COVID-19
Engagement Strategy

INTERIM REPORT

October 2020

SENDAI FRAMEWORK
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION 2015-2030

UNDRR
UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

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FOREWORD

There are few people around the world who could say they have not been affected in one way or another by the COVID-19 pandemic. Physical and mental well-being, employment, travel, schooling, training – almost all aspects of our lives – have been altered, possibly forever.

For many, the pandemic is yet another wave that they face in a sea of hazards coming one after the other, or even simultaneously. During the past eight months we have seen a devastating locust invasion and floods in East Africa, earthquake in Croatia, cyclones in South Asia and the Pacific, a devastating explosion of ammonium nitrate in Beirut, the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen, tropical storm Amanda in El Salvador, wildfires in California and the Amazon and, the exceptionally active ongoing Atlantic hurricane season which has had a devastating impact on many countries.

The COVID-19 disaster serves as a reminder to us all of the risk of pandemic specifically. But more than that, it shows that we rarely face one hazard at a time. In our contemporary and connected world risk is systemic and impact cascades.

Therefore, our collective action needs to look at risk in its entirety. We need to understand how it cascades, changes shape, and compounds. This formed the basis of our COVID-19 response: the actions we have taken over the past eight months have not only been aimed at addressing the pandemic immediately facing us, but also at equipping Member States, partners and communities with the tools they need to face multiple hazards now and in the future. From sharing experiences and connecting stakeholders to promoting a biological hazard-aware approach to developing disaster risk reduction strategies, our "glocalized" approach ensures that world-tested ventures are applied through a context-specific lens.

This report outlines the actions that UNDRR took with our partners within the UN system, government and communities. It highlights lessons learnt, advances made, and recommendations for the future. We have shared these with our partners through a dedicated online portal, webinars, bi-weekly newsletters and a coordinated social media campaign to ensure maximum outreach.

And we didn't stop there.

After a critical look at all we have achieved over the past months, along with the findings and recommendations of our partners, we have applied this learning to our future work. Major upcoming programmes such as Making Cities Resilient 2030, our private sector partner network ARISE, and the future iterations of the Global Assessment Report will be adapted based on our evolving knowledge.

We know we can never return to "normal", and we shouldn't want to. We have a chance to improve the way we approach development to ensure that it is genuinely risk-informed, to protect lives and livelihoods and secure our progress towards the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals. We cannot miss this opportunity.

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Mami Mizutori

United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

The COVID-19 disaster serves as a reminder to us all of the risk of pandemic specifically. But more than that, it shows that we rarely face one hazard at a time. In our contemporary and connected world risk is systemic and impact cascades.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has become the worst human and economic crisis of our lifetime, with the death toll exceeding 1 million[1] by the end of September. It is causing serious disruption to progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The COVID-19 disaster demonstrates that risk is more systemic than ever in a connected globalized world. No country, community or sector is immune, and what was initially presented as a health disaster quickly became a socio-economic disaster with long-term impact, highlighting the urgent need for a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach towards risk-informed recovery.

As tragic as they are, risk and crisis often provide opportunities for transformation, and these opportunities must be seized. The global response to COVID-19 is already providing critical lessons that can shape future disaster risk reduction policies and action worldwide.

In mid-March 2020, as the magnitude of the pandemic became evident, UNDRR responded through a COVID-19 engagement strategy, contributing to the whole-of-United Nations effort to respond to the pandemic: by tackling the health emergency; addressing social impact and economic response; and supporting recovery.
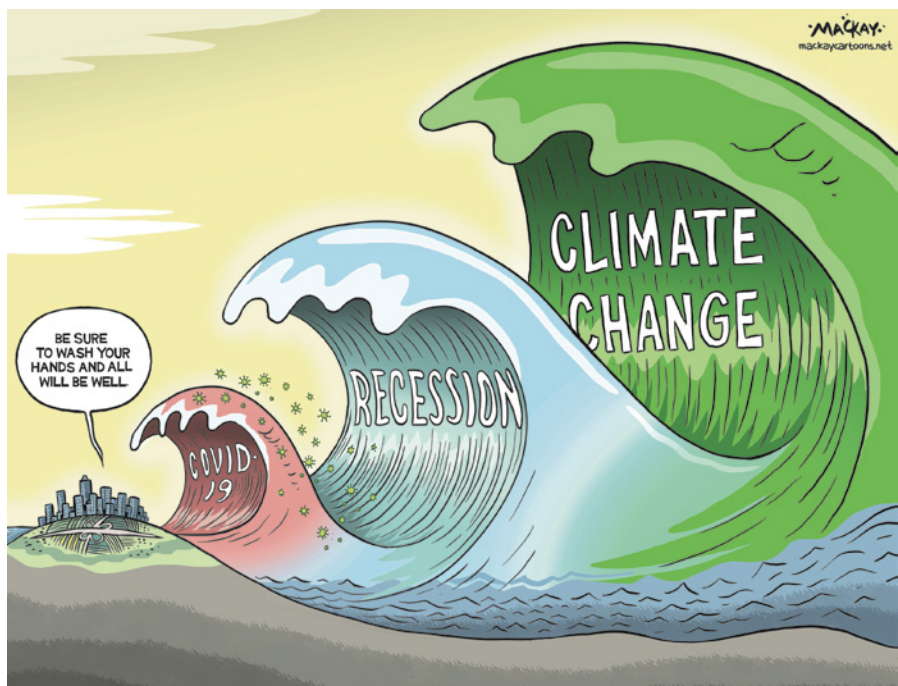
The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework) is a blueprint for reducing risk and building resilience. Our COVID-19 engagement strategy and its activities have been aligned with the bi-annual 2020-2021 Work Programme. The focus has been to promote evidence, knowledge and learning on the COVID-19 pandemic for more effective disaster risk reduction policy and practice as well as ensuring a better and more resilient recovery for those most affected.

Promote Evidence, Knowledge and Learning on the COVID-19 Pandemic for Improved Policy and Practice

As part of the international response to COVID-19, we are engaging diverse stakeholders at all levels to promote learning for improved policy and practice to ensure that effective and sustainable disaster risk reduction actively addresses pandemics and biological hazards. This work includes fostering dialogue amongst diverse stakeholders, developing guidance and tools, and ensuring a multi-dimensional understanding of risk, so that early lessons learned from the pandemic inform current and future disaster risk reduction efforts.

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[1] John Hopkins University of Medicine

In mid-March, we immediately pivoted from providing largely face-to-face support to Member States to provide a range of virtual services and opportunities to maximize the exchange of emerging knowledge and share early lessons from the COVID-19 disaster. UNDRR convened and influenced key decision makers across sectors from diverse institutions including parliamentarians, policy makers, communications professionals and the media. Amongst other initiatives, we facilitated dialogues with global experts, policy makers and practitioners through webinars and online training sessions, quickly curated a COVID-19 reference section on PreventionWeb [www.preventionweb.net], re-focused social media and advocacy channels to provide information on the DRR dimension to COVID-19, and reached out to social policy experts to examine how best to approach policy delivery in a time-constrained, single-focus environment. Tens of thousands of people around the world were engaged in these activities.

We worked closely with our United Nations system partners at the global and regional levels to contribute to the United Nations' comprehensive response to COVID-19. We did this by actively supporting and guiding efforts to ensure a recovery process that not only builds back better, but also strengthens resilience to reduce the risk of pandemics and other biological hazards in the future. This has included the development of technical guidance notes on incorporating biological hazard preparedness into UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks for Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), active leadership in UN Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) at the regional level, as well as efforts to bring together health sector and disaster risk management constituencies.

We continue to proactively identify opportunities to advocate for risk-informed recovery and share lessons learned in integrating pandemics in disaster risk reduction and sustainable development plans or strategies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the need for stronger and more consistent collaboration between the health sector and disaster risk management. This collaboration has been facilitated by fostering dialogue between health sector professionals and disaster risk managers at the national and local level to ensure that disaster risk is addressed across sectors.

