

United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Global Platform 2019: ActionAid Impact Report

ActionAid's efforts at the sixth global platform for disaster risk reduction (DRR), held in Geneva, Switzerland



Image 1: ActionAid staff and local women partners in Geneva at the GP2019

1. The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction 2019: (1) what is it and (2) why is it important?

The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP DRR) is the world's foremost gathering on reducing disaster risk and building the resilience of communities and nations. First held in 2007, it takes place every two years, with the 2015 edition rolled into the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

The sixth session of GP DRR took place in Geneva, Switzerland from 13 to 17 May 2019 under the theme **Resilience Dividend: Towards Sustainable and Inclusive Societies**. The platform was described by the UN Secretary General for DRR a space and opportunity for everyone, all stakeholders to come together to review and accelerate our efforts to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and reduce disaster risk reduction and make the world a safer and more resilient place for future generations. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is a 15-year agreement that recognises that the state has the primary role to reduce disaster risk and build resilience. Civil society's role (and our role) is to support and hold governments to account for achieving these targets and commitments. More information on the Sendai Framework for DRR and the commitments and targets made can be found here: <https://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework>

The Global Platform for DRR is run by the UNISDR organising team. UNISDR is an ActionAid ally and has made efforts in promoting women's participation in international meetings. Here, there has been a substantial increase from 30% of women at the 2015 World Conference on Disaster Risk

Reduction to 40% at the 2017 Global Platform for DRR. UNISDR are doing continued advocacy with governments to promote gender balanced delegations and promote senior and high-level women's representation at the 2019 Global Platform for DRR. They are holding a special session on women's leadership in DRR which ActionAid International is co-organising.

It is an important space where civil society can hold governments to account and advocate for us to make sure global decision making is rooted in lived experience from the communities we work for.

2. ActionAid & Partners: who was there?

We had a team of 25 ActionAid staff and local partner women leaders there from; Lebanon, Palestine, Bangladesh, Vanuatu, Kenya, Cambodia, Sweden, Italy, Australia and IHART. This included 9 local women leaders from our partner organisations in Lebanon, Cambodia, Vanuatu and Kenya. Two of ActionAid's programmes enabled this level of active local women presence at the platform: the Australia, DFAT funded Gender Responsive Adaptation to Climate Change (GRACC) programme and the DANIDA funded humanitarian rights and resilience in protracted crisis programme (DANIDA HUM).



Image 2: ActionAid partners and staff at the Grass Roots Academy prep days: 9 local women leaders and 6 ActionAid staff

3. What was our strategy? What did we do?

a. Pre-platform

In the lead up to the platform, we mobilised our local partner and women leaders to join us in Geneva and secure space to speak and share their experiences. We held three webinars aligning ActionAid's approach and developed guidance documents for meaningful local participation in the week as well as an advocacy brief and call for action. This included mapping out six advocacy messages to own and lobby for throughout the week. Including (1) women leadership, (2) localisation and shifting the power, (3) taking a HRBA approach, (4) increased attention required for conflict and protracted crisis contexts, (5) increased risk financing and (6) attention on loss and damage. We also coordinated with GNDR to align our messaging with their civil society network and with the Huairou Commission to align with a wider network of local women organisations.

In addition to this, two specific programmes developed work to share and showcase at the platform; (1) DANIDA humanitarian rights and resilience in protracted crises and (2) DFAT Gender responsive adaptation to climate change.

b. Prep days

The Monday and Tuesday were prep days for the global platform. We were actively involved in:

1. The International Grassroots Academy hosted by Huairou Commission (all grassroots women leaders supported by ActionAid attended the two-day academy to share experiences, build leadership skills and caucus their advocacy messages for the platform). This event also connected with the Community Practitioners Platform (a recognised stakeholder under UNDRR) where the advocacy messages were incorporated into the official statement
2. The civil society network and positioning prep days (Should this be titled as the Stakeholder Forum?)
3. The World Bank's World Reconstruction Conference 4 (Mary Jack from ActionAid Vanuatu was a panellist on a session titled "Building Back Better in Small Island Development States).

c. The platform.

