

Concept Note



We know what to do. All countries, from the richest to the poorest, should build disaster risk reduction into their development and poverty reduction plans...International donors should support the trust funds established to help poor countries cope with natural disasters.

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General

Concept Title	Initiative for Parliamentarians to make disaster risk reduction a tool for climate change adaptation
Amount Requested	To be determined
Implementation Period	2010 – 2011 Biennium
Impact	Reduced disaster risk and more effective climate change adaptation, especially in vulnerable developing countries

1. Context

Support to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), has been central to UNISDR's work since 2005. The first priority of the five underlined in the HFA is to make disaster risk reduction (DRR) a national and local priority. To ensure DRR is a national priority requires the sustainable political commitment of executive governments, with strong support from legislatures. This point was well emphasized in feedback received on the past five years of the HFA implementation.

The understanding and knowledge of legislators about DRR and its related issues can make a big difference in the process of building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters and climate change. Legislatures are uniquely positioned to influence policy change at national level and monitor policy implementation at local level since legislators, in most cases, are elected by local people to voice their needs and concerns at the national level. Moreover, legislators often oversee budget allocation where they can assure that there are resources adequate to a particular task.

2. Objective and Activities

The UNISDR secretariat started its Parliamentarians Initiative on DRR with the objective of increasing the politically-enabling environment of protecting lives, livelihoods and socio-economic development from climate change and its related disasters. In 2009, the focus was on the theme: *Making Disaster Risk Reduction a Tool for Climate Change Adaptation (CCA)*. While advocating the importance of DRR in the context of climate change, UNISDR has paid special attention to the leadership and ownership building of the initiative among parliamentarians.

Major activities included targeted advocacy among parliamentarians, partnership building with sub-regional and regional parliamentary forums and assemblies, and technical support and guidance to parliamentarians who become advocates and champions for greater synergy between DRR and CCA. In addition, a total of six consultative meetings on DRR and CCA were organized, with the support of national or regional parliaments in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as the Mediterranean region.

3. Initial Impact

From Oct 2008 to Dec. 2009, UNISDR was able to engage 130 parliamentarians from 62 countries. Parliamentarians with increased knowledge and access to information have approved powerful changes at different levels. At the national level, there has been increased debate and hearings on DRR in the context of CCA. In the Philippines, new legislation which promotes an integrated approach to CCA and DRR came into effect in 2009. Two parliamentarians have been

appointed as Regional Champions for DRR, one in Africa and the other in Asia. These two Champions have played an important role in carrying out high level advocacy among heads of state or heads of government in Asia and Africa. With the leadership of African parliamentarians, a regional campaign strategy for greater synergy between DRR and CCA has been launched, known as Black and Green – Ready to Lead.

Parliamentarians from different regions, with a better understanding of the synergy between DRR and CCA, actively participated in COP 15, usually as part of national parties. These parliamentarians have been actively advocating the importance of making DRR a tool for immediate climate change adaptation at different events, including the high level session of the COP 15, UN gender and climate change event and the parliamentarians' meeting organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Parliamentarians emphasized that governments should 'walk their talk' in order to reduce the impact of climate change on the poor. They called for more parliamentarians to join the cause of reducing the impact of climate change and its related risks and disasters, which are of a politically trans-boundary nature.

4. Feedback from Parliamentarians

As a principle practice, the team conducted round table oral evaluations after each UNISDR-led consultation with parliamentarians. The majority of participants welcomed the initiative, expressed interests in learning more and attached importance to the issue. According to the parliamentarians engaged, the consultative meetings helped increase the understanding and knowledge of parliamentarians on why and how DRR should be used for CCA and protection of development gains. Their increased understanding and knowledge of the link between DRR and CCA enabled them to take action at the national and regional levels, as appropriate.

To determinate how to improve and continue the initiative, the team has also sent out seven open questions, approved by the SRSG for DRR, to parliamentarians in December 2009. The questions are as follows:

1. What do you think about the UNISDR initiative on parliamentarians and disaster risk reduction ?
2. How long have you been working on the subjects related to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation ?
3. To what extent does the UNISDR initiative on parliamentarians and disaster risk reduction contribute to your understanding and knowledge about the subjects?

