

# Responding Amid Uncertainty and Managing Risk in Humanitarian Settings

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A Learning Guide for NGOs

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SEPTEMBER 2023



# RISK CATEGORIES

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## USE & DISCLAIMERS

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# KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

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## General Terms

**Uncertainty:** The effect of incomplete information, knowledge of events or circumstances, and an array of other unknowns that cannot be quantified, which effect an organization's decision-making, priorities and approaches.

**Threat:** A danger in the environment; a potential cause of harm.

**Risk:** The effect of uncertainty on organizational objectives, whether positive or negative.

**Likelihood:** The potential or probability of certain threats, and subsequent risks, materializing.

**Impact:** The potential effect of a risk on the organization if realized, or what consequences might arise and what they would lead to.

**Vulnerability:** Weaknesses or gaps that can be exploited by threats.

**Risk Management:** Organizational practices, procedures, and policies that reduce the probability of risks being realized and limit the harmful consequences if they are.

**Enterprise Risk Management:** An organizational approach to risk management that considers, combines, and prioritizes assessed risks across all areas (e.g., security, fiduciary, operational, informational,

and reputational) in order to strategize and implement mitigation measures.

**Strong Risk Management:** A risk management approach that enables quality and timely humanitarian delivery, performance and outcomes for crisis affected people and communities.

**Risk Appetite:** A general overview or organizational strategy that offers insights in the risk levels an organization deems acceptable.

**Risk Tolerance:** The level of risk an entity is willing to assume in order to achieve a potential desired result, or the degree of uncertainty that an organization or stakeholder can handle.

**Residual Risk:** The remaining risk after all appropriate mitigation measures are taken.

**Program Criticality:** The urgency or potential impact of the program, in terms of saving lives and relieving suffering. The concept of program criticality is being willing to accept greater levels of residual risk for life-saving programming.

**Risk Register:** A tool to assess, prioritize and mitigate organization-wide risks. This involves ranking risks in all categories by their perceived degree of likelihood as well as the level of impact they would have on the organization if realized and then developing strategies to mitigate them, including

outlining ways that procedures and practices may need to be adjusted.

**Risk Assessment:** The process through which risk is identified, analyzed and prioritized for mitigating action.

**Risk Identification:** The process of determining any event or factor which may do harm to the objectives of the organization.

**Risk Analysis:** The process of identifying and analyzing potential issues that could impact programs and objectives.

**Risk Monitoring:** The ongoing process used to track and evaluate identified risks, as well as the planned set of actions, both proactive and reactive, related to prioritized risks.

**Level of Risk:** An estimation drawn from combining likelihood and impact, or the consideration of the probability of an event and the consequences that would flow from it. This typically generates unrealistic estimates as likelihood is often overstated.

**Risk Treatment:** The process by which an organization improves existing or develops new rules, controls, frameworks or adaptations in order to reduce or modify potential risks by reducing the likelihood of occurrence or the impact should the occur.

**Risk Owner:** A person or entity responsible for managing threats and vulnerabilities that could be exploited. Typically, a risk owner is someone for whom the particular risk is relevant to their role and who has authority to manage and make decisions about certain risks.

**Risk Profile:** The prioritized set of the most significant risk identified through a risk assessment process. This is not a complete inventory of all risks.

## Risk Response Strategies

**Risk Response Strategies:** The option selected to treat the risk. This may include avoiding a threat, exploiting an opportunity, reducing the vulnerability to it, enhancing an opportunity, transferring a risk, sharing a risk and accepting a risk. Any combination of these strategies can be deployed at one time and in different ways across an organization.

**Risk Avoidance:** Ceasing the activities that give rise or exposure to risk, thus eliminating any and all likelihood of the threat occurring, or its ability to impact the organization to any degree.

**Risk Mitigation / Reduction:** Implementing measures to reduce vulnerability or exposure to threats and reduce the possible impact should risks materialize. This can include various treatments such as controls, actions, new processes etc.).

**Risk Transfer:** Voluntary or involuntary arrangement between two or more parties. Risk transfer deliberately shifts responsibility to mitigate and

absorb the consequences should risks materialize. Risk transfer is done with additional risks being incurred.

**Risk Sharing:** Reducing risk through sharing or transferring part of the risk to other parties (i.e., partners or using insurance), without the other party incurring additional risks, or with due recognition and resources to support the other party to manage additional risks.

**Risk Acceptance:** Risk acceptance implies a cost-benefit analysis. Certain identified risks are deemed acceptable, as the potential loss or harm from such risks is not great enough to achieve the desired level of risk reduction. The potential loss from accepted risk is considered tolerable.

## Types of Partnerships

**Transactional Partnerships:** Top-down, directive model, where the partner is treated sub-contractor to the funding entity or donor, rather than part of the decision-making process.

**Supportive Partnerships:** The partner receives a benefit beyond the monetary amount of the contract, including institutional support, technical assistance and mentoring and has at least some degree of strategic and project-design input.

**Collaborative Partnerships:** International and national partners are on an equal footing with decisions made jointly on how programs will be

designed and implemented, with funding shared fairly and used autonomously.

## Risk Categories

**Operational Risk:** The risk of technical or human error, or capacity deficits, leading to operational failure/inability to achieve objectives. Includes financial risk (the risk of unexpected fiscal outcomes or being unable to finance activities) as distinct from fiduciary risk.

**Fiduciary Risk:** The risk that money or materials are not used for intended purposes (i.e. fraud, theft, waste or loss).

**Legal & Compliance Risk:** The risk that laws and relevant regulations are violated by the organization or associated personnel.

**Safety:** The risk of accident or illness.

**Security:** Physical risk to individuals and assets from acts of war, violence and crime.

**Reputational:** Damage to the organization's image and reputation that results in future harm or losses.

**Ethical:** The risk of harm caused by unethical behaviors, including sexual misconduct and exploitation, inadequate duty of care, or insufficient consideration of humanitarian principles.

**Informational:** The risk of confidentiality breaches, data loss or theft.

## Risk Management Traps

**Risk Management Trap:** A reinforcing cycle or loop of practices that trap humanitarian organizations into ill suited risk management models often leading to the unintended effect of increased risks and diminished program performance.

### **Focused on Systems,**

**Not People:** Organizations often place more emphasis on creating and implementing their risk management systems and technologies (e.g., reporting software) than on empowering people that must use systems and processes to make decisions about risk.

**Staff Disempowerment:** Bureaucratic, centralized risk management systems can disempower staff (particularly field staff), limiting their ability to resolve risk-related issues quickly and effectively.

**Weak Risk Forecasting & Readiness:** Many NGOs do not have the resources and technical capacity to carry out strong risk forecasting, planning, and mitigation across all levels of the organization, which can lead to greater risk exposure.

**Institutional Learning Gaps:** Without strong mechanisms to capture, document, and reflect on institutional lessons about risk management, approaches to risk management are often undertaken in an ad hoc, instead of an evidence-based, way.

**Transactional Partnerships:** When partners are treated as sub-contractors, rather than collaborators, it leads to risk transfer and a lack of investment in their risk management capacity, which can increase risk exposure and erode trust in the partnership.

**Compromised Community Engagement:** When the relationship and trust between an organization and local communities is damaged, due a lack of prioritization and investment in community engagement or as a result of program disruptions or delays, it weakens access to and understanding of the local context, thus potentially increasing exposure to existing and new risks.

**Coordination Dilemmas :** Competition between humanitarian organizations weakens incentives to share information related to risk, which increases risk exposure for all actors.

**Prioritizing Compliance Over Delivery:** Donor policies and previous incidents can lead organizations to institutionalize risk-averse, compliance-focused ways of working, which can limit where organizations work and reduce the quality and timeliness of their programs.

# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This Learning Guide is an outcome of the *Risk III – From Evidence to Action* program (2020 – 2022), conducted in partnership between InterAction and CDA Collaborative Learning.<sup>1</sup> The Guide is informed by and intended to be a resource for operational humanitarian organizations and agencies seeking to strengthen risk management approaches in humanitarian programs and crisis settings.

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In humanitarian settings, organizations and teams face a range of unknowns. There is no way for an organization to have perfect knowledge of all the possible risks, their probability, and their possible consequences. Complexity, volatility, and uncertainty are inherent in any humanitarian crisis. The ability to respond to urgent needs and provide life-saving assistance is predicated on the ability to

manage this uncertainty and tolerate the unknowns.

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Drawing on recent learning from the last 10 years, the Guide uses the term and framing “strong risk management” examining positive and negative risk management models. Essentially, strong risk management puts people at the center. In this model, the purpose of risk management is to enable and facilitate responsive and quality humanitarian delivery. It is a proactive model that identifies possible problems that could affect humanitarian activities, and outlines and executes plans to address problems before they occur. The contents of this Guide come from intensive consultations conducted throughout the *Risk III* program which included 179 local and international non-governmental organization (NGO) staff working and supporting operations in some of the

most challenging current and recent humanitarian crises.<sup>2</sup>

## **STRONG RISK MANAGEMENT**

A risk management approach that is designed with the goal of enabling quality and timely humanitarian delivery, performance and outcomes for crisis-affected people and communities.

Over the last decade, there has been growing awareness among operational entities about the issues that compound risks throughout humanitarian programs. Seeking to make sense of these complex challenges, NGOs and other humanitarian entities have professionalized their risk management policies and practice. However, most improvements drew on private-sector practice, which up until recently prioritized controls- and rules-based models centered on compliance. Like the private sector, humanitarian actors often conflate compliance and risk management, using the terms interchangeably. External pressures to act, often following public failures or major risk events, cemented the top-down compliance model for risk management even further. The private sector had a similar experience—banks after the 2008 financial crisis and oil companies after the 2010 Deepwa-

<sup>1</sup> See [www.cdacollaborative.org](http://www.cdacollaborative.org) and [www.interaction.org](http://www.interaction.org)

<sup>2</sup> The detailed findings of those consultations are available in the [Global Report](#).



ter Horizon oil spill. A more rigorous compliance culture was needed, but it emerged piecemeal and without sufficient consideration of humanitarian action's unique goal: to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity before, during and after crises.

This experience created a risk management approach and culture centered around compliance. Rules and requirements proliferated across humanitarian organizations, including among those agencies delivering aid and those funding it. Few approaches asked a crucial and fundamental question—“How can risk management be built to optimize performance and, by extension, outcomes for affected people?” Compliance-focused and rules-based models absorb risk systems. Risk owners are forced to prioritize box-checking, rather than analysis. Organizational resources are consumed more with documentation and less with creating a “risk intelligent” culture that proactively detects and channels resources to mitigate risk. Strong controls and compliance may look good on paper but they have costly consequences, including increased uncertainty and more risks that often go undetected. The compliance-focused model has also generated more uncertainty. To cope, funding and implementing aid entities resort to suboptimal programming. Lower-risk programs in lower-risk settings create real imbalances in operational presence and humanitarian coverage. This raises important questions around account-

ability to affected people, the ability of agencies to meet their core mandate, and the overall effectiveness of humanitarian action. Though perhaps well intentioned, many controls used to “manage risk” fail to consider humanitarian delivery and funding models, organizational mandates, or the imperative to respond to acute needs.

### **Risk III Learning & Change Objectives**

This background shows the challenges of risk management approaches that were not designed for and by humanitarians, as well as the limitations to any single approach. By contrast, this Guide aims to foster learning and tailored action so organizations can address the complexities within risk management. It offers practical, participant-focused exercises to examine core ideas and facilitate team exchange and decision-making. It recognizes the various points of view and constraints of different NGO teams, from headquarters to sub-office staff and across different types of partnerships, whether in programs, leadership, or support function roles. This Guide may also be useful for other humanitarian actors including government donors, foundations or private donors, United Nations agencies, and other response or frontline aid organizations.

This Learning Guide provides a necessary resource that humanitarian organizations and staff can use to assess gaps and strengths in their risk man-

agement approaches, systems, and culture. It is designed to support and build awareness and preparedness in risk management policy and practice, so that organizations and teams can:

1. Assess how the organization's approach to risk management impacts program delivery and quality, staff, partners, and affected communities.
2. Identify the common risk management “traps” that may be negatively affecting the organization's ability to manage risk holistically, cope with uncertainty, and reach people in need of humanitarian assistance.
3. Explore the internal and external factors that are driving these traps and obstructing organizational progress.
4. Identify the changes needed to break the organization out of its risk management traps, including the roles, resources, and practical steps to follow.
5. Foster an organizational culture that is comfortable with uncertainty and can apply risk management norms and practices in a way that enables and facilitates effective humanitarian programs.

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## Risk III Origins

In 2015, InterAction started a dedicated body of work about risk management in humanitarian action. This was primarily due to the heightened real and perceived risks that NGOs were facing in humanitarian crises around the world. Most humanitarian crises were created by protracted conflicts, which were also highly politicized internationally. Operating environments had also become more extreme and threats, including violence, corruption, and interference, intensified. These trends created new dimensions and degrees of uncertainty for NGOs, each interconnected in complex ways. Too often, these trends have shown the detrimental effects of humanitarian programs and the people those programs aim to serve. Recognizing this dilemma, InterAction organized the Risk Leadership Cohort, a small group of senior NGO leaders to help shape and guide the body of work.<sup>3</sup>

With funding from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, the first several years focused on understanding the common problem, with more recent work focusing on ways to solve it. The content of this Guide is based on learning from both Risk I (2016) and Risk II (2019) program findings and is a product of the Risk III – From Evidence to Action (2020 – 2022) program.

Through Risk I and II, InterAction identified several crucial lessons, with the two most important being:

1. Established risk management policy and practice does not measurably improve country and program teams' ability to navigate and make decisions to better mitigate potential risks and manage them should they materialize.
2. Current risk management approaches prioritize the risk to individual organizations, rather than the risk to the humanitarian response and wider system of actors overall. The current compliance, or rules-based, approach can come at the expense of quality, effective, and efficient humanitarian programs. In crisis settings this translates to lives lost as a result of increased complexity, indecision, cost overruns, and project delays.

Initiated in 2020, the Risk III program was a continuation of InterAction's efforts to advance peer learning and deepen the evidence base around how NGOs cope with uncertainty and manage risk in humanitarian settings. Additionally, it aimed to advance useful solutions for NGO's institutional learning and progress. This Learning Guide draws from the findings of 10 workshops conducted between May and September 2021. The workshops convened 179 participants from more than 50 local and international NGOs. The workshops were truly global, with NGO staff participating from 38 countries, including from today's most acute humanitarian crises.<sup>4</sup> The Risk III workshops offered a rare opportunity for NGO staff to examine the tensions

between risk management and the need to ensure program continuity, sustained operational presence, and program delivery in high-risk settings where humanitarian needs are concentrated.

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The data and insights that emerged from the workshops further validated InterAction's previous learning. Importantly, current risk management approaches can create gaps in how risk is assessed, the impacts forecasted when risk materializes, and thus, the degree of unexpected impacts and the level to which organizations are prepared to cope and manage the risks. For example, an organization may consider informational risks independent of an organization's broader enterprise risk management agenda, without considering how these risks could affect the delivery of humanitarian aid. Integration may come only as an afterthought, and organizations then lose the opportunity to improve risk awareness and readiness. A good example of this lack of integration might be a breach or hack of

<sup>3</sup> CARE, Concern Worldwide, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Global Communities, International Medical Corps (IMC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Islamic Relief Worldwide, Mercy Corps, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Relief International, Save the Children, World Vision.

<sup>4</sup> Including, for example, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Lebanon, West Bank/Gaza, Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

beneficiary data used for program activities and distributions. The data might later be used maliciously by armed actors that aim to disrupt or repurpose the targeting of interventions. There is growing recognition that different types of risk cannot be siloed. They must be integrated, hopefully through the common frame of program continuity and program performance.

## Significant Findings

Throughout the *Risk III* workshops and data collection, InterAction and CDA found that NGOs have continued to invest in and strengthen risk management systems. Yet, the efforts often lack clear vision. Generally, advancements over the last decade have been reactive to external events or pressures to act without systemic evaluation of the main model to which adjustments were being

made. Analysis of the new evidence exposed a set of common, reinforcing cycles that organizations could get stuck in, which this guide refers to as the **8 Hidden Risk Management Traps in Humanitarian Action** (henceforth the risk management traps or traps). These interrelated traps can limit an organization's ability to effectively manage risk, and in many cases, create more risk that goes unseen and unaddressed.

### 8 Hidden Risk Management Traps in Humanitarian Action ↗

- 1. Focus on Systems, Not People:** Organizations often place more emphasis on creating and implementing their risk management systems and technologies (e.g., reporting software) than on empowering the people best placed to manage risks.
- 2. Staff Disempowerment:** Bureaucratic, centralized risk management systems can disempower staff (particularly field staff), limiting their ability to resolve risk-related issues quickly and effectively.
- 3. Weak Risk Forecasting & Readiness:** Many NGOs do not have the resources and technical capacity to carry out strong risk forecasting, planning, and mitigation across all levels of the organization, which can lead to greater risk exposure.
- 4. Institutional Learning Gaps:** Without strong mechanisms to capture, document, and reflect on institutional lessons about risk management, approaches to risk management are often undertaken in an ad hoc, instead of an evidence-based, way.
- 5. Transactional Partnerships:** When partners are treated as sub-contractors, rather than collaborators, it leads to risk transfer and a lack of investment in their risk management capacity, which can increase risk exposure and erode trust in the partnership.
- 6. Compromised Community Engagement:** When the relationship and trust between an organization and local communities is damaged, due to a lack of prioritization and investment in community engagement or as a result of program disruptions or delays, it weakens access to and understanding of the local context, thus potentially increasing exposure to existing and new risks.
- 7. Coordination Dilemmas:** Competition between humanitarian organizations weakens incentives to share information related to risk, which increases risk exposure for all actors.
- 8. Prioritizing Compliance Over Delivery:** Donor policies and previous incidents can lead organizations to institutionalize risk-averse, compliance-focused ways of working, which can limit where organizations work and reduce the quality and timeliness of their programs.

