

SNAPSHOT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

February 10, 2017

Understanding Risk Forums

2010 WASHINGTON, DC

2012 CAPE TOWN

2014 LONDON

2016 VENICE



This publication was produced at the request of Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery's Innovation Lab. It was prepared by Tracy C. Thoman, Ph.D., Independent Consultant.

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I am deeply grateful to the Innovation Lab staff and leadership for this exciting opportunity to conduct the first-ever theory-based evaluation of its Understanding Risk Forums since they began back in 2010. Thank you for allowing the use of random sampling as a way to reduce natural bias that enters all human endeavor. You are a group of energetic, knowledgeable and compassionate people who are keenly aware of the power of humor. I am most appreciative for your confidence and support.

Of course the views expressed in this document do not reflect the official views of any organization. They are those of the evaluator only. All errors contained herein are mine alone.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A snapshot performance evaluation using mix methods and random sampling was conducted from November, 2016 to January 2017. Thirty-two people were interviewed for this study in an effort to address the following seven evaluation questions:

1. What are the effects of UR Forums on partners? (Partners refer to all categories of organizations that have been either financial or content partners of UR Forums.)
2. What are the effects of UR Forums on attendees? (Attendees include those from academia, governments, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral institutions, the private sector, etc.)
3. What are the main factors affecting UR community member participation/non-participation in the UR biennial events?
4. What factors contribute to attendee and content partner interest in becoming future financial partners?
5. How do all past and present partners view UR?
6. Which factor(s) contributed most to outcome-level results, where applicable?
7. Were there unintended consequences, positive or negative, as a result of the Forums?

Findings showed that the logic model underlying UR Forums is robust, providing strong evidence in support of the six outcome-level results these global events seek to achieve. Namely, this study found evidence which supports the first level in the Forum's theory of change:

*If risk information innovations are showcased at biennial forums; communications products are showcased; bilateral meetings are facilitated; training sessions are held; Expo space is offered; networking space is offered; technical sessions are held; initiatives are launched; Forum attendees are diverse; registration costs are low; creative settings are offered throughout the events; a publication is produced; Forum materials are made available online; a cocktail reception is held; lunch/coffee breaks are provided daily; an opening reception is held; and cultural entertainment is held, **assuming** there is significant interest and funds to attend among the risk information community, **then** the understanding of risk is improved; disaster risk assessment (DRA) and disaster risk communication (DRC) capacity is built; new partnerships are formed; knowledge is shared; targeted Communities of Practice are strengthened; and technical expertise is applied at the country level.*

Recommendations include the creation of a Steering Committee to provide input on content for future UR Forums, communicating the UR Forum logic model with the UR community of practice, planning UR events 18 months in advance, using the results of this evaluation to revise the UR Forum logic model, and consideration of charging a registration fee.

BACKGROUND

Understanding Risk (UR) is an open and global community of over 6,500 experts and practitioners in disaster risk assessment (DRA) and disaster risk communication (DRC) from more than 125 countries. Together they represent government agencies, the private sector, multilateral organizations, NGOs, research institutions, academia and civil society. The UR community convenes every two years at UR Forums – five-day events that provide a space for collaboration among non-traditional partners, showcasing best practices and sharing knowledge in DRA and DRC. Forums provide organizations and individuals with the opportunity to highlight new activities and initiatives, build new partnerships, and foster advances in the field. Previous global events have been held in Washington DC (UR2010), Cape Town (UR2012), London (UR2014), and Venice (UR2016), with smaller events also held in Austria (URAT 2016); the Sub-Saharan African region (Understanding Risk & Finance Conference, 2015); Boulder, Colorado, USA (UR Boulder 2015); Haiti (URHT 2014); and Brazil (URBR 2012). This evaluation looks at only the four global UR events to date.

Understanding Risk Forums have grown in size and reputation since their beginnings in 2010. Organized by the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery's (GFDRR) Innovation Lab, the overall goal of these events is the increased *use of risk information to make informed decisions*. The path Innovation Lab staff involved in UR envisions to affect this high-level result can be seen in the UR Forum Logic Model in Appendix A. Specifically, this logic model is depicted in the UR Forum theory of change:

*If risk information innovations are showcased at biennial forums; communications products are showcased; bilateral meetings are facilitated; training sessions are held; Expo space is offered; networking space is offered; technical sessions are held; initiatives are launched; Forum attendees are diverse; registration costs are low; creative settings are offered throughout the events; a publication is produced; Forum materials are made available online; a cocktail reception is held; lunch/coffee breaks are provided daily; an opening reception is held; and cultural entertainment is held, **assuming** there is significant interest and funds to attend among the risk information community, **then** the understanding of risk is improved; DRA and DRC capacity is built; new partnerships are formed; knowledge is shared; targeted Communities of Practice are strengthened; and technical expertise is applied at the country level.*

*And if the understanding of risk is improved; DRA and DRC capacity is built; new partnerships are formed; knowledge is shared; targeted Communities of Practice are strengthened; and technical expertise is applied at the country level, **assuming continuing interest in, and belief that understanding risk is key to disaster risk management and resilience, then** communities are engaged; and innovation is stimulated.*

*Finally, if communities are engaged; and innovation is stimulated, **assuming decision-makers are involved and innovations are user-friendly, then** the DRA and DRC fields*

will be advanced. Advancing the DRA and DRC fields will assist in the use of risk information to make informed decisions over the long-term.

Any logic model (which will be used in this report to refer to both the model and its theory of change) should be a fluid construct, managed and adapted as the context in which it operates changes; the UR Forum logic model is intended to be modified as new evidence is found to support such changes. When developed within a larger framework, logic models should ideally link to a higher-level logic model. In the case of UR, the larger logic model is that of the Innovation Lab, under which UR operates. As stated previously, the goal of UR – or the result for which it seeks to ‘move the dial’ – is use of risk information to make informed decisions. This relates nicely to the purpose of the Innovation Lab logic model, “*risk information used to make informed decisions*”. One can see that the long-term goal of UR is the purpose of the Innovation Lab, the structure under which it operates.

PURPOSE AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Evaluation Purpose

The Understanding Risk Forum is an enormous undertaking for a small, agile and flexible unit such as GFDRR’s Innovation Lab. The purpose of this evaluation is to discern to what extent the results found within UR’s logic model are occurring, as well as the reasons why they might not be occurring. The effects are to be looked at through the prism of the human and financial cost of these events.

