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Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction: A Disconnect between International Initiatives and Domestic Challenges?

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Linking Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) has been perceived as an important measure in curbing exposure and vulnerability to climate-driven disaster events. International initiatives such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2012 Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (SREX) and the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015 acknowledge the interdependency between CCA and DRR. This acknowledgement can also be seen at the regional level as evidenced in the Declaration on Institutionalizing the Resilience of ASEAN and Its Communities and Peoples to Disasters and Climate Change adopted by ASEAN leaders in 2015.

Unresolved Issues

While international and regional platforms have played critical roles in shaping norms, concepts and guidelines, the successes of DRR and CCA implementations remain highly dependent on the dynamics at national and local levels. A large body of literature has extensively investigated the barriers to CCA which include, among others, poor coordination between agencies, a lack of financial, technical, and competent human resources, and a lack of awareness and public support. Eisenack *et al.* coins the term "institutional fragmentation" characterized by problems of interaction across sectors and administrative departments as an enduring obstacle found in CCA efforts. A review of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam's national progress reports on the implementation of the HFA reveals similar impediments, with issues of governance pertinent to decentralisation, and a lack of budget and dedicated human resources being revealed as crosscutting challenges in the region.

Governance is especially important because it greatly affects the extent of community participation and local empowerment, which is central to CCA and DRR efforts.

Unfortunately, the identification of barriers has not resulted in the formulation of solutions. Practical issues surrounding implementation do not seem to enter international and regional discourse as seen in more recent initiatives such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Reduction 2015-2030, the COP 21 Paris Agreement and the ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management, which continue to focus on setting out guidelines and targets. The pointers in Sendai Framework priority number 2 that calls to strengthen disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, for example, are normative at best. Similarly, the COP 21 Paris Agreement speaks of commitments to limit global warming to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels while aiming for a more ambitious limit of 1.5°C temperature increase, and at least US$100 million per year from developed to developing countries in support of climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. The ASEAN Vision 2025, while acknowledging the growing impacts of climate change on disasters in the region, does not directly address existing barriers either.

Stronger Relevance Needed

The disconnect between international efforts and real implementation issues at the domestic level could be one of the reasons for the slow progress in CCA and DRR. To fill the gap, efforts to bring local administrators from across the regions together, such as the ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability and Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network, have been pursued. While the sharing of similar experiences and good practices to solve practical issues is made possible in such an arrangement, independent initiatives that often fall outside national policy frameworks mean that local administrators would possibly lack the necessary support to come up with innovative solutions.

The specificity of cultures, institutions and systems across countries makes a one-size-fits-all solution unlikely. Regardless, more efforts at the international level need to be geared towards supporting national and local actors to iron out the long-identified barriers to CCA and DRR. Drawing stronger linkages between international initiatives and local problems could potentially expedite the effective implementations of CCA and DRR, and enable community participation and local empowerment to flourish.

Suggested Readings:

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CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND NATURAL DISASTERS

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Rob White, Nature Climate Change, Vol. 6, pp. 737–739
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28 October 2016,
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PEACE, HUMAN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

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