



FBO Statement on Disaster Risk Reduction

On 6th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
June 25th, 2014

Context

Risks in their many forms, such as disaster, climatic, social, environmental, economic or health risks, are increasing. They impede development gains that are particularly intended for the poorest and most vulnerable groups, including children, people with disabilities, women, the elderly and the indigenous communities. At times of risks, many of these groups are usually left behind. Risks undermine the coping capacity of communities, impacting access to livelihood opportunities and services that address basic needs. Risks also undermine the environment that supports rural communities.

The dominant risk profile in the world today is of underreported and uncompensated small-scale recurrent disasters (primarily triggered by weather events), which are increasing rapidly in developing countries and have disastrous consequence for communities. In today's world communities are dealing with multi-risk environments.¹

- In the last twenty years natural disasters have affected 64 per cent of the world's population (UNISDR); economic losses associated with disasters continue to grow each year in all regions (EM-DAT).
- 95 per cent of people killed by disasters are from developing countries (IPCC); women, children and the elderly disproportionately suffer the greatest disaster losses (UNISDR).
- More than 50 per cent of people affected by "natural disasters" live in fragile and conflict-affected countries (Safer World); conflict, insecurity and fragility affect one in four people on the planet (World Bank).
- There is a continuing gap between national DRR policies and local-level practices (GNDR VFL 2009/2011/2013).²

With these facts in mind, it is clear that development can only succeed if it is a process that is sustainable and is owned by and is considerate of local communities as active agents of transformation. In order to attain a more sustainable form of development, all stakeholders—including communities, governments, civil societies, academe, private entities and other actors—must guarantee national and international commitment to enhancing resilience, contribute to poverty reduction and build upon and strengthen the coping and adaptive capacities of at-risk and marginalised communities that are challenged by multiple and complex hazards.

Social cohesion, peace and stability that respect human rights are essential for resilience that leads to sustainable development. Interfaith, interethnic and intercultural unity must be integrated into strategies for risk reduction, adaptation and response to ensure human dignity.

¹ Policy brief for post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: Key Messages on Building Resilient Communities, *Partners for Resilience, 2014*

² Summarised by *Views from the Frontline (VFL)*, an action survey by Global Network of CSOs for Disaster Reduction, GNDR, 2013



The Role of Faith Based Organisations

In pursuit of optimal risk prevention, risk reduction and resilience, Faith Based Organisations (FBO) which work closely within local communities can use their unique strength—the unifying and ameliorative power of shared faith—to facilitate resilience in responding to concerns arising from disasters, including post-disaster peacebuilding recovery processes.

Bringing rich experience from Caritas Asia³, Soka Gakkai International (SGI)⁴, the ACT Alliance⁵, Humanitarian Forum Indonesia⁶, and Dompot Dhuafa⁷, an FBO consultation meeting took place on June 22, 2014, to:

- define best practices from past experience and analysis of the role of faith-based actors;
- illustrate how the strengths of faith-based actors can be maximised; and
- create a joint statement on the role of FBOs and make recommendations for all disaster risk reduction (DRR) stakeholders.

The consultation gathered good practices from Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar and the Philippines, and the cases reaffirm the following strengths of FBOs:

- Local faith-based networks reach every corner of our communities and nations. We live in a global society that is not homogenous. We must work together with other faiths to translate spiritual teachings and beliefs into concrete action for protecting society, strengthening resilience, reducing risk, responding to disaster and reducing poverty—all of which contribute to sustainable development.
- FBOs and local faith communities (LFCs) have material and social assets, which make them a natural locus for DRR action. Loudspeakers in mosques and bells in churches and temples can be the cornerstone of local early warning systems. Religious buildings often host community disaster planning events and serve as evacuation centres during emergencies. The social assets of FBOs and LFCs typically include existing volunteer networks and relationships with other FBOs, LFCs and wider civil society actors, which are also vital.
- FBOs and LFCs are almost always first responders in emergencies. In many contexts, they are particularly well situated to respond in the first 24 to 96 hours of an emergency. They are present even in very remote disaster-affected areas that may be physically impossible for external actors to access. They are also found in communities that have weak, fragile or dysfunctional states.

³ Caritas Asia is one of the seven Regional Offices under the Confederation of Caritas Internationalis, which currently has 165 Catholic relief, development and social service organisations operating in over 200 countries and territories. Caritas Asia is the regional secretariat of all 23 Caritas members found in Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia and South East Asia. Its members are of national character, mandated by their respective Episcopal conferences or Ecclesiastical authorities as responsible for the local Church's socio-pastoral works.

⁴ SGI is a lay Buddhist movement with an international network of organisations in 192 countries and territories around the world. SGI promotes public education focusing on peace and disarmament, human rights and sustainable development. For its members, Buddhism is a practical philosophy of individual empowerment and inner transformation that enables people to fulfil their potential and take responsibility for their lives.

⁵ ACT Alliance is a coalition of more than 140 churches and affiliated organisations working together in over 140 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards. Members are associated with the World Council of Churches or the Lutheran World Federation.

⁶ Humanitarian Forum Indonesia is a network of 12 faith based, and development organisations in Indonesia.

⁷ Dompot Dhuafa is a member of Humanitarian Forum Indonesia.