There are many intended users of this evaluation. The Innovation Lab requested this evaluation as part of a broader evaluation effort of its overall programming. It seeks to understand whether intended outcomes (as opposed to shorter-term outputs) have been achieved. Lab staff want to have a deeper understanding of what worked, what didn’t work, and why. There is a sincere wish to learn from this evaluation and make ‘course corrections’ if and where warranted. The Lab wishes to pause and reflect on the best way to move forward with UR. Specifically, it wants to improve upon its work and learn ways to build the UR community further. It hopes to also ‘tell the UR story’ in an effort to seek broader partnership.

Other interested staff at the World Bank will use the results of this evaluation to learn more about UR and to better communicate to stakeholders the benefits of this huge undertaking. Although many anecdotal stories of success currently exist, and solid monitoring data at the output level is regularly compiled, an analytically rigorous evaluation has yet to be conducted. Regular collection of outcome-level data has not yet taken place. This evaluative effort seeks to bridge that gap.

Evaluation Questions

The questions this evaluation seeks to address were compiled by UR staff. They are meant to address those issues about which little systematized information is currently collected. In addition, the answers to these questions are intended to be put to immediate use in the planning for the next UR Forum, in 2018.

1. What are the effects of UR Forums on partners? (Partners refer to all categories of organizations that have been either financial or content partners of UR Forums.)
2. What are the effects of UR Forums on attendees? (Attendees include those from academia, governments, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral institutions, the private sector, etc.)
3. What are the main factors affecting UR community member participation/non-participation in the UR biennial events?
4. What factors contribute to attendee and content partner interest in becoming future financial partners?
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METHODOLOGY

WHAT THIS IS

This evaluation is a social science undertaking that seeks to address the questions outlined above. It uses data collection and analytically rigorous methods so that if a different trained evaluator were to undertake the same evaluation, s/he would arrive at the same or similar findings and conclusions. The use of social science methods and tools as described below reduce the introduction of evaluator-specific judgments, to the extent possible. This report attempts to present an unbiased and analytically sound theory-based evaluation of UR Forums, according to the evaluation questions developed by Innovation Lab staff. Its intent is to inform and improve upon the work of UR Forums. Evidence in this report also will be used to update the UR Forum logic model. In short, this evaluation attempts to add to the body of evidence of what works, what doesn't work and why in the field of understanding risk information. Its principal intent is learning.

WHAT THIS IS NOT

This evaluation report is not merely a compilation of success stories. The evaluator did not seek out respondents through a convenience sample to gather stories of impact, although that would have been feasible and straightforward. Rather, this evaluation sought to address the questions articulated in an effort to improve upon UR Forums, and not simply to tell stories about the accomplishments of these events.

Evaluation Design and Methods

In order to address the big-picture evaluation questions above, the evaluator conducted a snapshot performance evaluation using mix-methods. Because this evaluation is intended to assist in both learning from what has been done to date and making changes to improve future

UR efforts, this is both a summative and formative evaluation. Methods employed were: 1. a thorough desk review of existing UR documentation dating from the first forum in 2010, as well as marketing materials and monitoring efforts; and 2. key informant interviews with samples of all stakeholders, stratified by Forum year; these include World Bank staff, attendees, non-attendees, and partners – past and present. Due to time constraints, UR staff requested that these two methods be used exclusively to compile both quantitative and qualitative results.

In order to address potential issues regarding selection bias, partner, attendee and non-attendee interviewees were selected by random sampling. This effort, similar to picking names out of a hat, helps with external validity of the findings, or the ability to generalize evaluation findings to the population of potential interviewees. The random samples were stratified by UR Forum year and type of attendee. All person-level data was disaggregated by sex. UR Forum staff were also interviewed in order to provide context for the setting in which this evaluation takes place as well as views on outcomes achieved.

UR staff sent an email, per protocol, to the randomly-selected potential interviewees; the evaluator then followed up with an introductory email and request for an interview. If the resulting response rate using random selection was lower than 10%, the evaluator would then use opportunity (also called convenience) sampling. Only in the case that the response rate was also low using this technique would snowball sampling have been used. Please see Appendices B, C and D for semi-structured interview schedules utilized in this evaluation.

Timeframe

Data collection began in November 2016 and ended in January 2017.

Sampling

The Innovation Lab’s UR Forum staff provided lists of attendees for all four UR Forums to date. The evaluator was also given a total list of partners over all four years and non-attendee names from the 2014 and 2016 Forums. The number of attendees, non-attendees and partners provided to the evaluator are shown below (total is 3,169):

2010: 471 attendees

2012: 538 attendees

2014: 767 attendees; 265 non-attendees

2016: 652 attendees; 385 non-attendees

Partners: 90

There was a trend of increasing number of attendees with each Forum which reversed in 2016, likely because the venue was changed at the last minute from Istanbul to Venice. There were 700 people registered by April 6, 2016 – one month before the change of venue due to security concerns.

The list of partners the evaluator was provided contained 90 names, over 50% of which were partners for the 2016 UR Forum only. Very few names were provided for the earlier years, especially 2010 and 2012. As the evaluator conducted interviews of partners, it became clear

that respondents participated in other UR Forums than that from which they were randomly selected.

Random number tables were utilized to randomly select 30 partners from the list of a total of 90 partners covering all four Forum events. Such tables were also used to select 10 non-attendees each from 2014 and 2016; and 10 attendees from each of the four events were randomly selected. This resulted in a total random sample of 90 out of 3,169 UR Forum participants.¹

90 emails were sent from UR Forum organizers to those randomly selected as above. Due to lack of contact information for 12 randomly selected attendees (6 each from 2010 and 2012) and two partners, as well as undeliverable emails to three attendees, a second round of stratified random sampling occurred. Out of those 17 new names, contact information could not be found for three attendees. A third and final round of stratified random sampling ensued.

After this pre-contact by UR staff, the evaluator followed up with respondents with a request for a Skype or phone interview. In some cases, several follow-up emails were sent. In an effort to increase chance of response, the emails from UR Forum staff and the evaluator were sent, interview schedules were simplified, and a commitment was made to keep interviews to 30 minutes.