If humanitarian organizations can interrupt and break out of these traps, they will be better placed to build risk management policy and practice that enables and facilitates quality program delivery in humanitarian crises.

These insights inform the structure and content of this Guide. It offers a detailed exploration of the various factors perpetuating the risk management traps. The exercises offer a practical framework that can be used to:

- o Identify which risk management traps affect an organization.
- o Develop action plans to address relevant traps.

### A Note on “Tools” and “Templates”

InterAction and CDA developed the focus and structure of this Guide with caution, recognizing that risk mitigation and management must be contextualized for each organization, their teams, partnerships, and the settings in which they deliver assistance. For example, if an organization is implementing a humanitarian program that requires them to stretch in new ways, then there is greater chance of doing harm. If risk factors shift in certain ways the organization is unprepared for, then there is an even greater likelihood of harm. Though a common experience, it presents differently across organizations, contexts, and conditions. If we hope to improve risk management policy and practice, we must focus on people, not systems. We must understand and build adaptive models, capacities, and mentalities that anticipate and accommodate the spectrum of uncertainty inherent in humani-

tarian crises. That work must be driven internally within organizations, and contextualized to their programs, operations, culture, and norms, as well as ways of working in partnership and coordination.

If effective risk management is the goal, there is no one-size-fits-all template, guidance, or tool. As noted, this Learning Guide and accompanying resources are not prescriptive. Rather, they are resources to support learning so that humanitarian organizations can develop and apply more sophisticated, adaptive, and integrated risk management approaches as they cope with the uncertainty ever-present in humanitarian action.

**Section 2 outlines how various actors can use this guide in whole or in parts. ↗**

*If we hope to improve risk management policy and practice, we must focus on people, not systems. We must understand and build adaptive models, capacities, and mentalities that anticipate and accommodate the spectrum of uncertainty inherent in humanitarian crises. That work must be driven internally within organizations, and contextualized to their programs, operations, culture, and norms, as well as ways of working in partnership and coordination.*

## SECTION 2: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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This Learning Guide can be used by any humanitarian organization at any level. It is relevant for leaders, as well staff who support, design, or implement programs. It is designed as a set of modules. Each contains information and advice, as well as adaptable, practical exercises that can be used to examine organizational approaches to risk management and identify the key changes needed to adopt a strong risk management approach that supports humanitarian program delivery.

### Who Should Use This Learning Guide?

Use this Guide in the following two ways:

1. **To conduct a dedicated analysis and action planning workshop(s)** on strengthening risk management. This guide includes instructions for facilitators to use the exercises in a workshop setting.
2. **As individual learning modules and exercises** that humanitarian teams and staff can use to support them in their day-to-day work. In this case, consider this Guide as a “Toolbox” from which individual staff or teams can draw for their needs.

### Primary Users

*All users* will benefit from working through Sections 3 and 4 of this Guide to establish a baseline understanding and common vocabulary for risk management. This includes factors that contribute to strong risk management practice, versus those that perpetuate risk traps.

*Humanitarian organizations or regional/country offices* can then look to Section 5 and choose the set of learning exercises most relevant to their needs.

*Programming and operational teams* can work through them in a dedicated workshop, over the course of several meetings, or asynchronously with a planned structure for bringing the work together.

Each learning exercise includes guidance on how the exercises can be used for different purposes. Cross-functional teams will gain a broader perspective from working through exercises together, surfacing risk factors, identifying traps, and exploring new ways to collaborate to manage risk. Individual teams or leaders can benefit from digging into additional exercises relevant to their function. The learning module annexes include case stories—a practical picture of each trap derived from the [Risk III findings](#)—to help teams see the implications of risk management practices and fuel discussion about how to change practice. Cases can also be used as an activity for reflecting on a draft strategy,

or to give teams the chance to exercise their muscles for doing ongoing risk management analysis.

### Secondary Users

*Board members or committees with governance responsibilities for humanitarian organizations.* The Guide offers suggestions on how learning exercises might be used to elevate risk issues for board awareness, to message strategic direction, or for executive decision-making. For example, presenting the summary of Exercise 1 ([Assessing Your Organizations’ Risk Management Approaches](#)) and [Exercise 5](#) (Risk Management Scorecard) could make for an engaging board discussion.

*Humanitarian donors and policy makers.* Any of the learning modules or cases can be adapted for use by donors themselves for their own understanding of risk management issues, for awareness about strong practices to require of grantees, or to invest in, and for strategy setting. Implementing teams or organization leadership may also adapt modules or draw on other information in this Guide to engage donor representatives at country or global levels—[See the tip sheet “managing risk is not for free” for talking points.](#)

## Background References

Several foundational reference documents offer background and insight into the content of this Guide. Each can be used in whole or in part by any of the audiences and for any of the purposes noted above.

**For facilitators:** the following may be relevant introductory content to build understanding among teams preparing to use specific modules of this Guide, or for a more comprehensive organizational workshop.

**For leaders, managers, donor engagement and communication functions:** the reference documents to the right may also be used for internal or external messaging about the importance of risk management priorities and/or investment.

- [NGOs and Risk: How International Humanitarian Actors Manage Uncertainty](#) (Risk I, 2016)
- [NGO Risk Management: Principles and Promising Practice](#) (Risk I, 2016)
- [Residual Risk Acceptance: An Advocacy Guidance Note](#) (Risk I, 2016)
- [NGOs and Risk: Managing Uncertainty in Local-International Partnerships](#) (Risk II, 2019)
- [Global Report](#)
- [Case Studies: Northeast Nigeria and South Sudan](#)
- [Good Practice and Recommendations](#)
- Response Essentials. Humanitarian Action and Risk Management 101: 9-minute Orientation Video
  - [Arabic](#)
  - [Bambara](#)
  - [Bengali](#)
  - [Burmese](#)
  - [Dari](#)
  - [English](#)
  - [French](#)
  - [Hausa](#)
  - [Pashto](#)
  - [Polish](#)
  - [Russian](#)
  - [Spanish](#)
  - [Ukrainian](#)
- [Glossary of Terms](#)

Section 3 presents the priority information about risk management systems that is the basis for using the rest of this guide. ↗

## SECTION 3: RISK MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

An organization's risk management approaches do not operate in a vacuum. They both inform, and are informed by, the organization's structures, culture, and policies. They are part of the organizational system, which is made up of both tangible features—policies, procedures, staff, and funding—and intangible features—attitudes, behaviors, experiences, and perceptions. Therefore, to understand why an organization manages risk the way it does, it is useful to look at all the features of the organization (tangible and intangible) and how they connect and interact. Seeing these connections can help identify the organizational factors supporting good risk management practices, as well as what may be acting as a barrier or blockage to positive change. This approach is called systems mapping.

*An organization's risk management approaches do not operate in a vacuum. They both inform, and are informed by, the organization's structures, culture, and policies.*

By showing all the interconnected parts of the system and how they impact one other, systems mapping can help organizations identify where to focus their efforts to achieve greater and more transformative change overall. The approach recognizes the complex and dynamic ecosystem that charac-

terizes humanitarian work and the humanitarian organizations that deliver it. It applies a systematic and rigorous approach so that organizations can:

- Explore the underlying factors of a specific problem, or set of problems;
- Assess the potential intended and unintended consequences of a problem;
- Redefine the problem drawing on deeper insights of the contributing factors; and
- Select the solutions that can deliver the greatest degree of change.

NGOs and their teams are inherently systems-thinkers. They grapple with complexity every day to be able to deliver humanitarian assistance. In every crisis, teams assess and analyze the causes of food insecurity, poor hygiene, disease prevalence, or protection risks. It is this capability that allows humanitarian action to address the multiple compounding factors that underpin humanitarian needs. Through this framework, humanitarian action is prioritized and aid reaches and responds to the greatest needs. Though systems thinking is not foreign to humanitarian organizations, there are often few opportunities to apply such rigor in looking at our own complex organizations.

*NGOs and their teams are inherently systems-thinkers. They grapple with complexity every day to be able to deliver humanitarian assistance.*

### The Risk Management Workshops

The content in this Guide, as well as the summary [findings report](#), is drawn from a series of risk management workshops conducted through 2020 and 2021. Over the course of 10 risk workshops, CDA and InterAction sought to understand the underlying causes and effects of an organization's approach to risk management. The workshops brought together 179 participants from a variety of roles. Participation included staff in leadership, programs, and support functions such as finance, human resources, logistics, and security. The workshop also included staff working in headquarters, regional, and country-based positions.

During the workshops, participants:

- Explored how current risk management approaches, policies, and practices either enable, or act as a barrier to, the delivery of timely, high-quality, humanitarian programs.
- Agreed on the approaches, or practices, that pose the greatest barriers to response timeliness and humanitarian outcomes.

- o Discussed the causes underlying these barriers and their effect on the organization's programs, staff, and the communities it serves.
- o Suggested good practice, or possible solutions, to overcome barriers and intentionally design and evolve risk management approaches to support program delivery and quality.

Workshop data was analyzed to determine key enablers, barriers, causes, and effects of the most significant factors affecting 'strong risk management'—the capability and capacity of NGO teams to manage risk in a way that allows them to deliver better aid when, where, and to whom it is needed most. Data was compared across organizations, roles, and staff levels, tracking how often barriers emerged as common across different groups. From this, InterAction and CDA uncovered common

and recurring connections, and the corresponding causes and effects across barriers working against a strong risk management approach centered around affected people. Those common connections revealed the 8 Hidden Risk Management Traps in Humanitarian Action.

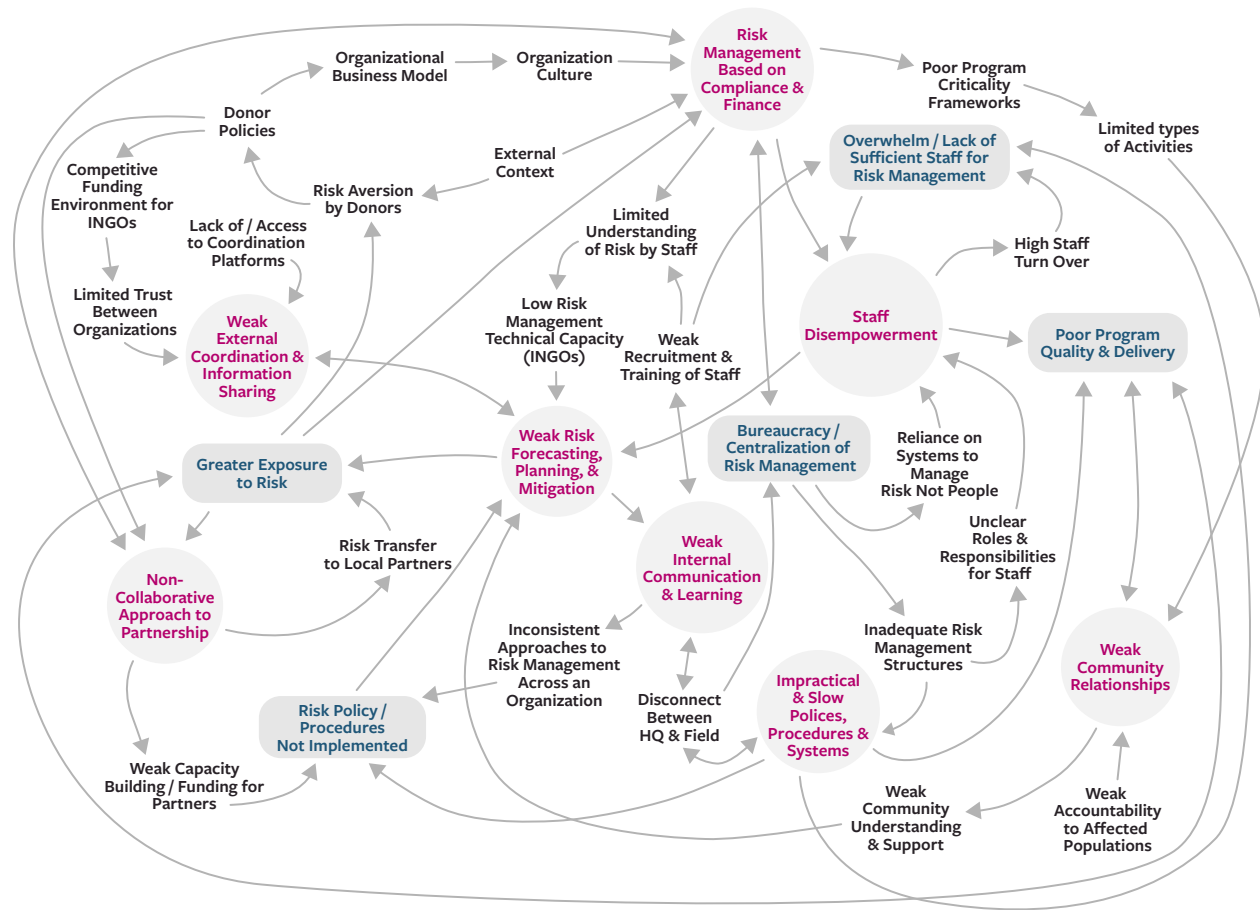
**Section 4 presents the overall systems map and maps of the eight traps. The following sections then pair the maps with the Risk III evidence base about possible solutions or ways to break the traps. ↗**





# SECTION 4: MAPPING RISK MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS REVEALS THE TRAPS

The following map—Hidden Risk Management Traps in Humanitarian Action—visualizes the evidence and findings from 10 risk workshops conducted in 2021 with nearly 200 NGO staff. The map shows the causal relationships between and among risk management barriers, causes, and effects, and how these can work together to create reinforcing loops that are difficult to break. Understanding how barriers, their causes, and their effects interact can provide insights on where to focus efforts to achieve the most effective and dramatic changes to risk management approaches.



A Guide to Reading the Risk Management Systems Map and Traps	
<b>ARROWS</b>	Show cause and effect and how different aspects of risk management impact others
<b>BLACK WORDS</b>	Risk management barriers, causes, and effects
<b>MAGENTA WORDS</b>	Critical barriers to address if working to break the traps
<b>BLUE WORDS</b>	Outcomes or consequences of the trap
<b>LOOPS</b>	Reinforcing loops within the traps

*Understanding how barriers, their causes, and their effects interact can provide insights on where to focus efforts to achieve the most effective and dramatic improvements in an organization's risk management approach.*

## 8 Hidden Risk Management Traps in Humanitarian Action

Close analysis of the risk management systems map revealed eight traps or small cycles within the larger map. The map visualizes how each trap, on its own and jointly with others, perpetuates risk management approaches that influence NGOs' ability to respond to humanitarian needs. The mutually reinforcing traps leave NGOs and teams "stuck" in recurring cycles. Ineffective risk management—that does little to recognize humanitarian needs—brings more of the same. The result is affected people do not receive the assistance they need, when and where they need it. The findings revealed countless cases where this was true and where risk management policy and practice had directly curtailed programs.

The 8 traps include:

1. Focus on Systems, Not People
2. Staff Disempowerment
3. Weak Risk Forecasting & Readiness
4. Institutional Learning Gaps
5. Transactional Partnerships
6. Compromised Community Engagement
7. Coordination Dilemmas
8. Prioritizing Compliance over Delivery

The traps were developed based on insights shared by local and international NGOs. However, given

the interconnected nature of the humanitarian ecosystem, these traps will likely also feel familiar to other humanitarian entities, including governmental donors and U.N. agencies.

### Interpreting the Risk Management Traps

To better understand and focus on a single problem area, each trap is visualized on its own. Each trap illustrates how risk management approaches and practice, along with the wider set of factors in an organization's system, impact the other. Factors are parts of the organizational system and include tangible features—such as policies, procedures, staff, and funding—and intangible features—such as attitudes, behaviors, experiences, and perceptions.

Examining these factors together reveals a series of negative, reinforcing loops, otherwise known as traps. Some details may look slightly different than how they appear in the broader map. This is because certain relationships (represented by arrows) have been highlighted, while others have been blocked out for the sake of readability. The actual relationships (e.g., the connections between and directions of the arrows) between the different factors have not been changed from the original systems map.

