HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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2018 HLPF Thematic Review: Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies - Building resilience

Background

The term 'resilience' in General Assembly Resolution 71/276 describes "the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management." A resilient society in today's world recognizes the pivotal transformative forces at play – climate change, globalization, urbanization, technological progress and demographic patterns – and develops strategies to address systemic challenges and transform them into opportunities. This also requires international cooperation for coherent and coordinated action through global frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the New Urban Agenda. These international frameworks provide solid bases for the formulation of national and local resilience strategies.

Resilience is reflected in a range of SDG targets, both explicitly and implicitly. Target 1.5 represents the core resilience target, aiming at building "the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations, and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters". Resilience is also a central feature of target 13.1 which seeks to "strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries." Resilience further underpins several other Goals and targets pertaining to hunger, infrastructure and urbanization, among others, and ultimately all SDGs.

Building resilience is thus a multidimensional challenge and a cross-cutting issue that will impact progress towards the SDGs and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Building sustainable and resilient societies is central to eliminating poverty, augmenting shared prosperity and leaving no one behind; it needs

to be pursued by focusing on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated manner.

Sudden, disruptive events, caused by internal or external factors, expose vulnerabilities in countries' economic, social, political, environmental, geographic and institutional situations. Such shocks include economic crises, natural disasters, and other environmental (or climate-related events), health-related occurrences and man-made (including technological[1]) hazards. Within countries, specific regions, population groups or individuals may be more vulnerable than others. When shocks occur, the severity of their impact on individuals, society and the environment depend on the level of vulnerability and exposure, preparedness, and recovery capacities. This cuts across multiple areas, including urban planning and infrastructure, food security, economic structures, insurance mechanisms, social protection systems and public institutions that are key to recovery.

Progress in Building Resilient Societies

Policies and actions at the global, regional, national and local levels can support sustainable and resilient societies in urban and rural communities. A wide range of research attests to the role of employment and unemployment in prompting people's exit and entry, respectively, into poverty, with implications for their risk exposure. Addressing this fundamental development challenge requires broad-based growth and multi-sectoral, integrated solutions for the provision of adequate employment and incomes for women and men, and addressing structural barriers to people's economic empowerment. It also requires planning ahead to respond to the challenges of new technologies.

Countries are also investing in early warning and climate prediction systems to make informed decisions about natural resources management, and to strengthen national policy frameworks for resilience, in line with international frameworks. The use of technology has allowed to refine, amongst other things, early warning, information gathering and needs assessment, thereby improving the disaster response. Innovation can contribute to enhance the understanding of risk factors and thus, strengthen evidence-based decision making. While ICT and social networks are becoming increasingly

[1] originate from technological or industrial conditions, dangerous procedures, infrastructure failures or specific human activities. Examples include industrial pollution, nuclear radiation, toxic wastes, dam failures, transport accidents, factory explosions, fires and chemical spills. Technological hazards also may arise directly as a result of the impacts of a natural hazard event.

available, there remain coverage gaps in rural areas. Likewise, indigenous languages need to be taken into account for inclusive and efficient transmission of risk reduction protocols and information. Context-sensitive technology and inclusive innovation, particularly pro-poor and gender-sensitive solutions, can serve as critical tools to support the improvement of livelihoods in the short-term, and shift societies on a sustainable and resilient path in the long-term.

To strengthen understanding and capacities for resilience building, the Sendai Framework calls for prioritizing the development and dissemination of science-based risk knowledge, technology and innovation and to strengthen the science-policy interface. Existing technology-enabled solutions that can be leveraged to increase preparedness to and manage the risk of disasters include spatial data, monitoring and early-warning systems, disaster resilience scorecards for cities, and emergency telecommunications. The potential of big data and drone-technology is being explored in several countries.

Innovative solutions are also being applied to 'build back better' once a disaster struck. The adoption of the Sendai Framework prompted the development creation of disaster risk reduction strategies at local, national and regional levels, in partnership with civil society and the private sector. Augmented efforts are needed to develop and implement national and local disaster risk reduction strategies and achieve target 11.B of the 2030 Agenda, ensuring they are based on a local understanding of risk. All strategies should be risk informed.

Small island developing states are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks, climate change, and natural disasters hazards, and require greater access to technology and capacity building to improve coordination and increase the use of data technology to help plan for disaster risk reduction. During the ECOSOC Integration Segment of 2018, Member States highlighted their experiences and priorities in using technology for disaster risk reduction, noting that the digital divide is a reality for developing countries whose ability for sustainable development is hindered without access to critical ICT infrastructure. Developing countries need access to technology for economic growth and job creation, including rapid and affordable access to the Internet.

Lessons Learned, Gaps in Implementation

The main risks faced by many countries around the globe are related to extreme weather events (including those induced by climate change) and earthquakes, exacerbated by water and food crises. As many of these hazards are of transboundary nature, cross-border and regional initiatives, policies and institutional frameworks are important additional layers in resilience planning, which requires coordination at and between different levels of governance. Reducing vulnerabilities and risk exposure across multiple sectors requires strategic planning and coordination. Yet, capacity gaps remain at the local, national and global levels to effectively do so.