4. What kind of actions have you carried out after your participation in the UNISDR consultative meetings - on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation?
5. What are the results or impacts of your actions in promoting the integrated approach between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in your country or region?
6. How do you plan to continue your commitment to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation at national and local levels ?
7. How do you expect UNISDR to continue its initiative on parliamentarians and disaster risk reduction in 2010 ?

UNISDR has received responses from parliamentarians from Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Cambodia, Chad, Central African Republic, China, Costa Rica, Kenya, Madagascar, Namibia, Senegal, Uganda, Globe Europe and the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank. In their response to the questions, they were all positive about UNISDR's initiative, notwithstanding their different backgrounds and varying expertise levels in DRR and CCA.

To explain why they supported the initiative, they emphasized that the initiative helps to raise awareness of DRR among parliamentarians who represent the power of popular support from local people. They are an important channel to disseminate information and knowledge to local people and, at the same time, they can easily influence allocation of substantial resources to DRR-related programmes. The initiative has enabled a good number of parliamentarians to understand the importance of climate change and its correlation with disasters, thereby equipping them with the knowledge on DRR as a tool for climate change adaptation. As DRR is a cross-cutting issue, parliamentarians are better placed to mainstream it in national, sub-regional and continental legislations.

The parliamentarians engaged come from various professional backgrounds. Some of them started getting involved in the subject through UNISDR's parliamentarians' initiative, while others have a deeper knowledge of DRR or its related issues such as environment and early warning (up to 30 years). The mixture of backgrounds helped ownership and leadership-building of the initiative among parliamentarians, as seen in Malta where parliamentarians made presentations and led discussions by sharing their knowledge and views on the DRR and CCA issues.

When talking about the contribution of the initiative to their knowledge on DRR, they estimated it from 20% to 'tremendously'. Those with in-depth knowledge of DRR related issues appreciated that the initiative had helped them understand global perspective on the issues and that they no longer consider DRR and CCA as an issue that is sector specific or country specific. The needs to coordinate efforts among different decision-making levels are better understood.

The responses from the members of parliaments (MP) also clear that most of them have taken actions after UNISDR consultative meeting(s) in their own capacities, without further requests for support from UNISDR.

The MP from Algeria broached the DRR subject with all the National Education officials, including elementary, middle and high schools, and universities, in order to establish a joint plan of work. The result is an agreement with the national education officials in principle to schedule workshops on disaster risks and appropriate means to reduce their impact, as the first step, and then to implement the action plan to be achieved at the workshop.

The MP from Argentina drafted a resolution and legislation aimed at mainstreaming the topic in the context of the Senate Chamber of Mendoza, where she received unanimous endorsement. Other activities included interactions and participation in meetings with national platform, members of Argentinean universities and media. More importantly, the MP currently prepares an agenda of actions to carry out in Mendoza in 2010 and consult specialists and academics that already have experience, for form joint work unites to develop awareness programmes and spread out these issues in different areas. The MP is advocating for the need for addressing DRR and CCA at national and regional parliamentary meetings.

The MP from Cambodia reported on the issue of DRR back to the National Assembly, describing the contents of the meeting, advocating on the issues among fellow parliamentarians and starting a radio programme on DRR. The impact of her action helped raise the level of awareness among Cambodian parliamentarians on the issue and familiarize them with the idea that DRR is a smart tactic to adapt to climate change. As a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), she is helping UNISDR bring the issue to the agenda of the IPU.

The MP from Kenya built a team of women leaders and trained them on the basics of DRR unique to their regions for the preparation of pilot CCA programmes such as water harvesting, bop gas fuel and awareness in disaster prevention. At regional level, she mobilized African parliamentarians to form an initiative on DRR which also extended to the sub-regional level, lobbied governments on DRR and CCA at highest levels at the AU summit, and introduced a motion to set up a group to introduce DRR to every national assembly. Now, she is focusing on a lobby for Africa with the international community, as well as partners for raising resources to implement DRR.

The MP from Madagascar said that before the political crisis, they were able to build dams to improve water reserves and floods gates to rice plantations. That

naturally improved the conditions of farmers and their water management. Climate change is now a priority across the nation. The action undertaken so far is far from sufficient given the speed of climate change. They therefore will focus much more on prevention of the consequences of climate change, particularly by raising public awareness about massive forest exploitation, the need for alternatives to oil, and learning from and interacting with other nations.

