

# THE NATIONAL LAW REVIEW

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## Year of the Flood

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Hurricane Harvey bombarded the Gulf Coast of the United States, leaving more than 250,000 people without power and causing substantial financial, physical, and emotional damage in its wake. Though record-breaking, Harvey was not a singular event. In 2017, severe rain events like Harvey have impacted many communities and businesses around the world. Africa is no exception.

In the span of less than eight weeks, there were over 1,000 people killed in mudslides following torrential rains in [Sierra Leone](#), 2,000 people displaced by floods in [Uganda](#), more than 100,000 people fled their homes because of major flooding in [Nigeria](#), and hundreds of homes destroyed and families displaced following storms in [Niger](#) and [Sudan](#).

According to [World Bank research](#) severe weather events have cost an estimated \$4.2 trillion between 1980 and 2014. Experts indicate that at least some of the financial loss in 2017 could have been avoided by repairing [faulty drain channels](#) in Sierra Leone to effectively divert floodwaters, or redirecting [attention to flood maps](#), which could have prevented construction in vulnerable floodplains surrounding Houston.

These disaster losses can impact a variety of industries including insurance, oil and gas, manufacturing, utilities, raw materials, and mining. Knowing that other severe rain events can occur, the question is: How can stakeholders manage the risk?

A tool businesses and communities can use is disaster risk management, which in many cases involves both disaster risk reduction (“DRR”) (prevention, preparedness, and mitigation) and humanitarian and development action (emergency response, relief, and reconstruction).

Below are three key instruments for businesses to understand when approaching disaster risk management in Africa:

### **Sendai Framework: Shared Responsibility**

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (“Sendai”), and its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework, serve as a foundation for sustainable development and international cooperation regarding disaster risk management.

Sendai is a 15-year, voluntary, non-binding agreement which recognizes that the State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk but that responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including local government and the private sector.

Adopted by the United Nations Member States at the 3rd U.N. World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction in March 2015, and endorsed by the UN General Assembly, Sendai sets four priorities:

1. Understanding disaster risk.
2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk.



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3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience.
4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.

The Framework also includes seven global targets which aim to reduce economic losses and critical infrastructure damage (Targets (c)-(d)), and increase the number of national and local DRR strategies and level of international cooperation (Targets (e)-(f)).

With a focus on enhancing infrastructure resilience, health and livelihoods, and the provision of adequate support to African countries to allow for the implementation of the framework (Sendai para. 43), Sendai highlights an opportunity for stakeholders in Africa to effect DRR mechanisms.

A global example of Sendai’s role in sustainable development includes the 2017 [Cancun High Level Communiqué](#), where leaders committed to implement the Sendai Framework, in coherence with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the New Urban Agenda and other relevant instruments.

### **Africa’s Regional Platform: Sendai Plus Five**

The [Africa Platform](#) emerged from a November 25, 2016 meeting where Government Ministers, heads of delegation, and national disaster management agencies from forty seven African countries agreed on a strategic plan to align disaster risk reduction with global priorities and targets to reduce disaster losses, based on the Sendai Framework.

The Africa Platform supplements Sendai by adopting five additional targets to augment action on disaster risk reduction. These include:

- Integration of DRR in school curricula.
- Making DRR part of sustainable development planning.
- Increasing domestic spending on DRR.
- Expanding the number of countries testing their preparedness plans.
- Increasing the number of partnerships for knowledge management.

Here, companies have the opportunity to partner in the knowledge management space and experience a renewed regional focus on DRR.

### **UNISDR Checklist on Essentials for Business in DRR: Data Driven Decision-Making**

Key provisions of the [Five Essentials for Business in Disaster Risk Reduction](#) include:

- Promote and develop public-private partnerships for disaster risk reduction to analyze the root causes of continued non-resilient activity.
- Leverage private sector expertise and strengths to advance disaster risk reduction and mitigation activities, including enhanced resilience and effective response.
- Foster a collaborative exchange and dissemination of data: assessment, monitoring, prediction, forecasting and early warning purposes.
- Support national and local risk assessments and socioeconomic cost-benefit analyses and capacity building.
- Support the development and strengthening of national and local laws, regulations, policies, and programs.

As Former U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon explained at the [launch of UNISDR’s 2013 Global Assessment Report](#), “economic losses linked to disasters will continue to escalate, unless disaster risk management becomes a core part of business investment strategies.”

The instruments above demonstrate that governments, particularly those in Africa, have tools at their disposal when looking towards future disaster risk management. Shared responsibility, regional, and data driven decision-making targets provide guidance for investment and an opportunity for businesses to collaborate.

This has the potential to yield innovative sustainability initiatives, knowledge transfer, corporate social

responsibility, and philanthropy, enabling the private sector to become a key driver of risk reduction.

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