has pushed many health systems to their limits. The rapid spread of the virus has also created immense economic and socio-political burden in almost all sectors and areas of society. **Increasing interdependencies and complex hazards and risks confront us with the challenge of finding new and more resilient approaches** to reduce the risk of critical infrastructure failure.

Despite an increasing understanding of the complexity of risks, these are not always adequately considered in development planning and programming. Current approaches frequently address just one threat at a time, typically a natural hazard, rather than considering several new global threats or multiple, simultaneously occurring risks. **Disasters suddenly wipe out many years of development successes and reduce the development opportunities of countries**. Achievements in terms of poverty reduction, combating illnesses and improving access to health care, education and services are fragile and undermined by new and emerging threats. A lack in understanding and managing systemic risks jeopardizes the achievement of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015- 2030) and the Sustainable Development Goals.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: RISK-INFORMED DEVELOPMENT

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

KEY MESSAGES ON RID

(1) Development is taking place in a complex and uncertain environment of risks—at the same time current development pathways are creating risk faster than we can manage risk;
(2) Risk needs to be understood as being interdependent and systemic;
(3) Disaster risk reduction is not enough—we need to transform our development pathways to risk-informed development;
(4) Building capacities and promoting an enabling environment to make decisions risk-informed is key;
(5) Fostering the participation of all members of society and systemically addressing inequalities are cornerstones of risk-informed development;
(6) There is no universal blueprint—risk-informed development needs to be tailored to the context with enough flexibility to reevaluate and adapt continuously;
(7) Risk-informed decision-making is a prerequisite for sustainable development and fundamental to preventing the creation

GIDRM IN GEORGIA

GIDRM supports **community-based approaches to risk-informed development**. The objective is to better protect populations and critical infrastructure through improved risk perception and assessments considering the systemic nature of risks and to strengthen risk-informed decision-making processes.

The National Environmental Agency of Georgia (NEA) is supported in capacity building of future professionals to better understand and manage landslide risk in Georgia. A cutting-edge **landslide monitoring system** is being installed in Gveso (Tsageri), a high-risk area in the Northern part of Georgia. Furthermore, capacity building of NEA on hazard assessment, data management, analyses and interpretation is foreseen as part of the project.

Along with improving data generation and assessment pathways, a new methodology of climate change and infrastructure vulnerability and risk assessment is piloted for the road infrastructure of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti. The Public Infrastructure

Engineering Vulnerability Committee (PIEVC) Protocol provides a structured framework that can be used to (1) systematically review climate data, (2) project the nature, severity and likelihood of future climate changes and events, (3) estimate climate impacts, (4) understand the adaptive capacity of infrastructure, and (5) enable the identification of higher risk components.

Moreover, a baseline assessment of existing university level programs related to hazard and risk assessments was conducted to identify gaps and entry points for specific capacity building measures. As a follow-up, interested representatives of universities—mainly students—are trained through practical knowledge exchange and field visits to Gveso and other hazardous zones. Students are further supported with mobile laboratory equipment and research opportunities upon being involved in exercises.

To promote a systemic understanding of risks at the community level, municipal representatives across impacted regions will be trained on interpreting various data sets into enhanced day-to-day action planning. Additionally, a small-scale impact chain assessment exercise will be piloted for Tsageri municipality focusing especially on the interdependencies between hazards, land use practices (agriculture) and access to health services. Landslides, floods, and similar hazards lead to limited access to health care services, e.g., due to road blockages, or disruptions in health care provision, e.g., due to electricity shortages or lack of clean water. Understanding and evaluating the concrete interdependencies will allow the community members to take more risk-informed decisions on investment and planning priorities and advocacy messages to the regional level.

In addition, GIDRM is aiming to support the enabling environment for risk-informed development in Georgia. Focusing on the six core dimensions of an enabling environment for RID (finance & resources, knowledge & information, culture & people, partnership & collaboration, organizational capabilities, policy & regulations), entry points for RID will be identified and capacities of various stakeholder groups will be built based on the identified needs. Complementing this process are a) an entry point analysis conducted on integrating RID approaches in the health sector; b) a video production on systemic understanding of risk and RID.

The combination of all these activities will result in a better understanding of risk-informed development in mountainous areas, while also building local capacities on systemic risk assessments, risk-informed decision-making at the local and governing levels in cooperation with diverse communities and actors.

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Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM)
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36
53113 Bonn, Germany
info@gidrm.net | www.gidrm.net | www.giz.de

On behalf of
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Division 503— Peace and Security, Disaster Risk Management

BMZ Berlin
Stresemannstraße 94
10963 Berlin, Germany
+49 (0)30 18 535-0 | poststelle@bmz.bund.de | www.bmz.de

Contact
Jacqueline Begerow
jacqueline.begerow@giz.de | +49 228 4460 1141