



## A People-centered, Preventive Approach to Disaster Risk

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### Abstract

*As natural disasters increase and intensify around the world, their consequences are felt most acutely in those countries less equipped to cope with them, economically and politically. The current response to such disasters is mostly reactive; however, this paper will argue that such disasters need, instead, a pro-active, comprehensive, preventative, and human-centred approach that has the capability of fostering change in human perspective, attitude and preparedness. This activist approach will not only involve the affected workers and population at large, as both resource and beneficiary, but should also be based on the establishment of Decent Work,\* as per the ILO definition: decent job opportunities and rights at work, which will contribute to fostering social and economic development. Such an approach entails a number of characteristics: an effective methodology; the active participation of employers' and workers' organizations; employment and livelihood concerns; anticipating and mitigating risks; collaboration among the public and private sectors, and the social economy; efficient and cost-effective multiple responses; a better plan of rebuilding; and reconstruction and recovery efforts that recognize and foster diversity. Implementation of such an approach must involve a coordinated effort among governments, the UN agencies, social partners, business and civil society organizations.*

### Foreword by Alberto Zucconi†

We have finally become aware and concerned about the rising risks of climate warming, the destruction of natural and human capital and the significant part that human behaviour has in impacting all the life forms of our planet. This awareness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for dealing effectively with such man made catastrophes. Successfully managing these emergencies requires the awareness that we not only need effective tools of diagnosis but effective tools of intervention as well. The efforts of disaster prevention and mitigation need to use more effective tools than in the past. The mechanistic approaches have clearly shown their limits, that too often they have been giving not only poor results but even some boomerang effects.

\*The decent-work agenda of the International Labour Organization is an important instrument for achieving the objective of full and productive employment and decent work for all through the promotion and realization of the fundamental principles and rights at work, creation of greater and equal opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and income, and enhancement of the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all and the strengthening of social dialogue ( ref. :ECOSOC Resolution 2008/18 Promoting full employment and decent work for all)

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Too often we have acted without consideration of some basic facts: that reality is socially construed, that there are many variables simultaneously at work, that we need to see, think and act systemically, address all the variables, especially the bio-psycho-social and spiritual ones and that our help needs to be offered by empowering the people, the communities, the regions and nations using person-centered, people-centered, culture-centered and community-centered approaches scientifically validated in order to avoid the risks of disempowerment, passivation, and of negative costs/benefits ratios that have undermined the results of too many good willed actions. It is quite encouraging to see that in this important paper Donato Kiniger- Passigli and Anna Biondi clearly address all these fundamental issues and that the UN agencies are taking the leadership in this direction. Hopefully we will see soon the dissemination of best practices of this promising course of action.

## 1. Introduction

Today, as the overall world risk situation continues to worsen dramatically as a result of natural disasters, the vast majority of such disasters and the consequences of their impact on people as well as property are regrettably concentrated in countries less equipped to cope with them in terms of ensuring assets and transfer costs of recovery. The preparedness and response to these disasters must be as dramatic as the disasters themselves. In this paper we will argue that such measures should be part of a comprehensive and human-centred approach that begins with fostering change in human perspective, attitude and preparedness. The underlying assumptions of our position lie in the innate, determinative capacity of humans to be active in meeting challenges as opposed to passively reacting to them. This activism is, furthermore, most effective when the affected population is both the beneficiary and resource for meeting the need of preparedness. In addition, a further challenge is to establish a comprehensive approach, addressing multiple dimensions and utilizing various types of resource capabilities and strategies. This universal challenge is best met by the unique role of international organizations, in general, and specifically, by the ILO's approach to disaster management based on social and economic justice.

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Evidence shows a growing need to improve emergency preparedness globally and, in particular, in countries at higher risks of natural hazards and conflict, i.e., the poorest and most fragile. In these countries, disasters are likely to exacerbate already existing weaknesses and instabilities due to the scarcity of human capital and due to the destruction of social capital.

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Climate change brings with it extreme conditions, such as floods, landslides, earthquakes, wildfires, tsunamis, typhoons (such as Haiyan) with unprecedented winds and storms: natural disasters that unfortunately will probably increase in frequency and intensity in the near future. Equally, if not more devastating, are the effects of progressive desertification, rising sea levels, carbon emissions and ecological disasters of all kinds.

The truth is that there is nothing “natural” about disasters, as they are largely provoked by human activities.<sup>‡</sup> While we cannot stop a hazard from happening, it is possible to act in order to *prevent* it from becoming a major disaster and to mitigate its effects.

