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FACT SHEET

What is loss and damage?

As 'Loss and damage' is a new concept in climate change research there is no commonly accepted definition yet. For the current [Policy Brief](#) the following working definition of loss and damage, which includes the inability to respond to climate stresses and the costs associated with adaptation and coping measures themselves, was the point of reference:

Loss and damage refers to negative effects of climate variability and climate change that people have not been able to cope with or adapt to.

Why is loss and damage important now?

Today loss and damage is already a reality for vulnerable communities. Climate change is intensifying and the limits of adaptation are increasingly being realized. Failure to address loss and damage now will compromise sustainable development and ensure that vulnerable countries that have contributed least to global greenhouse emissions will continue to suffer disproportionately. Please see case studies on loss and damage: <http://www.ehs.unu.edu/article/read/press-release-pioneering-study-shows-evidence-of-loss-and>)

What is social vulnerability?

The concept of social vulnerability links the relationship that people have with their environment with the social forces and the institutions and the cultural values that sustain or contest them (Oliver-Smith 2004). It rejects the view that a collapse of the productive functions of the social order is caused by the impact of a biophysical process alone. This perspective shifts the focus on ongoing societal and man-environment relations that prefigure disaster. Factors such as the lack of access to resources', health care, education etc. are taken into account and are associated with a relatively high level of vulnerability.

What is resilience?

Resilience refers to the ability to prepare and plan for absorb, recover from or more successfully adapt to actual or potential adverse event (National Research Council 2012). It is not the opposite of vulnerability, but a separate concept providing path for moving from disaster risk reduction to sustainability. Since resilience refers to the capacity of a community to withstand the effect of a stressor, it is based in and fundamentally a function of a socio-cultural system.

Why do we need to rethink these concepts?

To date, neither the concept of social vulnerability or social resilience has yet led to policies or practices that have significantly reduced losses or damages related to climatic stressor in much of the world. Loss and damage do not exclusively represent a biophysical phenomenon. Its interaction with the society expands the need to rethink and address social vulnerability and its capacity to build resilience. Avoiding doing so will conceptualize loss and damage as an event and not as part of societal transformations to reality.

Why is this piece of research submitted to UNFCCC?

The UNFCCC requested submissions (autumn 2012) to further understand the consequences of the effects of climate change: on society today and on generations to come.

Where did this knowledge derive from?

The knowledge derived from seven [Summer Academies](#) in the UN University Policy Brief with the aim to highlight the relevance of research on vulnerability and resilience for the COP discussions.

Where can I find further literature on this new topic of on loss and damage?

- Report: Evidence from the frontlines of climate change: loss and damage to communities despite coping and adaptation
<http://www.ehs.unu.edu/article/read/press-release-pioneering-study-shows-evidence-of-loss-and-damage>
- UNFCCC (n.d). A literature review on the topics in the context of thematic area 2 of the work programme on loss and damage: a range of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change. Latest draft available from:
http://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/loss_and_damage/application/pdf/literature_review_barbados.pdf
- Warner, K., and S.A. Zakieldein (2012). Loss and Damage Due to Climate Change: An Overview of the UNFCCC Negotiations. European Capacity Building Initiative (ECBI).
<http://www.oxfordclimatepolicy.org/publications/documents/LossandDamage.pdf>

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