



Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Fourth session, Geneva, Switzerland
19-23 May 2013



Chair's Summary Fourth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction Geneva, 21-23 May 2013

Resilient People, Resilient Planet

The biennial Fourth Session of the Platform was held in Geneva over 21-23 May 2013. Chaired by Switzerland, it brought together over 3,500 participants from 172 countries with representation from national and local governments, inter-governmental organizations, Red Cross and Red Crescent, non-government organizations, mayors and parliamentarians, representatives of local communities, indigenous peoples, children and youth, persons with disabilities, and leaders from business, academia and science. The session builds on regional platforms for disaster risk reduction convened in Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Arab States and Europe as well as many consultative and preparatory meetings convened by civil society, national and local governments and Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies.

A new element of the Global Platform was a High Level Dialogue session chaired by the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, moderated by H.E. Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland, and attended by 34 Ministers, senior CEOs and representatives of international organizations and the scientific community.

This Session was the largest and most diverse to date, a sign that disaster risk reduction outreach has yielded results. New representatives from cultural heritage professionals, standards-setting bodies and auditors joined the Global Platform and contributed their perspectives and knowledge. Participants came well-prepared with concrete proposals for the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction and used the opportunity for intensive exchange and learning.

The Communiqué of the High-Level Dialogue outlined bold yet achievable goals. The Platform met at a crucial stage in the international preparations for the post-2015 development agenda and the call for disaster risk to be overtly recognized in the post-2015 development was clear and strong. At the same time, concerted action in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) by 2015 must continue as we work to meet the financial and other targets from the previous sessions.

The dynamic discussions that took place in more than 170 events are summarized in the following points:

Targeting the root causes of risk: To date, countries and organizations report least progress on Priority 4 of the Hyogo Framework for Action: to “reduce the underlying risk factors”. Throughout the session, participants raised the need to take concrete measures to tackle risk drivers including poverty, hunger, disease, conflict, violence and inadequate health services, education, infrastructure, poor water and sanitation, housing, unemployment, land degradation, displacement, forced migration and discrimination. Several proposed actions included: full reporting of the health burden of disasters and



the consequences for community development and the systematic application of the International Health Regulations; promoting education services and systems, and committing to safe, uninterrupted education and other measures identified in the Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction; utilizing established mechanisms for environmental protection such as Environment Impact and Strategic Environmental Assessments, systems for protected areas management and integrated water resource and coastal zone management to address environmental degradation, strengthen livelihoods and address disaster risk; and, leveraging existing social protection mechanisms to target vulnerable households.

Connecting mutually reinforcing agendas: Both the accumulation and reduction of disaster risk are closely intertwined with the fields of sustainable development, environmental protection and climate change as well as human mobility. It is important that policies in these areas are designed to be mutually reinforcing, whether at the local, national or international levels. An emphasis was placed on integrated, multi-sectoral approaches to disaster risk reduction, and to strengthening disaster risk reduction in key sectors, such as education, agriculture and health. Development and resilience are unlikely to be sustained unless disaster risk is explicitly addressed in all development initiatives. Recovery and reconstruction costs are escalating and require risk reduction measures. In addition, Governments should take a strong lead to ensure that disaster risk reduction is well recognized and systematically incorporated in the international sustainable development agenda.

Assessing risk: The 2013 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction found that the global economy's transformation over the last 40 years has led to a growing accumulation of disaster risk. Annually, economic losses already amount to hundreds of billions of dollars and they are projected to double by 2030. Countless everyday local events and chronic stresses involving multiple risks are an ongoing burden for many communities. For example food security, livelihoods and people's health are directly at risk in drylands and drought prone areas subject to desertification and in Small Island Developing States. Urban risk needs to be more fully understood. The risk of failures in technical systems also poses severe consequences that have often been overlooked. The dynamic and multidimensional aspects of risk require holistic and comparable methodologies for risk assessment to enable, science-based decision-making and identification of development opportunities.

Leading at the local level: Disasters happen locally and solutions are to be found locally. This does not relieve national governments of their responsibilities to establish a framework and enabling environment for local action. However, municipalities and local authorities are in unique positions to lead and create opportunities for local partnerships and to take risk-informed decisions that protect the continued potential for economic and social development. Sound urban development and spatial planning, including attention to informal settlements, migration, safe housing, infrastructure and social services, were called for. Focus was placed on efforts to ensure that all schools and hospitals are built to resilient standards, that all necessary school and hospital preparedness measures are in place and that attention has been given to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Engaging communities achieves results: Approaches that are culturally sensitive and based on the principles of inclusiveness, participation and empowerment have been identified as a means of ensuring sustained impact in building resilience. Women are a driving force for resilient societies. Indigenous peoples, displaced persons, youth and children's groups, elderly, persons with disabilities and the vast array of voluntary associations each demonstrated how they have taken action to reduce disaster risk.



Respecting local cultural heritage can build community resilience. A range of models for forging partnership between government, elected officials, civil society and community organizations were highlighted and forward-looking proposals for formalizing these models in national and local laws and policies were suggested. Systematic and meaningful inclusion of communities in planning, decision-making and policy implementation is a must.

