



United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
Secretariat, Geneva

Q&A with Rachel Shebesh, UNISDR's new Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa

The Honourable Rachel Shebesh, Member of Parliament of the Republic of Kenya and Chair of the African Parliamentarian Initiative for Climate Risk Reduction, has just been appointed the UNISDR Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa during the launch of the Black & Green, Ready to Lead campaign that took place at the Pan-African Parliament in Johannesburg, South Africa on 27 October 2009.

Why did you accept to be an African champion for disaster risk reduction?

As a leader and parliamentarian, I have always believed in leading from the front. Africa is the continent most vulnerable from disasters and the most affected by climate change impacts, especially severe drought and frequent floods. I have been given a political mandate by my people and I feel it is my responsibility to find solutions that will alleviate their suffering and make their lives better. The fact that women and children bear the brunt of disasters is part of my main motivation. We need to develop better policies and ensure that African states integrate disaster risk reduction in their development plans to reduce the negative impacts of disasters on populations and their communities. We can reduce the impacts of disasters by investing in disaster risk reduction policies. These are not costly measures, but an investment that will benefit the most vulnerable. We need to integrate disaster risk reduction in our development plans in order to be able to adapt today to the increasing climatic disasters.

What are the disaster risk reduction priorities in Africa?

Africa suffers from conflicts, malnutrition, poverty, food insecurity and natural hazards. Everything is linked and we cannot think of reducing poverty, or fight against climate change without addressing these problems all together. We therefore need to ensure that disaster risk reduction is factored into national and local policies for immediate action.

What will be your first action?

My first action will be to roll out the Black and Green, Ready to Lead campaign that was launched at the Pan-African Parliament on 27 October. The campaign aims at getting African leaders to use disaster risk reduction as a tool to adapt to climate change as well as to sensitize the African population to the benefits of using disaster risk reduction to lower climate change impacts. There



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are many measures such as early warning systems, water resource management and urban planning that can considerably reduce future climatic impacts.

What are the main challenges?

The main challenge, I believe, will be to secure sustainable financial mechanisms for implementing disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation plans in Africa, mechanisms that are reliable, available and accessible. Africa must speak with one voice and rich countries must fulfill their commitments, as they are the main contributors to global warming. Africa needs its own fund for disaster risk reduction and I will work with all the African parliamentarians to convey the message in the upcoming negotiations in Copenhagen.

Interview conducted by Brigitte Leoni, UNISDR.