

# **Building Long-term Resilience During COVID-19: Lessons Learned from DRR Programming**

*A mid-pandemic survey of practices among UN Major Groups and other Stakeholders on the intersection of disaster risk reduction programming and COVID-19 prevention, preparedness, response and recovery*

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The full report will be published in the coming month: this version is an adaptation for the 2021 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and submitted by the Sendai Stakeholder Group.

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### Dedication:

In memory of Dr. Kathryn Adams, whose commitment for deepening our common knowledge on resilience drove the development of this report. Kathryn's passion and continued engagement in multi-stakeholder cooperation was outstanding. She will be dearly missed.

## Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark demonstration that risk is more systemic than ever in a connected globalized world: what was initially a health disaster quickly became a socio-economic disaster with long-term impact, highlighting the urgent need for a whole-of-society approach towards prevention and risk-informed recovery and development to achieve the SDGs. This report presents the results of a 2020 survey and literature review conducted by the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism (SEM) of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). It features lessons learned and insights on how DRR stakeholders around the world have leveraged existing disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes and initiated new ones to achieve the SDGs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery. The greatest threat to sustainability are natural hazards and man-made disasters which can serve to undermine gains made: this report highlights some lessons learned and recommendations that can support a sustainable and resilient Covid-19 recovery. More broadly, it highlights the need for a risk-informed approach to development.

### Key Insights

The survey and literature review revealed a breadth and depth of insights in relation to the implementation of existing and new DRR programmes, the nature of partnerships and collaboration, key gaps and challenges, and recommendations for enhancing DRR programming and risk-informed development. Four key insights in particular emerged from this report. These are summarized below.

#### Insight #1: Risk-informed development should be cross-cutting in efforts to achieve the SDGs

The SEM survey revealed a range of challenges that need to be overcome to enhance DRR and resilience programming and achieve the SDGs. There was consistency with the results of the broader desk review, showing that **policy coherence is a key challenge** (i.e., horizontal across agencies and vertical among levels of government, including with the local level), **as is the need to strengthen food security and the resilience of SMEs to disasters, including supply chain logistics**.

Other challenges were related to **misinformation, weak or non-existent social protection systems, competition among partners for resources, and lack of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure**. These all point to more systemic issues that need to be addressed going forward to enhance DRR programming. This finding was also reflected in the SEM survey results pertaining the top recommendations made by organizations, including calls for improved policy coherence, localization of programmes to better address ground-based issues, the strengthening of key systems (i.e., food security, access to water, healthcare, social protection and supply chains), attention to vulnerable groups and leaving no one behind, and better collaboration and co-creation with government partners.

#### Insight #2: Insufficient focus on risk-informed planning, prevention and preparedness in development processes

***There was insufficient focus by governments, the UN system, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector on evidence-based risk and vulnerability assessments to help prevent and prepare for pandemic risk.*** Of the 39 case examples observed through the SEM global survey, only two addressed pandemic hazard prevention. No examples of existing pandemic preparedness programmes were received. An overall gap was identified for risk-informed planning, analysis of risks and vulnerability assessments at the community and institutional levels.

The desk review of other surveys and literature echoed this overall lack of attention to pandemic prevention and preparedness. For instance, the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction concluding that “the impacts of this pandemic could have been prevented if lessons learnt from prior disease outbreaks as well as scientific and community-led research, had been taken into account in health services, global supply chains, transport systems, academic curriculum, and the tourism sector ([GNDR 2021](#)).” A similar message was conveyed by the United Nations International Organization for Migration in noting that given best practices learned during previous Ebola, SARS, MERS and H1N1 outbreaks, “too little has been done to mitigate biological hazards in disaster risk reduction strategies pursued by governments ([IOM 2020](#)).”

### Insight #3: CSOs Adapted Swiftly During the Pandemic by Leveraging Existing Local Development and DRR Networks and Programmes in response to new/emerging hazards

The SEM survey results and desk review showed that many ***organizations were able to swiftly adapt existing DRR programmes designed for other hazards and quickly initiate new ones which contributed to reducing exposure and vulnerability and building adaptive capacity*** in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. ***Key elements of success were local presence, partnerships and existing networks of trusted relationships with vulnerable groups.*** These actions were seen across all facets of DRR in the immediate wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- **Hazard reduction** (i.e., reducing the COVID-19 hazard by raising awareness of the potential for zoonotic spillover due to community expansion, deforestation, and consumption and trade of wild meat);
- **Exposure reduction** (i.e., through provision of personal protective equipment and WASH facilities and practices);
- **Vulnerability reduction** (i.e., through provision of food, water, housing and mental health support);
- **Building capacity to anticipate future risk** (i.e., through ongoing assessment of local government readiness and business continuity planning).

### Insight #4: Systemic risks and development deficiencies require systemic solutions

Risk-informed development is a cornerstone of achieving the SDGs. The challenges highlighted above are symptoms of siloed approaches to development. Therefore, it is not by coincidence that many of the recommendations made by SEM survey respondents also converged on the need for systems approaches, including calls for improved policy coherence, strengthening of critical systems, and all-of-society engagement and collaboration approaches. The desk review of other surveys echoes these recommendations, as evidenced by calls for a One Health approach for the prevention of zoonotic

diseases, use of multi-hazard approaches for DRR and strengthening of key systems. The main message being that ***for organizations to be resilient and to promote resilience in communities to systemic risks, a systems approach is necessary.*** A systems approach for DRR would necessarily begin with a focus on all facets of risk reduction, including ***preventing hazards, reducing exposure and vulnerability, and building adaptive capacity.***

Systemic risk requires systemic solutions. National governments and the UN system should lead the way in pandemic and multi-hazard prevention and preparedness in this new era of pandemics, with SEM members and stakeholder organizations advocating actively for such leadership and participating in the co-creation of systemic solutions.

## **Top recommendations for integrating risk-informed development approach to increase resilience and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**

Drawing from the Sendai Stakeholders' lessons learnt and the best practices in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, five key recommendations emerge to improve multi-hazard resilience in the context of all stakeholder driven efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda 2030.

### **Giving power to local actors through flexible support.**

While the pandemics are seen as global, risks remain local. Pandemics and other hazards unfold in locally specific contexts of poverty, weak infrastructure, and limited access to health & response services. In order to effectively factor in the various local risks, it is important to empower, capacitate and include local actors, especially the community based organizations in development and implementation of local as well as national DRR strategies. Moreover, flexible financing and resourcing mechanisms should be made available to the community based organizations to enable them direct the resources to shifting needs in relation to emerging new risks.

### **Empowering women and girls for DRR.**

Risk and vulnerabilities to disasters carry a gender-lens as illustrated by resurgence in gender-based violence during the pandemic imposed lock-downs and the increased strain on women's care-giving capacities in light of limited government's efficacy to address exacerbated needs. It is crucial to work with women and girls in the design of prevention and response systems to pandemics and other hazards alike to facilitate strengthening of violence response and prevention. Moreover, as the primary social care agents in their communities, women are the knowledge bearers on leaving no one behind in the disaster risk response planning, therefore, they should be partnered with in devising and delivery of social support systems. This is not to say that women and girls engagement should be limited to the two areas but to recognize the essential need for their contributions especially as pertaining to social care and to violence prevention.

### **Strengthening key systems through all of society approach**

In the context of DRR, siloed approach or sectorial response fails to achieve long term resilience. It is essential to promote a systemic and cross-sectorial approach to address multi-faceted hazard risks. Successful preparedness & response calls for collaboration of all DRR stakeholders and governments to ensure that health systems are well capacitated and accessible to all; science, research and education

sectors deliver reliable data to individuals and governments alike to empower them in response; communications and public information sector is transparent and reliable to counter disinformation and build relations among all stakeholders; while social infrastructure is functional to deliver social support to those affected. To achieve this, all stakeholders must be empowered in DRR governance, where decisions and plans are made collaboratively through partnership-based approach, building on practice based knowledge and expertise pertaining to risks and vulnerabilities, as well as unique stakeholder's capacities to successfully deliver.