Recognizing the private sector as actor and partner: Steering private investment towards greater resilience makes good business sense. The private sector recognizes that it has a crucial role to play in preventing and reducing disaster risk since businesses are not only exposed to natural hazards, but also often contribute to increased disaster risk in the process of driving economic growth. Indeed, resilient business and investment go hand in hand with resilient societies, ecosystems and the health and safety of employees. The private sector is progressively aligning its risk reduction efforts with the Hyogo Framework for Action and is developing business practices that promote resilience and foster new opportunities for public-private partnerships as part of an overall improved risk governance.

Strengthening integrated risk governance: There is strong evidence that empowerment of communities and local governments to identify and manage their everyday risks, and to engage in the development of disaster risk reduction strategies, programmes and budgets provides a sound basis for building resilience. This, together with reinforced national institutions and inclusive coordination mechanisms at national and local levels, are key elements of risk governance.

There is growing recognition that the prevention and reduction of disaster risk is a legal obligation, encompassing risk assessments, the establishment of early warning systems, and the right to access risk information. In this regard, the progressive development and codification of international law concerning the “Protection of persons in the event of disasters” is highly relevant and welcome. Parliamentarians have a strategic role to play in strengthening integrated risk governance through legislation, oversight and allocation of resources vis-à-vis the communities they represent.

Development and financing of resilience plans were identified as a means of promoting “whole of society” approaches. Policies for investment, improved tracking of financing for disaster risk reduction across sectors and funding streams, and the introduction of special markers in global aid reporting were recommended and the role of supreme audit institutions in providing impartial information on the legality, efficiency and effectiveness of public spending was noted.

Management and technical standards, such as building codes, should be regularly updated and enforced. Accountability systems and effective rules concerning stakeholders’ responsibilities and opportunities for engagement are necessary. Ultimately, risk governance can only be rooted in a strong acceptance of personal responsibility and commitment to behavioural change.

At the international level, trans-boundary risk management and coordination were repeatedly referred to as critical areas for cooperation including through regional Inter-governmental Organisations and international parliamentary networks.

Strengthening scientific and technical support: Organizations increasingly seek systematic evidence-based methods for risk-informed decision-making, drawing on scientific analysis and tested indigenous knowledge. All parties need access to risk information and scientific and technical methods that are



understandable and usable. Likewise, citizens need to be sensitized and assisted in their use including through information and communication technologies and space-based technologies.

There is an unmet demand for data, tools, methods and guidance on implementing risk reduction, and a shortage of specialists educated and trained for the task. As a relatively new field, there are large capacity gaps, and these must be addressed quickly in order not to impede progress. There is a critical need to include disaster risk across all disciplines. Integrating disaster risk management into education at all levels including higher education curricula should be a priority. The widespread development and implementation of databases, including national and local damage and loss statistics based on sex and age-disaggregated data, methods for risk assessment, sector-tailored risk management and community early warning systems are pressing needs.

Participants also called for action to narrow gaps between the scientific community and organizations responsible for implementing disaster risk reduction through the development of collaborative means and methodologies. Initiatives such as the Global Framework for Climate Services play an important role in ensuring development and availability of sector-relevant climate services to support decision-making.

Way Forward

The process to develop a successor arrangement to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) is well underway. There was consensus that the new instrument (informally referred to as HFA2) should build on the Hyogo Framework for Action and introduce the innovations necessary to address the challenges of increasing risk over the next 20 to 30 years. Participants called for the HFA2 to focus on implementation, as a pragmatic, strategic, dynamic and realistic plan for action advancing integrated risk governance, underpinned by a clear set of principles and commitment to addressing the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. It is expected that the HFA2 will recognize the need to govern disaster risk reduction and resilience through clear responsibilities, strong coordination, enabled local action, appropriate financial instruments and a clear recognition of a central role for science. Specific focus should be placed on addressing the drivers of risk and the recognition of the roles and contributions of self-organized community groups. The Platform called for an immediate start of work to be led by UNISDR to develop targets and indicators to monitor the reduction of risk and the implementation of HFA2. Periodic reporting should continue as part of monitoring of performance. Voluntary peer reviews were proposed as helpful instruments for progress.

Consultations on HFA2 will continue through various mechanisms, including regional platforms for disaster risk reduction, national level dialogues and intergovernmental meetings and conferences such as the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2014. These will help inform the preparations for, and decisions of, the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015. The active engagement of national and local constituencies, including communities, civil society and private sector, will be a prerequisite for a strong and shared outcome.

The World Conference, based on the experience matured in the implementation of the HFA, will adopt the HFA2 and consider instruments and modalities to ensure its implementation, in synergy with regional strategies for disaster risk reduction and other relevant international agendas. An inclusive preparation for and participation in the World Conference will be key to ensure that its outcome is

owned by all stakeholders. It was also proposed to include a youth and children's forum and a national platforms forum.

The Session welcomed the Government of Japan's announcement to host the World Conference in Sendai, Japan in March 2015. The outcome of the World Conference will build upon the foundations of the 1989 International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction; the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action of 1994; the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction of 1999; and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.

Finally, the United Nations will continue to support governments and civil society actors in disaster risk reduction work, including through the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience.