

Statement of the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism of the United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction – World Urban Forum 10

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

As the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism (SEM) of the United Nations Office of Disaster Risk-Reduction, we are pleased to submit a statement to the tenth session of the World Urban Forum to highlight the need for ensuring avenues of cooperation, communication and building capacity for inclusive disaster risk reduction and emphasizing the necessity for governments to adopt risk-informed urbanization. We seek to open avenues of cooperation, communication and capacity building for inclusive disaster risk reduction, and to model the kinds of relationship necessary across all lines of demographic distinction. With a theme Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation, WUF 10 provides an opportunity to voice our commitment to engage all stakeholders to help achieve the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and other critical global goals, including the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, particularly SDG 11, and the New Urban Agenda.

When people work together, they thrive together. Our lives are entirely interdependent and disasters, perhaps more than any other events, demonstrate this reality in stark relief. Each year, disasters impact nearly 200 million people. Communities experiencing poverty and other forms of vulnerability are among the most at risk.¹ For example, in Africa and South Asia unpredictable rainfall, floods and other sudden and slow onset hazards result in displacement, hunger and poverty and vulnerable groups often bear the brunt of the impacts. Cities face a growing range of adversities and challenges from climate change to involuntary migrant populations to inadequate infrastructure. Informal settlements can be particularly vulnerable to disasters because, in addition to their often precarious locations and exposure to natural hazards, the homes often do not comply with construction safety standards, tenants lack the security of tenure, and many are in danger of forced evictions. Individuals living in unregulated squatter settlements are more prone to death, injury and loss of housing after a disaster as such communities are often pushed to the periphery, and squatter settlements are often located in areas vulnerable to natural hazards, such as steep slopes and flood plains.

These challenges notwithstanding, we recognize that our diverse identities and resources serve to strengthen our unity and dignity and that full inclusion, particularly of those disproportionately affected by disasters and vulnerable populations, is a step forward towards addressing these issues. The success of implementation of these global agendas depends on meaningful participation of all stakeholders, especially at the local level. Involvement of local communities, government and civil society in the conceptualization, design, risk mapping, implementation and monitoring of policies, standards and plans is key to achieve sustainable disaster resilience.

¹ Vulnerability is different in different contexts. While it almost always includes women, children, persons with disabilities and the ageing, it may also include those who are discriminated against based on gender, race, religion, or employment. We have chosen not to list any particular group here knowing that any list would be incomplete.

Global Commitments

As the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, a 15-year agreement adopted by UN Member States in 2015, articulates in new and significant ways a profound shift in disaster risk reduction governance to an all-of-society approach. It identifies the urgent need “to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risk in order to more effectively protect persons, communities and countries, their livelihoods, health, cultural heritage, socioeconomic assets and ecosystems, and thus strengthen their resilience.” The Sustainable Development Goals address the need to “reduce poverty in all its forms” including a target to “build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.” SDG 11 calls upon the global community to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable and contains a target that governments “by 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels”. The New Urban Agenda, which was adopted in October 2016 at Habitat III, includes a commitment to “explore and develop feasible solutions to climate and disaster risks in cities and human settlements, including [...] investments in urban and metropolitan infrastructure, buildings and other urban assets as well as for local populations to secure their shelter and economic needs.”

Arriving at new remedies requires new models of collaboration as we cannot expect to fully implement and reach these goals without taking steps to leverage our resolve to work together.

Recommendations for Action

We call on Governments and the United Nations to:

- Support disaster risk reduction as a national and local priority, contributing to strong governance and participation of vulnerable populations in the decision-making process by fostering safe shelter and settlements awareness, strengthening local leadership and promoting gender and age balance.
- Engage local government officials with vulnerable communities, making them active participants as decision-makers and first responders when addressing local needs, applying community-based disaster risk reduction mechanisms and integrated approaches to improve the lives of vulnerable populations, develop capacity and raise awareness on shelter and settlements related risks.
- Include risk-informed development in local and national government planning and budgeting including rural as well as urban communities knowing that disasters in one community have an impact on surrounding communities.
- Provide inclusive and cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder collaboration at all stages of the humanitarian and development endeavor – from decision and policy-making to monitoring and evaluating, and at all levels from local to international.

- Enact adequate and effective laws and regulations that apply to disaster risk reduction and facilitate sound climate and risk-informed planning, land use, finance, access to services, design and construction of safe shelter and settlements, environmental management and climate change adaptation.
- Increase national government funding for disaster risk reduction to mitigate the rising cost of humanitarian assistance and economic losses by the impacts of disasters, recognizing that investments in prevention far offset the costs of disaster response.
- Work together with civil society organizations and local governments to build safer and more resilient communities, promoting a culture of preparedness and understanding that secured land tenure, affordable and adequate housing, safe water and sanitation are critical components to foster disaster risk reduction.
- Incorporate indigenous knowledge, including especially nature based solutions, into planning.
- Address disaster risk reduction in all shelter, housing and settlements programming with an emphasis on the causal and underlying factors of disasters by promoting interventions that address the exposure to hazards, reduce vulnerability of people including risk of displacement and property, facilitate the wise management of land and the environment, improve preparedness for adverse events and promote adaptations to climate change.
- Implement regulations that ensure security of tenure, particularly for affected populations, to safeguard continued access to safe land and rebuilding without fear of eviction before or after a disaster, within a framework for sustainable development.
- Call decision makers (countries leaders) civil society entities (the closest to communities) and the private sector (funders and business makers) to invest in sustainable development through investment of durable and robust urbanization and also facilitating access to a minimum of logistics to those living in rural areas.
- Elevate all SDG 11 indicators to Tier 1 to make it a priority for national governments.
- Integrate civil society, local and regional governments, and community-level databases as valid inputs into national statistical databases for SDG 11 to enable more accurate data in reporting.
- Increase partnerships across all sectors in order to collectively address these shared challenges.