

Youth Statement to the 5th AfRP 2014

As a society, if we fail to tap into the energy and creativity of our youth, we will be left behind. If we fail to meaningfully engage 65% of our region's population, the conversation and action around DRR is persistently incomplete. Africa is a youthful continent, its youth are without a doubt its greatest asset – yet, young people continue to be undervalued and left out of the dialogue. We need a radical and dramatic shift. Not only do we need to engage and involve youth, we need to recognize their potential to lead, and let them lead.

We must realize that excluding youth is a dangerous place to be, particularly as DRR is concerned. It is vital to engage youth as advocates and champions of DRR to protect the valuable work and indeed investment that has been made so far. If we do not engage young people now, they will have no reason or cause to protect what has already been accomplished. They will have no incentive or motivation to do things differently, as these concepts have not been internalized or embedded within them.

We, the representatives of youth at 5th Africa Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, identified the gaps in the existing Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA). We observed that youth participation was insufficient in the formulation and implementation of HFA. Youth were not recognized as key stakeholders in promoting DRR and neither were they identified as a priority risk group.

We are here to ensure that this changes. We are here to safeguard the need for youth engagement at all levels of DRR and we hope you will guarantee that youth have an active voice, a seat at the table and are used to ensure DRR in our communities. A post 2015 framework for DRR should incorporate the benefits, rights and responsibilities of youth in risk reduction and resilience in specific and concrete ways.

We want to be on board in implementing the Hyogo Framework of Action, but in order to do so we need to be involved in the **decision making process**. Our engagement must pervade every level – from planning to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. We need to debunk the idea of youth as inexperienced, naïve and amateurish. We need to be viewed as we are – leaders in business, academia, science and especially in technological innovation.

Youth need to be viewed and utilized in mainstreaming DRR. Mainstreaming DRR cannot happen or be effective without **building capacity** within the young people through formal and informal education channels. We want the information so that we can apply it and make better decisions about our futures. We need that information so that we can disseminate it and spread it within our networks through the creative, innovative, savvy, grassroots means that we are already accustomed to.

In light of our increasing **food security concerns** and the impact of food security on our health and welfare, we want farming to be made more attractive to the youth. We need special subsidies, training and resources to be able to fill in the much-needed gap in agriculture. We need our governments to help ease the

reluctance of youth to get into their own agro-businesses by providing special insurance and safeguards for youth. We also need mentorship, particularly for youth who are embarking on their own agro businesses.

We also want to see DRR initiatives linked to **youth unemployment** and within poverty reduction goals. We want to see potential employment opportunities beyond volunteerism for young people to engage with DRR, as youth will continue to be the strongest drivers of DRR within our local communities.

Furthermore, we feel that our engagement has to go beyond the process. We would like to see a specific allocation for youth within **DRR and climate change adaptation budgets** across all sectors. When we are budgeted for, we are able to implement the action we are so passionately fighting for.

Youth are increasingly dynamic and because of our vitality, we have agreed to not just ask for what we need, but also tell you what we are going to commit ourselves to doing by the global platform in 2015.

We will mainstream DRR into the activities and work of our respective youth organizations. We feel the knowledge we have gained at this forum will make us strong leaders and positive influencers for DRR within the specific mandates of our different organizations.

At the same time, we have committed to create a vibrant network of young people working at different levels to champion DRR issues and provide leadership to fellow youth.

Just last week, we the DRR youth champions represented at this forum, conducted a one hour twitter chat with the hashtag #AfricanYouthDRR. In just one hour, we were able to reach over 30,000 young people simply through our combined networks. In one hour, we were able to engage and interact with youth from the whole region on DRR issues, without any conference or any financial resources. In one hour, we made an impact for DRR. Imagine what we could do if we were brought on board fully?

We have identified numerous partners at this forum that have agreed to work with us, and help promote our intense social media campaign with the same hashtag #AfricanYouthDRR. We have committed ourselves to ensuring that we make DRR a trendable subject regionally.

It is no longer a question of 'can' we make a difference. We are already doing so. We are willing to reach more, to do more, to accomplish more. All we ask is that you bring us on board, not as a vulnerable group, but as drivers of change, transformation and development in our communities.

DRR Champions: Rahma Bajun, Olumide Idowu, Raphael Obonyo, Gloria Alida, Irene Ikomu, Kofi Yeboah, Belyse Sindayihebura and Yvonne Maingey