

The Sendai Communiqué

Second UNESCO Youth Forum Looking Beyond Disaster¹

Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan

August 16th-19th, 2012

Opening statement

- 1 This is a call for action based on the reflections of 80 youth from 14 countries who have experienced natural disasters in their own communities. We have a vision of a unified and resilient global community who are proactive in their approach to disaster management. The following reflections and recommendations are proposed as further elaboration and implementation of internationally agreed instruments, such as the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, the Operational Guidelines and Field Manual on Human Rights Protection in Situations of Natural Disaster and the Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance.²

Introduction

- 2 9-12 December 2011 – Beginning to look beyond disaster: Delegates of the First UNESCO Youth Forum: “Looking Beyond Disaster” demonstrated the impact of youth initiative in disaster recovery. The Forum was held in Christchurch, New Zealand, whose “Student Volunteer Army” demonstrated this potential with a 9,000-strong youth group, established following a sequence of earthquakes that began in 2010. The aim of the Forum was to create a platform for young people to interact, share experience of disasters, contribute to workshops, and develop disaster-related action plans based on the most pressing issues for them. Over 100 people travelled from 20 countries across the Asia-Pacific region and participated by sharing their experiences and ideas. The participants were between 16 – 30 years of age and their 25 action plans developed at the Forum were presented to high level officials including Members of Parliament. In addition, the *Christchurch Communiqué for Looking Beyond Disaster* was adopted as an official statement of delegates’ recommendations with the intention that it be a ‘living document’.
- 3 16-19 August 2012 - Developing international youth collaboration: The Second UNESCO Youth Forum: Looking Beyond Disaster strengthened the commitment from youth to collaborate in looking beyond disasters and, by being based in Sendai, Japan, developed a deeper understanding of natural disasters by learning from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011. Successes and lessons learnt from the First Forum’s action plans were shared and a further 25 action plans were developed. Building on the *Christchurch Communiqué for Looking Beyond Disaster as a ‘living document’* developed at the First Forum, this *Sendai Communiqué for Looking Beyond Disaster* is a testament of our deep and continuing desire to respond to the imperative of collective action on disasters and calls government and non-government organisations, UNESCO, volunteer groups, and the world’s youth themselves to create change.

Youth potential

¹ http://www.eubios.info/youth_looking_beyond_disaster_lbd/lbd2_in_sendai_2012

² Drafted by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, respectively.

- 4 The world's youth have significant and realistic potential to reduce the risks before, provide relief during, and aid recovery after a disaster. Delegates during the Forums agreed that in order to minimize the effects of natural disasters, proactive efforts to build holistic community resilience and to sustain best practice disaster management principles must be undertaken in collaboration with all stakeholder groups.
- 5 The proactive efforts ought to accommodate the needs of the diverse groups that make up communities, particularly those at risk, including, but not limited to: young people, the elderly, people living with disabilities, migrants, refugees, and people from linguistically and culturally diverse groups.
- 6 These efforts should be conducted in the spirit of social justice, social inclusion, transparency and accountability, respect for human rights, pursue of human security, inclusivity, solidarity, cross sectoral and international collaboration.
- 7 To ensure this is a more tangible and measureable call for action, we make the following recommendations in the Reduction, Relief, and Recovery phases of disasters, including how we can best use and collaborate with science, education, media and communication, culture, and different institutions; with a particular emphasis on the role of youth.

Disaster Reduction

- 8 We recognize the enormous human and developmental costs of natural disasters, and acknowledge the risk of the frequency and severity of these calamities increasing in the coming years. In this regard, we believe that individuals and communities should embrace effective disaster risk reduction education and other strategies as well as other forms of resilience building as necessary and integral to mitigate hazards and vulnerabilities and prepare against the wrath of natural disasters.
- 9 These reduction recommendations include preparation, planning and mitigation of disasters before they occur.

