

BRIEFING PAPER

LOSS & DAMAGE

INTRODUCTION

Despite past, current, and future efforts to reduce global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to keep climate change from becoming “dangerous”, climate change will continue unfolding, and will increasingly cause loss and damage in communities, socio-economic systems, and ecosystems worldwide.

Climate change will lead to loss and damage through an intensification of extreme weather events in both frequency and potency (storms, droughts, floods) as well as through slow-onset events (sea-level rise, desertification, coral bleaching, etc.). However, the degree of loss and damage will not only be a function of the meteorological and hydrological changes themselves but also of the exposure and vulnerability of the affected systems. A wider range of aspects will influence the equation; these include economic, social, geographic, financial, demographic, cultural, institutional, governance, and environmental factors.

The UNFCCC negotiations on loss & damage as well as the corresponding Loss & Damage Work Programme aim at informing a decision on how the international community, through its global regime on climate change, can, should or will support particularly developing countries cope with the losses and damages associated with the meteorological and hydrological implications of climate change.

NEGOTIATION STATUS

COP 16 2010

At COP 16 in Cancun, Parties recognized the importance of understanding, reducing and addressing the losses and damages associated with the adverse effects of climate change. Therefore they established – as part of the so-called Cancun Adaptation Framework – a work programme to consider approaches to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts (Decision 1/CP.16)¹.

COP 17 2011

At COP 17 in Durban, Parties agreed on a set of issues related to adaptation. These included the decision to operationalize the Adaptation Committee (Decision 2/CP.17)² as the major advisory body on adaptation under the UNFCCC. A mandate was also given to the Subsidiary Body for Implementation, to further implement the Work Programme on loss and damage (Decision 7/CP.17)³. This decision outlined the nature and objectives of the Work Programme:

- 1.) “[...] make recommendations on loss and damage to the Conference of the Parties for its consideration at its eighteenth session”
- 2.)

- 3.) “Invite Parties, relevant intergovernmental organizations, regional centres and networks, the private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders” to assist Parties in understanding and building expertise for addressing loss and damage.
- 4.) “engage a large and diverse representation of experts, in particular from developing countries, including the least developed countries and small island developing states, in undertaking the work”
- 5.) “Appreciates the need to explore a range of possible approaches and potential mechanisms, including an international mechanism, to address loss and damage, with a view to making recommendations on loss and damage to the Conference of the Parties for its consideration at its eighteenth session [...]”

Importantly, decision 7/CP.17 provided the structured along which the Work Programme was to be implemented, in the form of three complementary but logically connected thematic areas:

- I) Assessing the risk of loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change and the current knowledge on the same
- II) A range of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow onset events, taking into consideration experience at all levels
- III) The role of the Convention in enhancing the implementation of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change

Expert meetings 2012

Tokyo, March 2012

The meeting in Tokyo summarized current knowledge on relevant methodologies, and addressing data and capacity requirements as well as lessons learned and gaps identified at different levels, in the context of the first thematic area of the work programme on loss and damage. Furthermore there was a discussion about capacity needs for applying risk assessment methods on the ground and about the facilitation of results to support the decision-making process.⁴

Addis Abad⁵, June - Mexico City⁶, July - Bangkok⁷, August - Bridgetown⁸, October 2012

There were different expert meetings regarding the second thematic area of the work programme on loss and damage. They assessed the full range of approaches and tools that can be used to address the risk at different levels, the foundational resource requirements, lessons learned from existing efforts, as well as links and synergies between risk reduction and other instruments such as risk transfer. In addition there was a discussion on how risk management approaches can be tailored to a national context.

