

International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction

Good disaster risk governance can help prevent and reduce existing disaster risks and build resilience of agriculture and food systems!

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Rome, Italy

The United Nations General Assembly has designated 13 October as IDDRR to acknowledge and review the progress and efforts made in preventing and reducing disaster and climate risks for resilience building, within and across sectors, including in the agriculture and food systems, as outlined in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030).

To commemorate this important day, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) collaborated with the United Nations for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the United Nations in Geneva, to organize a webinar highlighting FAO's work on disaster risk reduction (DRR) governance at national and local level and to further enhance the understanding and awareness on the importance of risk governance from an agriculture, food security and nutrition perspective.

Agriculture at the front line for resilience building!

Agriculture absorbs approximately 23 per cent¹ of all total economic damage and loss caused by medium- and large-scale disasters in developing countries (FAO, 2018). At the same time, agriculture also offers promising win-win solutions to reduce disaster and climate risks, hence, contributing to build resilience of people, their livelihoods and food systems. FAO studies revealed that DRR good practices once applied at farm level do perform on average 2.2 times² better than usual practices under hazard conditions. Not only do these good practices yield benefits in terms of increased household resilience, they also hold great potential for implementation at much larger scales.

A failure to plan is a plan to fail!

One of the Sendai Framework's four pillars is strengthening disaster risk governance, which is key to reduce existing and future risks and mitigate their impacts, including in the agriculture and food systems. This was demonstrated throughout the event by lively discussions with leading experts from countries and regions.

Starting off with his opening remarks, Mr. Dominique Burgeon, Director of the FAO's Office of Emergencies and Resilience referred to the various unprecedented disasters that occurred in 2020 alone, which had devastating impacts on agricultural production and food security, including the worst desert locust outbreak in the Horn of Africa and the COVID-19 pandemic. Floods and droughts also took a heavy toll in terms of economic losses and pushed millions of people into acute food insecurity in various regions.

¹ [FAO \(2018\). The impact of disasters and crises on agriculture and food security.](#)

² [FAO \(2019\). Disaster risk reduction at farm level: Multiple benefits, no regrets.](#)

He emphasized that “this systematic nature of risks and their cascading impacts further reinforces the importance of careful risk governance”. This requires multi-hazard & multi-sectoral, preventive & anticipatory approaches, linking humanitarian response with development activities, well-capacitated institutions, political commitment and leadership, as well as a strong science and evidence base.

H.E. Cheryl Spencer, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations in Geneva highlighted that “we have long recognized the strong linkages between reducing disaster risks and the achievement of our development objectives”. In light of being extremely prone to climate-related disasters, in particular hurricanes, the Government of Jamaica has long been prioritizing disaster risk governance at global, regional, national and community levels. The country’s emphasis on active governance in disaster risk management (DRM) is supported at the highest level by the Prime Minister as the chair of the DRM council. This propagates an efficient and productive DRM network across the island. Ambassador Spencer specifically emphasized the need to mainstream disaster risk management and climate change adaptation (CCA) policies, within and across sectors.

Concluding the opening session, Ms. Paola Albrito, Chief of Branch, Intergovernmental processes, Inter-agency cooperation and Partnerships at the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction underscored that “the greatest single driver of disaster risk is weak governance and lack of political commitment to invest in disaster prevention. Succinctly put: a failure to plan, is a plan for failure.” She highlighted the need to speed up implementation of Sendai Framework Target E, in order to make the transition to good risk governance. She urged, “we need more and better national and local DRR strategies by the end of 2020. With the cascading impacts of COVID-19 and the climate emergency, particularly on the most vulnerable, achieving this target has taken on a new sense of urgency.”

Countries at the heart of good DRR governance

The event presented an opportunity to highlight FAO’s efforts, and share key lessons learned on DRR governance in agriculture, food security and nutrition to support member countries to meet their Sendai commitments, in particular on Target E. Country case studies from Afghanistan, Jordan, Paraguay and Timor-Leste underscored the importance of inclusive, participatory and iterative processes in developing agriculture disaster risk management plans and multi-sectoral DRM strategies, building on the existing countries’ capacities and aiming to create ownership within various government institutions at all levels and with communities.

The process of developing **Afghanistan’s** Drought Risk Management Strategy was a “strategic engagement” with various stakeholders/actors to ensure multi-pronged engagement with high-level leadership and ownership at strategic and operational levels. The case study from **Jordan**³ showcased the importance of interagency and multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration in DRR and CCA works including in agri-food sectors. It further highlighted the crucial role of open-source risk information systems for good DRR governance. In **Paraguay**, the establishment of a multi-sectoral disaster risk management and CCA working group helped ensure linkages across sectors and levels, as well as ownership and further investments from the government on DRM. In **Timor-Leste**, the development of a multi-hazard risk reduction plan for agriculture was based on and informed by communities’ requests to build resilient agricultural livelihoods and food systems. FAO’s new work stream on sand and dust storms

³ facilitated by the CADRI Partnership in which FAO co-chairs the Programme Board. For more info: please go to <https://www.cadri.net/en/where-we-work/jordan> and <http://impactstories.cadri.net/>

(SDS) also featured in the discussion. The impacts of SDS on agriculture emphasize the need to ensure that (emerging) risks, such as SDS, are integrated into multi-hazard, multi-sectoral disaster risk management.

Giving a closer look on key governance challenges and solutions in DRR and CCA planning and implementation at various levels, the webinar emphasized the need to overcome sectoral boundaries institutional parallelism. This is, particularly, the case for the agriculture and food sectors, in which DRR and CCA efforts must go hand in hand; hence, the urgent need for greater coherence and more convergent actions. Existing tools and guidance are available including the [FAO's guidance for analysis](#): governance challenges for DRR and CCA convergence in agriculture. However, we need make use of such tools and turn them into concrete actions and we need do it at scale.

The event reminded all participants that today the multitude of intersecting risks of disasters, climate change and crisis threatening and affecting the agri-food systems (and other systems too) are becoming the new normal. This demands a shift to better governance of systemic risks and implies a shared narrative and taxonomy of interventions for all actors across sectors to play their role in building forward better in order to strengthen resilience of people and systems and deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals commitments and ensure that no one or no place is left behind.

The webinar recording and other resources are available [here](#).