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Loss and Damage Livelihood Resilience

5 key insights from the Resilience Academy and 5 recommendations for the 5-year work plan on Loss and Damage

Climate change Loss and Damage has emerged as a key challenge of the 21st century. This Policy Brief first frames the challenge and then introduces the Resilience Academy, highlighting 5 key insights that both feed the debate and inform action. Finally, it provides 5 recommendations to the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM ExCom) for its 5-year work plan.

Rising to the Challenge

Loss and Damage (L&D) does not mean the same thing to everybody. There is a spectrum of positions and views on L&D. Some suggest that L&D refers to all climate change impacts, and that these can be addressed through existing United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) mechanisms on mitigation and adaptation. Others see L&D as impacts that are beyond the limits of adaptation. Yet another perspective is that L&D is already happening today. From this perspective, new measures are needed to deal with the consequences.

Climate change is widely recognized as a stressor that undermines sustainable development and the resilience of ecosystems and societies. It affects infrastructure, economy, food security, natural resources and livelihood opportunities. When adaptive capacity and the level of preparedness fall short, these changes result in L&D. Globally, the international community has a responsibility to minimize climate harm and address L&D, including non-economic L&D, that cannot be avoided.

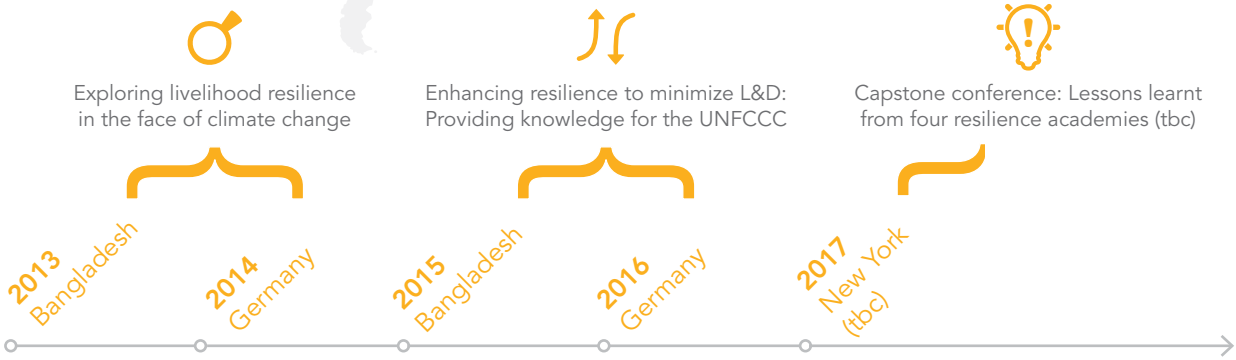
The Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) was established in 2013 to help identify what can be done to reduce and address L&D. Approaches proposed by the WIM should range from supporting pre-emptive action to developing future contingency plans equipping vulnerable countries for different climate change scenarios. By doing so the WIM can help the world's governments and communities reduce risks of L&D and guide them on how to address situations where L&D cannot be avoided.

THE RESILIENCE ACADEMY

29 COUNTRIES

68

ACADEMICS, PRACTITIONERS, POLICY ANALYSTS AND JOURNALISTS



Who we are

Since 2013, the Resilience Academy has brought together academics, practitioners, policy analysts and journalists to discuss livelihood resilience and L&D in the face of extreme weather events and slow-onset climatic changes. Participants come from 29 countries, with a balance between the global north and south. The group has a wide range of institutional affiliations, including universities, international organizations, NGOs, think tanks, donors and government institutions. The 2015-2016 cohort of the academy identified key questions and gaps, opportunities for action and critical steps forward on L&D over the next five years.

PLEDGE OF THE RESILIENCE ACADEMY MEMBERS

"We will continue to do research that enhances understanding of Loss and Damage and that informs policy to avert, minimize and address it. Our work will be people-centred and relevant to vulnerable people. We will seek active engagement with the UNFCCC, WIM, the ExCom and wider research and practice community to make sure our work is as effective as possible at serving the goal of reducing Loss and Damage."

Academy members (2015-2016 cohort): Alberto Preato – *International Organization for Migration*, Alvin Chandra – *University of Queensland*, Amy Quandt – *University of Colorado*, Ava Mulla – *Building Pioneers*, Brad Powers – *Tulane University*, Brian Chaffin – *University of Montana*, Camari Koto – *University of the South Pacific*, Christian Barthelt – *Munich Re Foundation (MRF)*, Christopher J Carter – *Ulteri Planning*, Cosmin Corendea – *United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS)*, David Wrathall – *Oregon State University*, Denis Opiyo Opondo – *Maseno University*, Ebinezer Florano – *University of the Philippines*, Emilia Yustiningrum – *Griffith University*, Emily Boyd – *Lund University*, Erin Derrington – Eco-Management and Design Services, Erin Roberts – *King's College*, Golam Rabbani – *Bangladesh Center for Advanced Studies*, Hafijul Islam Khan – *Centre For Climate Justice-Bangladesh*, Ina Islam – *International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD)*, Istiakh Ahmed – *ICCCAD*, Jack Bolland – *Climate Action Network South Asia*, Jakob Rhyner – *UNU-EHS*, Jana Junghardt – *Caritas Switzerland*, Kees van der Geest – *UNU-EHS*, Koko Warner – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (*UNFCCC)*, Laura Schäfer – *UNU-EHS*, Laurens Nijzink – *independent researcher and journalist*, Nandan Mukherjee – *University of Dundee*, Nimisha Jha – *Asian Cities and Climate Change Resilience Network*, Olivia Serdeczny – *Climate Analytics*, Rachel James – *University of Oxford*, Rocio Granados – *Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (Colombia)*, Roger-Mark De Souza – *Woodrow Wilson Center*, Sabine Henry – *University of Namur*, Saleemul Huq - *ICCCAD*, Sonja Ayeb-Karlsson – *UNU-EHS*, Sönke Kreft – *Germanwatch*, Susanne Schwan – *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*, Terry Cannon – *Institute for Development Studies*, Thomas Loster – *MRF*, Vishal Pathak – *All India Disaster Migration Institute*, Zinta Zommers – United Nations Environment Programme (*UNEP)*

Opinions expressed in this document may not reflect views of individuals or the organizations they represent.