- FBOs and LFCs also contribute to strengthening resilience by utilising their pre-existing local networks and infrastructure; their shared identity, social vision, religious narratives and leadership can encourage stakeholders to mobilise, coordinate, register, train, console, encourage, promote capacity building, deal with psychological problems and help resolve conflict. FBOs and LFCs build on existing community's coping mechanisms and assets; they harness social capital and thus, contribute to strengthening community resilience.

Forty-eight representatives (from seven countries) participated in the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction and shared best practices, discussed the strengths and roles of FBOs in DRR and formulated a joint FBO statement.

Recommendations

To National and Local Governments and Intergovernmental Institutions

1. In view of the roles FBOs play in DRR, we recommend that HFA2 and the 3rd UN World Conference on DRR refer to FBOs as unique stakeholders highlighting how FBOs can help communities from within to enhance their resilience, prepare for hazards, cope with impacts and avert losses. We recommend that national and local governments take initiative to form suitable mechanisms such as interfaith councils for the promotion of understanding, acceptance, tolerance and coexistence among religious groups. Also, it is important to create an enabling environment that helps communities strive towards strengthening resilience to cope with impending risks and limit development losses.
2. We recommend that national and local governments continue to establish partnerships with multiple stakeholders including FBOs that can serve as potential resource for risk prevention, risk reduction, preparedness, resilience and efficient disaster response.
3. At the same time, we call for a commitment by partnerships to mutually respect and empower the strengths and contributions of governments, civil society, private sector actors, FBOs and communities in a common objective of averting loss and damage to life and assets toward a more sustainable development. As it is important to ensure local ownership in addressing risks, *regular multi-stakeholder collaboration* that (1) builds accountability across local and national levels and (2) guarantees communities' voices are heard and taken into account in HFA2 and sustainable development agendas *must remain a commitment*. When national and local governments organise regular consultations on DRR with relevant stakeholders, it should include FBOs as they are the ones who often sustain development programs even when international NGOs are absent, and they are often the best able to respond to psychosocial issues and problems caused by disasters.

To the FBO Community

1. FBOs should promote volunteerism, emphasising values including compassion, service, courage, hope, unity, interconnectedness, justice and reconciliation with inspiration and guidance from the teachings and principles of their faith traditions. These values are critical in crises and disasters when constituencies are most vulnerable.
2. FBOs should encourage civil society to advocate for strengthening engagement through networking among congregations, member affiliates, organizations and individuals to ensure real grassroots involvement and dialogue. Furthermore, we recommend that all those organisations involved should meet the minimum standards such as ensuring quality and making duty bearers accountable in all their services to the affected communities in order to allow people to live with dignity.



3. FBOs should challenge beliefs and practices that hinder human rights or development in cooperation with other stakeholders. In addition, FBOs have a greater role in building a culture of peace and in promoting the concept of a rights-based approach and risk reduction principles. It is also important to note that faith actors working together in disaster preparedness can foster understanding and connectedness, which then, in case of human-induced disasters, can turn to useful togetherness in addressing conflict issues.

To All Stakeholders

1. DRR should respect values and perspectives within communities, which are critical for empowering community members by acknowledging their potential for self-help (with external inputs like models for systematic approach to community development processes), especially when it comes to addressing underlying risks in vulnerable locations prone to disasters. We need to ensure that communities are able to meet their basic needs, building upon existing and effective local practices to face climatic and disaster risks. Community level involvement and interventions are crucial to the success of any disaster risk reduction effort. HFA2 must acknowledge and promote a central role for local communities in DRR interventions. Assuring survivability, meeting of basic needs and risk-proofing of livelihood options by active participants contributing to valuable local knowledge and expertise should be done for the common good—regardless of background or status of individual community members. Promoting community self-management is essential, particularly in negotiating among actors, differences of agendas, values and scales.
2. With strong political commitment, we recommend that DRR and climate change adaptation are mainstreamed into sustainable development, and community-led approaches with strengthened accountability measures are promoted. We need to seek a more transformative form of development that is equitable, grounded in human rights, and moving towards cohesion among all elements within a community, where natural resources are protected and used in a sustainable manner with accountability through monitoring by multi-actors.
3. Together with FBOs and communities, DRR leaders must facilitate cross-sector engagements that amplify advocacy as well as catalyse learning from the past into formulation of HFA2. Particularly, we need to ensure strengthened early warning systems that include access to information on climatic and disaster trends and forecasts. Communities must be enabled to understand the implications of disasters on their lives and livelihoods and plan their risk reduction and adaption strategies, in alignment with positive traditional practices, including reading warning signs and signals that effectively herald environmental and climatic danger.
4. Recognising the heterogeneous nature of communities, HFA2 must aim to integrate risk reduction methods within existing systems and structures, which are being implemented through customs, indigenous groups' lifestyles, local traditions and faith-based institutions, often by women, farmers or other relevant livelihoods groups; ensure continuous transfer of expertise to future generations; and ensure that local practices are integrated with local government policies and programs. It is critical to ensure specific protection strategies for individuals who are most at risk.

ANY OTHER FBOS OR FBO GROUPS ARE MORE THAN WELCOME TO CO-SIGN THE STATEMENT.