

Building Resilience to Disasters for Sustainable Development: Visakhapatnam Declaration and Plan of Action

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Contexts

Building resilience to disasters for sustainable development is the overarching theme that binds five different but interrelated global frameworks and agreements of 2030 development agenda.

The Sendai Framework seeks to build resilience through substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries. The framework prescribes four priorities of action for achieving seven global targets for disaster risk reduction.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have incorporated disaster resilience in the targets of seven out of seventeen goals, making disaster risk reduction the most important cross-cutting themes of development. These goals include poverty eradication, food security, health, education, infrastructure, cities and human settlements and inclusive development.

The Paris Agreement on Climate Change outlined eight action areas for enhancing 'understanding, action and support' for disaster reduction, while the Agenda for Humanity identified six specific action areas for enhancing investments on humanity. The New Urban Agenda focused on three 'transformative commitments' for sustainable urban development that include commitments for environmentally sustainable and disaster resilient urban development.

National and local governments as well as regional and international organisations around the world are developing their strategies and plans of action for the implementation of the global agenda.

Challenges

In this backdrop Third World Congress on Disaster Management held in Visakhapatnam on 6-10 November 2017 discussed the challenges and opportunities of implementing the global development agendas of building resilience for sustainable development across different sectors and at different levels.

The challenges of building resilience are stupendous. These include inadequate assessment, understanding and communication of risks to people; poor standards of compliance and governance of risk reduction laws, codes, standards and manuals; inadequate investments of governments, corporate, donors and financial institutions for disaster risk reduction; low level of capacities of governments, institutions, communities and individuals for risk reduction; non-availability of robust disaggregated data across sectors to benchmark and assess gaps in building resilience; and last but not the least, absence of a sound system of monitoring and evaluation of progress or lack of progress in building resilience to disasters.

Opportunities

2030 global development agenda itself has created tremendous opportunities for overcoming some of these challenges in a coordinated, systematic and effective manner. First, the five global agreements have been negotiated and accepted by 193 member countries of the United Nations providing common framework for action by national governments, regional associations, international organisations and other stakeholders like scientific, technical and academic institutions, corporate sector, media, non-government organisations including community and faith based organisations. There is common language, common understanding and common agendas by all stakeholders, which would facilitate mobilization of human, material and financial resources for action.

Second, the five global frameworks are linked and integrated with each other, calling for convergence and integration of initiatives and action across all sectors and at all levels. This provides opportunities for breaking silos and compartments created by laws and institutions for performing specific tasks of building resilience.

Third, pre-2015 global frameworks like the Hyogo Framework of Action created strong foundations for carrying forward the agendas of building resilience. Much of the Hyogo decade was spent on enacting new laws and regulation, setting up institutions and procedures and strengthening disaster preparedness and response like early warning system and emergency management protocols and practices. Once the basic tasks of saving lives in disasters have been attended it may be expected that national institutions of disaster risk management would be able to attend to important tasks of reducing risks of disasters for building resilience.

Finally, the emphasis on achieving goals, targets and indicators in all the global frameworks have put onerous pressure on national governments and other stakeholders to perform for achieving the targets within given time frame.

Seven Pillars

National governments have the primary responsibilities for building resilience, but this cannot be accomplished by governments alone. This requires continuous and consistent support of many stakeholders who either through their own initiatives or in collaboration with others, in particular with the national and local governments, can support, facilitate and promote resilience across sectors.

We, the participating organisations and individuals in the Third World Congress on Disaster Management, shall work collectively and individually with the concerned stakeholders for building resilience to disasters across the following seven pillars, as highlighted in the 2030 global development agendas:

- a) Resilience of poor
- b) Resilient agriculture and livelihood
- c) Resilient schools and hospitals
- d) Resilient infrastructure
- e) Resilient cities and human settlements
- f) Resilient Communities
- g) Resilient Business

We will work together to assess risks, identify gaps and formulate projects, programmes and activities in collaboration and partnerships with all stakeholders for building resilience across all these seven pillars.