#### **Promoting a multi-hazard approach to risk management**

Risk management should be enhanced through policies and interventions focused on systemic resilience, including equitable investments in health and in physical and social infrastructure resilience. The 2020 UNDRR's Status Report on Sendai Target E highlighted the urgency to accelerate efforts to develop multi-hazard national and local DRR strategies that integrate biological hazards, including the benefit from a multi-stakeholder and inter-sectoral approach to DRR governance arrangements. Importantly, it was observed that lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that countries that had in place multi-hazard disaster risk management strategies, including health emergencies, "found themselves better prepared to respond to COVID-19."

#### **Reduce inequality for increased resilience**

The ongoing pandemic again brought to light how underlying socio-economic inequalities can aggravate negative impacts of hazards and disasters. To ensure structural resilience building, it remains crucial to reduce socio-economic inequalities prevalent in our societies. Implementing universal healthcare coverage would be one of the ways to alleviate the impact of structural inequality in the context of DRR, as well as ensuring food and livelihood security, and access to other basic services.

## Introduction

### Context

The Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism (SEM) was established by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in 2018 as a means to operationalize an all-of-society approach to the development and implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies. SEM<sup>1</sup> aims to leverage the convening, advocacy and implementing power of stakeholders in support of resilience building across, within, and through the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

One of the priorities of SEM is to bring local voices and stories about effective DRR to the global policy processes and decision-makers including at the High Level Political Forum. In support of this, SEM members gathered a collection of case studies to understand how the implementation of existing disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes influenced the ability of communities to effectively address the COVID-19 pandemic. A global survey was rolled out in summer 2020 to find examples of work undertaken by stakeholders that illustrate this intersection. The survey received 45 responses from organizations participating in SEM, bringing experiences from Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Oceania.

The timing of the survey in the middle of the pandemic meant that examples and insights submitted about existing DRR programming were inherently contextualized mostly in relation to contributions to pandemic preparedness and responding to immediate needs. But importantly, many of the actions taken in responding to immediate needs also contributed to DRR and achieving the 2030 Agenda.

In the context of the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs and also the potential opportunity to accelerate progress toward the SDGs through COVID-19 response and recovery, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs outlined in June 2020 that initial assessments were already alerting the international community to the immense risks of failing to act swiftly and in a coordinated manner ([UNDESA 2020](#)). At the time, it was estimated that countries were getting set to trigger fiscal stimulus on the order of USD \$9 trillion to respond to immediate challenges and also build towards longer-term SDG commitments. Importantly, it was observed that the severity of impacts being experienced by countries were influenced by pre-pandemic progress on the SDGs.

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<sup>1</sup> The SEM offers representational space for all ‘non-state’ Sendai stakeholders as set out in Paragraphs 36 and 48 of the Sendai Framework. Key functions are to enable an inclusive and broad movement for the Sendai Framework, influence policy design and implementation, strengthen citizen-led and social accountability mechanisms, and promote coordination and harmonization between different stakeholder groups. Stakeholders can join the mechanism through signing up to their respective Major Group and Other Stakeholder Group (MGoS). Elected focal points of each of the MGoS, as well as a small number of other groups, constitute the ‘Stakeholder Advisory Group’ as an integral part of the UNDRR-SEM and main interlocutor between stakeholders and UNDRR. The most recent list of focal points of the respective groups can be found on the UNDRR website.

## Survey Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of the SEM survey and literature review was to better understand how effective DRR actions implemented at the community and grass-root levels positively affected people’s resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also aimed at demonstrating the role stakeholders play in enhancing global action on DRR and as enablers of disaster prevention and resilience building. Importantly, the case studies aim to showcase advantages of local community approaches for achieving DRR.

The SEM survey was administered in four sections to understand how existing DRR programmes and projects implemented by SEM organizations also helped address the prevention or mitigation of COVID-19. These actions may have already taken place before the pandemic but had an impact on both disaster and pandemic preparedness, recovery and reduction of future risk, or may have been initiated and/or implemented during the pandemic.

- Section I: Examples for Effectiveness of DRR for COVID-19 response, preparedness and recovery
- Section II: Examples of Partnerships and Collaboration
- Section III: Gaps, Challenges and Obstacles Faced in DRR and Resilience Work
- Section IV: Solutions and Recommendations

The survey received responses from 45 organizations participating in the SEM, including 18 from Asia, 16 from Africa, 7 from the Americas, 1 from Europe, 1 from the Middle East, 1 from Oceania, and 1 global organization. Sectors represented in the survey are summarized in Figure 1 and include agriculture, consulting, disaster risk reduction, education, financial, governmental, health, housing, humanitarian, human rights and development, rural development and actors working on sustainable development and the SDGs.



Figure 2 Sectors represented in the survey case examples



The review of literature focused on other similar surveys conducted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to compile additional case examples and to compare and contrast key messages with those gleaned from the SEM global survey. The literature review also searched for key messages of experts related to improved DRR programming with a focus on prevention and preparedness.

## Roadmap to this Report

This report is divided into three main Parts:

- **Part A: SEM Survey Results and Insights.** This part contains four sections aligned with the sections of the SEM survey, including (i) case examples; (ii) partnerships and collaboration; (iii) challenges and obstacles; and (iv) lessons learned and respondent recommendations.
- **Part B: Review of Other Surveys and Literature.** Part B examines the results of other similar surveys and literature that have been published during 2020-21, mirroring the four sections of the survey covered in Part A.
- **Part C: Discussion and Conclusions.** This part brings together the results of the SEM survey and the desk review to take stock of key insights for improved DRR and development programming going forward.

## Part A: SEM Survey Results and Insights

### Case Examples of DRR Programming in the Context of COVID-19

The first section of the SEM survey aimed to find examples of work undertaken by stakeholders that illustrate the intersection between DRR, development and COVID-19 prevention or mitigation. That is, what programmes or projects already being implemented before the pandemic had a positive impact on being prepared for, responding to, and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as preventing the occurrence of future pandemics. Forty-five SEM organizations responded with 39 different case examples, 17 of which were existing DRR programmes and projects and 22 were new (started specifically in response to the pandemic). However, as the survey was rolled out mid-pandemic, consequently, most examples focused on how DRR helped pandemic response, preparedness and recovery, rather than long-term prevention and mitigation.

#### Leveraging Existing DRR Programmes and Projects for Addressing COVID-19

These initiatives were classified as contributing to one or more of the following categories: Hazard reduction (preventing or reducing the potential for the hazard, such as COVID-19, to occur); Exposure reduction (preventing or reducing exposure to a hazard); Vulnerability reduction (reducing vulnerability or increasing adaptive capacity); and Capacity strengthening for DRR (risk analysis, contingency planning, monitoring and early warning).

The 2020 Global Sustainable Development Report prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs described six entry points for achieving sustainable development transformation which often overlap with disaster risk reduction. The survey asked which of these six transformative pathways best characterizes this overlap between DRR and sustainable development. 56% of respondents identified 'Strengthening human well-being and capabilities' as representing the most relevant connection with the programmes and projects their organizations were implementing for DRR and COVID-19 response. This result highlights the clear role that DRR actions on the ground play not only in increasing people's ability to cope with hazards, but also in strengthening communities' well-being more broadly and fostering sustainable development. As illustrated in Figure 4, the next most mentioned entry points were 'Shifting towards sustainable and just economies' and 'Building sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns'. These latter two further reinforce the fundamental role of DRR for sustainable development.