National and local ownership of strategies for building resilience play a key role in advancing progress on the SDGs. Top-down or one-size-fits-all approaches have a greater chance of failing than those rooted in local realities. Local governments, local communities and actors are best placed to understand how to apply the SDG targets and pursue resilience in ways adapted to local contexts, priorities and capacities. They are also inclined to thinking about longer-range impacts, flexibility and the specific aspects that could affect effective implementation.

Foresight and risk planning is also a requirement. Short-term thinking is antithetical to building resilience and addressing risk in a sustainable way, but the capacities, incentives and data needed for forecasting are sometimes lacking. Strategic foresight prioritises resilience by focusing on uncertainty and, using the best available evidence, anticipating how particular problems may be experienced by local communities and what existing and new resources could be used to prevent or resist development setbacks. Awareness informs flexibility in long-term plans, resulting in the formulation of more adaptable policies and programmes.

Economic, social and environmental sustainability and resilience are mutually dependent, and require an integrated approach for policy and planning. The importance of thinking systemically about the continuum of policies that reduce people's exposure to risks is critical for building sustainable and resilient societies; it allows for addressing the complex interlinkages between risks and opportunities. Integrated approaches are also necessary to look across policies and actions to assess trade-offs and determine the most optimal strategies for achieving the SDGs.

The need for quality reliable infrastructure was repeatedly emphasized as essential for sustainable economic development, job creation, quality education and health services,

adaptation to the effects of climate change, and cyber security. Spatial planning attuned to the needs of the urban poor can help to foster more resilient cities, engaging them in citizen-driven mapping and local planning strategies.

Technology is best employed as a way to enable people to develop capacities to deal with risks and vulnerabilities so that they do not turn into disasters and crises. Evidence has shown that investing in disaster risk reduction is more cost-effective than relying on emergency responses. The Financing for Development Forum emphasized the need for greater focus on prevention and risk reduction, including the development of disaster risk reduction financing instruments. To create resilient cities, the interlinkages among physical infrastructure, safety, and digital technologies must be addressed.

The coordination within government and between the different levels of governance has been highlighted as critical for building resilient societies. Participatory approaches involving civil society, the private sector, scientists and academia, and media in the policy making and implementation processes of resilience strategies are also crucial for the effectiveness of the latter.

As women and girls are disproportionately affected by disasters, the development and implementation of integrated and gender-sensitive policies and plans are critical in this regard. It can be supported by comprehensive data sets, the collection of which is facilitated by new technology, including Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), artificial intelligence, drones or social media to name a few. As illustrated by the 2017 hurricane season, extreme weather events and natural hazards cause substantial hardship to affected communities. Yet, resources continue to flow primarily to post-disaster activities rather than towards disaster risk reduction and the improvement of coping capacity. Understanding disaster loss and the dynamic risk landscape, therefore, is the first step for risk-informed, evidence based decision making. Accelerated efforts are required to ensure all countries systematically account for disaster losses and conduct risk assessments to develop national and local disaster risk profiles, as a basis for coherent and inclusive disaster risk reduction policies and plans.

Safe, secure and clean water and sanitation infrastructure and services are particularly important for poverty eradication, reduction of inequalities and sustainable and resilient societies in urban and rural communities. Sustainable water management is also critical

for addressing disaster vulnerability and strengthening the resilience of communities to water-related hazards (floods, droughts, hurricanes, storm surges and landslides), which account for approximately 90 percent of disaster events worldwide.

Coherence in the implementation of the different international frameworks, including 2030 Agenda, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, Paris Agreement, and New Urban Agenda, is also essential to build sustainable and resilient societies. Integrated strategies and plans for sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation provide an opportunity to enhance coherence in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Paris Agreement, and the New Urban Agenda at national and local levels

Recommendations – Selected Aspects

- Strategic planning for building resilience is needed.
- Political will is critical to devote sufficient resources and investment towards disaster risk reduction.
- Action towards sustainable and resilient societies requires a risk-informed approach to sustainable development with enhanced efforts to prevent the creation of new and reduce existing disaster risk at all levels.
- There is need to increase the adoption and implementation of integrated national and local policies and plans by 2020 towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and resilience to disasters.
- Solutions for resilience must be bottom-up and localized, and involve vulnerable sectors, including the urban poor, persons with disabilities, and indigenous persons.
- There is need for new resilient planning paradigms in urban systems.
- There is need for training, tools and guidance for local and regional governments.
- Risks inherent in urban areas should be analyzed.
- Technology infrastructure in developing countries must be strengthened.
- There is need for a new approach to global risk assessment, evidence-based decision making and systematic accounting for disaster losses.

Guiding Questions

- Who are the furthest behind and are we managing to build the resilience and improve the lives of those people?

- What actions and policies have proven successful in increasing resilience of countries and people and addressing the impacts of climate change, natural disasters, conflict, and displacement on countries in special situations?

- How can science, technology and innovation strengthen resilience and inclusion in an integrated manner? What has been most effective in your country?

- How can integrated policies address resilience gaps and address underlying social, economic and environmental root causes for low resilience?

- How do we move from incremental to transformational change for higher resilience?