

International Day For
Disaster Risk Reduction

13th October 2021



INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR
DISASTER REDUCTION



"We cannot stop disasters but we can arm ourselves with knowledge: so many lives wouldn't have to be lost if there was enough disaster preparedness"

PETRA NEMVOCA

Greetings from the Sustainable Initiatives Committee

Every year, the number of Fijians pushed into poverty could reach 32,400 people, the cost of climate-related disasters could increase 30% and the rising sea levels could threaten more than 30% of the population by 2065 (The Government of Fiji, 2017). An estimated amount of US\$ 4.5 billion is required over ten years to increase the resilience and capacity of Fiji to climate change - an amount which corresponds to the country's yearly GDP (The World Bank, 2017). According to the government's estimates, Fiji has a 50% probability of experiencing a catastrophic disaster in a scenario where losses could exceed US\$ 800 million, and on average, the yearly losses from earthquakes and cyclones are expected to reach US\$ 85 million (Government of Fiji, 2016). Overall, the estimated impact of climate change on GDP could reach -2.75% by 2050, half of which is attributable to the loss of agricultural sectors (The World Bank, 2016).

Future predicted temperature increase has been estimated to reach 1.0°C by 2030, and up to 5 degrees in the worst-case scenario simulations by 2080. Yearly rainfall variability is also expected to fluctuate, with atmospheric models projecting an increase in the average rainfall over the entire country. By 2050, the expected annual losses due to extreme weather could potentially reach 6.5% of the GDP as a result of climate change (The Government of Fiji, 2017).

While the pandemic still looms large in our minds, it is important that we continue to advocate sustainability. The International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction is observed in order to promote the global culture of risk awareness since 1989 after the announcement by the United Nations General Assembly. Our island nation is prone to disasters along with other small island developing states in the region where we share a common space. Risk mitigation is paramount to avoid any form of disaster. Thus, we must plan well as an individual, as a community, and as a nation.

Sustainability and disaster risk reduction are closely linked on many levels, and the relationship cuts both ways. Disasters often add devastating costs to societies and communities in terms of financial losses, destroyed infrastructure and loss of life. They can set sustainable development back for years. The primary intention of sustainability is to reduce disasters by better integrating sustainability. For example;

- Wildlife can be killed by the force of the disaster or impacted indirectly through changes in habitat and food availability.

- Endangered species are especially vulnerable when habitat is destroyed.
- Water quality is impacted when sewage treatment facilities flood or debris enters reservoirs and waterways

We can together battle such tragedies through sustainability, which must be accompanied by increased preparedness. Disaster preparedness is important to prepare and reduce the effects of disasters which could be done through prior risk assessments. Little can be done to prevent a disaster but if we prepare ourselves through various measures, then we could save countless lives, speed up people's recovery and save resources.

While we promote the Sustainable Development Goals, we must also support women's empowerment, as women must be equally involved in assisting families and communities in disaster planning and response.

In most male-dominated societies, women are still stereotyped and confined to carry out household duties that should not be the case. Women must be empowered to respond quickly in the event of a disaster and share responsibilities for reducing disaster risks.

With this, the Sustainability Initiatives Committee also acknowledges the short online course organised by the College of Humanities and Education with UNITAR Hiroshima Women's Leadership in Tsunami-based Disaster Risk Reduction. The Programme targeted women from Small Island Developing States (SIDS); FNU provided a platform for women to upskill and help focus on the distinct gender-specific capacities and vulnerabilities to prevent, prepare, confront, and recover from disasters. The female participants completed the course early this year in March and were awarded Certificates.

The frequent disasters around the world remind everyone of the importance to raise awareness and plan for potential disasters. Greater preparedness protects vulnerable people, such as children, the disabled, and the elderly.

Therefore, the Sustainable Initiatives Committee would like to urge everyone to take actions to identify, assess, and reduce the risk of disaster. In doing so, we can aim to reduce socioeconomic and environmental vulnerabilities and any hazards that trigger them.

Reference: https://www.unisdr.org/files/68251_682302fijirevised16oct2019.pdf