



## A Review of the Outcome of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2019: An Azerbaijani Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The main objectives of successful disaster risk reduction activities are the integration of risk reduction into national recovery programs, the development of policies and the progress of capacities designed to enhance and innovate preventive measures, awareness and risk assessment. This includes the analysis of threats and other vulnerabilities, as well as the development of knowledge, such as education, training of the population, in addition to emergency response protocols and the development of forecasting and early warning systems. A number of states have now become actively involved in the strengthening of their national capacities for disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Efforts are being made to ensure a systematic approach to identifying and assessing risks and minimizing the social and economic consequences of disasters. Therefore, the Global Platform's contributions to states and to other stakeholders have been of significant importance. Countries such as the Republic of Azerbaijan are currently in the process of creating their own strategies concerning disaster risk reduction. It is also important to recognize the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2019 as a platform for viewing and analyzing the progress that the Republic of Azerbaijan has made on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction since 2015.

**Keywords:** Disaster Risk Reduction, Global Platform, Azerbaijan

**JEL Classifications:** Q5, O2, I3, F5, R5

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In May of 2019, after two years of waiting, the 6th Global Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP19) took place in Geneva. More than 182 countries joined the platform to focus on disaster risk reduction policies and resilience strategies to maintain sustainable and inclusive societies. In parallel to the GP19, the 2nd Multi Hazard Early Warning Conference, the World Reconstruction Conference and the Science-Policy Forum took place within that same week, which provided the Global Platform with further enhanced recognition and status. It is important to note that the GP19's main role has been to make contributions to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Climate Action Summit in 2019. Another contribution that the GP19 has made has been the member countries' implementation of the Sendai Framework for

Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR) (UNDRR, 2015). The acceleration of the achievement of defined targets specified within the SFDRR and in SDGs is also a very crucial component of reaching the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (ISC, 2019).

The primary objectives of successful disaster risk reduction activities are the integration of a risk reduction strategy into national recovery programs, the development of public policies and the advancement of capacities aimed at the improvement of preventive and preemptive protocols, as well as risk assessment and awareness. Meeting such objectives involves in depth analysis of internal and external threats and vulnerabilities as well as the development of education and training programs designed to improve the awareness of local populations. The maintenance of emergency response teams and facilities as well

as the development of early warning systems such as preemptive forecasting strategies are also vital for successfully reducing the risk of disasters. Multiple states are now becoming actively involved in the strengthening of their national capabilities with regards to disaster preparedness as well as risk reduction and risk management. Significant efforts are being made in order to ensure a systematic approach to identifying potential risks and assessing the likelihood of their occurrence while minimizing the potential social and economic consequences of disasters. Therefore, the Global Platform's contributions to states and to other categories of stakeholders have been very important. Countries such as the Republic of Azerbaijan are currently in the process of creating their own unique disaster risk reduction strategies (UNDRR, 2019c). It is with this in mind that the GP19 has provided another important platform for observing and examining the progress that the country has made since 2015. It is within this context that the present article seeks to review the 2019 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction while analyzing the global progress that has been made by the states and discussing the various methods of moving forward in order to create and implement national development plans for DRR strategies. This article also pays close attention to the areas of specific progress that have been made by Azerbaijan and reviews the future expectations held by the Global Platform and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

## 2. WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE?

The main question among the participants of the platform for the last two years has been the progress that is being made towards the implementation of the SFDRR. Informational data that has been provided from the relevant states to the SFDRR Monitoring and examination of the 2019 UN Global Assessment Report has made clear indications that there has been significant levels of improvement in various areas of progress (UNDRR, 2019a). In total, 116 Member States have been reporting to the SFDRR Monitoring system and this provides analysts with a useful instrument for comprehending and acting upon the dynamic risks and challenges that exist across the world and as a means of better implementing the SFDRR and SDGs. The data that has been collected in SFDRR Monitoring has highlighted novel and innovative approaches to reducing disaster risk, adapting to the adverse effects of climate change and the promotion of sustainable development. In accordance with information that has been collected, research has been conducted in order to analyze the social, economic and environmental perspectives as a way to provide better resilience and risk-informed policies.