Leveraging Partnerships to Recover Better with a Focus on Socio-Economic Impact on those Most Affected

Both the risk drivers and future impact of the COVID-19 pandemic go well beyond the health sector. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on already vulnerable at risk communities and developing countries and has exposed deep inequalities in societies and economies with existing social protection gaps.

COVID-19 has underscored the critical but often overlooked importance of risk governance. It is not enough to have a plan or a strategy. Structures, people and processes that surround this plan or strategy must also be linked, engaged and supported by resources to implement it. This is why we worked with diverse partners to share early lessons and develop tools and guidance to support governments and stakeholders improve their risk governance and preparedness, response and recovery efforts.

We hosted a series of webinars to provide a platform to explore in detail how global communities were affected by COVID-19. The resulting virtual policy discussions were synthesized into a series of topic specific key findings and policy recommendations to overcome the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, particularly as it relates to some of the world's most affected populations in complex settings.

While the world is still actively responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have to initiate a more resilient recovery now. There are diverse recovery needs that extend far beyond the health sector. Just as the disaster has impacted every single sector of our societies, our response must be multisectoral as well. We are contributing to resilient recovery through developing tools and providing technical support, including toolkits to support business resilience of the vulnerable micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and policy briefs outlining opportunities for more resilient and greener economies.

As urbanization continues, COVID-19 demonstrates that urban and city-based prevention and preparedness work is more urgent than ever. At the same time, COVID-19 is not the only disaster affecting many places in the world. Extreme weather events are doubling down on COVID-19 related challenges, increasing impact and vulnerability. The implementation of Sendai Framework Target (e), which requests an increase in the number of national and local disaster risk reduction strategies is more vital now than ever before. It urges national and local governments to address complex risk contextually and to develop evidence-based strategies for action. Many cities became the first responders to COVID-19, as in many disasters. Through training, technical support and the introduction of technical tools, we supported the development of local disaster risk reduction strategies that encompass all hazards, including biological ones, and address their preparedness so cities can develop response capacity down to the community level. In addition, we complemented and facilitated the implementation of the UNDRR Disaster Resilience Scorecard for Cities with the development of the Public Health System Resilience Addendum. More than 200 cities and towns around the world already use the UNDRR Disaster Resilience Scorecard to develop evidence-based approaches to managing their disaster risk.

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Health workers wearing personal protective equipment arrive to conduct a door to door check up at Dharavi slum in India during the COVID-19 pandemic

Integrated planning that takes into account disaster risk reduction measures will remain ineffective if it does not include adequate financing and related accountability measures. Diverse players in the international community need to step-up, innovate and integrate science to better adapt, anticipate and prepare.

COVID-19 is a global disaster event caused by a biological hazard. This type of hazard was included within the scope of the Sendai Framework 2015-2030. Transparency, information-sharing and transboundary cooperation are critical to mounting a rapid, appropriate and effective response. At risk populations and those with little access to information must be prioritized. As we bear witness to diminishing sustainable development gains, we must achieve a resilient, green and equitable recovery through risk-informed decisions for sustainable development.

Early Lessons Learned

Even if the pandemic is not yet over, the following early lessons can be drawn from our activities and engagement over the past months:

- The COVID-19 pandemic, while in the first instance a public health crisis, has triggered a disaster with social and economic consequences on an unprecedented global scale. It concretely demonstrates the systemic nature of risk that contemporary societies face, and the potential for cascading negative effects across systems.

- Governments are now more aware of systemic risk thinking and the need to adopt a multi-hazard, multi-sector approach to disaster risk reduction. Risk governance, which ensures that public authorities, civil servants, media, the private sector, and civil society coordinate at community, national and regional levels to manage and reduce disasters and related risks will help reduce vulnerability to shocks that are exacerbated by siloed policies and institutional mechanisms.

- The pandemic has triggered a closer examination of the quality and effectiveness of national disaster risk governance. Managing the pandemic and the potentially significant trade-off decisions that governments face across different sectors, requires the engagement of all State institutions and enhanced cross-sectoral coordination and participation amongst all actors. Inclusion, participation, transparency and accountability are key for effective and improved disaster risk governance.

- The development and implementation of robust disaster risk reduction strategies (Sendai Framework Target (e)), which include biological risks such as pandemic risk management, are critical. In order to achieve the 2020 deadline for this target, efforts need to be stepped up and drastically accelerated.

- The pandemic highlights the need for multi-hazard risk assessments and vulnerability analysis and the importance of considering biological hazards and risks, including epidemics and pandemics in these assessments.

- The private sector has a crucial role to play in disaster risk reduction. COVID-19 has demonstrated the need to invest in enhancing the resilience of the private sector, in particular micro, small and medium enterprises. Post-COVID recovery provides an opportunity for green growth, including through ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction.

- As in all disasters, the most vulnerable are hit hardest by this global disaster. Risk-informed, adaptive and shock-responsive social protection is essential in making COVID-19 recovery resilient and equitable.

II. BACKGROUND

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is one of the worst human and economic crisis of our lifetime, with a rising death toll exceeding 1 million[2], and causing serious disruption to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nothing undermines development like a disaster. According to a recent UN report, an estimated 71 million people are expected to be pushed back into extreme poverty in 2020.[3] The poorest and most vulnerable – including children, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees – are being hit the hardest. The full scale of the direct and indirect economic and social impact of the pandemic is yet to be known and felt.

With ever more interconnected, networked and globalized societies, this century is likely to be dominated by the emergence of large-scale systemic risks, that cut across the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Today's environmental, health, food, supply chain, information, financial and communication systems are complex and deeply interwoven. These systems are challenged by drivers of disruptive influences such as infectious disease outbreaks, food shortages, social unrest, political and financial instability and increasing inequality.

The COVID-19 disaster is a complex manifestation of systemic risk: a hazard leads to negative effects in discrete parts of the system and also threatens the failure of the entire system. The cascading and devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate the interconnected nature of risk today. The overall impact of COVID-19 goes beyond the health sector and highlights the urgent need to move from hazard-by-hazard, siloed approaches to a more holistic multi-hazard systems approach, which takes into account compound vulnerabilities and cascading risks.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (the Sendai Framework) reflects that the nature and scale of risk has changed and continues to evolve, to such a degree that existing disaster management institutions and approaches also need to evolve. The current pandemic has reinforced the requirement for a shift from managing disasters to managing disaster risk. Therefore more coherent approaches between emergency management and disaster risk management are needed.

Governments need to understand the social, ecological and economic dimensions of exposure

Refugees and migrants, wearing protective masks, stand next to the military bus which transfers them in the port of Mytilene, Greece

© SHUTTERSTOCK/Photocarioca

[2] John Hopkins University of Medecine

[3] United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

Residents in Botafogo, in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro, doing their own street cleaning to prevent the expansion of Covid-19

and vulnerability. Plans and strategies need to focus on inclusion and equality to effectively promote whole-of-society resilience.[4] Improved risk governance that delivers on risk management strategies that reduce the human, social and economic costs caused by disasters is essential. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a myriad of these issues which the disaster risk reduction community has been highlighting over many years. As challenging as the current situation is, this pandemic provides an opportunity to tackle outstanding issues and build on the progress made by disaster risk management institutions and other stakeholders.

The Sendai Framework should guide the way forward. It calls for a substantial increase in the number of countries that have national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by the end of 2020. As of August 2020, 93 Member and Observer States have reported having a national disaster risk reduction strategy in the Sendai Framework Monitor – an online database which tracks progress against the Sendai Framework's seven global targets. Ensuring that these strategies prepare countries to develop and implement multi-sectoral risk management approaches to complex disasters, such as COVID-19, is a key priority.

Good governance and political commitment is fundamental to operationalize existing strategies, ensuring they are linked to coherent planning and financing mechanisms to achieve effective implementation. Progress towards risk-informed sustainable development will only be accelerated if the diversity of risk and its systemic nature are reflected in the design of policies and investments across all sectors at all levels.

