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Outline

The Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) is an independent international research institute that has been engaged in environmental and development issues at the local, national, regional and global policy levels for over two decades. SEI was formally established in 1989 with the aim of bringing about change for sustainable development by bridging science and policy.

SEI has its headquarters in Stockholm, Sweden and additional centres in the United States, the United Kingdom, Kenya, Thailand and Estonia, with about 180 research staff in total.

As a non-profit and non-partisan research institute, SEI is committed to rigorous and objective scientific analysis to support improved policy-making. We engage with academia, public policy decision makers, media and NGOs in both the global North and South, often acting as a convener of dialogues to bridge different constituencies and communities of practice.

Our research tackles overarching issues like climate change, disaster risk, food security, water and urbanization, as well as specific problems like air pollution. SEI's work feeds into four research themes: Managing Environmental Systems; Transforming Governance; Reducing Climate Risk; and Rethinking Development. Our projects help to build capacity and strengthen institutions to equip our partners for the long-term. In addition, SEI publishes widely in peer-reviewed journals and hosts Climate and Development journal, the leading international journal on the links between climate and development.

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SEI places high importance on stakeholder engagement, the co-production of knowledge and joint learning. SEI is working closely with leaders of subaks--traditional farmer organizations--to strengthen governance in the Bali Cultural Landscape, leading to more resilient and sustainable activities.

Research Achievements and Challenges

From 2015, SEI will invest in eight different research initiatives. These SEI initiatives will function as hubs for research on key issues around sustainable development. One of these initiatives, **'Transforming Development and Disaster Risk Reduction'** focuses on connecting disaster risk reduction (DRR) with inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. 2015 marks a crucial year for both development (as the MDGs are coming to an end and the new SDGs are expected to be adopted) and for DRR (as the HFA comes to a close and the HFA2 takes shape). Furthermore, a new UNFCCC climate agreement will be discussed later this year. At this critical junction, a number of researchers have highlighted the need to increase the synergies between DRR and development.

This SEI initiative on Transforming Development and DRR has gathered international support from over 50 different organizations worldwide, including from research institutes, UN agencies, NGOs, government agencies and academia. The momentum created by this initiative has created a strong network of potential research partners committed to strengthening the linkages between development and DRR fields of practices for improved coordination, collaboration and greater positive impact for vulnerable and at-risk individuals and communities.

This initiative will conduct research into socio-economic changes and environmental risks in specific contexts. The knowledge generated from this can both enable communities to cope with hazardous situations and support policy and practice to pursue development that takes account of new and emerging risks.

However, significant challenges remain. More than fifty years of DRR science, policy and practice and thirty years of integrated research on global environmental change, which includes DRR, climate change adaptation and sustainable development, have so far shown only limited success in significantly reducing human vulnerability to environmental hazards. We highlight three particular challenges for DRR research:

1) The view of disasters as exogenous and unforeseen shocks that supposedly strike "normally functioning" economic systems continues to persist. Yet the reality is that even hazards themselves are increasingly caused by human development. As such, vulnerability and resultant disasters are often a sign of persistent development problems caused by unsustainable economic and social processes and ill adapted societies (Lavell & Maskrey, 2013), often resulting from rapid short-term economic development.

2) While DRR researchers increasingly discuss the need to address the underlying drivers of risk, as opposed to only the risks themselves, this research is still sorely under explored. In addition, research tends to revolve around the root causes of already existing risks, failing to consider new and emerging risks that will continue to arise in a changing climate and environmental, economic, social, cultural and political landscape.

3) While the disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and development communities need to strengthen their linkages and build stronger partnerships (including through their research activities) strong conceptual differences continue to exist between these three communities of practice. Different (and often times conflicting) sets of actors, terminology, language and focus have resulted in 'siloed' thinking which contributes to the considerable barriers to improved coordination that exist between them.

Over the coming decade, disaster research needs to take better account of the linkages between DRR, adaptation and development. The development implications of DRR and adaptation and vice versa are perceptible, yet institutional barriers, including differences in language and methods, have reinforced 'siloed' thinking and blocked linkages between the three communities of practice (Thomalla et al. 2015; see Schipper and Pelling, 2006; Lavell and Maskrey, 2013).

Current pathways are unsustainable as growing populations and deepening social inequalities couple with increasing, cascading and tele-connected risks (Thomalla et al. 2015). It is widely known that disaster and climate change impacts can interfere with development gains, but the effects ill-planned development can have on DRR and adaptation, for example by exacerbating risks, or even creating new hazards, must also be considered. While development is key for reducing vulnerability, for example by improving basic infrastructure, development can also exacerbate disaster risks, both in the long-term by increasing greenhouse gas emissions and in the short-term by worsening hazards (Schipper at al., under review).

References

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