"How do you invest in DRR when the interval between one disaster to another is so short that you don’t have time to recover and to prepare for the next disaster”

Dr. Asha SG Kenya Red Cross
In the past 20 years, 90 per cent of major disasters have been climate related. Disasters are not waiting for COVID-19 to pass to ravage lives and livelihoods. The effects of the pandemic on poor and vulnerable people are compounded by pre-existing vulnerabilities.

**WEBINAR OBJECTIVE:**
Discuss emerging issues relating to Disaster Risk Reduction and Increasing vulnerability from COVID-19 Impacts; Offer Recommendations and learning on how to continue working on DRR to multiple hazards while responding to COVID-19 in Africa.

**PANELISTS:**

- **Kenya Red Cross**
  Secretary General, Dr. Asha Mohammed
- **UN Resident Coordinator**
  Uganda, Rosa Malango
- **OCHA**
  Head for West and Central Africa, Julie Belanger
- **African Union Commission**
  DRR Technical Head, Kai Gatkuoth
- **African Risk Capacity**
  Head of DRR, Papa Zoumana Diarra
- **Mali Civil Protection**
  DRR Focal Point, Dr. Fanta Mady Kone’
- **Partners for Resilience**
  Steering Group Chair, Juriaan Lahr
- **UNDRR Africa**
  Chief, Amjad Abbashar
- **Partners for Resilience**
  Facilitator, Thandie Mwape Villadsen
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Using risk as an opportunity for transformative action
- Harness the role of the youth/young people and innovative solutions
- Psychosocial support must be prioritized as some communities face the ‘triple whammy’ of multiple disaster impacts
- Health pandemics must be mainstreamed in disaster preparedness/contingency planning (this is often neglected)
- Support local organizations at frontline of response but with limited financial resources
- COVID-19 presents an opportunity to strengthen collaboration across different sectors, structures to strengthen ‘integrated’ actions
- Long-term solutions that are climate smart are critical and must remain a priority as climate change impacts combine with COVID-19 to affect the most poor and most vulnerable
- Stimulus packages for COVID-19 response provide an opportunity for initiating a transformational and green recovery with the creation of green jobs

1. Africa’s Disaster Profile and Policy Direction

“The current COVID-19 crisis demonstrates what UNDRR has been saying for years: risk is becoming systemic and crises are cascading.”

UNDRR

Disaster risk in sub-Saharan African countries is multi-faceted and fast changing. Across the 44 countries and during the decade of 2008–2018, over 157 million people were directly and indirectly affected by disasters; in the majority of cases these were associated with natural hazards. The most common disasters in Africa are triggered by hydro-meteorological or climatological hazards, predominantly droughts, floods, storms and cyclones. In 2019, Southern Africa was hit by two cyclones affecting over 3.8 million people in the Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe and still reeling from drought impacts of 2019. Currently East Africa has the added burden of locust swarms and flooding that coincides with COVID-19 causing a triple threat.

The heavy rains have increased the risk of health emergencies and provided conditions conducive to the further breeding of locusts. Lake Victoria’s water level is at an all-time high, superseding the comparable levels recorded during the 1997-1998 El Niño event. The floods have caused deaths, displacement, and destruction to critical infrastructure. In the Sahel and West Africa, some 11.4 million people are estimated to be in need of immediate food assistance. COVID-19 outbreak has set off the first recession in Sub-Saharan Africa in 25 years. The impact of COVID-19 has the
potential to push 5 million to 29 million people into extreme poverty and 19 million jobs could be lost in Africa\textsuperscript{viii}.

The Sendai Framework includes biological hazards, which was a result of a strong push from African Member States based on their experience from Ebola. However, currently few of the 19 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with a national DRR strategy, include biological hazards in them.

2. COVID-19 Response and Coordination

The African Union has established a COVID-19 Response Fund\textsuperscript{ix} and appointed four special envoys and mobilized funds from its Member States. The Africa Center for Disease Control (CDC) has been distributing health equipment and supplies and providing trainings to health professionals.

The UN released a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund that that extends to all low- and middle-income countries. Under three windows: (1) Tackle the health emergency; (2) Focus on the social impact, and the economic response and recovery; and (3) Help countries recover better. While many African countries are also issuing their own funding appeals or contingency plans to control the outbreak. The UN Country Teams are launching appeals and working to reallocate funds to support the response. The private sector has mobilized to support Africa as well as the World Bank.

The Kenya Red Cross has 150,000 members and volunteers, most of whom are youth. With community health volunteers reaching out with health messaging and targeting hard-to-reach communities. The Red Cross with the Ministry of Health is providing mental and psycho-social support. Communities are being relocated numerous times due to the floods with 36 out of the 47 counties in Kenya affected. Those in shelters and make-shift camps find it difficult to social-distance. Clean water is a challenge and people are unable to access health facilities. Farmers are losing land to the floods along with locusts that are destroying crops.