In March, the UN Secretary-General asked the international community to focus on three critical areas of action to respond to the COVID-19 disaster: tackling the health emergency; social impact and economic response and recovery; and recovering better. The global response is yielding lessons that must shape future disaster risk reduction policies and action worldwide.

In mid-March, as soon as the magnitude and scale of the pandemic became evident, we developed our initial COVID-19 engagement strategy in coordination with the UN's wider efforts to respond to the global pandemic. The strategy and its activities are aligned with our Work Programme. Activities focus on the organization's key role in generation of evidence-based data, knowledge-exchange, coordination and advocacy.

This report provides an overview of the early results in implementing the UNDRR COVID-19 engagement strategy to date.

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[4] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Global Assessment Report 2019

III. Promote Evidence, Knowledge and Learning on the COVID-19 Pandemic for Improved Policy and Practice

UNDRR is engaging diverse stakeholders at the global, regional, national and local level to promote learning for improved policy and practice so that effective and sustainable disaster risk reduction addresses pandemics and biological hazards. This work includes fostering dialogue amongst stakeholders, developing guidance and tools, and ensuring a multidimensional understanding of risk so that early lessons inform current and future disaster risk reduction efforts.

1. UNDRR's Role within the United Nations System

From the early stages of the pandemic, we have worked closely with our United Nations system partners, in particular with WHO, at the global and regional level to contribute to the comprehensive response to COVID-19. We are contributing to the United Nations' efforts to ensure a recovery that not only builds back better, but also strengthens resilience to reduce the future risk of pandemics and other biological hazards. Key achievements so far include the development of technical guidance notes for Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), active participation in UN Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) at the regional level, as well as efforts to bring together health sector and disaster risk management constituencies.

We continue to proactively identify opportunities to advocate for risk-informed recovery and share lessons learned in integrating pandemics in disaster risk reduction and sustainable development plans or strategies.

During the fifth annual meeting of the UN Senior Leadership Group on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience, chaired by Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction (SRSG Mizutori) in July 2020, United Nations entities endorsed nine recommendations to ensure risk-informed COVID-19 recovery. The recommendations include leveraging UN system disaster risk management expertise to systematically integrate disaster risk reduction and systemic risk considerations in advocacy and support to national pandemic and epidemic risk management and risk-informed recovery, and strengthening the role of national multi-sectoral disaster risk management bodies in the governance and management of COVID-19 related risks. This will ensure COVID-19 recovery efforts reflect multi-hazard risk management, resilience building approaches and the participation of the most vulnerable communities and people.

Guidance for UN Country Teams

Building on existing collaboration with United Nations agencies, in particular, the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), which provides support to United Nations Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), we had led the development of the Guidance Note Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. This Guidance Note now features a special addendum concerning the integration of disease outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics such as COVID-19 in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (Cooperation Frameworks). The addendum provides practical advice

Health care workers wear protective suits as they wait for patients to be tested for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Riga, Latvia

on how to integrate the risk of outbreaks, epidemics, pandemics and biological and other hazards at key stages of the Cooperation Framework cycle, and urges the consideration of these risks in related programme planning, implementation and resourcing at the national level. We are currently preparing a complementary training package for UNCTs which will also address biological hazards.

Addressing COVID-19 through UN Issue-based Coalitions at the Regional Level

In the context of COVID-19, our active participation and leadership in United Nations Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) has ensured that a systemic understanding of risk and related disaster risk reduction measures are integrated into cross-sectoral activities and plans. IBCs are a critical tool for linking global policy with regional and national level implementation and provide technical support to UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams, and ultimately national stakeholders.

Linking COVID-19 Recovery Strategies for a Better and More Sustainable Recovery in the Americas and the Caribbean

Alongside UNEP, we co-led the Issue-based Coalition on Climate Change and Resilience for the region of the Americas and the Caribbean which is focusing its work in 2020 on two key areas: the provision of technical knowledge and recommendations related to the systemic nature of risk and the extent to which natural, human, political, economic and social systems interact; and the identification of ways to link COVID-19 stimulus packages and recovery strategies and plans to environmental

"UNDRR was one of the first entities to initiate and master early lessons learned and conversations from practitioners and partners in the COVID-19 response. In doing so, there was a strong focus on the broadest participation of stakeholders, reflective of the importance outlined in the 2030 Agenda for the active engagement and dedicated partnership of governments, civil society, academia and the business sector.

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), the topics and discussion on challenges were particularly pertinent, and enabled the UN team in the Maldives to consider what was emerging from other countries, and proposals for solutions, given that the pandemic in Maldives was slower to develop.

These fora operated as effective fast-moving thinktanks in real time, which is the measure of the Secretary-General's call to UN Development System to be agile and respond to the needs at the country level in a way which brings the resources and expertise from the regional level to enhance the impact of our results during the "development emergency" unique to COVID-19.

The policy briefs that followed proved to anchor the discussions in concrete and tangible recommendations, which enabled us to share with government partners, and continue to do so. As we move forward with our efforts to increase engagement with the business sector around the 2030 Agenda in the Maldives, we will rely on the toolkits and assessment tools as an important value-add in our future partnerships."

Catherine Haswell
UN Resident Coordinator in the Maldives

CITIES OF THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN FACING COVID-19
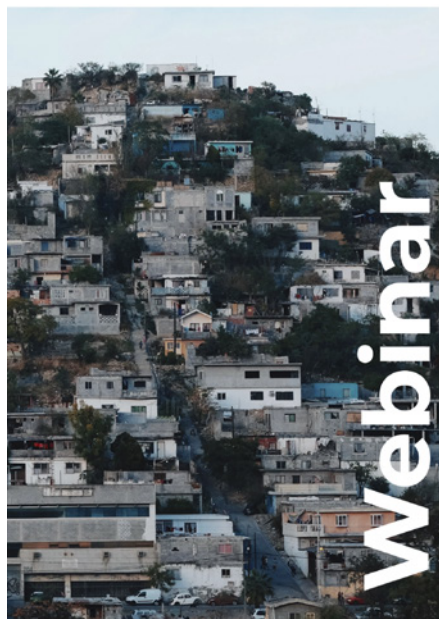
Webinar

**SERIAL CONVERSATIONS:
CONSIDERATIONS ON RESPONSE,
SYSTEMIC RISK AND THE FUTURE**

3. RESILIENT CITIES

FRIDAY
JUNE 5TH
11:00 A.M.
Panama time

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT:
lburon@eird.org

COVID-19 RESPONSE   CITIES on the FRONTLINE   RESILIENT GLOBAL RESILIENT CITIES NETWORK   UNDRR UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

We advocate that an understanding of the multidimensional nature of risk needs to be integrated into social and economic recovery strategies, not only national and local disaster risk reduction strategies.

sustainability, climate action and resilience in order to build back better and greener. A series of UNDRR webinars in May 2020, beginning with the inaugural webinar Addressing climate-related disasters in times of COVID-19: multiple-hazards and systemic risk explored these issues and a corresponding series of policy briefs and related recommendations were developed.

We advocate that an understanding of the multidimensional nature of risk needs to be integrated into social and economic recovery strategies, not only national and local disaster risk reduction strategies. Acknowledging the coherence of the risk reduction, climate and development agendas and putting risk reduction and resilience building at the heart of economic and social recovery will ensure development is sustainable and serve to better address inequalities and vulnerabilities. COVID-19 provides the opportunity to prioritize resilience building and a greener recovery in the region, including increased investment in renewable energies and climate smart technologies.

Building Resilience in Asia-Pacific

Within Asia-Pacific, UNDRR and UNDP serve as co-leads of the Issue-based Coalition on Building Resilience. The

IBC has developed a COVID-19 Action Plan structured around a multi-sectoral response addressing social impact and economic response and ensuring a whole-of-society response and recovery; and identifying pathways for resilient recovery in the most vulnerable sectors.