LIMITATIONS

It is not uncommon for relatively new interventions in an innovative environment, such as UR Forums, to not have established baseline data or a counterfactual at the start of implementation. Nonetheless, a performance evaluation can yield useful data which looks at the theory of change and outcomes it seeks to achieve. As stated above, this study used randomization to address potential respondent selection bias.

One threat to external validity of the findings of this evaluation is the relatively low sample size, which results in the inability to have a high degree of confidence that the conclusions found herein can be accurately generalized to the entire population of UR Forum participants. This study uses analytically rigorous methods, including random sampling, to address bias and validity concerns.

Recall bias is potentially at issue here given that some respondents will be asked about events that took place six years earlier. Studies have shown that five years after an event, 50% of the memories for that event are completely lost. To address this potential threat to validity of findings, evaluation questions and interview schedules were carefully crafted; in addition, the evaluator was careful to ask questions regarding other variables which could have been related to the results being measured.

Non-response bias could present a limitation in this study if people do not respond to email requests for an interview due to lack of time, poor timing or desire to take part; many had

¹ Due to various constraints, the number of people randomly selected was not large enough to have a high confidence level and low margin of error typical of most surveys.

recently responded to a post-Forum online questionnaire as well. This type of bias is found more often when the questions concern a sensitive subject; that is not the case with this evaluation.

And, without a counterfactual, it is impossible to assert causality between UR Forums and the results we find during this study. In other words, it's not completely clear that UR Forums were the sole reason for the results we see in this evaluation. The evaluator did try to address this threat to external validity by asking follow-up questions that delved into what respondents thought was due solely to UR Forum participation, and not to other factors.

FINDINGS

The overall response rate for this evaluation was slightly above 31%. Opinions on what is a 'good' response rate vary in the literature, but in general, internal surveys receive a 30-40% response rate on average, and external surveys obtain an average 10-15% response rate. Given that this was not an internal study limited to the World Bank, this response rate can be said to be quite strong. Further, there is no reason to believe that those who did not provide valid responses are different from those who were interviewed. Rather, those who did not agree to be interviewed appeared to do so because of busy work schedules, retirement, maternity leave, the holidays, or belief that because they did not attend a UR Forum, they could not provide useful information. The evaluator was asked multiple times to speak with a colleague rather than the person randomly chosen. In every instance, only randomly-selected persons were interviewed.

The response rate, broken down according to stratified random samples, was:
50% for partners;
25% for attendees; and
15% for non-attendees.

Several respondents who were interviewed as partners were also participants in other years and some who were randomly sampled from the attendee lists were partners at different UR Forums. Below are evaluation findings, discussed by evaluation question, which respondents directly attributed to UR Forums.

Respondents represented every corner of our world – spanning time zones from GMT-8 to GMT+ 11 – as well as foundations, academic institutions, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral development organizations, governmental bodies and independent researchers/scientists. The random sample indeed appears to be representative of the overall population of the UR COP.

1. What are the effects of UR Forums on partners? (Partners refer to all categories of organizations that have been either financial or content partners of UR Forums.)

Fifteen out of the thirty randomly-selected partners took part in this study. Ten were male and five were female. The six outcome-level results were reportedly experienced to a very high degree by these partners. Specifically, all 15 respondents in this category reported 1. An improved understanding of risk; 2. DRA and DRC capacity built; and 3. Knowledge shared as a direct result of the global UR Forums. While 100% of respondents reported results achieved in these three areas, over 93% credit UR events with helping them form new partnerships, nearly

87% report technology applied at the country level, and 80% experienced COP strengthening from their participation in UR Forums.



One partner articulated the degree to which outcome-level results were achieved by UR Forums by stating, “In some cases, the impact might be indirect. All of these results were fostered and continued by these events for certain.” And as another partner succinctly put it, “You could never capture the diversity of outcomes.”

However, as detailed in the methodology section above, this evaluation utilized analytically rigorous methods to capture the six concrete outcomes contained in the UR Forum logic model. Other outcomes, as applicable, will be discussed in the question on unintended consequences. These outcomes could subsequently be considered by UR staff as it revises its logic model moving forward.

Such descriptive statistics cannot illustrate the true nature of the lasting effects UR Forums have had on its partners. Appendix F contains a sample of success stories of UR Forums, which statistics cannot provide. For example, technical expertise applied at the country level is a result typically associated with developing countries. This evaluation found however, that in some cases, new technology was indeed applied by developed country governments and firms in their home countries.

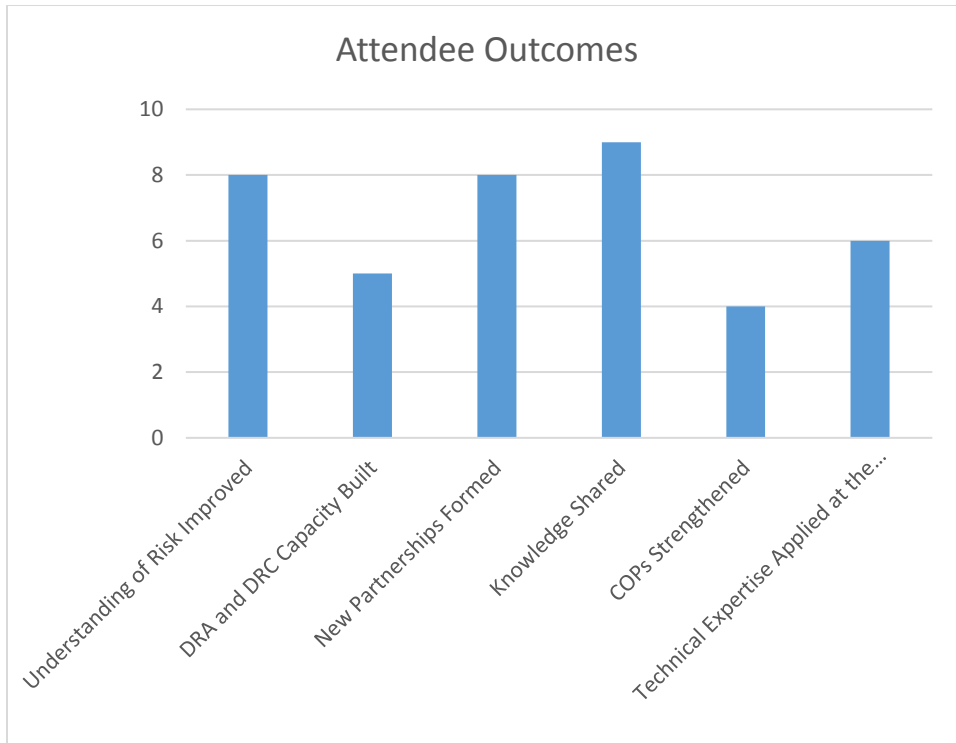
The data show some results that occurred very quickly, while others took a longer time to materialize. However, in all cases, respondents could think back to a person they met or an idea

they shared or received, etc. at a UR Forum which started a process that led to one or more of the outcomes UR works to achieve.