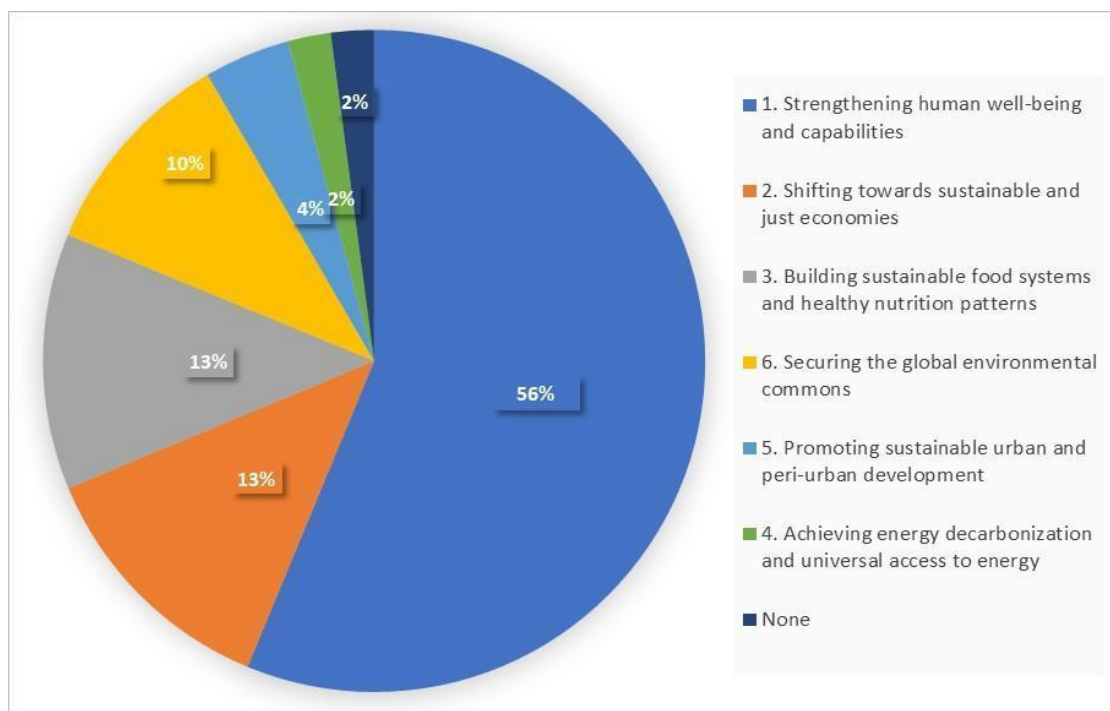


Figure 3. Transformative pathways that best describe the overlap between DRR and sustainable development in the case examples submitted by SEM organizations.

Thus, the below thematic analysis presented from the resilience angle, should also be seen in the broader context of achieving the SDGs. As risk analysis pertains to all of development structure & process, including to social & economic risks, institutional capacities, environmental risks, and etc.; the three themes with the selected case samples are highlighted in their relation to the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Hazard reduction.** Three examples from Africa highlighted how existing DRR programmes were contributing to the reduction of the COVID-19 hazard. The Community at the Centre of Resilience programme implemented by the NGO AICED (Appui aux Initiatives Communautaire de Conservation de l’Environnement et de Developpement Durable), raises awareness of the potential for spillover of zoonotic diseases from community expansion into forest edge zones and also from wild meat consumption (Box 2). In another example, COVID-19 limited the ability of the Union for Promotion, Protection, Human Rights Defense and the Environment (UPDDHE/GL) to implement its forest conservation programmes that would have had a co-benefit for future zoonotic spillover.

Among these examples, the aspects reported having most contributed to successful DRR, while improving preparedness, response and recovery from COVID-19, included deployment of:

- Shared management and leadership committees among stakeholders and across hazard types;
- Shared activities implemented by governments and other partners;
- Awareness raising efforts (single and multi-hazard); and
- Leveraging and building social capital and solidarity.

**Box 2: Community at the Centre of Resilience Programme**  
*Contributing to Awareness for the Prevention of Zoonotic Diseases*  
(SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8 13, 15)

The organization “Appui aux Initiatives Communautaire de Conservation de l’Environnement et de Developpement Durable” (AICED) is working with the Hehu Hill community in the Democratic Republic of Congo to implement the initiative called ‘The community at the centre of resilience to the consequences of climate change’. This involves the creation of community-led disaster prevention committees, with the aim of coordinating resilience building actions. This structure proved essential to ensure the community prepared and responded effectively to COVID-19. The committee provides a channel to raise awareness among community members on various risks (including zoonotic risk caused by environmental degradation of the Virunga National Park, climate-induced community expansion into forest areas and consumption of wild bushmeat). The initiative was undertaken pre-COVID and proved essential during COVID-19 as a locally-led structure for awareness raising and information sharing that leveraged existing social structures. Moreover, the initiative is taking forward lessons learned from Ebola outbreaks to raise awareness of the risks related to unsafe contact with wild animals.

Additionally, AICED’s DRR activities also benefited from the local social connections that had already been built through its women’s solidarity groups, which focused on strengthening capacity for income-generating activities such as sewing.

*Sources:*

<https://pfbc-cbfp.org/actualites/items/AICED-SOS.html>

<https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/rd-congo-glisement-de-terrain-dans-le-village-de-kibiriga-zone-de>

<https://pfbc-cbfp.org/actualites/items/AICED-Rapport-2019.html>

**Exposure reduction.** Eight examples, listed below, illustrated how existing DRR programmes helped to reduce the exposure to COVID-19. Such programmes in Asia, Africa and the Americas leveraged the provision of personal protective equipment and hand sanitizers to the public. For example, the Mexican Red Cross in collaboration with the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance, leveraged its existing municipal presence in the state of Tabasco to deliver community COVID-19 sensitization programmes. Additionally, several organizations were able to quickly adapt their internal health and safety protocols and Information Communication Technologies (ITCs) to protect their employees during the pandemic, including through business continuity planning as in the case of PwC in the Philippines.

- *Gram Bharati Samiti (India):* Continued support for migrant people, slum dwellers and daily wage earners through the provision of washable masks.
- *HOPE Worldwide (Pakistan):* Ongoing adaptation of safety measures for employees and provision of food, PPE and health supplies through programming.
- *PwC (Philippines):* Continued work facilitated through Business Continuity Plan and provision of technology for remote work.
- *UDYAMA (India):* Continued delivery of Food System, WASH system & Education programmes having impact during pandemic.

- *LIDÈ Foundation (Haiti)*: Door-to-door visits for COVID-19 prevention awareness and programmes for local skills development (Box 3).
- *Women’s Climate Centers International (Africa)*: Keeping disaster-displaced persons safe from COVID-19 spread (Box 4).
- *Cruz Roja Mexicana (Mexico)*: The Flood Resilience Program initiated a strategy of community sensitization called “COVID-19: From physical distancing to community outreach”.
- *US Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (U.S. Virgin Islands)*: Expanded shelter space capacity to meet social distancing requirements.

### **Box 3. Adapting Existing Programmes to Support DRR in the Context of COVID-19 in the Americas**

*(SDGs 3, 4, 5, 10, 17)*

The LIDÈ Foundation, is an NGO based in Haiti providing academic support and arts programmes to strengthen the resiliency of adolescent girls and differently abled youth who have been denied equal access to education. LIDÈ observed that its community-based and locally-led programmes enhanced the organisation’s resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic and allowed it to continue its daily operations/work. At the same time, the new challenges presented by COVID-19 forced LIDÈ to develop innovative alternative ways to achieve its programme objectives while reducing disaster risks caused by the pandemic. Two initiatives in particular exemplify these co-benefits of existing programmes and DRR.

**Mental Health Resilience Training:** Building on its locally-driven model for mental health resilience training and psychosocial and educational support, the LIDÈ Foundation was able to engage already trained local leadership staff to deploy door-to-door COVID-19 prevention and mental health trainings, and it worked with women’s groups to produce PPE with existing materials available within the villages.

**Hurricane Preparedness through Nursing Student Networking:** Another partnership initiative that was in place before COVID-19 focused on connecting nursing students with schools and NGOs in preparation for hurricane season. When the pandemic hit, LIDÈ encountered a challenge of having to cope with a hurricane while at the same time preventing the spread of COVID-19. This necessitated an expansion of the programme and so the organization issued a call to its partners in the NGO community to include local nurses finishing their schooling, into their hurricane response teams as well as local volunteers who could be trained as health agents. A similar call was extended to partners in the education sectors, to ensure that each school had a health agent assigned to it.

Thanks to connections with other disaster resilience networks, this initiative has spread beyond Haiti to other Islands in the Caribbean under risk of being completely cut off from external help when disasters hit. While this programme was initially created to address disaster risk related to hurricanes, its close connection with the nursing sector enabled the programme to quickly expand to meet the additional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and thereby help reduce exposure and vulnerability.

### **Box 4. Keeping Disaster Displaced Persons Safe**

*(SDGs 3, 5, 10)*

The Women's Climate Centers International highlighted the importance of keeping people displaced by disasters safe from the spread of diseases like COVID-19. In disaster such as floods and landslides, people are often forced to flee their homes to safer ground and organizations are challenged to assist people to evacuate, often moving people in large crowds to densely populated shelters where they can seek refuge. In this environment, the spread of diseases like COVID-19 can be an additional risk for displaced people, since maintaining physical distance becomes very challenging. In addressing these important needs, mobility and travel restrictions during the pandemic made it more difficult for the Women's Climate Centers International to import essential goods and emergency items, to deploy staff to remote locations and to move populations in need to safer areas.