We took the strategy of divide and conquer to be present at as many sessions as possible. We also came together to take over some important sessions on women led DRR, localisation, displacement and resilience in conflict and fragile states.

Main Sessions

1. ActionAid international co-organised the session on women led DRR. whilst unfortunately our local women leader, Roula, from Lebanon was bumped off the panel, she was given time to speak from the floor and make recommendations. One of which powerfully called for the UNDRR to involve local women in organising global platforms not just being present at them.
2. ActionAid's Resilience delegation Bangladesh co-organised a session on resilient cities where Farah Kabir sat on the panel and shared ActionAid's work on safe cities and the HRBA.
3. Further to this our team of strong women leaders fought for their chance to raise points and questions throughout many sessions including pushing for empowering local women leaders to be involved at all levels of decision making in the sessions on locally led DRR, displacement and indigenous DRR.
4. We also submitted a question to the high-level panel on the SDGs which was voted, by participants of the session the number one, most pressing question: "Who is really being left behind? Grassroots communities have knowledge and experiences that governments, donors and international organisations still ignore. They are adapting to the realities of disasters and climate change. When will government and donors bring them to the table, so their solutions inform these dialogues."
5. Lastly, Mary Kuket from ActionAid Kenya read the statement for the women majors for the high-level statement's session.

Side events

1. ActionAid International with ActionAid Lebanon organised a side event with ODI and the World Bank on DRR in conflict contexts and fragile states. Here, Roula, our local women leader from our partner organisation RDFL in Lebanon shared her experience and

recommendations of working on the Syrian refugee crises. Here, the opportunity that women's protection has to act as an entry point for transformational resilience was shared. Samah, our team mate from ActionAid Palestine in Gaza, also shared her experiences from Gaza, from the floor and called on an end to the occupation and support for local women leaders in Gaza to be involved in global decision making.

Ignite stage slots

We had two ignite stage slots.

1. One on how women's protection can be an important entry point for resilience building in protracted crises. Here, IHART and the Lebanon team shared examples from the Syria refugee response; including a video from one of our local women leaders in Bekka, Lebanon.
2. The second was sharing the research findings from the GRACC programme on women led climate change adaptation; presented by our local women leaders from the GRACC programme in Kenya, Cambodia and Vanuatu.

Breakfast, evening events & more

1. ActionAid Australia along with the Cambodia, Kenya and Vanuatu teams held a breakfast event to share the findings of the Monash University led research on a gender responsive framework to address climate change and related crises. Women from each country presented their experiences in relation to the research findings. The event was attended by representatives of the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, Kenya; the World Bank, the African Union, and civil society.
2. ActionAid International, ActionAid Palestine and ActionAid Lebanon were invited to speak at an evening event held by the New Humanitarian and the Gates foundation on locally led DRR and humanitarian response. Here our local partners and teammates shared the contexts, challenges and recommendations for local women led interventions in protracted crisis contexts.
3. We also participated in an event held by the Australian Government for DRR in the Asia-Pacific.
4. Lastly, as part of the GRACC programme, a videographer followed a small number of the local women leaders from Kenya, Vanuatu and Cambodia to document their experience at the platform

Government engagement

Between us we attempted to engage with all our governments. Here, we shared our experiences from the local level and our call for action. This included meetings with government representatives from: Bangladesh, Australia, Cambodia, Kenya, Vanuatu, UK and Sweden.

Wider civil society

Lastly, we connected with GNDR to align our messaging with the wider civil society. We shared our call for action and GNDR's new chief executive, who is champion of ActionAid's work and presented our messages on women leadership and localisation during his high-level opening sessions speech.

4. What was different?

1. The number of local women leaders ActionAid supported to be there was higher than ever before.
2. The number of spaces ActionAid and local partners spoke at was higher.

3. Support from the GNDR was in alignment with our messages.

5. Did we have an impact?

We did have an impact! This teamwork and effort paid off.