One private sector representative reported, “There are several levels of these outcomes in practice. For example, there are some people you meet again; there are some practices you see for the first time, which raises your knowledge base. You turn contacts into collaboration. UR gave us the opportunity to test our concept. We could then refine it as result of feedback received at UR.” An academician stated, “We’ve benefitted from the variety of actors available to us at UR and struck partnerships that have proven useful in practice.” Summing up one of UR’s stated cross-cutting goals, a developed country government official opined, “It’s hard to say because you don’t carry things home in a parcel. Ideas come to you and sometimes you don’t even know where they come from. You get ideas and information from UR Forums; you take bits and pieces back. *You get new inspiration for your work.*”

2. What are the effects of UR Forums on attendees? (Attendees include those from academia, governments, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral institutions, the private sector, etc.)

Ten respondents from the “attendees” list participated in this study. Some of these respondents were also partners and some of the partners above were also attendees in other years. Of the ten interviewed, seven were men and three were women. All six outcome-level effects were reported to have occurred as a result of attendance at UR Forums over the years. The three most in evidence among this group were 1. Understanding of risk improved; 2. New partnerships formed; and 3. Knowledge shared.



Attendees reported that knowledge sharing was the number one outcome they experienced through participation in UR Forums. Many of them credited the interaction among participants and presenters. One Pacific Islands Minister liked the “informal approach and discussions that makes it more interesting for me.” He reported that he benefited greatly from the fact that UR brought in people that are practitioners in risk on the ground in different locations. He enjoyed discussions on presenting risk in user-friendly formats and credited the event for all six outcomes in his case.

A clear example of improved understanding of risk, one international NGO representative had never been to anything like a UR event in the past. She said it was an industry with which her NGO had not previously considered involvement. But that “...now having heard the debate, we feel we can fit into the UR community and bring the voices of those most at risk into the conversation.” Illustrating application of technical expertise at the country level, one international consultant related a story of a Caribbean country requesting assistance in application of his new tool after his interactive session.

One representative of a large private sector firm expressed his view that the most beneficial aspect of the UR Forum he attended was the focus on a discrete problem. He added that 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.”

3. What are the main factors affecting UR community member participation/non-participation in the UR biennial events?

Regarding reasons why people registered for UR Forums over the years and did not attend, although varied, they almost always concerned personal or financial reasons. The fact that they registered one year and did not attend did not appear to have broader implications or reflect a negative view of the event. Rather non-attendance in a particular year was mostly due to lack of funds for travel, geographic proximity, busy work schedules or personal reasons such as young children or the recent addition of a child to the family.

Consider the case of one young female engineer residing in the Horn of Africa. Although she would have very much liked to attend, her supervisor was not in the office to approve funds for the trip, so she could not attend. One senior scientist was a recent mother and wished to travel less. Still others noted “an issue of competing interest” and scheduling conflicts.

Geographic proximity was cited several times as a factor affecting attendance and non-attendance at UR events. “I try to minimize travel; I think because the other conferences were outside of DC, I did not attend. Budget was probably also a factor.” Two of the respondents randomly selected for this evaluation are based in Istanbul. They were planning to attend UR 2016, but did not when the location was changed on relatively short notice. “When UR was canceled in Istanbul, it was hard for me, given that I am Turkish. So many people were thinking of attending, but then could not because it was canceled.”

4. What factors contribute to attendee and content partner interest in becoming future financial partners?

Out of the twenty people who were asked about their views of financial partnership for UR Forums, 50% reported that their organizations were too poorly-resourced to afford financial partnerships. These respondents represented developing country NGOs, universities, themselves, or international NGOs. Two respondents from government agencies (10%) said that their governments are members of GFDRR and contribute to UR Forums through their membership. Another respondent worked for the World Bank. Of the seven remaining respondents, all said that if they had enough notice and if the interests of their organizations and the UR Forum coincided, they would consider financial partnership.

For most of these seven, the bottom line on becoming a financial sponsor is early notice. One partner sponsored UR in 2014 but not in 2016. The respondent reported that there were competing interests in the budget, and that companies have a limited amount for such things. This organization values UR a great deal and he thinks “there will be interest and eagerness to sponsor” in the future, provided sufficient notice. He suggests that when the notes are issued from the previous global UR event, it would be useful to his firm to include sponsorship marketing for the next UR Forum at the end of those notes. Some partners say their budget is set over one year in advance. They state that if they had sufficient time, they could financially support the UR Forum.

Two other private sector firms mentioned that in order to justify financial partnership they would have to show how the Forum benefits their private sector clients, mostly multinational corporations. Another partner reported that her organization was in fact seriously considering sponsoring an exhibition booth for 2016, but the last-minute change in venue meant they did not

have sufficient time to plan. She thinks that her organization would consider it in the future, given enough lead time.

One very large private sector firm said that he was unaware that the Forums were interested in such financial sponsorship. He asked, “If there are future activities that UR is planning, please do keep us in the loop.” 25% of the respondents said that if there is value in it for their companies, they would consider financial sponsorship. One international engineering firm representative said, “It’s a good opportunity to touch base. For companies, it’s useful to support that, because it gives their work some visibility.”

5. How do all past and present partners view UR?

Fifteen randomly-selected partners were interviewed for this evaluation. Overall, the view of UR Forums from these respondents is extremely favorable. However, there were three partners (20% of partner respondents) who provided feedback in two areas where they feel there is need for improvement. One respondent did not think that there was sufficient focus on “the real needs of developing countries.” She added, “It’s a good conference that should continue. They should expand it. They should invite more people from the developing world because people who work in DRM do not have the same opportunities to share ideas and work as those from the developed world.” Two respondents, in addition to providing positive feedback, expressed a concern that planning on Forum content should be more inclusive. One stated, “We are not really partners in shaping it. I would like the Forum to get closer to needs of countries, and think this through together.” These partners also felt the Forum could benefit from what they termed “a more strategic focus”, or “vision”. One partner said, “I think the World Bank needs to do some soul searching and ask where it wants to take this platform in the next ten years.”

