Relief efforts in Mozambique after Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in early 2019 showcase GFDRR’s holistic approach to disaster risk management (DRM), from projects which strengthened lifesaving infrastructure before the cyclones hit and innovative financial solutions which are helping the government build back better and providing support to small and medium enterprises to continue operations.

On March 14, 2019, Mozambique was hit by Cyclone Idai, the second-deadliest tropical cyclone ever recorded in the South-West Indian Ocean basin. With powerful winds and extensive flooding, it killed more than 600 people in the northern and central parts of the country, directly affected more than 1.8 million people, and devastated infrastructure, with recovery needs exceeding $3 billion. Cyclone Idai also had significant impacts in the neighboring countries of Malawi and Zimbabwe, and the devastation of its aftermath was exacerbated by the impact of Cyclone Kenneth, a less deadly storm which struck on April 23, 2019. Humanitarian agencies responded quickly to the disasters, providing much needed aid to those affected. As they tended to the most urgent human needs, support from GFDRR helped the government of Mozambique and technical teams with early response and planning for next steps.

The immediate aftermath

Shortly after Idai dissipated, an initial damage assessment using the Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE), a speedy and information-rich remote methodology, was done, drawing on analysis done by World Bank teams with GFDRR support through a Just-in-Time (JIT) grant. Using satellite imagery along with data compiled through the Africa Disaster Risk Financing Initiative (ADRF), the GRADE analysis identified approximately $773 million in damages to buildings, infrastructure, and agriculture. Equipped with this knowledge, the government and recovery teams were able to make more informed decisions about allocation of recovery resources in a much shorter time frame. Following the GRADE, a team was on the ground in Beira supporting a government-led Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA). The PDNA estimated that Cyclone Idai caused about $1.4 billion in total damage and $1.39 billion in losses, with major impacts in housing and transport infrastructure.
Looking ahead

The findings of the PDNA helped mobilize further support and directly informed the preparation of the Cyclone Idai & Kenneth Emergency Recovery and Resilience Project. The project is a $130 million IDA Crisis Response Window grant, which will be used to repair and reconstruct housing and rebuild public infrastructure while strengthening climate resilience in the areas most affected by Idai and Kenneth. The project also has a first-of-its-kind private sector recovery component that will help micro and small-sized firms get back on their feet and improve access to finance through matching grants, credit lines, and technical assistance to support the implementation of these firms.

Coming together for a more comprehensive DRM plan

These resilient recovery activities complement existing and long-standing DRM efforts in the country. In the days following Idai, the World Bank approved the Mozambique Disaster Risk Management and Resilience Program, a project which had been under preparation during the previous two years with support from the ADRF initiative. The $90 million project ($84 million from IDA and $6 million from Global Risk Financing Facility, GRiF) is supporting implementation of Mozambique’s second DRM master plan, which will strengthen disaster preparedness throughout the country, improve climate resilience in its school infrastructure, and enhance financial protection against disasters through a new Disaster Management Fund.

The project includes two financial instruments for disaster response: (i) a contingency fund capitalized with IDA funds and the national budget, which was first used to respond to the recovery requirements following Cyclone Idai, and (ii) a sovereign risk insurance scheme that is being prepared with the $8 million in grants provided by the GRiF. Of this, $6 million is directly co-financing IDA resources in the project to pay for premium subsidies for cyclone or drought insurance, which is complemented with $2 million in technical assistance to support the government on design and implementation of the instrument.

The master plan is aligned with the priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and has five strategic pillars: (i) improving the understanding of risk; (ii) strengthening governance and public and private participation in disaster risk reduction; (iii) mainstreaming DRM in public investment and territorial planning, and consolidating financial protection against disaster; (iv) strengthening disaster preparedness, response, rapid recovery, and resilient reconstruction; and (v) building partnerships and international cooperation.

Successful DRM investments helped strengthen the case for more

The losses could have been even worse. Mozambican cities have high exposure to coastal and river flooding. Fortunately, the city of Beira had recently upgraded its stormwater drainage system. Just six months before Idai made landfall, the first stage of the IDA-supported Mozambique Cities and Climate Change Project was completed. The new drainage system, which benefits over 250,000 people, including over 70,000 people living in informal settlements, helped divert large quantities of storm water out to the sea. The areas that had benefited from drainage rehabilitation investments under the project suffered little to no flood damage compared to areas not serviced by rehabilitated drainage systems.

The success of this intervention has helped drive institutional support in Beira to undertake other resilience-building projects. “The drainage system and water retention basin worked well during heavy rains earlier this year,” said Beira Mayor Daviz Simango during the aftermath of the storm. “Even after Cyclone Idai, Beira faced less flooding than other parts of the country. Now we need to extend our drainage network to other parts of the city.”