The Global Platform has reported that 91 countries have already developed their National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction ahead of 2020, which is the deadline for the Target E (National Disaster Reduction Strategy) of the SFDRR (UNDRR, 2019c). However, when taking into consideration that only around half of the member states have developed their national strategy for disaster risk reduction, there may need to be a reassessment of the time limit. It is likely that implementation of a further extended deadline might be necessary for a number of countries in order to complete their national strategy. The national strategy on disaster risk reduction is also a crucial component in the reduction of

the mortality rate associated with disasters, which has been on the rise across the globe. Most specifically, national strategies are of vital importance in the lowering of natural hazard related mortalities for those living in countries characterized by low and middle incomes. Economic losses that are related to disasters have been increasing every year and this situation is relevant to all the countries around the planet. Whether they be high-income countries, middle-income countries, the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries as well as small island states, all nations have been presented with rising levels of economic losses and challenges year after year (UNDRR, 2019b).

In general, there is a diverse range of risks that currently threaten our world. The present and future habitants of Earth face a broad number of dangers that include climate change as well as biological and industrial accidents. New and emerging types of hazards have brought about new financial and environmental challenges and it is therefore vital to develop awareness of these risks with innovative and dynamic approaches. A global methodology for a strategy of comprehensive risk reduction is principally the recognition of the primary groups of people that are at risk of being adversely affected by potential disasters. Vulnerable groups of people include persons with disabilities, elderly people, children, women, displaced people as well as refugees (PFR, 2019). If the SFDRR did not exist, we would be equipped with only traditional methods of data collection and, as a result, reports being submitted by contributing countries would not indicate aggregated information on disability, sex and age. A disproportionate disaster risk reduction policy would result in insufficient commitments towards a comprehensive disaster risk reduction approach. Therefore, the Global Platform 2019 has recognized the contemporary speed and action of the governments along with other stakeholders and has announced that the current pace is not fast enough to successfully reach the goals and targets asserted in the current SFDRR and SDGs (ISC, 2019).

## 3. MOVING FORWARD

Having an understanding of the ways that we will deal with risks is of critical importance. In order to re-examine the past and to move forward it is necessary to adopt a systematic approach that leverages the advantages associated with implementing multi-hazard risk assessments. In this framework, global risk assessment is the platform that is required in order to reach professionals from both public and private sectors and researchers from various fields of science as well as experts from UN institutions and allow them to collectively develop a working group for the further implementation of the SFDRR. As made clear in the GP19, in order for international cooperation to advance, it is necessary to implement a novel approach with new styles and dimensions of risk reduction. Just as international relations between countries requires cooperation on social, political and economic issues, collaboration on disaster risk reduction strategies also needs to be taken into consideration as a key component of bilateral and multilateral relations. Such an approach would also be very likely to serve to increase the collective awareness of the potential risk factors while accelerating the decision-making process and changing the global risk reduction behaviors.

Moving forward equipped with comprehensive and informative data that has been collected professionally is the key for effectively managing exposure and vulnerability to various risks. Because of this reason, making better use of collected data that has been reported by the states in SFDRR monitoring is a very strategic way of taking further action in disaster risk reduction. Since the Sendai Framework has been accepted, the UNDRR has made the announcement that the office will provide the necessary assistance to countries in the development of disaster loss databases. This assistance would also serve as a contribution to the DRR cooperation between local and central governments together with the private sector and civil society. In order to reach the SDGs, SFDRR and other global framework targets, it is necessary for national governments, private enterprises along with individuals and communities at the micro and macro levels to develop their capacities for preventing disasters and building up resilience for unpredictable or unavoidable consequences. For the manifestation of such coherent capacities, states and other stakeholders require access to adequate funding for local strategies, policies, programs as well as dynamic platforms for risk assessment.

The inclusion of marginalized groups of people and responsible gender-sensitive approaches in addition to specific attention for children and youth can help contribute to the implementation of a stronger disaster risk reduction policy. Furthermore, the part that mass media plays is also an important means of effectively implementing the Sendai Framework. The role of mass media should not just be limited to the spreading of information about the aftermath of a disaster but rather to educate and enlighten members of the public of their potential roles in making a contribution to disaster risk reduction behaviors, protocols and contingency plans. Therefore, it is necessary that a dynamic and critical mechanism is created between both national and international media organizations in order to ensure a greater level of cooperation and exchange of information. The goal of facilitating cooperation at international levels first needs a regional approach in order to promote the notion of countries engaging in regional transboundary risks with their neighboring nations. Such risks can be viewed as providing great opportunities that are mutually beneficial for the domestic growth of both countries. This approach would also promote the exchange of information that concerns the national strategies being implemented by governments of any neighboring countries. Strategies like this are likely to generally promote the coherent and dynamic implementation and planning of the disaster risk reduction strategies.

