

Briefing Note

Submission to The Civil Society Dialogue with The High-Level Panel on The Post-2015 Development Agenda January 12, 2013



All India Disaster Mitigation Institute

A. INTRODUCTION

In January 2013, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) made a submission to the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda's ('High-level Panel') civil society consultations on how the future development framework should take shape. The High-level Panel, co-chaired by President Bambang Yudhoyono (Indonesia), President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia), and Prime Minister David Cameron (United Kingdom), was instructed by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to prepare, by May 2013, a 'bold yet practical' development agenda which builds on the Millennium Development Goals, strengthens accountability mechanisms, reshapes the global partnership for development, and ensures economic growth, social equality and environment sustainability.¹ Almost 800 responses were received globally and a number of AIDMI's key contentions were included in the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service's report to the High-level Panel for its third meeting in Liberia. This was held from 30 January to 2 February 2013.

This briefing note highlights the central arguments made in the submission. Essentially based upon all of the organisation's experience in working with India's poorest, disaster-prone/disaster-affected, and most vulnerable communities, AIDMI contends that:

- (a) Much more attention needs to be given to addressing disaster risks concurrently with other social, environment and economic agendas, programmes, schemes and activities – ultimately it should be that disaster risks are a standard, default, inherent consideration in any activity that is being carried out.
- (b) There needs to be a greater appreciation of the dynamic relationship between poverty, vulnerabilities (social, economic, environmental, and political) and disasters
- (c) Disasters should not be conceptualized as singular catastrophes which are 'freak' events of nature, but as shock and stress factors on social, economic, environmental and political systems
- (d) A development framework that enables disasters and other types of risk to be internalized, absorbed, adapted to, reduced, mitigated, and responded to is urgently needed

Addressing all these issues would pave the way towards securing an economically, environmentally, and socially-resilient future for all individuals, communities, societies and nations. The next part of this briefing note discusses these contentions in further detail.

B. KEY ISSUES IN DESIGNING THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Throughout its years of operation, at both the policy and practical level AIDMI has worked on critical issues facing India's disadvantaged communities, some of whom are located into the remotest and most underdeveloped of areas. Some of these are: human rights protection, child safety, inequality, disempowerment of vulnerable groups, poverty, discrimination (caste, religion, gender and income-based), abuse, environment degradation, climate change, livelihood security, disaster risk, and inaccessibility to essential health, sanitation, water, and education facilities. In the course of doing so the organisation identified the following issues:

- (a) The 'How' question is unanswered: Strategies, frameworks, policies, plans, and goals for disasters and development abound at the international and domestic levels, but they contain little detail on how they should be implemented at the ground level so that they have an impact in the local communities whose interests are most at stake. These communities are the ultimate beneficiaries and stand to benefit or lose the most from development frameworks.

AIDMI encountered this issue while developing pro-poor and inclusive DDMPs for the districts of Madhubani in Bihar (flood and earthquake-prone), Puri, Odisha (cyclone-prone),

¹ <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>

and Leh/Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir (multiple disaster risks). It knew very well that one of the targets under Millennium Development Goal 7 was to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, but how should it go about fulfilling and implanting this goal in areas where there already are deep-rooted systemic failures in water supplies? How should it secure this goal during and after disaster situations, where a whole complex set of challenges are involved? As another example, the Hyogo Framework for Action calls for disaster risk reduction to integrate gender perspectives and 'take into account cultural diversity, age, and vulnerable groups', but how exactly should this be carried out in the highly complex communities that AIDMI works with? Too often high-level directives are being issued without any form of guidance or support in implementation; too often grassroot organisations with limited resources are left to figure out for themselves how these frameworks should be fulfilled.

- (b) Strategies, frameworks, policies, plans and goals must be made locally relevant and have locally-achievable benchmarks: The difficulties with implementing strategies, frameworks, policies and goals in communities indicates that much more work needs to be made in making them relevant and enforceable in local contexts. Consideration has to be given to whether scale compromises effectiveness, and whether broad overarching goals, strategies, frameworks, and policies devised at the international and national levels, supplemented with complementary goals at the community levels, would enable disaster management and development objectives to be achieved.
- (c) Poor and vulnerable people want help so that they can help themselves: AIDMI has observed that in addition to securing the basic essentials of life namely education, nutritious food, clean water, shelter, decent work, and good sanitation, poor and vulnerable people place the utmost value on empowerment and security. They want to be able to take control of their own lives and overcome the political, economic and social barriers which prevent them from achieving their full potential. They do not want to be seen as helpless victims, as objects of aid, or dependents on others. They want to be viewed as agents of change and action; they want their fundamental human rights to be upheld, and they want to be guaranteed the security and freedom to do so.

In short poor and vulnerable people want help so that they can help themselves. AIDMI has identified that access to clear and accurate information, participation in decision making processes (whether it be community projects, government policies, or personal life decisions), a consciousness of one's basic human rights, and the ability to make choices for one's self are essential means for achieving this. Self-Help Groups and other collective groups can be a useful means of empowerment as they foster a sense of solidarity and united voices are always far more effective than just one alone. Livelihood security is also essential as they enable a person to gain economic and consequently, social independence.





- (d) Disasters are the sum of all our crises: Disasters are typically viewed as singular catastrophic events of nature. In AIDMI's experience though, disasters only become a crisis when people are unprepared for such eventualities, when they have pre-existing vulnerabilities which render them unable to cope with the impacts of disasters. Earthquakes, floods, cyclones, cloudbursts, landslides – they are only disasters because they suddenly exacerbate prior social, economic, and political problems to such an extent that is beyond society's means to respond adequately. A key example can be found in Haiti, where continuous political instability, high levels of chronic poverty and extremely low levels of socio-economic development (for instance 18.9%

of the nation's children under five years old are underweight and the nation's literacy levels stand at 52.9%), rendered the nation's population extremely unprepared for and unable to recover from the 2004 hurricanes (Tropical Storm Fay, Hurricane Gustav, Hurricane Hanna and Hurricane Ike), and the country's worst ever earthquake in 2010.

- (e) Disaster risks must therefore be integrated across the social, environmental and economic domains, with environmental resilience being the unifying thread: While responding to local communities' calls for assistance following the 2008 Kosi floods in Bihar, the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2011 Cyclone Thane in Tamil Nadu, the 2009 Cyclone Alia in West Bengal, and the 2012 floods in Assam, AIDMI found that the dynamics between poverty, vulnerabilities, environmental conditions, and disasters showed that they all had to be managed in an integrated manner, rather than as separate domains. Moreover, it found that environment resilience was a fundamental precondition for human resilience as there exists a symbiotic relationship between them. Contrary to common understandings, the 'twain do meet together.

To achieve this risk management has to be built into all activities, and one method which AIDMI has successfully used to unite environmental, social, disaster, and economic considerations together is the Climate Smart Disaster Risk Management approach. This was carried out in the coastal villages of Odisha, who stand to come under much greater risk of cyclones and floods due to climate change. Consciousness of human rights and environment protection is an essential first step.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

AIDMI recommends the following actions be taken in developing a resilient post-2015 development framework:

- That the High-level Panel works with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction to integrate disaster risks across all aspects of the development agenda
- That the High-level Panel ensures policy coherence and integration by adopting a cross-sector, multi-stakeholder approach in all its work and consultations. For instance, in addition to the consultations on the Millennium Development Goals, it should also have regard to the concurrent consultations on the post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Rio+20 framework.



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