

REDOUBLE EFFORTS TO REDUCE DISASTER RISKS

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A man rides a scooter through mud and debris after heavy rainfall flooded Tangxia town in Dongguan, Guangdong province, China. | Photo Credit: Reuters

As [leaders underscored at the G-20 summit in New Delhi](#) on September 10, ahead of the [United Nations General Assembly SDG \(Sustainable Development Goals\) summit](#) in New York next week, the [world stands at a critical juncture](#). Risks are being created faster than they are being reduced. The aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with a polycrisis of war, debt, and food insecurity, are putting our collective ability to cope to the test. And all against the backdrop of the climate crisis, driving the extreme weather events that are occurring more frequently and with greater intensity.

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The rise in disasters is a trend, not an aberration. Headlines this year alone have brought a relentless wave of bad news across the world, from severe flooding in China to destructive wildfires in Europe and Hawaii to the hottest month ever on record in July. This is set to become the new normal if more action isn't taken.

And perversely, it is the most vulnerable countries and communities which are paying the greatest price despite having contributed least to the problem. The majority of the 50 countries most vulnerable to climate change also suffer from severe debt issues.

India, already among the world's most disaster-prone countries, is experiencing this new reality acutely. In 2022, the country was battered by disasters or extreme weather nearly every day, while this year's severe monsoon has caused widespread loss of livelihood and lives.

Yet, there is also good news. First, we have the solutions for both adaptation and mitigation at hand. The SDGs remain our best blueprint for peace and prosperity, together with commitments made in Paris to limit global warming to 1.5°C, and the global framework for reducing disaster risks — the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Eight years into the implementation of the Sendai Framework, progress is severely lacking. However, in May this year, UN member states committed to accelerate resilience building with renewed urgency.

Many lessons are being learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the importance of systems-wide disaster risk reduction, resilience, and adaptation. The crisis not only revealed our

vulnerability to risk, but also forged new ways of working together, including through digital innovations, such as computer modelling and India's CoWIN digital vaccine system.

Another reason for optimism is India's stewardship on disaster risk reduction. All the 28 States have prepared their own disaster management plans in recent years. Accordingly, mortality from extreme weather events has fallen drastically in recent years. India's early warning system for cyclones covers the entire coastline and has helped reduce cyclone-related mortality by 90% over the last 15 years, while heat wave action plans at the local level have reduced heat wave deaths by over 90%. The recent zero death toll of Cyclone Biparjoy in Gujarat demonstrates what can be achieved through effective preparedness, response, and early warning and action systems. In fact, there were rays of joy amidst the disaster, as hundreds of babies were reported to have been born to women who had been transported to hospitals and shelters for safe delivery by the government before the cyclone.

The 15th Finance Commission in India introduced significant reforms to disaster risk financing. With a total allocation of \$28.6 billion at the national and State levels for a period of five years, the Government of India has provided sufficient resources for disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and capacity development.

On the international stage, India is promoting disaster resilience and sustainability, including through the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, a global partnership for building resilience in infrastructure. India's National Disaster Response Force responds to domestic disasters and is also regularly deployed to disaster zones around the world.

Importantly, India's ongoing G-20 presidency established the first-ever work stream on disaster risk reduction. The Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group is aligned with the SDGs and reflects many of our shared priorities.

Disaster risk must be integrated at all levels, into how we build, how we invest, and how we live. One of the most cost-effective risk-reduction methods is early warning systems for all, spearheaded by the UN, with India's support. Just a 24-hour warning of a coming storm can reduce the damage caused by 30%. Yet, over a third of the world's population, mostly in least developed countries and Small Island Developing States, do not have access to such systems. The ultimate goal is a global multi-risk warning system for all kinds of hazards, whether biological, tectonic, or technological.

Improving global data capabilities will help us predict and respond to the risks we are facing. We commend India's G-20 presidency for its progress on knowledge sharing, joint data infrastructure, and risk analysis.

Finally, we need to ensure that no one is left behind. We must enhance international cooperation in disaster prevention, response, and recovery, especially for the countries of the Global South.

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The G-20 summit and the outcomes of the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group are an opportunity to design a future where we are equipped to withstand disaster risk. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, "Extreme weather events will happen. But they do not need to become deadly disasters."

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