Expert Group Meeting on Partnerships and Collaborative Approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction in SIDS Municipalities

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I. Introduction

1. As decided by resolution 209 of the 67th session, the UN General Assembly decided to convene the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction that will take place in Sendai, Japan from 14-18 March 2015. Pursuant to paragraph 120 of the SAMOA Pathway and as part of UN-OHRLLS’ efforts to enhance coherence of UN processes on small island developing States (SIDS) related issues, UN-OHRLLS is endeavouring to ensure that the DRR outcomes from the SIDS Conference – amongst others - are paid focused attention in light of the upcoming DRR Conference in Japan and indeed in the broader post-2015 development agenda.

2. In light of the recently concluded Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Apia, Samoa and the upcoming 2015 DRR conference in Japan, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) convened an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Partnerships and Collaborative Approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction in SIDS Municipalities in Singapore, on the margins of the capacity-building seminar on Collaborative Approaches and Solutions to Disasters Management Challenges for SIDS Municipalities in the Context of Sustainable Development (10 – 12 November) co-organised by UN-OHRLLS, UN-DESA and the Singapore Cooperation Programme.

3. The EGM, brought together experts in disaster risk reduction and resilience building from SIDS to explore solutions to the vulnerabilities and challenges of SIDS in regard to the increasing occurrence and intensity of natural disasters, impacts of sea-level rise and other risks posed by climate change.

4. The experts also supported the DRR capacity-building seminar which included lectures delivered by EGM experts, presentations and group discussions with the aim of enhancing the knowledge and capacity of SIDS participants with regard to reducing disaster risks and enhancing resilience to disasters and climate change related impacts at the municipal and community levels.

5. Recognising the importance of collaborating with experts on the ground and drawing on their experiences in their respective countries, the EGM discussions and recommendations by experts will be used as further advocacy know-how for UN-OHRLLS’ efforts in strongly advocating on SIDS DRR related issues including those outcomes from the SIDS Featured Event entitled Strengthening Partnerships Towards Disaster Risk Reduction for Small Island
Developing States co-organised by UN-OHRLS and UNISDR at the Fourth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva, 2013. As UN-OHRLS looks ahead to the 2015 World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, the discussions and recommendations by experts in the field will play an important role in strengthening and better articulating the advocacy on DRR issues pertinent to SIDS.

II. Background – SIDS and DRR

6. Twenty years after the Earth Summit, the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference firmly placed DRR on the sustainable development agenda. In it, governments called for “disaster risk reduction and building of resilience to disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.” Furthermore, donors and the international community are encouraged to enhance international cooperation in support of DRR in developing countries through appropriate channels such as technical assistance, technology transfer as mutually agreed, capacity building and training programmes. Stressing the importance of stronger inter-linkages among disaster risk reduction, recovery and long-term development, it further recognizes the importance of comprehensive hazard and risk assessments, and knowledge and information sharing. Governments also called for “all relevant stakeholders, including governments, international, regional and subregional organizations, the private sector and civil society, to take appropriate and effective measures, taking into account the three dimensions of sustainable development.”

7. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are particularly vulnerable to natural as well as environmental disasters and have limited capacity to recover from such disasters. The issue of vulnerability has received growing international recognition as a major disadvantage facing the sustainable development of SIDS. Most recently, the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA Pathway) adopted at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States held in Apia, Samoa outlines recommendations for action in the area of disaster risk reduction. Paragraphs 51 and 52 of the document identify the critical need to promote cooperation and strengthen coordination at the national and regional levels, mobilising the public and private sector in disaster risk management. The document refers to important areas such as: access to technical assistance and financing for early warning systems; emergency relief and population evacuation; climate change

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adaptation and development; harmonizing national and regional reporting systems to mention a few.

8. The increasing occurrence of natural and human-induced hazards and disasters over the last decades, serves as a constant reminder of how disasters are not only a major threat to individual lives and assets, but also have profound social, economic and environmental consequences. Disasters can wipe away years of efforts and achievements towards sustainable development at the regional, national, and community levels.

9. Between 2000 and 2011 it is conservatively estimated that over 110 and 187 disasters caused by various hazards affected the Pacific and Caribbean regions, respectively.\(^2\) While the death toll and economic losses may appear low in comparison to ‘mega disasters’ elsewhere, the local-level impact on communities and the economic impact to the affected countries are enormous, eclipsing disasters in other parts of the world which often receive much greater global attention.

