



4th World Reconstruction Conference: Inclusion for Resilient Recovery

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(5 minutes)

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Opening Plenary: Leave No One Behind

– Making Inclusion A Reality

Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
Disaster Risk Reduction

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you at the opening of this 4th World Reconstruction Conference. This is a really important discussion which can contribute much to strengthening our ability to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and to achieve the SDGs.

It is a hard reality that in today's world we are constantly in the process of reconstruction and trying to build back better after earthquakes, floods, storms and other natural hazards.

We will hear later today from Nepal where the reconstruction effort after the 2015 earthquakes continues on a scale so massive that ensuring the recovery is inclusive, remains a key challenge for the National Reconstruction Authority.

More recently, similar challenges have arisen for Mozambique and other countries in southern Africa, following the destruction caused by the unprecedented impact of two cyclones in rapid succession.

In India, Cyclone Foni has left a huge trail of devastation in its wake including homelessness and loss of livelihoods for many.

The reconstruction effort in all such cases should be seen as an opportunity.

An opportunity to correct existing inequalities in society and to ensure that during the process of reconstruction these inequalities are addressed in practical ways.

One of my favorite examples comes from India where the National Disaster Management Authority has promoted the practice of ensuring that where government support is provided to rehouse the displaced, the property title to the new home is in the name of both the husband and wife.

The recovery phase of any disaster is an ideal moment to promote gender equality.

In Nepal, the reconstruction effort has been used to bring many poor people into the national banking system.

By the simple measure of requiring all recipients of state aid for reconstruction to open a bank account, the Housing Reconstruction Authority has brought 700,000 people into the banking system who never had a bank account before.

This innovative measure along with all the technical support provided, has empowered many households and expanded their horizons in a way that was not possible before the earthquake.

The world over, it is the most vulnerable and the poor who lose most in any disaster.

They lose their modest homes. Their livelihoods. Access to health and education. And often struggle to feed and clothe themselves.

It is often the case that in the natural desire to help as many people as possible in the wake of a disaster that people who are already marginalized can fall through the cracks.

We have a great opportunity at this Conference and the Global Platform to underline how important is that this issue is addressed in national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction which should be in place by next year according to target (e) of the Sendai Framework.

The Sendai Framework emphasizes that the policies and practices for disaster risk management should be based on an understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets.

We know that in many cases it is the voices of women, girls, older persons, persons living with disabilities, single parent families, ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous peoples which are most often ignored when it comes to disaster preparedness and planning.

Those same people are placed at further risk of being ignored and sidelined in the recovery phase. They may lack mobility, literacy, proof of identity, land rights and the confidence to assert their entitlements.

Millions of people are displaced and pushed into poverty every year by disasters, often unable to afford the basic necessities.

If we are to make progress on eradicating poverty and reversing the rise in world hunger, inclusive recovery must be at the heart of our efforts to build back better.

Building back better is not simply shorthand for the safe construction of a house, a health facility or a school.

It is about empowering marginalized groups to publically lead on the recovery efforts in their communities.

Inclusive recovery must be people-centered. The recovery process should not be hijacked by vested interests for political or commercial gain.

We have an important opportunity today and tomorrow to learn from one another, from successes and failures, and together, to carve out a new path toward an inclusive, more resilient future.

I am looking forward to engaging with all of you, and to carrying the recommendations of this Conference forward for consideration at the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction later this week.

Thank you for your attention.