

Adaptation Futures 2016

# Intolerable risks of climate change and the debate on loss and damage under the UNFCCC

Gregor Vulturius, Marion Davis, Richard Klein  
Stockholm Environment Institute

## Loss and Damage in the UNFCCC (1)

### **COP 13: Bali Action Plan (2007)**

Two-year work programme “to consider, including through workshops and expert meetings, as appropriate, approaches to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in developing countries particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

### **COP 16: Cancun Adaptation Framework (2010)**

Work Program: “Approaches to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change”

## Loss and Damage in the UNFCCC (2)

### **COP 19 Warsaw International Mechanism**

International mechanism to address loss and damage associated with impacts of climate change, including extreme events and slow onset events, in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change

### **COP 21 Paris Agreement**

Article 8: Parties recognize the importance of averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events, and the role of sustainable development in reducing the risk of loss and damage.

## WIM Work Plan

To enhance understanding, action and support of:

- (a) Early warning systems;
- (b) Emergency preparedness;
- (c) Slow onset events;
- (d) Events that may involve irreversible and permanent loss and damage;
- (e) Comprehensive risk assessment and management;
- (f) Risk insurance facilities, climate risk pooling and other insurance solutions;
- (g) Non-economic losses;
- (h) Resilience of communities, livelihoods and ecosystems.

## Research objective

- L&D emerged from scientific insights that some impacts of climate change may be unavoidable ... BUT science has been lagging behind UNFCCC negotiations
1. Reconnect individual aspects of L&D with the relevant climate science and science on vulnerability
  2. Examining the implications of making value judgements in the political debate about L&D
  3. Inform work under the WIM

## Science about L&D

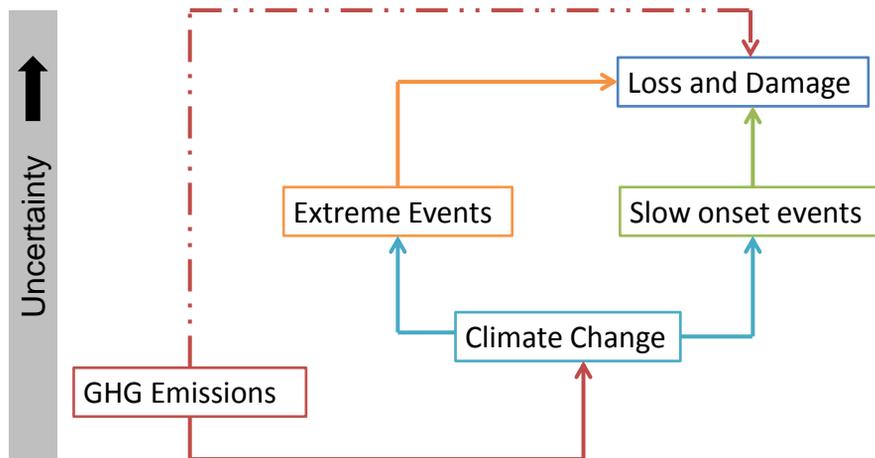
### **IPCC SREX (2012)**

- “Long-term trends in economic disaster losses adjusted for wealth and population increases have not been attributed to climate change, but a role for climate change has not been excluded (high agreement, medium evidence)”
- “Accept and deal with increased and unavoidable (residual) risks seen are part of national systems for managing risks from climate extremes and disasters”

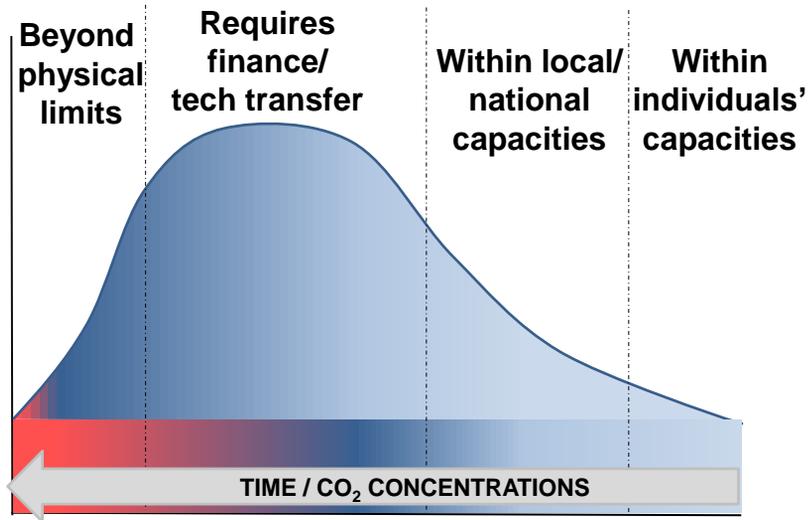
## Limits to adaptation and L&D

- AR 5: Chapter 16 Adaptation Opportunities, Constraints, and Limits
- “Limits to adaptation can emerge as a result of the interactions among climate change and biophysical and socioeconomic constraints (medium evidence, high agreement)
- **Limit to adaptation:** Point at which an actor can no longer secure valued objectives from intolerable risk through adaptive action (Dow et al. 2013)