The visualizations include several common elements:

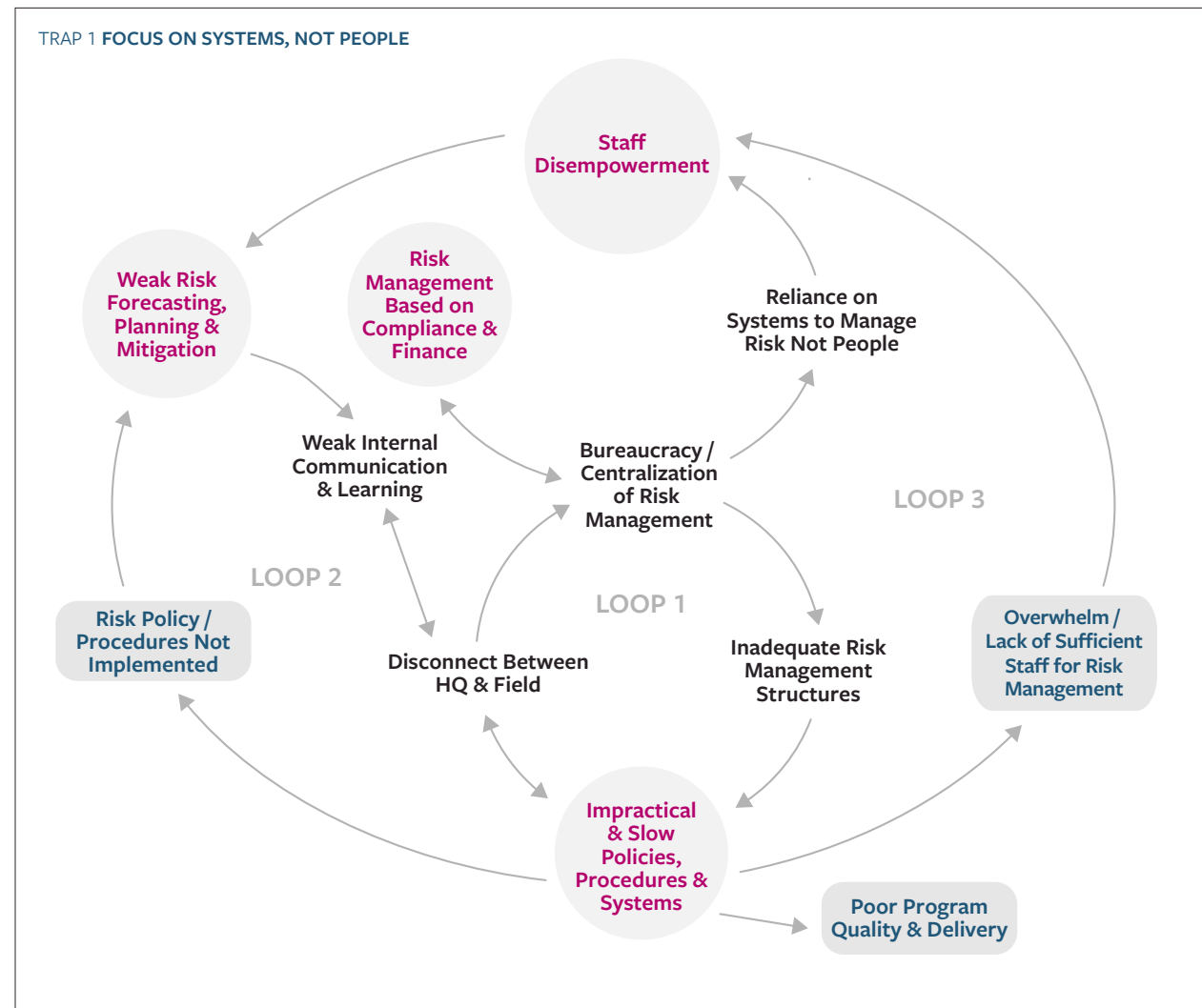
- Words in **magenta** are the factors in the system which were identified as key barriers to a strong risk management approach that supports program delivery and quality, which, if addressed could lead to significant positive change across the full risk management system.
- Words in **blue** are the effects, or end results, of the risk management traps. These effects are best addressed by focusing on the key barriers identified in **magenta**. The effects can also reinforce a trap. For example, in the 'Focus on Systems, not People' trap, the effect that risk policies and procedures are not implemented can weaken risk forecasting, planning, and mitigation.
- Words in **black** are other risk management approaches and factors within the system that play a role in the risk management traps.
- The arrows link causes and effects, showing how one risk management approach or factor in the system leads to another.
- The loop number indicates reinforcing loops, or mini traps, within the image depicting all the traps together.

## Trap 1: Focus on Systems, Not People

Because of the high stakes of risk management, there is a tendency for organizations to centralize risk management and build bureaucratic systems to try to control risk. Often, due to a breakdown in communication between headquarters and the field, organizations miss opportunities to inform their risk management systems with important contextual information. This can lead to structures and policies that are burdensome and ill-adapted to the realities of the field. Moreover, without strong internal learning on risk management between headquarters and response teams, many problems go uncorrected, leaving the centralized, bureaucratic approach to risk management in place.

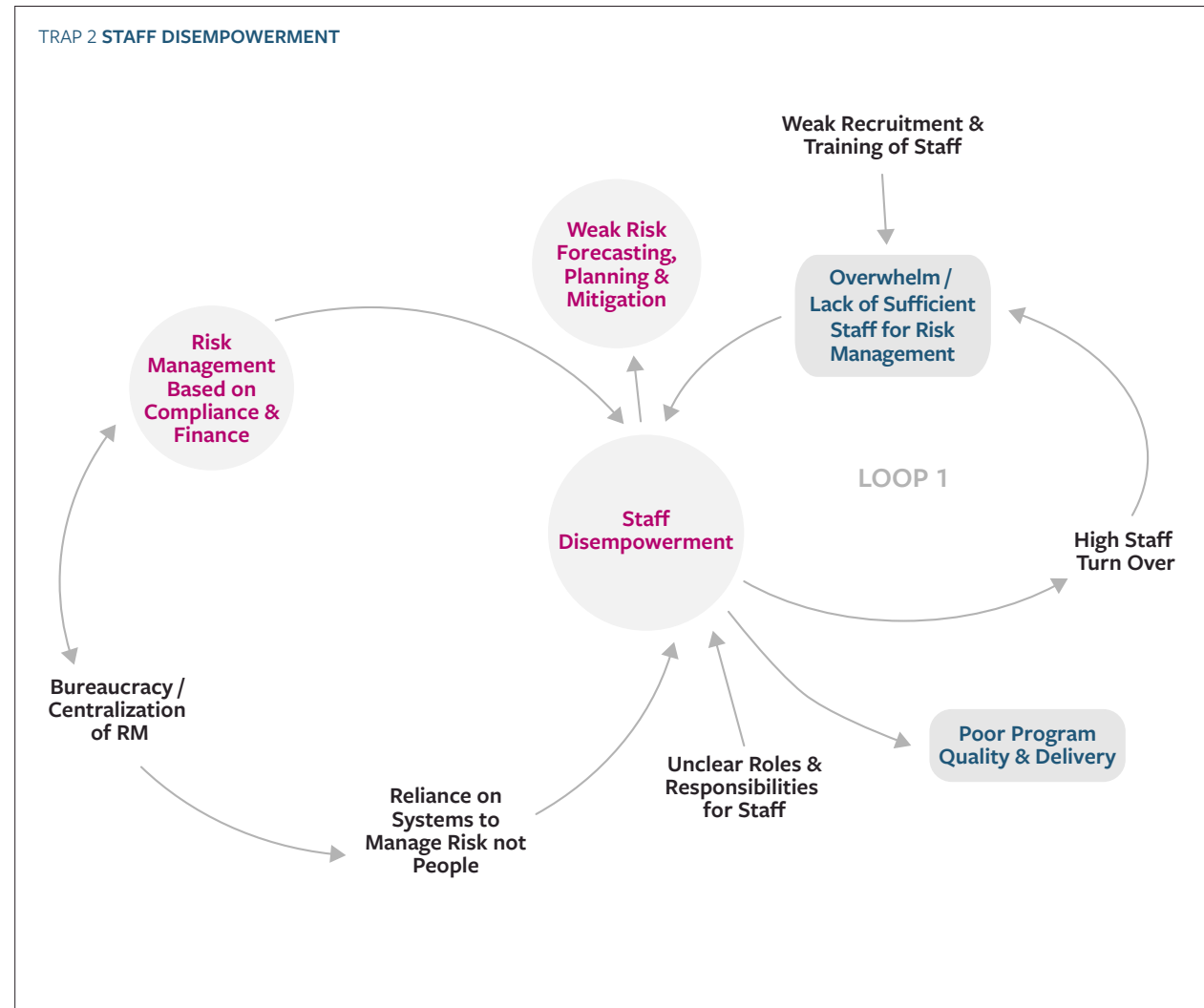
With this centralized approach, organizations often place more emphasis on creating and implementing their risk management systems and technologies (e.g., reporting software) than on equipping or empowering the people best placed to manage risks. Staff can feel disempowered when their value is mainly in checking boxes and feeding information up the chain. As per [Trap 2](#), disempowered staff do not proactively manage risk as well as they could.

Without a healthy culture to reflect on and change practice, existing bureaucratic structures can perpetuate top-down compliance (instead of bottom-up problem-solving) approaches and impractical policies, which can delay programs, overwhelm staff, and disempower staff and partners, reinforcing poor risk management.



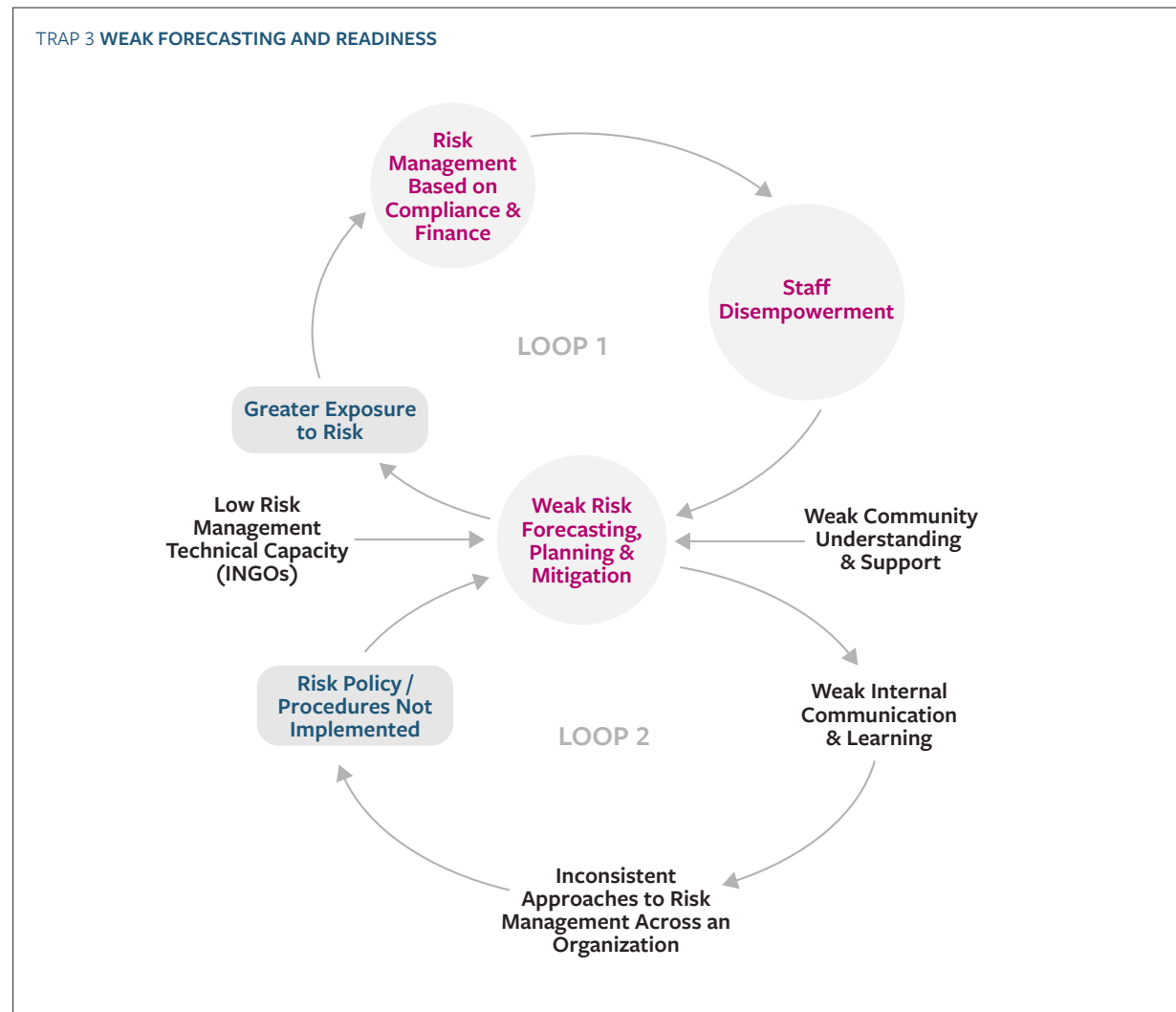
## Trap 2: Staff Disempowerment

Bureaucratic, centralized risk management systems can disempower staff (particularly field staff), limiting their ability to resolve related issues quickly and effectively. These systems often consider risk through compliance, legal, and fiduciary lenses as opposed to a human-centered perspective, which can lead to staff frustration. In turn, weak recruitment practices, unclear roles and responsibilities, and poor performance management can lead to staff feeling overwhelmed and disempowered. The result is often poorer program quality, burnout, high turnover, and more pressure on remaining staff, reinforcing the trap. Ultimately, it is staff—individual human beings in different roles in an organization—who make the decisions that impact both the risk landscape affecting an organization and the ways risk is managed. When staff are disempowered, they are less likely to make decisions or take actions that are necessary to help the organization forecast, plan, and mitigate risks. In the end, the organization is neither aware of, nor prepared for, the risks it must contend with.



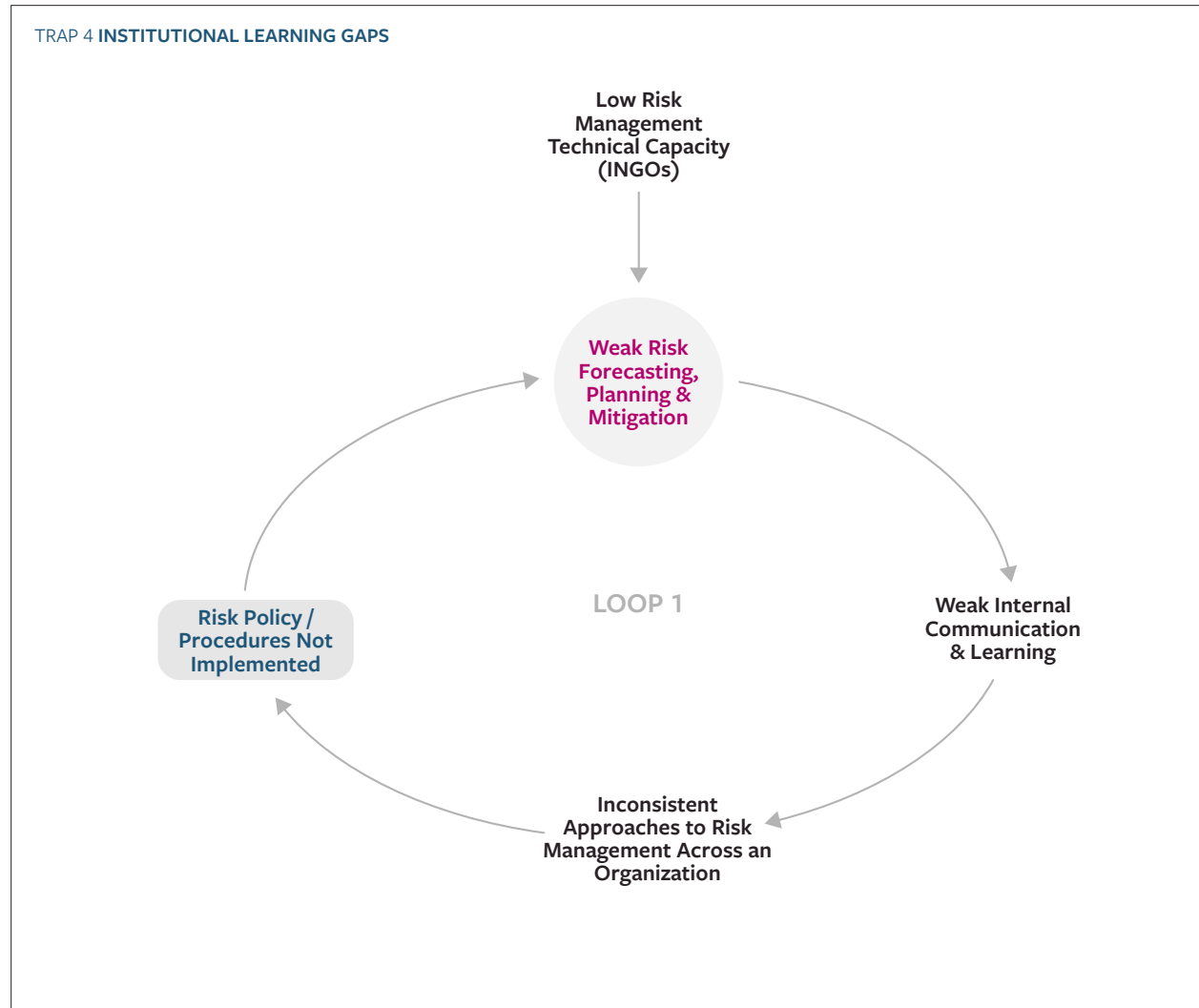
### Trap 3: Weak Forecasting and Readiness

An organization's ability to carry out strong risk forecasting, planning, and mitigation can be undermined by the lack of sufficient technical capacity, strong community support, empowered staff, and/or strong adherence to risk policies and procedures. This can increase risk exposure, which many organizations react to by taking a more top-down, compliance-focused approach to risk management. Compliance-focused approaches to risk tend to be disempowering to staff who are dealing directly with risk at different levels of the organization, which further undermines the organization's ability to manage risk proactively. Weakened risk forecasting and implementation also means that organizations often struggle to capture and document learning effectively, which leads to weak institutional learning on risk management (discussed in [Trap 4](#)).



## Trap 4: Institutional Learning Gaps

Many organizations lack technical capacities for adequate risk forecasting, planning, and mitigation practices. Organizational resources become consumed with firefighting—constantly reacting to the latest risk rather than proactively communicating and preparing for what is to come. Without strong mechanisms to capture, document, and reflect on institutional lessons about risk management, approaches to risk management are often undertaken in an ad hoc (instead of evidence-based) way. This can create inconsistency in risk management approaches across the organization, with some staff not even aware of or following risk management policies. This further undermines risk forecasting, planning, and mitigation capacity, reinforcing a cycle based on reactivity instead of reflection.