Science

- 10 Research must be conducted into the natural and social processes that contribute to disasters and its impacts on various sectors of society developing partnerships between civil society, academia and the private sector, exploiting the opportunities made available by advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and integrating a comprehensive view involving all branches of human knowledge We must build a broad understanding of the science behind disasters in order to minimise their risks.
- 11 International links must be maintained to disseminate new scientific ideas. These links can be fostered through more coordinated scientific research and collaboration among different academic disciplines. Modern examples include social movements like www.ted.com that may be complimented with more traditional educational links through universities and international 'sibling cities'.
- 12 Early warning systems and innovative disaster mitigation technologies and infrastructure must be introduced, developed, improved using the best available science and supported sufficiently by public

investment and international cooperation³. Measures must be taken to make these systems easily accessible domestically and internationally.

Education

- 13** Education plans must be developed to promote understanding of existing international law, protocols, standards and best practice approaches to disaster management.
- 14** Young people and youth led organisations must be involved locally in the creation and delivery of youth-specific education and support material for disaster management and community resilience.
- 15** All age levels in the community must have access to locally documented knowledge and history of disasters, including the traditional wisdom of indigenous peoples. This will ensure an increased awareness of local threats and minimize risk through an increased understanding of what has happened in the past and how to prepare and respond in the future. People can share experiences to minimize disaster risk, for example to. evacuate from a receding ocean line, which can indicate an approaching tsunami.
- 16** Community members, especially young people, must have access to professional and personal development, including teamwork and leadership programs and education in health, first aid, and home economics, for example. These should be during the reduction phase before a disaster occurs to build confidence and skills, help realise the potential of well-informed leaders, and ultimately build community resilience before the response and recovery phases. In this manner, young people may help lead a community to relative safety in whatever capacity, time, or location required if a disaster occurs.,
- 17** Locally relevant creative, fun and stimulating disaster education programs must be developed and delivered on a regular basis as part of a standardized national curriculum to raise awareness of disaster management arrangements and risk reduction strategies among children and young adults (eg: Shelterbox Game <http://www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au/home/images/image004.jpg>). Young people and youth led organisations must be involved locally in the creation and delivery of youth-specific education and support materials for disaster management and community resilience.
- 18** These materials and education programs must be developed to be accessible also for individuals from different linguistic backgrounds and people living with disabilities.
- 19** Central ‘disaster information centres’ should also be established in the community level and in partnership with local government units to teach disaster education and disseminate information and resources.

Communication and media

- 20** Both private and state-run media must contribute to the reduction and planning process of disaster management and be regularly engaged in education campaigns that aid communities in their preparation for disaster threats. The media will play a key role in developing and fostering a culture of resilience.

³ Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation, part II.

- 21** Consideration of special needs, access issues and social/cultural inclusion must be taken into account when planning for disaster reduction, response and recovery⁴.
- 22** New Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), including social media, should be used to improve and promote disaster and community resilience by increasing accuracy, access, speed and local relevance of information being communicated about natural disasters. Thanks to their experience and familiarity with these technologies young people should be engaged as the key drivers for such new practices.
- 23** New media usage must also contribute to the effective dissemination of accurate information, and as such may require standards or an awareness of data integrity needs within this media, as with more traditional forms. Youth has an important role to play in avoiding unintended harm deriving from information flows, and should be empowered to fulfil it.

Government

- 24** During the disaster preparation and reduction phase, we urge local, national and international governments to:
 - a. Consider disaster prevention as collectively converging with other themes of global cooperation – climate change, economic growth, sustainable human development, peace, and security. Disaster prevention must be geared towards building resilience in communities and nations.
 - b. Join the discussion of scientific evidence for human-induced environmental degradation increasing the frequency and impact of some natural disasters.
 - c. Proactively plan the integrated use of all available human, economic, social and technological resources in the event of a disaster. Plan roles and responsibilities of different agencies and community stakeholders involved in disaster management and community recovery to maximise efficiency and cross-agency collaboration.
 - d. Support the implementation of existing frameworks for action, guidelines, standards and best practice approaches to disaster management in all countries across the world.
 - e. Establish effective international systems to disseminate lessons from international disasters into disaster preparedness; specifically to avoid situations like Sri Lanka 2004, where citizens walked into the receding ocean, unaware of the historically known sign of an approaching tsunami.
 - f. Implement policies to ensure emergency situations cannot be an excuse for any form of an abuse of power, or a chance to marginalise or discriminate against any individual or community.
 - g. Support programs that empower individuals' capacity to respond practically to address their own needs.

⁴ Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation, part I.

