GP09 Daily

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ISDR

Informal Highlights from today's events at the Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Tuesday 16 June 2009

Second Session of the Global Platform opens
The Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction opened in Geneva today at an impressive ceremony marked by a keynote video message from UN Secretary General, Ban-ki Moon, welcoming remarks from Hans-Rudolf Merz President of the Swiss Confederation, and a range of high level speakers, including the President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Bruce Golding and the Prime Minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga.

The UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Chair of the Global Platform, John Holmes announced the creation of a 'help desk' arrangement for disaster risk reduction (DRR) to provide Governments with systematic access to information on organisations, networks, tools and the like needed to support their disaster risk reduction efforts. This system will be developed by the UNISDR and will involve ISDR partners as prime sources of information and support. The USG added that UNISDR is being asked to develop an upgraded strategy to quantify, to the extent possible, the nature and levels of investment in risk reduction.

In a compelling speech, Philippines Senator, Loren Legarda – UNISDR Regional Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation for Asia Pacific – described disaster risk reduction as a moral imperative and social responsibility calling for a new vision and approach to development. The current model of economic development has failed us, she said and needs to be replaced by a new politics, leadership, governance, and humanity.

Investing in a Safer Future: A Disaster Risk Reduction Policy for the Australian aid program
The Government of Australia launched the policy framework for its new *Investing in a Safer Future: A Disaster Risk Reduction policy for the Australian aid program* last night at the Platform.

The goal is to reduce the vulnerability and enhance the resilience of countries and communities to disasters. The new aid program will also assist developing countries to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development in line with key government policy initiatives and will apply to all Australian overseas development assistance, delivered by AusAID and by whole-of-government partners.

Writing in the foreword to the policy document, Minister of Foreign Affairs Steven Smith states: "Investing in disaster risk reduction not only saves lives and livelihoods – it helps reduce the costs involved in responding to disasters, can offer a measure of protection to developing economies, and helps safeguard critical infrastructure."

Involve our Children
The world's four largest children's agencies came together at the Platform in recognition of the potential crisis facing the world due to the increasing impact of disasters and the threat that climate change brings.

Plan International, UNICEF, Save the Children and World Vision jointly endorsed the statement that children are key to promoting change at household and local level. Further, children must not only learn about DRR but must also be encouraged and expected to be involved in community level, local, national and global debates.

The meeting also concluded that although prioritizing education is a good investment, the best returns only appear when education is combined with programmes that support the active citizenship of young people.

Prevent or React
A major highlight of today's events was the recording of a BBC World Debate, entitled *Prevent or React*. Presented by leading BBC anchor, Nik Gowing, four experienced panellists debated the issue, heatedly at times, in a one hour broadcast, recorded 'as live' in front of an audience of some 200 Platform participants who provided incisive interventions. The program will be aired through the BBC World Service to an global audience of some 90 million people, provisionally on 4 July – timings to be announced.

Meetings' round up
Principal proposed solutions, messages or recommendations from today's Platform meetings include:

- The level of participation in this Global Platform – more than1,800 delegates, 309 Governments and Organizations and 169 Sovereign Governments illustrates that disaster risk reduction has succeeded in occupying an increasing space in the policy dialogue of communities, nations and international actors.
- Increased investments in DRR are required in order to benefit from triple returns: reduced levels of disaster risk, poverty reduction and greater resilience against the impact of from climate change. Many countries already report a considerable increase in investments in DRR. Developing countries and small Island Developing States (SIDS), however, emphasized that they require additional assistance to address the challenges at hand, especially climate change.
- Contributions to the UN Trust Fund for DRR are not substantial enough. A sum of 25 billion USD could be gathered every year and invested into the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA), if all countries contributed to the UN Trust Fund at the same level that Jamaica invests into the Caribbean Regional Disaster Reduction Insurance Facility (4/10 of 1/10 of 1% of its GDP).
- The HFA is already at the mid-point of its implementation. Concrete action will be required to accelerate progress in disaster risk at local, national, and global levels and to sustain the substantial achievements that have already been made.
- Disaster risk and climate change have both common causes and common solutions. It is therefore essential that the new global agreement on climate change acknowledges the importance of disaster risk reduction and the HFA; DRR and climate change adaptation (CCA) need to be pursued at all levels through integrated and well coordinated policy and institutional frameworks that are mainstreamed into development; disaster risk reduction is a 'no regret' climate change adaptation strategy.
- Local level solutions have yielded considerable success in protecting populations from disasters and strengthening their resilience – local brigades in Dominica and early warning systems in Bangladesh for instance.
- Although building codes are developed reflecting domestic situations and also tend to be very technical, international collaboration, such as sharing best practices and principals of safer buildings, should facilitate the awareness-raising of policymakers and communities in order to enforce, implement and disseminate building codes effectively and promote retrofitting of existing vulnerable buildings. It has been confirmed from the session that the existing Task Force initiated by the UNCRD and UNESCO to address potential coding strategies should be developed and adopted as part of an action plan deriving from this Global Platform meeting
- UNISDR will work towards improved monitoring of investments in DRR despite the still limited access to relevant financial and economic data.
- Kiribati announced greater investments in offshore mining in order to reduce the need for on-shore mining which will help to protect coastlines against the impacts of climate change.
- Kenya announced the Initiative of African Parliamentarians "Black and Ready to Go Green"– a concerted effort to save Africa from disasters and the impact of climate change.

Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender-Sensitive
More than 300 copies of a new booklet setting down policy and practical guidelines for making disaster risk reduction gender-sensitive were snapped up by Platform participants today.

The publication is a collaborative effort between UNDP, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and ISDR. More copies will be available tomorrow.

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