

New Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction in G20 is timely

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The creation of a new Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Working Group within the G20 under India's Presidency is a timely and welcome development. Disasters have the potential to devastate communities, economies, and infrastructure, causing loss of life, injury, and damage on a large scale, and hindering progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. India's approach to disaster management prioritizes community-based efforts, as demonstrated by the achievement of two districts in the eastern state of Odisha being recognized as 'Tsunami Ready' by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission in 2020, making India the first country in the Indian Ocean Region to attain such a high level of disaster preparedness at the community level. The establishment of the new DRR Working Group within the G20 coincides with the mid-term review of the intergovernmental Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2023, further demonstrating India's commitment to advancing its efforts in disaster risk reduction.

The DRR WG will bring together representatives from the G20 countries to discuss issues that have been identified by the Indian Presidency. One of the main priorities of the DRR WG is to ensure global coverage of Early Warning Systems for all hydro-meteorological disasters. According to the Sendai Monitor, only 23 out of 195 countries have reported having multi-hazard early warning systems in 2021. Timely dissemination of warning remains crucial for taking early action in the face of a disaster because it can provide advance notice of an impending disaster, allowing people to evacuate to a safer location and securing their property. The G20 can pursue this agenda to support and supplement ongoing initiatives to achieve 100% coverage of early warning systems across the world.

Another priority of the DRR WG is to increase commitment towards making critical infrastructure systems disaster resilient. Disaster resilient infrastructure helps in reducing the long-term costs associated with natural disasters, as it can prevent or minimize damage to infrastructure and reduce the need for costly repairs or reconstruction. Recently, in November 2022, Indonesia experienced a shallow earthquake on the main island of Java. The rescue efforts were hindered due to damage to hospitals and loss of electrical power, resulting in difficulties for authorities. By establishing shared standards for evaluating the risk of disasters to infrastructure, G20 countries can more effectively consider the potential impact on critical systems such as transportation, communication, and access to clean water and health services. These systems are vital to economic and social development, and by working together to assess and mitigate risk, the G20 can take important steps towards ensuring their resilience to disasters.

Disaster risk assessment of infrastructure will provide valuable data and information to G20 members to support the development of disaster risk financing strategies, such as risk transfer mechanisms like insurance, or risk financing instruments like catastrophe bonds. The third priority of the new workstream is to align national financing frameworks with disaster risk reduction financing strategies while utilizing new and innovative market-based tools. It will assist the G20 countries in understanding the transmission channels through which disaster risks can impact the country's ability to finance sustainable development. To achieve the SDGs, it remains vital that countries make their financing policies and regulatory frameworks sustainable and risk-informed.

Fourthly, the DRR WG will bring together G20 countries to share their knowledge and best practices on cost-efficient and time-efficient disaster response. Timeliness of this initiative can't be understated as Turkiye, a G20 member, currently races against time to unearth victims and rescue survivors in the aftermath of the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that has wrought destruction upon the nation in February of 2023. By fostering technical knowledge sharing and capacity building, the WG will aid in the development and implementation of national and regional disaster response strategies and plans that allay future crises of this nature. Japan, a G20 member country with an efficient and well-organized emergency response system, could serve as a model for other member countries to learn from.

Lastly and more importantly, the DRR WG will promote the discourse on ecosystem based approaches to reduce disaster risks and build resilience in communities. Ecosystem-based approaches can be more cost-effective, sustainable and have fewer negative externalities on the environment than hard infrastructure. For example, hard infrastructure like dams and levees can disrupt natural water flow patterns and harm aquatic ecosystems, while ecosystem-based approaches like wetlands restoration can help to restore natural flood control mechanisms. During India's presidency of the G20, member countries will have the opportunity to inform the development of their disaster risk reduction policies through such collaborative discussions.

India is a country that is prone to a wide range of disasters, including earthquakes, cyclones, and floods. To manage these disasters, India has established the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and developed the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP). The NDMP outlines the country's approach to reducing disaster risk, including measures such as early warning systems, disaster preparedness, and risk assessment. In 2015, when Nepal was struck by a major earthquake, India provided significant assistance, including rescue and relief services, funding, and technical expertise for rebuilding and reconstructing damaged infrastructure. India is also a founding member of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, which was established in 2019 and is headquartered in New Delhi. As a result of its experience, expertise, and commitment to international cooperation, India is a leader in disaster risk reduction efforts.

During its G20 Presidency, India has focused on the theme of "One World, One Family, One Future," emphasizing the interconnectedness of the global community and the importance of cooperation and solidarity in addressing disasters. Disasters know no boundaries and have disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities that can exacerbate existing inequalities. By creating a new DRR WG and emphasising on the importance of shared responsibility and solidarity in addressing disasters, India has mainstreamed disaster risk reduction into sustainable development planning and policy discussions within the G20 and reaffirmed its commitment to international cooperation on disaster risk reduction.

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