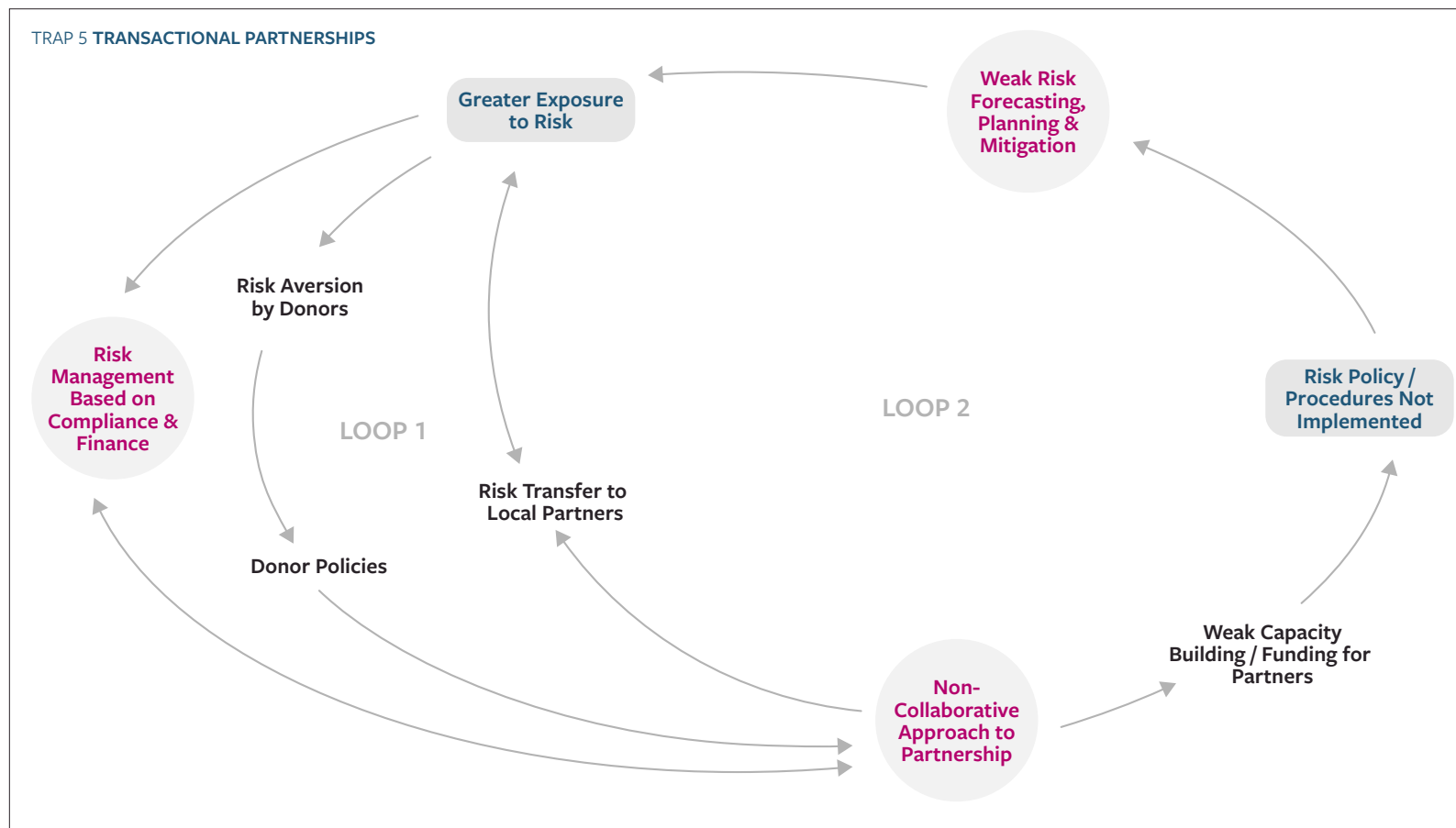


## Trap 5: Transactional Partnerships

Partnerships, including those between INGOs and local and national NGOs, can often take on transactional characteristics, with one partner being treated as a sub-contractor rather than a collaborator.<sup>5</sup> Partnerships emerge this way sometimes due to donor requirements and other times from program objectives that prioritize fast interventions without giving adequate attention to the role the partner

plays in the speed of delivery. Without necessary investment in local partners to strengthen their own risk management policies and practices, and with the common practice of risk transfer, local actors often become exposed to greater risk. This greater exposure to risk can often be perceived as a failure of the local partner, as opposed to a failure of the partnership to provide adequate support, which can make donors and INGOs more skeptical

about organizations' ability to manage risk. This can reinforce a top down, compliance-oriented form of partnership that adds burden to partners without providing the support they need to better manage risk.



<sup>5</sup> The RISK III evidence-base focused on the partnership dimensions between international and local/national NGOs, but similar dynamics can be present in any partnership that adopts sub-contracting characteristics that reflect inherent power dynamics and tensions.

## Trap 6: Compromised Community Engagement

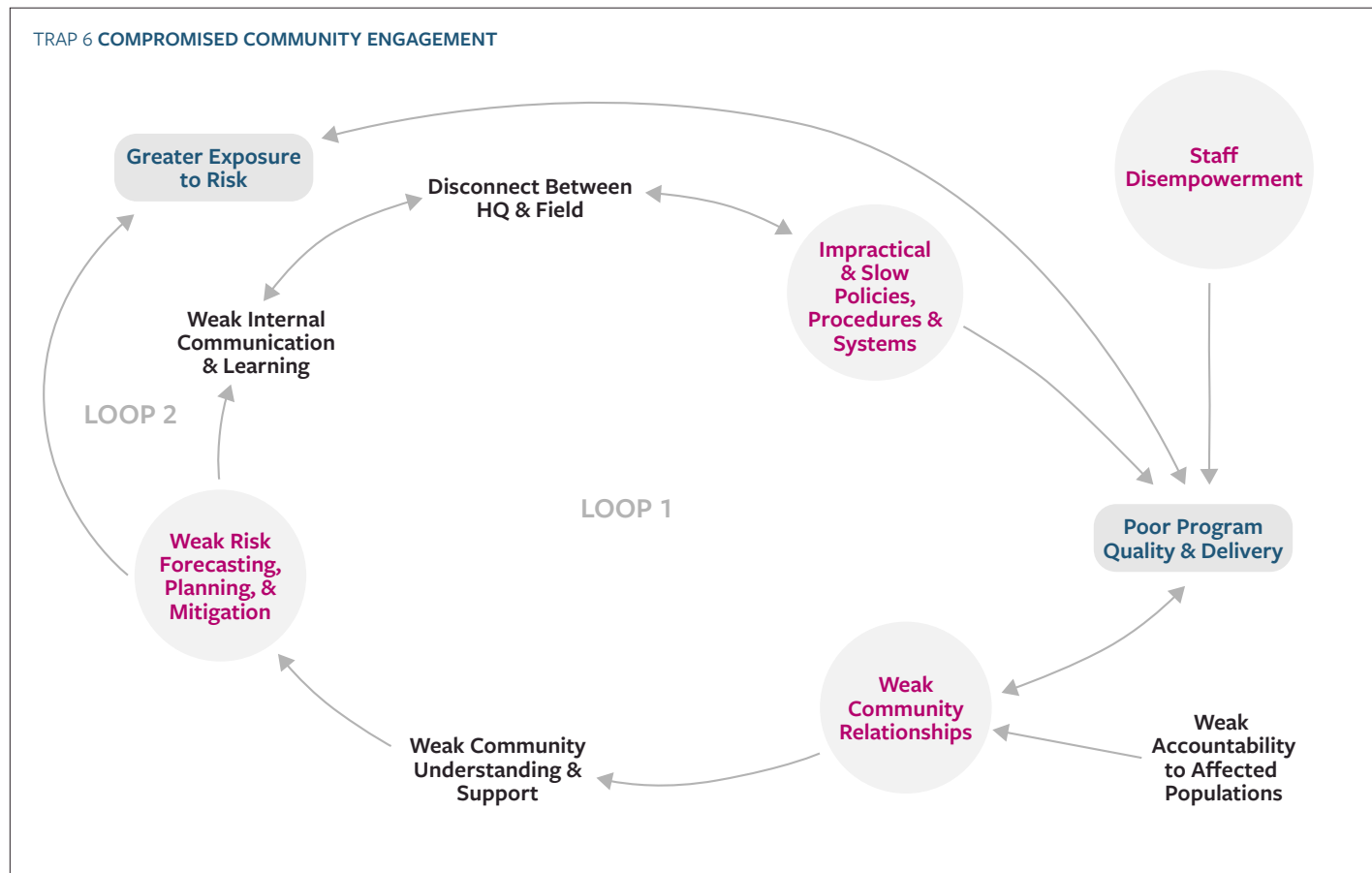
Delayed or poorly implemented humanitarian efforts can weaken relationships between organizations and affected communities. Communities may feel disappointed or even betrayed if implementing organizations cannot deliver on what was promised. This situation can deteriorate if the organization lacks effective engagement mechanisms that

allow people to submit feedback and complaints, and can also help the organization explain program delays or changes. Once trust is broken between communities and organizations, communities may withhold information critical to risk forecasting.

When teams lose access to important contextual information, they are less risk aware and less risk prepared. This increases uncertainty. Mitigation can also become less effective as community support

and acceptance help reduce vulnerability to and the impact of potential threats. When communities lose trust in organizations, they often withdraw support, resulting in greater risk exposure. In turn, program delays and quality issues escalate, which further undermines relationships and trust with the local community. Weak risk management and learning at the field level can reinforce a top-down, headquarters-driven approach to risk, which can be

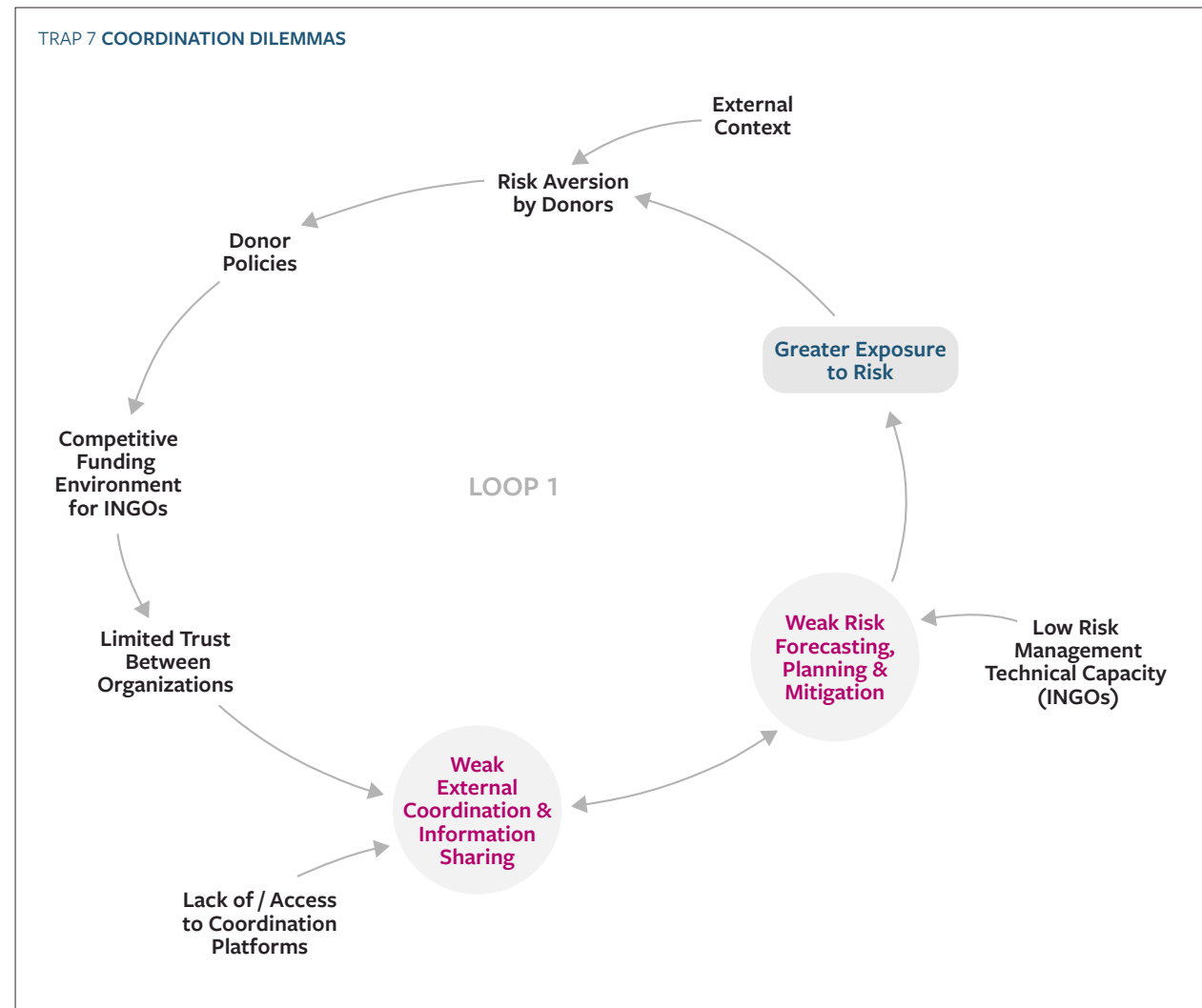
impractical and lead to program delivery that is delayed or not meeting community needs. This dynamic often drives further frustration.





## Trap 7: Coordination Dilemmas

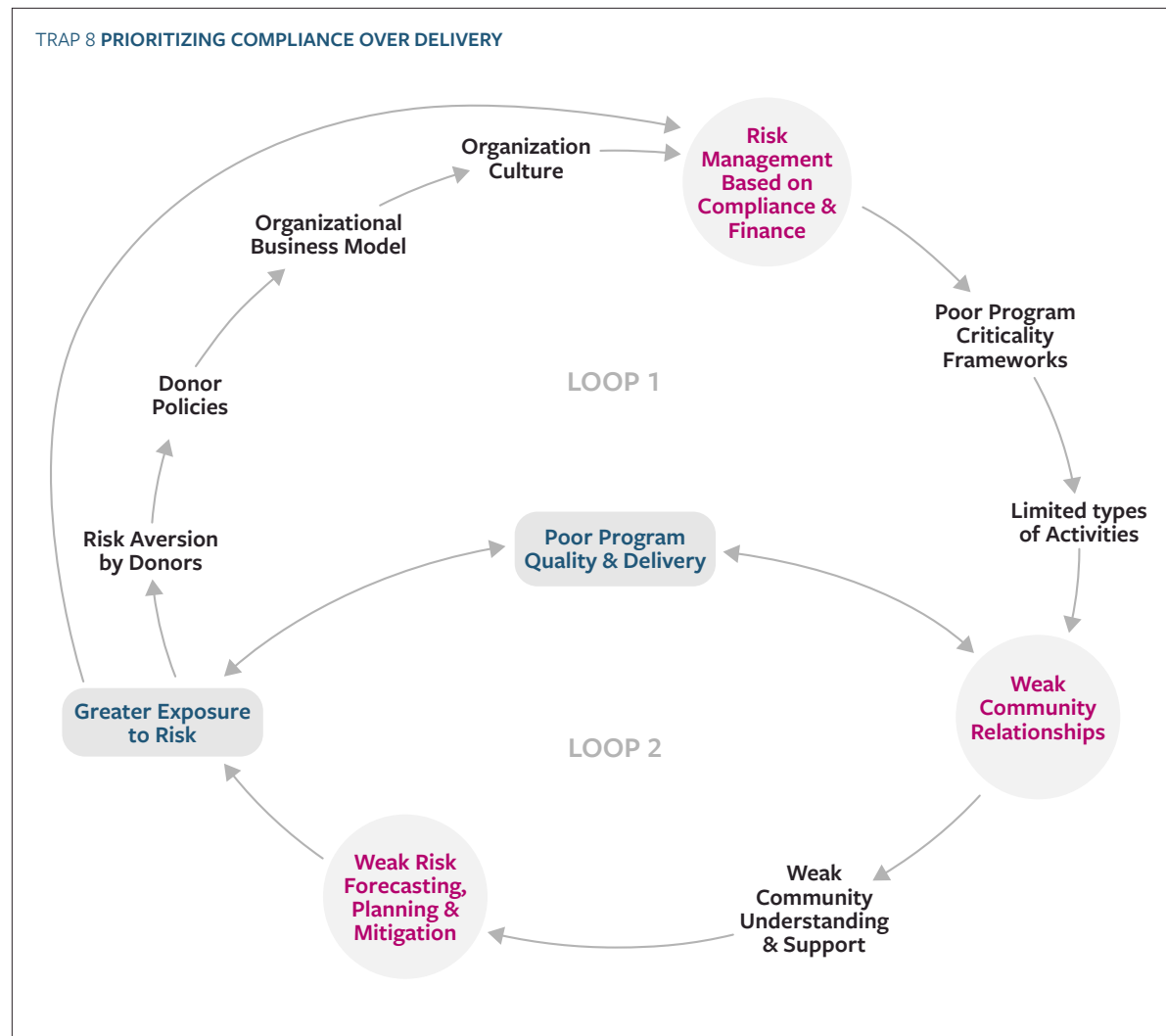
Humanitarian donors often create competitive funding systems, which can position organizations as rivals. This dynamic undermines trust among responding agencies and can significantly weaken incentives for organizations to share information related to risk in coordination settings. Strong information sharing can also be undermined by a lack of access to coordination platforms, particularly for smaller or more local organizations. Without strong information sharing and coordination, collective and individual efforts at risk management may be ineffective, particularly for organizations that lack technical capacity in risk management. This increases risk exposure for all actors, leading to more negative incidents and reinforcing donors' risk aversion, which helped create the high-pressure, competitive environment to begin with.



## Trap 8: Prioritizing Compliance Over Delivery

Donor policies can emphasize risk aversion, leading them to favor organizations with low-risk profiles and fewer ‘incidents’ in recent history. Because many organizations’ survival depends on being selected by donors for projects, organizational leadership may institutionalize risk averse ways of working that prioritize compliance (particularly in terms of legal and fiduciary risks) over everything else. The compliance focus often means that organizations will limit the kinds of activities they do to ones that they can carry out with minimal risk. This may affect coverage of needs on the ground and lead to a weakening in community relationships and trust.

Affected communities play an important role in risk management by providing information and support. When that support is withdrawn, risk management becomes more challenging and an organization may be exposed to greater risk. That uncertainty can negatively affect program timing and quality, again undermining community relationships and increasing risk exposure. Some organizations react to greater exposure to risk by further entrenching rigid, compliance-focused risk management approaches. Similarly, when donors hear that risks are greater, they react by emphasizing compliance-focused policies. Both reactions reinforce the rigid compliance-driven model that undermines the very risk management approaches that are most effective.