The MP (now a former MP) from Namibia reported back to the national parliament and advocated the issue at the SADC regional meeting. She was also involved in the African Inter Faith Activities with regard to the problems arising from climate change in the region. She was involved in the Black and Green campaign on disaster risk reduction as a tool for climate change adaptation, and advocated on the issue at the occasion of the first session of the second Pan African Parliament. She is now trying to work with the national planning commission on an agricultural project for the north of the country.

The MP from Central African Republic brought the DRR issue to sub-regional meetings such as the conference organized by the Network of Parliamentarians for the sustainable management of the Central African Forest and Humid Ecosystems in Congo Basin held in Data, Equatorial Guinea. Disaster risk prevention and reduction is part of the statement made at Data: *Nationally, the Department of Environment, which has established a general office in charge of disaster risk reduction, will be regularly consulted on national policies for reducing disaster risks in order to mainstream the concept into national legislation.*

The MP from China shared his experience on satellite monitoring of disasters and also reminded colleagues of the complexity of climate change and advised that one should be careful about forecasting future climate trends. Talking about the impact of his work, he mentioned that the National People's Congress of China has made a decision on actively responding to climate change.

The MP from Costa Rica said that the results of participation in the consultative meetings included reporting back to the Environmental Commission of the Parliament. The MP also started including the issues in the bills that she was drafting or reviewing. A very strong position has been taken on this issue of DRR and CCA before the COP 15. In addition, the parliament has also undertaken coordination and support actions with executive entities to improve efficiency and promote cooperation on issues such as CCA. It may be premature to measure the impacts, but legislators are more sensitive to the subject.

The MP from Chad said that he organized, with the support of UNISDR, a consultative meeting among MPs from Central African Countries on CCA and DRR and, in his capacity as President of the Pan African Parliament, he provided support to advocate the linkage between DRR and CCA among members of

parliaments who came from all the member states of the African Union. The actions taken resulted in greater awareness among legislators from Chad, Central Africa and the Pan African Parliament, support to the executive on climate related projects such as planting trees, and demands for extra funds within the national budget for CCA related programmes.

The MPs from Senegal said that their level of understanding has led them to become part of the UNESCO Scientific Committee against coastal erosion, which is also a factor contributing to disaster risk. Parliamentarians, with the leadership of their Speaker, also started using different forms of communication such as movies on CDs and public lectures in schools to promote new behaviors that take into account the negative effects of climate change. They brought the DRR and CCA issues into the media and down to local authorities. In association with the Ministry of Environment, parliamentarians are about to implement a comprehensive programme of awareness on the subject of disaster risks related to climate change. As a result, parliamentarians have increasingly been involved in decision-making processes, becoming partners of a national commission in charge of preparation of a law on coasts. Parliamentarians' engagement also helps increase the possibilities for the integration of DRR into development policies at the national and local levels. With the influence of MPs, social organizations involving women and youth have emerged with a mission to develop an alert and critical view of government environmental policies. The MPs also secured the support of their President and their national speaker for the hosting of the UNISDR consultative meeting with parliamentarians from West African countries from 2010.

The MP from Uganda has been on the core team that started a parliamentary forum on climate change. The forum has a membership of about 60 MPs. Other activities included working closely with the DRR unit in the office of the Prime Minister where a national DRR policy is being prepared. He is advocating DRR as a tool for climate change whenever there is an opportunity. Coming to the impact of the actions taken, the MP said that the impacts of their concerted efforts are not yet very visible but there is now clearer understanding of issues by many of their people than ever before. For example, they have been urging the government to put in place a modern early warning system which is now available. Weather fluctuations are now fairly accurately predicted and the information widely disseminated. People are now strongly dissuaded from constructing houses on risky hilly slopes and wetlands prone to flooding. Planting of trees is now being given attention by government and private individuals.