Furthermore, disasters, if not prevented or mitigated, will have a major impact on the world of work, adding numbers to temporary or long-term unemployment in countries where the lack of decent work is already the rule, in rural areas (among agricultural workers and share croppers) and in urban and semi-urban peripheries where large numbers of emarginated youth survives, often in idleness.

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The International Labour Organization (ILO), historically the first specialized agency of the UN system that addresses labour and economic life, aims at supporting its constituents through rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction. The ILO’s constituents – governments and social partners (workers’ and employers’ organizations) – contribute substantially to set in place and implement recovery programmes based on employment intensive schemes, productive jobs, social protection, human and labour rights, and social dialogue. Based on this comprehensive approach, alongside UN partners, the organization works towards prevention, mitigation and improved disaster preparedness.

## 2. Preparedness is the Key

Higher preparedness is key to reducing risk levels, developing the capacity to respond and reinforcing the ability to recover both at community and workplace levels. The promotion of resilient employment and livelihood opportunities is an integral part of higher preparedness, and by enhancing the capacity of communities to survive, adapting and growing in spite of adverse conditions produces social and economic stability.

In order to create decent job opportunities and dignified occupations, a multidisciplinary, people-centred approach has to be set in place with joint efforts of governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations, local communities and civil society at large. Preparedness should not be treated as an afterthought in the wake of mega disasters; on the contrary, it should be designed to fit people’s requirements and skills, to ensure better living and working standards, and to anticipate post-disaster recovery needs.

Technological responses alone are doomed to failure or can be easily “misunderstood” and misused as demonstrated in the early days of the post-tsunami recovery when the “Lost

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<sup>‡</sup> According to the definition provided in the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), a hazard is a “damaging physical event, phenomenon or human activity and can have different origins, natural or induced by human processes.” This definition implies that technological hazards are within the remit of disaster risk reduction and legitimates the workplace as a centre stage of disaster risk reduction in view of its role in prevention, mitigation, recovery and rehabilitation.

in Translation” Syndrome caused more harm than good in many villages on the shores of the Indian Ocean.

This is why preparedness measures should be developed along people’s cultural and traditional beliefs with innovative methods that build upon those endogenous, ancestral and original models, while ensuring a comprehensive and contemporary rights-based approach, including, for example, gender equality issues, if need be.

But what does it take to be prepared?

First and foremost, it requires us to **have at hand a mix of designed settings, proper skills and an effective methodology**. As stated, this not only means seeking out very expensive solutions (often not affordable in developing countries) but creating the necessary safeguards and awareness, and continuously building the capacities of local and international experts in anticipation of possible disasters. With this aim, the ILO has successfully mainstreamed the employment and livelihood dimensions into the post disaster needs assessment initiative led by the UN family, the EU and the World Bank. The global rollout of the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) training in 2014 has generated a growing pool of experts ready to be deployed upon demand.

In their efforts to preserve assets and development gains from the devastating consequences of disasters, countries should strengthen participatory planning mechanisms, encouraging the active **participation of employers’ and workers’ organizations (with a national, local and sectoral component)** in disaster risk management.

**Employment and livelihood concerns** should be factored into disaster risk management of vulnerable countries, considering in particular the planning and management of rural and urban development and of ecosystems, and focusing on strategies to reduce livelihood risk and increase resilience. **Workplaces** should be placed center stage for disaster risk reduction in view of their role with managers and trade union representatives as frontlines in de-escalating the impact of disasters through prevention, mitigation, recovery and rehabilitation. Existing Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) Committees should be enhanced in order to include these new skills, and new ones should be created where needed. Collaboration between employers’ and workers’ representatives in OSH committees is, in fact, the first step in establishing a culture of prevention and mitigation: it must not be forgotten that the workplace is also a potential source of major industrial and technological disasters, and that a key strategy in preventing and dealing with them is to adopt a health and safety approach based on the respect of international labour standards. Positive synergies also need to be established with labour *inspectors* as well as along the supply chains, including across countries.

While intervening in a disaster setting, a **people-centred** approach is required, focussing on human needs and livelihood concerns. Helping people to recover their means of earning a living is central to the ILO’s overall mission. Economic recovery enables people to reduce their reliance on long-term relief, adding to self-motivation, dignity and a sense of purpose. Alongside direct relief to affected people, local public and private markets, services and businesses that provide employment or support livelihoods more broadly also need to be assisted. Livelihood recovery can be part of rebuilding homes and infrastructure through

employment-intensive schemes, and it is more likely to be successful when reconstruction avoids the simplistic relocation of people or settlements, or simply rebuilding “as it was”, without innovative approaches which will anticipate and prevent future problems.

