

# Stories of Impact

A series highlighting achievements in disaster risk management

## Understanding Risk: A Growing Global Community



**REGION:** GLOBAL  
**FOCUS:** RISK IDENTIFICATION



### RESULTS:

- The UR community has grown to more than 6,500 members, representing a diverse array of organizations in government, academia, civil society, and more from 135 countries.
- The UR community has contributed to a number of important GFDRR projects like *ThinkHazard!*, a new web-based tool enabling non-specialists to consider the impacts of disasters on new development projects, as well as the Challenge Fund, a joint program with DFID that supports innovation in risk identification.
- In addition to regular international events, the UR community boasts a vibrant online presence, with more than 12,000 users accessing resources and information via [UnderstandRisk.org](http://UnderstandRisk.org).

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Building resilience to natural hazards begins with a better understanding of disaster risk. In many developing countries, however, restrictive limits on budget and capacity often prevent government agencies and other stakeholders from undertaking the kinds of information gathering and analysis that enables targeted risk reduction investment. In an effort to bridge gaps in risk information and create a self-sustaining culture of resilience, together with partners around the world, the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) formed the Understanding Risk community in 2010.

Today, Understanding Risk (UR) is an open and global community of more than 6,500 experts and practitioners in the field of disaster risk assessment that seek to better facilitate non-traditional partnerships, encourage innovation, and promote best practices. UR members include representatives of government agencies, the private sector, multilateral organizations, nongovernmental organizations, community-based organizations, research institutions, and academia across 135 countries.



**WORLD BANK GROUP**



**GFDRR**  
Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery

## CONTEXT:

In the mid-2000's, the field of disaster risk assessment for non-insurance purposes began to emerge. Events like the Aceh earthquake and tsunami were making it clear to the international community that recurrent natural disasters were threatening sustainable development, and that coordinated action must be taken. Hindering effective investment, however, was a strong lack of data and an adequate understanding of risk.

GFDRR, along with its partners, formed Understanding Risk to create a strong and growing community committed to advancing the field of disaster risk identification and communication, recognizing that these activities cut across sectors and industries. The first UR Forum, held in Washington, DC, in June 2010, was attended by 500 practitioners representing 41 countries to promote the sharing of ideas and the exchange of knowledge through a series of expert-led technical sessions. Over the next 7 years, the community grew by more than 600%, holding 3 more global fora and a number of smaller international events, all while creating a vibrant online exchange.

## APPROACH:

Every two years, GFDRR convenes the UR Forum—a five-day event designed to showcase best practices and the latest technical know-how in disaster risk assessment. The fora provide organizations with the opportunity to highlight new activities and initiatives, build new partnerships, and foster advances in the field. GFDRR has also spearheaded a series of spin-off events called UR+, which are tailored to local contexts and challenges and can be implemented by other stakeholders.

Mostly, though, the UR community is connected digitally through a vibrant online exchange via the Understanding Risk website, monthly newsletters, and more. After each global forum, a detailed publication is also produced conveying an overview of lessons learned and insights gained throughout the multi-day agenda, all with the goal of increasing the use of risk information to make informed decisions.

An evaluation report of the UR program was recently undertaken, and found that 100% of randomly selected UR Forum attendees viewed the events positively, with 'networking spaces' as the most valued aspect of the program, followed by the technical sessions.

## NEXT STEPS:

The first priority of the recent Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is 'understanding disaster risk', showing that the core mission of UR is being recognized by the international community as a global priority, but also that there is much work left to be done. Capitalizing on the momentum of the previous 7 years, the UR community will look to build new partnerships and scale up activities going forward, with the next global UR Forum set for 2018.

### Contact

Alanna Simpson  
asimpson1@worldbank.org  
Learn more at [www.gfdr.org](http://www.gfdr.org)

\*ALL MONETARY VALUES IN USD



**“UR is one of those rare occasions where you bring academics and the commercial sector together, and they actually talk with each other – and not at each other.”**

– 2016 UR Forum attendee

## LESSONS LEARNED:

**Catalyzing innovative ideas requires inspirational places.** UR fora are known for creative, well-designed event spaces and entertaining schedules that allow for powerful collaborative opportunities. The UR community is also highly dispersed around the globe, making it equally important to have a physical space to convene (through the UR Forums and UR+ events), but also a rich and dynamic virtual environment to share knowledge and resources more frequently and across various mediums.

**Non-traditional partnerships are vital to building long-term resilience.** A core tenet of the UR community is that collaboration is the key to sustainably reducing disaster risk, especially between actors that rarely interact in a freeform environment – including government agencies, the private sector, civil society, and academia. UR attempts to give these diverse stakeholders the tools and spaces they need to build lasting, productive partnerships in pursuit of resilience. For example, the Understanding Risk and Finance conference in Addis Ababa brought together private sector firms and insurance companies with major development agencies to tackle risk management at regional, national, and local levels.