Interestingly, what some respondents felt were positive aspects of the Forum, others felt were negative. For example, some respondents (as above) felt that UR Forums should adopt a more developing-country focus, while others believed the complete opposite. One noted, “When UR is held in a developing country, private firm senior executives won’t attend...Don’t make it just developing country centric.” Yet another respondent requested UR to, “Keep the international flavor of it. Keep it as a global meeting. Don’t just focus on developing economies. Maturing economies are not investing in their aging infrastructure.”

Another instance of opposing views on the same issue was found in the entertainment aspect of UR Forums. This same attendee felt that, “To be an innovator, you don’t have to show off; this platform should be the ultimate substance.” While others noted that the music, general vibe and excitement helped them to take in and digest the substance. And yet another issue concerned participation of government officials. One respondent said that “more government decision-makers would add value to UR events.” And another said, “The best thing about UR Forums is that a lot of government officials attend.”

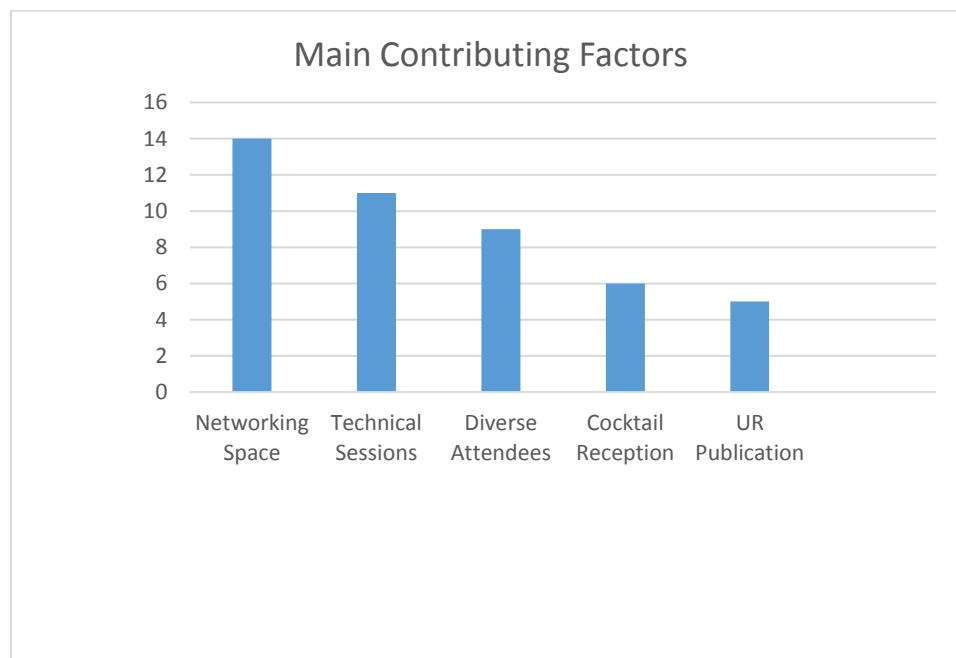
While no one had solely areas of improvement to detail, 100% of those interviewed shared positive feedback regarding their experiences with UR Forums. Much of the views expressed in these interviews concerned the outcomes discussed below in question number 6 below. Namely, networking and collaboration, the ability to meet and share ideas with a diverse group of people,

and the interactive nature of many sessions rose to the top of the feedback on partner experiences with UR Forums. A positive indication, one partner offered, “I always look forward to UR conferences. There is always a lot more to attend than there is time.” Another shared, “Conveners are encouraged to involve the audience and not just give presentations – I like that about UR.” And echoing many respondent’s words, one partner stated, “The sessions in the main event are really good. For me they have a really good mix of kinds of speakers. I like the fact that we have all kinds of different organizations giving the talks and the dialogue between the two. I spent much more time in Venice between sessions talking to people. There are so many different people there, it’s really a quite good networking opportunity for me.”

Other noted positive themes that emerged during partner interviews were the open nature of the Forums and the element of surprise. One respondent recalled “...an atmosphere where people expect to be surprised and engaged in a different way; this forms an important part of the success of the event.” Yet another recalled listening to speakers such as a brain surgeon discuss risk in their professions; “...it was extremely interesting – thinking of other risks, such as economic risks, or that of a surgeon. It was a wake up session; risk is everywhere in life and you have to manage it.”

6. Which factor(s) contributed most to outcome-level results, where applicable?

Out of the 15 outcomes stated in the UR Forum logic model, attendee and partner outcomes were mostly attributed to networking, sessions in which presentation and practice were combined, and the diverse nature of attendees. The only factor that no one mentioned as contributing most to UR Forum outcomes was communications products. In all, 14 out of the 15 factors contained in the UR Logic Model were mentioned by respondents as being important contributions to the outcomes they experienced as a result of attendance at one or more UR Forums.



Networking, and the resulting collaboration achieved, was the most often-cited output-level result that contributed to not only higher-level outcomes, but overall satisfaction of those interviewed. Interestingly, respondents tended to group all receptions together; no respondent distinguished between an opening reception and a cocktail reception for example. Receptions were viewed together as very beneficial to networking and collaboration. One respondent echoed views of the majority of those interviewed by saying, “UR Forums offer the ability to connect with people with whom we wouldn’t normally connect; it gives us an opportunity to expand our network and explore opportunities of mutual interest.”

Interactive technical sessions, that combined both presentation and practical application of the tool/model presented, were also highly lauded. Partners and attendees alike commented that this ability to actually see the tool in practice was extremely beneficial to their work, and the outcomes achieved.

Regarding diverse attendees, one partner offered, “If you put people from everywhere in the world into a box and shake it, only good stuff can come out.” An attendee said, “Compared to scientific conferences, the UR Forum had a really fantastic mixture of practitioners and scientists who had the time and the possibility to exchange ideas.”

