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Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: Recommendations for the way forward to 2030 and beyond

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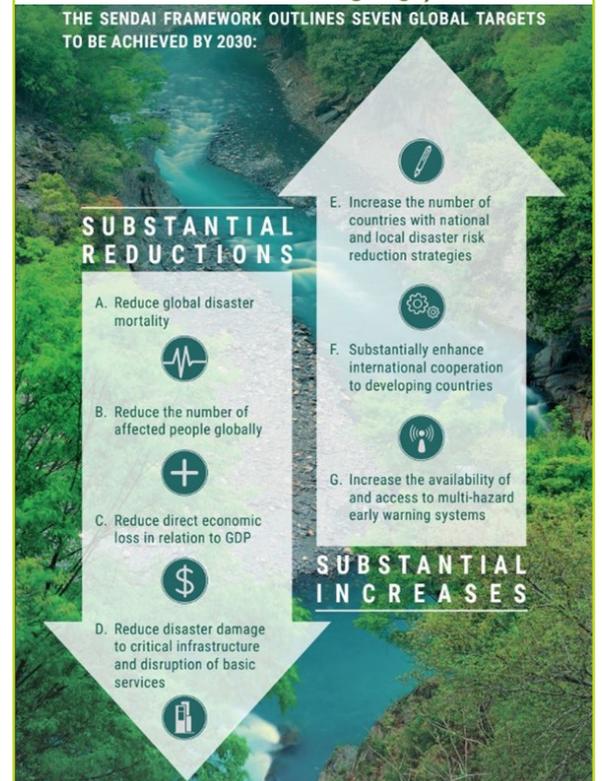
The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework or SFDRR) was adopted by the United Nations (UN) Member States at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in Sendai, Japan, and was subsequently endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2015. The Sendai Framework outlines seven targets and four priorities for action to facilitate the pursuit of its goal: “The substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities, and countries” (UN 2015).

With the year 2023 marking the mid-point in the implementation of the Sendai Framework and the other Post-2015 Development Agendas, the UN General Assembly has agreed to hold a Midterm Review “to assess progress on integrating disaster risk reduction into policies, programmes and investments at all levels, identify good practice, gaps and challenges and accelerate the path to achieving the goal of the Sendai Framework and its seven global targets by 2030” (UNGA Resolution A/RES/75/216, 29 December 2020).

The Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework comes at a highly significant time in global development. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the intrinsic socio-economic inequalities embedded in nations, inadequacies of governance structures, and spatial and critical infrastructure needs and considerations. Along with the accelerated impacts of climate change, including heatwaves, an increased number and strength of storms and floods, and stress on water and food systems, nations now need to recognize that

the status quo is no longer a viable option in development. In addition to the rippling effects of COVID-19 and the planetary impacts of climate change, the increasing disaster-conflict-migration nexus has shown the interconnections between development and risks that move beyond transnational boundaries. Govern-

Figure 1: The Seven Targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030)



Source: <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/what-sendai-framework>

ments now not only need to reduce risks from the most expected hazards in their territories, but must also seriously consider the potential of compounding and cascading disasters, while preparing for uncertainties and emerging disasters which may lead to vital impairments in the functioning of societies.

To that end, the Midterm Review of the SFDRR includes both “a retrospective and prospective exercise” which would explore the systemic nature of risk; support integrated partnerships among nation-states and other stakeholders; and develop policy options to accelerate realization of the goal and outcome of the Sendai Framework (sendaiframework-mtr-undrr.org). In short, the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework, undertaken in the new global risk landscape, calls for a whole-of-society and whole-of-governance approach to risk governance and management.

The Ongoing Midterm Review Process and National Voluntary Reviews

The Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework commenced in October 2021 and will culminate in a main report developed through the Member States’ review process, stakeholder consultations, and review of other UN conferences and summits. The main report and political declaration are to be adopted at a high-level meeting of the General Assembly in May 2023 and are expected to inform the review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the ECOSOC High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the SDG Summit. They are also intended to provide recommendations for the “Our Common Agenda” process led by the Secretary-General, and the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2023 (for more recommendations on the “Our Common Agenda” process, see [sef: Global Governance Spotlight 4|2021](#) by Ulbert/Roth).

