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Task Force 06
STRENGTHENING MULTILATERALISM AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Advancing the Governance of Global Catastrophic Risk through the G20

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Abstract

Global catastrophic risks, including advanced artificial intelligence, escalating conflicts, ecological collapse, global pandemics, and catastrophic climate change, present urgent challenges for international cooperation. The G20, as a key multilateral institution, is well-positioned to lead proactive governance of global catastrophic risk (GCR). However, its disaster risk reduction (DRR) working group, established in 2023, currently lacks an integrated focus on these risks. This policy brief outlines five key recommendations to enhance the G20's role in the governance of GCR:

1. *Recognise and Prioritise GCR*: The G20 should formally acknowledge global catastrophic risk as a global priority, and its impact on inequalities and inclusion, and promote international cooperation and education on these issues.

2. *Create 'Action Agenda 7'*: Create a specific agenda within the DRR working group to prioritise research and development for understanding and mitigating GCR.

3. *Establish a GCR Task Force*: Establish a task force to identify governance gaps and implement risk mitigation strategies, including improved emergency preparedness.

4. *Establish Guidelines and Principles*: Develop guidelines based on the task force's findings to ensure a coordinated multilateral response to GCR. This should cover both the reduction of GCR, and guidelines to ensure emergency responses are fair, inclusive, and democratic.

5. *Utilise the G20's Coordination Role*: Engage with other institutions like the UN Summit of the Future, G7, OECD, BRICS+, WHO, and the UNFCCC to strengthen the global governance of GCR.

Implementing these recommendations will enable the G20 to significantly enhance global governance structures and effectively reduce global catastrophic risk in a fair and inclusive manner.

Keywords: G20; Global catastrophic risk; Multilateralism; Fairness, Inclusivity, Democracy

Diagnosis of the Issue

Global catastrophic risk (GCR) is integral to the G20 agenda. GCR refers to unprecedented global catastrophes, such as the loss of a quarter of the global population and disruption of key critical global systems. The risk of such a catastrophe is underpinned by hazards such as nuclear weapons, climate change, and emerging technologies and vulnerabilities such as global inequality and highly interconnected supply chains (Torres 2017, 27). Such a disaster could undermine or even reverse the achievement of the UN 2030 global agenda.

GCR is relevant to multiple minilateral and multilateral initiatives, for instance, the G7 and G20 Global Shield Against Climate Disaster. Other similar initiatives include the Resilience Initiative Africa within the African Union, the OECD high-level advisory board on the financial management of catastrophic risks, and the UN emergency platform proposed in 2023 by the Secretary-General.

GCR also intersects with many international agreements. For example, agreements to prevent dangerous climate disruption include the 1992 United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Efforts to control the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons include the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Regional approaches to governing risk are also important. Africa, a continent of immense diversity and potential, grapples with a complex web of catastrophic risks. From the impacts of climate change to armed conflicts and health crises, effective governance is paramount. Moreover, the risk landscape is multifaceted, with extreme weather events disrupting livelihoods, ecosystems degrading, and ongoing conflicts threatening stability.

Amidst these challenges, regional approaches have emerged as crucial to mitigating against worst-case scenarios.

Despite important gains, efforts by the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD, African Risk Capacity (ARC), and Regional Economic Communities like ECOWAS and SADC to boost resilience face significant governance challenges. These include inadequate data, ineffective early warning systems, insufficient financial risk management mechanisms, and poor policy integration across sectors. Additionally, the need for greater civil society empowerment and rights-based governance approaches is critical (ARC 2024). But the recent establishment of the Africa Credit Rating Agency (ACRA) by member states in 2024 illustrates promising institutional innovation in risk governance.

Despite these initiatives, the current international governance of GCR is fragmented and inadequate. Recent efforts to systematically map international initiatives found that there were numerous gaps including for large-scale volcanic eruptions, advanced AI, and solar geoengineering, as well as a need for more general foresight, resilience-building, and coordination (Kemp and Rhodes, 2020, 2). Even areas with extensive arrangements, like climate change, lack specific provisions for low-probability, catastrophic events, such as tipping points. In short, the current international governance of GCR is not fit for purpose. This needs to change soon and the G20 is in a prime position to catalyse this reform.