The unique needs of displaced persons must be catered for in the immediate aftermath of emergencies, as well as in the response to the long-term impacts of the pandemic. It is society's responsibility to ensure they are not left behind as we chart the way forward.

**Vulnerability reduction.** Eight examples of existing DRR initiatives were reported which contributed to the reduction of vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic (see below). These cases, while primarily supporting food security through the supply of food and water, contributed also to the provision of housing and mental health support. For example, in Asia, the Participatory Development Action Program was already working with people living in poverty in urban and rural areas. They expanded their efforts to also provide food and hygienic support for poor families in urban slums.

- *Ntengwe for Community Development (Zimbabwe):* Schools Feeding Programme was impeded by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.
- *Gram Bharati Samiti (India):* Continued support for migrant people, slum dwellers and daily wage earners through the supply of cooked food.
- *Participatory Development Action Program (Bangladesh):* Food and hygienic support for 500 families living in poverty.
- *SEEDS India (Asia):* Online training programs for disaster risk reduction.
- *Adobe Home Aid (Mexico):* Community development including provision of living space.
- *LIDÈ Foundation (Haiti):* Trainings for organizations on the impacts of trauma on mental and physical wellbeing, and coping/self-care strategies.
- *US Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (U.S. Virgin Islands):* Expanded shelter space capacity to meet social distancing requirements.
- *Arab Network for Environment and Development (Middle East):* Survey to highlight the views of the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals on the targets of the Sendai Framework.

The examples related to exposure and vulnerability reduction reveal a series of success factors that enabled the organizations to create synergies between existing activities and COVID-19 response. When some of the factors listed below were in place, the organizations were able to quickly adapt their activities to prepare for, respond to and recover from the pandemic. The success factors identified in the survey responses included:

- Shared activities among DRR programmes

- Local partnerships and presence
- Inclusion and community participation in all steps of project design, and delivery
- Existence of structures and networks for quick provision of resources (such as food, water, housing, transportation, PPE, capacity, monitoring, sanitation, hygiene)
- Communication and communication technology
- Multi-hazard awareness (natural disasters and COVID-19)
- Multi-disciplinary approaches and teamwork
- Flexibility, adaptiveness and creativity in the design and delivery of solutions
- Long-term vision while addressing short-term issues
- Trusted and respectful partnerships and valuing of partners and communities

**Capacity Strengthening for DRR.** One example demonstrated how an existing programme contributed to preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Resilience Council, a governmental organization in the Philippines, created the ‘Resilient Local Government Systems Scorecard’ (NRC Scorecard) as a guide for local government units (LGUs), specifically cities, to determine the preparedness, adaptation, and transformation of their local government systems towards resilience (Box 5). This initiative also highlighted the importance of local partnerships for leveraging existing initiatives for new types of disasters, along with the need for multi-sectoral, transdisciplinary approaches such as the NRC’s Resilient Local Government Systems programme.

**Box 5. Resilience and Governance**  
(SDGs 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17)

The Resilient Local Government Systems Scorecard, implemented by the Philippines National Resilience Council (NRC), helps assess key local systems that support resilience, many of which were directly relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in the following areas:

- Health, Education, and Social Protection for Human Development
- Livelihoods, MSMEs, and Large Businesses for Local Economy
- Settlements, Buildings, and Lifelines for Infrastructure
- Management and Rehabilitation of Ecosystems, Protection of Socio-ecological Systems, and Pollution Management & Resource Use

The Scorecard is divided into different pillars, each looking at one particular area listed above. The Health sub-pillar is aligned with the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management in Health objectives of the Philippine Department of Health which are: 1) prevention of mortality and morbidity; 2) continued public health services and 3) prevention of outbreaks.

A critical feature of the NRC Scorecard is that it localizes indicators, minimum requirements, means of verification, and references so that they are in accordance with local government systems. As such, they are based on national instruments as well as respective department orders, memoranda, manuals, and protocols of key government agencies.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic the NRC reviewed the Scorecard to factor in new and emerging risks such as those from biological hazards. Critical references of its ongoing review are the updated guidelines and early lessons learned documented by the UN agencies along with those of the Philippine government and NRC’s Local Government Unit Partners.

DRR programmes reported in the survey were also analyzed against the four priority areas of the Sendai Framework. The results illustrate that the majority of DRR programmes are aligned with Sendai priority areas #1, #2 and #4 on improved understanding of disaster risks, strengthening DRR governance, and improved disaster preparedness, respectively.

Sendai Priority Area and relevant SDGs	Example Programmes
<p>Sendai Priority 1: Improved understanding of disaster risks</p> <p>Relevant SDGs: 3, 4, 15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Community at the Centre of Resilience</b> (AICED, Democratic Republic of Congo): Raises awareness of spillover of zoonotic diseases from community expansion into forest zones and consumption of wild animal products</li> <li>● <b>General Human Rights and DRR Programming</b> (UPDDHE/GL, Democratic Republic of Congo): COVID-19 limited the ability to implement the organization’s forest programs that would have had contributed to preventing future zoonotic spillover</li> <li>● <b>DRR training</b> (SEEDS, India): Training using online platforms</li> <li>● <b>General Programming</b> (LIDÈ Foundation, Haiti): Trainings for organizations on the impacts of trauma on mental and physical wellbeing, and coping/self-care strategies</li> </ul>
<p>Sendai Priority 2: Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk</p> <p>Relevant SDGs: 8, 9, 10, 16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Resilient Local Government Systems Scorecard for PREPARE, ADAPT AND TRANSFORM</b> (National Resilience Council, Philippines)</li> <li>● <b>General Consulting</b> (PwC, Philippines): Continued work facilitated through Business Continuity Plan and availability of technology</li> <li>● <b>DRR training</b> (SEEDS, India): Reaching out to various stakeholders online related to humanitarian response , building back better and reducing risk.</li> <li>● <b>Views from the Frontline</b> (Arab Network for Environment and Development, Middle East): Programme to highlight the views of the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals on the targets of the Hyogo Framework for Action</li> </ul>
<p>Sendai Priority 3: Investing in disaster risk for resilience</p> <p>Relevant SDGs: 9, 11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Community Development:</b> (Adobe Home Aid, Mexico): Provision of habitat and housing.</li> </ul>
<p>Sendai Priority 4: Improving disaster preparedness for more effective emergency response and building back better</p> <p>Relevant SDGs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Schools Feeding Programme</b> (Ntengwe for Community Development, Zimbabwe): Food security programming</li> <li>● <b>General Programming</b> (Gram Bharati Samiti, India): Continued support of migrant people, slum dwellers and daily wage earners</li> <li>● <b>Humanitarian Programming - Management of Village Fund</b> (CARE, Indonesia): Humanitarian support</li> <li>● <b>Internal Protocols for Humanitarian programming</b> (HOPE Worldwide, Pakistan): Ongoing adaptation of COVID-19 safety measures</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Support for 500 families living in poverty</b> (Participatory Development Action Program, Bangladesh): Food security and hygienic support</li> <li>● <b>Food System, WASH system &amp; Education programs</b> (UDYAMA, India): Programme delivery for food security and WASH</li> <li>● <b>Disaster-displaced persons programming</b> (Women Climate Centres International, Africa): Keeping disaster-displaced persons safe from COVID-19 spread</li> <li>● <b>General Programming</b> (LIDÈ Foundation, Haiti): Door-to-door awareness raising and building on local skills for reducing exposure to COVID-19</li> <li>● <b>DRR training</b> (SEEDS, India): Training using online platforms</li> <li>● <b>DRR training</b> (SEEDS, India): Reaching out to stakeholders online related to humanitarian response, building back better and reducing risk.</li> </ul>
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### New COVID-19 Response and Recovery Activities that Support DRR

While no new initiatives reported in the survey were focused directly on reducing pandemic hazard, a number of new initiatives did support efforts contributing to exposure and vulnerability reduction and building broader DRR capacity.

