

UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) Inputs

Secretary-General's background note for the preparatory meeting of the UN Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14

Healthy Oceans Matter for Disaster Risk Reduction

For communities in coastal zones, natural hazards and the impacts of climate change can significantly undermine decades of progress towards sustainable development. At the same time, healthy and sustainable oceans, seas, and marine resources are essential to reduce disaster risk, minimize the consequences of climate change, and to accelerate the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Small island developing States and other developing countries with extensive coastlines warrant particular attention in view of their higher vulnerability and risk levels, which often greatly exceed their capacity to respond to and recover from disasters. Such vulnerability requires the urgent strengthening of international cooperation and ensuring genuine and durable partnerships at the regional and international levels.

In low-lying coastal zones, natural barriers such as coral reefs play an important role in protecting communities from storm and tidal surges and other hazards. As ocean warming and acidification has destroyed many of these barriers, the exposure of vulnerable coastal communities to disasters has greatly increased.

At the same time, the degradation of coastal dunes, wetlands and forest ecosystems due to unregulated human activity and coastal erosion hastened by more intense and frequent weather events has significantly increased disaster risk along coastal zones.

For many coastal communities reliant on the oceans and healthy fish stocks for their livelihoods, the degradation and pollution of oceans and coastal ecosystems significantly compromises their economic resilience in the face of disasters. Healthy, productive and resilient oceans and coasts, combined with risk-informed building practices, are also critical for sustainable tourism on which many coastal communities rely.

Relevance of the Sendai Framework for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 supports the goal of conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development through its focus on environment, observing systems and the particular attention given to small island developing States.

The Sendai Framework identifies unsustainable use of natural resources and declining ecosystems, as underlying drivers of disaster risk that need to be tackled and identifies priority actions. It also highlights the particular disaster risk challenges facing small island developing States, including the need for adequate, sustainable and timely provision of support, including through finance, technology transfer and capacity building from

developed countries and partners tailored to their needs and priorities, as identified by them.

The Sendai Framework sets the goal of preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk through the implementation of integrated and inclusive environmental measures, among others. It calls broadly for the active engagement of environmental managers in national platforms and for the adoption and implementation disaster risk reduction strategies and plans aimed at strengthening environmental resilience.

It goes further to specify a range of priority actions focused on implementation of integrated environmental and natural resource management approaches that incorporate disaster risk reduction. Key measures include:

- Mainstreaming disaster risk assessment, mapping and management into rural development planning and management of coastal flood plain areas (as well as in mountains, rivers, drylands, and wetlands) (paragraph 30 (g));
- Supporting trans-boundary cooperation that enables policy and planning for the implementation of ecosystem-based approaches with regard to shared resources, such as within river basins and along coastlines (paragraph 28 (g));
- Encouraging the establishment of mechanisms and incentives to ensure high levels of compliance with existing laws and regulations addressing land use, environmental and resource management, and updating them, where needed, to ensure an adequate focus on disaster risk management (paragraph 27 (d)).

The Sendai Framework also identifies measures focused on the application of science to decision-making. Science and indigenous knowledge is needed to strengthen ecosystem considerations and anticipated environmental changes in disaster risk modelling, mapping and assessment. Implementation of Sendai Framework Target (g) on multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information¹ encourages important support to oceanic observations which are the cornerstone of many early warning systems including for coastal storms, tsunami risk and the onset of the El Niño Southern Oscillation.

The condition of the oceans and coastal ecosystems will affect outcomes across the Sendai Framework's seven global targets. Achieving SDG Target 14.2 to sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems and achieve healthy and productive oceans by 2020 is essential for reducing disaster risk. At the same time, implementation of the Sendai Framework's priorities for action will contribute to sustainable development in vulnerable coastal areas and the protection of marine ecosystems.

¹ Target (g) Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to the people by 2030.