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Sustainable Development Goal 14

“Life Below Water”

UN Economic Commission for Europe: Group on Risk Management

29 November 2017

Key Topics for SDG 14



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Major issues of concern:

- marine pollution including marine debris such as plastics and nutrient pollution
- managing and protecting marine and coastal ecosystems
- the impacts of ocean acidification
- overfishing and ensuring effectively regulated harvesting

GRM two-day global workshop at leading Research Institute in March 2017

Reflected in the discussions at the UN Ocean Conference in June

Understanding the bridges between managing fisheries activities and their pressures in a regulatory context v. protection and conservation measures

The use of current environmental indicators as Key Performance Indicators (KPI), Key Risk Indicators (KRI) and Key Control Indicators (KCI)

The role of governance and policy in establishing the risk context; and the role of stakeholders in the understanding of risk tolerance in the development of regulatory approaches and technical standards

The role of scientific and technical advisory process in risk-based regulatory decision-making to ensure the independence of the advice

The Problem of Governance



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- The right environmental regulation is hard to deliver promptly
- Is decided by bodies intended for other purposes, usually economic
- Often involves overlapping, even competing, and complex bodies
- There is no mechanism for reconciling differences short of returning to capitals

All these are true for SDG 14, exacerbated by this challenge:

On the huge oceans outside littoral waters, there is no international body with authority;

**Life in the two-thirds of the earth's surface
below water is ungoverned**

Refreshing thinking on Strategic Risk



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Our experience is that for any governing body to become truly risk competent:

- Risk management must become more central to strategic control, and have legitimate authority to challenge plans and the power to shape strategy.
- The primary focus of risk management must be the direct support and facilitation of good decisions.
- Any new approach to risk must be developed by taking account of the unique history, culture and strategy of the organisations involved
- After aligning culture and approach, organisations start to control risk with increased confidence

This applies to Sustainable Development Goals as much as a business or national project

We should think about risks in other SDGs



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Commercial pressures drive major risks in fishing:

- companies seek larger catches that are bad for fisheries management
- fishing in bad weather and remote areas, and concealing positions hindering rescue

These factors combine to:

- deplete fish stocks;
- result in more accidents to seafarers than any other labour (in UK by a factor of 10 compared to the next high risk occupation).

Overfishing by large Western fleets deprives seafarers in developing countries of their livelihood; a key cause of poverty in coastal areas and even piracy.

So we should also think about SDG 5 in promoting safety of people

Some Ideas for New Approaches



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- The United Nations should encourage more coherent delivery, based on risk measurement, campaigning to make its subsidiary agencies to be responsive on key global issues such as the Sustainable Development Goals
- The risk community should focus less on fine tuning the familiar areas where regulation is already in place
- Instead it should focus on the biggest risks to human life and to ecosystems globally; it should adopt a more focussed approach looking to eliminate rather than simply mitigate the greatest hazards
- Develop effective reporting and procedures for risk escalation, enabling senior management to make informed decisions. Nichols has seen major gains in performance from producing KPIs and metrics to measure and evaluate risk behaviour.

Summary: Get governance right for the big risks to SDG



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- We tend to look at risk in isolation from the bodies that make decisions
- Some of the greatest risks to the SDG – maritime pollution, safety of fishing crews and nuclear risks- are controlled by bodies which are driven by different priorities
- We can spend too much effort on smaller risks that we know how to control
- Instead we should focus on these larger risks which threaten SDG outcomes
- Some of the decision-making bodies concerned are within the UN system, and are others controlled by member Governments
- SDGs are an opportunity to press for a more coherent and high impact approach – by getting the right international governance.

For more information



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- The Nichols Group specialises in achieving transformational change at the strategic level, often advising decision-makers in Government.
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