

Executive summary

Disaster risk reduction and protracted violent conflict

The case of Afghanistan

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September 2019



giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

**International
Institute of
Social Studies**

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Cover photo: Men from the village of Jabraeel on the banks of the Harirod River in Herat, Afghanistan build a retaining wall to limit flooding. © UNOPS

About this paper

This report is part of the project ‘When disasters and conflict collide: uncovering the truth’, a collaboration between the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). It also draws on research conducted for the project ‘When disaster meets conflict’ from the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Erasmus University Rotterdam, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), VICI grant 453-14-013.

Available in this series

Peters, K. (2018) *Accelerating Sendai Framework implementation in Asia: disaster risk reduction in contexts of violence, conflict and fragility*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11153-accelerating-sendai-framework-implementation-asia-disaster-risk-reduction-contexts-violence-conflict)

Peters, K. and Peters, L.E.R. (2018) *Disaster risk reduction and violent conflict in Africa and Arab states: implications for Sendai Framework Priorities*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11208-disaster-risk-reduction-and-violent-conflict-africa-and-arab-states-implications-sendai-framework)

Peters, K., Holloway, K. and Peters, L.E.R. (2019) *Disaster risk reduction in conflict contexts: the state of the evidence*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11340-disaster-risk-reduction-conflict-contexts-state-evidence)

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Siddiqi, A., Peters, K. and Zulver, J. (2019) *‘Doble afectación’: living with disasters and conflict in Colombia*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11414-doble-afectacion-living-disasters-and-conflict-colombia)

Peters, K. (2019) *Disaster risk reduction in conflict contexts: an agenda for action*. London: ODI (www.odi.org/publications/11408-disaster-risk-reduction-conflict-contexts-agenda-action)

Multimedia content

- Online feature including videos from Colombia, Lebanon, and Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction, Ms Mami Mizutori (www.odi.org/disasters-conflict)
- Podcast series: *When disasters and conflict collide* (www.odi.org/opinion/10507-podcast-series-when-disasters-and-conflict-collide)
 - Episode 1: *Conflict: the elephant in the diplomatic meeting room*
 - Episode 2: *The politics of disasters*
 - Episode 3: *A call to action*

All reports and content as well as information on the project can be found online: www.odi.org/projects/2913-when-disasters-and-conflict-collide-uncovering-truth

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this report – including Shirin Agha Samim and Nematullah Wafa, for their valuable role as research assistants in Afghanistan, and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) for their support. This report would not have been possible without comments and guidance from Adriaan Ferf and Erika Marques from ISS, Leigh Mayhew and Alice Caravani from ODI and independent researcher Hannah Measures. We are extremely grateful for peer review comments from Dr Aditya Bahadur, Laura Peters, Ria Hidajat and Dr Sandra Rubli. The editing and production process was managed by Matthew Foley and Hannah Bass.

Special thanks go to the interviewees who contributed their reflections and knowledge and provided materials – especially from the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium (ARC), the Coordination of Afghan Relief (COAR) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). We are grateful to the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), without whose support and contribution this research would not have been possible.

Finally, our heartfelt thanks go to the people of Afghanistan, who endure daily disasters and conflict, for welcoming us into their stories and their lives.

Executive summary

While technical experts and donors profess an ambition to adapt conventional disaster risk reduction (DRR) approaches to conflict contexts, they struggle to overcome the long-held perception that this is not a viable option. Conflict can undermine national disaster risk governance and the implementation of DRR strategies, and conflict contexts are often considered too difficult an environment in which to deliver DRR. In such conditions, disaster risk management is likely to be a low government priority, with action limited to protection and response. Afghanistan presents a contrasting picture, where a national strategy has been formulated and includes explicit consideration of the conflict environment, and where some local DRR interventions are linking with conflict prevention ambitions.

Afghanistan has been beset by numerous disasters in recent years, with a high toll of death and displacement. Thousands have been injured, killed or forced to flee their homes as a result of the country's longstanding conflict. DRR has become a major concern for international donors and the Afghan government over the past decade. This study explores how DRR initiatives and projects are being linked with conflict prevention, 'do no harm' principles and peacebuilding efforts to show that it is possible to mitigate against natural hazards while also seeking to reduce the risk of conflict. The study also strikes a note of caution that, while DRR is possible, it requires long-term, dedicated effort and continuous monitoring. Of particular concern is the scope of current DRR projects, as the tailored approaches required in remote disaster-prone communities do not easily allow for scaling up.