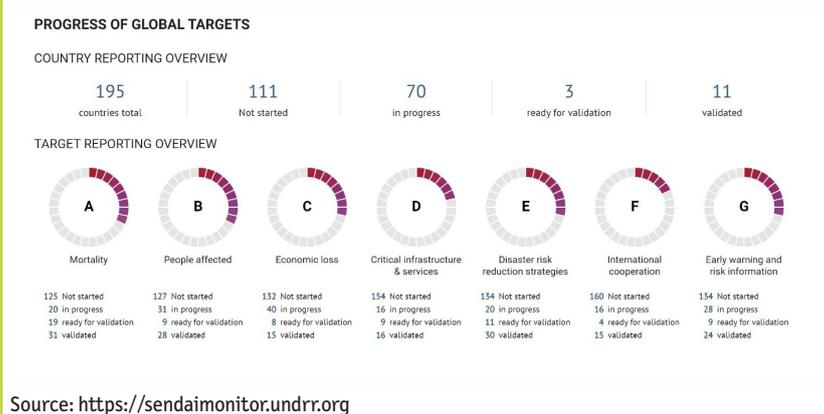
The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), tasked to oversee the implementation, follow-up and review of the Sendai Framework, has provided Member States and stakeholders with a set of guiding

questions to facilitate the development of relevant inputs and reports. However, despite the urgency of the current global risk landscape, out of 195 Member States which have adopted the Sendai Framework, only 42 have submitted their National Voluntary Midterm Reviews at the time of writing. Most developed economies, including Germany, have not yet done so. In addition, according to the Sendai Monitoring System, less than half of the Member States have submitted or are in the process of submitting the report on their progress towards the global targets (see Fig. 2). More nations need to accelerate their reporting process for an all-encompassing Midterm Review of progress on DRR as a basis for a sound political declaration and recommendations for the way forward.

The Member States have taken different approaches in the preparation of the National Reviews. While some of the reports are highly detailed in their review of risk management actions, challenges and opportunities since the adoption of the Sendai Framework (e.g. Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria, Philippines, Republic of Korea), others have taken the approach of developing short papers which respond to the guiding questions posed by UNDRR. For the most part, nations’ prospective reviews and recommendations are based on the local contexts and state of disaster risk management. However, several thematic areas emerge across nations. Among them are issues related to “data”. For instance, the *United States National Review* discusses the importance of “standardized and consistent disaster loss data”, while the *Austrian National Voluntary Review* discusses the “feasibility of a central national repository integrating and harmonizing relevant data”, and the *Cambodian Voluntary Review* suggests that overcoming “data silos” and sharing data openly are necessary steps in the implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR.

A second theme that emerges from several National Reviews is the significance of strategic approaches and updated governance mechanisms for risk reduction. Discussions around this theme include the “need for national disaster risk management strategy and relevant hazard maps and data” (Türkiye), “inclusive and interconnected governance and collaboration networks” (Australia, Georgia), involving women in leadership (Cambodia), fostering local and inclusive governance (Slovenia), increasing perception of risk (Mauritius) and educating the public (Poland, Tunisia). Other recommendations include “developing a better horizontal and vertical integration set-up” (Ethiopia) and further enhancement of international cooperation in DRR (Japan, Republic of Korea, Sweden). In addition, the reports discuss that there is a “need for ‘re-framing’ disaster risk management by 2030 and beyond” as the existing policy and normative frameworks do not seem to effectively provide for new risks (Bosnia and Herzegovina), particularly with climate change as “a game changer that exacerbates many existing risks” (Switzerland).

Figure 2: Progress of Global Targets, Country and Target Reporting Overview. Sendai Monitor. Retrieved on 8 December 2022



A third theme that emerges from the National Reviews relates to the importance of the Sendai Framework for the 2030 Agenda: focusing on poverty reduction and sustainable development (Montenegro), using a systemic risk management approach addressing underlying drivers of risk (Trinidad and Tobago), and increasing socio-economic resilience of communities (Philippines). The emerging themes vary in scope according to the national contexts. However, the Member States generally focus on understanding risk in a time of shifting and newly emerging challenges, inadequacies in data collection and technical capacity, as well as strategic re-formulation and governance systems in relation to risk management. In addition, there is an increased recognition of the strong interplay between the Sendai Framework and the SDGs. Governments need to find synergies and coordinate risk reduction actions with other areas such as poverty reduction, sustainable development and climate change.

Multi-Stakeholder Consultations for the Midterm Review

In addition to the National Voluntary Reviews discussed above, the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework attaches special importance to input from “civil society, the private sector, the scientific community, academic and research institutions, grassroot groups, local communities, including women & youth and key population/social groups at all levels” (UNDRR 2022a). Embedded within the guiding principle of the Sendai Framework, which calls for an “all-of-society approach” to disaster risk reduction, the stakeholder consultations are central to the Midterm Reviews and developing the way forward for the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, the input of the wide-ranging stakeholders reflects the importance of disaster risk reduction in local communities, the state of the art in risk research, and potential ways forward for developing new partnerships and new governance mechanisms necessary for the new risk landscape.

The Stakeholder Report of the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework, submitted in autumn 2022, includes a cornucopia of recommendations. The rest of this article will focus on the recommendations that relate to two priorities for action: the changing nature of disaster risk; and the evolving forms of governance mechanisms to address these risks.

