



University of Reading



LUNDS

A spectrum of views on Loss and Damage

Loss and Damage has emerged as a key area in international climate change policy. But what does “Loss and Damage” actually mean? We asked 40 experts in policy, research and practice. They offered a spectrum of views about Loss and Damage (L&D). Here we summarise the results of our study, identifying four key perspectives, or “typologies” of L&D. Characterising these stakeholder perspectives is important to increase awareness of the different views influencing the debate. Understanding the typologies could help avoid endless debates over meaning and fast track progress towards real action to help manage L&D.

Key messages

- **There is a spectrum of views on L&D.** Some suggest that L&D refers to all potential climate impacts, which can be dealt with through mitigation and adaptation. Others emphasise the need for new approaches to address unavoidable harm to vulnerable countries.
- **Perspectives on L&D vary,** in terms of the distinction between L&D mechanisms and adaptation, the emphasis on climate change, the relative focus on preventing L&D versus actions to address L&D once it has occurred, and the emphasis on justice.
- **Different perspectives imply different priorities.** The most appropriate actions to address L&D are different for each typology.
- **Finance is only one component of L&D.** L&D has often been associated with a debate about financial transfers. Our interviews suggest that there’s a lot more to it than that.
- **Policy-makers have built consensus on L&D,** in the form of the Warsaw International Mechanism and Paris Agreement.
- **Greater clarity might be needed for implementation.** For researchers and practitioners, implementation is difficult given remaining questions about L&D. The typologies can facilitate transparent discussion of the options available.

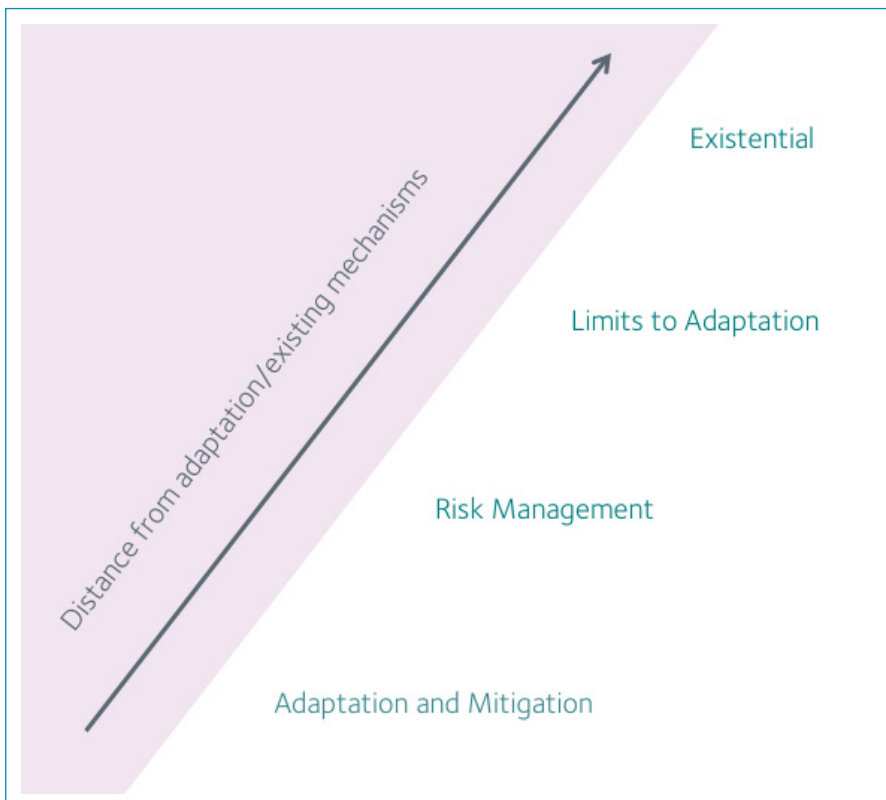


Figure 1: Typologies of L&D

Why might typologies be useful for addressing L&D?

Whilst an official definition of L&D may not be necessary politically, conflicting perspectives could be harmful for progress on the ground. For example, it is difficult to have practical conversations about actions to address L&D and science to support these actions, if different stakeholders have contrasting definitions in mind. Parties need not adopt a formal definition of L&D, but progress may be enhanced if there is awareness of the different ideas and views which are being held.

This policy brief reports findings from a social science study to examine perspectives, definitions and “typologies” of L&D. Through interviews with key L&D stakeholders between April and November 2015, we explored their perspectives on L&D, actions associated with these, and points of agreement and distinction. Interviewees were selected for their geographical, expert and gender cross-representation among the L&D community.

