



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



Summary Day 1

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 SRSR Ms. Mami Mizutori, emphasized how the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic will 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, ON, PC, MP, 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 Hon. Desmond McKenzie, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development indicated, they must commit to the task of developing proper DRR strategies, especially with 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 centered 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 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 also been exacerbated. 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 the platform for discussion on 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. One of the most significant advantages of NBS is its cross-sectoral reach and cost-benefit as an alternative to achieving disaster risk reduction to 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 analyzing 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.