Under our co-leadership, the IBC is strengthening prevention, preparedness and response to climate-induced disasters and biological hazards, including pandemics, and providing related technical guidance for their inclusion in disaster risk reduction strategies and UN planning. To support this objective, we reviewed national disaster risk reduction strategies to determine the current level of integration of biological hazards. Through diverse briefing papers, we are also disseminating policy advice related to COVID-19; informing socio-economic recovery based on a UNDP study of recovery from previous disasters in Asia-Pacific; developing a small and medium enterprise (SME) Continuity and Recovery Planning Toolkit; and supporting national level implementation of the Bangkok Principles within the Asia Pacific region. At the sub-regional level, our Pacific Office is supporting the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Fiji to work with ten countries to adapt UN Joint Country Action Plans to address COVID-19.

2. Strengthened Collaboration Between Health and DRR Actors

The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the need for better collaboration between the health and disaster risk management sectors.

Implementing the Bangkok Principles

The need for better collaboration amongst national institutions is not a new issue. It was clearly demonstrated in 2016, when the Ebola epidemic in West Africa and the Zika virus outbreak demonstrated the need for a multi-hazard approach to strengthen health and socio-economic resilience. The International Conference on the Implementation of the Health Aspects of the Sendai Framework (Bangkok 2016) recommended specific measures to prevent and reduce the risk of health emergencies, like pandemics that have significant social and economic impact. The Bangkok Principles emphasize the shared need for risk assessment, surveillance and early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, and coordinated incident management. This strengthened coherence is needed to better manage the increasingly inter-connected and transboundary nature of risk. The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed the Health Emergencies and Disaster Risk Management Framework which reiterates these points and calls for a multisectoral approach to health-related emergencies.

The seven recommendations of the Bangkok Principles for the International Conference on the Implementation of the Health Aspects of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

1. Promote systematic integration of health into national and sub-national disaster risk reduction policies and plans and the inclusion of emergency and disaster risk management programmes in national and sub-national health strategies.

2. Enhance cooperation between health authorities and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen country capacity for disaster risk management for health, the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) and building of resilient health systems.

3. Stimulate people-centered public and private investment in emergency and disaster risk reduction, including in health facilities and infrastructure.

4. Integrate disaster risk reduction into health education and training and strengthen capacity building of health workers in disaster risk reduction.

5. Incorporate disaster-related mortality, morbidity and disability data into multi-hazards early warning system, health core indicators and national risk assessments.

6. Advocate for, and support cross-sectoral, transboundary collaboration including information sharing, and science and technology for all hazards, including biological hazards.

7. Promote coherence and further development of local and national policies and strategies, legal frameworks, regulations, and institutional arrangements.

We are proactively supporting countries to implement the Bangkok Principles for a more integrated disaster risk management approach. This includes a review of national and regional disaster risk reduction strategies and governance mechanisms to assess the level of integration of biological hazards into disaster risk reduction planning and institutional mechanisms. The review incorporates interviews with national disaster risk reduction focal points to understand lessons learned from their COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, and proposes how learning from the pandemic should improve overall disaster risk governance.

We are briefing UN Country Teams in Asia and the Pacific and building the capacity of national authorities to integrate aspects of the Principles into their national disaster risk reduction and health sector strategies to facilitate coordinated financing and implementation.

© UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Secretary-General Holds Virtual Townhall with Women's Civil Society in Light of COVID-19

We are also supporting national disaster management agencies in Africa to examine their role in the COVID-19 response. A survey conducted by UNDRR in early April 2020 demonstrates that sub-Saharan African countries are strengthening government coordination forums composed of public officials and diverse sectoral experts, including health experts who are guiding the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the region. This is a positive sign highlighting the growing importance of risk governance in prevention and response mechanisms.

In order to understand the extent to which biological hazards are integrated into national DRR strategies in Africa, we conducted a desk review of existing strategies. Each of the eighteen disaster risk reduction strategies which were analysed mention epidemics as one of the major hazards countries have to face. Several strategies include the need to coordinate with the health sector, and mention either the Ministry of Health or health experts as part of the coordination mechanism for disaster risk reduction implementation. Several countries also mention the need to coordinate at the regional level to cope with transboundary risks of epidemics. The reflections on biological hazards in national strategies, and the analysis of coordination mechanisms for the response to the COVID-19 crisis indicate that more work is needed to better understand the linkages between the importance given to epidemics in the policy documents and the actual implementation of corresponding actions.

We convened a series of discussions with European member States to examine how countries can assess national policies and capabilities to respond to shocks such as COVID-19, including through tools such as a new stress test tool piloted by UNDRR, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats and the Ministry of the Interior of Finland. The tool takes multi-hazard risk assessments and disaster loss data into account for decision making. Discussions identified opportunities to align national health emergency and national disaster risk reduction strategies through the use of resilience assessments, including a dedicated track on health dimensions aiming to strengthen economic, social, health and environmental resilience.

To further support collaboration between health and disaster risk management sectors, UNDRR in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Government of Israel, co-organized a virtual dialogue in May with representatives from thirty European countries. This was followed by a second dialogue focused on the COVID-19 context in Central Asia based on the experience of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These virtual encounters have provided an opportunity for countries to share recommendations on how to strengthen the capacities of governments and communities to tackle a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and to better anticipate future pandemic risks. This resulted in a proposal for

greater collaboration between Sendai Framework and International Health Regulations (IHR) focal points in the region which focuses on cooperation to enhance multi-sectoral partnerships, local level preparedness, and joint advocacy for evidence-informed action to reduce disaster risk.

Countries also agreed to collaborate through joint situation analysis of systemic risks to inform health security and emergency planning, joint promotion of investments in health security to build back better, and identification of opportunities to strengthen local level preparedness and resilience. In addition, countries committed to ensuring that the IHR and Sendai Framework disaster risk reduction monitoring and evaluation tools inform the development of National Action Plans for Health Security (NAPHS) and National DRR strategies.

3. Capacity Development and Technical Support

As COVID-19 began to spread globally, in March 2020, UNDRR's office for Northeast Asia and the Global Education and Training Institute (GETI) based in Incheon, Republic of Korea were uniquely positioned to immediately provide a virtual platform to maximize the exchange of emerging knowledge and early lessons from COVID-19 through webinars and online training.

The inaugural COVID-19 webinar series was organized in partnership with WHO to share practical experiences from the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China – the first countries to be at the forefront of addressing challenges related to COVID-19. The webinars reached a global audience of 1,000 participants representing governments, intergovernmental organizations, the United Nations system, civil society, researchers, and media from over 100 countries – an indicator of the urgency to learn from the emerging pandemic.

The Republic of Korea presented data and approaches on tracking COVID-19 including testing, tracing and treatment and outlined the Government's four main policies to prevent the spread of COVID-19, based on lessons learned from the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome outbreak in 2015. China shared its experience activating its 'all government, all society' emergency management system in response to COVID-19, including

"The pandemic has highlighted the importance of implementing the International Health Regulations and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction."

"With the support of UNDRR, WHO has published a comprehensive Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Framework, to support all countries to reduce and manage public health emergency risks, including disease outbreaks."

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General, World Health Organization (WHO)

© UN Photo/Elma Okic

the prioritization of vulnerable populations and international collaboration.

These early lessons from COVID-19 were disseminated broadly through our global network of more than 3,000 policymakers and practitioners at Sendai Framework focal ministries, national sectoral counterparts and members of national platforms for disaster risk reduction, local authorities, Making Cities Resilient Campaign partners, academia, private sector, and other stakeholder groups.

Other webinar topics included business continuity and how businesses can prepare for reopening; parliamentary action to reduce risks, increased resilience and

strengthened emergency preparedness; building back better; and the role of emerging technologies including blockchain, ICT and data. We also collaborated with Making Cities Resilient Campaign partners to conduct webinars on *Applying the principles of resilience building* with Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and *Disaster Risk Reduction for the unexpected: responding, re-opening and recovery towards resilience of cities* with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and ICLEI.

