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International Study for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience

TALKING POINTS, ROLF ALTER

Policy Economy of Risk Policies and Science

A. High Level Risk Forum in the OECD provides a policy platform for the development of effective risk policies.

- Risk is **complex**. Risk is a result of (i) their probability or likelihood and of (ii) significance of their disruptive consequences.
- For policy makers, risk has a **negative connotation** (e.g. risk governance is not always a winning issue for elections, however, it is very easy to lose an election if a risk is badly managed --- the result of successful and poor risk governance is **asymmetric** ---).
- **Verification** of the success of decision making in the area of risk management becomes visible only **over the long term**.
- Given the nature of risk in the context of policy making processes, the OECD's **High Level Risk Forum** has as its underlying logic **the notion of the policy cycle**, which starts from risk awareness ⇒ risk assessment⇒ action⇒ implementation⇒ monitoring ⇒and evaluation of the performance and impact of recovery actions.

B. Competing Sources of Input into Decision Making

- The OECD's Recommendation **for the Governance of Critical Risks** highlights **the need for policy decisions to be based on evidence and informed of risks**. It explicitly calls for the continuous sharing knowledge, including lessons learned from previous events, **research and science** through post-event reviews, to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention and preparedness activities.

- **Science is only “one of the sources”** that policy makers should consider. Other inputs to be considered are, for example:
 - **Shared interests and common goals** across public and private sector
 - **Transparency and accountability** of decision making processes
 - **Participation** of all stakeholders, from individuals to government entities, businesses, non-governmental organisations and the third sector
 - **Lessons** learnt from previous events
 - **Exchange of experiences** what worked and failed

The OECD's **High Level Risk Forum** is the platform for government officials, private sector risk managers, think tanks and civil society to **exchange policy practices and raise awareness**. These are critical areas where **international cooperation** can help.

C. Profile of Demand for Scientific Input

- We have to help move societies and governments from knowledge of risks to **policy actions**. Possession of scientific knowledge is not enough. It has to be communicated to decision makers at the right level in a form that is understandable and actionable.
 - Scientific knowledge must be shared in a proper **format** and understandable **language** for policy makers.
 - **Multidisciplinary approaches** need to be taken, combining many scientific streams as well as social science.
 - Innovative solutions should be responsive to challenges, such as **timeliness, cost efficiency, feasibility in practice, budget constraints** of decision makers, **effectiveness compared to alternative choices**, and **applicability** in social context.

D. Complementarity or Clash of Culture?

- **Sir Paul Nurse**, the Royal Science President and Nobel Prize-winning geneticist, said **politicians are “cowardly”** because they repeatedly **ignore scientific evidence** that may be unpopular with the public (BBC News on 13 January 2015).
- **Establishing institutional arrangements** is one of the necessary approaches to **avoid a “clash of cultures”** between scientific research and policy making processes, so that both could be **complementary**. Several options could be considered:: appointing a senior scientist as a Chief Scientific Advisor within the Centre of Government, identifying a third party to bridge science and policy making processes, or helping policy decision makers learn the latest scientific knowledge so that are better able to use scientific information...