Subsidiary Body of Implementation Thirty-sixth session in Bonn, May 2012

The meeting in Bonn outlined the knowledge and work done addressing the issues related to Thematic Area 1. It highlighted the importance of adopting a holistic approach in considering the three thematic areas and further noted:⁹

- a) The assessment of climate-related risk is complex.
- b) There is a range of approaches, methods and tools available to assess the risk of loss and damage but the selection of appropriate ones depends upon capacity, contexts and circumstances and involves the engagement of all relevant stakeholders.
- c) Gaps can be addressed by involving communities and populations in the risk assessment processes.
- d) The use of local and indigenous knowledge and observation helps to fill gaps in information about historic exposure and vulnerability.
- e) Assessment of the risk of loss and damage is often constrained by the limited availability of data and knowledge.
- f) Access to, sharing and the use of information and data on a voluntary basis is important to facilitate the assessment and management of climate related risk.
- g) Enhanced technical and institutional capacities supported by technical and financial assistance and other resources will help developing countries to assess the risk of loss and damage.
- h) Involvement of, and dialogue with, decision makers at all levels can strengthen the design, dissemination and delivery of information on climate risk.
- i) Numerical data are sometimes not sufficient in conveying a comprehensive range of the risk of loss and damages.

NEXT STEPS IN NEGOTIATION

Next steps in the negotiation are the consideration of the above recommendations of SBI on loss and damage by the Parties. Especially the need to explore a range of approaches and potential mechanisms, including an international mechanism, to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change.

KEY OUTSTANDING ISSUES RELATED TO THE TOPIC

The concept of loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change has been widely discussed and analyzed during the last two years. Nevertheless it has not been clearly defined under the Convention. In addition, no comprehensive risk assessment model for climate change loss and damages exists. Assessing the risk of loss and damage is complex and constrained by low technical capacity, data gaps, inexistence or low reliability of early warning systems and uncertainty in future climate projections.

There is a range of approaches to mitigate loss and damages caused by climate change or extreme weather events like risk reduction, risk retention, risk transfer and measures that address slow onset climatic process. The selected approaches addressing loss and damage are rooted in two major schools of thought: disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA). The recent analysis provided by the IPCC Special Report “Managing the Risk of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation”¹⁰ can be seen as an effort to combine the two different schools of thought in the context of extreme events. The same has to be done for slow onset events.

Another challenge that became evident is the need of information and capacity enhancement for delegates around the technical issues. Delegates have to understand the different concepts of risk management and technical terms to successfully negotiate on appropriate measures that might be implemented to address loss and damage following COP18.

Overall, it is important to recognize that complex systems, such as communities, societies or social-ecological systems rely on different physical, social, cultural, economic, institutional and environmental facets that are not likely be measured in the same manner. Therefore a holistic perspective is necessary to measure and manage these risks. Only an integrated and interdisciplinary focus can more consistently take the non-linear relations and dynamics of social and environmental systems into account.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIAN COUNTRIES

Loss and damages related to climate change is a very important topic for Asian countries due to the existing high exposure and vulnerability. It is clear that more effort is needed in understanding and mitigating loss and damages caused by climate change. Despite these challenges, it is evident that there has been a significant increase in attention and effort to offset the climate change in Asia. These efforts call for multi-stakeholder collaboration in the decision-making process, with increasing emphasis on community involvement in disaster risk management.

REFERENCES

¹ Report of the Conference of the Parties on its sixteenth session, held in Cancun from 29 November to 10 December 2010

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf#page=6>

² Report of the Conference of the Parties on its seventeenth session, held in Durban from 28 November to 11 December 2011

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a01.pdf#page=19>

³ Report of the Conference of the Parties on its seventeenth session, held in Durban from 28 November to 11 December 2011

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf#page=5>

⁴ Current knowledge on relevant methodologies and data requirements as well as lessons learned and gaps identified at different levels, in assessing the risk of loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change

http://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/loss_and_damage/application/pdf/background_paper_full.pdf

⁵ Expert meeting on a range of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow onset events - Addis Ababa

http://unfccc.int/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/loss_and_damage/items/6872.php

⁶ Expert meeting on a range of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow onset events – Mexico City

http://unfccc.int/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/loss_and_damage/items/6952.php

⁷ Expert meeting on a range of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow onset events – Bangkok

http://unfccc.int/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/loss_and_damage/items/6993.php

⁸ Expert meeting on a range of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow onset events – Barbados

http://unfccc.int/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/loss_and_damage/items/7058.php

⁹ Approaches to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change to enhance adaptive capacity

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2012/sbi/eng/l12.pdf>

¹⁰ Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation

http://www.ipcc-wg2.gov/SREX/images/uploads/SREX-All_FINAL.pdf