Our webinars and virtual trainings opened the door to participants who may not usually be able to access face-to-face meetings and training opportunities. Between March and September 2020, we hosted more than 22,000 participants in 75 webinars and online trainings globally. Many webinar participants – including parliamentarians, local authorities and over 500 students who will be future disaster risk reduction leaders – have subsequently enrolled in online courses.

"This webinar is timely as it is very important to learn and apply the lessons learned and best practices in the COVID Response, and to identify challenges in preparing for, and managing COVID-19 across the world."

Dr. Stella Chungong
WHO Director,
Health Security and Preparedness

4. Influencing Decision Makers and Agents for Change

We have played a key role in convening and influencing key decision makers from diverse institutions across sectors.

Parliamentary Action in Response to COVID-19

In April, we partnered with WHO and the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) to explore parliamentary action to reduce risk, strengthen emergency preparedness and increase resilience in an initial webinar for parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and partners. The dialogue triggered requests for additional discussions to further define the central role of parliaments in reducing the risk of disasters and building back better from COVID-19. These dialogues engaged more than 700 participants from over 85 countries. Members of parliament agreed to take urgent action to ensure that relevant legislation moves forward and alongside the IPU and WHO, UNDRR committed to providing guidance to identify key components for risk-informed legislation.

We are also collaborating with the IPU on the development of a new Parliamentarian Advocacy Toolkit on Disaster Risk Reduction. The toolkit considers parliamentary action in light of the COVID-19 disaster and lessons learned. It will be launched by the end of 2020.

Providing Effective Communication and Reliable Information to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Trusted, accurate, accessible, and widely shared risk information saves lives, particularly when it reaches 'the last mile' and is used by affected communities. Well-targeted, timely information, with clear messages, is an essential part of successful disaster prevention and response interventions. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Effective dissemination of accurate and accessible information to target audiences can prompt action that will prevent the spread of COVID-19, mitigate its socio-economic impacts and support countries to recover better.

Through practice and policy discussions, capacity building and knowledge products, as well as a comprehensive COVID-19 communications strategy, we have reached a diverse global audience including policy makers, grassroots practitioners and communications professionals to support effective communication to address COVID-19.
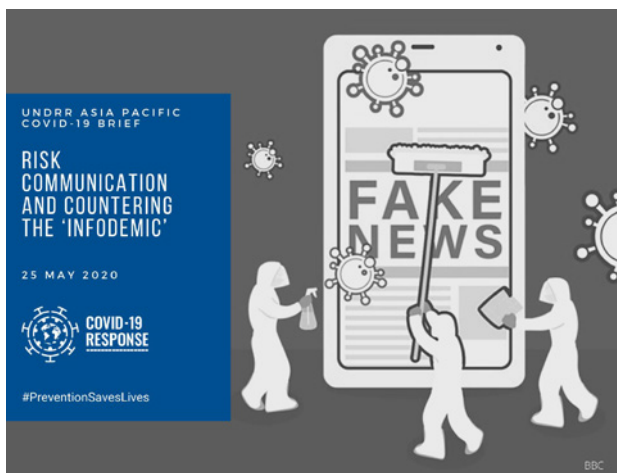
Soon after the outbreak, UNDRR immediately re-focused content across our online channels to explore the risk reduction dimension of COVID-19, and amplified WHO health-related messaging to its diverse audiences.

How Individuals and Communities Respond to Risk and what that Means for Communication

Between April and July we convened two webinars focused on the role of risk communication in addressing COVID-19. One session, joined by more than 300 specialists, focused on how people respond to risks and what that means for communication. Expert panelists explored what behavioral economics can teach diverse practitioners about the way individuals and communities respond to risk and the practical application of this in policy making and public communications. A tailored version of this session was conducted for communication professionals within the UN system and its partners. More than 100 communications professionals tuned in to renowned behavioral economist Kate Orkin.

COVID-19 Risk Communication and Countering the Infodemic

In April as the spread of misinformation began to emerge as a serious threat to COVID-19 prevention and containment efforts, we organized a webinar on risk communication and countering the "infodemic".

The webinar featured examples of how governments, media organizations and civil society have used communication to encourage behavior change to reduce the impact of COVID-19. In Fiji and the Solomon Islands, for example, Oxfam was able to fact-check, facilitate and adapt pandemic risk messages from ministries of health to communities by leveraging credible voices and trusted local networks, such as traditional leaders and faith-based organizations. The webinar also served to promote examples of how organizations were combating misinformation, disinformation and stigma around COVID-19.

UNDRR ASIA PACIFIC COVID-19 BRIEF

RISK COMMUNICATION AND COUNTERING THE 'INFODEMIC'

25 MAY 2020

COVID-19 RESPONSE

#PreventionSavesLives

Trusted, accurate, simple, and widely shared risk information saves lives, particularly when it reaches 'the last mile' and is used by vulnerable communities. This is the case in all communities, countries and disasters, including during the current COVID-19 pandemic. However, several weeks into this global crisis, it is also clear that a 'parallel universe' of rumour and false information is also active. Its wide reach and ability to influence behaviour could increase health risks and fuel racism and hate. This 'infodemic' is a genuine threat to COVID-19 prevention and recovery.

This brief, developed by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Regional Office for Asia-Pacific, aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities for effective risk messaging. Special emphasis is placed on reaching and helping to protect vulnerable communities and deploying tactics to counter misinformation and disinformation which threaten the public health responses and increase societal tensions.

The brief reflects the interventions and feedback from the UNDRR Asia-Pacific webinar on 30 April 2020, titled Risk communication to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19: Countering the 'Infodemic'. The webinar was co-organized with World Health Organization.

UNDRR
UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

World Health Organization

"We have to relook at legislation. In fact, the Sendai Framework refers to the role of parliamentarians in terms of how we can strengthen legislative frameworks. What we have to do now is make sure the legislation we have covers all the hazards – not just natural hazards which become disasters because we have not been able to manage them ... but making sure that biological risks and pandemics are covered, and looking at how can we strengthen the linkages with health is very important. Health is also an overarching theme of the SDGs in terms of SDG 3, and also referred to in the Sendai Framework. ... We now have the chance to look at risk. A lot of legislation in many countries doesn't address the issue of risk [...] legislation might mention disaster risk reduction but in effect it is still disaster management. We need to make that mindset change."

Mr. Saber Chowdhury
Honorary President, IPU and Member of Parliament, Bangladesh

The webinar's related policy brief highlights examples of effective risk messaging. Special emphasis was placed on reaching and helping to protect vulnerable communities and deploying tactics to counter misinformation and disinformation which threaten the public health response and increase societal tensions.

In addition, we provided targeted media capacity building to enhance the role of key stakeholders to address COVID-19 using diverse communications channels. Together with Solutions Journalism Network, we hosted a series of 'how to talk about risk' information sessions for journalists in different regions to build media capacity to talk accurately about risk and how countries can start to plan to recover early. Specific trainings on communicating risk in times of crisis were carried out with diverse global media resulting in training for 110 journalists. The training focused on equipping journalists with practical recommendations on how to cover news during a global crisis.

#PreventionSavesLives Campaign

Since April we have run a global campaign, Prevention Saves Lives, to disseminate information to key audiences to prompt action that will prevent the spread of COVID-19, mitigate its socio-economic impacts and support countries to recover better. The global communication campaign promotes focused attention on most-at-risk groups throughout all stages of COVID-19 crisis.

At the global and regional levels we have promoted key messages through audiovisual content, social media assets, news stories & op-eds. Over 900 social posts were made across Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn and the #PreventionSavesLives campaign with more than 5 million impressions. Particular success was realized on LinkedIn where our corporate channel grew from 2,300 followers in March 2020 to more than 46,000 in August 2020. In addition, we actively contributed to the UN's #Verified Campaign, fighting misinformation and sharing United Nations approved language and posts across appropriate channels.