**Exposure reduction.** The survey captured 10 examples of new programmes and projects that were initiated to help reduce exposure to COVID-19 among communities and within the implementing organizations (see below). The cases covered efforts relating to provision of PPE, hand sanitizing, and awareness raising. For example, in Uganda, the Kikandwa Rural Communities Development Organization led the government’s Awareness, Sensitization and Monitoring programme for COVID-19 in Mukono District. In the Philippines, the Far Eastern University developed exit and entry protocols to its premises, and disinfection and equipment measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19. In the Americas, Oxfam worked with its partners to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and support basic food needs and livelihoods.

- *Kikandwa Rural Communities Development Organization (Uganda):* Led the government’s COVID-19 Awareness, Sensitization and Monitoring Program in Mukono District, Uganda.
- *Synergie Des Partenaires Pour La Promotion Des Droits De La Femme (Burundi):* Internal protocols for pandemic protection.
- *Africa Development Bank (Africa):* National COVID-19 Response Funding.
- *Sustainable Environment Food and agriculture initiative (Nigeria):* Distribution of PPE.
- *Apt Succor Organization (South Sudan):* WASH programming.
- *Global Ecovillage Network (Central African Republic):* Provision of COVID-19 Awareness Kits.
- *Peoples Federation for National Peace and Development (Malawi):* Internal protocols for COVID-19.
- *Youth and Environment Vision (Tanzania):* Supporting WASH facilities to orphanages, elderly and people with disabilities.
- *Food for the Hungry Philippines (Philippines):* Construction of handwashing facilities in schools and village centers.

- *Oxfam (Americas)*: Working with partners to prevent spread of COVID-19 and support basic food needs and livelihoods.

Programme characteristics reported by MGoS members that contributed to successful implementation of new projects addressing the reduction of exposure to COVID-19 included the following: Teamwork and communication; Awareness raising; Training and education; Synergy and coordination with stakeholders and multidisciplinary approaches; Social capital and solidarity; Provision of resources, such as PPE.

**Vulnerability reduction.** Seven examples of newly created programmes were reported in the survey that contributed to reducing the vulnerability of stakeholders and organizations to the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- *Agri South Africa (South Africa)*: Advocated to have all agriculture supply chain sectors declared as essential services to enable continued operation during lockdown and to avoid that food shortages would increase vulnerability. To achieve this, Agri South Africa leveraged existing relationships with various government departments and the National Disaster Management Centre.
- *The Asia Institute of Management (Philippines)*: Created a student-led COVID-19 Situation Room to provide forecasting and situation reports for informing food, financial and physical security during the pandemic (see Box 6), among other initiatives.
- *National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (India)*: Inclusion monitoring survey for COVID-19 relief schemes and policy advocacy.
- *UNDRR ARISE India (Asia)*: Preventative Advisories; Re-opening Measures; MSME cash flow packages; Facilitating movement of migrants; Compulsory insurance for informal sector; Information Webinars.
- *LIDÈ Foundation (Haiti)*: Implemented a toll-free tutoring project to support physical and mental health, an initiative that will become permanent and extended to other disasters caused by natural hazards such as hurricanes.
- *Global Fire Monitoring Centre (Global)*: Online repository of experiences regarding personal safety and the role that additional stresses such as smoke pollution might have on vulnerability to COVID-19.
- *Cairns Regional Council (Australia)*: Established a local COVID-19 hotline to help support residents and tourists to manage their circumstances during the pandemic.

#### **Box 6. Anticipating Systemic Risk**

(SDGs 1, 2, 4, 9)

The Asian Institute of Management (AIM) established a student-led laboratory called the AIM COVID-19 Situation Room that focused on physical, food and financial security. The Situation Room was responsible for awareness raising through social media, preparing forecasts to help different sectors in their decision making, writing situation reports and briefs. The Situation Room functioned as a listening post and communications center, where students collected and prepared news reports and intelligence from a wide range of sources including contacts, networks and online sources.

One of the identified concerns included the phenomenon of a “double whammy” of compound effects of a natural hazard such as a typhoon occurring during the ongoing COVID-19 response

management. AIM organized two town hall meetings to help parents, teachers and school administrations to collectively understand the impact of the pandemic, identify the main problems that people were experiencing and share solutions and best practices.

AIM also introduced Business Continuity Planning sessions and exercises for strengthening pandemic preparedness for the heads of university departments.

Source:

<https://aimleader.aim.edu/aim-news/aims-covid-19-situation-room-student-leaders-collect-curate-and-communicate-vital-information-on-the-ongoing-crisis/>

Key programme characteristics reported by survey respondents that made the activities successful clustered around three main categories: local circumstances, substantive programming, and programme design and implementation. Local-related characteristics included: local engagement and partnerships; leveraging of local knowledge through creation of solutions and use of existing networks; and inclusion and meaningful participation of community members in project activities. Programming-focused characteristics touched on areas including: social protection schemes linked with disaster response; training (supply chain and business continuity); and provision of resources (hospitals). In the context of programme design and implementation, characteristics which contributed to vulnerability reduction highlighted by respondents included elements of flexibility and adaptiveness in project planning, long-term thinking, creativity and multi-disciplinary approaches, as well as elements that reinforced mutual respect and trust, teamwork, and communication.

**Capacity Strengthening for DRR.** Three examples of new DRR initiatives were reported which contributed to enhancing capacity for disaster risk reduction. In Honduras, the role of corporate social responsibility programming in supporting COVID-19 related DRR was explored (see Box 7). In Asia, a web-based geospatial risk database for COVID-19 provided an example of a DRR programme that builds capacity for anticipating pandemic-related risks. And in Kenya, a DRR programme on COVID-19 response, adaptation and resilience building helped mitigate the impact of the pandemic on farmers' livelihoods and quality of life.

#### **Box 7. DRR and Corporate Social Responsibility**

*(SDGs 4, 8, 9, 11, 16, 17)*

FUNDAHRSE, the Honduran Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility, developed a series of activities to support the work of its member companies during COVID-19. As a result, increased capacity and knowledge is not only improving the response to urgent needs during the pandemic, but will also help companies and communities to prepare better to future pandemics.

- **Weekly Special Reports on COVID-19:** on the actions of member companies.
- **Weekly Webinar Program:** on topics related to COVID-19 including on how to face the emergency through corporate social responsibility and sustainability, post-pandemic effects and business continuity.
- **Emergency Committee on COVID-19:** to respond to urgent pandemic needs identified in coordination with national and local authorities, civil society organizations and the FUNDAHRSE member companies.

- **Publication on the Role of Corporate Social Responsibility:** to raise awareness on the importance of responsible business decisions, and human rights during the crisis.

## Partnerships and Collaboration

The SEM global survey asked respondents to indicate if any of the existing or new programmes they have implemented to support DRR and COVID-19 benefited from a government partnership and if so, the role the government played in this.

Survey results showed that government partnerships played an important role in 87% of cases, particularly in relation to partners' ability to quickly adapt and implement existing and new DRR programmes and projects. The nature of these partnerships included government collaboration in the organizations' projects and vice versa, provision of resources by government, sharing of information and government listening to local advice (see Box 8 for examples).

### Box 8. The Nature of Partnerships

*(SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 16, 17)*

The nature of partnerships between SEM organizations and government varied across the respondents and reflected the following aspects:

- **Collaborating in local projects:** In Zimbabwe, the organization Ntengwe for Community Development partnered with the government to provide communities with COVID-19 and health related information from WHO and Ministry of Health. The initiative benefited from government agencies accompanying enumerators into communities, which increased its legitimacy.
- **Government-led programmes:** ARISE India, a network of private sector entities led by UNDRR, supported the government in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, as the government recognized that a disaster of such scale could not be overcome by government or by stakeholders alone.
- **Provision of resources:** In Mexico, the organization Adobe Home Aid described how the government provided the land necessary for relocating at-risk people during the pandemic. HOPE Worldwide in New Zealand was supported by the government's Community Awareness and Preparedness Grant Fund to roll-out COVID-19 response activities in various communities. In Pakistan, the same organization used its local resources and fundraising strategies to take action on COVID-19.
- **Sharing information:** In Mexico, the Red Cross worked closely with the local government entity, the Institute of Civil Protection of the State of Tabasco. The government shares information with the Mexican Red Cross about hazards and disasters at the state and municipality level such as fires and/or tropical cyclones, adapted to a language accessible for the communities. During the COVID-19 emergency, this type of information sharing was fundamental for communication with communities. The organization also shared materials with the government on preventive health measures at the community level with the intent to adopt these for use in other communities.