10. Scaling the economic impact of disasters provides a clearer picture on how development in SIDS is affected by disasters. For example, Cyclone Ivan in 2004 resulted in estimated direct losses of $900 million in Grenada, more than twice the Country’s GDP. Cyclone Evan, which hit the South Pacific in 2012, resulted in total losses equivalent to one third of Samoa’s annual economic output. Similarly, losses associated with the 2010 earthquake in Haiti are estimated to have exceeded 15 per cent of GDP. Given their small size, individual hazard events like cyclones may affect an entire territory and economy. As such disasters can destroy decades of capital investment and hard-fought development gains, often followed by slow and costly recovery.\(^3\) The increased indebtedness and constrained fiscal space can have long-term developmental consequences.

11. Given their small size, the expected annual average losses from earthquakes and tropical cyclone wind damage in SIDS represent respectively only 2 per cent and 1.4 per cent of the global total. However, precisely because they are small, 8 of the 10 countries that would lose the largest proportion of the value of their produced capital stock in a one-in-250 year earthquake are SIDS. In the case of a one-in-250 year cyclone, they comprise 6 of the 10 countries most at risk.\(^4\)

\(^{4}\) GAR 2013
12. Countries with low levels of investment and high average annual losses are less likely to be able to absorb losses, even from more frequent, less severe events. Jamaica observed annual average losses between 1991 and 2011 equivalent to 2.6 per cent of its average annual investment. This contributed to its sluggish growth over this period.\(^5\) Similarly, Vanuatu and Tonga are estimated to sustain average annualised losses at 6.6 and 4.4 per cent, respectively.\(^6\)

### III. Meeting Summary

13. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative (UN-OHRLLS). The High Representative in his opening remarks, emphasised that achieving disaster resilience must permeate all aspects of the development agenda and as DRR becomes more mainstreamed – including at the community level - short and long-term efforts are required to ensure effective coherence and coordination by all stakeholders. He reflected on the importance of current and upcoming processes including the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the 2015 World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Financing for Development Conference and others, in their implications for both SIDS and the DRR agenda. He stressed that for SIDS, DRR is an important issue to be tackled through an inclusive, holistic approach involving partnerships as outlined in the recent Third International Conference on SIDS and its outcome document; the SAMOA Pathway.

14. In the ensuing discussions, experts highlighted the upcoming 2015 DRR conference as an important opportunity for the international community – including civil society, business community and others - to further strengthen through an all-inclusive approach, efforts to ensure disaster resilience for SIDS including in light of the Post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

15. In reference to the 2015 Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, experts underscored the importance of the means of implementation and that to achieve inter-alia DRR goals, all elements must come together to achieve effective financing for sustainable development. Financing requires different strategies and should consider existing financing structures within SIDS and how these can be further strengthened.

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\(^5\) GAR 2013
16. Experts agreed that the impacts of climate change including disasters will require efforts that ensure climate proofing and that financing needs to take a holistic approach to achieve DRR goals. The outcomes of the upcoming climate change conference in Lima, Peru (COP 20) (1-12 December) would be an important avenue to further build on discussions for a global agreement at the 2015 COP 21 in Paris. Disasters and climate risk solutions should be seen in a more holistic context including within on-going development processes. In this context, there is a need to develop more resilient and economically stable communities.

17. On mobilizing resources, experts noted the necessity to provide resources at the local level including private sector, civil society and other stakeholders as being crucial in building resilient communities. In this regard, policies for achieving disaster risk reduction need to be inclusive and not only set at the national level but importantly be applicable at the local and neighbourhood level. It was agreed that community engagement and leadership on DRR is an important component of building resilient societies. Likewise, community capacity – including the use of traditional knowledge - needs to be strengthened to achieve DRR goals.

18. Effective efforts at achieving DRR nationally must take into account the importance of neighbourhood level engagement ensuring that families and individuals – including those with special needs – are in a position to respond proactively when disasters strike.

IV. Recommendations

Emanating from discussions, the experts agreed on the following recommendations:

1. Not all SIDS have adequate systems to effectively interface with communities. This presents challenges including the need of linking communities to national strategies. Likewise, decentralization of risk governance and greater capacity development at local levels is needed.

2. There is a need for evidence based research, greater coordination of international and regional organizations at country level and ensuring that poverty alleviation is addressed with a special focus on poor people with special needs.

3. Recognising that ecosystems play key roles in DRR, protecting, conserving and sustaining ecological resources is essential for SIDS. Thus, there is an urgent need for ecosystem based protection solutions, soft where possible (protective landscapes), hard only where necessary. Multifunctional solutions are preferred, which can help obtain financing (multi stakeholder approach). It is recognised that most situations
will require mixed solutions including soft and hard responses. Multi-functional solutions should combine “safety, sustainability and beauty.”

