

The Means Necessary

A stakeholder declaration to the 2019 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

When people work together, they thrive together. Our lives entirely interdependent and disasters, perhaps more than any other events, demonstrate this reality in stark relief.

Hazards are increasing in severity and frequency, a trend that is likely to accelerate with global climate change and the large-scale degradation of ecosystems, leading to new humanitarian crises. Disasters cause far-reaching economic and structural disruption, and have long-term social and psychological impacts. Years after being struck by earthquakes, ghost towns remain where bustling communities once thrived in Italy, and Nepal is heavily indebted and struggling to rebuild. Vanuatu has not recovered from the economic shock of a cyclone that pushed large segments of the population back below the poverty line. Devastating wildfires in Chile, Greece and the US, and slow-onset disasters from Africa's Sahel region to the Pacific Islands, demonstrate the universal challenges that local people, national authorities and the international community face.

As the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, we seek to open avenues of cooperation, communication and capacity building for inclusive disaster risk reduction, and to model the kinds of relationship necessary across all lines of demographic distinction.

In doing so, we recognise a) that our diverse identities and resources serve to strengthen our unity and dignity, and b) that full inclusion, particularly of those disproportionately affected by disasters and those who have been marginalised, is the best practical step toward solutions for problems the likes of which we have never encountered before. The extent to which the vital UN agreements emerging from Sendai, Paris and Addis Ababa will have impact in the real world will be determined by their practical implementation in our communities and daily lives.

We call on all who aim to put the noble aspirations of the UN into practice to acknowledge that humanity's future depends on the mobilisation of the capacity latent in every human being. If applied to the challenges we face, this simple truth would bring about a profound shift in our collective action, the "transformation" that the 2030 Agenda envisages. It would help to ensure that those most affected by disasters are given equal voice at all stages of risk-informed development, it would bring the strength and wisdom of our diverse perspectives and roles to the fore, it would reduce siloed interventions and it would counteract the group-based hostilities currently in the ascendant.

Many stakeholders have already undertaken efforts to promote inclusive preparedness and risk reduction efforts, organise responses, address the impacts of disasters and build back better. These are commendable indeed, but today's institutional and social structures, grounded largely in a culture of competition and antagonism, perpetuate power imbalances and entrench inequalities. Unsustainable patterns of human behaviour, including a growth-first mentality and the pursuit of power, also aggravate rather than ameliorate the challenges.

As the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction articulates in new and significant ways, a profound shift in DRR governance to an all-of-society approach is needed. This must go beyond including new voices in old systems. It requires unified vision, shared volition and concerted action. It runs deeper than economic, technological or political interdependence. It is a call to rethink and revitalise our relationships with each other, the broader ecosystem and future generations.

New values based on respect, equality, reverence and stewardship of the earth, rather than materialism and consumerism, will help to mitigate both the underlying causes and impacts of disasters, environmental degradation and climate change. Arriving at new remedies requires new models of collaboration. We can no longer afford to ignore the wisdom and diversity of populations who have historically been overlooked or are disproportionately at risk. Their capacities, are vital to DRR processes at all levels.

Initial steps to bolster these capacities have been taken in the form of international accords, but practical action is now required. This should include:

- Inclusive and cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder collaboration at all stages of the humanitarian and development endeavour - from decision and policymaking to monitoring and evaluating, and at all levels from local to international
- Decentralised and localised resource allocation that reflects the true value of investing in prevention and resilience
- Tailored solutions that value diverse knowledge sources, strategies and technologies
- Recognition of and focus on those most at risk, particularly through resilience capacity building
- Risk-informed development across all dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals and from local to global
- Regular reporting at all levels on progress made and lessons learned with the goal of constant improvement rather than adulation

Disasters do not distinguish between developed or developing, impoverished or wealthy, and our increasingly interconnected world means that impacts are felt beyond geographical boundaries. With this in mind, the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism issues its call not only to Member States and policymakers, but to all people of all ages from the subsistence farmer to world leader. We must put the reality of our shared humanity and dependence on the wellbeing of the planet and each other at the centre of our deliberations and actions. Severe impacts of global climate change already being felt, and the need to implement the provisions of the Sendai Framework as part of our commitments to the global development agenda and the SDGs is urgent. Let us set aside outdated conceptions of us and them, and commit to the collective, unified, and inclusive measures needed for all to flourish.