



PRELIMINARY FINDINGS TO INFORM THE OPERATIONALISATION OF A FIT FOR PURPOSE SANTIAGO NETWORK FOR LOSS AND DAMAGE

What is loss and damage?

Heidi White

This paper picks up where I left off in my [last piece](#) where I described guiding principles for decision makers as they turn their minds to how to operationalise a fit for purpose Santiago Network for Loss and Damage (Santiago Network).

However before I turn to the content of this paper, I want to acknowledge the loss and damage being suffered in Madagascar. Cyclone Batsirai made landfall in Madagascar in early February causing extensive devastation. As I am writing, there is news that Cyclone Emnati has made landfall. It was expected to impact many of the same communities and will be the fourth tropical storm in five weeks to impact the country. These storms have caused the deaths of close to 200 people already: flooding is still likely and eight to twelve more cyclones are forecast in the region in the coming months. This is in a country which was already suffering from food insecurity due to drought which in 2021 left around 400,000 people at risk of starvation.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) recorded 140,000 people needing assistance in the most affected districts before Cyclone Emnati landed. Estimates are that more than 250,000 people could be impacted by this latest cyclone. Save the Children, which is in the process of identifying the scale of the damage, has reported that 133,627 children “...have been left with no access to education as these cyclones have torn school buildings apart.” Speaking with people on the ground, Save the Children reported on a child, age 13, whose home was destroyed two weeks ago by Cyclone Batsirai. He said: “I am not going to school now because all the classrooms have been destroyed by the Cyclone. What I need is for our house to be rebuilt, as well as our school. I’m really afraid that our house will never be rebuilt.”

As the submissions deadline of 15 March 2022 approaches, I interview people and conduct research. Again and again I have come up against a very fundamental question: what is loss and damage? For decision makers to have any chance of designing a fit for purpose Santiago Network that has a mandate to do what is needed to address loss and damage in frontline communities like Madagascar, they are going to need to understand the parameters of the challenge that they are trying to solve, and where the Santiago Network fits. It is for that reason that before we can land on what the institutional arrangements of the Santiago Network should be, we must first explore the challenge it needs to address.



Despite advances including the establishment of the WIM in 2013 and the inclusion of loss and damage in the Paris Agreement in 2015, the debate on loss and damage “...is broad, diffuse and somewhat confusing, while concepts, methods and tools, as well as directions for policy remain vague and often contested” (Mechler R., et al., 2019: 4). This state of affairs “...stems from historic and contemporary disagreements over multiple issues” including strong disagreements over whether liability and compensation is a remedy underpinning this area of policy making; whether addressing loss and damage is a policy issue that is separate from and ‘beyond’ adaptation; and whether the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or the United Nations Disaster Risk regime is better placed to deal with loss and damage (Vanhala et al., 2021: 146).

One interviewee I spoke to reflected that people feel that loss and damage is a term used under the UNFCCC that is technical and inaccessible but for people in communities on the ground, loss and damage is simply what they are experiencing. Rather than turn to the literature on defining loss and damage, this brief uses a hypothetical story as an explanatory tool. Inspired by a case study assessing and addressing loss and damage in Nepal (Practical Action, 2021), *this is Sita’s story*.

Sita lives between the two branches of the Karnali River. It is the largest river of Nepal originating in the Tibetan plateau and flows across Nepal crossing into India to join the Ganges River. Extreme rain events have become more frequent in recent years resulting in intense flooding and landslides. She lives along the riverbank and over the last few years, inundation has deposited sediment rendering large areas of agricultural land unproductive and has swept away large swathes of paddy fields. Changes in weather patterns have made some crops less economically viable. Sita’s husband has left her behind in search of a job and wages in India. The money he sends her is just enough to manage the daily essentials for her children and elderly relatives.

One weekend, record-breaking rainfall is recorded across eight meteorological stations in the region. These result in an exceptional flood event killing 222 people and badly affecting 120,000. Sita and her family do not lose their lives. Instead, her home is destroyed along with cash received from her husband and she loses almost all sources of income as crops, stored grains and livestock are washed away. She needs to borrow rice from other families to feed her children. The children can’t go to school for several months because they have lost their school possessions and the road to school as well as the school building itself is damaged: some do not return to school again.