Partnerships to Recover Better with a Focus on Socio-Economic Impact on those Most Affected

The impact of COVID-19 goes well beyond the health sector. The pandemic has had a disproportional impact on communities and countries already in hazardous or unstable situations and has exposed deep inequalities in societies and economies with existing gaps in social protection systems. With its cascading and devastating social and economic impact, COVID-19 has demonstrated the interconnected nature of risk today, highlighting the urgent need for a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach to risk-informed recovery and sustainable development. UNDRR has responded by leveraging our partnerships developing guidance and tools to support governments and stakeholders improve their risk governance and support their preparedness, response and recovery efforts.

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1. Understanding and Overcoming the Socio-economic Impact on those Most at Risk

Through a series of webinar discussions we explored the global communities that are most at risk and most affected by COVID-19, and subsequently produced specific key findings and policy recommendations informing efforts to overcome the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, particularly as it relates to some of the world's most vulnerable populations in complex settings.

Disaster Responsive Social Protection

We explored how effective social protection reduces vulnerability and supports timely recovery. COVID-19 has

demonstrated how national systems have not been sufficiently developed nor flexible enough to allow them to be effective before or during emergencies. Despite these shortcomings, many countries are relying on social protection mechanisms to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 disaster, using them, for example, to reach millions of people with cash-based assistance. Our briefing document on *Disaster Responsive Social Protection* developed in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), explores how countries in the region are leveraging social protection systems to both reduce vulnerabilities so that communities are more

> **"There are three ways disasters like COVID-19 impact women: they have less access to information and thus are more likely to miss out on important life-saving risk information; women are more likely to drop out of the labour market to support their families when someone falls ill or when schools close; and where you have restrictions on mobility, women are at particular risk of facing violence, and some groups of women in particular would find it very difficult to access services."**
>
> *Ms. Anna-Karin Jatfors*
> *UN Women Deputy Regional Director, Asia and Pacific*

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resilient to shocks and can recover faster, and serve as a vehicle to enable early action and deliver rapid relief. Universal approaches are essential to reaching both the poorest households and to providing a much-needed cushion to vulnerable households who do not qualify as extremely poor and are mostly employed in the informal sector.

Leave No One Behind in COVID-19 Prevention, Response and Recovery

Although COVID-19 spreads indiscriminately, certain groups are disproportionately impacted. These include those already marginalized by structural barriers and gender inequalities present before the pandemic, including older persons, women and girls, persons living with disabilities, caregivers and migrant and informal sector workers.

In partnership with Help Age International and UN Women, we produced a policy brief *Leave No One Behind in COVID-19 Prevention, Response and Recovery* that outlines key response challenges and ten policy recommendations outlining differentiated responses to meet different needs based on intersectional approaches. These include identifying and mitigating

UNDRR UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction **IFRC** **Flood Resilience Alliance** **PARTNERS FOR RESILIENCE**

WEBINAR – 27 MAY 2020

Planning for Climate Change during COVID-19 Crisis: The role of humanitarian and disaster risk management actors

PREVENTION SAVES LIVES!

COVID-19 RESPONSE **UNDRR** UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

10:30 – New York
16:30 - Geneva

Back to normal is not good enough: we must recover and build back better

Distinguished invited panellists will provide an overview and insight into major climate change and disaster risk reduction policy objectives for 2020 in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. This will help practitioners from the humanitarian and disaster risk management communities understand critical climate related policy objectives, identify ways risk management and humanitarian actions can contribute to climate change related planning, and highlight ways we may wish to adjust work in the contact of COVID-19. Can we use projects already identified in countries' national DRR, climate change adaptation plans and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as part of the stimulus and recovery?

Please check the webinar's event page for further information and registration:
https://www.undrr.org/event/webinar-planning-climate-change-during-covid-19-crisis

the unintended economic and health consequences of the COVID-19 response; proactively addressing increased stigma, discrimination and risk of violence, in particular, sexual and gender-based violence; ensuring targeted messaging reaches all vulnerable groups; scaling-up social protection for the most vulnerable; and targeting economic stimulus and recovery programmes for vulnerable groups.

Reducing Vulnerability Amongst Displaced Populations and Migrants

Migrants and displaced populations are highly vulnerable to COVID-19, and subsequent severe socio-economic impact. The UNDRR policy brief Reducing Vulnerability Amongst Displaced Populations and Migrants built on a webinar that was co-organized with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and provides recommendations to protect these vulnerable groups while minimizing transmission risks to the larger population. The brief also highlights lessons from Bangladesh's experience hosting one of the largest refugee camps in the world.

Persons with Disabilities in the face of COVID-19 in the Americas and the Caribbean

The magnitude of the emergency generated by the COVID-19 pandemic has far exceeded the response capacity of governments and other service providers. This particularly affects persons with disabilities, who face additional barriers due to the way they interact with their surroundings as well as from a lack of, or interruption to, health services, support networks and other critical services. There are approximately 85 million people living with some form of disability in the Americas and the Caribbean region. In collaboration with ONG Inclusiva and the Latin America and the Caribbean Network for Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Management, we organized a webinar focused on supporting people with disabilities.

Informed by the experience and perspectives of persons living with disabilities, their caregivers and families as well as representative organizations and social support networks, we produced a policy brief People with Disabilities in the Face of COVID-19 which puts forward specific recommendations to address barriers faced by people with disabilities during disasters, such as accessible communications and information platforms, including Braille, captioning and sign language and the use of disaggregated and geo-referenced data that enables a more adequate

response to the population; as well as the provision of more flexible social protection packages.

Experiences and Challenges in Fragile Contexts

Fragile contexts present a particular set of challenges for the national and international response to the pandemic. The policy discussion Experience and Challenges in Fragile Contexts: Building Resilience to Future Shocks, highlighted information on COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery efforts with a focus on experience in fragile contexts, including lessons learned from previous crisis such as the 2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the experience of addressing COVID-19 in Liberia, Iraq and Mozambique. It also analysed the policies and socio-economic response plans in place to protect people who are already vulnerable or marginalized, such as displaced persons, refugees and persons affected by disaster and conflict. It provided policy recommendations for international humanitarian and development partners, outlining how best to integrate efforts to build resilience to future multidimensional shocks in fragile contexts.

"We could even say that COVID-19 has served to de-mask the world and the world has begun to live as we so often do. But at the same time, we are seeing great and successful initiatives borne from willingness and collaboration. Above all else we need community participation, because if there is anything that should be laid to rest with the old 'normality', it's exclusion. We need a more equitable world with people working together; a world that is truly inclusive."

Carlos Kaiser
Executive Director ONG Inclusiva

2. Strengthening Preparedness and Recovering Better

Much of the world is still focused on responding to the COVID-19 disaster, but it is crucial to initiate a more resilient recovery early on. There are diverse recovery needs that extend far beyond the health sector and require multisectoral participation.

International Recovery Platform COVID-19 Recovery Policy Brief and Toolkit

To support key partners including policy makers, development organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and corporate and private philanthropy, UNDRR worked with the International Recovery Platform (IRP) to develop two key resources to support COVID-19 recovery.

A COVID-19 Recovery Policy Brief and checklist highlight challenges and presents recommendations to guide decision-makers through the unique circumstances presented by COVID-19. To support government and stakeholders to plan for recovery, they outline eight guiding principles and nine key recovery actions. Crucial recovery activities include assessing the wider socioeconomic impacts of the crisis and management needs; providing guidance on societal recovery; planning for a comprehensive economic recovery; promoting livelihoods and psycho-social recovery; and the expanded use of e-governance and emerging technologies.

In collaboration with UNDRR, IRP also published a toolkit designed to apply an existing compendium of twenty-one IRP disaster recovery tools and guidelines to support countries and communities to build back better.

