



## VII Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas and the Caribbean (RP21)

*Building Resilient Economies in the Americas and the Caribbean*

1 to 4 November 2021, Virtual Event



# The VII Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas and the Caribbean

## Chair's Summary

### November 4, 2021

This seventh session of the Regional Platform takes place at a pivotal time, as we look towards social and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as countries convene at COP26 to define commitments with regards to the climate crisis, as we review the Regional Action Plan for the implementation of the Sendai Framework in the Americas & the Caribbean, and as we look towards reviewing the progress made so far with regards to the Sendai Framework's implementation and the achievement of its targets.

At the opening ceremony of the RP21, the SRSG for Disaster Risk Reduction and head of UNDRR, Ms. Mami Mizutori, emphasized that the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic would play a central role in the discussions during the RP21. Other high-level speakers spoke to the broader expectations of the nations of the region as it pertains to recovery, disaster risk reduction, and building resilience. The Most Hon. Andrew Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica, called upon all nations in the region and participants to reflect on required measures to address the impacts of disasters and facilitate resilient economies in the Americas and the Caribbean. Ms. Alicia Barcena, Executive Secretary for ECLAC, pointed out the importance of putting in place socioeconomic policies directed to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations and ensure sustainable development. In this context, SIDS face specific challenges, and as the Hon. Desmond McKenzie, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development of Jamaica indicated, they must commit to the task of developing proper DRR strategies, particularly with regard to the competing priorities that must also be addressed. A call to consider a proactive approach to increase resilience rather than a reactive approach to disasters was made by the Youth Ambassador representing ODPEM, Ms. Kayla Gaynor, who urged Governments and other stakeholders to hear and enable the voices of youth.

The deliberations during the first High-level Session were centred on the notion that climate and disaster resilience is complex and requires meaningful, transformative and inclusive cooperation with consideration for a multitude of social and economic factors at all levels to account for the dynamic and complex nature of disaster risk and act with appropriate resourcing. Great emphasis was put on the key role of women as leaders and key agents of change to build resilient development pathways. Since its onset, the COVID-19 pandemic has derailed development trajectories across the region. Similarly, social and economic inequalities have been exacerbated. Yet, the pandemic can also serve as a catalyst for human-rights based meaningful change as it has shown us the vital importance of collaboration and building alliances across critical sectors throughout the region. Opportunities for collaboration include strengthening data sharing at country level and across the region and increased provision of evidence-based scientific research and analyses for decision-making.



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The first Parallel Session of the RP21 provided a platform for discussing the implementation of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) as a mechanism to build resilience while enhancing benefits for communities and ecosystems. The interventions from Northeastern University, Cuba, Mexico City and Jamaica identified opportunities for the implementation of NBS in the region given not only the vulnerability of many local populations to environmental hazards but also the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The most significant advantages of NBS are its cross-sectoral reach and cost-benefit ratio, which make it an alternative to achieving disaster risk reduction through costly hard infrastructure.

The resilience of critical services and infrastructure has never been more important. The speakers at the session on Enhancing Resilient Infrastructure pointed to the increasing interconnectedness of the world by means of globalization, increasing threats and disaster risks, and the need to multiply the capacity of the infrastructure to satisfy demand – including the regulation and legislation towards decarbonization. There cannot be disaster risk reduction without considering infrastructure. Investing in resilience is economically feasible, and results in cost-effectiveness benefits. Each dollar invested in maintaining the infrastructure is equivalent to USD 1.5 of savings. Giving local communities the autonomy to implement locally appropriate approaches was also seen to be of critical importance.

During the launch of the 2021 Regional Risk Assessment Report, it was stressed that the manifestation of climate and disaster risk is a social construct and can thus be socially deconstructed. The need for a systems-based approach and inclusive, transdisciplinary and accountable disaster-risk governance mechanisms was highlighted as means to overcoming underlying factors of risk. The discussants emphasized the importance of analysing risks based on physical space and the interconnected relationships with communities and social systems. The lessons learned from COVID-19 emphasize the importance of ensuring appropriate and proactive planning processes and developing cross-cutting strategies at all levels, aligned to Sendai Framework target E. Establishing mechanisms for monitoring and periodic review with both government and non-government engagement is fundamental to ensure progress and inclusivity. Science and technology – co-production of knowledge – are the primary allies in disaster risk governance.

Participants in the Learning Laboratory on Disaster Impact Modelling had a unique opportunity to gain a clear understanding on how it works, what its outreach is, which outputs can be produced, and how various models can inform decision-making in the face of a potential disaster regarding prevention, mitigation, and response. The session exposed the audience to options available for increasing disaster awareness and building trust through the use of reliable scientific methodologies to determine risk. The benefits of disaster impact modelling are cross-cutting and provide for targeted disaster risk reduction as well as increased accountability and transparency.



