

STRENGTHENING THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: THE ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

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In June, the 2019 Japan G20 Interfaith Forum in Tokyo gathered experts from religion, civil society, government and academia to focus on issues vital to security and well-being in the face of disasters. The challenges included peace-building, refugees, health, disaster risk reduction, forests, and children amongst others. In disaster risk reduction (DRR), an emerging nontraditional security issue, the forum concentrated on the religious dimension, highlighting the critical role of religious and faith-based organizations in meeting the physical and spiritual needs of communities affected by disasters. It is critical to consider integrating networks of religious communities to maximize the efficiency of current international and national DRR frameworks, especially focusing on requiring international cooperation in developing countries.

To better implement DRR measures and reflect the current understanding of disaster risks, the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015 adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 to address the next 15 years. This framework is the successor instrument of the Hyogo Framework for Action launched in 2005.

The so-called Sendai Framework mentions the significance of strengthening disaster risk governance at local, national and global levels to manage disaster risk efficiently. At the national and local levels, it emphasizes the importance of the development of government coordination forums that should include all stakeholders to share their concerns and experience in DRR measures. At the global level, the framework also emphasizes the necessity of sharing practice and knowledge on disaster risk-informed policies.

Though the framework outlines goals to better address DRR, it does not provide more details regarding how to reach and include all stakeholders. To strengthen and achieve the goals of the Sendai Framework with a focus on international cooperation, this year's G20 Interfaith Forum experts produced four policy recommendations regarding the role of religious communities. First, they suggested that G20 countries take action to establish or improve their national DRR platform to ensure the development of resilient communities. The national DRR strategies should also ensure its inclusion and integration with all stakeholders including disproportionately vulnerable communities. The religious network can provide links for the governments to connect with those groups. They also suggested G20 governments take the lead in investing sufficient resources like early warning systems and climate disaster resilience measures to enhance the resilience of places that have the highest risks. In addition, the forum urged governments to commit to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals with bold action to make progress addressing interrelating challenges like climate change and disasters. Finally, the forum recommended governments strengthen their partnerships with religious organizations, as many of them have many experience in helping vulnerable communities increase their resilience and can share both knowledge and networks to improve the efficiency of DRR strategies.

The recommendations provided also raise several problems, like how can religious groups develop an efficient communication channel with G20

governments to develop a cooperative relationship and ensure their suggestions are taken into account? Without effective communication, it is difficult for religious groups to share their community networks, especially those who are most vulnerable. Also, how can religious groups assist the government in identifying stakeholders if there is no clear definition of stakeholders? Furthermore, it is necessary to consider how to measure the influence of the religious groups in DRR management.

Though these problems still need to be resolved, more and more literature addresses the implication of religion for DRR and how these organizations can help vulnerable people prepare as well as respond to a disaster. Apart from the literature contributions, dialogues such as the G20 Interfaith Forum have provided policy recommendations for G20 governments to keep the issue at the forefront. Further, in gathering religious groups, NGOs, academics, and even the former government officials like former Britain Prime Minister David Cameron, they are able to provide policy recommendations for DRR that are balanced and feasible. Most importantly, the G20 Interfaith Forum increases the influence of religious groups in DRR and broadens the public's perception about the role of religious groups in world affairs.

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