The event publication and proceedings were viewed by many as quite important. One partner stated, “Tangible proceedings is a valuable thing and we wouldn’t want to see that go away; it has been a good way for us to get the word out.”

Although not an explicit output in the UR Forum logic model, 33% of the partners interviewed voluntarily brought up the ignite sessions as being extremely useful to the outcomes they received. They appreciated the fact that they could quickly learn about what other people are doing, which allowed them to determine with whom they would like to speak. In addition, the comfortable spaces, welcoming atmosphere and ‘cool music’ were mentioned by several respondents as contributing to their ability to learn and grow professionally from attendance at these Forums.

UR COP members are discerning customers, who are exposed to many meetings, conferences and forums in the area of risk information. One respondent summed up his thoughts on UR Forums by saying, “It’s quite simple; we know it will be beneficial to our work. After you’ve been there once, you’re addicted.”

7. Were there unintended consequences, positive or negative, as a result of the forums?

During the 32 interviews conducted for this evaluation, outcomes emerged that are not directly stated in the Forum’s logic model, and are therefore considered unintended results of UR global events. Without being asked about these three outcomes in particular, respondents brought up these issues on their own, as they were answering open-ended questions about their experiences with UR. Two of these outcomes can be considered positive, while one can be argued to be negative. They are: [Positive] 1. Increased confidence among Forum participants; 2. Replication of aspects of the UR Forum format in other contexts; and [Negative] 3. People not attending sessions for which they previously registered.

Unintended Consequences

Positive: *Increased Confidence*
Replication of format

Negative: *Empty Sessions*

A theme echoed by approximately 25% of respondents is that UR helped them to increase their confidence in the work they do in this field. A senior employee of a multilateral organization mentioned that a person she met at one Forum “helped me to feel a bit more confident about my having my finger on the heartbeat of advancement and projects and what is happening on risk assessment.” An NGO head in a South East Asian country that had recently experienced a devastating disaster said that the feedback he received on something he worked for “so passionately...made us feel good and gave me confidence, which helps us continue.” And the head of one Ministry reported that the “UR Forum gave me confidence to talk to technical staff and move in the right direction; it provided a great deal of clarification regarding progress in specific relevant areas.”

About 15% of those interviewed voluntarily brought up the fact that they are now using some aspect of the UR format as they plan their own risk events. One respondent now uses the combination of presentations and practical application in workshops he holds, while another combines technical information with “more fun stuff that touches your senses and makes it easier to digest technically difficult concepts” in events he organizes within his European country government Ministry. He feels that “One of the key takeaways for me was how to organize a conference.”

Less positive was a theme which emerged from the data regarding session attendance. A full 25% of respondents mentioned that some Forum sessions, which had previously been shown as at capacity in the Forum registration system and therefore unable to accept additional people who really wanted to attend, were nearly empty in the end. This disconnect between the number of people who register for a session and those who actually attend is partly due to the high number

of non-attendees. As discussed previously, there are many reasons why people sign up for a Forum, but do not attend in the end. It should be noted that UR Forums do not charge a registration fee; anyone can register for sessions, even if they are not sure they can make the Forum. 1As one respondent put it, “I tried to go to all sessions I was interested in, but I couldn’t go to all because registration was already full. Too many people register and don’t go there.”

Learning

Throughout the seven-year history of UR Forums, there have been myriad points of learning which UR staff have incorporated into subsequent events. Too many to detail here, it is an interesting finding that although no formal evaluation had been conducted on UR events prior to this one, a large amount of learning is evident, which has been carefully and thoughtfully incorporated into UR Forum events. Many of these points of learning concern the actual organization of these huge happenings, which has been improved with each event.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, UR cannot be all things to all people. The very aspect that some respondents voluntarily offered they liked less, other respondents voluntarily stated they liked more. Despite having diverse stakeholders with varying ways of viewing the world and interests, this evaluation has unearthed evidence which strongly supports the UR Forum’s current logic model and the theory of change it represents. Namely, by holding these biennial risk information events, the UR community has experienced improved understanding of risk, strengthened DRA capacity, new partnerships, knowledge sharing, strengthened COPs, and application of technical expertise at the country level. It also appears to increase confidence of participants, and is an idea for UR staff to consider as it revises its logic model.

All but one result at the output level have been found to be important factors in contributing to outcome-level results of the UR Forum logic model. The most important of these are networking, technical sessions and the diverse nature of attendees UR events offer. There are some areas of refinement possible to the underlying logic of UR Forums such as the inclusion of ignite sessions at the output level and refinement of the wording or implementation of communications products, also at the output level. Increased confidence is an interesting and unintended outcome of these events, which should be considered by UR Forum staff as well.

UR Forum staff and supervisors have learned a great deal over the seven years of UR Forum experience. Key elements of this learning have been incorporated into subsequent UR events, thereby reducing or eliminating key sources of stress and overwork which were present in previous events.

Regarding financial sponsorship of future UR events, respondents reported that their organizations didn’t have sufficient funds to sponsor events such as UR, that they had not considered it, been asked before, or had sufficient lead time to work it through their internal budget cycles. There appears to be some room to increase UR Forum sponsorship, but requests and discussions with potential sponsors should begin well over one year in advance of scheduled event date.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Continue to hold these events – the benefits are enormous! The current theory of change appears to hold up well to the evidence found in this evaluation.
- ❖ Consider having a brainstorming session with a group of representatives from governments (at all levels), the private sector, multilateral and bilateral development partners, NGOs and academics approximately 18 months before the UR Forum is scheduled. Such a ‘Steering Committee’ would allow GFDRR to hear diverse views of what people find important in these Forums and what themes they would like to see as the focus of the next event. It could also help to give a feeling of ownership to Forum stakeholders, which could increase opportunities for sponsorship. Consider holding this 16 to 18 months prior to the scheduled event, where practical.
- ❖ Begin planning for the next Forum no later than six months after the most recent event. This will help in many ways, not least of all with the human costs of planning such a complex and large event.
- ❖ Reach out to potential financial partners at least one year in advance of the Forum date, and preferably 18 months in advance, so that they have sufficient time to work the request for funds through their systems. Sufficient lead time could make differing fiscal years and funding constraints less of an obstacle.
- ❖ Continue to learn from the organization of each event. Document learnings approximately 3 months after each Forum so the next event can begin to be designed with this new information.
- ❖ Consider communicating the UR logic model to the UR community of practice. This could help provide increased focus to UR Forums and the results they seek to achieve. It could provide clarity to stakeholders who find it useful, and allow them to provide input.
- ❖ Consider inclusion of questions pertaining to the UR Forum theory of change in the surveys sent to attendees and partners after each event. This will allow closer monitoring of the results UR seeks to achieve.
- ❖ Attendees should be asked in advance of the Forum if they agree to have their contact information shared with the group; this will facilitate even more interaction among the group, and therefore increase potential for UR results to be achieved.
- ❖ Consider charging a nominal fee such as \$300 to attend the event. If attendance remains at approximately 650 people, nearly \$200,000 can be attracted to lessen Forum costs. If there are concerns about such a fee resulting in lower attendance, especially from developing nations, consider keeping careful records and monitor any change in attendance, by categories such as level of country development and sector. If results show a marked decrease in attendance from a certain targeted category of attendee, then the fee can be removed for subsequent events. An additional benefit to instituting a small