# SECTION 5: LEARNING MODULES

This section includes eight learning exercises designed to guide your organization through a workshop or other process of assessing its risk management approaches and identifying the strategic changes necessary for risk management to support high-quality and timely humanitarian action. Suggestions are also provided on how exercises can

be used as standalone activities, or alongside other exercises, as part of smaller, focused sessions. It is important to identify the purpose and audience when using the exercises. (Refer to [Section 2](#) for options about how to select and sequence exercises for different groups and goals).

The first six exercises focus on assessment and analysis, while the final two exercises move from analysis to action planning. If using all exercises, by the end of the process, the organization should have a concrete risk management action plan to implement the strategic changes prioritized by the organization.

## Exercise 1 ↗

### Assessing Your Organization's Risk Management Approaches

Assess the organization's risk management approaches to identify how they are both supporting and hindering humanitarian program quality and delivery to crisis-affected populations.

## Exercise 2 ↗

### Risk Management Composite Cases

Help your organization to recognize if it could be stuck in one of the eight common risk management traps and the impact this has on the organization's ability to manage risk effectively and deliver high quality and timely humanitarian programs.

## Exercise 3 ↗

### Exploring the Risk Management Traps

Explore the internal and external causes of your organization's risk management traps and the effect they have on the organization's programs, staff, partners, and affected communities, as well as the high-level changes that could help the organization break free.

## Exercise 4 ↗

### The Humanitarian Risk Management Systems Map

Introduce the Humanitarian Risk Management Systems map and demonstrate the positive ripple effect that breaking one risk management trap can have on the risk management system as whole.

## Exercise 5 ↗

### Risk Management Scorecard

Complete a self-assessment scorecard to understand your organization's specific risk management strengths, weaknesses, and gaps and identify the strategic changes needed to help your organization adopt an approach to risk management that enables humanitarian program delivery.

## Exercise 6 ↗

### From Analysis to Action

Translate the findings from the risk management traps and self-assessment scorecard exercises into a detailed risk management action plan to achieve the strategic changes that are the greatest priority for your organization. This includes agreeing on the immediate next steps to take these actions forward, including roles and responsibilities and mechanisms for implementation and follow-up.

## Exercise 7 ↗

### Final Reflections and Close

Provides an opportunity to a) reflect on learning and insights gained during the assessment and planning exercises; b) initiate the plan for using the results of exercises; and then c) close the process.

**Note:** All timings and instructions on how to deliver the exercises are provided only as guidance. They can be adapted and modified to suit organizational needs, objectives, and participants.

# 1 EXERCISE 1: ASSESSING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S RISK MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

This grounding exercise is the first step in exploring the unique and individual issues affecting your organization's approach to risk management in the context of how it helps, or hinders, program delivery.

## Goals and Learning Objectives for Exercise 1

This exercise will support your organization to identify how its risk management approaches are both supporting and hindering humanitarian program quality and delivery to crisis-affected populations. Upon completing the exercise, participants will:

- o Understand the importance of risk management approaches being designed to facilitate and support quality program delivery to affected communities.
- o Recognize how risk management approaches may work as a barrier or hindrance to high-quality and timely delivery of humanitarian programs.
- o Identify which risk management approaches may be curtailing program delivery to affected communities, why, and how.

## Different Ways to Use Exercise 1

- o As the first step in an organizational risk management self-assessment and planning workshop or process with, for example, the aim

of designing or revising the organization's risk management strategy.

- o As part of a program planning process to identify how the organization's current approaches to risk management could impact the proposed program. This might help teams plan programs so that they do not come into direct conflict with the organization's risk management policies, which could result in delays or blockages.
- o As a stand-alone exercise in meetings or workshops, with leadership or board members, to raise awareness and recognition that the organization's risk management approaches could negatively impact program quality and delivery. This can be a catalyst to start a wider process of revising risk management approaches, so they work in support of program quality and delivery.
- o As part of program or partnership evaluations or real-time reviews to understand how risk management policy and practice can support or curtail program delivery for the organization and/or its local partners.

## Key Questions for Participants Completing Exercise 1

- o How do the ways your organization manages risk either help you, or hinder you, from delivering high-quality programs to affected communities?

- o What is causing the barriers, and what impact are they having on you, your programs, your partners, and the communities you serve?

### Suggested Timing: 60 minutes

**0.00 – 0.05 (5 mins):** Introduce the exercise

**0.05 – 0.45 (40 mins):** Group work

**0.45 – 01.00 (15 mins):** Plenary debrief

### Facilitator Instructions

1. In the plenary, explain that this exercise aims to identify how the organization's risk management approaches impact program delivery and quality. Groups will discuss the ways in which risk management approaches support and enable program delivery and how they hinder or act as a barrier. Groups will then discuss the underlying causes for these barriers and their effect on programs, staff, partners, and affected communities. Explain that these enablers and barriers can be:
  - o **Internal** to the organization, such as policies and staffing, or external to the organization, such as donor requirements or issues within the operational context; or

# 1

- o **Tangible issues**, such as organizational policies, structures, resources, security conditions, etc. and **intangible issues**, such as behaviors, attitudes, past experiences, and identities.
2. Break participants into **groups of 4-6 people**. Design groups to have enough diversity of experience for discussion yet be small enough that everyone has space to participate. Be aware of potential power dynamics in the group and think ahead about ways to help everyone feel safe and encouraged to share. For example, if you think people would feel uncomfortable talking in front of a manager or leader, keep that in mind when setting up groups. Explain that group discussions are confidential, and participants should not use names, give identifying details of any incidents they discuss, or share details of what was discussed outside of this process.
  3. Appoint a note-taker for each group and explain they will have **40 minutes** in their breakout rooms to complete **Table 1 and Table 2 in the Exercise 1 Worksheet** ↗. Suggested timings and instructions to complete Table 1 and Table 2:
    - a. **(10 mins)** Complete the box on the **left-hand side of Table 1** by discussing how risk management approaches and practices are **enabling or supporting** humanitarian program delivery. It is important groups start with the positive aspects of risk management, as the positives are typically harder to identify than the barriers
    - a. **(10 mins)** Groups should move to the **right-hand box of Table 1** and discuss how risk management approaches and practices are **hindering or acting as a barrier** to humanitarian program delivery
    - a. **(5 mins)** Groups should **prioritize** the 3-4 risk management approaches or practices that present the greatest barrier to the organization's ability to deliver high quality, timely, humanitarian programs
    - a. **(15 mins)** Groups should copy the three prioritized risk management barriers into the **middle column of Table 2**, with one cell for each barrier. Groups then discuss the reasons or **underlying causes** for this barrier (i.e., why does this issue exist?) and the **effects** this barrier has on the organization's programs, its staff, partners, and the communities it serves. It is ok if the same issues are raised as barriers, causes or effects as these are often very interconnected
  4. Bring the groups back together for a **15-minute plenary discussion**. Ask each group to take 2-3 minutes to share the risk management approaches or practices identified as key barriers. Then lead a plenary discussion using the questions below. Choose the questions that are most relevant based on the discussions and whether this exercise is happening in isolation, or alongside the other exercises in this learning module.
    - a. *Were there any areas of consensus across groups in terms of the main barriers identified?*
    - b. *If so, what does this mean for the organization? What are the risks for the organization if these barriers are not addressed?*
    - c. *Was there agreement on the underlying causes of these barriers?*
    - d. *What impact do the barriers have on how we plan and deliver programs? Do we need to plan mitigation measures for our own risk management approaches and practices in program plans?*
    - e. *What needs to happen next to start the process to address these barriers?*
    - f. *Were there any areas of consensus on the risk management approaches and practices that support program delivery? How can these be built upon?*

**JUMP TO EXERCISE 1 WORKSHEET** ↗

## EXERCISE 2: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES

The *Risk III – From Evidence to Action* research identified eight common, reinforcing cycles or Risk Management Traps. Each can compromise and limit an organization’s ability to effectively manage risk (see [Section 4](#)). This exercise illustrates these traps using eight **composite risk management cases**, which are one-page hypothetical scenarios compiled using real-life experiences captured throughout the program. Each case illustrates a different **risk management trap**, which are only named “Case A” and “Case B” at this stage to help participants focus on the experiences, dynamics, and patterns each case describes.

Exercise 2 uses storytelling to show how the risk management barriers, causes, and effects identified in Exercise 1 may be connected and affecting one another to create a risk management trap.

### Goals and Learning Objectives for Exercise 2

Using hypothetical cases, this exercise will help your organization recognize if it could be stuck in one of the eight common risk management traps. It will also help examine how a trap may impact the organization’s ability to deliver high-quality, timely humanitarian programs in high risk-settings. Upon completing the exercise, participants will:

- o Recognize the risk management traps and how NGOs may be “stuck” in one or more trap.

- o Realize how risk management traps may limit or compromise the ability to manage risk effectively, and in many cases, create more risk that goes unseen and unaddressed.
- o Understand these traps create a vicious cycle where ineffective approaches to manage risk negatively impact program delivery and quality, which then exposes the organization to increased risk. The organization responds by introducing more ineffective approaches to manage risk and the cycle continues.
- o See that the negative effects of being stuck in a risk management trap are far-reaching and impact the quality of the organization’s programs, its staff, local partners, and the communities being served. More broadly, risk management traps can lead to an organization failing to meet humanitarian needs and its core mandate.
- o Recognize that risk management is a human undertaking. While these traps focus on institutional issues, each case illustrates the human element of what it means to be stuck in and trying to break free of a trap.

### Different Ways to Use Exercise 2

- o As the second step (following Exercise 1) in an organizational risk management self-assessment and planning workshop or process with, for example, the aim of designing or revising

the organization’s risk management strategy or approaches.

- o As a stand-alone tool for strategic discussions across the organization. For example, senior or board leadership might use the cases to think through how current risk management approaches affect program delivery, staff, partners, and communities. The cases may be particularly helpful when starting new organizational change efforts. In this instance, you can select the cases which most strongly represent the traps affecting your organization. In upcoming sections, see advice on how to use the composite risk cases as stand-alone exercises.
- o Test new risk management systems, processes, procedures, and policies by reading through the cases and assessing if new risk management approaches have the potential to contribute to a risk management trap. See text box at the end of this section for additional questions you can pose if the cases are being used in this way.
- o During program or annual planning processes, teams can review the most relevant cases and discuss if their program or annual plans could be affected by any of the risk management traps, and if so, how they plan for and mitigate against this in the future. See text box at the end of this section for additional questions you can pose if the cases are being used in this way.

## Key Questions for Participants Completing Exercise 2

- o Do you recognize your organization in any of these cases? If so, how is this situation affecting your organization's ability to respond to humanitarian needs and meet its mandate? What is the impact on affected communities?

### Suggested Timing: 90-120 minutes

Timings may need to be modified depending on the number of cases each group needs to review. The timings below are based on four groups each reviewing two cases.

**0.00 – 0.05 (5 mins):** Introduce the exercise and the origin of the cases

**0.05 – 1.05 (60 mins):** Group work to review cases

**1.05 – 1.35 (30 mins):** Rotate cases between groups

**1.35 – 1.45 (10 mins):** Plenary debrief and calculating the case ratings

**1.45 – 2.00 (15 mins):** Presenting the risk management traps

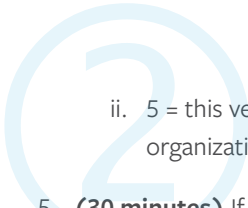
### Facilitator Instructions

1. In the plenary, explain that groups will now be given composite risk management cases to review, discuss, and rate depending on to what degree they reflect their organization. Explain that the cases are based on the real-life

experiences and observations of aid practitioners from around the world. Encourage groups not to focus too much on the details of each case, but instead, whether the general dynamics and patterns in that case feel similar to what they have experienced or observed in their organization.

2. Break participants into groups, but do not have more than eight groups, and assign a notetaker.
3. Distribute the eight composite cases evenly between the groups until none are left.
4. Groups have 40 minutes in their breakout rooms to read each case allocated to them and complete the [Exercise 2 Worksheet](#). More time may need to be allocated if groups have more than two cases each to review, or you want to rotate cases around groups. Suggested timings and instructions to complete the Exercise 2 Worksheet are below. Shorter times are to review one case, a longer time is to review two cases:
  - a. **(5 - 10 mins)** Read the case
  - b. **(10 - 20 mins)** Groups reflect and discuss the case using the discussion questions below, which are also included on the [Exercise 2 Worksheet](#):
    - i. *What is the impact of this situation on humanitarian interventions and the organization's ability to respond?*

- ii. *What is the impact of this situation on affected communities? On local partners? On the organization's own staff?*
  - iii. *What does this situation say about the efficacy of the organization's risk management approaches?*
  - iv. *More broadly, how does this situation affect the organization's relevance and ability to meet its humanitarian mandate?*
- c. **(10 - 20 mins)** Groups reflect on how closely the case reflects their experiences and observations of their organization, using the following guiding questions:
    - i. *What about the case feels like it could or couldn't happen in the organization?*
    - ii. *Does this case remind them of something they experienced, saw, or heard in their time with the organization?*
    - iii. *Does this case reflect any of the barriers, causes, or effects they identified in Exercise 1 (if completed)?*
  - d. **(5 - 10 mins)** Based on the discussions above, groups should rate how relevant each composite risk case is for their organization using the scale below. Be clear that groups are not ranking the cases in order of most to least relevant, but should rate each case independently of the others:
    - i. 1 = this does not reflect our organization's experience at all



ii. 5 = this very strongly reflects our organization's experience

5. **(30 minutes)** If time allows, groups can exchange cases and repeat the exercise, with less time allocated for discussion this round. This will help triangulate the ratings and see if groups had similar ratings
  
6. Bring the groups back to plenary and ask them to share the rating they gave for each case, with a brief explanation of why they rated it this way. Record the ratings in the table to the right – it can help to have a co-facilitator do this while you are presenting. Calculate the average rating for each case and note those that received a score of 4 or 5. These are the cases that groups felt most reflected the organization's experiences and indicate which risk management traps the organization may be affected by.
  
7. **(15 mins)** Use the [Risk Management Traps Overview in Section 4 as a handout](#) to reveal to participants which cases illustrate which traps. Explain the eight hidden risk management traps. Describe how organizations are “trapped” in recurring cycles and problems and how these undermine the effectiveness of their risk management approaches and negatively impact program quality and delivery, staff, partners, and affected communities. If time allows, lead a brief plenary discussion using the following questions.
  - a. Do you agree this trap(s) are the ones most affecting your organization?

- b. What does it mean for an organization when it is “stuck” in a trap? What does this mean for the organization’s ability to meet humanitarian needs?
  
- c. How critical is it that the organization attempts to break this trap? What will happen if it does not?

Use the key on [Page 33](#) to identify which risk management trap corresponds to each composite case. Do not share this with participants.

Composite Risk Cases	Case	1 <sup>st</sup> Rating	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rating <i>(if more than one group read the case)</i>	Average Rating <i>(if more than one group read the case)</i>
Cyclones, Cholera, and Corruption	Case A			
Preventing Trafficking in a Refugee Response	Case B			
Food Distribution in an Evolving Conflict	Case C			
Struggling with the Past During Disaster Risk Reduction	Case D			
Local Partnerships and Remote Management	Case E			
Epidemics, Conflict, and Community Trust	Case F			
Coordination in Forgotten Crisis	Case G			
When Regulations and Cash Transfers Clash	Case H			





## Using Composite Risk Cases as Stand-Alone Tools

The composite cases can be used in a standalone exercise or tool. The scenarios can be applied in team meetings, board meetings, or other settings to help jumpstart discussion, planning, and preparation on possible future events. Use the scenarios in any of the following formats and consider the accompanying questions:

### In a leadership or board meeting:

- o What challenges is this situation causing for the organization?
- o What is the impact on the organization's strategic priorities?
- o What impact could this have on the organization's reputation? With donors? With the public? With partners?
- o What are the financial implications of this situation?
- o If a situation like this is not addressed, what are the implications for the organization in the immediate, medium, and long term?
- o What is the role of leadership in addressing this type of situation?

### To "pressure test" new risk management systems, processes, procedures, and policies:

- o If we introduced the new risk management approach we are planning into this situation, what would the impact be?

## Facilitator Key: Risk Management Composite Cases + Corresponding Risk Traps

Case	Title	Related Management Trap
A	Cyclones, Cholera, and Corruption	Trap 1: Focus on Systems, Not People
B	Preventing Trafficking in a Refugee Response	Trap 2: Staff Disempowerment
C	Food Distribution in an Evolving Conflict	Trap 3: Weak Risk Forecasting and Readiness
D	Struggling with the Past During Disaster Risk Reduction	Trap 4: Institutional Learning Gaps
E	Local Partnerships and Remote Management	Trap 5: Transactional Partnerships
F	Epidemics, Conflict, and Community Trust	Trap 6: Compromised Community Engagement
G	Coordination in Forgotten Crisis	Trap 7: Coordination Dilemmas
H	When Regulations and Cash Transfers Clash	Trap 8: Prioritizing Compliance Over Delivery

- o Would it help address the challenges here? Or contribute to them?
- o What could be the potential unintended consequences of the new risk management approaches? On program delivery? On staff, at all levels, and in different roles? On affected communities? On our local partners?
- o Is there anything we can do to prevent this from happening?
- o Does the risk of this happening have implications for our activities, staffing, budget?
- o Who do we need to involve in discussions to plan prevention and mitigation measures for the issues in this case?

### To support program or annual planning processes:

- o What in the case could happen to us during this program or year?

**JUMP TO EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET ↗**

# EXERCISE 3: EXPLORING THE RISK MANAGEMENT TRAPS

This exercise directly follows Exercise 2, which identified the risk management traps that are most relevant to the organization. In this exercise, groups will explore why their organization has become stuck in one or more of the risk management traps, the impacts this has created, and the high-level changes needed to break free. The traps are broadly felt, but each organization will have unique pressures that led them into the trap and unique pathways to break free. This exercise assesses what your organization has in common with the general findings about how the traps function and what is unique or specific to your organization. This lays the groundwork for upcoming exercises that will help organizations examine options and priorities to address the traps.