In response to question 6 – *How do you plan to continue your commitment to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation at national and local levels?* Most of the MPs have expressed a willingness to continue their commitment to DRR and CCA. The activities below are among those planned:

- Intensify radio broadcast on DRR, with the high profile examples of Haiti and low profile examples from the country such as mud slides. (*Cambodia*)
- Reinforce the advocacy action, starting an initiative for reviewing the national legislative framework and continuing to carry out extensive information and awareness programmes on the negative effects of climate change and the need for governments to establish coherent policies for adaptation to climate change so as to avert any risk of disasters, with partners at local level, including the Civil Defense Office, the Environment Office, the National Meteorology Agency and UNDP country office. (*Senegal*)
- As a firm believer that DRR is the first line of defense, the Government has no choice but to integrate DRR into their planning, budgeting and implementation strategies which will be used by legislators for the legal framework. Government will be supporting national implementation as well as civil society involvement in implementation at the grassroots level, with an emphasis on women. (*Kenya*)
- Within the Pan African Parliament (PAP), a group on climate change was established. Membership is voluntary and will address various aspects and disciplines of the climate change agenda. The Black and Green programme has also been entrenched within the PAP and will seek to create awareness among legislators on the importance and necessity of using DRR as a tool for CCA. Emphasis is being placed on women who bear the brunt of CC related disasters. 'This being the year of the woman, as the PAP president, we intend to play our rightful role in educating and empowering women.' (*PAP and Chad*)
- To continue the commitment by keeping herself informed, by training technicians and consultants and by coordinating with institutions. This commitment will not be limited to the work of MPs. She has requested the Latin America Parliament to analyze the Malta Declaration for further action, where she will give a presentation on the issue. (*Costa Rica*)
- To raise more awareness, increase the number of press releases and conduct more discussions with the relevant committees (*Austria*)
- Continue to lobby fellow parliamentarians to ensure adequate funding to address DRR-related problems. (*Uganda*)
- Addressing climate change is an important opportunity and challenge facing China's national economic and social development. Resources for addressing climate change must be based on thorough implementation of a scientific outlook on development. Concrete measures must be taken to actively respond to climate change. The legal framework for addressing climate change must be strengthened. The awareness and capability of the general public in coping with climate change must be increased and China will continue to actively participate in international cooperation on tackling climate change. (*China*)

- At the local level: During 2010, the MP will prepare for the legislature – with support from professionals, academics and students of the UN, consultants from the UN and US Government – two activities that are complementary: training for teachers and a contest for middle school students to prepare a risk map of their areas of residence. At the national and international levels: The MP will propose to convene a meeting of parliamentarians of MERCOSUR in the city of Mendoza to discuss the issue and joint action, and engage all the parliamentary groups of Mercosur through the Union of Parliamentarians of Mercosur, a body that the MP belongs to, for wider advocacy on the issue (*Argentina*).
- Nationally, it is crucial to replicate the UNISDR consultative meeting to generate parliamentary interest and, if needed, to create a national branch of the parliamentary network on DRR. Locally, it is necessary to undertake an awareness campaign focused on local politicians to raise their attention to the subjects and bring them to act to prevent and reduce disaster damage caused by climate change. (*Central African Republic*)
- Climate change is no longer a problem confined to the Third World but rather one that affects all nations. Acting together is crucial. If developed countries do not take steps to improve the way things are done in industrial plants, for example, all effort and action we take is useless. There must be a compromise between the developed and developing countries so that we can minimize or delay the effects of climate change on people (*Madagascar*).

In order to improve our initiative, MPs were also requested to express their views on how they expect UNISDR to continue its initiative on parliamentarians and DRR in 2010. In general, it is considered essential that UNISDR continues to engage parliamentarians and parliamentary networks as these processes do not bring immediate results, and also because parliamentarians must strengthen the actions being carried out by deputies and must train future leaders. UNISDR is expected to do a number of things.

- It is essential and strategic to support these countries or regional groups in the organization of specific activities not only to expand knowledge among parliamentarians, but also to engage them in concrete action, through projects that might have funding opportunities. For example: what type of legal regulations and legislative action are needed to support the control of river basins, urban risk reduction, water management, provision of financial resources for DRR and CCA, and utility management in risk contexts. How can we mainstream these issues in political parties' agendas so that they start appearing as strategic issues and as primary responsibilities in the training of young politicians. (*Argentina*)
- The Malta Declaration could become a powerful tool for parliamentarians to align behind if it is updated to remove the COP15 specific context,

which renders it time-bound and of limited use (*Secretariat of the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank*).