5 KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE ACADEMY

Over the past four years members of the Resilience Academy have conducted extensive research on the impacts of climatic stressors in vulnerable countries. This body of research has generated insights that feed the L&D dialogue and inform action plans in the context of the Paris Agreement. Key insights of the Resilience Academy that have strong policy implications are summarized here.

1 **Enhance livelihood resilience to minimize Loss and Damage:** Resilience thinking can play an important role in reducing climate harm, but this requires a critical treatment of the concept to inform policy. Not all resilience is beneficial as there is also harmful resilience which keeps people in undesirable situations. To minimize L&D, policy interventions must promote beneficial resilience that protects people from falling out of their current livelihood when confronted with impacts of climate change. Conversely, policy interventions must combat harmful resilience that prevents people from transitioning to more sustainable and less risky livelihood systems.

2 **Do not ignore the role of Loss and Damage to ecosystem services:** Studies of L&D to date have focused primarily on human systems and tended to overlook the mediating role of ecosystems and the services ecosystems provide to society. Yet, by impacting food production, health and water supply, climate-induced L&D to ecosystems services will affect people's lives and livelihoods. Mitigating damage to ecosystems will help reduce L&D to human well-being.

3 **Enhance understanding of social and cultural constraints to adaptation disaster preparedness:** Early warning systems which seem to function well from a technical point of view often fail at saving lives and protecting livelihoods due to social and cultural constraints. A deeper understanding of religious beliefs, traditional practices, social mechanisms of exclusion, gender roles and perceptions of risks and uncertainty are crucial to support vulnerable populations living with disaster risks.

4 **Identify ways to avoid erosive coping:** Coping means 'to deal successfully with something difficult'. However, in practice, the coping strategies that people adopt to adress the impacts of climatic events are not always successful. Erosive coping refers to coping measures that undermine people's livelihoods in the longer term. Examples include taking out loans with high interest rates, livelihood activities that degrade natural resources and taking children out of school to work. People are often forced to adopt erosive coping measures when they have run out of other options. Indirect L&D associated with erosive coping will be minimized if people who are affected by climatic events receive the right support at the right moment.

5 **Engage with islands states or other vulnerable constituents as champions of action:** While the most vulnerable countries are highly exposed to climatic stressors, many are also champions of resilience whose experiences can inform other countries that are currently less vulnerable. Actors on low-lying small island states, for example, have unique knowledge, skills, experiences and social systems that can benefit coastal countries around the world. WIM must provide a platform for vulnerable countries that aims at gathering their perspectives on L&D and actions to avoid it. The platform must be a place to build capacity and share knowledge and experiences about how to best avoid and manage L&D.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WIM EXCOM'S NEXT 5-YEAR WORK PLAN

The L&D debate in the UNFCCC stands at a crossroad. Paris delivered the vision that addressing L&D will become a major area of international cooperation. UNFCCC decision makers will have to define the WIM priorities for the next 5 years. The WIM must become a coordinating body that is able to mobilize a much larger body of work. The WIM should be a catalyst for both research and action. Based on the experience of researchers and practitioners working in close connection to UNFCCC processes, the following recommendations for the WIM EXCOM are made:

1 Engage the Science Community – Natural and social scientists have much to offer but need to be mobilized to inform policy: As L&D is a newcomer in the international policy arena, many researchers working on relevant topics are unaware of its importance. The WIM must systemize its science engagement. This can be done by:

- ✓ Engaging science organizations in expert groups and task forces
- ✓ Extending the rosters of experts for various L&D related themes, through consultation with relevant bodies, for example the IPCC and the GFCS
- ✓ Encouraging research councils to support L&D related research to complement the WIM work in the future. For example, knowledge gaps identified at WIM ExCom meetings could be circulated to the roster of experts and to research councils

2 Give orientation through the structure of the work plan: The work plan has a major function in giving orientation to outside organizations to structure their work on loss and damage. Future work plans must be designed with the perspective to maximize engagement in the fields that are relevant for averting, minimizing and addressing L&D. To this end, focus topics must be clearly outlined.

3 Evaluate the effectiveness of national and sub-national mechanisms to address Loss and Damage: This can inform decision-making about which efforts to replicate or scale up. The experiences and opinions of the intended beneficiaries of these actions must be central in the evaluation. Interventions that need to be evaluated include risk and loss sharing approaches, but also social solidarity mechanisms. On this basis the WIM must provide concrete support for national policy makers to improve their loss addressing measures.

4 Ensure that policies and recommendations are 'fit for purpose' in serving the poor and those most vulnerable to Loss and Damage: This means that each and every action or recommendation of the WIM must be screened for its usefulness and applicability in developing countries and its ability to serve the needs of vulnerable populations.

5 Provide reflection and impulse to other UN agencies and international organizations: Engage with other organizations to ensure L&D is included in their work and resolutions. The WIM must create more linkages with organizations outside the Convention. This way the WIM will function as an international warning system linking evidence of climate change L&D with operational mandates of implementing organizations.

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