- **Listening to local advice:** In South Africa, the organization Agri South Africa lobbied national government to ensure the agricultural sector remained fully operational during the COVID-19 response. Consultations and negotiations were held with Director Generals on challenges experienced and reported by farmers. Also, Agri South Africa advocated for and provided support to ensure continued agricultural commodities exports and trade, such as addressing congestion of crates at the national sea harbors.

Respondents noted that partnerships can be leveraged to strengthen various aspects of resilience building, particularly in relation to biological hazards reduction and management. Specifically, it was described that **prevention of future hazards of this kind can be strengthened by addressing the root causes of the pandemic** (i.e., prevention of zoonotic spillover and related systemic risks), **enhanced monitoring** (i.e., disease surveillance systems and rapid information sharing), **better awareness and education** (i.e., translation of available information to all languages), **more localization** (i.e., partnering with NGOs on the ground), **more accountability** (i.e., listening to early warnings of WHO), **sustainability** (i.e., implementing green solutions that provide employment opportunities), **leaving no one behind** (i.e., communications for persons with disabilities and social protection measures for children, women and girls).

**Preparedness and response actions benefit from strong partnerships when it comes to provision of facilities and equipment** during the pandemic (i.e., Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), WASH, education facilities), **increased capacity** (i.e., in the vaccine supply chain), **increased support** (i.e., social protection measures), **better coordination** (i.e., DRR and humanitarian efforts), **development and enforcement of guidelines** (i.e., PPE and social distancing).

SEM organizations also reported which sectors played an important role, either through partnerships or integrated action, in the implementation of their DRR and COVID-19 initiatives. The responses are summarized in Figure 3. While the responses indicated that all of the twenty sectors considered played an important role, the following sectors were the five most mentioned: health, livelihoods, education, food security, and youth empowerment.

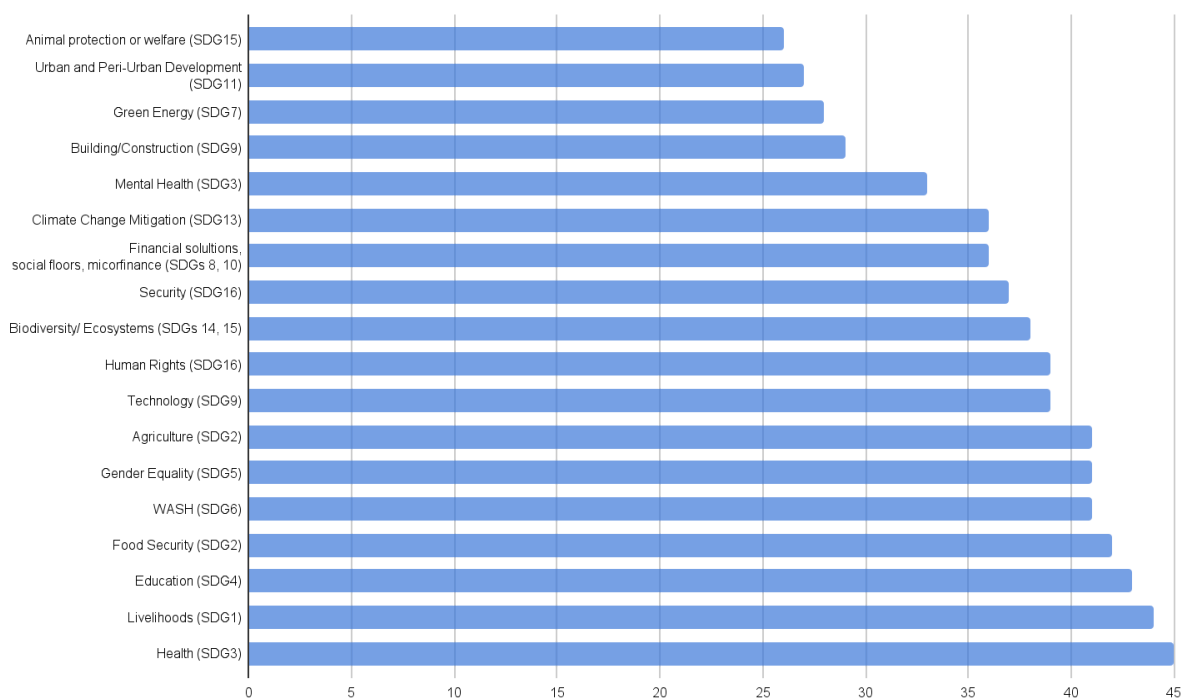


Figure 4. Sectors playing an important role in DRR and COVID-19 response initiatives of SEM organizations

## Gaps, Challenges and Obstacles Faced

Section III of the survey focused on challenges, gaps or obstacles faced by SEM members in disaster risk reduction, development, and resilience building work at the community level and in regard to human resources, logistics, funding, partnerships, and policies. The challenges, gaps or obstacles faced by SEM members in DRR and resilience building work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was another focus of the survey.

One of the core challenges for development generally, and disaster risk reduction specifically, is **operationalizing the underlying principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on “leaving no one behind”**. As an illustrative view of how SEM organizations were working to leave no one behind, the survey asked respondents to list actions taken to reduce risks to persons with disabilities. The survey captured 27 types of action that were clustered into the following categories:

- Awareness raising, education and advocacy (i.e., WASH facilities for persons with disabilities),
- Gathering and analyzing information (i.e., administering baseline surveys on persons with disabilities),
- Provision of resources, equipment and work support (i.e., financial, food, PPE, home visits, reduction of workload for staff with vulnerable dependents),
- Programming (i.e., targeted programmes for persons with disabilities),
- Protocols (i.e., COVID-19 safety protocols).

These actions demonstrate that, to ensure an effective operationalization of the principle of “leaving no one behind”, projects and programmes need to integrate a specific focus on most vulnerable groups throughout all their activities: this sometimes means creating a complimentary stream of work to cater for the specific needs of these groups.

A high-level view of all the challenges reported by organizations indicates that ***all systems (listed below) were unprepared for a global pandemic and ill-equipped for preventing future pandemics.*** One respondent commented that “traditional human resources management focuses on normal times, with very few organizations versed in crisis scenarios” and emphasized that with DRR not being on the radar until after a crisis has occurred, there is little opportunity for critical thinking and innovative solutions. This is contrary to the principle of risk-informed development.

A view of responses from stakeholders across a range of system categories yielded the following insights relating to gaps, challenges and obstacles:

- **Community-level:** limited understanding of causes of vulnerability and effective risk reduction actions for more at-risk groups such as women and girls, youth, elderly, persons with disabilities, displaced individuals, and indigenous peoples.
- **Human resource:** loss of employees either due to need for lay-offs under lockdown or voluntarily leaving because of lack of access to PPE.
- **Logistics:** compromised supply chains due to inflation and delay in delivery.
- **Funding:** revenue-side challenges (i.e., access to funding both pre- and post-disaster) and expense side challenges (i.e., inflation).
- **Material resource:** lack of PPE, WASH, medicines, and educational materials.
- **Partnership:** difficulties to connect with partners due to travel restrictions and competition between non-government organizations for donor funding.
- **Policy:** national versus local tensions (i.e., lack of coordination between the national and local levels and centralized authorities lacking ability for local implementation) and design versus implementation tensions (i.e., lack of capacity for agile policy design or lack of coordination for effective implementation).

#### **Box 9. Sampling of Policy Barriers as Reported by SEM Organizations Across Regions**

**Africa:** Lack of localization policies makes it difficult for local organizations to directly access donor funds which could enable them to engage effectively in disaster reduction and resilience building activities.

**Americas:** To reduce the risk of future pandemics international standards and agreements on prevention are needed that governments must abide by. These also need to be aligned with other disaster risk reduction policies. Where policy is merely a suggestion, countries where it may be financial or culturally challenging to initiate let alone comply, simply will not try.

