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**Title of the Session:** Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction in West Africa Region.

**Date:** 08/09/2014 to 14/09/2014

## **Summary**

Disasters in West Africa are increasing in frequency and adversity of impact, compounding the challenges to sustainable development and undermining West Africa's prospect of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Environmental disasters are events that do not give notice to its occurrence but are tackled through careful planning and execution of contingency measures. The flood disaster of 2012 in Nigeria has revealed several challenges regarding the nations disaster preparedness, the need to strengthen West Africa's Disaster Risk Reduction mechanism is therefore particularly timely.

Hazards and disasters are two sides of the same coin; neither can be fully understood or explained from the standpoint of either physical science or social science alone; and are inextricably linked to the ongoing environmental changes at global, regional and local levels. Environmental hazards exist at the interface between the natural events and human systems. Human responses to hazards can modify both the natural events, and the human use of the environment.

## **Context**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION**

Environmental degradation is a process that reduces the capacity of the environment for meeting the social and ecological objectives, and related needs. The potential effects of degradation varies, and may contribute to an increase in vulnerable conditions along and intensity in occurrence of natural hazards. Some examples include: land degradation, deforestation, desertification, wild land fires, loss of biodiversity, land, water and air pollution, climate change, sea level rise and ozone depletion etc.

Disasters are events of environmental extremes which are inevitable entities of this living world. The major environmental changes driving hazards and vulnerabilities to disasters are climate-change, land-use changes and degradation of natural resource (Gupta and Nair, 2011). Environmental concerns are crucial in all phases of disaster management and vice versa. Environmental services like shelter, water, food security, sanitation, waste management and disease control form crucial components of emergency relief. Considering disaster risk reduction as important aspect in all stages of environmental management is crucial in order to focus on disaster prevention and reduce risk from hazards, minimization of rehabilitation and overall leading to sustainability. Opportunities for integration also exist in planning and decision making tools, and in regulatory provisions pertaining to environmental governance and disaster management.

## **CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENT AND DRR IN WEST AFRICA**

**Politics:** Initiatives to address the problems in the settlement are a challenge due to conflicting development agendas, disagreements within the settlement, objections from outside stakeholders, and political disputes

**Community growth:** The uncontrolled growth and the overcrowding of the community.

**Lack of land:** The overcrowding of the area results in use of land largely unsuitable for habitation and the limited space combined with a rapid growth results in an unplanned settlement.

**Community Risk Behavior:** Understanding and ownership of risk among the community residents.

**Institutional Capacity:** The lack of institutional capacity to provide housing and service deliveries.

**National Levels:** There is no or insufficient DRR legislation at the national level.

**State Levels:** Disaster risk reduction is not part of the formal responsibilities of state ministries, though the officials recognized the importance and agreed it would help to have a coordination forum for DRR.

### **THE WAY FORWARDS:**

- Regularly sensitize national, zonal, state, local authorities and stakeholders on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation concepts and practices, specifically regarding their mandates, roles, and responsibilities, in order to assume ownership and further engage in DRR for resilient long-term development.
- Regularly sensitize Local Government Chairmen, urban planners, and city technical teams on urban risk management concepts and practices, and advocate for the adoption of the UNISDR campaigns.
- Strengthening the existing National platform on DRR to include climate change adaptation issues. The platform should ensure the streamlining of all disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation activities and initiatives in the country.
- State and local government platforms on DRR should be created in line with the already existing national platform.
- Provide adequate and direct funding for all DRR activities and Climate Change at all levels, and ensures that greater percentage of funds is allocated for direct DRR activities.
- Provide adequate capacity and training for all DRR, climate change platforms and other stakeholders across all levels
- The platforms should improve the vertical and horizontal coordination, collaboration and implementation of all DRR and climate change activities at all levels of government aimed towards sharing of data and expertise.
- Massive development initiatives should be implemented.

- The already high population density must also be addressed, through allocating more land, building multi-story buildings or presenting an alternative location that is attractive enough for inhabitants to choose to move.
- Large public investments are necessary to meet the demands for housing and service deliveries in the township.
- Large-scale public awareness raising campaigns are needed to address various and widespread behaviors and activities that increase risk in the community.
- Disaster risk reduction is a development problem and therefore must be an integrated part of development planning with the collaboration of all administrative levels and sectors of government in West African Countries.