- h. Recognise and maximise youth leadership networks as a valuable future resource. Youth have led many of the world's most innovative volunteer disaster responses (e.g. Student Volunteer Army, Christchurch, New Zealand; Architecture for Humanity, Brisbane, Australia), ultimately saving often scarce resources in response and relief work.
- i. Prioritise the development of Media Standards and training in relation to natural disasters. These standards should ensure the needs of people of all languages, including the deaf, are met.
- j. Engage the private sector and multinational corporations, fulfilling their role as lifeline of modern human societies as well as capitalizing on their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives towards public-private partnerships for resilience building.
- k. Commit to disaster prevention and risk mitigation as a pillar of effective governance especially in disaster prone communities, and sustain efforts not only in times of disasters but across changing political leaderships and political cycles.

Disaster Relief

- 25** Experiences shared by young delegates from various countries during the Looking Beyond Disaster forums demonstrate that the contexts of disasters vary, not only in terms of measurable damages sustained but also the characteristics of existing social structures, political systems and culture of people. Governments, civil society, and the international community must be sensitive to the emotional, social and economic/material well being of the people to ensure disaster relief is holistic and contextual.
- 26** We believe that decision-making when a disaster occurs must be based on and incorporate a long-term vision without compromising expediency and efficiency of disaster relief.
- 27** The following relief recommendations include immediate, short-term and medium-term response during a disaster, with consideration for the long-term impact and repercussions for community resilience:

Science

- 28** Scientists must utilise all appropriate mediums to disseminate the best available scientific information, help people make better and more informed decisions during a disaster, and maximize their personal safety and resilience.
- 29** Where appropriate and with respect for disaster victims, the natural and social impacts of disasters must be vigilantly observed and shared as they occur to capture relevant data including the scale, impact and human response and identify lessons to be learned for building community resilience.

Education

- 30** Sharing, recognising and documenting people's experiences of disasters is critical for encouraging recovery and for learning from such events. During the relief phase it is critical to record the lessons from disaster events and subsequent response and relief efforts. The capturing of relevant data surrounding scale, impact and the human response to disaster events is the key to further resilience building.

- 31** Education providers must be sensitive and flexible to the needs of their students post disasters, with allowances made for those who underperform as a result of disruption to their lives by disasters. Emotional support and access to professional counselling must be made available for both students and teachers, including those coping with both direct and indirect effects of being in a disaster affected community.
- 32** Public education for young people must be provided on critical thinking and understanding the media so they can develop the skills to source the accuracy and relevance of the large amounts of information and misinformation being shared during times of disasters. This will result in young people who are able to make better decisions and support their families, friends and communities through the transfer of more accurate information in times of crisis.
- 33** We also firmly believe that young people should be engaged by disaster management agencies and governments to rapidly share relevant information during and post disaster events. This could go a long way to preventing panic or individuals placing themselves at unnecessary risk because of incorrect information and would also promote long-term community resilience through encouraging stronger interconnectedness and partnerships between young people and disaster management and government agencies.

Communication and Media

- 34** To promote and achieve sustainable individual and community resilience, communication should be encouraged and facilitated among community members and stakeholders with the goal of opening up opportunities for volunteering activities and active involvement in the coping process. We believe that communication and dialogue will help promote social inclusion and community cohesions.
- 35** In this endeavour, a responsible media and the scientific community will play a pivotal role in catalyzing effective information sharing, guiding and coordinating the action of communities, authorities and various concerned groups.
- 36** Media reporting in times of natural disasters should be sensitive to the needs of special groups such as the deaf and minority people, with the aim of reaching to the widest possible audience, informing them about scientifically verified risks, and fostering collective action in disaster response. In addition, new technologies and social media are an important tool to help facilitate connections between affected communities and communities of practice.
- 37** During times of disaster recovery, we believe that the media, specifically news institutions, should always remember to uphold ethical practices of journalism and news coverage at all times. News institutions should be responsible and sensitive whenever broadcasting or publishing images of disaster recovery and should not sensationalize disastrous events in order to shock or scare the public beyond what is actually real and true. The media should be transparent about their sources of information, commit to ethical balanced reporting and avoid broadcasting information that spread fear or exploit people's suffering⁵.