**Asia:** There is a need to update national and local DRR and disaster management policies in consideration of current and emerging risks such biological hazards like the pandemic; moreover, updating national labor and social protection policies is needed, so as to recognize the invisible sector of urban communities, especially the homeless and the informal workers living in the informal

settlements of urban centers (governments often do not have an official statistical definition or indicator for these groups). Science and technology based, evidence-informed, whole-of-society (multi-sectoral and trans-disciplinary) policy formulation by national and local governments should become the norm, especially to manage risks such as pandemics. This should involve representatives from all sectors.

**Global/Oceania/Europe:** There is uncertainty about how a disaster event, such as this pandemics, fits the usual policy criteria for DRR, recovery and ongoing resilience development, as it is often not considered. There is also less focus on DRR plans and policies at present, because of the pandemic.

## Reported Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Section IV of the survey focused on DRR solutions and recommendations based on experience and lessons learned during response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions asked to survey respondents also aimed at understanding the role of nature-based solutions for DRR.

### Nature-based Solutions for Pandemics and Disaster Risk Reduction

Stakeholders were asked specifically about the role of nature-based solutions (NbS) for DRR generally, and for addressing pandemic risks, specifically. Respondents noted that **NbS helps reduce the possibility of a “double whammy” of other natural hazards occurring during a pandemic**, by for example reducing zoonotic hazards (i.e., reforestation) and reducing vulnerabilities (i.e., increased food security). Respondents also noted that the deployment of NbS for preparedness and DRR could be strengthened by efforts such as community-level contingency funds and better facilitation of dialogue and co-creation of solutions.

### Lessons learned from COVID-19 Pandemic Response for Informing DRR

SEM organizations reported a range of lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic response that can help improve DRR efforts. These lessons can be characterized along four categories in relation to policy effectiveness and coherence; preparedness; collaboration; evidence and information sharing.

For example, one respondent elaborated on lessons learned in the context of policy coherence and evidence-based responses, noting that disaster response needs to be contextualized, while at the same time rely on evidence-based and standardized information from health professionals. Policies can't be developed by the government alone but in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Collaborative governance is essential in these situations.

In relation to preparedness and evidence, one respondent noted that the pandemic has shown the importance of early warning systems and preparedness (disease surveillance systems, for example). They also highlight the importance of information sharing and global collective action to fight disasters without discrimination.



Furthermore, respondents also noted the broader nature of better preparedness and policy design for disaster risk reduction, emphasizing another lesson learned, which is that *“challenge drives creativity and innovation if we are willing to adapt and to take a realistic look at the resources around us”*. Innovation is to be seen not as a synonym of technology, but as an approach where creativity and cross-disciplinary thinking are integrated into resilience building.

Additionally, it was noted that the current pandemic has highlighted that DRR needs to be part of our everyday thinking and policy framing. The effects of a disaster, including a pandemic, can be greatly reduced by making sure that public systems and services are functioning well in normal times. *“The entire machinery cannot be made or expected to deliver highly in response to a disaster when on other occasions they stagger and falter, and remain out of reach of the masses, who depend solely or substantially on these public services.”*

The stakeholder survey concluded with recommendations for improving DRR programmes ***Overall, survey respondents identified that improvements in the following areas would lead to strengthened DRR in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic:***

1. Regulatory frameworks (i.e., to institutionalize government funds for DRR)
2. Policy coherence (i.e., examining the links between climate change and pandemics and strengthening international and regional cooperation and partnerships)
3. Strengthening systems to become more effective and resilient (i.e., food, health, social protection, supply chain)
4. Preparedness and pandemic protocols (i.e., planning and management, finance, awareness raising and a focus on humanitarian response for all groups, including most at-risk ones)
5. Prevention of zoonotic spillover (i.e., regulating consumption of wild meat and protecting wildlife habitat)
6. All-of-society engagement, partnerships and collaboration (i.e., for DRR and Recovery Committees and strengthened public-private partnerships)
7. Communication, information sharing and early warning (i.e., web-based geo-spatial mapping to inform DRR governance, provision of mobile and free internet facilities)
8. Enabling environments (i.e., support to emergency responders and SMEs)
9. Capacity development (i.e., for data collection)
10. Localization and leaving no one behind (i.e., respect community-led solutions and start with the most vulnerable and fragile groups)

## Part B: Review of Other Surveys and Literature

This section presents a desk review of other surveys and literature on DRR in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, covering both pre-existing programmes and new ones initiated that helped reduce pandemic hazards, exposure and vulnerability.

### Case Examples of DRR Programming in the Context of the COVID-19

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace conducted a review of civil society activism around the world in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([CEIP 2020](#)). Overall, they observed that “civil society actors in many countries, democratic and nondemocratic alike, are rising to the pandemic challenge in myriad small and large ways” and that the pandemic “is catalyzing new forms of civic activism.” In acknowledging this, the authors remark that international supporters of civil society “should step up their efforts to bolster these local responses.” More specifically, their analysis noted that while pandemic-related activism naturally varies widely across contexts, several common dimensions stood out, and these are elaborated on below.

**New Mutual Aid Initiatives.** The CEIP review observed that citizens are coming together in new voluntary associations and mutual aid societies. For instance:

- In Tunisia, more than 100,000 people joined a Facebook group bringing together volunteers to help fight the virus. The group now has 24 coordination centers across the country; its volunteers have raised money, collected medical supplies, disinfected public spaces, and worked with regional authorities to identify families with urgent financial needs.
- In Iran, a group of businesses and volunteers has delivered 70,000 respirators and other protective gear to Iranian health workers.
- In Poland, new online platforms and social media groups are matching people in need with community groups that can provide support and organizing to supply medical staff with equipment and food.

**Repurposing:** The CEIP review also concluded that “many established civil society groups have shifted their work from longer-term projects to emergency relief” including partnering with government authorities to distribute aid to their local networks and stepping in to fill gaps left by the state. For example:

- In India, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been at the front lines of feeding communities under lockdown that are no longer able to go to work.
- Syria Relief and Development, a humanitarian organization based in Idlib, has shifted toward training medical staff and aid workers on infection prevention and control.
- In Brazil, the community organization Coletivo Rapo Reto, which usually documents police abuses in Rio de Janeiro, is now using its platform to denounce fake news surrounding the crisis.
- In Kenya, the human rights NGO Muslims for Human Rights has been distributing protective masks and food supplies to vulnerable community members.

**Fighting disinformation:** Civil society actors were also observed supporting awareness efforts by challenging disinformation, such as:

- In Senegal, the youth movement Y'en a Marre (Engl. Fed Up) has switched gears from advocating for transparent and democratic governance to disseminating songs that promote social distancing.

**New advocacy roles and tactics:** CSOs were observed by CIEP as leading efforts to hold governments to account for “ineffective or undemocratic crisis responses”, such as in the context of:

- Overreach and abuse of power, where in Argentina, the civil society organization, Directorio Legislativo, has been mapping crisis-related regulations issued in Latin American countries and initiated a social media campaign focused on protecting democracy during the pandemic.
- Demands for faster response: In Brazil and Chile, citizens have shown their discontent with government responses by participating in pot-banging protests from their balconies.
- Highlighting plight of vulnerable groups: In Singapore, NGOs have successfully put pressure on the government to improve living conditions in a migrant worker dormitory where foreign workers have been confined to contain the pandemic. And in South Africa, NGOs have pressured the government to stop evictions while the crisis lasts.

Similarly, early in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, OXFAM engaged over a dozen activists and governance practitioners across Nepal, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana to gain an understanding for how CSOs were adapting ([OXFAM 2020](#)). Featured below are a number of insights and examples gleaned from OXFAM’s engagement.

**Information, transparency and trust.** The importance of transparency, as a bedrock of trust and accountability between citizens and governments, was highlighted by the OXFAM report, based on examples such as:

- Sharecast’s work in Nepal revealed that understanding citizen trust and satisfaction, based on accurate and timely information, is key to an effective response.
- Disruptions to the electoral process in Ethiopia and the post-electoral politics playing out in Cameroon, revealed that a lack of trust resulted in alternative and parallel governance and service delivery in the pandemic.

**Digital technology, media, and mediated governance and advocacy.** OXFAM’s engagement surfaced many examples about the “adaptable, creative, and innovative use of technology to drive access, provide information, make and maintain connections, deliver services, foster transparency, enable participation, and seek accountability.” For instance:

- In Nepal and Nigeria, even the telephone has been key, enabling Sharecast to conduct a novel nationwide survey, and PWAN to connect with communities through home-based rights awareness campaigns.

