

Risk Landscapes and International Development

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The Risk Doctor Partnership

Everyone has their own “risk landscape”, representing a set of opportunities that we can benefit from along with challenges that can limit us or threaten our development. The risk landscape differs for each of us as individuals, and different communities, professional associations, social or ethnic groups also have their own risk landscape. This is particularly true in the context of international aid and development. The risk landscape of a farmer in Malawi, for example, will be very different from that of a Dutch farmer. Similarly, the risk landscape of Ebola-affected communities will be different from that of a fragile community.

When we initiate a development intervention we may heighten some challenges and remove some opportunities, or vice versa. As a result, development interventions will inevitably change the risk landscape of the direct beneficiaries, as well as influencing the risk landscape of those indirectly affected. This is known as risk proliferation, a kind of ripple effect, which will result from any development intervention.

Development partners have devised structured ways to define the priority objectives of development interventions and the course of action to be taken, including LogFrame and the Theory of Change. But are the risk landscapes of those who will be impacted by the intervention also taken into account? Do we monitor the changes triggered in the risk landscapes of our beneficiaries to ensure that, ultimately, we don't leave them worse off? Do we take responsibility for our interventions by ensuring responsiveness to the changing risk landscapes?

Development programming could intentionally consider risk landscapes by including the following simple steps in the planning process:

- Understand the **initial risk landscape** of the target beneficiaries prior to any development intervention.
- Set the priority objectives for the intervention as a **desired risk landscape** for primary beneficiaries. This requires careful consideration and explicit reference to the potential challenges and desired opportunities our intervention might trigger for its beneficiaries. We should also think about possible connections between various risks in the landscape (networked risks), as well as considering the risks that could be triggered for the larger cycle of indirect beneficiaries.
- Design our monitoring and evaluation system to **provide feedback** on both the progress made in changing the risk landscape (retrospective view), as well as exposing emerging risks (forward-looking perspective).

- Ensure **proactive learning** throughout the implementation of the development initiative to embrace emerging changes and stay on course towards the desired risk landscape.

International aid and development is a vital part of our shared human responsibility as we seek to respond to situations of need around the world. Risk-based thinking should form an essential part of development planning, so that we design development interventions to increase opportunities and minimise threats for the intended beneficiaries. The use of risk landscapes offers a clear way to ensure that risk is properly considered in the development context.

To provide feedback on this Briefing Note, or for more details on how to develop effective risk management, [contact the Risk Doctor \(info@risk-doctor.com\)](mailto:info@risk-doctor.com), or [visit the Risk Doctor website \(www.risk-doctor.com\)](http://www.risk-doctor.com).

About the Author



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Magda Stepanyan is founder & CEO of the Risk Society consultancy (www.risk-society.com). She holds an MA in Sociology from Yerevan State University, Armenia, an MSc in Public Administration from Leiden University, the Netherlands, and the International Certificate in Risk Management from the Institute of Risk Management (IRM).

Magda's expertise is in resilience programming, integrated risk management (IRM), risk-informed strategy planning and implementation, disaster and climate risk management, horizon scanning for strategy and policy development, monitoring and evaluation. She has more than 15 years of management and consultancy experience, working with organizations such as the EC, UN, WB, Red Cross, and others. In 2012 Magda authored a UNDP Technical Paper on "Risk Management for Capacity Development Facilities".

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