- At the European level, UNISDR could play a role in supporting parliamentarians at the EU and national levels to ensure that DRR issues are mainstreamed in the already announced financial commitments of the EU for climate change adaptation in developing countries – and to ensure that these funds are adequately invested by recipient countries. (*Globe Europe*).
- UNISDR must continue to provide technical support to parliamentarians until the issues of DRR and CCA are well grounded throughout the continent. A lot more needs to be done. The Issues of CC in Africa are just picking up, but the in-depth understanding of issues needs to be better articulated.
- To encourage and assist national parliaments to start awareness campaign with locally-elected officials and with government officials as well as UN country offices. (*Cambodia*)
- UNISDR must support parliamentarians in the establishment of national networks, raising the awareness of local officials and promoting their participation in international forums for this purpose. (*Central Africa Republic*)
- It would be wise to promote the moral motivation of parliaments to show a genuine desire to support the commendable efforts of UNISDR. This would be an incentive for some parliaments and help to produce awareness materials for parliamentarians. (*Senegal*)
- UNISDR helps developing countries to thoroughly understand climate change issues and take realistic steps to respond to climate change. (*China*)
- UNISDR should be fully supported to continue and expand its operations. Funds should be made available to carry out direct projects that can be used as examples for governments to emulate. More consultative meetings should be held to continuously pump up support. We should be able to meet the UN Secretary General to make our case. We should be able to seriously make our presence felt in Mexico (COP 16). (*Uganda*)
- UNISDR should make the best, and worst, examples of action widely available, so that we can use them for illustrating our demands. (*Austria*)

The results of the survey reflect similar comments received at the end of each consultative meeting – that UNISDR's parliamentary initiative is very welcome and much appreciated by the majority of the target group. The initiative was able to increase understanding and knowledge among most parliamentarians on DRR and CCA, as only a few have in-depth knowledge of DRR related issues to begin with. The majority of the parliamentarians who attended UNISDR consultative meetings have reported back to their parliaments and tried to spread the basic

message – *that disaster risk reduction an important tool for climate change adaptation*. What is most encouraging is the fact that most have been continuing to advocate DRR and CCA afterwards, taking action in their own capacities and through their own initiative, and that many plan to continue putting their commitment to DRR and CCA into practice.

5. Challenges and Opportunities

Our initiative to engage parliamentarians has been both rewarding and challenging. The initiative does offer opportunities for UNISDR to extend political support for integrating DRR into development work. Engaging parliamentarians offered clear opportunities for UNISDR to influence policy and changes in legislation for achieving disaster resilient nations and communities. These opportunities come together with the core responsibility of parliamentarians, which includes oversight of the executive and drawing up of legislation, as well as in the appropriation of the national budget.

Moreover, parliamentarians are the bridge between the executive and the people to ensure that policy measures are taken and implemented. Unlike government officials, parliamentarians are more dynamic and active as their political career largely depends on their individual performance.

The initiative has encountered some challenges of course. The first is the political sensitivity, as parliamentarians come from both the executive government side and from the opposition. To deal with the issue, we have been advocating that disaster risk reduction is a cross-cutting developmental issue which transcends political boundaries. To balance the politics, each consultative meeting was organized with the support of the national parliament *and* the executive government.

A second challenge is that parliamentarians are a group of people of great diversity of professional background, both in terms of professional discipline and level of expertise. They are driven by national politics and the priorities of their local constituencies. As DRR has not been an issue on the political agenda, engaging them proved demanding at first, and quite time consuming.

To sustain their engagement is a serious challenge as well. UNISDR first needs to provide more thorough guidance and more comprehensive support to partners who accept to host consultative meetings. UNISDR needs to build the ownership and leadership of the initiative through informal and formal preparations to make sure that the expected results will be achieved. This has been an effective way to increase interests, information and knowledge of parliamentarians on DRR and CCA. However, to sustain the effort, UNISDR needs to find ways to establish

more institutional cooperation with national parliaments and parliamentary assemblies and networks.

6. A Way Forward in 2010

The initiative with parliamentarians in 2010 aims to increase political commitment in the three strategic areas underlined in the UNISDR Biennial Work Programme 2010-2011. The work will be carried out under the theme “DRR: an instrument for achieving the MDGs.” To build on the gains made in 2009, more effort will out into: 1) partnership building with parliamentary forums or networks in order to integrate DRR in their activities, 2) facilitation/provision of technical support to core, committed parliamentarians who champion DRR, and 3) continuation of consultative meetings to follow up on parliamentary recommendations from the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2009.