Four typologies and associated actions were identified from this analysis. These have been reviewed with several expert groups including the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM).

Les Cayes, southern Haiti, October 5 2016. Following Hurricane Matthew, loss and damage is clearly evident in Haiti. Stakeholders might disagree about whether and how this should be addressed under the UNFCCC. (Photo: Jethro J. Sereme / American REd Cross / IFRC)



The four typologies of L&D

Four distinct viewpoints of L&D emerge from the interviews and literature. These do not represent separate groupings of stakeholders, but a spectrum of typologies, with some stakeholders expressing elements of more than one, and the potential for opinions to shift between them. The typologies do not necessarily have associated definitions, and we found that the term “loss and damage” was not used consistently, sometimes being used to refer to climate change impacts, or to describe a mechanism, or a debate.

Adaptation and Mitigation Typology

Some stakeholders highlight all climate change impacts as potential L&D, and stress that the mandate of the UNFCCC is to avoid dangerous anthropogenic interference, or L&D from climate change. The UNFCCC already has mechanisms for mitigation and adaptation, and, according to this typology, these existing mechanisms are sufficient to address, or prevent, L&D. Consistent with this typology, stakeholders can express confusion at the call for L&D mechanisms which are separate from adaptation, or suggest that distinctions between adaptation and L&D are false or politically motivated.

Risk Management Typology

For other stakeholders, L&D mechanisms represent an opportunity to promote comprehensive risk management, alongside existing efforts under disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation, and humanitarian work. They may allow for climate change risk to be more comprehensively integrated into disaster risk reduction. This could include approaches to risk reduction, risk retention, and risk transfer which go beyond the national level, and address high level risks. The typology focuses on a techno-pragmatic problem approach.

Limits to Adaptation Typology

Under the Risk Management typology, separating L&D which can and cannot be adapted to might be perceived as unhelpful. In contrast, under this typology stakeholders’ perspectives on L&D are centred around the limits to adaptation, and how to address residual L&D beyond mitigation and adaptation. They highlight that even with additional adaptation and risk management there are limits and side effects, which will negatively affect vulnerable communities in developing countries. L&D generally applies to impacts of any climate-related event, rather than just those that can be attributed to climate change, to maintain a focus on addressing vulnerability at the community level.

Existential Typology

There are some for whom L&D represents a means to highlight the importance of addressing the inevitable harm which climate change will impose on vulnerable countries, populations, cultures, and ecosystems. This perspective is “existential” in the sense that climate change represents unavoidable transformation for some communities and systems. There is an emphasis on irreversible loss, non-economic loss and damage (NELD), justice and responsibility. There is a sense of urgency to provide options for those who are most vulnerable, for example through migration facilities; and there is also discussion of compensation, although stakeholders highlighted that monetary compensation is not the only, or even the most important issue.

Table 1: The spectrum of typologies and associated actions

| Typology | Adaptation/ Mitigation | Risk Management | Limits to Adaptation | Existential |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Keywords | adaptation, mitigation, Cancun Adaptation Framework, disasters | risk, insurance, risk transfer, risk retention, comprehensive risk management, extreme events | residual risk, side effects, vulnerability, resilience, on the ground, transformation, hard and soft limits | permanent, irreversible, unavoidable, compensation, justice, non-economic, responsibility, slow onset, sea level rise |
| Distinction from adaptation | L&D can be dealt with through mitigation and adaptation | L&D mechanisms should address impacts which can be adapted to and impacts beyond adaptation | L&D refers to impacts beyond mitigation and adaptation | Emphasis on irreversible, unavoidable L&D, which cannot be adapted to |
| Climate risks considered | L&D refers to all climate change impacts (or L&D from disasters) | Emphasis on incorporating climate change risk into comprehensive risk management | L&D mechanisms should address any climate-related damage (not exclusively climate change impacts) | Focus on addressing anthropogenic climate change impacts |
| Ex-ante / Ex-post | Adaptation and Mitigation can be used to prevent L&D (ex-ante) | Main focus on future risk, preventing L&D (ex-ante), and insurance mechanisms to aide recovery (ex-post) | Emphasis on avoiding L&D/risk reduction (ex-ante), but also addressing unavoidable L&D (ex-post) | Emphasis on addressing unavoidable future losses (ex-post) |
| Relevance of finance | L&D does not require additional funding beyond existing climate finance | Emphasis on insurance schemes, private sector finance | Emphasis not generally on finance | Associated with calls for compensation, but not exclusively |
| Role of justice | Implies common but differentiated responsibility already embedded in existing mechanisms | Based on principles of distributive justice | Emphasis on support for the most vulnerable | Emphasis on justice and responsibility, in particular compensatory justice |
| Associated actions | Mitigation and adaptation | Insurance, insurance pools, catastrophe bonds, life insurance, DRR, sovereign disaster risk rating, climate services and early warning, engineering, capacity building | Risk transfer, social safety nets, micro insurance, innovations in livelihoods (early warning), participation | Compensation, migration facilities, homeland resettlement, acknowledgement, official apologies, memorial, historical preservation, international litigation |