## Goals and Learning Objectives for Exercise 3

This exercise will guide your organization to understand what is causing it to be stuck in one or more risk management traps and the effect they may be having on the organization's programs, staff, partners, and affected communities, and the changes needed to break free. Upon completing the exercise, participants will:

- o Understand that the causes and effects of a risk management trap are different for every organization, which means the path to break free will also be unique to each organization

- o Recognize that understanding the underlying causes of a risk management trap is critical to planning effective strategies to address them.

## Different Ways to Use Exercise 3

As this exercise builds on discussions in Exercise 2, it should not be used as a stand-alone exercise. It can therefore be used.

- o As the third step in an organizational risk management self-assessment and planning workshop or process with, for example, the aim of designing or revising the organization's risk management strategy or approaches
- o Alongside Exercise 2 as a stand-alone discussion tool during leadership and board meetings
- o Alongside Exercise 2 as a means of pressure testing new risk management systems, processes, procedures, and policies.
- o Alongside Exercise 2, during program or annual planning processes.

## Key questions for participants completing Exercise 3

- o Why is our organization stuck in this risk management trap?
- o What is the effect of this trap on our programs, staff, partners, and affected communities?

- o What does our organization need to do to break free from these risk management traps?

## Suggested Timing: 1 hour 30 mins

Timing may need to be modified depending on the number of risk management traps rated as a 4 or 5 in the previous exercise:

**0.00 – 0.10 (10 mins):** Introduce the exercise and briefly review of the prioritized traps in the previous session.

**0.10 – 1.00 (50 mins):** Group work to discuss the causes and effects of each of the prioritized traps, and the high-level changes that are needed to break the traps. Allow around 10-15 minutes per trap, depending on the number of traps being discussed.

**1.00 – 0.20 (20 mins):** Each group to share back in plenary one trap they discussed, including its causes, effects, and the high-level changes they identified to address it.

**1.20 – 1.30 (10 mins):** Facilitate a plenary discussion about points of consensus and priority changes that emerged.

## Facilitator Instructions

- (10 mins)** In the plenary, introduce the exercise and explain that participants will now explore the causes and effects of the risk management traps identified in the previous exercise, and begin discussions the high-level changes that could help the organization to break out of the traps.
- (50 mins)** Break participants into small groups. Ask the notetaker to use the [Exercise 3 Worksheet](#). Write the risk management traps rated as a 4 or a 5 in the previous exercise in the second column (with one trap for each cell). Then for each trap, discuss:
  - What is causing the trap?** What are the underlying issues that may have led to the organization being stuck in this trap? Are they internal or external? Are they the same causes as the risk trap systems map or are the causes different within your organization?

- What are the effects of the trap?** How does this trap prevent your organization from effectively delivering programs and meeting humanitarian needs? How does it affect staff? Local partners? Affected communities?
- What has worked or could work in helping the organization break out of the trap?** It is important to encourage participants to be explorative and creative when thinking of actions, changes, or good practices. However, do be clear that these suggestions may not be acted upon right away (or at all). This exercise can draw on people's experiences of what has worked to overcome some of the challenges represented by each trap, their observations of what may have helped other organizations overcome the challenges, and their ideas about what could work in helping the organization overcome this trap

There may be some overlap with Exercise 1 and 2, which is ok – it is still important that groups assess how the risk management traps is manifest specifically within their organization.

- (20 mins)** Bring everyone back to the plenary and ask each group to report back on one trap they discussed, including the causes, effects, and potential changes that could help to break the trap.
- (10 mins)** Facilitate a brief discussion about any common points or priorities that emerged from the groups. Encourage people to draw connections to Exercise 1 to see how the individual barriers they identified connect and impact one another. This will help uncover how the organization became, and remains, in one or more risk management traps.

**JUMP TO EXERCISE 3 WORKSHEET** ➔

# EXERCISE 4: UNDERSTANDING RISK MANAGEMENT AS A SYSTEM

This exercise introduces a map of [risk management systems in humanitarian action](#). The map shows the interconnected web and reinforcing loops of the eight common risk management traps. Participants may feel overwhelmed by the scale of change and resources needed to break out of the traps.

But...let's take a closer look.

Examine the traps as a system—with all its interconnected and interrelated parts. Efforts made to break out of one trap (i.e., address one problem area) can have outsized returns, creating positive ripple effects that can support the resolution of other traps. Even small changes can generate enormous positive returns for the organization and its teams.

## Goals and Learning Objectives for Exercise 4

This exercise will help staff see that it is worthwhile to make changes at any scale or level to help improve the organization's approach to risk management and program delivery. After completing the exercise, participants will:

- o Understand how systems mapping can support organizations in focusing their efforts to achieve a more transformative change overall.

- o See that even small changes can have an enormous, positive ripple effect across an entire system.

## Different Ways to use Exercise 4

This exercise builds on previous discussions and is best used alongside previous exercises, but it can be used as a standalone exercise to present the humanitarian risk systems map. It can be used as follows:

- o As the fourth step (following Exercise 3) in an organizational risk management self-assessment and planning workshop or process with, for example, the aim of designing or revising the organization's risk management strategy or approaches.
- o Alongside Exercises 2 and 3 as a discussion tool during leadership and board meetings.
- o Alongside Exercises 2 and 3 as a means of pressure testing new risk management systems, processes, procedures, and policies.
- o Alongside Exercises 2 and 3 during program or annual planning processes.
- o As a standalone exercise during meetings and workshops to present the humanitarian risk management systems map, explain how it works and where it came from, discuss the individual traps within it, identify strategies to break the

traps and improve the system, and explore how individual changes can have a broader impact on the system overall.

## Key Questions for Participants Completing Exercise 4

- o *How can we support small changes that have a positive ripple effect on risk management approaches across the organization?*
- o *Where is most practical and accessible place to start?*

## Suggested Timing: 45 minutes

**0.00 – 0.20 (20 mins):** Present the risk systems map and walk through the impact one change can have on risk management traps across the entire system

**0.20 – 0.35 (15 mins):** In small groups or plenary, identify other changes and trace the impact they have on the risk management traps and system.

**0.35 – 0.45 (10 mins):** Group feedback and plenary discussion.

## Facilitator Instructions

1. **(20 mins)** Present the [Humanitarian Risk Systems Map](#). Explain that the map shows how the eight risk management traps connect and interact. By showing all the interconnected parts of the system and how they impact other parts, systems mapping can help organizations identify where to focus their efforts. Stress to participants that although the map may look overwhelming, breaking it down into individual traps helps us identify small changes that then can have an enormous positive ripple effect across the whole system.

Using one of the commonly suggested high-level changes from Exercise 3, explain the ripple effect that could flow from making that one change. For example, investing in community engagement can lead to better communication

and forecasting about possible threats or vulnerabilities, which can reduce risk exposure and potentially lessen donor risk aversion.

2. **(15 mins)** Break participants into groups and provide a handout of the humanitarian risk systems map. Ask them to select a change they identified during the last exercise and map out the positive changes or “ripple effects” this could have across the risk management systems map using markers. Then ask them to identify all the risk management traps that were positively affected by that one change. If groups have time, they can repeat this process with other changes to address different risk management traps affecting the organization. This exercise can also be conducted in the plenary by asking different participants to suggest a change, then talking through the potential ripple effects it could have.

3. **(10 mins)** Conclude the exercise by asking participants to reflect on the following questions:

- a. *How do you feel about risk management within the organization now? Does it feel like it can be improved, or does it still feel overwhelming?*
- b. *Were you surprised by the impact one small change could have?*
- c. *Will you do anything differently because of this exercise?*

## EXERCISE 5: RISK MANAGEMENT SCORECARD

Risk management is made up of a diverse set of people, processes, systems, attitudes, and behaviors. Across each of these areas, organizations will have areas of strength and others where they may fall short. Humanitarian organizations will also experience some degree of variability around their strengths and weaknesses. For example, an organization may have strong monitoring and evaluation teams in one country, but weaker teams in another. Perceptions or understanding of certain policies and processes may be positive among finance teams, but less so among program teams.

Assessing these factors and how they vary across operating environments, departments, and individuals is critical. The [Risk Management Scorecard](#) allows organizations to self-evaluate and identify areas of strength or weakness (i.e., Risk Management Traps) and focus on potential solutions (i.e., Strategic Changes).

### Goals and Learning Objectives for Exercise 5

The Scorecard is a comprehensive reflection exercise evaluating an organization's risk management practices, capabilities, and approach. It is a diagnostic tool that will help organizations and individual teams:

1. Assess the impact current risk management models have on staff, partners, affected communities, and overall program quality.
2. Identify which of the 8 Risk Management Traps are affecting an organization and how.
3. Prioritize areas for focus and continuous improvement across 5 Strategic Changes.
4. Develop a greater awareness of how risk management approaches are viewed and how they might affect teams and programs.

### Different Ways To Use Exercise 5

The scorecard is a dynamic excel tool. It covers 77 questions and respondents should be able to complete the survey in approximately 45 minutes. After completing the scorecard, users can immediately access their results in a summary dashboard, explore detailed scores, and identify areas that need immediate attention or action. The tool allows users to print summary and detailed reports, which can then be shared for internal use. It also includes functions to export data should organizations wish to conduct comparative analysis.

The scorecard does not have to be used as part of a workshop. It may be most useful as part of annual or strategic planning exercises. It can be applied in several ways, including:

- o As part of a dedicated workshop or learning event on risk management, with findings later



aggregated by organizers and presented to leadership for follow-on action.

- o During a recurring Enterprise Risk Management committee meeting or by individual team members at the country level (e.g., senior management team).
- o In specific organizational departments or functional meetings (e.g., annual country directors' meeting, global technical meetings, regional meetings, or routine department planning across finance, human resources, operations etc.).
- o Via email by headquarters, regional, or country offices to staff within their line management for completion and later analysis.

### Suggested Timing: 45-80 minutes

Timing may need to be modified depending on how this exercise is being used, the audience, and the number of overall participants. Some rough timing for in-person discussion or workshops is as follows:

**0.00 – 0.10 (10 mins):** Presentation of scorecard in plenary

**0.10 – 0.55 (45 mins):** Participants are disbursed to complete the scorecard independently, preferably in a quiet place.

**0.55 – 1.15 (20 mins):** Group feedback and plenary discussion.

### Key Questions For Participants

- o What insights did your score offer that are new or especially relevant to you and your work?
- o Based on the score, what areas should the organization focus on moving forward?

### Facilitator Instructions

1. Preparation: If using the scorecard exercise in a workshop or team meeting, the coordinator

provides a dedicated email where participants will send their completed scorecards. Later, participant scores can be aggregated. Broader analysis can be conducted and shared following the workshop or meeting and can inform future actions and focus areas.

2. (10 mins) Present the scorecard and its design. Explain that the scorecard is a survey to assess staff, team, and organizational capabilities relating to the eight risk management traps and five strategic changes. The questions are drawn directly from the Risk III evidence base and reflect the barriers and constraints and the enablers and opportunities that connect to strong risk management. Explain that data entered in the scorecard will be confidential and not attributed. However, it will be aggregated, analyzed, and compared across core organizational departments, roles, and geographic areas (i.e., country offices, finance, business development, humanitarian response, etc.) This will allow the organization to focus its energy and resources where they are needed most.
  3. (45 mins) Instruct participants to find a quiet place somewhere to complete the scorecard.
4. (20 mins) Reconvene participants in plenary. Conclude the exercise by asking participants to share their thoughts on the exercise around the following questions:
    - a. *What score did you receive and why do you think this was the case? Which strategic change areas received the highest and lowest scores?*
    - b. *How do you think your score might align or diverge from different colleagues, teams, or areas of responsibility across the organization?*
    - c. *How did this exercise change your thinking on some of the core priorities we should be pursuing as an organization or as individual staff and teams?*

Participants can complete the scorecard independently or in small groups of 2-3 people. Instruct participants to print their summary and detailed reports to a PDF using the “print reports” and “export data” functions in the worksheets. Participants should share results to a dedicated organizational email or focal point so it can be used and referenced later.

**JUMP TO SCORECARD ↗**

## EXERCISE 6: FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION

This exercise helps your organization develop a detailed risk management action plan, move from analysis to action, and achieve the strategic changes that are of the greatest priority. This includes agreeing on the immediate next steps to take these actions forward, including roles and responsibilities, and mechanisms for implementation and follow-up.

### Goals and Learning Objectives for Exercise 6

This exercise translates the findings from the previous analyses into a concrete risk management action plan, which outlines how to implement strategic change(s) highlighted as the organization's greatest priority through the Risk Management Scorecard self-assessment exercise. The action plan will also set out who can lead each action, the timeline for implementation, the resources required, any anticipated challenges and mitigation measures to overcome them, and immediate next steps. This will help build consensus, ownership, and accountability to carry forward the action plan. Upon completing the exercise, participants will:

- o Recognize that focusing risk management action plans around the five strategic changes can support organizations to have direct, positive effects on multiple traps at once, as well as indirect positive effects on other traps in the larger system.

- o See that improving risk management approaches is a collective undertaking in which everyone can play a positive role.

### Different Ways to Use Exercise 6

As this exercise builds on the findings from the Risk Management Scorecard, it should not be used without first completing Exercise 5. Exercise 6 can be used in:

- o Organizational risk management assessments and planning workshops or processes with, for example, the aim of designing or revising the organization's risk management strategy or approaches.
  - o Annual or strategic planning processes to identify risk management gaps, needs, and priorities for the year(s) ahead.
  - o Program planning processes to identify risk management gaps and priorities that need to be addressed within the program plan and budget.
  - o Working with new partners to identify both the organization's and partner's risk management strengths and weaknesses and develop an action plan.
- ### Key Questions for Participants Completing this Exercise
- o How can we implement actions in the strategic change areas that will address our organiza-

tion's weaknesses and help us break out of the risk management traps?

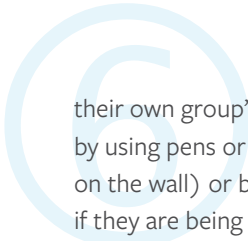
### Suggested timing: 2 hours 30 minutes

- 0.00 – 0.10 (10 mins):** Introduce the exercise and the shift from analysis to action
- 0.10 – 01.10 (60 mins):** Group work to develop risk management action plans
- 1.10 – 01.15 (5 mins):** In plenary, explain the voting process
- 1.15 – 1.45 (30 mins):** Groups review and vote on each other's plans
- 1.45 – 2.30 (45 mins):** Agree on the next steps and how to take actions forward



## Facilitator Instructions

1. **(10 mins)** In plenary, explain that groups will now develop detailed plans to help their organization implement the actions and strategic changes identified as a key priority or area of weakness through the Risk Management Scorecard.
2. **(60 mins)** Participants should organize into groups and use the [Exercise 6 Worksheet](#). You need to be able to display the action plan worksheets in the next exercise so these should either be completed by hand or be printed out. This discussion might take longer if four or five strategic changes were identified as priority areas for the organization. Instructions to complete the [Exercise 6 Worksheet](#):
  - a. The worksheet has sections to add actions for each of the five strategic changes. Groups do not need to complete all five sections, only those they discussed or emerged as priority changes for their organization in the self-assessment scorecard exercise. Suggest groups start with the strategic changes identified as the organization's greatest priority.
  - b. Ask participants to be as specific and concrete as possible with each action – these are the action steps needed to achieve the strategic change so they need to be practical and clear.
  - c. Encourage groups to draw on the discussions and analysis already conducted during previous exercises to identify actions. For example:
    - i. Review the Risk Management Scorecard findings (Exercise 5) to see which questions they scored particularly low on. This could indicate specific aspects of risk management they need to address, such as missing policies, issues with approval processes, communication between levels, access to risk management training, etc.
    - ii. Revisit what is causing their organization's risk management traps (Exercise 3) and suggest actions that could directly address these underlying causes.
    - iii. Review the high-level changes already identified to break specific traps (Exercise 3 & 4) and discuss in more detail what actions would be needed to implement these changes.
  - d. For each action, groups also need to identify:
    - i. Who will implement the action and who else is needed to support it. This can be a named person, a specific role, or a department.
    - ii. The resources or support needed to implement the actions. Encourage participants to think beyond just money—what would that money do? It's important to think of resources in terms of people, time, materials, and funding. People can also list more intangible things, like new systems, policies, or trainings that could facilitate a change in culture. Encourage them to be creative but concrete.
    - iii. The timeline to complete actions, considering if some actions need to happen first for others to be successful.
    - iv. Potential challenges the organization may encounter while trying to implement these actions (for example, a lack of funding, a change in leadership priorities, a loss of critical staff positions, etc.) and what mitigation measures could be put in place to overcome these potential challenges.
3. **(5 mins)** Bring everyone back to the plenary and explain that groups will now review and vote on each other's action plans so that one overall action plan can be agreed upon. Ask each group to place their risk management action plans on the wall or save them all in a central location that everyone can access at the same time on their computer (e.g., a Google drive).
4. **(30 mins)** Participants review each other's plans and vote on the actions they feel will have the biggest impact for the organization in terms of strengthening approaches to risk management. If helpful, you can allocate a specific number of votes to each person (e.g., 10 votes per group). Participants should not vote on



their own group's plan. Votes can be allocated by using pens or stickers (if plans are posted on the wall) or by adding a star after the action if they are being viewed on a computer/shared screen.

5. **(45 mins)** In the plenary, review the actions that received the highest number of votes and discuss what needs to happen next to take these actions forward. It is important to keep this discussion as concrete as possible, including agreeing on roles, responsibilities, processes for implementation, and mechanisms to monitor actions and report on progress.

This can include next steps for participants in

the room, and next steps which would need to be taken forward by others, such as senior leadership. If there is no clear plan and expectations on how to take the agreed actions forward, there is a risk they will be forgotten when people go back to their daily activities. Options for this include:

- a. Review each action individually and agree on who is responsible for following it up, by when, and how progress will be monitored and reported on.
- b. Agree on the overarching structures that can supervise the implementation of all actions, for example, by establishing and

agreeing on the membership of a risk management working group.

- c. Use the actions and wider learning from this process to develop a risk management improvement strategy for the organization.