Government/International community

⁵ Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation, part II.

- 38** During the immediate and medium term relief phase we urge local, national and international governments to:
- a. Encourage and facilitate community response through volunteering to ensure all members of the community are able to contribute, and utilise their own skills as appropriate or required. Civil Defence of Christchurch, New Zealand, are developing a best practice model of this based on successful community engagement by the 'Student Volunteer Army' and Federated Farmers 'Farmy Army', among others.
 - b. Provide channels for all people to be engaged in the process of recovery planning regardless of class, gender and social differences.
- 39** International assistance in times of natural disasters should not encroach on national and local governments. Instead, it should lead towards capacitating local institutions not only to lead restoration efforts but also ensuring independence since foreign aid will eventually leave.
- 40** We emphasize the importance of respecting and observing international disaster and humanitarian legal frameworks, such as the Hyogo Framework for Action, the Operational Guidelines and Field Manual on Human Rights Protection in Situations of Natural Disaster and the Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance⁶, in the response process. Combined with the conscious engagement with existing local institutions, this will give credibility and legitimacy to response actions and ultimately win the trust of the people affected by disasters.
- 41** Young people's efforts and actions have to be given space and included in responses to natural disasters. The energy of youth-led volunteerism is vital in the sustainability of interventions. We should allow young people to shape and decide about the future of their communities.

Disaster Recovery

- 42** The process of disaster recovery is a complex and long-term process that entails time, commitment and participation. We want to emphasize not only the reconstruction and restoration of the previous lives of disaster stricken areas but their improved ability to withstand, recover from, and respond positively to crisis or adversity in the future.
- 43** We believe that recovery is a multi-dimensional process. It will entail rebuilding physical infrastructures, restoring institutions and social relationships, and rethinking community systems (economic, political and social) that are more resilient to natural disasters. Towards this end, we recommend the following:

Science and Education

- 44** Scientists must continue to utilize all appropriate mediums to disseminate the best available scientific information as a disaster moves to the recovery phase to help maintain trust in the science behind disasters, aid understanding of those affected, and alleviate some fear.

⁶ See footnote 2.

- 45** Regular consultation and community engagement process with youth should be undertaken to gauge and respond to any issues they are facing. Based on this consultation, education and support programs for longer-term recovery and resilience building need to be developed, ideally in partnership with the young people themselves.
- 46** Community education through the documentation and sharing of individual's stories is important for the long term recovery process of communities. Young people could play an important role in driving initiatives to assist individuals to express and document their stories and it is strongly believed that this will encourage peer-to-peer and intergenerational and communal learning and sharing of information, while reinforcing that education and preservation of experiences are extremely important tool of recovery.
- 47** A culture of personal resilience and self-efficacy is a key pillar of a resilient community. This makes recovery period a critical time to foster safety attitudes and create new cultural norms that foster disaster and community resilience. Therefore cultural change can be promoted through public education campaigns and information disseminated through the media, all of which need to be easily and widely accessible and sensitive to special needs as well as social, cultural and linguistic barriers.
- 48** The many effects of disasters include destroying the economic systems of communities and wiping out economic and development gains of countries. We believe that individuals, especially the youth, should be empowered and educated to engage in entrepreneurship and various economic activities that aim to restore their productivity and economic well-being.
- 49** Disasters also expose the inequalities and other vulnerabilities of communities, which can adversely and disproportionately affect poor families. Education should be geared towards empowering individuals and families, especially the poor, in regaining control and effectively managing the economic and financial shocks of natural disasters.

Media

- 50** The responsibility of the media, as we have elaborated in our recommendations in the relief phase, should continue to be upheld in the recovery phase of a disaster. This implies keeping attention during the long recovery process while avoiding stigmatization of affected populations.
- 51** Effective communication fostered by democratic channels also remains critical and crucial in the recovery process. Stakeholders should always be given a voice and be listened to by community leaders to ensure that their needs and priorities are synchronized in the rebuilding agenda.

