



# Guidelines for Assessing the Human Impact of Disasters





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The **Guidelines for Assessing the Human Impact of Disasters** commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) aims to help national governments and national and international agencies assess the impact of disasters on people, their living conditions, access to basic services, livelihoods, social status, coping capacities, and also on overall levels of poverty and human development. It adds to the compendium of Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) guidelines published jointly by the European Union, World Bank (WB) and the United Nations for conducting assessments in disaster-affected countries.

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# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

In 2013, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, the World Bank and the European Union jointly published the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) guidelines. The overarching purpose of these guidelines are to provide improved support to governments in post-disaster recovery assessments and planning through a coordinated approach. The more immediate objective of the guidelines is to provide an agreed framework and predictable arrangements for effective, efficient and coordinated support from the European Union, the United Nations and the World Bank to governments requesting international assistance for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction. At present, the PDNA guidelines comprise two volumes: Volume A and Volume B.<sup>1</sup>

This document, Guidelines for Assessing the Human Impact of Disasters, has been developed as part of the PDNA guidelines, and similarly follows a people-centred, human-recovery approach. The concept of human development is central to these guidelines, particularly measures that ensure people recover their ability to lead productive and creative lives to the extent possible, in accordance with their needs and interests. In order to achieve this, people need equitable access to secure livelihoods, health services, shelter, land, security, freedom, community life and other quality-of-life services essential for human recovery and development. Equally important is the need to empower and strengthen human capabilities to help people recover and meet the additional challenges presented by disasters. Human recovery involves creating an enabling environment for women and girls, boys and men, communities, population subgroups and governments to recover from the impact of disasters.

A people-centred, human-recovery approach to post-disaster assessment and recovery focuses on the following elements:

- the human development impact of disasters
- the distinct needs and priorities of women, girls, boys and men of all ages and subgroups of affected populations, through stakeholder engagement
- the participation of affected stakeholders in their own recovery process
- recognition of and support to spontaneous recovery efforts for the affected population
- consideration of the sociocultural aspects of disaster recovery, in addition to economic imperatives
- measures to build resilient communities and societies.

These guidelines aim to ensure that the human impact of disasters is accurately assessed during a PDNA. This is especially important, as the assessment exercise is crucial in forging links between initial humanitarian efforts, recovery measures and longer-term development.



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Volume A of the PDNA guidelines facilitates the planning and organization of the PDNA, presents the assessment approach and outlines the process and steps for conducting a PDNA. Volume B provides technical guidance for sector-specific assessments aimed at technical experts who participate in the PDNA.

## THE HUMAN IMPACT OF DISASTERS

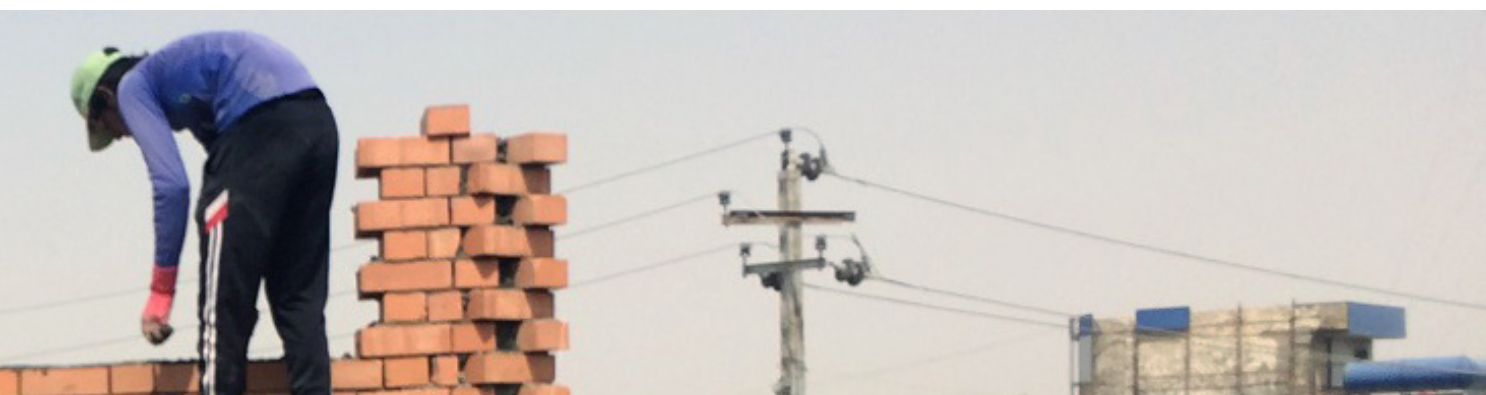
In addition to the significant effects that disaster events have on the economy, they severely impact people's well-being. Disaster events can deprive households of their basic living conditions and standard of living, destroy their livelihoods and income base, erode their productive assets, reduce their access to basic services, such as health and education, and compromise their food security. As a result, poverty may become entrenched, inequality may increase and human development progress may be undone or at risk.

When disasters occur, poor households suffer disproportionately. While the total share of economic losses sustained by poor households may be relatively low, the impact upon these households is usually very high. This is because poor people often live in hazard-prone regions, are exposed to hazards more often, are more vulnerable and lose a bigger proportion of their wealth and assets in the disaster. They also have a lower capacity to cope in the aftermath and receive less support from safety nets and social protection mechanisms.

Disasters are in fact a driver of poverty. Although the full effect of disasters on poverty has not yet been quantified, a growing body of empirical evidence suggests that household well-being and poverty status are largely affected by disasters. One study in Peru on disasters and poverty from 2003 to 2008 found that one extra disaster per year increased poverty rates by 16–23 percent. In coastal communities in Bangladesh that were affected by Cyclone Aila in 2010, the poverty headcount rate increased from 41 percent before the storm to 63 percent afterwards. A larger study of 89 countries found that on average, floods and drought are responsible for the extreme poverty of about 25 million people every year.

The same study estimates that if all disasters could be prevented in the following year, the number of people in extreme poverty – those living on less than \$1.90 a day – would fall by 26 million.<sup>2</sup> Disasters, exacerbated by climate change, present a major obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As temperatures warm, many of the world's poorest and most vulnerable will face more intense or lengthy droughts, extreme rainfall and flooding and more powerful hurricanes or cyclones – risks that threaten lives and livelihoods and hamper poverty reduction efforts.

One study concluded that there will be very high levels of vulnerability to poverty in 2030, based on projected income poverty, and that the highest levels of vulnerability lie in Asia, Central America and sub-Saharan Africa. The study estimates that up to 325 million extremely poor people will be living in the 49 most hazard-prone countries in 2030, the majority in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup> By 2050, hunger and child malnutrition could increase by up to 20 percent because of climate-related disasters.<sup>4</sup>



2 Hallegatte, Stephane, et al., *Unbreakable: Building the Resilience of the Poor in the Face of Natural Disasters* (Washington D.C., International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank, 2017).

3 Shepherd, Andrew, et al., *The Geography of Poverty, Disasters and Climate Extremes in 2030* (London, ODI, October 2013)

4 The United Nations World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/stories/8-facts-disasters-hunger-and-nutrition>.



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