Close the exercise and agree to share the final action plan and next steps with everyone who took part in the exercise.

**JUMP TO EXERCISE 6 WORKSHEET** ↗

# 7

## EXERCISE 7: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The closing exercise is a time for participants to reflect, consolidate, and synthesize what they learned. This exercise is a general wrap-up so participants can offer their insights on how the discussion and takeaways from the learning process will affect the organization's risk management approach, humanitarian program delivery and performance, and relationships with partners, donors, and affected people. It is critical that there is someone within the organization who can take responsibility for following up on the Risk Management Scorecard assessment and planning process and ensuring the agreed upon actions move forward and any working groups are established and convened. While everyone has a responsibility for risk management, a dedicated focal point to lead and drive actions forward can help it to not be forgotten amidst the many competing priorities staff contend with.

### Goals and Learning Objectives for Exercise 7

This last closing exercise should offer a summary of the main points, open the floor for discussion on the effectiveness of the learning process, and take time to recognize contributions and effort. It should also include details on upcoming priorities and actions the organization or teams plan to pursue. To build momentum, facilitators should share ways participants can continue their learning and follow-up if they have questions. The recap should

echo the critical learning objectives in previous exercises, including a fundamental understanding of the following:

- By addressing underlying and often hidden risk management traps, we can achieve meaningful improvements that lead to real, sustainable changes in the way our organization manages risk.
- We all have a role to play in improving the way our organization manages risk.
- Strong Risk Management is a risk management approach that enables and facilitates quality and timely humanitarian delivery, performance, and outcomes for crisis-affected people and communities.
- Affected people and communities are the central and priority design consideration for Strong Risk Management.

### Different Ways to Use Exercise 7

This exercise cannot be a standalone activity; it should be used as the closing exercise for an organizational risk management self-assessment and planning workshop or process.

### Key Question for Participants Completing Exercise 7

- How can we take forward what we learned and make positive changes to our organization's approach to risk management to help it support high-quality, timely humanitarian programs that meet the needs of affected communities?

### Suggested timing: 30-60 minutes

#### 0.00 – 0.20 (20-40 mins)

Plenary discussions on reflections and learning.

#### 0.20 – 0.30 (10-20 mins)

Evaluation of the risk management self-assessment and planning process.

## 7 Facilitator Instructions

1. **(20 mins)** In the plenary, hold a final closing discussion with participants to reflect on overall lessons learned and insights gained during this process. Key questions to ask include:
  - a. *What overall lessons or observations stand out for you from this process?*
  - b. *What challenges did you experience during this process?*

- c. *Has anything surprised you or caused you to change your opinion about risk management?*
  - d. *How do you hope this process will impact the organization's programs? Our approaches to working with partners? With affected communities? With donors?*
2. **(10 mins)** This is also an opportunity to collect feedback from those who took part in the process on how they felt it worked and what could be improved. This can be done by sharing an

evaluation form or asking participants to write on three separate post-it notes what they liked about the process, what they didn't like, and what they hope will happen next. Stick these to a flipchart with the same headings at the front of the room. Recap what will happen next based on the discussions in the previous exercise and thank everyone.

## EXERCISE WORKSHEETS

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- ① **Exercise 1 Worksheet** ↗  
Assessing Your Organization's Risk Management Approaches
- ② **Exercise 2 Worksheet** ↗  
Risk Management Composite Cases
- ③ **Exercise 3 Worksheet** ↗  
Exploring the Risk Management Traps
- ⑤ **Exercise 5** ↗  
[Risk Management Scorecard](#)
- ⑥ **Exercise 6 Worksheet** ↗  
From Analysis to Action

You can find an overview of all excersise in [Section 5](#) of this Learning Guide.

Worksheets can be printed to be filled in by hand or you can use this [digital working document](#) if you prefer.

# EXERCISE 1 WORKSHEET: ASSESSING YOUR ORGANIZATION’S RISK MANAGEMENT APPROACHES



## Objective

Analyze the impact your organization’s risk management practices have on program quality and delivery in difficult contexts.

## Instructions

1. In your groups, complete Table 1 below and discuss how your organization’s risk management approaches and practices are impacting your ability to maintain quality programs in difficult, high-risk contexts. Consider how risk management approaches are

either **supporting** or **hindering** program quality and delivery. You can also include issues external to the organization, such as operational context or donor policies. This can include tangible things like policies, procedures and resources, or intangible things like culture, attitudes, and knowledge.

2. Prioritize the three or four risk management approaches or practices that present the greatest barrier to the organization’s ability to deliver

high quality, timely, humanitarian programs.

3. Copy and paste these prioritized barriers into Table 2 below and discuss what is driving or causing these barriers within the organization, and what effects they are having on program delivery, staff, communities, partners, and the organization as a whole.

TABLE 1	
RISK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES THAT <u>SUPPORT</u> PROGRAM DELIVERY & QUALITY  ➔	RISK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES THAT <u>HINDER</u> PROGRAM DELIVERY & QUALITY  ←
This can include policies, behaviors, structures, processes, and attitudes –within the organization or externally.	This can include policies, behaviors, structures, processes, and attitudes – within the organization or externally.

# EXERCISE 1 WORKSHEET: ASSESSING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S RISK MANAGEMENT APPROACHES



TABLE 2		
CAUSES	RISK MANAGEMENT BARRIERS	EFFECTS
What are the reasons or underlying causes for these barriers?	Copy and paste the 3–4 risk management barriers that hinder program delivery and quality the most.	What effects are these barriers having on program delivery, staff, and the organization?
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	

# EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



## Objective

Assess which risk management cases most closely reflect your organization’s risk management experiences, and the impact this has on the organization’s ability to manage risk effectively and deliver high-quality, timely humanitarian programs in high-risk settings.

## Instructions

1. Read and review the risk management trap cases provided to your group (as separate handouts)
2. Reflect on the case(s) and discuss the implications, using the key questions below:
  - a. What is the impact of this situation on humanitarian interventions and the organization’s ability to respond?
  - b. What is the impact of this situation on affected communities? On local partners? On the organization’s own staff?
  - c. What does this situation say about the efficacy of the organization’s risk management approaches?
  - d. More broadly, how does this situation affect the organization’s relevance and ability to meet its humanitarian mandate?
  - e. Discuss how closely the case(s) reflect your organization’s risk management experiences, using the following guiding questions:
    - i. What about the case feels like it could or couldn’t happen in your organization?
    - ii. Does this case remind you of something you have experienced, seen, or heard in your time with the organization?
    - iii. Does this case reflect any of the barriers, causes, or effects, you discussed in Exercise 1 (if completed)?
3. As a group, rate how closely the case reflects the way your organization manages risk, on the table below using the following scale:
  - a. 1 = this case does not reflect our organization’s experience at all
  - a. 5 = this case very strongly reflects our organization’s experience

CASE / SCENARIO	RATING (1–5)
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	
F	
G	
H	



# EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



## COMPOSITE CASE A: Cyclones, Cholera, and Corruption

My name is Lin. I work in a country office for the NGO All Aid. A few years ago, the organization had a corruption scandal that badly affected our reputation with donors and the public. As a result, All Aid invested heavily in strengthening its risk management approaches, including investing in a new global software system to record all risks and automated processes for approving contracts and procurements. This work was led by global risk and compliance. They did some limited consultations with other departments and country offices in the process but didn't speak much with the teams or staff who would be using the system.

Currently, I lead All Aid's emergency response to a major cyclone in this country and the region. The program includes providing clean water, sanitation, and shelter and non-food items. People are living in exposed areas and have no fuel or clean water. The basic infrastructure is destroyed. Unfortunately, the new systems, that were set up after the corruption scandal, are seriously affecting our ability to respond quickly.

Now, any procurement over \$5,000 requires a competitive tender with at least three quotes and approval by the HQ Director of Support Services. We put out a tender for tarpaulins a month ago and got good quotes from local suppliers that had the items in stock. It was time consuming, but we collected all the necessary bid details and documentation, and uploaded everything for approval into the new system. The system isn't easy to use or understand and requires a lot of manual data entry. We had to keep going back to the suppliers to ask for more evidence, which wasn't always easy for them to provide, as they were also affected by the cyclone. On top of this, the system is only in English and most of our procurement team speaks French, so I had to take time away from community work to enter all this information. We then had to wait for the global risk and compliance team to process this on their end of the system, which got delayed because someone went on holiday and forgot to delegate sign-off to their deputy. I called my counterpart in HQ to ask if they could speed this up, but they said there is no way to override the system. After two weeks we finally got the approval to go ahead, but the suppliers already sold their stock to other NGOs and it's going to be two months before more tarpaulins arrive. So instead of being one of the first to respond, we'll probably be one of the last. HQ are now asking why we haven't done more as it doesn't look good in the reports back to the donor. It's been six weeks since we completed the needs assessments, and community members are reaching out to see when we are coming back to deliver.

The Ministry of Health just declared a cholera outbreak in the area after confirming 100 cases. We need to distribute soap and household water treatment kits as quickly as possible. We can't afford to spend three weeks on paperwork and approvals, so we're going to keep our procurements under \$5,000 this time. It will reduce the number of people we can support and end up costing more per item, but at least we'll be able to respond in a reasonable timeframe when people need it most.

I had to upload all our risk and prevention measures for the response to All Aid's global risk tracking system (another lengthy and challenging process), so I included these operational risks and suggested there should be faster approval processes for emergency responses. However, the only feedback we received was a long list of questions about our financial, recruitment, and procurement processes. It seems these new risk management systems are just about documenting everything, rather than helping country teams to better forecast and manage risk in programs. I do understand the value of a software system like this, but it feels like I'm becoming a cog in the machine instead of a human being trying to make the right decisions to help other human beings in an emergency.

# EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



## COMPOSITE CASE B: Preventing Human Trafficking in a Refugee Response

My name is Carlos. I've been working for the INGO All Aid as a National Program Officer for just over a year. I coordinate a program providing education and livelihoods programs for young people in a refugee camp, just over the border from the conflict. Unfortunately, the camp isn't completely safe, as human traffickers often target young men and women in the camp because of the poor living conditions and lack of opportunities to learn and work.

Our program runs from a sub-office in the remote border area near the camp. Last year, there was a big media story about the camp's poor living conditions and trafficking risks, which reflected badly on NGOs and led to issues with our donor. All Aid responded by hiring a new Country Director who worked in high-risk settings in other parts of the world. She introduced a whole new set of policies and procedures we need to follow, covering everything from travel plans to procurement decisions. We understand the importance of risk management protocols, but there was no consultation with any of the sub-offices, and it feels like they were copied and pasted from somewhere else because they don't make sense in this context. It didn't feel like she understood our work at all, and it wasn't clear what our roles were in this new system, besides sending lots of reports to HQ and waiting for their decisions.

We didn't get any training or extra support on the new procedures. The Country Director and the admin team made a short visit to present the new procedures, and the consequences for not following them. They weren't interested in any of our concerns. When they left, our team felt confused and afraid of making a mistake.

The new paperwork we had to complete piled up on top of our existing work. Staff had to stay late to keep up with all the new procedures. The Country Director now has to approve all travel plans and program changes, and this slowed our movements and work down. We had to send the strategy for recruiting participants for the new vocational training program to HQ for approval. They added extra steps for us to screen out anyone who might belong to the trafficking ring, but these steps were impossible for us to implement and slowed down the program, which frustrated people in the camp.

We have built good relationships with leaders in the camp. They warned us people from the city are targeting girls and boys who are not in school or training and taking them to the capital to work as domestic slaves or prostitutes. They urged us to expand enrollment for our new program. Last year, we would have immediately worked on a way to do this, but the rigid new protocols are paralyzing the team.

We didn't feel able to make this decision by ourselves anymore. Our area coordinator had months of back-and-forth with HQ before we got permission to make a modest expansion. During that time, we found out that two dozen young refugees were trafficked out of the camp. Our sub-office has been steadily losing staff. Some of them are burned out by the increased work and reporting burdens. Others are frustrated that our programs are slower and less effective, which has damaged our relationships with the communities. Each time a colleague quits, the work burden increases on those of us who are left. I am now covering three people's jobs and just received a bad annual review because I can't keep up with everything anymore. And worst of all, we can see the risk to the refugees increasing. If we can't keep our education programs running and relevant, many more young people will end up in the hands of the traffickers. That's my motivation for trying to stay, but I don't know how long I can keep this up without burning out myself.

# EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



## COMPOSITE CASE C – Food Distributions in an Evolving Conflict Settings

My name is Adil, and I just took on a new job managing INGO All Aid's food assistance program in a country with a protracted internal conflict. The program has been running for just over a year, but a lot has changed in that time. At first, there was only sporadic fighting in the areas where we work, but the conflict has gradually moved south and now the fighting is much more intense.

The dry season is coming soon, so I need to review the program plans to make sure we are ready to scale up our food distributions as needed. There was a risk assessment and risk register completed at the start of the program, which is quite comprehensive, but quite generic and not specific to the local context. For example, there is nothing about the ethnic dimension to the conflict and how that could affect our work in communities. The risk register seems to follow the donor's global template, which is more focused on threats related to fraud, corruption, and security, than operational risks.

It also doesn't look like the risk register and mitigation plans have been updated since the program started and there is no clear process in place for monitoring threats and how they are evolving. I ask the program team about this, and they say they are not responsible for risk management as it's led by HQ. Most of them didn't contribute to risk assessment and what went into the risk register. The one person who was, says she got the sense it was just something HQ needed as part of the program reports for the donor as they never got any feedback on it, and it was never mentioned again.

I've worked in active conflict areas before. If we want to keep people safe and programs running, it's important to detect and monitor potential risks and plan mitigation measures. I suggested we organize a workshop with our national and international staff and community stakeholders to review and update our risk management plans of the dry season, but country leadership said forgotten crises like ours don't have funds or staff to support risk management like the more high-profile responses do. Country leadership says we need to focus on planning distributions.

The dry season started, and the team is working long hours to get enough food into communities so malnutrition rates don't skyrocket. Last year, food distributions targeted women to increase the likelihood that children received rations, and the risk assessment said this was safe. But we haven't updated our risk analysis since the conflict intensified, and now there are many more men from a militia in the area. They began attacking women on their way home from distributions. They steal their food, use some to feed their soldiers, and sell the rest on the black market. Not only did our distribution strategy put women at risk and fail to get food to children, but it means an armed group was able to get resources to sustain itself.

In a coordination meeting, a peer NGO leading nutrition response in the area reported an alarming increase in severe acute malnutrition cases of children under 5 in the last several weeks. The NGO asked us for a meeting to discuss our food security interventions in the area. I tried to use the current situation to jumpstart the team's risk planning so we could develop a new strategy, but the team is discouraged, confused, and paralyzed by what happened.

There is a total breakdown in the program. We did disclose everything as soon as we were aware, but the risks now are so great that the donor and our HQ suspended the program, launched an internal investigation, and began a country-office restructure. We lost so many staff so quickly that I'm afraid we won't be able to remember or capture what went wrong or what we learned. If that is the case, there is nothing preventing this from happening again once the program re-opens.

## EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



### COMPOSITE CASE D – Struggling with the Past During Disaster Risk Reduction

My name is Maria and I work at the Global Headquarters for an INGO called All Aid. We've just been given a large grant for a disaster risk reduction program in four countries that are very vulnerable to climate change. I am responsible for global program coordination and liaising with the donor.

I was told by my manager that it was important to work with the five country offices to put together a global risk register. I had never put together a risk register before and asked my manager if I could attend a training, but she said that training is only once per year, and I had just missed it. She couldn't tell me who else in HQ I could talk to who had experience with risk registers. She told me they were mostly to keep the donor happy and to just "do my best".

I knew that there had been disaster risk reduction programs in some of these countries in the past, so I tried to find any evaluations, reports, or internal learning from those programs. Unfortunately, everything I found was just about hitting program outputs and targets, and there was nothing on how these programs had confronted and dealt with different risks.

Next, I reached out to the Country Offices to see if I could talk to any of the staff who had worked on these programs. Unfortunately, because program staff salaries are tied to projects, as soon as the project funding ran out, All Aid had to let these staff go. There doesn't seem to be any attempt to capture their lessons learned or experiences before they left. In general, there has been so much turnover in the past five years that only a handful of drivers and administrative staff are still the same.

I tried to work with our Country Leadership to do some brainstorming around what possible risks we could anticipate in the program, but they were under so much pressure to get programs launched that they barely had time to speak with me. I managed to scrape together some basic information from each country to fill out the risk register. I handed it in to my supervisor and told her I didn't think it was very strong, but she glanced at it and said, "good enough".

All the disaster risk reduction programs were supposed to work through the central government and ministries that were responsible for disaster management. While All Aid staff may not have had any institutional memory of working with these government officials, many of the government officials remembered working with All Aid. More specifically, they remembered successfully asking All Aid for bribes and 'favors' during these previous DRR projects in order to help them move along quickly. Some government officials insisted on All Aid only buying from approved "government sources" that we suspected were personal friends and allies. This was not a risk we had been anticipating and the projects all slowed to a halt as each Country Office tried to figure out how to deal with this issue. They didn't have any lessons from the past to rely on for guidance, and neither did I. In addition, even though the Country Offices were dealing with similar issues, they were hesitant to talk to each other about the issue.

Each Country Office eventually figured out a way to manage the situation, but the projects ended up being seriously delayed and the donor wasn't happy. I tried to talk to the different Country Programs to document what had happened and what lessons they learned, but I didn't get much of a response. The offices were under such pressure to make up for the delays they didn't have time to speak with me, and I think there is a bit of reluctance to talk about what ended up being an embarrassing situation. I just found out that I'm being moved to another project and I'm doing my best to write down what I've learned. But I'm not sure where these kinds of 'lessons learned' should be stored so that the next person in my position can find them and avoid these risks in the future.

# EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



## COMPOSITE CASE E – Local Partnerships and Remote Management

My name is Sara, and I recently joined the international NGO All Aid's Partnership Unit. The unit was set up when the security situation deteriorated, and All Aid had to switch to remote management. Both HQ and donors were nervous about working through local NGOs, so the Partnership Unit was set up, and I was hired as national staff to manage our relationship with local NGOs.