Culture

- 52** Considerations of indigenous and traditional cultures must be taken into account during the recovery phase. Damage to the natural environment, culturally significant sites and locations of items can cause significant disruption to the continuation and survival of these cultures. Ongoing and participatory engagement with authoritative bodies must take place to empower to empower indigenous and traditional communities taking control of their recovery.
- 53** The culture of volunteering, especially those initiated by young people, should be continuously encouraged and facilitated throughout the recovery period and beyond. This can be done with the

support of volunteer organisations like the International Association for Volunteer Effort, IAVE; international relief organisations such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent; and other volunteer bodies and through developing legislation and policies that are supportive of volunteer initiatives while reducing red tape. The safety and welfare of volunteers needs to be considered and planned for in any ongoing volunteer efforts during the recovery period. In addition, particular attention ought to be paid to how volunteer activities can be sustained and how to ensure volunteer activities are meeting the needs of communities in a sensitive and appropriate way.

- 54** The fostering of social inclusion and community cohesion is critical in the recovery phase for communities affected by disasters. Programs, activities and events that promote community members coming together and connecting through active participation and connecting over shared goals and values should be encouraged and supported wherever possible. Specific consideration and motivation should be given to those which have emerged from a grass roots level, as well as those who are marginalised or vulnerable. We believe this process will facilitate a culture of trust and safety in disaster affected communities.
- 55** A culture of cross sectoral collaboration needs to be maintained in the recovery period, building on the relationships and partnerships which had taken during the response period, in order to encourage long term community resilience through better connected networks of agencies, organisations, practitioners and individuals.
- 56** We believe that various efforts will only be effective if importance and primacy is given on a victim-centred response to disaster rebuilding and recovery. It is important for victims to have ownership in the coping process, prioritize their needs where possible, respect cultures and value systems, and put the interest of communities above anything else.

Youth Role (culture)

- 57** Young culture is created and consumed by young people across the world, bringing a vibrancy and diversity to communities, which becomes at risk of being lost during the long process of recovering from natural disasters. Importantly, young people process their experiences and express their emotions, thoughts and ideas through their cultural and creative practices (such as music, dance, their use of social media, the way they interact with spaces and places in their environment etc.). This process of exploration, social interaction and self-expression makes up a significant learning experience to their personal and collective resilience and activities, therefore events and programs which foster and support youth culture are extremely important during the recovery period.
- 58** Young people have a unique contribution to make to communities in recovery who are interested in capturing and sharing the stories of individuals and of the wider community. There is great potential for programs to be developed in partnership with education bodies and youth organisations. These partnerships could also foster greater community resilience through intergenerational skills sharing and relationship building.

Government

- 59** During the recovery phase we urge local, national governments and international bodies to:

- a. Design recovery projects from an asset based approach, working with the strengths, capabilities and interests of individuals and communities, to ensure empowered and sustainable impacts on disaster affected communities.
- b. Put emphasis on the importance of a democratic, inclusive and consultative process in making decisions for community recovery, directly involving affected communities in decision making and in execution of interventions for recovery, recognising that achievements will depend on their own capacities.
- c. Encourage and support youth contributions to disaster-affected communities, ensuring the work they do is appropriate and sensitive to community needs.

Conclusion

- 60** This *Sendai Communiqué for Looking Beyond Disaster* calls both government and non-government organisations, UNESCO, volunteer groups, and youth themselves to action. If we are to build community resilience together by significantly reducing the risk before, providing better relief during, and recovering rapidly after a disaster, we must commit to these recommendations in all three phases. Our efforts and recommendations are interrelated and may overlap, reflecting and reinforcing our holistic approach in looking beyond disasters.
- 61** We, the delegates from the Second UNESCO Youth Forum: Looking Beyond Disaster in Sendai, Japan, request funding, collaboration, active support and appropriate policy from both government and non-governmental organisations if we are to look beyond disaster through youth-led action plans and significantly contribute to building community resilience.
- 62** We again thank and applaud UNESCO for bringing us together by encouraging previous and new participants to share their diverse contributions, and we ask UNESCO to support future Youth Forums Looking Beyond Disaster and our ongoing efforts in our action plans.

Closing Statement

- 63** We understand that there are many issues that surround disasters and their immense impact in our daily lives. We are also aware of the enormous tasks ahead, but disasters cannot wither our idealism and the spirit of our leadership. We are ready to act now, together.

Inquiries to lookingbd@gmail.com