#### 4. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The national disaster risk reduction strategy is regarded as the main element that serves to guarantee the successful implementation of the Sendai Framework (UNDRR 2019c). Governments should create and enact local and regional strategies together with domestic and international organizations in the private sector in order to ascertain knowledge and develop solutions that have been demonstrated to significantly reduced the likelihood and severity of known risks. It is generally understood that contemporary urbanization is in need of better

information and data as well as a more integrated system of urban-rural design in addition to greater levels of financial support. This brings us to the next level of resilience: disaster resistant infrastructure. Every level of government, whether it be local, regional or federal, needs to firmly establish a risk-informed, ecosystem oriented road map for the development of critically important infrastructure. This framework allows government officials to provide recommendations to industries and a more stable investment environment for the private sectors. From health care infrastructure to industrial developments, all sectors of an economy are in vital need of a disaster risk reduction strategy as well as policies that endeavor to address any potential consequences of possible disasters. The continual updating of climate change and environmental policies also need to be taken into account in the framework of a nation's critical infrastructure (UNDRR, 2019c).

Successful implementation of national development plans also requires the use of central forecast-based financing. It is clearly evident that long-term sustainable development strategies require new and ongoing financial investments into a variety of industrial sectors within a country's economy. Currently, the acquisition of financial resources is one of the main concerns for a number of countries as a means of developing their national plans and strategies. The significant roles of international financial institutions are undeniable but it is important to emphasize the crucial duties of the governments in the creation of a transparent functioning platform for these donor and financial institutions to assist them in the development of their programs for financing various sectors of their domestic economies. The investment strategies and fiscal policies of each country should be focused on prevention and resilient building policies as opposed to damage-control of the aftermath of a destructive event as well as any reconstruction protocols. This is the area where a comprehensive and dynamic risk-informed road map comes into play in ensuring that investments and financial developments are not overly risk sensitive but have a clear disaster risk reduction strategy. In this framework, the most essential components are the partnerships existing between public and private entities, the engagement of national and central banks, as well as the credit rating agencies' abilities to facilitate the reaching of the goals of resilient economies and cities. Strong forms of investment also need to be innovative and based on each individual country's specific needs, which may differ largely according to different geographic locations. The involvement of both small and medium enterprises also needs to be integrated into public and private disaster risk reduction partnerships.

In general, the development of a national disaster risk reduction strategy requires countries to take into consideration the numerous pathways and actions available, which include creating resilient DRR governance system, implementing multi-hazard methods, promoting unity between sustainable development, climate change and disaster risk reduction, stimulating the whole of society strategically, integrating DRR across all sectors of the economy, linking and exchanging national strategies with the regional approaches and building customized strategies that are suitable for specific countries.

## 5. WHAT HAS AZERBAIJAN GAINED FROM GP19?

Azerbaijan has very clearly communicated its position on the reduction of the risks and severity of potential disasters and has laid down firm foundations for ongoing development and innovation in this area. The government's stance is essentially that the prevention of a catastrophic disaster through investment into risk reduction strategies and contingency plans is much a more efficient and economically tactical than having to pay for the significantly higher and more devastating costs of the consequences of possible disasters. Within the territory of Azerbaijan, more than half of the area covers a landscape composed of highly mountainous terrain and an extensive river basin. It is believed that approximately half of the country's territory and 80% of the population are at risk of the effects of catastrophic disasters. Examples of potential natural disasters in the country include strong earthquakes, frequent landslides, hail storms, droughts and floods. Such potentialities have the potential to cause horrendous damage and are a serious threat to the safety and wellbeing of people, which is seen as a significant hinderance to the country's sustainable development roadmap. Since the country is geographically situated in one of the most seismically active regions of the world, the occurrences of earthquakes are a constant and imminent threat. In addition to natural disasters, it is necessary to take into account the potential risks of human-caused catastrophes that could result from the growing number of urbanization and regional energy projects that are engaging in the development of critical infrastructure within the region. All of these factors create an atmosphere that is vulnerable to a high risk of both natural disasters as well as man-made disasters.

The natural disasters that have been occurring in large areas across the territory of Azerbaijan usually cause direct damage to the economy of the country. Such a scenario is particularly apparent with the negative effects that come about during and following mudflows, which have unfortunately become a regular event for civilians. In response to threats like this, more than 750 assessment activities have been implemented in Azerbaijan in recent years in order to ensure the maximum prevention of the consequences of man-made and natural disasters. Thus, one of the main goals of the Strategic Development Plan of the Republic of Azerbaijan until 2020 has been to guarantee the safety of individuals and society as a whole through the creation of conditions that reduce risks and minimize potential damage from man-made accidents and hazards as well as natural disasters. Issues of prevention of emergency situations are included in various program sections within the fields of health care, agriculture, housing and communal services, space activities, as well as the mineral resource industries (ECO, 2017).