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The second day of the Regional Platform focused on building resilient economies by examining the lessons learned from multi-hazard response in the Caribbean; risk-informed public and private investments; the integration of disaster displacement into inclusive DRR legal frameworks, policies and plans; and risk-informed recovery.

The day commenced with the second High-level Session of the Platform, which focused on the key drivers to building resilient economies and the importance of taking the opportunity to build back better and greener, while leaving no one behind. Speakers shared critical aspects that need to be addressed in the face of the complexity of the pandemic recovery and the climate challenge and stressed the need for a higher ambition in the implementation of the Sendai Framework in tandem with the 2030 Agenda. To achieve these goals, boosted investments in building resilience are required. A key sentiment conveyed by the panel is that in times of uncertainty, effective governance is fundamental for the management of risk. Social contracts that collectively manage risk are needed and these should be anchored in universal social protection systems.

The second Special Session of the Platform focused on the lessons learned from the Caribbean region in 2020 and on the need to enhance regional approaches to strengthen coordination in the face of multi-hazards, which increasingly affect the region. Presentations delivered by regional agencies highlighted the role of science and education, as well as the importance of strengthened strategic planning and prioritization of resources –including human resources– for preparing better and responding more effectively and efficiently to multiple hazards. Regional response agencies also brought attention to the successes observed so far, as well as to the areas where the systemic approach of regional mechanisms could be strengthened.

The Regional Action Plan technical meeting aimed to review and agree on recommended adjustments and areas of prioritization for the advancement of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 in the region. A primary concern was to ensure that the Regional Action Plan considered the systemic nature of risk and integrated lessons learned from the pandemic, including the need to strengthen risk governance and the linkages between disaster risk reduction and public health. Among the elements emphasized in the Plan are the need to strengthen linkages with social protection mechanisms to support the most vulnerable, the importance of the role of the private sector in disaster risk reduction, and the need to strengthen public-private partnerships. Other areas that warrant special mention are the importance of ensuring access to basic services and the resilience of infrastructure, the need to strengthen capacities of local governments to assess risk, and the need to develop and implement disaster risk reduction plans and strategies in coherence with climate adaptation and sustainable development efforts. A special effort was made by all delegations to guarantee the inclusivity of the Regional Action Plan and ensure that no one is left behind.



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The third Parallel Session of the Platform featured discussions on overcoming economic losses incurred as a result of disasters – including pandemics – in the region. Several best practices were shared, highlighting gender inclusiveness, strategic planning and the use of technology to strengthen the development of public investments. Recommendations coming out of the session emphasize the need to establish systems that allow for supervision and monitoring of public expenditure and coordination of focused spending for public investments. It was also recommended that disaster risk information be cross-referenced with public health data to determine practical and sustainable public investment solutions.

The fourth Parallel Session of the event concentrated on the need for disaster-related displacement to be addressed from a cross-sectoral perspective, including at the local, national and regional levels. Stakeholders, including States and civil society organizations, were called to make a concerted effort for the implementation of the Sendai Framework to include the assessment and reduction of displacement risks. Specifically, efforts should include the framing of innovative and necessary approaches by agencies responsible for migration management, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction.

A Learning Lab on the Forensic Investigations of Disasters (FORIN) methodology sought to enhance the understanding of participants on the causality of past disasters. The Learning Lab emphasized the idea that disasters are a social construct and called for moving away from the notion that disasters are a purely natural phenomenon. Four approaches used and advanced by FORIN were presented, along with a list of potential new cases in the region in which the methodology can be applied in the future.

Three side events of the Platform focused on resilience-building through: promoting recovery practices in the Americas and the Caribbean in a multi-hazard context; critical success factors for reducing disaster risk to SMEs; and the sharing of best practices and knowledge sources for developing inclusive disaster risk reduction plans that take into account people with disabilities and indigenous knowledge as well as priority groups, such as children, adolescents and women with disabilities.

In light of the experiences from the pandemic over the past months, governments and intergovernmental institutions agree on the relevance of continuous strengthening of institutional capacities and coordination. A key observation from the side events is that ethical principles and evidence-based decision-making will be crucial to arrive at a safe haven for what is left of the pandemic and to face the potential crises that may affect the region in the future.

The Regional Platform continued on day 3 with highly interactive sessions and the sharing of ideas



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and best practices in the region. There were three Parallel Sessions, one Learning Lab and four side events. The focus of the sessions was on social protection, disaster risk financing, impact-based forecasting and early warning systems, all in the context of building resilience.