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Being prepared also means **anticipating and mitigating risks**, such as climate change, through innovative approaches. For example, in 2011 the ILO completed a pilot project on climate change adaptation in the Philippines that developed an integrated financial package with weather index-based insurance to help service providers identify high-risk communities that are not covered by regular financial institutions. The results were promising: In the face of climatic risks, the identified communities were able to continue their production by applying climate-informed decisions and reduced their risk through a more diversified source of income and better access to insurance schemes.

The private sector involvement in disaster risk reduction is key in achieving a solid integrated approach to share expertise and capacities in order to develop an enabling environment for recovery and to minimise the long-term impacts of a hazard. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ILO is currently collaborating with collective representations of the private sector in developing blueprints for businesses to prepare for and respond to disaster situations. Through social dialogue, the ILO facilitates the active participation of entrepreneurs and workers’ organizations at both the community and national levels in order to develop suitable business continuity plans along the supply chain to be activated when a disaster strikes.

While governments need to retain and increase their firm governance role in disaster risk reduction, the **collaboration between the public and private sectors** is also an important driver in achieving a solid integrated approach, in sharing expertise and capacities for prevention and response, in developing an enabling environment for recovery, and in minimizing the long-term impacts of hazards and risks. In particular, the development of **business continuity plans** through the participation of employers’ and workers’ organizations has the potential of contributing to the protection of workers’ lives, of maintaining adequate standards for health and safety, of promoting job and income security, and of reducing business losses.

Plans to guarantee the continuity of public services should be developed and implemented in all critical sectors, given their utmost importance. Such plans, currently being discussed with communities and civil society organizations, should involve the public sector unions in their design, ensuring ownership, positive response and support from the start.

Lessons learned from previous sudden disasters show that appropriate preparedness reduces the impact of disasters and lays the foundations for quicker business recovery. Such preparedness restores quality jobs and incomes, while also improving key enterprise functions, processes and practices, with positive spillover effects at the community level.

Along with continuity of business and public service delivery, livelihood support is key to minimizing the impact of disaster-induced population displacement/forced migration, and a precondition for addressing it through durable solutions.

Providing a smooth transition from relief to recovery is also central to disaster preparedness. Only when employment and development opportunities are maximised from day-one of the relief effort can we foster a strong and lasting recovery and, at the same time, address underlying risks and vulnerabilities. In the 2010 massive earthquake that hit Haiti, the ILO programme included emergency employment-intensive reconstruction, jointly with the promotion of quality jobs in enterprises and the enhancement of entrepreneurship skills. Several enterprise service centres have since been opened, which provide practical, technical and managerial training in recycling the debris material into pavement blocks, and in road and public space rehabilitation. Small enterprises have acquired the capacity to repair roads; workers have been trained and trainers equipped with business development skills. More work is needed – especially in reference to securing better wages, conditions of work and collective agreements for workers – but this action has shown a practical way towards longer-lasting solutions, desperately needed on the island.

In Somalia, the ILO has worked with the government and local implementing organizations in employment-intensive infrastructure investments. Flood-retaining walls, catchments, roads and irrigation canals have been constructed and rehabilitated, generating work opportunities for women and men: again, a small contribution on the way towards decent work in a difficult setting for workers and their families.

Such activities aim at involving local business and workers' representatives in disaster risk reduction, and taking actions to enhance their disaster resilience at the local level. Natural and man-made disasters also **require efficient and cost-effective multiple responses** to strengthen national and local coping mechanisms. With increasing hazards, humanitarian needs threaten to increase beyond the capacity of governments and of the international emergency response system. Action is needed to tackle natural and human-made risks, to reduce the scale and costs of humanitarian interventions, and to increase their effectiveness; on the other hand, adequate resources need to be allocated for prevention if the national government and the international community believe in such prevention beyond mere slogans.

At this critical juncture, when a Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is being prepared, participants in the discussions leading to next March's World Conference in Sendai, Japan, have importantly recognized that "disaster risk is a combined result of hazard, exposure and vulnerability" and that among underlying risk drivers – such as unequal economic development, poverty, inequality, weak governance and local capacities and climate change – compound disaster risk and, hence, determine higher losses. The vicious circle of fragility is determined by social crises, risks of violent conflict, unemployment and precarious conditions of work, lack of participation, inequality and discrimination. The response is a combination of reducing levels of risks, strengthening social and economic resilience, and adopting a just transition to a "greening" economy in response to the global climate change challenge.

