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Title of the Session: Risk Blindness: a Threat to Resilience Building

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Summary

Risk exposes people to disasters. Understanding risk is important for communities. Despite efforts from different stakeholders on risk awareness we are witnessing damage and losses during disasters. It could be avoided. People are not removing their assets to safer places though there is a signal of hurricane or cyclone, people are not changing the electric wiring though they are aware of fire, government builds schools in flood prone area without flood resilient design, industries do not keep enough firefighting equipment or escape routes in their buildings. This is Risk Blindness. It is an obstacle to build resilience.

Context

For last two decades different organizations including NGOs, UN, Government, Red Cross movements, are working with the vulnerable communities to build capacity of the vulnerable communities, organizations, institutions and individuals so that we become resilient against disasters. Social safety nets are integrated with the capacity building and disaster mitigation programmes to enhance the coping mechanism and resilience in many countries. One of the key part of capacity building is to develop risk and vulnerability awareness culture in the society. And in the long run to facilitate a process of risk reduction led by the communities themselves. Overall resource for capacity building is almost 20% of the projects and programmes implemented and run by different organizations and institutions.

There is strong evidence that a risk aware community is able to reduce the loss and damage of disasters. Risk awareness programmes among the children pay more dividends. They become the change agent within the families and society to build risk awareness. However, despite many good examples, and numerous efforts and programmes we are observing that people are forgetting the risks, depend on conscious false assumption that nothing will happen and losing their assets and lives also.

There are so many examples now. Recent fire incidence in the building of London is an eye-opening example. This sad incidence happened because authorities and residents blindfolded themselves against identifying risks and taking measures to reduce the risks. Industrial fires in Bangladesh, building collapse, loss during cyclones are other examples. People are not fixing the wiring to prevent fire. Authorities are not designing disaster resilient infrastructure though the knowledge and technology is available. New USA president's stand on Climate Change is another big example.

These are commonly clubbed under the broader framework of governance. Within the governance framework, it's time to talk about the issues of negligence to risks. I am terming it as Risk Blindness. In today's world, information and evidences are within our reach. We

are witnessing many incidents every moment. However, we are not recognizing the fact and keep our consciousness blinded. This Risk blindness is a key challenge to build resilience. All efforts will go in vein if we fail to remove the risk blindness. We need to build a risk informed and risk aware culture where people will consciously analysis and calculate the risk to hazards and take preventive action to save life and assets.

References for reading:

1. Understanding Risks <https://understandrisk.org/publication/disaster-risk/>
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3. Vulnerability Analysis and Disasters
<http://www.radixonline.org/resources/cannonfloods-chapter.doc>
4. Vulnerability capacity Assessment – IFRC www.ifrc.org/vca