In Mali, COVID-19 is addressed through regular meetings of the permanent secretariat of the DRR platform; coordinated by the Prime Minister, who established a special committee to ensure collaboration with the Ministry of Health. There remains a challenge of capacity at the Regional Civil Protection level to develop multi-risk response and contingency plans.

The Partners for Resilience recognized the impact COVID-19 has on policy development/influencing and capacity building initiatives. Learning to optimize virtual dialogues where issues on impacts of the global environmental crisis can continue to be raised. PfR has redirected some of its funding from long-term interventions to support COVID-19 response.

OCHA has the INFORM Platform\textsuperscript{x}, which is a multi-stakeholder forum for developing shared, quantitative analysis relevant to humanitarian crises and disasters with the Joint Research Center of the European Commission as the scientific and technical lead. INFROM has developed a COVID-19 risk index. It identifies countries at risk from
health and humanitarian impacts of COVID-19 that could overwhelm current national response capacity, and the need for international assistance. The COVID-19 risk index also looks at hazard & exposure, vulnerability, and lack of coping capacity.

The African Risk Capacity is a mutual insurance facility providing risk transfer services to African Union Member States. Some Member States in West Africa, East and Southern Africa are receiving drought insurance during COVID-19. ARC is also modelling the potential impact of COVID-19 in Africa which will inform and guide Member States to look at its short to medium term effects on the Continent and how to mitigate these shocks. Building on its existing infrastructure and experience, the ARC Agency is introducing sovereign parametric insurance products for outbreaks and epidemics into its portfolio. This product is being designed to help strengthen the health systems, contribute to national capacity in risk profiling and response planning, and to ensure that slow and unpredictable funding does not continue to significantly impede the ability of Member States and partners to adequately respond to outbreaks and epidemics. The inclusion of outbreaks and epidemics will diversify the risk pool. The aim is to have this available by 2021, which will add COVID-19 coverage for future outbreaks.

3. Opportunities and Recommendations

“COVID-19 gives an opportunity to change the narrative”
Rosa Malango UN RC Uganda

- Transforming risk into opportunity
  - Uganda has the largest number of refugees in Africa (1.4 million). Refugees in Uganda often share villages and homes with local communities. That is an opportunity to sustain livelihoods for refugees, migrants, and Ugandans.
  - It is time for Africa to start implementing climate smart approaches. The UN is supporting Uganda-Kenya cross-border programme for the Karamoja Cluster benefiting pastoral communities. As Karamoja faces frequent drought, the sharing and coordinated use of natural resources promotes the peaceful co-existence among pastoral communities by protecting their key livelihoods assets and boosting their resilience. The programme bridges the humanitarian, development and peace nexus for the realization of Sustainable Development Goals.
  - While there is flooding in East Africa, the Lake Victoria Basin which is the largest freshwater lake in Africa, has the potential to provide renewable energy through, biomass, hydropower, solar and wind.
  - Post COVID-19 fiscal stimulus packages provide an opportunity for initiating a transformational and green recovery with the creation of green jobs. Renewable energy provides an opportunity for ‘building back
better’, creating green jobs, facilitating the transition to carbon neutral economies, and protecting ourselves from future.\textsuperscript{xiii}

- There is a need to respond to and recover from this disaster, and it is crucial that we recover better. \textbf{Back to normal is not good enough}. We must flip this disaster into an opportunity to address fragilities, inequalities, gaps in social protection for a more sustainable, equal, and carbon-neutral international society, that should be our new normal. In addition to responding and recovering better, we need to prevent better.

- **We need stronger risk understanding and knowledge.**
  
  - According to the GAR2019\textsuperscript{xiv}, risk assessments (including socio-economic analysis) inform policymakers to act to prevent, detect, prepare for and respond to hazards, including biological one. This includes measures to reduce exposure and mitigate vulnerability of groups at increased risk of infection due to biological hazards, containing the spread of the risk, and eventually stopping it.

- **There are similarities and shared needs among disasters and health risk management approaches.**
  
  - For example, there should be joint efforts to conduct risk assessments, surveillance and set up early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, and coordinated incident management. This strengthened coherence is needed as the inter-connected and transboundary nature of hazard risk increases.

- **Information and data are instrumental to support decision-making and planning**
  
  - Disaster loss databases and the Sendai Framework Monitor offer some opportunities to track impacts of disasters. This is very much needed in this moment so that we can continue advocating for stronger DRR structures and resources to face the impacts of natural hazards during the COVID-19 crisis. RC Offices and UNCT’s can work closely with governments to support this.

- **Risk communication, to complement the health interventions**
  
  - Sub-Saharan Africa tops the world with the largest offline population, only 28 per cent uses the internet\textsuperscript{xv}. Therefore, in Africa risk communication through community engagement is essential. Awareness and prevention campaigns have been designed and translated into local languages to target the most vulnerable.

- **National DRR strategies should ensure the inclusion of Biological Hazards.**
  
  - In Sub-Saharan Africa epidemics are recognized as a risk in DRR strategies but more efforts are needed to develop implementation plans
that clarify the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and the resources needed for implementation.

