

Flood Risk Management in Low Income Countries: Balancing Risk and Development

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Abstract : The Sendai Framework notes that disaster risk reduction is essential for sustainable development, and Disaster Risk Reduction is included in 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and 4 of the SDG targets. However, apart from promoting better governance and resourcing of disaster management agencies, little guidance is given how low-income nations can balance investments across the SDGs to achieve sustainable development in an increasingly climate vulnerable world with increasing prevalence of flood and drought disasters. As one of the world's poorest nations, Malawi must balance investments across all the SDGs. This paper explores how Malawi's National Guidelines for Community-based Flood Risk Management integrate sustainable development and flood management objectives at different administrative levels. While Malawi periodically suffers from large, widespread flooding, the greatest impacts are felt through the smaller annual floods and flash floods. The Guidelines address this through principles that recognize that while the protection of human life is the most important priority for flood risk management, addressing the impacts of floods on the rural poor and the economy requires different approaches. The National Guidelines are therefore underpinned by the following; 1. In the short-term investments in flood risk management must focus on breaking the poverty - vulnerability cycle; 2. In the long-term investments in the other SDGs will have the greatest flood risk management benefits; 3. If measures are in place to prevent loss of life and protect strategic infrastructure, it is better to protect more people against small and medium size floods than fewer people against larger floods; 4. Flood prevention measures should focus on small (1:5 return period) floods; 5. Flood protection measures should focus on small and medium floods (1:20 return period) while minimizing the risk of failure in larger floods; 6. The impacts of larger floods (> 1:50) must be addressed through improved preparedness; 7. The impacts of climate change on flood frequencies are best addressed by focusing on growth not overdesign; and 8. Manage floods and droughts conjunctively. The National Guidelines weave these principles into Malawi's approach to flood risk management through recommendations for planning and implementing flood prevention, protection and preparedness measures at district, traditional authority and village levels.

Keywords : flood risk management in low-income countries, sustainable development, investments in prevention, protection and preparedness, community-based flood risk management, Malawi

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