The third High-level Session, covering social protection and inclusion to strengthen community resilience, identified concrete and feasible recommendations to enhance intersectoral synergies among social protection and disaster risk management policies. Relevant lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic point towards amplifying the inclusivity of social protection and prioritizing contributions from historically marginalized groups in decision-making as vehicles for significant improvements in system-wide disaster risk management and governance, particularly in the context of complex and interconnected disaster risks.

Parallel Session 5 emphasized the disparity between climate change adaptation strategies and the effects of climate change on vulnerable populations. Many people are still left behind during emergency response. Civil protection systems, disaster risk management systems, and social protection systems should evolve into comprehensive, redistributive, and universal protection systems that promote a resilience approach, allowing inclusive and rapid recoveries in the aftermath of crises or shocks.

The challenges of governance structures in optimizing risk management solutions at the local level and in achieving policy alignment were the focus of Parallel session 6. It was expressed that without policy and action at the local level and greater coherence with the national level, societies may fall behind in preparing to face risk. There was a call for a shift in mindset about the management of risk and for the establishment of synergies between DRM, CCA and development. The protection of the natural environment needs to be at the heart of economic growth and sustainable development. There needs to be risk-informed, climate-smart development policies that reflect this required shift in mindset. A multi-stakeholder approach that includes citizens as key stakeholders is to be used to strengthen partnerships and accountability in the performance of authorities.

Acting before a disaster or crisis hits protects the lives and livelihoods of those affected by disaster and reduces suffering. In fact, if 50% of the emergencies are predictable and 20% of them are highly predictable, only 1% of the funds allocated for response is channelled through anticipatory measures. Parallel Session 7 focused on Anticipatory Action or Anticipatory Financing mechanisms, sharing experiences and lessons learned from pilot projects across the globe. These mechanisms take time to install, but it is necessary to include them into emergency action plans, clearly identifying the triggers and the forecast-based data on which decisions are made. Anticipatory Financing mechanisms must be developed using a multi-stakeholder approach where communities, local government and humanitarian actors work together to ensure that the systems in place are sustainable.



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Learning Lab 3 was an interactive session with contributions made on the challenges and opportunities of impact-based forecasting and for the strengthening of Early Warning Systems (EWS) in the Caribbean Region. Common challenges include the lack of data sharing across critical sectors and institutions and the limited access to hydrometeorological datasets. EWS tend to be centred around science and infrastructure and less around a fundamental aspect for their effectiveness, which is the communication of messages to the people that will use the systems and information they provide. Sustainable forecasting and EWS should be integrated into local DRR strategies. Finally, opportunities were identified to capitalize on existing regional partnerships.

The side events of the third day were four in total. The MCR2030 side event provided participants with an opportunity to share country experiences and best practices in building disaster resilient cities. The need to strengthen knowledge and action on climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction considering the systemic nature risk was underlined. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and the current climate challenge should inform not only short- and medium-term thinking, but also our vision for development of societies beyond the 2030 global landmarks. The side event on Energy & Water highlighted the need to ensure business continuity and accessibility of safe water supplies after the impact of a hazard. The feasibility and advantages of geothermal energy supply for the Caribbean region were discussed, as well as the need to perceive wastewater as a secondary resource for water supply through treatment and the importance of making early warnings for drought sector specific. Finally, the side event on Resilient Tourism examined the lessons learned in the management of tourism facilities as shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. While experiences on the tactics and procedures that worked or failed were shared, key recommendations and observations for post Covid-19 tourism were discussed.

A Ministerial and High-Level Authorities meeting, with representatives of 29 countries of the region, culminated with the adoption of a declaration that includes commitments on critical aspects that need to be addressed in the face of the complexity of the pandemic recovery, the climate challenge and the need for a higher ambition in the implementation of the Sendai Framework in tandem with the 2030 Agenda. Strengthening multi-sectorial, multi-stakeholder and multi-level risk governance and boosting the investments in building resilience become fundamental to achieve those goals. Social contracts that collectively manage risk are required, and these must be anchored in universal social protection systems. The Ministerial Meeting was attended by the Prime Minister of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and other ten (10) Ministers of different countries, holding different portfolios, signalling the importance of these discussions for the social, political and economic future of our region.



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On the fourth and final day of the Platform, the High-level session titled “Strengthening disaster risk governance: Lessons from COVID-19” addressed the elements of governance that the current pandemic has highlighted as key to manage complex situations in the context of systemic risk. The urgent need was highlighted to bolster a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to comprehensive disaster risk management and to strengthen integration across sectors and at all levels. Specifically, the integration of disaster risk reduction in all government legal frameworks, policies and plans was recommended as a best practice to manage emergencies and disasters, including pandemics. The session highlighted important advancements in health disaster risk reduction including the concept of Safe and Smart Hospitals (Safe and Green = Smart), the Health Sector Multi-Hazard Response Framework, and Disability Inclusion in Hospital Disaster Risk Management (INGRID-H).