Building Greener and More Resilient Economies

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the lack of sustainability and pre-existing inequalities of current economic and social systems, but it has also created an opportunity to rethink such systems and, in this way, generate a paradigm shift towards sustainable development. The COVID-19 recovery process has the potential to be a transformational catalyst for many countries, offering the opportunity to improve their overall long-term resilience. The policy brief, Opportunities for Resilient Recovery, developed in collaboration with ESCAP and IRP, presents countries with guidance on how to take advantage of current opportunities to build

greener and more resilient economies. It includes lessons from past disaster recovery efforts and an introduction to the World Bank's new recovery checklist, which aims to help policy makers select projects that can address immediate employment needs, contribute to restoring degraded ecosystems while also helping to reduce climate and disaster risks.

Recommendations for a Resilient COVID-19 Recovery in Europe

There is a clear opportunity to build resilience into European Union Member States' recovery activities, in particular under the "Next Generation EU" COVID-19 recovery effort, and ensure the groundwork is put in place to successfully meet longer term sustainability and resilience goals. The impact of climate change has the potential to mimic and even supersede the immense damage and loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic recovery and building a green and resilient Europe must be coherently pursued.

The set of recommendations developed in the Recommendations for a Resilient COVID-19 Recovery in Europe brief are organized around the three pillars of the Next Generation EU instrument. They demonstrate how the European COVID-19 recovery should be not only resilient to future similar shocks but also manage the impact of disaster and climate change including emphasizing that recovery is green and resilient; disaster risk reduction is a part of all recovery planning;

investments are made in sustainable infrastructure; support is given to data driven investments based on risk, and national policies; and capacities undergo 'stress tests' to understand their ability to respond to pandemics.

Strengthening the Capacity of the African Union Commission and Member States to Prepare, Respond and Recover from COVID-19

In Africa, we collaborated with the African Union Commission (AUC) to organize the first virtual meeting of the Africa Working Group on DRR to outline how to strengthen the capacity of Member States in the region to prepare, respond and recover. The meeting was attended by over 80 participants from AUC, Regional Economic Communities, member States and other member organizations.

Participants agreed to strengthen support to member States' capacity to manage COVID-19 and other hazards, through enhanced preparedness and early warning systems as well as improved risk governance and management of systemic risk. The group committed to integrate disaster risk reduction into all measures to address COVID-19 and improve risk governance.

As an outcome of a high-level virtual workshop on Building State Resilience, UNDRR, WHO, the AUC, and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), agreed to jointly undertake capacity building for governments in the region to strengthen disaster risk reduction for resilience, as well as enhance capacity for preparedness, response and recovery. They also committed to proactively support member States to implement international frameworks relating to shocks, disasters and infectious diseases, including the Sendai Framework, the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (ARSDRR) and the International Health Regulations (IHR).

3. Ensuring Business Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an upheaval in social and economic life globally and is having a devastating impact on businesses. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), one of the strongest drivers of economic development, innovation and employment, are especially hard hit. Global and regional supply chains have been severely disrupted, hampering the ability of many suppliers to move materials and products to vendors, even where demand has remained strong. Coupled with COVID-19 lockdowns and reduced foot traffic this has caused many businesses to close. Others are struggling to maintain operations while ensuring the safety of their workers.

According to the World Bank, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a major role in most economies, particularly in developing countries. SMEs account for the majority of businesses worldwide and are important contributors to job creation and global economic development. They represent about 90 per cent of businesses and more than 50 per cent of employment worldwide. Formal SMEs contribute up to 40 per cent of national income (GDP) in emerging economies. These numbers are significantly higher when informal and micro SMEs are included.[5]

"Business Resilience in the Face of (COVID-19) Webinar'

Supporting MSMEs to maintain operations and achieve resilience is key to recovery and has been one of our key priorities throughout the pandemic. A series of webinars and related policy briefs looked at how businesses from different sectors have been impacted by the crisis and how they are adapting their business practices to withstand the economic consequences of COVID-19. These dialogues were complemented by a series of tools for MSMEs to enable them to emerge more resilient from recovery as well as policy briefs for business owners and policy makers.

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[5] The World Bank, Understanding Poverty, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMES) Finance. Available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/smefinance

Guidance and Tools for the Private Sector

Enterprise risk management and business continuity management are components of building business resilience and are especially critical for risk prevention in the face of large disasters. For businesses to survive, especially MSMEs, they must be able to quickly adapt their operations to the new environment.

We are developing a global study and recommendations to improve the resilience of MSMEs which will be launched before the end of 2020. The study focuses on the specific changes needed to ensure the policy, fiscal and financial environment is better tailored to the circumstances of MSMEs. The study includes an initial review of the impact of COVID-19 on MSMEs and lessons learned and will be accompanied by a compendium of UNDRR MSME tools and resources.

COVID-19 Small Business Continuity and Recovery Planning Toolkit

The COVID-19 Small Business Continuity and Recovery Planning Toolkit was developed in partnership with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) to support MSMEs to protect their employees and customers from contracting and passing COVID-19; protect their businesses from the incoming disruptions; and utilize all resources that might be available to them to remain operational. The toolkit and accompanying training course are available in eleven Asia-Pacific languages and have been promoted to MSMEs by partners and business associations in six countries and at the regional level.

An online Quick Risk Estimation (QRE) tool for MSMEs has been developed to walk business owners through a survey to estimate their level of risk as a first step to building their resilience. Specifically, the QRE tool aims to help business owners identify possible internal and external risks to their business from COVID-19 and provides them with a general estimation of their risk. The tool is being translated into Spanish and will be available online on the QRE Tool website.

To strengthen the private sector's capacity to build disaster resilience as part of their sustainable business approach, we are working at the national, regional and global level through ARISE, the UNDRR Private Sector Alliance for Disaster Resilient Societies, which is made up of over 350 private sector entities globally. Through ARISE, we have disseminated guidance and tools to private sector companies to support business resilience through measures including business risk assessments, risk reduction plans and multi-hazard scenarios.

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"The pandemic reveals the systemic nature of risk. Crises in basic services have increased in our cities, especially affecting vulnerable populations.

This scenario will lead us to reconsider our modern world and the organization of our cities from governance, investment, production and consumption to our relationship with nature and with each other, prioritizing risk reduction in the process.

It gives us the opportunity to rethink cities and understand that overcoming the great challenges facing disaster risk reduction also means ensuring the sustainability of development."

Mami Mizutori
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

4. Impact on Cities and the Role of Local Authorities and Communities

Cities and local governments are on the frontline of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, with the vast majority of cases occurring in urban areas. More than half of the world's population lives in cities, and this is expected to increase to two thirds by 2050.[6] Ensuring diverse stakeholders in cities, including local governments, have the capacity to reduce disaster risk and build resilience is crucial for making cities places where people flourish and prosper. COVID-19 has demonstrated that pandemic preparedness in cities and towns is more urgent than ever, particularly in challenging situations where disease outbreaks may coincide with extreme weather events as evidenced by Cyclone Amphan that caused widespread damage in Eastern India and Bangladesh in May.

We convened a series of urban-focused dialogues on this subject and disseminated related policy briefs which profile socio-economic response and recovery activities to ensure urban areas and local governments emerge from this crisis more resilient and inclusive.

Local Strategies for Disaster Risk Reduction

Local strategies for disaster risk reduction are an essential part of the process of better recovery and building resilience to future disease outbreaks and must include pandemic risk reduction and preparedness as a priority. Cities have been forced to confront the fact that unplanned urbanization creates conditions where many of their residents lack adequate water and sanitation facilities, while living in overcrowded places where physical distancing is challenging. The COVID-19 crisis has also exposed the large numbers of citizens who do not have affordable access to health care and systemic vulnerabilities in healthcare systems that cannot handle surging caseloads. It is an urgent priority that cities and towns understand their risks related to future pandemics, just as they would for other hazards like extreme weather events.

Governments, especially at the local level, need to plan and use strategic tools that address all hazards, including biological ones, as well as identify gaps in their preparedness so they can develop response capacity down to the community level.

"Covid-19 responses that ignore local realities will exacerbate risk. Millions of people living in poverty can't access handwashing facilities and social distancing is nearly impossible in slums. These challenges and gaps are currently being met by frontline responders, including civil society organizations. Governments, both national and local, must listen to and partner with those communities who are most at risk."