Disaster Risks need to be managed at local, national and international levels in order to reduce the likelihood and severity of the consequences of their occurrence. It is therefore necessary to make changes in the development of strategies and planning processes at both national and global levels. In this sense, the Global Platform has provided the Republic of Azerbaijan with an ideal opportunity to further the development of dialogues, share valuable experience and transfer knowledge between key decision-makers. The country is faced with a clear task, which

is to increase the level of resilience to disasters, in particular to reduce the damage they cause while also counteracting the consequences and catalysts of catastrophic events. A National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction is being developed in the Sendai framework of priorities for the Prevention and Elimination of Emergencies (UNDRR, 2016). Increasing levels of efficiency are being comprehensively achieved through the interaction and consolidation of all levels of the entire system while eliminating the potential consequences of major emergencies by means of regional centers, local authorities, as well as organizations. The national strategy can be viewed as the key mechanism for the implementation of the Sendai Framework Program. Its application provides coordination and analysis while offering ongoing assistance and support for the integration of disaster risk reduction measures in various areas of government activity and policy-making. The national strategy will play an ongoing crucial role in confirming the results of the biennial assessments of the progress that has been made towards achieving the global targets that have been set out in the Sendai Framework.

At the present time, the main activities of the Republic of Azerbaijan are to correspond to the strategic goals and priorities of the Sendai Framework and take action toward the implementation of the following items:

- Develop and coordinate a national strategy and application of best practices in the field of protection against natural disasters;
- Develop annual work programs for their actions, priorities, and objectives in accordance with the strategic objectives in the field of disaster protection and disaster risk reduction;
- Organize the preparation of progress reports on goals in the Sendai Framework and include reports in the monitoring portal;
- Support stakeholders in the development and integration of monitoring systems;
- Support the development of methodologies for the analysis, assessment, and mapping of disaster risk maps.
- Coordinate with the relevant structures of the Cabinet of Ministers in planning further actions on the national strategy within the framework of the Sendai Program;
- Analyze and evaluate international documents in the field of disaster risk reduction and protection from natural disasters;
- Organize and maintain information campaigns on various types of risks and disaster response.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the contemporary world, cooperation and integration in the field of disaster risk reduction remains the most vital multilateral strategy for the governments of all countries to employ. In the last two decades, conservative estimates suggest that disasters have caused at least 200 billion USD of economic damage throughout the world every year. Around 300 million inhabitants of the world have suffered from the devastating effects of various disasters throughout numerous countries (ISC, 2019). In spite of this, it is also important to take into consideration the fact that these figures increase every year largely due to the significant increases in levels of population growth and populations extending land use

and urbanization. However, increasing environmental issues and climate change are also playing a key role. Furthermore, it is not just populated areas that have been the target of disasters but also many important areas where vital infrastructure has been built. During any disastrous event, most countries must usually face serious problems associated with economic losses as well as damage to the critical social infrastructures, such as schools, hospitals and residential facilities. Damage to such infrastructure can be particularly costly for countries that have weak disaster risk reduction policies and are less equipped to deal with the possible consequences of catastrophic events. As such, it is a vital necessity that all of the countries around the globe implement dynamic and robust strategies for dealing with disaster risk reduction, prevention of risks, preparation for any events involving high-risk activities, research, adaptation to local environmental changes as well as ongoing development of comprehensive strategies and plans. The implementation of disaster risk reduction and resilient national and international programs is more likely to pay off in the long-term timeframe than demonstrate immediate results. This is because DRR is a unique field that involves many diverse areas of expertise and so successful coordination and implementation needs a significant amount of time and financial investment. Accordingly, it can be proposed that a greater level of awareness in every field is the key to comprehensive understanding as well as strong implementation of a successful policy of the disaster risk reduction.

In a review of the 2019 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, it was clear to see that there have been a number of significant levels of progress as well as a number of innovative strategies that are being developed and implemented in the SFDRR. However, it is also clear the current level of progress it is not sufficient to reach the projected targets by 2030. This is mainly the result of a lack of necessary support for developing countries. Increasing countries' capacities for constructing key infrastructure that is based on disaster loss data and risk assessment will be the key for dealing with future disaster vulnerability and exposure to risk. Therefore, many countries, in particular the landlocked and the least developed countries are the main states that are in need of assistance in developing a better focus on increasing their building capabilities, disaster preparedness and aftermath reconstruction programs. Furthering improvements to the implementations of the multi-hazard early warning systems are also critical in advancing the effectiveness of their strategy. Finally, there is a need for greater political commitments in order to further implement and integrate the SFDRR into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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