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Title of the Session: What role can young local volunteers play in leading on, and participating in, disaster risk reduction actions in their communities to build community disaster resilience?

Date: 01/02/2016 to 07/02/2016

Summary

Supporting local people to lead on, and participate in, disaster risk reduction activities within their own community is essential for effective and long-lasting disaster resilience. Young people are a powerful force for positive change in their own communities and we must harness their energy, adaptability to change, and desire for a better life. Young people are at the forefront of testing new technologies and thinking innovatively; they are increasingly connected and can reach more people than any generation before them with vital information on reducing disaster risks. We won't meet the new Sustainable Development Goals with business as usual; young people have to be engaged and leading the process.

Context

Young people play an integral role in effective disaster risk reduction in their local communities. Local young people and other community members know: the history of disasters in the area and their impacts; what the day-to-day priorities are for those living in the community; which areas flood most often or how the climate has been changing. This knowledge is invaluable and must be complemented with accessible information, training and support on effective DRR, CCA and humanitarian response.

Harnessing young people to lead and participate in actions to build community disaster resilience is so important. If young people gain skills and knowledge in these areas, and have a say within their own community, they will ensure change happens and benefit from living in a place that is safer and more responsive to their needs. Empowering young people with the knowledge they need to keep safe and make a difference also builds personal skills such as leadership, public speaking, community sensitisation, peer education and advocacy which help to build confidence and well-being and improve the resilience of young people; resilience not just to disasters but also to other shocks and stresses.

There is a lot young volunteers can do to reduce the risk of disasters in their homes and communities, and it doesn't have to cost a lot. For example, small-scale actions led by volunteer groups at the community level can reduce the risk that a flood will become a disaster and disrupt lives and livelihoods. In slum communities across Freetown, community-based disaster management committees have been established and trained as part of a Sierra Leone YMCA and Y Care International project. Committee members are volunteers from within the community and have a high youth representation. By providing training through local organisations such as the YMCA, established in Sierra Leone more than 100 years ago, these committees are skilled, knowledgeable and proud of their role in the community. Committee members are now the first port of call for community members worried about the rainy season, a small house fire, or a localised landslide. Community

members are the first to respond to disaster when they happen; they now have the skills and knowledge to help effectively and keep themselves safe.

These skills and mechanisms can also help young people bridge the gap between community members and local authorities, government departments/ministries and others. Supporting youth-led advocacy is an interesting area of work which, if successful, can make a real difference to the day to day life of people living in poverty in hazard-prone areas. For DRR actions to be sustainable, activities and projects must genuinely engage with local authorities, community leaders and other community stakeholders who will have a role in ensuring community DRR mechanisms are continued beyond the end of any funded initiative or project.