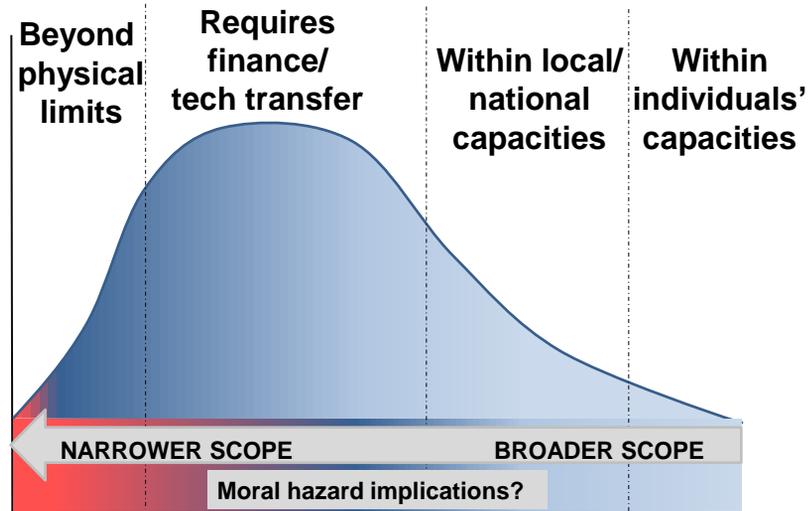
### Attributable risk



# Unavoidable risk



# Unavoidable risk

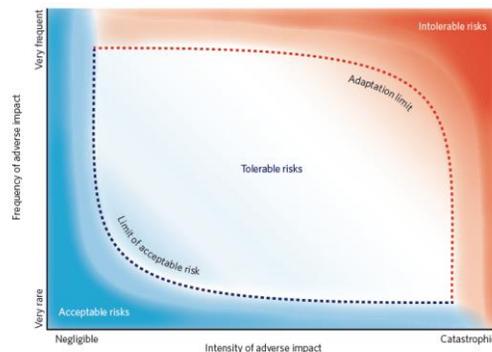


## Irreversible risk

- Loss defined as irreversible vs damage defined as replaceable
- Physical irreversible losses relates to science of “tipping points” “catastrophic climate change” or “planetary boundaries”
- What are irreversible losses? Loss of place based identity, livelihood, home?
- In practical terms, what is the difference between loss and disaster response and recovery?
- And is our capacity to reverse impacts of extreme events a factor in whether we consider something L&D or DRR?

## Intolerable risk

- **Intolerable risk:** Point at which an actor must either live with the risk of escalating loss and damage, or transform behaviour to avoid the risk (Dow et al. 2013)
- Risk that fundamentally threatens private or social norms [...] despite adaptive action being taken



## Intolerable risk

- What is considered intolerable differs among different actors, depending on their objectives, values, access resources, their perception of risks, efficacy etc.
- But there are also multilaterally acknowledged standards what we consider a intolerable risk, human rights violations for example



## Implications for WIM (1)

- **Attributable risk:** Compensation that is based on the notion of liability/polluter pays principle requires attribution. Consider the inherent uncertainty of attribution science and persist resistance from EU and US, it is unclear how a viable liability compensation mechanism could be established
- **Unavoidable risk:** Assuming we get passed the question of how you provide assistance for L&D, what we consider avoidable or unavoidable risk determines the scope of finance, the potential overlap with other financial mechanisms, and the potential of moral hazard

## Implications for WIM(2)

- **Irreversible risk:** Finance of irreversible loss of climate change is likely to overlap with disaster response, and face the same underlying drivers of vulnerability to disaster risk, in particular in developing countries
- **Intolerable risk:** Discussions and decisions about finance of loss and damage are/will be the subject of differences in values, objectives and power relations. Approaches to deal with these issues, such as capacity based, social justice or human rights need to be considered

Thank you for listening

Gregor Vulturius

[gregor.vulturius@sei-international.org](mailto:gregor.vulturius@sei-international.org)

 @GregorVulturius