



Africa
COVID-19 BRIEF

Virtual Dialogue between
national and regional
Disaster Risk Reduction
Focal Points

28 April 2020

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Photo Credit: UNICEF Kenya

DIALOGUE OBJECTIVE:

The main objective of the virtual dialogue was to provide a platform for Disaster Risk Reduction Focal Points (DRR FPs) from Member States (MS) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), African Union Commission (AUC) and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Regional Office for Africa to promote the exchange of experiences and a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The dialogue was attended by 76 participants including from MS, RECs, AUC, and UNDRR.

Specific objectives of the dialogue were to:

- Share information on preparedness, response and recovery efforts to COVID-19
- Focus on lessons learned, good practices, challenges and way forward.

DISCUSSION:

The dialogue featured a panel discussion in which three speakers, Dr. Godfrey Bahiigwa, Director of African Union Commission-Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (AUC-DREA); Dr. Benjamin Djoudalbaye, Head of Policy, Health Diplomacy and Communication for Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and Amjad Abbashar, Chief of UNDRR Regional Office for Africa shared insights into the support being provided by their respective organizations to strengthen preparedness, response and recovery from COVID-19. Representatives from RECs and Member States then shared their experiences, lessons learned and way forward in respect to COVID-19. The discussion was moderated by Harsen Nyambe, Head, Environment, Climate Change, Water and Land Management Division at AUC-DREA.

The following questions were the center of discussion:

- What role have national DRR/M institutions been playing in COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery efforts?
- What support can the AUC, RECs and UNDRR provide to strengthen COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery efforts across the continent?

- What steps have been taken so far to assess and address the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on Africa, and what are the specific roles expected from national and sub-regional DRR FPs in this regard?
- What needs to be done, including by the international development community, to strengthen MS capacity to better prepare for, respond and recover from and build resilience, including against biological hazards and epidemics?

MS and RECs are making strides in COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery efforts. In addition to its leadership and coordination role, the Africa CDC continues to play an important role in supporting Member States' efforts, including by providing capacity building support and mobilizing the required resources. However, due to restrictions put in place by MS to curb the spread of COVID-19, the Africa CDC continues to face challenges in deploying human resources MS.

MS and RECs' Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Institutions and Focal Points are also playing their part in supporting national and transboundary interventions, including by closely working with the health and other sectors using existing coordination mechanisms such as national and regional DRR platforms. In some countries, existing DRR/M coordination mechanisms are not being utilized. Creation of new coordination mechanisms when every crisis occurs is perceived as unsustainable.

UNDRR highlighted its efforts in the COVID-19 context. Among which was a survey launched among the MS DRR focal points to assess their involvement in addressing COVID-19, advocating for and supporting the integration of biological hazards into regional, national and sub-national DRR strategies and by improving understanding and management of systemic risk and to promote risk informed, sustainable and resilient development.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Concurrent management of COVID-19 and other hazards:** While continuing efforts to combat COVID-19, Member States, RECs, AUC and other partners are encouraged to give due attention to the multiple hazards and associated disasters that Africa faces such as desert locust invasion, flooding, droughts, epidemics and conflict, which are currently posing serious threats to food security and sustainable development on the continent.
- 2. Building resilience:** Support the development and implementation of **social protection programmes**, including **safety net programmes**, targeting the most vulnerable to build resilience, including against biological hazards such as COVID-19.
- 3. Turning the COVID-19 crisis into opportunity:** The COVID-19 pandemic should be embraced as an opportunity to establish and/or strengthen disaster response funds for multi-hazard preparedness and response. It is also an opportunity for increasing investment in prevention and build back better and to integrate biological hazards into DRR strategies and mainstream Disaster Risk Reduction/Management into relevant sectors.
- 4. Knowledge management:** Supporting documentation and exchange of experiences, lessons learned and best practices from governments' response to COVID-19 pandemic, and strengthening capacity for knowledge management should be considered. Additionally, improving the understanding and management of systemic risk (including **transboundary risk**) are critical for promoting and supporting risk informed and evidence-based decision making for recovery and building back better.
- 5. Strengthening coordination mechanisms:** Enhancing, sub-regional, national and sub-national coordination mechanisms is critical for ensuring multi-sectoral engagement and a whole-of society, multi-hazard and holistic approach to risk management, including those associated with biological hazards such as COVID-19.

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MEMBER STATES AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES DIALOGUE

Africa

Sharing information on
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