registration fee is that it will likely decrease non-attendees as well as those who sign up for a session and do not attend. This will help with session attendance and decrease empty sessions due to non-attendance.

- ❖ Use the results of this evaluation to review and modify the UR Forum logic model where relevant, and continue to review it as new sources of evidence for what works, what doesn't work and why is presented.
- ❖ Give serious consideration to assigning one person full time to UR year round. This is not a small endeavor; if one person were in charge of not only assisting or leading the organization and implementation of the Forum, but also ensuring that careful monitoring records are kept, Forum reports are written and widely-disseminated, feedback is gathered from attendees, non-attendees and partners alike, and plans begin for the next UR Forum 18 months prior to its scheduled date, there is more potential to be strategic in Forum content, lower costs, increase sponsorship and greatly lessen unknowns Forum staff will face, thereby decreasing stress.

APPENDIX A: UR FORUM LOGIC MODEL

Goal
Information used to make informed decisions
Purpose
Risk information field advanced
Sub-Purposes
Innovation stimulated
Communities engaged
Outcomes
Understanding of Risk improved
DRA capacity built
New partnerships formed
Knowledge shared
Targeted Communities of Practice strengthened
Technical expertise applied at the country level
Outputs
Innovations showcased
Communications products showcased
Bilateral meetings facilitated
Training sessions held
Expo space offered
Networking space offered
Technical sessions held
Initiatives launched
Attendees are diverse
Publication produced
Forum materials available online
Cocktail reception held
Lunch/coffee breaks provided daily
Opening reception held
Cultural entertainment held

INFLUENCE

INSPIRE

INNOVATE

APPENDIX B: PARTNER/ATTENDEE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Sex M F; Years attended and in what role
Name of respondent and organization

1. Could you please tell me a bit about what you do and how you came to know about the UR Forums?
2. Could you tell me more about your experience with and at the Forum (s)?
3. Specifically, did you experience any of the following?
 - Understanding of risk
 - DRA and DRC capacity
 - New Partnerships
 - Knowledge sharing
 - Communities of Practice
 - Application of technical expertise at the country level
 - Did you meet someone you didn't know before?
 - Did you learn something new?
 - Did you make connections?
 - Did you see new knowledge creation?
4. Has the experience with UR affected your work in any way? Please explain.
5. What were the main reasons you participated in [state year]? Did you participate in other years? Why or why not?
6. Have you ever considered being a financial UR Forum partner? Why or why not?
7. What do you think were the most important aspects of UR that helped with your learning?
8. Is there any additional feedback you would like to provide?

APPENDIX C: NON-ATTENDEE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Sex M F; Years did not attend

Name of respondent and organization

1. Could you please tell me a bit about what you and your organization do?
2. How did you come to know about the UR Forums?
3. Have you ever attended a UR Forum?
4. Could you tell me more about why you signed up for, but did not attend, the 201x UR Forum in (city)? (main factors why did not attend?)
Money or Schedule conflict; Similar content as last year; Unsafe location?
5. Have you ever considered being a financial UR Forum partner? Why or why not?
6. Is there any additional feedback you would like to provide?

APPENDIX D: UR FORUM STAFF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Sex M F; Years involved in UR planning and in what role

Name of respondent

1. Which UR Forums were you involved in?
2. How far in advance does the planning begin?
3. What is involved in planning?
4. Could you talk a bit about the cost – in person-hours, emotional stress and financial costs?
5. Did you experience any difference in terms of the amount of work on one compared to another?
6. Are other organizations such as any UN organizations consulted to be partners?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

APPENDIX E: UR FORUM SUCCESS STORIES

CATALYZING IDEAS FOR USE

After over 20 years working on one continent of our world, this senior scientist found that his networks, innovations and communities of practice were all converging at one event in 2016 – UR Venice. A partner on content, he participated in an all-day interactive session with former and present colleagues. The session focused on practical application of a tool he created, which was further strengthened by a colleague’s software, also on display throughout the day. He directly credits the Forum with being a catalyst for a working group that was established at this UR 2016 session, and which continues to be very active today.

But that’s not all. Although he could only attend two out of the five days of the event, he attributes several outcome-level results to his attendance in Venice. For example, he gave hardware to participants from over 20 countries to use in their countries. In addition, scientists in one Caribbean country had applied his innovation, using the instruction manuals openly-available online, and took it further by creating a system to monitor its use. They presented their application at the Forum, which was deeply gratifying for this senior scientist to witness – his innovation being successfully applied in other country settings.

He was also able to form new partnerships during his short time at UR 2016. He developed a concept note with a Pacific Island official, which was completed very quickly. His colleague and he, realizing the potential of their software and hardware working together, successfully received funding for a joint project for three years shortly after the Forum. In addition, he now uses the format he saw in action at UR Venice in his own very active COP; he realized that exchange of ideas between people is much more important than just talking to people, thanks to UR 2016. He is also creating a university-level course on the basis of the work he illustrated in Venice. And he met someone at the Forum who funded a full two-day meeting of his COP; this person is now spearheading the development of the scientist’s innovation in his foundation in a South European country.

He summed up his views of UR Forums with, “Opportunities were created; you meet people from everywhere in the world, and you can see that what you have done is actually going somewhere.”