In this policy brief we present five key recommendations for the G20:

1. Formally recognise and prioritise global catastrophic risk (GCR).
2. Create a specific GCR agenda within the DRR working group.
3. Establish a GCR Task Force to identify governance gaps, implement risk mitigation strategies, and improve emergency preparedness.

4. Establish Guidelines and Principles to ensure an integrated, fair, and inclusive response to GCR prevention and crisis management.

5. Utilise the G20's Coordination Role to engage with other relevant institutions such as the G7, OECD, and WHO.

For each of the five recommendations we provide a rationale, a clear outline of the action, and explain how this fits into the existing multilateral framework. We then describe three potential scenarios which could occur if these recommendations are implemented. For each we identify the positive and negative outcomes, potential trade-offs, and what actions can be taken to navigate towards preferable scenarios.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing diagnosis, we suggest the following recommendations of how the G20 can advance the global governance of global catastrophic risk.

1. **Recognise and Prioritise Global catastrophic Risk**: *The G20 should formally acknowledge GCR as a global priority, and its impacts on inequalities and inclusion, and promote international cooperation and education to mitigate it.*

The G20 has been a powerful forum for addressing emerging global challenges, setting the agenda, outlining policy commitments, and developing action plans. For instance, the G20's commitment to phase down inefficient fossil fuel subsidies was later adopted by the UNFCCC. In this vein, the G20 can commit to addressing global catastrophic risk in its communiqué, outline key policy aspects, and grant an implementation mandate to the UN DRR under the G20 Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction (G20 2023, 2). Specifically, the G20 in its communiqué would direct the DRR Working Group to create an action agenda to address global catastrophic risk.

2. **Create 'Action Agenda 7'**: *Create a specific agenda within the DRR working group to prioritise research and development for understanding and mitigating GCRs.*

Following the G20 directive, the DRR Working Group would establish an action agenda to deal with global catastrophic risk.

Option #1: Create a standalone action area: It would specifically create 'Action Agenda 7: Global Catastrophic Risk', which would outline how the G20 should address the risk. The Action Agenda (AA) would include the rationale for the role of the G20 as a minilateral forum that is well-suited to address these risks. The proposed Agenda Action

7 can position the G20 as the focal institution for supporting the UN-led Early Warnings for All initiatives and provide high-level political support to the UN DRR. Specifically, the G20 could focus on the financial and economic aspects of global catastrophic risks, such as disruptions to international trade and the collapse of the global financial system.

Option #2: Expand 'Action Area 1' (Universal Coverage or Early Warning Systems) to include global catastrophic risk. Steps to do so could include the following:

- Develop a white/technical paper to examine how the G20 can address global catastrophic risk:
  - Clarify the G20's definition of global catastrophic risk, and potentially existential risk[1] (ISC 2023, 8; Cremer and Kemp 2021)
  - Map the multilateral landscape on GCR and identify the G20's role.
  - Conduct an in-depth analysis of the financial and technological requirements needed to address GCR
    - Methodology could include (Stauffer et al 2023, 14):

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[1] As the UN DRR has noted, 'The global risk governance community's definition of a large-scale event inadequately considers global catastrophic or existential risks. Addressing this gap calls for joint analysis and planning across duty bearers, focusing on government intervention and fostering capacity-building in regions where risk governance may be lacking…'While risk assessments prioritize the most likely and frequent events, governments and duty bearer organizations must focus on hazards with the greatest escalation potential. Incorporating measures to halt escalation into all disaster risk reduction efforts and contingency planning can lead to more proactive, effective and resilient risk management strategies for risks of any scale (ISC 2023, 8)

- Identifying hazards with escalation potential

- Identifying hazard root causes

- Inferring shared hazard characteristics

- Distilling governance challenges

- Distilling implications for research and governance

   ▪ Mapping could be conducted against the escalation potential of the hazards (Stauffer et al 2023, 18):

- Geohazards with escalation potential

- Biological hazards with escalation potential

- Technological hazards with escalation potential

- Social hazards with escalation potential

- Missing and underrepresented drivers of global risk

   ○ Identify how the G20 could include GCR in its contribution to the UN Early Warnings for All initiative and the UN Summit for the Future's Emergency Platform (UN 2024; UN 2023).

   ○ Identify concrete ways that the G20 can support the UN DRR to close the key implementation gaps identified in the Report for the Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, especially on information on the complex and cascading nature of global risk.