- In Mombasa County, where technology provides a virtual space for children’s voices at decision-making tables, the media becomes an intermediary in governance and accountability relationships, bringing with it implications around power, responsibility, and the ability to limit (e.g., prohibitive costs) or enable (e.g., access to a wider audience of rights holders) participation and advocacy.

**Gender dimensions and intersectional vulnerabilities.** The OXFAM engagements showed that where governments fail in an equitable response, many civil society groups are trying to address gaps through intersectional and gender-focused interventions. This is evidenced by examples such as:

- In Ethiopia, high-risk groups (e.g., street children, commercial sex workers, people living with HIV/AIDS) have been disproportionately affected by the virus and at the center of LIAE’s community-based response.
- In Nigeria, Physical distancing has curtailed PWAN’s advocacy for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, as they can no longer conduct confidential interviews and represent survivors in court.

In its 2020 report on ‘Building the Resilience of SMEs to Disasters’ ([UNDRR 2020](#)) the UNDRR observed that certain types of actions by small and medium-size enterprises around the world implemented in the context of preparedness for and response to disasters also had the potential to reduce disaster risk through reductions in exposure and vulnerability. Their observations were based on a global survey conducted prior to and during the very early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and through a desk review of case examples. The UNDRR report cited a recent survey of 8,000 microfinance institutions around the world by Washington-based FINCA Impact Finance, where it was observed that “fintech options like mobile banking, e-wallets, or hyperlocal agent networks are keeping customers connected that would otherwise be unsafe or impossible during this time (FINCA Impact Finance 2020, in [UNDRR 2020](#)).” However, this recommendation came with a word of caution: “in the rush to digitize, key vulnerable demographics – notably women – are often left out.

Other examples cited in UNDRR’s SME resilience guidance report showed how SMEs have adapted to help reduce exposure and vulnerability during the pandemic, including:

- Kenya’s M-PESA, a mobile-based banking network, waived its fees for SMEs, and China’s Ant Financial, described as a tech company that provides financial services, launched a “Contactless Loans” campaign to support the digital transformation of 10 million SMEs. Examples like this led the SME Finance Forum to conclude that this crisis could be a catalyst for transformation in SME finance, noting that some lenders have moved the entire credit journey online and have begun to think beyond loans and liquidity, to focusing on capacity building efforts.
- The case of DBS Bank Ltd. in Singapore exemplifies the role of capacity building in long-term resilience building. The company quickly strengthened its e-training efforts via their SME Academy to enable businesses “to make the most of the current lull in business activity to upgrade their skills”, the result being that more than 1500 SMEs have “freely benefited from guidance and insights on how to efficiently ensure business continuity amid the crisis.”

- The SME Finance Forum observed that learning, collaboration and digitization were three powerful tools at the disposal of the SME lending community and contributed to both short and long-term coping mechanisms. Specifically, when “used strategically, these methods could ensure business survival for affected SMEs, and could also eventually accelerate their recovery and bring long-lasting changes to the industry as a whole.”

## Partnerships and Collaboration

An analysis conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization in August 2020 on lessons learned for DRR in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([FAO 2020](#)) highlighted the importance of partnerships and localization. Specifically, the FAO observed that the COVID-19 pandemic has “reemphasized” that nothing could and should be done without partnerships and that future resilience building efforts will require “close partnerships, including at the local level, with a wide range of actors and stakeholders.”

The [CEIP \(2020\)](#) survey of civil society action during the pandemic, introduced previously, also picked up on the importance of collaboration, relationship building and shifting social contracts. In particular, it was observed that the strategies that seem to work are based on collaboration, both new and pre-existing, and often across sectors. Evidence of this was seen in:

- Nigeria, where an organizations prior advocacy with law enforcement agencies and community leaders was critical in pivoting their COVID-19 advocacy.
- In Ethiopia, government leadership, faith-based organizations and community actors are working hand in hand unlike previous times.

CEIP also highlighted several questions pertaining to partnerships and collaboration which they believed to be crucial in determining whether or not the COVID-19 pandemic results in undercutting or rejuvenating civil society in many countries over time. For instance, in recognizing the emerging local “civic dynamism” during the pandemic, concern was expressed by the authors that local initiatives could prove “short-lived and brittle or too fragmented” giving rise to a potential scenario whereby civil society activism remains structured around “hierarchical and professionalized national and international organizations.” The collaborative nature of this new activism emerging at the local level was also highlighted, where groups were “joining together and, in some cases, working with local businesses and government authorities.” But this was not without its challenge, as some governments, despite leveraging the local strength of CSOs, neglected to consult, leading to concern that, in going forward, to what extent will governments be “willing to work with and encourage local initiatives, rather than try to maintain top-down control.”

UNDRR’s report on ‘Building the Resilience of SMEs to Disasters’ also observed the key role that collaboration and public-private partnerships play in disaster risk reduction. For instance, the case of the Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council was cited (CBI 2016, in [UNDRR 2020](#)):

- Created in 2016, the Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council (FBDRRC) strengthens the resilience of small and medium enterprises by providing training, tools and guidelines. The FBDRRC has joined the Fiji Disaster Management Committee, worked with other organizations to survey 1,200 village heads

and connect businesses with villages, launched a BCP toolkit and acquired funding to prepare its BCP trainers in the country. The council serves as a coordination mechanism where businesses can manage their own risk, strengthen resilience training and have a voice on matters related to disaster risk reduction.

## Gaps, Challenges and Obstacles Faced in DRR and Resilience Work

**Horizontal coherence and coordination.** Continuing with the focus on collaboration and partnerships from the previous section, UNDRR's Status Report on Sendai Target E (increasing the number of countries with national and local DRR strategies) reported that the COVID-19 crisis highlighted that some Governments developed their pandemic response plans/strategy within Ministries of Health without the involvement of other ministries (i.e. in isolation from their disaster risk reduction or management strategy), which has "significantly reduced opportunities to build coherence and integration between health and disaster risk management at national level." It was concluded that such a situation represents a serious barrier to securing coherence between disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and climate change adaptation at national level.

**Multiple challenges faced by SMEs.** From a private sector perspective, the 2020 UNDRR report on *Building the Resilience of SMEs* noted that SMEs are important catalysts for resilience, given their agility, entrepreneurship, and role in providing livelihoods ([UNDRR 2020](#)). However, SMEs experience multiple challenges in relation to disaster risk reduction. These tended to cluster around the following areas: their relatively small size; access to financial resources and products; awareness of risks and risk creation (including multi-hazard); business strategy challenges with a tendency to focus on response and recovery, rather than risk reduction and prevention; and operational challenges such as vulnerability within global value and supply chains.

**Food security.** The Food and Agriculture Organization also reported on lessons learned for DRR in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([FAO 2020](#)). Food security, for instance, was highlighted by the FAO as a challenge during the early stages of the pandemic. Policy coherence was another area of concern illuminated in the FAO study, specifically in connection to their recommendation that "we need to continue to strengthen countries' capacities in integrating disaster and climate risk considerations into governance and policy actions, including through supporting countries in the development/update of their multi-sectoral national/local DRR strategies that are well aligned to national climate change and biodiversity strategies and plans."

**Slow progress on SDGs affecting resilience.** The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs outlined in June 2020 that initial assessments were already alerting the international community to the immense risks of failing to act swiftly and in a coordinated manner ([UNDESA 2020](#)). Among these early insights reported by UNDESA and the congruencies with the insights reported by MGoS organizations in the SEM global survey are the following:

- Lack of progress on SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), such as insufficient health facilities and medical supplies, increased risk during COVID-19 response and recover. This is consistent with the lessons learned, challenges and recommendations reported by MGoS organizations about

the need for improved health services and facilities, especially for the marginalized and vulnerable groups.

- Lack of clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) increased risk during the pandemic. This assessment was echoed in the survey in the many instances where MGoS organizations were providing such facilities and the challenges in doing so during the pandemic.
- Limited access to internet infrastructure (SDG 9), and related remote education and health services, increased risk to the pandemic – a fact amplified by the MGoS survey results.
- Cities with people living in slum conditions and crowded housing and public transportation (SDG 11) increased risk during the pandemic. This was also noted by several MGoS organizations across the survey.