INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

FIGHTING INEQUALITY FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE

#ResilienceForAll #BreakTheCycle #DDRDay
Introduction

In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly designated 13 October as the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDRR) to promote a global culture of disaster risk reduction. IDDRR is an opportunity to acknowledge global progress in preventing and reducing disaster risk and losses.

The day’s purpose aligns with the Sendai Framework, the international agreement to prevent and reduce the loss of lives and livelihoods as well as economic losses and damage to basic infrastructure. The Sendai Framework has seven global targets and 38 indicators for measuring progress. It complements the Paris Agreement on climate change, and both of these frameworks are interlinked with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

IDDRR 2023 will focus on the reciprocal relationship between inequality and disaster vulnerability: while unequal access to services such as finance and insurance leaves the most at-risk people exposed to danger, the impacts of these disasters exacerbate inequality, pushing the most at-risk groups deeper into poverty.

Background

United Nations Secretary-General
António Guterres

“Our world is plagued by a perfect storm on a number of fronts. Start with the short term, a global economic crisis. The outlook, as we all know, is bleak ... We see deepening inequalities and a rapidly unfolding cost-of-living crisis – affecting women and girls the most. Supply chain disruptions and an energy crunch. Soaring prices. Rising interest rates along with inflation. And debt levels pounding vulnerable countries.” (SG/SM/21661).
This comes in the context of growing disaster risk, which is intensifying inequality and deepening vulnerability. On our current trajectory, by 2030 the world will face around 1.5 significant disasters per day. The majority of countries facing high disaster risk are also among those with the highest share of people living below the national poverty line. For example, the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction found that among the top 20 most vulnerable countries, 90 per cent were middle- and lower-income countries with an average national poverty rate of 34 per cent. This can be compared with less than 0.5 per cent for countries on the opposite end of the risk scale (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2022a).

Research from recent decades shows that it is generally people living in poverty who are hit the hardest by disasters. Between 1970 and 2019, the United Nations found that 91 per cent of all the deaths from weather, climate and water hazards occurred in developing countries. The World Bank found statistics in the same range, with 82 per cent of disaster-related deaths occurring in low and lower-middle-income countries (World Bank, 2022). Meanwhile, current research shows that about 75 per cent of extreme weather events are currently connected to climate change and fuelled by carbon emissions (Climate Adaptation Platform, 2022). The countries experiencing the greatest losses from disasters are those who have contributed the least to the problem. In effect, inequality facilitates the transfer of disaster risk from those who benefit from risk-taking to those who bear the cost of it.

Within countries and communities, inequality is also powerful in determining who suffers from disaster. Impoverished people are more likely to live in hazard-exposed areas and less able to invest in risk reduction measures. They often live in low-quality and insecure housing. A lack of services such as health care, public transport, communications and basic infrastructure exacerbates the situation. Certain groups, such as women, children and persons with disabilities, are especially affected by disaster impacts. For example, research in Nepal found 71 per cent of men receive early warning from a formal source while 51 per cent of women receive warnings through informal and social sources (Brown et al., 2019). In the Great East Japan earthquake of 2011, persons with disabilities were twice as likely to die (Japan Disability Forum, 2012). Higher mortality rates among at-risk groups are directly linked to a range of poverty factors.

While wealthier people’s risk exposure tends to be buffered by insurance, along with greater asset bases and coping capacities, poorer people must often rely on their own funds, which can drive them further into poverty and impair their ability to bounce back from disasters. Poverty is therefore both a cause and a consequence of disaster risk. A World Bank study found that while poor people may lose less in terms of physical assets (by virtue of owning less) their loss of well-being and earning power is affected significantly more than those of other classes. This loss of income, coping mechanisms and ability to participate in the local economy can worsen existing inequalities significantly in the long term (World Bank, 2021).

Under the SDGs, we have tools, targets and systems in place. However, to help countries reduce their vulnerability and tackle inequality, we need far greater investment. This is essential for effectively reducing disaster risk and delivering a resilient future for all. As disaster risk reduction is everyone’s responsibility, we must involve all communities and countries in this task.
Call to action

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction states that “more dedicated action needs to be focused on tackling underlying disaster risk drivers, such as the consequences of poverty and inequality”, and that disaster risk reduction “requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted.” (UNDRR, 2022b).

To raise awareness and mobilize action, UNDRR will use the 2023 IDDRR to raise awareness of severe disaster inequality and encourage a fight against inequality for a resilient future.

Key messages

» Poverty, inequality and discrimination are causes and consequences of growing disaster risk.

» Inequality creates conditions that render people exposed and vulnerable to disasters. Disasters also disproportionately impact the poorest and most at-risk people, thus worsening inequality. Reducing vulnerability to disasters requires addressing these dimensions.

» According to current climate projections, by 2030 the world will face some 560 disasters per year while an estimated 37.6 million people will be living in extreme poverty because of climate change effects and disasters. A “worst case” climate change and disasters scenario is estimated to push an additional 100.7 million people into poverty by 2030.

» We must break the cycle of disaster > growing inequality > repeat.

» We can curb the destructive power of hazards — in other words, stop them turning into disasters — through careful and coordinated planning that is designed to reduce people’s exposure and vulnerability to harm.

» Member States must prioritize their commitments to achieving the Sendai Framework and SDGs, especially the reduction of poverty and inequality. They must also urgently address disaster risk and vulnerability with a focus on the most vulnerable communities.

» Greater investments are needed in disaggregated data, both to better understand disproportionate disaster impact and exposure and to inform resilience-building plans.
Global decision makers must make our financial system fit for purpose in delivering finance for the most climate vulnerable countries. We need to deliver economic resilience for the people most at risk from disasters.

We must accelerate implementation of the Early Warnings for All initiative to ensure everyone on earth is covered by early warnings in the next four years, prioritizing the most at-risk communities.

Countries must engage, build capacity and empower groups in all disaster risk reduction decision-making. Countries must ensure that those most at risk, including older persons and persons with disabilities, are meaningfully included.

References