The Stakeholder Report highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing discourse on climate resilience have led to a debate about the changing nature of risk. However, most of these discussions have been limited to natural and biological hazards and do not include “global catastrophic or existential risk scenarios” (UNDRR 2022a), which the UN Secretary-General had urged “international institutions to be ready for” (UN

Executive Office 2021). The various topics include a “breach of planetary boundaries; sharp increase in multidimensional inequality; rapid technological change [...]; food system fragility; unplanned urbanization; lack of outer space governance; the nexus of disaster-conflict-fragility; unprepared energy system transitions; the divergence from the planetary health approach; inaccessible migration pathways and disaster induced migration” (UNDRR 2022a). Most themes discussed by the stakeholders greatly diverge from discussions in the National Reviews, which may indicate that civil society organizations, academic institutions and other stakeholders better recognize the type and level of risks affecting local communities, including those that may just be emerging. The stakeholder consultations also underscore that this changing global risk landscape calls for more effective and innovative risk governance arrangements to implement Priority 2: Strengthening Risk Governance of the Sendai Framework. Discussions highlight that while risk governance approaches have included an “all-of-society” approach at the global and regional levels, there needs to be improvement at the national and local levels. On the other hand, the stakeholders have also expressed views about “the multilateral systems and its institutions not being ‘fit for purpose’ to govern and adapt effectively to today’s realities” (UNDRR 2022a). Additionally, the discussions on risk governance have raised the need for the UN and the multilateral system to “integrate southern perspectives into institutional culture and strategic thinking”. Overall, to effectively govern the current, emerging and intersecting risk landscape, stakeholder discussions stress the importance of “enhancing the effectiveness, accountability and inclusivity of the multilateral system, including by addressing fragmentation, gridlock and lack of agility, and greater engagement of local communities”.

While some of the National Reviews have also discussed the need for more inclusive risk governance, it is front and centre in the stakeholder consultations. In recent years, some Member States, the UN and other institutions have also been emphasizing the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches for implementing the global development agenda, in particular for disaster risk reduction. Among them, UNDRR in collaboration with the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and other experts and stakeholders have developed a *Words into Action Guide for Using Traditional Knowledges for Disaster Risk Reduction*, with the understanding that “traditional knowledge is a critical component of how communities across the globe reduce and manage disaster risk in their respective localities” (UNDRR 2022b). Such guidance is essential for local and national governments to understand the significance of different knowledge systems for risk reduction and find ways to incorporate them.

Looking Ahead to 2030 and Beyond

While the Sendai Framework marked a paradigm shift in understanding disaster risks and their management, the intersection of COVID-19 and subsequent socio-economic crises, intensifying impacts of climate change and ongoing conflicts have created an urgent need for governments and other stakeholders to re-think the concepts of compounding, cascading and emerging risks and re-evaluate disaster risk governance to provide for this changing global risk landscape.

In this critical period, the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework offers an opportunity for the Member States, stakeholder groups and the UN system to revisit their progress and evaluate challenges and opportunities in implementing the Sendai Framework. It also allows them to re-examine the contextual shifts in risk and explore new models to govern systemic risk deeply embedded with sustainable development decisions. However, as the analysis of National Voluntary Midterm Reviews has shown, not all Member States have taken this opportunity yet, and among those that have, the breadth of reviews varies greatly. This may partially be related to the discussions initiated by the Member States about the need to better link the DRR agenda to that of sustainable development and find ways to use limited resources to work in coherence to advance the two agendas.

In comparison, the stakeholder reviews indicate the interest and commitment of the diverse communities and institutions to the DRR agenda as they are either directly impacted by disasters or their research and activities are better aligned to it. This commitment brings an additional argument to the discussions on inclusive risk governance and finding innovative ways for governments and stakeholders to work together.

In addition to this whole-of-society approach, four other themes need to be emphasized for the success of disaster risk reduction as we look ahead to 2030 and beyond:

1. International, national and local risk governance mechanisms require a re-evaluation to address the new risk profiles, but also need to be agile to adapt to emerging crises. They should be vertically and horizontally integrated, consider different knowledge and learning systems and adopt inclusive approaches to increase trust and empowerment of society.

2. The interplay between disaster risk reduction, poverty reduction and sustainable development should be emphasized. The emerging global landscape also requires the connections with climate change, biological diversity, food, water and energy security to be emphasized, along with a focus on the humanitarian, development and peace nexus;
3. Technical and knowledge-based capacities need to be strengthened. This particularly includes an emphasis on relevant data collection and eliminating “data silos” for effective collaboration and expanded scope in DRR actions for urban areas;
4. Disaster risk reduction actions ranging from early warning systems to infrastructure resilience require funding and investment in prevention, necessitating the fundamental integration with the larger economy and greater involvement of the private sector.

All these action points need to be implemented in unison to further the understanding of existing and potential future risks, to reorganize governance systems and foster partnerships to address them, while developing technical capacities and new approaches to reduce such risks. At the same time, nations urgently need to find ways to integrate their actions and develop coherent strategies for resilience and equity, thus addressing the increasing importance of risk reduction for sustainable development.

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