Learning from Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, with nearly all of its 34 provinces affected by at least one natural disaster over the past 30 years. In 2018, the

lives and livelihoods of more than 4 million Afghan people were threatened by floods, storms, droughts and landslides. This figure is almost three times higher than the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance on account of conflict. Meanwhile, after more than 30 years of armed struggle, the country has a low level of socioeconomic development, reduced governance and only basic capacity for disaster recovery and resilience-building. While some national policy documents articulate the importance of linking disasters with conflict, there is limited capacity to design and deliver relevant implementation strategies. Corruption, mistrust of the government and lack of transparent governance add a further layer of complication.

Afghanistan exemplifies many of the themes emerging from recent studies of DRR in contexts of conflict. Protracted conflict and state fragility have undermined disaster risk management and increased people's vulnerability to natural hazards. Furthermore, international attention has tended to focus on relatively accessible locations, largely neglecting what happens in areas where the state does not control territory. Another issue of concern is that different types of violence tend to be treated in the same way, which means that new opportunities or entry points for building disaster resilience may be overlooked.

The research highlights the need for approaches to DRR that consider the multiple and varied conflict dynamics in which they operate. State institutions and the international community tend to focus on the national level, whereas local-level manifestations of conflict can be much more important in terms of programme implementation. Failing to take account of local societal issues can mask the multiple causes of vulnerability, resulting in projects that may not adequately address the root

causes of disasters. If not adapted to the local context, DRR interventions have the potential to cause or exacerbate social conflict.

Towards a more holistic approach

In addition to revealing the complexity of working with conflict dynamics in Afghanistan, the study also illustrates a new trend in approaches to DRR. While previously hazard-focused infrastructure projects and responses to rapid-onset disasters were the norm, there is now a move towards explicit consideration of local resilience, with interventions taking a more holistic approach to intersecting threats and risks. A number of aid agencies have adapted their approach to DRR through a process of conflict analysis, centring on a commitment to ‘do no harm’. Although not specifically oriented towards conflict resolution or peacebuilding, these approaches nonetheless can help reduce the risk of conflict. This change of tack has come in response to lessons from the past and current donor trends linking DRR with topics such as climate change, development and education.

The research also revealed a lack of consideration of intersectionality, or the ways in which power systems affect the most marginalised in a society. Uniform approaches to ‘community’ are coming under increasing scrutiny, with calls for more attention to different forms of vulnerability and how to make DRR policies more inclusive. An intersectional approach offers a more nuanced perspective than is typical in DRR programmes by taking contextual realities into account, and recognising that people experiencing marginalisation have different identities, needs and priorities. The study also calls for attention to the relationship between disasters and gender, climate change and urbanisation.

Afghanistan has taken significant steps to advance its ability to access and utilise climate finance. Although not always explicit, many interventions are enhancing DRR, including the adoption of early warning systems, but there is still a need to build institutional capacity to

bolster those links; to work with international funding mechanisms to enable climate funds to be channelled to high-intensity conflict contexts; and to link programmes including adaptation and conflict and DRR components more closely with national policies on sustainable development.

Recommendations

DRR in Afghanistan is taking more account of the relationships between hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities. DRR is now being pursued both to ‘do no harm’ *and* to minimise conflict risk. These insights lead to several key recommendations.

Build capacity and strengthen coordination

This includes strengthening local knowledge on the basic concepts of DRR, and deepening understanding of how disaster risks manifest and the interrelationships with conflict. It also involves developing remote monitoring technologies to overcome access issues. Encouraging donors to make conflict-sensitive processes compulsory in project design and delivery will facilitate the allocation of resources to training and building knowledge on conflict analysis. Inter-agency coordination and learning also needs to be improved.