The eighth and final Parallel Session of the Platform sought to promote a better understanding of systemic risk and how it is constructed, its underlying drivers, the interconnections that it encompasses, and the way it materializes. Country presentations showcased the ways in which national and local governments are engaging in risk-informed decision-making, beyond just looking at hazards. A telling example of the successful implementation of a systemic risk approach in the education sector was presented by the Minister of Education of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Chair of the Caribbean Safe School Initiative, Hon. Curtis King. Finally, different tools and resources to better measure and understand risk and inform the design of strategies and decision-making processes were presented. A Learning Lab on Cultural Heritage Management & DRR aimed to raise awareness and promote knowledge exchange and cooperation on the benefits and necessity of integrating cultural heritage management in DRR strategies and plans. The presentation of the Scorecard – Cultural Heritage Addendum gave operational insights on how to concretely achieve this goal. A Learning Session on Lightning and Wildfires provided concise but important insights about the wildfires and/or lightning information systems in the region. Specifically, it allowed for the review of wildfire monitoring, prediction and response systems in the Americas & the Caribbean and assessment of the region’s progress and challenges in lightning detection and prediction. Best practices for integrating lightning and wildfire data systems were identified and means for improving current risk management approaches for these hazards were considered.

The last two side events of the Platform showcased Uruguay’s achievements and challenges of risk governance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and promoted an increased understanding of how to implement Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR) to increase local and national resilience in the Americas and the Caribbean.



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The Seventh Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas and the Caribbean ended with the closing ceremony. In her remarks, Ms. Elizabeth Riley, Executive Director of CDEMA, underscored that the outcomes of the RP21 will provide a favourable context for the upcoming review process of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Strategy 2014-2024, as well as the Mid-Term Review of the implementation of the Sendai Framework. Ms. Riley read the Chair Summary, which succinctly encapsulates the proceedings of the four-days event.

The SRSR for Disaster Risk Reduction and head of UNDRR, Ms. Mami Mizutori, remarked that we emerged from the Platform with a determination to promote international cooperation in favour of developing countries and support progress in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, she indicated that we have reiterated our commitment to reducing mortality, the numbers of people affected by disasters, damage to critical infrastructure and economic losses as set out in the Sendai Framework and to aligning our actions with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, and the New Urban Agenda. Ms. Mizutori expressed satisfaction for establishing the Youth Forum as part of the Regional Platform and congratulated the adoption of an updated Regional Action Plan that captures the lessons learned from the disasters of the last years and recalibrates the regional priorities to achieve the targets of the Sendai Framework.

The Hon. Brig. (R'td) Mark Phillips, Prime Minister of Guyana, also delivered remarks at the closing ceremony. After describing Guyana's risk context, which includes marked coastal vulnerabilities along with other existing and emerging threats, the Prime Minister recognized that sustainable growth and development must take into account risk-informed investments that build resilience. He indicated that Guyana has this year adopted its National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, in line with target E of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, as an encouragement to other States. He invited governments of the Americas and the Caribbean to shift from a reactive approach to a preventive and holistic approach that recognizes the systemic nature of disaster risk.

In his closing remarks, the Hon. Desmond McKenzie, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, highlighted that the more than 30 sessions and discussions that had taken place over these last four days, convening thousands of people from the region who shared their expertise, concerns, perspectives and ideas, contributed to making our region more resilient. From the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations in British Columbia, Canada, to the southern cone, over 2,500 people joined the event's bespoke digital platform and triggered a remarkable following on social media and our website live stream – adding up to more than 35,000 views! – making this the most attended Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction of the Americas & the Caribbean. The Minister also stressed that this event had broken other very significant records. This was indeed the first Regional Platform to be preceded by a Youth Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, the first one to have a representative from the youth take the floor at the opening ceremony, the first one to invite a representative of the youth to the



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Ministerial and High-Level Authorities Meeting, and the first one to end with concrete commitments to ensure the youth are part and parcel of our collective efforts to reduce disaster risks and build resilience. Nothing about them without them!

The Ministerial Declaration, the Youth Declaration, the Civil Society Declaration, the adjusted Regional Action Plan, and a Chair Summary capturing only a snapshot of the rich discussions held during these last four days can be found at the Regional Platform's webpage.

In his opening remarks, the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica, called upon all nations in the region and participants to reflect on the measures needed to address the impacts of disasters and build resilient economies in the Americas and the Caribbean. We want to thank all participants, organizations, agencies, community leaders, and particularly session organizing teams, for having responded to that call over these last four days and having contributed to make our societies more resilient.

