

International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction

13 October 2024

Role of education in protecting and empowering youth for a disaster-free future

The linkages between biodiversity conservation and disaster risk reduction are well established. Wetlands, forests, and mangroves, for example, absorb floodwaters, stabilize soils, and protect coastlines. Healthy ecosystems underpinned by thriving biodiversity act as a bulwark against disasters. The biodiversity conservation and disaster risk reduction nexus can be addressed through the synergistic implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Adopted in 2022 under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the KMGBF is the world's masterplan to halt and reverse biodiversity loss through 23 action targets that must be achieved by 2030. The KMGBF includes important elements pertaining to disaster risk reduction and reducing the impacts of hazards. The Sendai Framework, adopted in 2015, aims to reduce vulnerability to natural hazards by strengthening resilience and adaptive capacities, particularly in communities at the frontline of climate impacts. In a commendable initiative, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has recently issued guidance* on integrating disaster risk reduction in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), the principal vehicles of implementation of the CBD and the KMGBF.

The scale of transformational change required for the implementation of the KMGBF demands a whole-of-society endeavor that includes young people. Youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow but also powerful agents of change today. We count on them to raise awareness, advocate for sustainable practices, and push for policies that prioritize biodiversity conservation and sustainable use while bolstering disaster risk reduction.

Education underpins social and ecological resilience in the face of environmental shocks. Ramping up the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal SDG-4 on education can empower youth and give them the tools to deploy leadership and innovation for a disaster-free future. By giving them the means to unlock their full potential, education empowers young people to the benefit of society as a whole. In many disaster-prone regions, women and young people are among the most vulnerable. In such contexts, education and literacy reduce vulnerability and exposure, thus preventing natural hazards from becoming disasters.

Conversant with information technology and able to receive and act on timely weather reports or emergency-response instructions, youth can assume leadership roles in the field of disaster preparedness and response within their families and communities.

* <https://www.undrr.org/publication/strengthening-disaster-risk-reduction-national-biodiversity-strategies-and-action-0>

As citizens, youth need education to understand the science base of the environmental poly-crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation and pollution, which is exacerbating natural hazards. This will, in turn, foster their awareness and action to mitigate disaster risks, and support their participation and future leadership. Their informed contributions within their communities and societies will enhance the overall effectiveness of disaster risk reduction and biodiversity policies.