4. Given the challenges of climate change, there is a need for adaptable designs. Disasters and climate risk solutions should be seen in a more holistic context including within on-going development processes. In this context, there is a need to develop more resilient and economically stable communities.

5. Global integration of DRR messaging mainstreamed into all areas of international dialogue; to be able to mainstream DRR at the national level into all areas of government, this needs to be on the agenda internationally outside of specific DRR dialogues. SIDS also need to inform and influence global policies for DRR; stronger coordination and collaboration amongst SIDS is needed to influence global policies.

6. In regards to risk assessment, existing regional centres play an important role for data collection, modelling and analysis. However, there is a need for greater focus on capacity development at the country level where more financial and technical support for risk assessment is required. Improving in-country capacity for risk assessment will require a move towards more open source software – including in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), user-friendly tools and techniques and traditional knowledge so that risk analysis is more affordable for SIDS. South-South cooperation must also be enhanced as a means to build capacity through sharing lessons learned and best practices. There is a need to building stronger partnerships and formal collaborations between SIDS to share experience and expertise. Greater support for formal research opportunities in SIDS both in academia and in collaboration with the private sector is also needed.

7. Infrastructure protection, building regulations and land use planning are important components of effective DRR objectives. For SIDS, land-use regulatory systems need to be updated, improved and allow for site specific solutions (local ordinances) as solutions may need to be designed and implemented at neighbourhood level.

8. Vital facilities including education and health infrastructure must be better protected and there is a need for greater understanding of the dual role of public buildings in disaster relief. These facilities need to be disaster resilient and equipped with emergency utilities and it is important they be returned to their original functions as soon as possible. Recognising that some of these facilities may be built in disaster prone areas requires that there is mapping of these facilities and their characteristics in order to analyse potential effects under different hazard scenarios and emergency evacuation plans to safer facilities. It is important that private facilities/institutions be formally/officially engaged to network and augment emergency services both pre and post disaster periods.

9. Training, education and public awareness are crucial to building resilient communities. Therefore, DRR related messages – including graphics - needs to be
simple, targeted and coordinated. All agencies should transmit the same message to avoid confusion. Likewise, the role of the media in delivering messages is crucial and similarly, communities must have trust in both message and messenger. It is important not to rely on one communication tool only (i.e. SMS is more useful for region specific or slow set events. Cellular broadcast works for urgent national messages. Radio can be useful.

10. In relation to SIDS-specific financing and resource mobilization for DRR, existing funding is fragmented and needs to be consolidated. Appropriate frameworks are needed to obtain and expend funds effectively; with the support of the international community and regional agencies. In addition, there is a need to establish partnerships with non-traditional donors. It is also pertinent that financial support is provided for strategic interventions, rather than relying only on tactical level trainings. At the local authority level, there is a strong need to build capacity to access funds and likewise, local resource mobilization should include establishing appropriate financing and incentive mechanisms that also includes involvement of the private sector and ensures economically stable communities.

11. Partnerships are recognised as an important aspect of achieving DRR. In this regard, interoperability of early warning systems with international, regional and local systems requires partnerships that can leverage access to wider networks.

12. It is crucial to ensure that social, emotional and cultural needs of displaced persons are considered in recovery and reconstruction. It is pertinent to consider a “happy return” versus an “early return.”

V. List of Experts

- Dr. David C. Smith  
  Coordinator, Institute for Sustainable Development, University of the West Indies

- Ms. Diane McFadzien  
  Climate Change Adaptation Adviser, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

- Ms. Mereoni Ketewai  
  Risk Mapping Officer, Disaster Risk, Applied Geosciences and Technology Division (SOPAC), Secretariat of the Pacific Community

- Ms. Venetia Bellers  
  Adviser for Disaster Management, Prime Minister’s Office, Government of Mauritius
VI. Meeting Agenda

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>Welcome Remarks</td>
<td>Welcome Remarks by Under-Secretary-General and High Representative, Mr. Gyan Acharya (UNOHRLLS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:05</td>
<td>Tour de Table</td>
<td>Discussion and elaboration of DRR recommendations by Experts</td>
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<td>09:45</td>
<td>Consolidation of recommendations</td>
<td>Group discussion and consolidation of recommendations</td>
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<td>09:00</td>
<td>Meeting Ends</td>
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<td>09:30</td>
<td>Capacity Building Seminar begins</td>
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