United Nations
UGANDA

Opening Remarks at the Global Platform Side Event on
Enhancing the Effectiveness & Evaluation of
Risk Governance Across Scales

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24 May 2017, Cancun, Mexico

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Fellow speakers,

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations in Uganda, I welcome this opportunity to contribute to this critical discussion on empowering local governments to engage in disaster risk management, in pursuit of risk-informed development.

Allow me to start by providing some brief context. Uganda is managing risks from 4 inter-related and ongoing situations: (1) with over 1.3 million refugees, Uganda is now the largest refugee hosting country in Africa (and third globally). The implications on the generation of new, and the increase of existing disaster risks are far reaching; (2) Uganda is experiencing increasingly erratic weather patterns and increased regularity of droughts – over 10 million Ugandans are facing significant levels of food insecurity; (3) Uganda is seeing increasing cross border movement of people, armed groups and illicit arms and trade in border regions; and (4) the northern region of Uganda is post-conflict (following the LRA insurgency) and consequently suffers from chronic underdevelopment, poverty, fragile livelihoods and weak rule of law. Overall, it is estimated by the World Bank that 43 per cent of Ugandans could regress into poverty during shocks.

The intersection between these "pre-existing" vulnerabilities and emerging, and increasing, risks are district local governments. For Uganda, while decentralisation is relatively new, it is at the forefront of its transformation aspirations.

The journey began just over 20 years ago, and primarily sought to shift service delivery and related governance to district local governments to improve access for the rural poor.

Today, Ugandans are participating more actively in planning, and decision making in local governance. Underpinning this, has been UNDP's sustained support and investment in both the policy and the tools required to realise this shift.

In the disaster risk management space, the Office of the Prime Minister – the entity responsible for both disaster risk reduction and overseeing the implementation of the SDGs – has, with UNDP's support, developed 'hazard, risk and vulnerability' profiles for each of the country's 112 districts.

These profiles, developed by the districts, are providing critical information and an evidence base on which planning and investment decisions are made. The Office of the Prime Minister, with UNDP support, has taken further steps to produce and disseminate a standard contingency planning protocol.

 In view of the 2016-2020 UNDAF commitments towards national capacity building for peace, security and system resilience, UN agencies delivering through local governments embrace this effort to streamline contingency planning. UNICEF is utilising the standard guidance on contingency planning to support local governments to integrate contingency needs of children and women in District Development Plans. WFP on the other hand is supporting a review of the targeting methodology for food assistance towards a needs-based approach.

As the first priority of the Sendai Framework states, "disaster risk management should be based on an understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of

vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets, hazard characteristics and the environment".

Utilising this powerful tool is not without its challenges. Despite commitments to decentralization, local governments are still grappling with a range of challenges, including inadequate locally generated financial revenues coupled with an over-reliance on conditional transfers from the central government; an inability to attract and retain trained and experienced staff.

District local governments are burdened. In the push to 'localise' development, districts are responsible for a growing array of demands. Despite a high awareness of disaster risks, very few local governments in Uganda develop contingency plans that are integrated (and funded) within their annual district development plans.

Recognises the need for greater investment in the capacity of district local governments to deliver, UNDP established the 'Emergency Response and Resilience Strategy', to provide a vehicle to address the challenges districts face in getting ahead of the management of disaster risk.

Nevertheless, the participatory nature of the tool, and its utilization in district-level prioritization and planning is helping to manage risks, or at the very least raise awareness and support citizens to hold their leaders accountable. To re-enforce this, the Government of Uganda has embarked on a review of the National Policy on Disaster Preparedness and Management, and is in the process of drafting disaster risk management legislation.

Strengthening the national-level disaster risk management architecture, in part to align it to the Sendai Framework and the SDGs, is expected to result in better

coordination, particularly of non-state partners, and to enhance the capacity and accountability of district-level leaders and officials.

Updating the architecture also offers an opportunity to strengthen efforts to increase women's empowerment. For those not familiar with Uganda, women make-up the majority of the 70 per cent of the total labour force (both formal and informal) engaged in the agriculture sector. It is therefore undisputable that climate and disaster risks affect women disproportionately. Supporting women to have an equal voice in the planning and decision-making processes, particularly in local development, is necessary if Uganda's commitment to 'leaving no one behind' is to be met.

The UN system in Uganda recognises the need to improve monitoring and to support the identification of districts lagging. Establishing targets and indicators, and benching-marking progress, will provide district leaders, and more importantly their citizens, with a transparent measure.

In support of this, UNICEF has invested in innovative mobile-based approaches such as U-report with the potential to receive and disseminate real-time information and to increase community participation in social development and disaster risk management. U-Report is a large-scale messaging tool and communication engagement platform designed to give citizens a chance to voice their opinions on what is happening in their community and receive valuable information via messages. In collaboration with the Uganda Red Cross Society, and within the framework of the One Billion Coalition for Resilience, U-Report will be used to ensure access to valuable information at scale, track occurrences, community service needs and feedback thus contributing towards resilience building in fragile and risk prone states.

Related to this work, UNDP has led efforts to enhance the national database on damage and losses, to customise it to Uganda's context and ultimately report on areas linked to national development priorities, particularly in agriculture.

Recognising the need for greater investment in the capacity of district local governments to deliver, UNDP has established the 'Emergency Response and Resilience Strategy', to provide a vehicle to address the challenges districts face in getting ahead of the management of risks, starting in refugee hosting districts.

UNDP is also collaborating on the 'Presidential Initiative on Wetlands'. Wetlands, found in highly vulnerable areas, are a critical resource in Uganda, particularly for districts dependent on climate sensitive and marginal livelihoods. The initiative recognises the need for an integrated multi-sectoral approach, that moves beyond single-sector interventions, as Uganda seeks to restore and increase the resilience of both ecosystems and livelihoods. The success of this initiative primarily rests with the local governments and communities.

Indeed, related to this initiative is Uganda's Green Growth Development Strategy, that seeks to attain an inclusive low emissions economic growth process that emphasizes effective and efficient use of the country's natural, human, and physical capital while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide for present and future generations.

Empowering local governments requires sustained investment and support from the central government and development partners. Uganda has achieved a lot in the space of 20 years. However, its recognised by everyone that the journey must continue if resilient and sustainable development is to be achieved.

Allow me to conclude by thanking you again for this opportunity.