EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Building Resilience During COVID-19: Lessons Learned from Disaster Risk Reduction Programming

A mid-pandemic survey of practices among United Nations major groups and other stakeholders on the intersection of disaster risk reduction programming and COVID-19 prevention, preparedness, response and recovery
In memory of Dr. Kathryn Adams, whose commitment to deepening our common knowledge on resilience drove the development of this report. Kathryn’s passion and continued engagement in multi-stakeholder cooperation was outstanding. She will be dearly missed.
This report has been prepared by the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

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*Hands washing under running water with the tap to protect against bacteria and viral diseases*

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*Group of people at a community meeting in a village*

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The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark demonstration that, in a connected and globalized world, risk is more systemic than ever: what was initially a health disaster quickly became a socioeconomic one with long-term impact, highlighting the urgent need for a whole-of-society approach towards prevention and risk-informed recovery and development.

This report presents the results of a 2020 survey and literature review conducted by the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). It features lessons learned and insights on how disaster risk reduction stakeholders around the world have leveraged existing disaster risk reduction programmes and initiated new ones to better prevent, prepare, respond to and recover from COVID-19 and future pandemics.

The survey was rolled out mid-pandemic and, therefore, most examples focused on how disaster risk reduction helped immediate pandemic response, preparedness and recovery, rather than long-term prevention and mitigation.

Executive Summary
The survey and literature review revealed a breadth of insights in relation to the implementation of existing and new disaster risk reduction programmes, the nature of partnerships and collaboration, key gaps and challenges, and recommendations for enhancing disaster risk reduction programming. Four key insights in particular emerged from this report. These are summarized below.

**Insight 1:**
**Insufficient focus on pandemic prevention and preparedness**

There was insufficient focus by Governments, the United Nations system, civil society organizations and the private sector on the prevention of and preparedness for pandemic risk. Of the 39 disaster risk reduction case examples observed through the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism global survey, only two addressed pandemic hazard prevention. No examples of existing pandemic preparedness programmes were received.

The desk review of other surveys and literature echoed this overall lack of attention to pandemic prevention and preparedness. For instance, the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction concluded that: “The impacts of this pandemic could have been prevented if lessons learnt from prior disease outbreaks, as well as scientific and community-led research, had been taken into account in health services, global supply chains, transport systems, curriculum, and the tourism sector”¹. A similar message was conveyed by the International Organization for Migration in noting that, given best practices learned during previous Ebola, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and influenza A (H1N1) outbreaks, “too little has been done to mitigate biological hazards in disaster risk reduction strategies pursued by governments.”²

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Insight 2: 
Civil society organizations adapted swiftly during the pandemic by leveraging existing local disaster risk reduction networks and programmes

The Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism survey results and desk review showed that many organizations were able to swiftly adapt existing disaster risk reduction programmes designed for other hazards and quickly initiate new ones, which contributed to reducing exposure and vulnerability and to building adaptive capacity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key elements of success were local presence, partnerships and existing networks of trusted relationships with vulnerable groups. These actions were seen across all facets of disaster risk reduction in the immediate wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- Hazard reduction (i.e., reducing the COVID-19 hazard by raising awareness of the potential for zoonotic spillover due to community expansion, deforestation and consumption and trade of wild meat)
- Exposure reduction (i.e., through provision of personal protective equipment and WASH – water, sanitation and hygiene – facilities and practices)
- Vulnerability reduction (i.e., through provision of food, water, housing and mental health support)
- Building capacity to anticipate future risk (i.e., through ongoing assessment of local government readiness and business continuity planning).
Insight 3: Significant challenges need to be overcome for enhanced disaster risk reduction and resilience

The Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism survey revealed a range of challenges that need to be overcome to enhance disaster risk reduction and resilience programming. There was commonality with the results of the broader desk review, showing that policy coherence is a key challenge (i.e., horizontal across agencies and vertical among levels of government, including with the local level), as is the need to strengthen food security and the resilience of small and medium-sized enterprises to disasters, including for supply chain logistics.

Other challenges related to misinformation, weak or non-existent social protection systems, competition among partners for resources and lack of information and communications technology infrastructure. These all point to more systemic issues that need to be addressed in future to enhance disaster risk reduction programming. This finding was also reflected in the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism survey results pertaining to the top recommendations made by organizations, including calls for improved policy coherence; localization of programmes to better address ground-based issues; the strengthening of key systems (i.e., food security, access to water, health care, social protection and supply chains); attention to vulnerable groups and leaving no one behind; and better collaboration with government partners.
Insight 4:
Systemic risk requires systemic solutions

The challenges highlighted above are symptoms of siloed approaches to development: many of the recommendations made by Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism survey respondents converged on the need for systems approaches. The desk review of other surveys echoes these recommendations, as evidenced by calls for a One Health approach for the prevention of zoonotic diseases, use of multi-hazard approaches for disaster risk reduction and strengthening of key systems. The main message was that, for organizations to be resilient and to promote resilience in communities to systemic risks, a systems approach is necessary. A systems approach for disaster risk reduction would necessarily begin with a focus on all facets of risk reduction, including preventing hazards, reducing exposure and vulnerability and building adaptive capacity.

Systemic risk requires systemic solutions. National Governments and the United Nations system should lead the way in pandemic and multi-hazard prevention and preparedness in this new era of pandemics, with Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism members and other stakeholder organizations advocating actively for such leadership and participating in the co-creation of systemic solutions.
The survey and desk review provided valuable insights on the importance of disaster risk reduction for effective prevention, preparedness and response to new hazards. The results show that effective disaster risk reduction programmes, designed in collaboration with all stakeholders, with meaningful engagement of community groups and which ensure coherence across sectors and levels, provide mechanisms and structures that help to address emerging hazards, such as the COVID-19.

Insights from this report will inform the development of a forthcoming Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism report focused on providing practical advice for operationalizing an all-of-society approach to disaster risk reduction, including in the context of medium and long-term COVID-19 recovery and accelerating progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and building resilient societies in the face of a growing and intensifying global risk landscape.