● Include GCRs and x-risk as a cross-cutting and distinct category of risk throughout the Action Agenda

3. **Establish a GCR Task Force**: *Establish a task force/ad hoc body to identify governance gaps and implement risk mitigation strategies, including improved emergency preparedness.*

The G20 could establish a task force, or an analogous ad hoc body, hosted by the DRR Working Group, and comprising the UN DRR, multilateral institutions, academics, civil society, and other actors to examine how the G20 can best integrate GCR in its mandate and operations. Terms of reference for the taskforce/ad hoc body could include the following:

- Multi-stakeholder consultations on the role of the G20 in addressing GCR.
- Preparation of the white paper based on the consultations above.
- Provide recommendations to the G20 on how to address GCR.

4. **Establish Guidelines and Principles**: *Develop guidelines based on the task force/ad hoc body's findings and recommendations to ensure a coordinated multilateral response to GCR. This should cover both the reduction of GCR, and guidelines to ensure emergency responses are fair, inclusive, and democratic.*

5. **Utilise the G20's Coordination Role**: *Engage with other institutions like the UN Summit of the Future, G7, OECD, BRICS+, WHO, and the UNFCCC to strengthen the global governance of catastrophic risk.*

The G20 can support the UN and other multilateral institutions to address GCR in the following ways:

- Contribute to the UN Summit for the Future by including GCR in its contributions, especially the Emergency Platform

- Identify the financial, economic and technological aspects of GCR that the G20 has competence in and outline how this can complement analogous multilateral initiatives.

- Provide technical support to closing the implementation of the gaps identified in the [Report for the Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) to strengthen the Sendai Framework's role in addressing GCR, where the major gap us informational as "little data on the indirect or cascading impacts of disasters is available to anticipate abrupt and non-linear changes or understand the potential consequences of disaster events."(ISC 2023, 4)

Scenario of Outcomes

The G20 can leverage its role as a focal institution in multilateral cooperation to advance the governance of global catastrophic risk. Below is a range of scenarios through which the G20 can achieve this objective.

- *Agenda-setting*:
  - Including a commitment to address global catastrophic risk in the G20 communiqué.
  - Grant the UN DRR Working Group the mandate to address global catastrophic risk.

- *Norm-diffusion*:
  - G20 DRR working group to develop norms and principles on the global governance of catastrophic risk.
  - To seek to build coherence and convergence towards these norms and principles.

- *Institutional coordination*:
  - G20 to create an Ad Hoc Steering Group on GCR.
  - To coordinate cognate multilateral initiatives such as the UN Emergency Platform, OECD Catastrophic Risk Insurance, among others.
  - Coordination mechanisms would be akin to the Financial Stability Board that was established to respond to the Global Financial Crisis of 2008.

- *Reforms*:
  - Leverage the DRR WG to shape the post-2030 Sendai Framework.
  - Lead the initiative to close the gaps identified in the Sendai Mid-term Review Report.

Some of the scenarios can be cross-cutting and completing, thus generating the following contradictions and trade-offs:

- *Conflicting mandates:*
  - Between multilateral institutions, hence creating conflicts over mandate and jurisdiction.
  - *Trade-off*: Playing an agenda-setting and catalytic role to advance multilateral cooperation and global governance of GCR.

- *Building consensus:*
  - Divergent preferences amongst G20 member states on the relevance and governance of global catastrophic risk
  - *Trade-off:* Focusing on the technical aspects e.g. norm diffusion and institutional coordination

- *Limited scope of the G20:*
  - Financial and economic aspects of global governance (and risk)
  - *Trade-off*: Delegating to, and orchestrating, other institutions such as UN (DRR)

Table 1 below presents an overview of the diagnosis, recommendations and scenarios of how the G20 can advance the governance of global catastrophic risk.

TABLE 1. Overview of the scenarios through which the G20 could advance the governance of global catastrophic risk.

Diagnosis (challenge)	G20 role (cooperative mechanism)	Scenario outcome
Salience	Agenda-setting	Inclusion of a commitment to addressing GCR in the G20 communiqué Granting the G20 DRR WG the mandate to address GCR
Conflict	Norm diffusion	Creation of a common set of norms, guidelines, and principles for the multilateral/global governance of GCR
Fragmentation	Institutional coordination	Creation an Ad Hoc body to coordinate multilateral cooperation and global governance of GCR
Gridlock	Reform	Inclusion of GCR in the post-2030 Sendai Framework agenda and initiatives

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