

Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM) Strengthening critical infrastructure resilience through risk-informed development in Lesotho's water sector

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: RISK-INFORMED DEVELOPMENT

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

Despite the increasing awareness of the complexity of risks, they are still 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. Disaster risk management is still largely focused on responding to disasters rather than adopting a cross-cutting, preventative approach to minimising risk. The skills and capacities of decision-makers in adequately dealing with risks can be fostered. To address the complex nature of risks and safeguard development, the Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM, 2020- 2023) aims at strengthening risk governance and risk-informed development. In doing so, GIDRM has the objective of strengthening the capacities and skills of selected decision-makers, regional organisations and initiatives in Southern Africa, Asia and Latin America in mainstreaming risk-informed development principles and key messages by considering context-specific fragility factors.

The debate around risk-informed development (RID) is becoming increasingly relevant at international, national, and subnational 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 re-evaluate and adapt continuously;
- (7) Risk-informed decision-making is a prerequisite for sustainable development and fundamental to preventing the creation of risk.

CONTEXT: WATER AS THE KEY SECTOR IN LESOTHO

Water is Lesotho's principal natural resource. It is a vital resource for a wide range of sectors and critical infrastructure services, such as energy, agriculture, and economic production (i.e., textile industry). In fact, Lesotho is considered the "water tower" of Southern Africa, meaning, that all national water-related challenges and interventions also have an immediate effect in downstream countries.

At the same time, the water sector in Lesotho is exposed and vulnerable to multiple hazards and risks. Erratic weather patterns and drought, unsustainable land-use methods, increased demand due to growing population and unplanned urbanization patterns, as well as insufficient access to alternative livelihoods leads to overgrazing, erosion and desertification. This is further driven and compounded by climate change, which is expected to push Lesotho into a period of water stress by 2030.



Given the relevance of water for the environmental, social and economic pillars of development, Lesotho's water sector criticality poses a systemic risk with severe potential consequences, these include insufficiency of water resources potentially spilling over and cascading into crisis and insecurities in various sectors such as energy, food, and economy unfolding to involuntary migration flows or social and political instabilities. Managing water infrastructure and supply from a systemic, transboundary, and risk-based perspective is thus critical for a resilient and sustained water provision.

GIDRM IN LESOTHO

GIDRM aims to strengthen the capacities and skills of selected decision-makers in Southern Africa by making methods for risk-informed development interventions available. In conjunction with the "Integrated Catchment Management" (ICM) project implemented in the SADC region, specifically in Lesotho, GIDRM is piloting a climate risk-assessment tool with the water sector as an entry point for RID.

Together with the Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM) and the Climate Risk Institute (CRI), GIDRM

WHAT IS THE PIEVC PROTOCOL?

The *Public Infrastructure Engineering Vulnerability Committee (PIEVC) Protocol* was developed by Engineers Canada as a standardized process and tool to assess and define climate risks and vulnerability of civil infrastructure to the impacts of extreme weather and climate change as a basis for the identification of risk-informed options.

is advancing the use of the *Public Infrastructure Engineering Vulnerability Committee (PIEVC) Protocol* for the assessment of climate change risks associated with infrastructure assets in the water sector in Lesotho. Additional capacity building measures like technical trainings, stakeholder workshops, and the provision of various related materials, will add to the development of climate-proofing standards for the region and/or sector.

In addition, GIDRM is aiming to support the enabling environment for risk-informed development by fostering resilience in Lesotho's water sector. Focusing on the six core dimensions of an enabling environment for RID (finance and resources; knowledge and information; culture and people; partnership and collaboration; organizational capabilities; policy and regulations), entry points for RID will be identified and capacities of various stakeholder groups will be built based on the identified needs.

Given the transboundary nature of water resources in Lesotho, GIDRM activities also strive to open avenues for Lesotho stakeholders to contribute to the regional agenda and provide good practices for ORASECOM member states and the SADC Secretariat to scale up the approach beyond and with the water sector.

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

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

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