Bijay Kumar,
Executive Director Global Network of Civil Society Organization for Disaster Reduction (GNDR)

UNDRR Disaster Resilience Scorecard Public Health Addendum

Guided by the Bangkok Principles and the Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Framework (HEDRM), we improved the UNDRR Disaster Resilience Scorecard for Cities with the development of the Public Health System Resilience Addendum. More than 200 cities and towns around the world already use the Scorecard to develop evidence-based approaches to managing their disaster risk.

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[6] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision (New York, UN, 2019). Available at https:// population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Report.pdf

> **"We are very encouraged and building confidence from the strategies and lessons you have been sharing with us. This pandemic has exposed to us a very important issue, with the urban poor…We didn't realize just how vulnerable we could get in the face of such a crisis. Thanks for the timely information and webinars being offered…the advice is really helpful."**
>
> *Doris Ombara*
> *City Manager of Kisumu, Kenya*

The online Addendum provides guidance to local governments on the wider issues of management and recovery in case of biological hazards and helps cities engage multi-sectoral stakeholders in disaster risk reduction including public health emergencies, establish their public health system resilience baseline and frame an action plan.

The Resilience of local governments: *A multi-sectoral approach to integrate public health and disaster risk management* webinar introduced the Addendum and was attended by more than 1,100 participants from 121 countries and territories. It triggered requests for additional training which led to the delivery of the Making Cities Resilient Campaign's first online training course.

Our 4-week online training *Resilience of local governments: A multi-sectoral approach to integrate public health and disaster risk management* reached participants from

56 countries. This initial online training triggered new requests for more customized trainings from governments and has resulted in the development of various online courses, including the 6-week online local training *Making Cities Resilient: Developing and implementing local disaster risk reduction strategies* and a self-paced online course on the use of the Public Health Scorecard Addendum and Making Cities Resilient in collaboration with UNITAR.

In addition, the existing online *Disaster Risk Reduction and Local Sustainable Development* course developed with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and its International Training Center (ITC) now introduces a session on disaster risk reduction and COVID-19 and includes the Scorecard Public Health Addendum.

The Pandemic is Global but the Risk is Local: Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction

Evidence indicates that the exposure of people and assets to risks continues to increase faster than vulnerability is decreasing.[7] As COVID-19 has demonstrated, this trend, coupled with current inequalities has seen the generation of new risks and a steady rise in disaster-related losses, with significant economic, social, health, cultural and environmental impact, especially at the local and community levels.

To explore community-based disaster risk reduction approaches in the context of COVID-19 in Africa, UNDRR and the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR) convened a dialogue between key experts and partners, and issued recommendations to: highlight effective community-based disaster risk reduction approaches and their applicability to the COVID-19 pandemic; demonstrate the critical importance of locally led risk assessment methodologies for preparedness and response in extreme crises; and provide examples of how community-based disaster risk reduction reinforces resilience.

Participants advocated central governments to empower local governments to improve engagement with communities and to promote a coherent approach towards resilience. There was strong agreement that local actors must be engaged in the development of early action strategies and related data collection in order for risk reduction to be effective at the local level.

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[7] United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2019

V. Early Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Way Forward

It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a transformational effect on our world. Like other major disasters in human history, it will influence and shape future risk reduction and sustainable development policies and action worldwide. The COVID-19 disaster has become a watershed moment that demonstrates the urgent need to strengthen disaster risk governance at all levels and in all sectors.

We have engaged actively with governments, UN system partners and stakeholders to facilitate dialogue for sharing experiences and related research, analysis and policy recommendations to highlight early lessons learned in addressing the current pandemic. COVID-19 has also provided an opportunity for us to further increase the need to understand and address the systemic and cascading nature of risk, the value of ensuring a multisectoral approach to risk reduction and to advocate for related reforms in policy, planning and financing.

Even if the pandemic is not yet over, the following early lessons can be drawn from our activities and engagement over the past months:

- The COVID-19 pandemic, while in the first instance a public health crisis, has triggered a disaster with social and economic consequences on an unprecedented global scale. It concretely demonstrates the systemic nature of risk that our contemporary societies face, and the potential for cascading negative effects across systems. Governments are now more aware of systemic risk thinking and the need to adopt a multi-hazard, multi-sector approach to disaster risk reduction. Risk governance, which ensures that public authorities, civil servants, media, the private sector, and civil society coordinate at community, national and regional levels to manage and reduce disasters and related risks will help reduce vulnerability to shocks that are exacerbated by siloed policies and institutional mechanisms.

- The pandemic has triggered a closer examination of the quality and effectiveness of national disaster risk governance. Managing the pandemic and the potentially significant trade-off decisions that governments would face across different sectors, requires the engagement of all State institutions and enhanced cross-sectoral coordination and participation amongst all actors, including civil society and the private sector. Enhanced linkages amongst all development sectors, including health, and disaster risk management systems are essential. Inclusion, participation, transparency and accountability are key for effective and improved disaster risk governance.

- Several countries have applied disaster risk management instruments and institutional mechanisms to respond to COVID-19. This points to the importance of not only having a plan in place but investing in its implementation and strengthening disaster risk governance, including revising national policy and legal risk management instruments.

- The development and implementation of robust disaster risk reduction strategies (Sendai Framework Target (e)) is critical. In order to achieve the 2020 deadline for this target, efforts need to be stepped up and drastically accelerated.

- Few countries have made adequate inclusion of biological risks, including pandemic risk management, in their national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction; filling this gap is an essential part of the recovery from COVID-19.

- The pandemic highlights the need for multi-hazard risk assessments and vulnerability analysis and the importance of considering biological hazards and risks, including epidemics and pandemics in these assessments.

- The private sector has a crucial role to play in disaster risk reduction. COVID-19 has demonstrated the need to invest in enhaced resilience of the private sector, in particular micro, small and medium enterprises. Post-COVID recovery provides an opportunity for green growth, including through ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction.

- Last but not least, COVID-19 does not discriminate between rich and poor but the poorest and the most marginalized members of society have been the most affected, owing to underlying social, economic and environmental drivers that have increased their exposure and vulnerability. As in all disasters, the most vulnerable are the most hit by this global disaster. Risk-informed, adaptive and shock-responsive social protection is key in making COVID-19 recovery resilient and equitable.

And we cannot afford to take our eyes off the bigger threat: while the world's attention has been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, the global climate emergency continues to intensify. From tropical storms across Asia and the Americas, to food insecurity, floods and locust swarms in Africa, and wildfires in the United States, many countries are struggling to prepare and respond to additional disasters in the middle of the pandemic. Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation into planning processes and financing mechanism will help governments better prepare for and manage risks and their potential for cascading effects across systems. Diverse international actors need to step-up, innovate and integrate science to better adapt, anticipate and prepare.

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Migrant workers walk on the highway, in India, on their journey back home during a nationwide lockdown to fight the spread of COVID-19

Integrated planning that takes into account disaster risk reduction measures will remain ineffective if it does not include adequate financing and related accountability measures. Recent events have also demonstrated how transparency, information-sharing and transboundary cooperation are critical to mounting a rapid, appropriate and effective response. As we bear witness to diminishing sustainable development gains, COVID-19 must be a catalyst for collaborative, risk-informed development that prioritizes people and the planet.

COVID-19 is not expected to disappear any time in the near future and the road to socio-economic recovery will be long. Societies will need to learn to live with the virus and its impact, at least in the coming months and maybe years. We have applied and will continue to apply these learnings to our future work in implementing the Sendai Framework. We will continue in our efforts to convene Member States, the United Nations system and stakeholders to ensure that what the world learns from this pandemic will be applied in shaping future disaster risk reduction and sustainable development policies and practices. The development of UNDRR Global and Regional Assessment Reports, monitoring of the Sendai Framework global targets, the Making Cities Resilient 2030 Initiative, as well as the upcoming Regional and Global Platforms that will take place in 2021 and 2022 will provide opportunities to take stock on progress.