

Overview of UN Side-Event on SDG1: Community-level adaptation practices to reduce disaster risk, build resilience and end poverty

Held on 14th November 2016, this side-event focused on hearing from community leaders and government officials their lessons in addressing adaptation and disaster risk reduction from the local perspective, towards the Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG1) of ending poverty. Moderated by Mary Robinson, Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate Change, the side-event was organized by a number of UN agencies, including WFP, UNISDR, World Bank, OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP, FAO, with contributions also from WMO, UNCTAD, UNU, UN Habitat, UN OHRLLS, UNICEF and UNESCO.



Under Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), Mr Gyan Chandra Acharya, opened the side-event, emphasising this side-event was important to understand and address needs of the most vulnerable, remote communities, including least developed countries (LDCs) with large coastal areas and small island states.

Mary Robinson, Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate highlighted her pleasure in this side-event's approach, reflecting a new way of thinking, where many UN bodies have collaborated to look at the important issues of climate change adaptation by listening to the voices of those directly engaged in adaptation practices and coping strategies at the community level. Ms Robinson reflected that Paris and Sendai have already given us powerful solutions at hand, and that we now need to bring those solutions to scale in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind. The way we approach this work is critical to success. Solutions need to be experienced at community level and community level actors need to be engaged in addressing the challenges. Successful responses integrate diverse approaches that build on community planning, rights-based approaches, full gender inclusion, risk management strategies, climate science and institutional support such as social protection. Achieving this at scale also requires partnerships across the public and private sector, with the UN system aiming to support people and countries by listening to the experts on the ground dealing with the frontline response.

Panelists were then introduced and each challenged to address the questions of their lessons learnt in community adaptation practices, on how to bring adaptation to scale, and to reflect on the UN system's role in supporting these efforts.

Nina Gualinga, an indigenous woman from Kichwa Community of Sarayaku, first gave her story of an oil company coming to her community to drill for oil. A large part of the community were opposed to the oil exploitation based on impacts they had observed in other places. Ms Gualinga highlighted the resiliency of her community and of indigenous people to be at the frontline of protecting land and the impacts of climate change, and how important it is that such people are not criminalised by big corporations and governments. UN and NGOs can play an important role in supporting indigenous people and local communities. Mary Robinson reflected how indigenous and local peoples are both the most at risk to climate change but also the ones defending our environment the most.

Prema Gopalan, Founder and Executive Director of Swayam Shikshan Pra yog (SSP - Self Education for Empowerment) in India, is part of the GROOTS international worldwide grassroots network of women's organizations. She conveyed the message of a number of "lighthouse" women (to be awarded by the UNFCCC tomorrow), who have brought light and energy through their knowledge building efforts. A thousand women entrepreneurs have not just delivered clean energy solutions but used it an entry point for dealing with disaster risks and extreme climate events. Several decades of drought in western India have seen regular farmer suicides and challenges for government to provide water. Women have become part of the solution by taking on new roles within community leadership. In the last decade, a cookstove project sponsored by BP has allowed women to combat indoor air pollution in their homes, but also improve the productivity, saving half a million dollars on cooking fuel. At the same time, the project has focused on disaster risk reduction, diversification of livelihoods and sustainability, with many innovations emerging. Ms Gopalan concluded that we should leave COP22 recognising that women are no longer the end users or beneficiaries but as full partners, with the need for financial mechanisms to allow women and communities to drive change

through a bottom up approach that focuses on empowering the most vulnerable to climate change.

Samuel Pohiva, Secretary of Tonga's Local Government and Community Development and Head of Tonga National Safety and Protection Cluster at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, also reflected that a bottom up approach is the best means to address climate change issues. Mr Pohiva indicated that this approach is part of the Tonga Government's strategic framework, having completed almost 140 local community plans in the past few years with a risk and vulnerability focus. Incorporating gender and social issues within their scope, these plans have been drawn from communities and endorsed by the Government. The role of the Government has been to facilitate people in their communities to bring out their priorities. There have been challenges, as such a process is intensive and involves a wide range of partners. A lack of capacity at the local level can also require more support from the Government, along with adequate, flexible and accessible financing for communities to put plans into action. Mr Pohiva also highlighted that to end poverty, an important focus of this work is to build people's longer-term resilience alongside addressing climate risks, including loss and damage.

Sonya Orre, Director of Technical Services at Kenya's National Drought Management Authority talked about the country's Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), which has been so far put in place in 4 counties. The UN family has contributed a lot to the HSNP to address the challenges that drought have posed. Support from DFID allowed the Government to pilot cash transfers through the HSNP in 2009, with equal contributions of support from both DFID and the Government at the start, but with the Government doubling its contributions every year; the Government will take over the programme in 2017. Thus far over half of the HSNP's investment has been in food transfers, with support also going to resilience building, savings schemes and an education incentive. The cash transfer component has been important in supporting Kenya's market systems, including its cash economy and banking. Mr Orre reflected that a lesson has been that the responsiveness of a community based system requires a policy towards early warning and action, building in a "no regrets" function, where funds are set aside to facilitate quick action. Contingency planning is also important, building on a number of scenarios.

Special Envoy Robinson rounded up the discussion with a number of remarks. She highlighted there are great opportunities to scale up and accelerate action for climate change adaptation, with a lot of power in supporting local movements. The risk of not engaging local communities was highlighted as well. It is also vitally important to ensure inclusive rights-based climate action that benefits everyone - and particularly those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. There is also an instrumental role that national governments can play in supporting community-led action and bringing a coherent approach that links global objectives from the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the SDGs to local action. It is also important to set up facilities to provide financial support and grants to local communities, and to develop social protection schemes and support early warning with funds set aside for community-level response. The UN can play a critical role by supporting local people to implement their solutions, to support multiple partnerships, and to steer solutions towards a new way of working and that involves continually listening to people's experiences on the ground. The

current El Niño and its impacts provide a window into this potential future under climate change with the Blueprint for Action, an important tool to ensure that climate and disaster information is used to avoid humanitarian consequences that have affected 60 million people around the world. We cannot afford these challenges to continue, if we are to realize SDG1 and leaving no one behind.

Under Secretary Acharya concluded that while we need global goals such as the SDGs, the lessons from today's discussion is that if we want to deliver, we need to deliver at the local level, and institutionalize support at the government level.

Click [here](#) to access the recording of the event.