We got four of our advocacy messages directly mentioned in the chairs summary including:

1. DRR and resilience should take the HRBA
2. Voices of women at the local level, local women leadership & youth lead DRR
3. Locally led strategies for DRR
4. The importance of greater efforts to focus on DRR and resilience in protracted crisis and conflict affected states

Displacement, loss informed preparedness and displacement all got mentioned too. Here is our favourite and most striking point in relation to our efforts and call for Action:

19. Voices of women, including at the grassroots, should be reflected at all stages of development and implementation of national and local strategies. Gender-sensitive and responsive approaches contribute to stronger disaster risk reduction interventions, reducing the vulnerability of women in times of disaster. Their leadership role must be strengthened. In order to translate commitments to women's inclusion into real progress, increased attention and targeted resources are required.

6. Challenges and learnt lessons

Here, we asked our local in country teammates and partner organisation staff how they felt the platform went; what the challenges were, what went well and what we have learnt, collectively

We also faced a few challenges...

Whilst overall a successful week, the team came up against a few challenges. We asked each participant (both AA staff and partner) to reflect and share the challenges they felt limited, restricted or made the week more challenging. These are listed below to help guide us and global platform organisers in the future:

1. **Language.** We knew language was going to be a challenge. Particularly for our local women leaders. We had fantastic teammates supporting translation to our local Cambodian and Lebanese women. The main sessions did provide French, Arabic and Spanish translation. However the side events and ignite stages did not provide translation. This excluded non English speaking participants and made it challenging to meaningfully engage. We even had to provide ongoing Arabic translation at an event our local women leader from Lebanon was speaking on the panel at. This is something we would like to advocate to future global platforms to invest in more to make the platform more inclusive of non-English speaking participants.
2. **Visas, permits and logistics.** Four of our local women based in Palestine (Gaza) and Lebanon did not get their visas and/or permits to travel. Despite applying multiple times and preparing for over six months their visas were rejected. Further to this, our team mate from Gaza faced an incredibly challenging journey across Egypt to and from the Rafah border. Is there more we can do to support this process?
3. **So much going on!** An overall feeling from participants was how much there was going on. Whilst the planning, briefings, call to action, advocacy brief and itinerary were felt to be very helpful, it was still exhausting and overwhelming. This was felt particularly by our local

women who had travelled long distances to be there. No matter how much we were engaging in there was always more we could have been at. Is there anything more we could do to ease pressure whilst making maximum impact?

7. What went well?

1. The participation and involvement of the local leaders in the relevant sessions.
2. The strategic distribution of the teams in the sessions to insure our effective contribution.
3. Early planning. Planning started way ahead the event dates so it helped us be prepared, organised and confident
4. Wider support from networks such as GNDR and the Huairou Commission.

8. Lessons learnt

1. Empower local women leaders to join and create space for them to be heard. This is more powerful than ActionAid staff. This made the global community stop and listen. We had to fight to get the space, but it worked. Powerful messages were shared and heard.
2. Be organised prepare your advocacy messages and call for action before. Strategically plan where you will advocate for them and how.
3. Apply to co-organise sessions, run side events and speak at the ignite stage. Keep sharing the same key messages at each space. Be everywhere, get as much space for our local women leaders to share their voice and messages as possible.
4. Get the support of civil society networks – to get behind you and your advocacy messages. For us this was GNDR.
5. Translate into different languages; including ongoing translation in sessions as well as pre translation of key messages documents, advocacy briefs and the call for action. We made sure we had Arabic and Cambodian translation, to support our teammates who did not speak English confidently.
6. Have a half day induction meeting upon arrival for all AA participants to get to know each other and coordinate messages
7. Have a comms person available in the venue to support.
8. Develop more documentation of our work, in more creative ways, to be able to showcase ActionAid's approach at global platform events.
9. Explore how to access greater opportunities to share and showcase in country contexts and challenges.
10. Explore how to encourage learning from the wider UNDRR platform on how to integrate conflict prevention and human rights into DRR programming and policy in protracted crises contexts

7. What's next?

We will share this report with our contacts at GNDR and UNDRR along with an impact report from the event. We will capture feedback from our local women leaders on their experience and how to improve and prepare for the next global event.

Images: GPDRR 2019