Resilience of poor

The very first goal of SDG is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. One of the targets of this goal is to reduce exposure of the poor to risks of disasters, particularly climate related risks. One of the guiding principles of Sendai Framework is inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, especially of the poorest that are disproportionately affected by disasters.

We will work with all concerned agencies to review poverty eradication schemes of selected countries in South Asia and Africa and suggest measures required to mainstream disaster risk reduction in these schemes.

Resilient agriculture and livelihood

The second goal of SDG is to end hunger, achieve food security and promote sustainable agriculture. One of the targets of this goal is to strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters. Scientists are working overtime to develop agricultural systems and practices that are sustainable especially in the contexts of rising temperature, uncertain rainfall and growing incidence of droughts and flood.

We will work with agricultural scientists and farming communities in selecting areas affected by disasters for transferring innovative research from labs to the land

Resilient hospitals and schools

Third goal of SDG is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Developing early warnings of health related risks of disasters is one of the targets of this goal. The Sendai Framework has also called for enhancing the resilience of national health

systems, by integrating disaster risk management into primary, secondary and tertiary health care, especially at the local level; developing the capacity of health workers in understanding disaster risk and applying and implementing disaster risk reduction approaches in health work.

Ensuring inclusive and equitable education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all is the fourth goal of SDG. An associated target calls for building and upgrading educational facilities that are safe from disasters. Disaster management education in schools and institutions of higher education along with school safety programmes are major initiatives for resilient educational system in many countries.

We will work with selected health institutions to develop and implement standards of safe hospitals and resilient health systems.

We will further conduct studies and organise workshops to draw lessons from the ongoing and future initiatives on school safety and other programmes of resilient educational system in selected countries in the region.

Resilient infrastructure

Damages of infrastructure like buildings, roads, bridges, railways, sea and airports, power stations and transmission system, water supply and sewage systems etc account for most of the economic losses due to disasters.

Building resilient infrastructure is the ninth goal of SDG. Substantial reduction of disaster damages to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services is also the fourth target of Sendai Framework.

We will conduct studies and organise workshops to review the standards of resilient infrastructure, and measures required for improving compliance and standards of resilient buildings and infrastructure.

Resilient cities and human settlements

Making cities and human settlements safe, resilient and sustainable is the eleventh goal of SDG and the fifth target of this goal calls for significantly reducing the number of deaths, affected and economic losses by disasters, echoing the targets of Sendai Framework. Sendai framework has further called for substantial increase in number of local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.

We will work with selected city governments to review the development and implementation of city disaster management plans and strategies.

Resilient Communities

Countries and regions cannot achieve resilience to disasters unless the urban and rural

communities at the grassroots develop the capacities become resilient to disasters. Communities have developed inherent capacities for resilience through local and indigenous knowledge and practices. These are undermined by development models imposed from outside and further threatened by emerging risks like climate change over which they have no control.

Building resilience of communities in changing contexts is a major challenge that has engaged the attention of various national governments and local organisations. We will network with some of these initiatives to learn and document the work for dissemination and replication in larger scale.

Resilient Business

Industries, trade and tourism are affected by disasters. Many small and medium business enterprises are affected to the extent that these are not able to recover. There is pressing need for developing capacities for business continuity in disasters.

Disasters provide opportunities for business houses to discharge their corporate social responsibilities. Public-private-people partnerships can also create new avenues for disaster risk reduction.

We will work with some selected business houses and chambers of commerce to highlight the needs for resilient business and develop capacities for such resilience that can be replicated on a larger scale.

Way Forward

DMICS shall network with all participating scientific, technical, academic and civil society organisations and individuals working for building resilience to disasters across all these seven pillars.

DMICS shall develop a portal for sharing knowledge and good practices on building resilience.

The progress achieved in this direction shall be reviewed in the Fourth World Congress on Disaster Management in 2019.