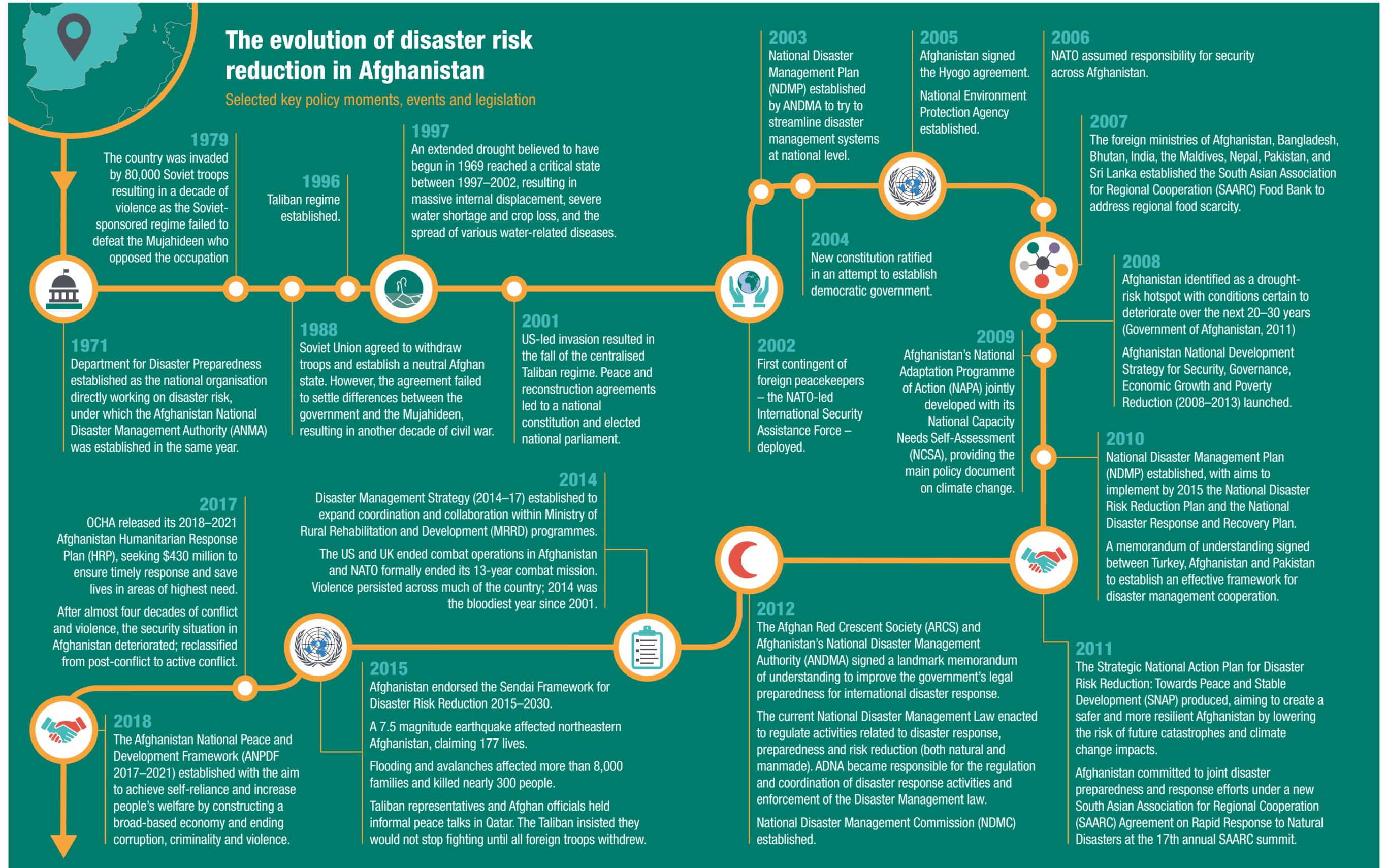
Scale up action on DRR in a conflict-sensitive manner

Understanding of and action on climate and disaster risk should be guided by explicit emphasis on the links between natural hazards, conflict and peace. There is a need to develop conceptual and operational approaches that improve the integration of DRR with actions relating to minimising conflict, and to move beyond short-term timeframes. Conflict analysis at various scales can be used to inform the design and delivery of national and local DRR strategies and plans. Stronger collaborations between disaster, climate and peace actors could bolster knowledge and mature programme design.

Integrate learning from DRR and conflict into intersectional and climate change adaptation ambitions

Lessons from the DRR community should be better documented and shared to strengthen the evidence base and promote systematic inclusion

of DRR and conflict in adaptation programmes. This could attract additional funding for DRR through climate finance and other sectors, helping governments to improve coherence between parallel strategies, each striving to support peaceful and sustainable development progress.





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