The government snaps into action with rescue operations and disaster relief. The international community turns their heads and financial support is pledged. Local agencies and international organisations collect data and distribute relief materials. Sita’s neighbour also lost her house but needs special support for her newly born child. Another neighbour suffers from a medical



condition that requires special medication. But they each receive the same relief package. It feels like some help is there for a moment but it only helps in some ways and not others and then it is gone again. Only a small portion of the finance that was pledged arrives in the country. Sita doesn't see it.

Over the months and years that follow, Sita is unable to recover her land and grow the same crops she grew before. She cannot afford to rebuild the infrastructure she needs. She loses her sense of belonging as her community does not return to what it was before and she feels helplessness about her situation as it is unpredictable, with further flooding events not unlikely and her husband still away in India trying to earn a wage to send home. She does not know who can help her as assistance providers appear to have overlapping and contradictory functions and roles, and she doesn't understand how to access their services. Even if she did understand how to access their services, she is not sure if they can provide what she needs.

Sita's circumstances are a consequence of both extreme and slow-onset events which manifest in both economic and non-economic loss and damage. Although already there is humanitarian relief and disaster risk communities and indeed organisations working on loss and damage there remains a large gap in support being provided to people on the ground who do not have the capacity to address the loss and damage that they are suffering from. Those approaches and measures that are urgently needed to address unavoided and unavoidable loss and damage include support for: setting up financial protection measures; recovery and rehabilitation measures; displacement, migration and alternative livelihoods; and addressing non-economic loss and damage (Germanwatch, 2021; Shawoo et al., 2021).

The challenges that decision makers need to solve through the Santiago Network will require much more than the operationalisation of a website or 'matchmaking entity'. The functions that Parties agreed to at COP26 already provide guidance, for example, that the Santiago Network will need to assist with the identification of needs, and identification of the types of relevant technical assistance to address those needs. It will also need to actively connect those seeking technical assistance with those who can address their identified needs and walk countries through that process. It will need to create coherence between existing processes and target cracks in the system where people like Sita are falling through unseen and unheard.

The Santiago Network is not a silver bullet particularly where loss and damage finance remains at large but if set up to be fit for purpose it can start the work of building capacity, and identifying the scale of needs and what is needed to address them.

In my next piece I will turn to answering the next question that needs attention ahead of the submissions deadline: what should the Santiago Network look like and how should it operate?



Resources

Dhungana S., Kathmandu Post (2021) ‘Death toll from post monsoon disaster reaches 101’
<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/10/22/death-toll-from-post-monsoon-disaster-reaches-101>

IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S. L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M. I. Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R. Matthews, T. K. Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelekçi, R. Yu and B. Zhou (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press.

Independent (2022) ‘Roofs ripped off houses as another cyclone hits Madagascar’
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/madagascar-africa-indian-ocean-b2021180.html>

Mechler R., et al. (eds.), *Loss and Damage from Climate Change, Climate Risk Management, Policy and Governance*. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-72026-5_2

Practical Action, 2021. Assessing and addressing climate-induced loss and damage in Nepal.

Reliefweb, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2022) ‘Madagascar: Red Cross teams rush to avert a tragedy as Tropical Cyclone Emnati approaches’
<https://reliefweb.int/report/madagascar/madagascar-red-cross-teams-rush-avert-tragedy-tropical-cyclone-emnati-approaches>

Save the Children (2022) ‘Climate vulnerability highlighted as children in Madagascar brace for fourth tropical storm in five weeks’
<https://www.savethechildren.org.au/media/media-releases/climate-vulnerability-highlighted-as-children>

Schäfer L., Jorks P., and Seck E., 2021. Financing Instruments and Sources to Address Loss and Damage from Slow-onset Processes. Germanwatch.

Sharma B., and Hariis, G., New York Times (2014) Floods and landslides kill dozens and leave scores missing in Nepal
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/17/world/asia/floods-and-landslides-kill-dozens-and-leave-scores-missing-in-nepal.html>

Shawoo Z., et al., 2021. Designing a fair and feasible loss and damage finance mechanism. SEI briefing paper.



Tiwari A., Kathmandu Post (2022) Floods, landslides inflict damage and disruptions in various districts

<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/06/18/floods-landslides-inflict-damage-and-disruptions-in-various-districts>

Vanhala L., Robertson M., and Calliari E., 2021. The knowledge politics of climate change loss and damage across scales of governance. *Environmental Politics*, 30(1-2): 141-160. doi: [10.1080/09644016.2020.1840227](https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1840227)