There are lots of good local NGOs, but only three can meet the strict partner screening requirements required by our donors. This means every INGO wants to work with them and they are overwhelmed. My friends who work for these NGOs say they can't turn down projects because each one comes with such little overhead that they're barely keeping the lights on.

We decided to partner with Local Action, who I once worked for. They needed to put new policies in place to meet donor requirements, such as child safeguarding and anti-corruption. We didn't have a lot of time so ended up just copying and pasting All Aid's policies and having Local Action sign them.

Local Action is managing a cash program in a remote IDP camp in an active conflict area. The partner vetting process took so long, and we were under such pressure to start the program that we didn't have any time to plan together or discuss how to manage risks. There was no funding in the partnership agreement for security costs, such as satellite phones, a security officer, or a field office close to the camp. Even direct project costs like salaries were low: two months into the program, another INGO hired away Local Action's most experienced project manager (they offered him a much higher salary) and Local Action had to scramble to hire a replacement, who was much less experienced.

Local Action staff confided in me that they found All Aid's risk management policies to be unrealistic and unnecessary in the context. They said they don't take the policies seriously because they seem more about meeting donor requirements. The Local Action team understands the context well, but I worry they are desensitized to some of the threats after working in this crisis for so long. My time in the partnership unit is taken up with writing donor reports and chasing Local Action for paperwork, and now it's been over a month since we discussed the program and how to manage risk. I know things are happening that aren't being shared, and I worry it's only a matter of time before someone gets hurt.

And then my worry comes true. On the way to a cash distribution, an armed group ambushed a Local Action convoy, attacking the driver and project manager, and stealing the cash. Apparently, they had been getting threats for a while, but they didn't tell All Aid, because they thought we might close the program and they would lose the funding. And without a security officer and satellite phones, they couldn't plan their movements to avoid the armed groups. Now the program has been suspended and communities are not getting the cash they need to meet their basic needs. Some people in the camp are accusing Local Action of faking the attack so they could take the money. Because the program has been suspended, Local Action can't pay their staff salaries and a lot of them have left.

HQ and the donor are also very upset. The program is not meeting its targets and the armed group who stole the money have links to a designated terrorist organization, which has led to difficult questions with our donor government and potentially the media. The donor has told us we need to tighten up our partner vetting process and HQ have introduced new compliance measures that any local NGO will struggle to meet. I believe in the project and working with local partners, but after this year, I'm afraid that we are setting ourselves – and our partners – up to fail.

# EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



## COMPOSITE CASE F – Epidemics, Conflict, and Community Trust

My name is Mohammed, I work for All Aid, an INGO working in a country with a protracted internal conflict. I've worked in this area for a long time, and though this country is often considered a 'forgotten crisis', our small team has built up trust with community members with over a decade of education and livelihoods work. During weekly meetings with community leaders, they would talk to us about the latest news on the conflict and we were able to adjust our programming to stay safe.

Then Ebola was discovered in this area. The country suddenly began receiving a lot more attention and support, but it was also receiving a lot more pressure to act quickly. An emergency team came in to start building treatment centers and we had to hire new staff to do emergency hygiene promotion. The message from HQ was that we needed to act fast to stop the spread of the epidemic and save lives, so we didn't have time to involve the communities in regular consultations or planning. The emergency team barely had time to consult those of us who'd been working in the country for a long time.

The health promotion activities focused on the importance of drinking safe water and regular handwashing, but community members told us they don't have access to safe water or soap so can't follow the advice. They said they lost patience with our health promoters and so they see no reason to speak with them. Some people are saying All Aid is just using the epidemic to make money to pay salaries, not to solve community problems. These frustrations are now creating new security problems: last week, community members threatened our hygiene team and stoned their vehicle.

After the attack on All Aid's vehicles and team, HQ told us to update our security posture and added more steps to assess and mitigate risks for any community visits. Not only does this create more work for our community-facing staff, but it reduces and delays our community visits. The relationships with community leaders continued to deteriorate - we're now lucky if we get a chance to talk to the community leaders once a month, and because they're frustrated with All Aid, they have been less open with us about everything. I feel I am no longer up to date with what is happening with the conflict and that it's only a matter of time before something happens.

And indeed, for the first time in the decade I've worked in this country, we had a major security incident. Two weeks ago, armed gunmen broke into our warehouses where we had been storing materials to build treatment centers. They held our staff at gunpoint and stole building materials. This armed group is notorious for attacking NGOs but previously hadn't operated in this part of the country - if I had known they were in the area, I would have advised our health team against prepositioning supplies like this. Before the Ebola outbreak, community leaders used to warn us about things like this. But, as I mentioned before, since our community relationships have deteriorated, so has our information about the conflict.

The epidemic continues to spread, and about 200 displaced people a day arrive from hard-hit areas to access medical treatment. The two areas we work in have already seen about 1,500 people arrive in the last week. Construction is on hold until we get new supplies to replace the stolen materials. The community prevention campaigns are still on hold, but HQ just notified us that we can expect approval to adjust our program interventions slightly for soap distributions and borehole repairs. However, it might all be too little too late. Once trust is lost, it is a difficult thing to gain back.

# EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



## COMPOSITE CASE G – Coordination in a Forgotten Crisis

My name is Anna and I work for humanitarian INGO, All Aid. We just secured a significant donor grant for one of our country offices who are supporting people displaced by a protracted internal conflict. Initially there was a lot of attention on the crisis and many organizations launched programs, but as the conflict continued donor interest waned, and funding has been harder and harder to come by.

I have come to the country office to support coordination and during briefings, have been hearing about the challenging security situation. For example, there are many checkpoints on the way to the IDP camps and there are always new demands to pass through. The Country Office is still scaling up so has limited resources to plan and anticipate risks and is just dealing with issues like this as they come up. There is a well-established interagency coordination group that meets in the regional capital. I am the first person to attend the meeting on behalf of All Aid in over a year. The country team seems happy to have someone there, but I've gotten mixed messages about what I can share. My program team asked me to get more information on how others are dealing with the checkpoints. But then the Country Director said we shouldn't share anything that could get back to donors, make us 'look bad', or affect our chances during the next round of grant applications.

In the coordination meeting, we discuss the security situation. Everyone shares the latest information on checkpoint locations. Local authorities began asking some agencies for beneficiary lists at the checkpoints and elsewhere. The coordinator reminded us that agencies all agreed to stick together and refuse the requests because they are a protection risk. But when the coordinator spoke to the government minister this week, he told her some NGOs had shared their lists, so he did not understand why others had a problem with it. The coordinator said that this kind of disunity makes us all look bad in front of the government and makes it hard for us to advocate for our principles and collectively manage risk. In the coordination meeting, no one admitted to sharing their lists, including me. I decided not to admit that All Aid has agreed to share lists with local authorities to pass the checkpoints and access the camps. I knew this could make us 'look bad' in front of the others.

The next week, opposition armed groups started to ask for lists of recipient names. They said if the government has this information, they should too. We drew the line at this and refused to share our lists. The soldiers at the checkpoint said, "other agencies are happy to share the information so we must be hiding something" and then they cut off our access to some of the camps.

The issue of sharing recipient lists came up again at the next coordination meeting, but agencies were still reluctant to discuss the issue publicly. I found out later that a smaller group would usually have coffee after the meeting and share their checkpoint strategies, but they were all people who had been in the country a long time and knew each other well and as I was new, I wasn't invited.

A month later, one of the armed groups attacked one of the camps and had a list of all the families who lived there. They took some people away and damaged some of the tents. The government was furious and shut down access to the camps for weeks while they 'vetted' every humanitarian agency. Colleagues at HQ told us donors had heard about the situation and were considering reducing funding for the response because it seems that NGOs weren't able to handle the risks. This will make funding next year even more competitive, which probably won't make the coordination more open or effective. I just don't see the point of coordination if we can't be honest and real about the risks we all face.

# EXERCISE 2 WORKSHEET: RISK MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE CASES



## COMPOSITE CASE H – When Cash Transfers and Regulations Clash

My name is Alex. I work for All Aid, an INGO delivering humanitarian aid in a protracted internal conflict. The response is only 50% funded. Food prices have increased considerably. Needs are acute, but households only receive half of a monthly food ration due to funding shortfalls. I run an emergency cash program for 10,000 households, the only one of its kind in the area. Families use our cash to offset delays or smaller rations from general food distributions, but also to pay medical or school fees.

We received a new grant from a government donor. The requirements say no funds can directly or indirectly benefit one of the conflict parties, the same one that controls the areas where we operate and where needs are greatest. The proposal submission timeline was so fast that our HQ did not get enough input from the country team. The program timeline, donor requirements, and level of monitoring committed to is just not realistic. For example, 90% of our program targets female-headed households. It's impossible for us to verify if assistance would "indirectly benefit" a conflict party or combatant.

To meet the donor requirements, we created a new beneficiary assessment and registration process, which entails more information collection in the community. It is time-intensive, so the first cash distribution was two months delayed. Staff spend more time on paperwork and less time with the community. We also cut beneficiaries by 500 households, so we had enough money to hire more support staff.

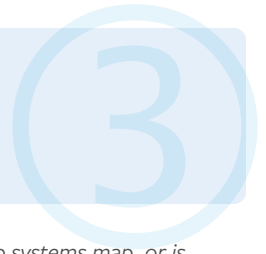
We have an amazing local NGO partner. Their strong relationships with local communities and authorities, and their context knowledge helps us cope with insecurity, keep staff safe, and adapt programs quickly if needed. Our partner monitors the cash programs. They track if cash met people's needs and how families used that aid. Our partner is small and doesn't have all the policies to meet the donor's requirements. We spoke with our donor in-country to see if we could continue working with the local NGO, even though they don't meet the requirements. They said they would have to check with their HQ. We had to suspend the partnership in the interim. The local NGO stopped paying their staff salaries last week. Our monitoring capacity is now cut in half without our partner. Our staff are overworked and tired. We still haven't heard back from our donor on the HQ opinion.

Five months have passed. The new procedures worked. We are sure funds went to people in need. The new process is slow, so we only distributed cash to 4,000 households. The other 5,500 must wait. We heard that families who didn't get cash are skipping more meals and taking girls out of school. The community is upset with the delays. Last week, community members harassed and threatened our area coordinator. They accused us of "stealing money." Our convoys were stopped at new check-points unexpectedly. We were more prepared for context changes when we worked with our local partner.

The team is disheartened. We've focused all efforts to reduce the risks that matter most to our HQ and the donor, but our staff are more at risk and the program can't deliver quickly enough to meet the humanitarian needs. We had a team meeting, and we think it's not possible to work safely in the area and still meet the donor requirements. Next year, we will likely suspend operations and move programming to a more secure area under government control.



# EXERCISE 3 WORKSHEET: EXPLORING THE RISK MANAGEMENT TRAPS



## Objective

Identify what is causing your organization to be stuck in one or more risk management traps and the effect this is having on the organization's programs, staff, partners and affected communities, and the high-level changes needed to break free from these traps.

## Instructions

1. For those risk traps ranked a 4 or 5 in Exercise 2, discuss:

- a. **Causes:** *What is causing this trap in our organization (internally or externally)? Are they the same causes as the risk management trap systems map, or are there different causes within your organization?*
- b. **Effects:** *What effect is this trap having on your organization, staff, programs, and the communities you are serving? Are they the same effects as in the risk man-*

*agement trap systems map, or is this trap having different effects in your organization?*

- c. **Changes needed:** *What potential actions, changes, or best practices could help your organization to break out of this risk management trap?*

2. Write your answers in the table below.

CAUSES	RISK MANAGEMENT TRAP	EFFECTS	CHANGES NEEDED
What are the reasons or underlying causes of this trap?	Insert the name of the risk management trap being discussed.	What effect is this trap having on program delivery and performance, staff, communities, and the organization?	What good practices or potential changes need to take place to exit the trap?

# EXERCISE 6 WORKSHEET: FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION



## Objective

Participants develop detailed risk management action plans to achieve the prioritized strategic changes using the findings from the risk management traps and self-assessment scorecard exercises.

## Instructions

1. The template action plan has a section for each of the five strategic changes areas needed to break organizations out of the risk management traps. Groups do not have to complete all sections, only those they discussed and identified as priority changes for their organization in the self-assessment scorecard exercise.
2. Actions should be identified using the analysis from the previous risk management traps and self-assessment scorecard exercises. The following questions can help guide you to identify actions:

- a. What gaps did you identify during the self-assessment scorecard? Go back and review the questions where your organization scored low and discuss if taking action to address this issue would help you achieve your priority strategic change(s)
  - a. What did you identify as the underlying causes for why your organization is stuck in one or more risk management traps? What actions would help to address these causes?
  - a. What actions are needed to implement the high-level changes you identified to break your organization out of its risk management traps?
3. For each action identified, include who will lead the action (name a person, role, or department) and who else needs to be involved, the specific re-

sources required to implement the action (including time, funding, materials, human resources, etc.), the estimated timeline for the action to be completed, and any challenges the organization may encounter implementing this action and ideas for how these could be overcome.

4. Groups can add more boxes under each strategic change if they need more space. However, be realistic about how much can be implemented within the action plan timeframe.
5. Groups are welcome to add activities that fall outside the five strategic changes if these are identified as important and needed for the organization to improve its risk management approaches.
6. Note if activities will only be implemented at one level or location or within specific departments or programs.

Example Action Plan Template. Templates are provided on the following pages.

RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN				
Strategic Change 1: Empower Country Teams to Manage Risk				
Empower country teams to manage risk by changing organizational culture and attitudes on risk management from a focus on compliance to a means of enabling program delivery in difficult contexts.				
Actions	Who	Resources	Timeline	Challenges and Mitigations
<i>What actions are needed to achieve this strategic change? Use the self-assessment scorecard and risk management traps worksheets to help you identify these.</i>	<i>Who will lead these actions, and who else needs to be involved?</i>	<i>Funding, human resources, materials, etc. required to implement the actions.</i>	<i>When will these actions be implemented by?</i>	<i>What challenges might be faced and how can these be overcome?</i>

# EXERCISE 6 WORKSHEET: FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION



RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN				
<b>Strategic Change 1: Empower Country Teams to Manage Risk</b> <b>Empower country teams to manage risk by changing organizational culture and attitudes on risk management from a focus on compliance to a means of enabling program delivery in difficult contexts.</b>				
<b>Actions</b> <i>What actions are needed to achieve this strategic change? Use the self-assessment scorecard and risk management traps worksheets to help you identify these.</i>	<b>Who</b> <i>Who will lead these actions, and who else needs to be involved?</i>	<b>Resources</b> <i>Funding, human resources, materials, etc. required to implement the actions.</i>	<b>Timeline</b> <i>When will these actions be implemented by?</i>	<b>Challenges and Mitigations</b> <i>What challenges might be faced and how can these be overcome?</i>

# EXERCISE 6 WORKSHEET: FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION



RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN				
<b>Strategic Change 2: Build Connectivity Between Risk Management and Program Planning and Implementation</b> <b>Break silos and improve risk forecasting, risk preparedness, and active mitigation by building risk management approaches with clear links to humanitarian program planning and project cycle management.</b>				
<b>Actions</b> <i>What actions are needed to achieve this strategic change? Use the self-assessment scorecard and risk management traps worksheets to help you identify these.</i>	<b>Who</b> <i>Who will lead these actions, and who else needs to be involved?</i>	<b>Resources</b> <i>Funding, human resources, materials, etc. required to implement the actions.</i>	<b>Timeline</b> <i>When will these actions be implemented by?</i>	<b>Challenges and Mitigations</b> <i>What challenges might be faced and how can these be overcome?</i>

# EXERCISE 6 WORKSHEET: FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION



## RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

### Strategic Change 3: Adopt a 'Do no Harm' Approach to Partnering

Applying 'do no harm' considerations to not over-burden or transfer risk unfairly to partners, reduce potential harm to the organizations and the partnership overall, and safeguard against program disruptions or failures.

<b>Actions</b>  <i>What actions are needed to achieve this strategic change? Use the self-assessment scorecard and risk management traps worksheets to help you identify these.</i>	<b>Who</b>  <i>Who will lead these actions, and who else needs to be involved?</i>	<b>Resources</b>  <i>Funding, human resources, materials, etc. required to implement the actions.</i>	<b>Timeline</b>  <i>When will these actions be implemented by?</i>	<b>Challenges and Mitigations</b>  <i>What challenges might be faced and how can these be overcome?</i>

# EXERCISE 6 WORKSHEET: FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION



RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN				
<b>Strategic Change 4: Be Systematic About Inter-Agency Coordination</b> Establish systematic interagency coordination on risk issues to improve information sharing, risk forecasting and mitigation, and collective action on shared issues.				
<b>Actions</b> <i>What actions are needed to achieve this strategic change? Use the self-assessment scorecard and risk management traps worksheets to help you identify these.</i>	<b>Who</b> <i>Who will lead these actions, and who else needs to be involved?</i>	<b>Resources</b> <i>Funding, human resources, materials, etc. required to implement the actions.</i>	<b>Timeline</b> <i>When will these actions be implemented by?</i>	<b>Challenges and Mitigations</b> <i>What challenges might be faced and how can these be overcome?</i>

# EXERCISE 6 WORKSHEET: FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION



## RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

**Strategic Change 5: Advance donor policies that support responsive interventions and risk management oriented around crisis-affected people and their humanitarian needs.**

**Work with donors to design risk management systems that prioritize and support program delivery over control.**

<b>Actions</b> <i>What actions are needed to achieve this strategic change? Use the self-assessment scorecard and risk management traps worksheets to help you identify these.</i>	<b>Who</b> <i>Who will lead these actions, and who else needs to be involved?</i>	<b>Resources</b> <i>Funding, human resources, materials, etc. required to implement the actions.</i>	<b>Timeline</b> <i>When will these actions be implemented by?</i>	<b>Challenges and Mitigations</b> <i>What challenges might be faced and how can these be overcome?</i>