INSPIRING YOUTH

Consider the case of one young social scientist who attended her first UR Forum in 2016. This young scholar attended UR in Venice to not only gain exposure to what she had heard from many colleagues is a well-respected platform, but to also meet similarly-minded young scientists in the realm of DRR. During her time at the Forum she supported a session organized by the UN MGCY Young Scientists Platform on DRR (for which she is a focal point), the Water Youth Network and UNISDR in which ten other young scientists participated²; this focused group allowed greater depth of discussion on the shared challenges they face. She credits two senior scientists for also taking part in the session, for the guidance and motivation they provided to the group.

Remarkably, although she was only able to attend the Forum for one-half day, seeds were planted which have already borne fruit. This young scientist reports that it was extremely beneficial to share research and insights into different fields of science with this group; the Young Scientists Platform on DRR has a mailing list which the participants joined and could engage in further activities. Most notably, they wrote and submitted an academic paper together on research gap mapping on the Sendai call to action. The Young Scientists platform on DRR has since conducted outreach at other events including the UK Alliance on Disaster Research Conference in January and the Asian Ministerial Conference on DRR. They are currently planning for engagement at the Global Platform on DRR.

In sum, all six outcome-level results in the UR Forum theory of change were achieved to some degree in this young scientist's case. For example, the session organizers shared the report from the session³ with members of the UNMGCY Young Scientists Platform on DRR. Knowledge sharing occurred during the session they led as well as continues to this time. In addition, the YSP on DRR she works in has been significantly strengthened by her involvement in UR 2016. She credits this 'prestigious event' with her ability to successfully network and even meet high-level government officials in targeted countries related to her area of study. She was extremely motivated by her short exposure to the one UR Forum she was able to attend and believes that "it is up to young people to move forward with Sendai over next 15 years, and replace the senior scientists who are working right now." UR 2016 clearly inspired this young scientist.

² <https://understandrisk.org/event-session/young-scientists-platform-on-disaster-risk-reduction/>

³ See session report here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/OB6VKA11cphmFT3pUbnRkakZsaWs>

SPONSORED PARTNERSHIP PAYS OFF

One international environmental foundation discovered that by sponsoring a booth at UR 2016, the short-term cost is far outweighed by the medium- and long-term benefits, which continue to accrue to this day. Noting the “incredible visibility” his organization’s booth received, the foundation representative views his time at the Venice event as “a great opportunity which was super successful”. Recalling over 100 visits to his foundation’s booth over two days, his team was able to explain the DRR platform they created to a diverse set of participants. He directly credits UR 2016 for the networking and contacts he made which resulted in “an incredible boost to our COP”, in both quantity and quality. His COP – the Rapid Analysis and Spatialisation Of Risk (RASOR) – now has over 200 members from more than 70 institutions.

In addition to this enhanced learning and cooperation within the COP, he was able to form a multi-hazard/multi-risk partnership on the last day of the Forum. In fact, this partnership has already met twice to continue discussions in this technical area. He has also managed to follow up on some discussions from Venice regarding funding opportunities to put ideas into practice, and is in the application process for grant funding that was discussed at the Forum.

He views UR as more practical than other conferences, referring to it as “a place where you can meet the people you want to work with, and sit down to make it happen in the near future”. He cites the “fantastic mixture of practitioners and scientists who have the time and the possibility to exchange ideas.” For his organization, UR Forums are “fundamental to a deeper understanding of the very latest advancements in the field.”

INSPIRATION FOR MORE TARGETED RESEARCH

Working in the field of climate and environmental risk reduction, this researcher was able to attend both the 2014 and 2016 UR Forums. He and his team look at tools to simulate risks at a global scale and also work with users by creating easy online models. During both events he attended, this researcher convened interactive sessions with his audience, which he feels is a very positive trait of these Forums. He praised UR by saying, “Sessions are not only technical in nature; they are also focused on application and use, which is enormously valuable. I think it is one of the best conferences I go to, mainly due to the breadth of different kinds of people – NGOs, national agencies, and the like – as well a great mix of different countries – it attracts; I liked that there were young people as well as more senior people active throughout.”

All six higher-level results in UR Forum’s logic model were reported to be achieved in this researcher’s case. Most notably, he described partnerships, knowledge sharing, and COP creation as critical results of his affiliation with UR events, which in his case he described as closely intertwined. He felt that the breadth of the event allowed him to learn a great deal, not only about science, but also regarding the need to create a COP around the topic of the session he led. Together with people he met at UR, he successfully developed a new COP on compound hazards, and through this new group is developing another session for a different conference.

The continuing influences and inspiration from UR Forums don’t stop there, however. This researcher witnessed what he termed “huge progress in availability of data as well as use of data between 2014 and 2016. It was a big eye-opener that so much progress happened in a short period of time.” He was inspired by participants who spoke about communities on the ground gathering data, and the fact that this community mapping opened up a new level of capability and trust for scientists as well as users of the data. He found enormous benefit in networking with others, especially potential users of his tools so they could implement some testing in practice in various country settings. Such partnerships are an important result of his attendance at UR Forums. He concluded, “There are so many different people there, it’s really a quite good networking opportunity for me.”

APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

A co-founder of a risk management consulting firm located in Eurasia credits UR 2014 with his learning about, and subsequent use of, innovative technologies in his work. Only able to attend one UR Forum to date, he attended two sessions on drone technologies during the London event. For him, the demonstrations of the technology when the sessions were finished were crucial for him to be able to see the technology in action; he states that using the technology at UR helped him think about how he could obtain results with this innovative technology. In his own words, “Just seeing and touching the technology helped me think through how I could use it; after all, a picture is worth a thousand words.”

Upon returning to his home country, he and his partner investigated drone technology and decided to purchase three drones. After necessary software purchases and hiring and training of new staff to utilize this new technology, his firm now uses drones and the information gathered from them to develop maps and photos of interest for local governmental bodies, which are included among their client base. For example, building imagery is useful for mayors to have a more accurate picture of the buildings they are managing. Additional uses in his work include data such as address of houses taken with aerial imagery for use at the local authority level.

In addition to applying drone technology at home, this consultant also met scientists at UR 2014 who use other innovative technologies, with whom he plans to collaborate in the near future. In short, this company co-founder views UR events as extremely useful. He has grown his business to include additional staff and use of drone technology to collect data for local clients. The lasting effects of UR for him will continue well into the future.