- **Lessons from Ebola**
  - There are lessons to be learned in West Africa from Ebola that can enable tangible biological hazard strategies. Promoting good hygiene will be an essential method to break the chain of transmission of COVID-19, as it proved to be in the Ebola epidemic in 2014-2015 in West Africa.

- **Innovation is needed**
  - In Africa, the “tippy tap” is implemented where there is no running water to wash hands even prior to COVID-19. However, its popularity has now grown with many nations outside of Africa implementing this technique.
  - The Kenya Red Cross is deploying drones to spread COVID-19 prevention messages to communities.
  - Digital engagement tools can be used. Virtual dialogues show a new way to work together while maintaining social distancing.
  - The innovation approach should be climate-smart.

- **Integrated Response**
  - There are COVID-19 funds being raised but we must not forget about the same populations that are being affected by natural disasters.
  - Interventions should be combined (social protection, food security, WASH, health etc).
  - Pandemics and epidemics must be integrated into our preparedness plans.
  - This must be an inclusive approach that identifies the most vulnerable.
  - Overcome siloed approaches and enhance coordination “whole of society”
  - As evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic it is important to understand the inter-linkages between disasters and how responding to one disaster may exacerbate the impact of another.
  - Youth and indigenous groups are providing solutions to COVID-19 and must be included.

4. **Random Sampling of Participants’ Contributions**
   - Thank you very much Rosa Malango for your nice presentation here. [I am] member of Africa Youth Advisory Board on Disaster Risk Reduction AYAB-DRR for East Africa and am from Uganda. **Youth are implementing many innovations** and Solutions. Many of them are going unnoticed and unreported. *(Abel Wilson Walekhwa)*
• To OCHA Julie: How do you advise us as NGOs and Donors on how to practically put in place an **Operational readiness Plan** (Welongo Faizi II - Fida International)

• Target G of the Sendai Framework is to substantially increase the availability of and access to **multi-hazard early warning systems** and disaster risk information and assessments to people by 2030. In the wake of this pandemic, how do you see the incorporation of pandemics like COVID19 in such systems?" (Maryanne Muriuki, AYAB DRR)

• When responding to question on **persons with disabilities**, can you explain how children with disabilities are supported? (Amos Malawi)

• Is Group **Trauma therapy** being proposed for those communities greatly affected by affects of COVID19? (Charles Sharp)

• Governments have started to discuss possible economic recovery programmes. This is an opportunity for us. How can we ensure a concerted Africa-wide effort to emphasize **“Green economic and inclusive recovery processes”** (Shaban Mawanda, Uganda)

• I would also like to supplement Dr Kone from Mali. The Malian Red Cross in its capacity as auxiliary to the public authorities support the government in reaching the most vulnerable communities has developed an action plan. (Al Mahady TOURE, Mali Red Cross)

• Horn of Africa Region faces a greater risk from climatic disasters - Locust and Floods, yet we see that the Covid 19 response is given such high priority, Is there any plan at the AU level to review the current response strategy to ensure an **integrated response to these multiple disasters** and ensure that we safeguard life and livelihoods? (Merciline Oyier, Cordaid, Kenya)

• We need a commitment to **sustain the current multi-sectoral engagement** for COVID and - considering the heightened and more complex risks we face - invest in longer-term disaster and climate risk reduction and address the risks and impact of **conflict and violent extremism**. UNCT Theme Groups under the UNRC has a key role to play on this, supporting national and regional partners. (Lars Bernard, UNICEF)

• Regarding displacement: The restrictions on movement and restrictions on the use of evacuation centres, schools and other communal spaces due to Covid is likely to affect people’s ability to flee violence, conflict and disaster (which is a fundamental **protection mechanism**): how are DRR actors looking at this and collaborating with Protection actors? (Valentina Evangelisti DRR Lead, Oxfam)
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References for further Reading

5 FEWS NET East Africa Seasonal Monitor 5 May 2020 https://reliefweb.int/report/world/east-africa-seasonal-monitor-may-5-2020
10 OCHA INFORM https://data.humdata.org/organization/inform
WEBINAR

Addressing Disaster Risk Reduction of multiple hazards during the COVID 19 crisis

Africa
5 May 2020
12:00 Nairobi time

Dr. Asha Mohammed
Secretary General
Kenya Red Cross Society

Jurian Lehr
Chairman of the Steering Committee
Partners for Resilience

Thandie Merepe
Violadini
Facilitator Partners for Resilience

Rosa Malango
UN Resident Coordinator Uganda

Amjad Abbashar
Chief, OCHA Regional Office for Africa

Julie Belanger
Head, OCHA Regional Office for West and Central Africa

Kai Guldhou
Technical Coordinator, DRR, African Union Commission

Papa Zoumana Kante
Chief of Planning and Operations, African Risk Capacity

Dr. Chinedu Ezienyi
MDR Manager
MDR Management Unit

UNDRR
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