Implications for progress to address L&D

Each of the typologies has a different emphasis in terms of the most appropriate actions to address L&D (see Table 1). Fundamentally, there is a distinction between actions which attempt to prevent L&D, or reduce risks (ex-ante), and actions which are intended to deal with actual L&D after it occurs or to prepare for actual L&D which will occur (ex-post). Most stakeholders agree that both aspects are relevant for L&D, but there is difference in emphasis, with the Adaptation and Mitigation typology implying that L&D can be avoided, and the Existential typology focusing on addressing the unavoidable. The latter highlights questions such as how to deal with the loss of homeland and sovereignty, and discussion of actions includes reference to reparation or compensation. The Risk Management and Limits to Adaptation typologies are situated somewhere between these two, including both ex-ante and ex-post actions. Both of these typologies emphasise innovation in disaster risk management and resilience mechanisms particularly insurance and reinsurance.

Siti, Ethiopia, April 6 2016. Humanitarian response to the recent drought in Ethiopia. It is unclear how L&D mechanisms should compliment existing humanitarian, disaster management, and climate change adaptation efforts, in order to avoid and address L&D. Photo: ©EU/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie.



Typologies could be used to inform collaboration between policy-makers, researchers and practitioners to discuss actions to address L&D and relevant research gaps.

Relevance for policy

In the policy sphere, consensus is important for progress, and there is a need to reconcile different perspectives. Development of action areas under the WIM and specific decisions at COP21 represents a clear desire by Parties, along with a range of well established NGOs, research institutions, and international organizations, to jointly develop policy and actions to deal with L&D. The WIM and Paris Agreement demonstrate success in building consensus, and they do reflect concerns highlighted across a range of perspectives. Many of the actions noted under the typologies, for example insurance, risk transfer and addressing non-economic loss and damage and migration, are important features of the WIM's current work-plan. Further analysis would be needed to establish how stakeholder perspectives are represented, and this may be useful to identify gaps which could be incorporated into the new five-year work plan.

Relevance for research & practice

For researchers and practitioners, greater specificity is likely to be needed. There are remaining questions which could be important for the purpose of specific applications, for example what activity should be undertaken, at what level, which losses and damages need to be addressed. One issue which has recently been discussed is the role for insurance in addressing L&D: parties and observers agree that insurance is important, but further work is needed to establish what kinds of insurance are most relevant, and how these relate to the use of insurance in disaster risk reduction and adaptation. More specificity may also be desirable for measuring effectiveness of projects, programmes and activities on the ground.

The typologies could be used to inform collaboration between scientists, policy-makers and practitioners to discuss actions to address L&D and relevant research gaps. These could be explored through workshops to identify new research questions of relevance to the community and for generating evidence for future global assessments such as the next Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report.

Acknowledgements

This research was facilitated the UK Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)-funded ACE-Africa project, and special contributions from the University of Reading RETF. Thanks are extended to the interviewees, and to the expert groups which provided feedback on the initial findings; in particular the Executive Committee (ExCom) of the WIM and observers.

Participants at the Third Meeting of the Executive Committee of the WIM. Photo: UNFCCC



For further information please contact the authors:

Prof. Emily Boyd
emily.boyd@lucsus.lu.se
Director, Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies

Dr. Rachel James
rachel.james@eci.ox.ac.uk
Research Fellow, Environmental Change Institute (ECI), University of Oxford

Prof. Richard Jones
richard.jones@metoffice.gov.uk
Science Fellow, Met Office Hadley Centre and Visiting Professor, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford

Since 1991 the Environmental Change Institute has been carrying out interdisciplinary research on the nature, causes and impact of environmental change. Our thematic areas are climate, ecosystems, energy, food and water. We have an interdisciplinary and integrated programme that involves understanding processes of change; exploring sustainable solutions; and influencing change through education and partnership.

Environmental Change Institute,
Oxford University Centre for the Environment,
South Parks Road,
Oxford, OX1 3QY, UK
t: +44(0)1865 275848
e: enquiries@eci.ox.ac.uk
www.eci.ox.ac.uk
Twitter: @ecioxford