Preparedness also **requires a better plan of rebuilding.** Reconstruction and recovery efforts must take future hazards and risks into account. In the Philippines, the ILO supported the Department of Labour and Employment in creating jobs in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan. This effort was made to create quality jobs (from the temporary jobs in the aftermath of the crisis), with a guaranteed minimum wage, and protective gear and clothing as well as health and social security contributions – to help improve living and working conditions of affected communities.

*“A disaster may be transformed into an opportunity for improvement.”*

### 3. Integrated Approach

**Reconstruction and recovery efforts must also recognize and foster diversity.** Communities and populations affected by disasters are not homogeneous. Different groups have different needs, skills and capabilities. In its disaster recovery efforts, the ILO gives special consideration, in particular, to the needs of women, indigenous people and disadvantaged groups. In this sense, a disaster may be transformed into an opportunity for improvement. If projects and programmes are well-designed and implemented, we can build the capacity of institutions; expand access to services, such as health and education; reduce poverty and strengthen livelihood security; advance gender equality; and empower and open up spaces for civil society. ILO intervention is always based on creating an opportunity for implementation in practice of International Labour Standards. When addressing this topic, a mix of standards is needed for guidance: fundamental rights at work (which include freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, elimination of child labour, forced labour and discrimination) are considered “enabling rights” for workers, especially in condition of distress or great vulnerability, and they need to be respected, together with other standards, such as C. 122 on Employment, C. 169 on Indigenous people, C. 174 on Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents, among others.

A specific mention should be given to C. 94 on Labour Clauses in Public Contracts, which is particularly relevant if – in the aftermath of a disaster – the public bodies charged with reconstruction want to truly build longer lasting examples, both for public and private contractors.<sup>§</sup>

An integrated approach is needed to reinforce local capacities, shift from a reactive to a preventive approach, establish robust public-private partnerships and secure ways for the private sector to increase their investments in risk management and business continuity.

If more investments are directed towards disaster risk reduction programmes, more quality jobs may also be created. In parallel, governments and local institutions should promote an effective understanding of measures at hand and offer effective solutions to the challenges communities are facing in order to build a society resilient to disasters. As stated in the UN Plan of Action, resilience can be achieved only through higher preparedness, a higher capability to respond and a higher ability to recover. Generating resilient jobs and livelihoods that can withstand shocks is key to this endeavour as they ultimately create a better working

<sup>§</sup> For the full list of ILO standards please see: <http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/introduction-to-international-labour-standards/lang--en/index.htm>

environment, better skills, and improvements in production, income-generation and safety at work.

Achieving resilience requires all stakeholders, both in the public and private sectors, to participate and assume responsibilities. Governments should promote – through specific incentives and mechanisms of cooperation with the local communities – a stronger engagement of social partners, of businesses and of officials in charge of local economic development in disaster risk reduction.

Private-public partnerships may offer useful avenues of reducing risk by leveraging business strategies (such as supply chain management and business continuity planning), and strengthening the foundations of resilience, leading to economic opportunities for the public sector as well as for small, medium and large enterprises and cooperatives. The principles of the ILO MNE Declaration are particularly important for companies that want to support workers and employers in managing risks along the supply chain.<sup>¶</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is worth re-stating that the main role of the international community and the multilateral system is to prevent disasters from happening through adequate planning, coherent efforts and sharing resources for implementing the sustainable development goals currently being set in the post-2015 agenda. In case a disaster strikes, the response should not aim to rebuild the status quo but to use the emergency as an opportunity for improvement. If the recovery is well-designed, development will follow, starting with the institutions' capacity-building as well as progress in a number of areas, such as health and education, poverty reduction, security of livelihood, gender equality, and the empowerment of men and women who have lived on the margins of society. Decent work has to be a key component of any successful strategy in rebuilding resilient and democratic societies.

We trust that the successor of the original Hyogo Framework for Action will contribute to the achievement of these goals.

As UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon urges us: “Ours is the first generation that can end poverty, and the last that can take steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. In this 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year in which we renew our commitment to the goals and principles of the UN charter, the international community must rise to the moment”.<sup>\*\*</sup>

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<sup>¶</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS\\_094386/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_094386/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>\*\*</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/12/last-generation-tackle-climate-change-un-international-community>