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**Title of the Session:** Disaster risk assessment: Desk top exercise or engagement platform to inform and prioritise disaster risk reduction initiatives?

**Date:** 19/03/2018 to 01/04/2018

## **Summary**

The Sendai Framework for Action calls for a “Multi-hazard, whole of community” Disaster Risk assessment. What does this really mean for our Governments, Metropolitan Provinces and Local Municipalities and communities? Who should be involved in carrying out these assessments? What are the principles and framework to be followed in conducting such assessments and what is the ultimate “product” that we should expect at the end of the day?

## **Context**

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk reduction promulgates a shift from disaster management to disaster risk management with a people-centred approach to Disaster risk reduction. The framework espouses a broader scope that covers slow onset, rapid, bio and man-made hazards. Its aim is to guide the multi-hazard management of disaster risk at every stage of development across all sectors. The framework envisages an “All of society” and “All of State Institutions engagement”. Further, the framework articulates the need for a deeper understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions, namely exposure, hazard characteristics and vulnerability. The Sendai Framework also enunciates the strengthening of Disaster Risk governance, accountability for disaster risk management and the recognition of stakeholders and their various roles. What does this all mean in practice though? Why is it important for the Multi-stakeholder Disaster Risk assessment teams to adhere to these fundamentals and how does this all pan out in bringing out a more effective Disaster Risk Management system?

In accordance with the framework, there has to be a broader and more people-centred preventive approach to disaster risk. The public and private sectors, civil society organisations, academia and the scientific society should work more closely together and create more collaborative opportunities and business should integrate disaster risk management into their day to day management practices.

A number of Disaster Risk Assessments conducted have failed to inform Disaster risk reduction initiatives largely because they were conducted by highly technical personnel without due considerations for the community members on the ground. Highly technical Disaster Risk Assessment documents whose output many fail to decrypt have largely remained archived in “File 13” whilst the risks arising from the hazards continued to blossom. There has also always been a challenge in bringing together highly technical teams to speak the same language as ordinary community members. Further to this a number of the Disaster Risk assessment methodologies are highly complex thereby requiring a high level of training and understanding which limits the number and category of participants during the risk assessment process. Disaster Risk assessments are also largely viewed as one off “exogenous” exercises meant to fulfil a legal or other requirement. The challenge for

Disaster Risk Practitioners is to develop Disaster Risk assessment methodologies that are sensitive to both the quantitative and qualitative nature of risk thereby bringing on board all the key stakeholders to the Risk assessment platform. Disaster risk assessments should also not be viewed as a one off exercise but rather as part of the Project management cycle, with Disaster Risks being continually reviewed and key stakeholders appraised on an ongoing basis.