

## **Protecting countries from disasters through risk-informed local development planning. A case study in Burundi.**

In 2020 worldwide over 40 million people have lost their homes and were internally displaced. Contrary to what you might think, the main reason wasn't war but natural hazards, like floods and earthquakes, causing over 75 % of displacements, destroying people's lives and severely impacting a country's economy. Often a long time passes before a country can recover from such a shock. What's hard to hear is that many of the losses could have been prevented. Sure, you can't stop the rain from falling, but you can look at the weather forecast, take an umbrella or plan to go to the cinema instead of the beach. For countries it's the same. Most of the time good planning can keep you 'dry'. Like someone plans their career, countries plan their national development to improve a population's living conditions, for example having good roads and schools. A school out of paper right next to a river wouldn't last long. It could easily catch fire or get washed away. Instead of building a new school every day it makes sense to construct something that will last. A school needs to be big enough, built from good materials and located in a safe spot. Unfortunately, when countries plan their development, they often make things from "paper", forget about the "weather forecast" or put things in spots that aren't safe.

So, what can you do? Let's make sure that you think of the risks when you plan. That means, figuring out, what can happen, what and who needs protection, and what can we do to stay dry? In other words, you have to assess the risks and systematically use this information to base your planning on, aka mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction into development planning. Even though we know what should be done, it's difficult to put into practice. In our study we looked at why this is difficult and how it could be changed using the example of Burundi in East Africa.

Burundi is a small, densely populated, mostly rural low-income country, which borders Lake Tanganyika, one of the world's largest lakes. In the past years the water level has risen 4m above average, submerging neighbourhoods, washing away fields, and displacing more than 50,000 people. Besides that, Burundi knows dangers such as torrential rains, violent winds, drought, and internal conflict. Barriers to consider disasters in planning are e.g., a lack of funding and coordination, insufficient information management, legislation, and expertise.

For example, the Burundian law prohibits people from settling within 150m from the lake because it's dangerous. People do it anyway. Why? Because they often don't see the risk, they live from fishing, or they simply don't have the money to move. Additionally, the law isn't enforced, so it becomes toothless. But it's complicated to make people follow the law and it can spark conflict.

For our study we've interviewed 36 experts in 4 different communes and experts from national and international organisations. We also looked at literature to find out what is already known about the issue and at the communes' development plans to see if they already included disaster risk. We could see that most issues are embedded in the administrative structures, and the barriers are interlinked with each other across different sectors, hierarchical levels and planning phases. Power dynamics between stakeholders also play an important role. This study helps to get a good overview of what barriers there are and how they are connected, which is important to understand when you want to resolve them. We also give some concrete tips for what to do.