Disaster Risk Reduction Communication and Sensitization Strategy for Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles

Comoros

Madagascar

Mauritius

Seychelles

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1. Background

1.1 Institutional context

The formulation of a communication and sensitization (C&S) strategy is one of the key activities planned under the "Building Resilience and Improving Institutional Capacity in Indian Ocean Island States for Disaster Risk Reduction" component of the "Resilience Building and Disaster Response Management in the Indian Ocean (RDRM-IO) Programme". This component of the RDRM-IO programme is being implemented by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in partnership with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) with funding from the European Union. UNDRR has engaged The Humanitarian Cooperative (THC) to develop the C&S strategy and to produce a range of tools and assets that will be made available to partners across the region to enable them to roll out the strategy.

The overall objective of the RDRM-IO programme is to reduce disaster and climate related losses in the human, economic, social, physical and environmental assets of IOC member states. The aim of the UNDRR-led component is to improve DRR understanding and governance capacities in the island states of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles. While the need to develop and implement effective disaster risk reduction strategies is well understood in these countries, there is a clear and urgent need for better communications and sensitization efforts to promote the DRR agenda through the promotion of existing tools and where necessary the creation and distribution of new tools that complement existing ones.

This aligns with the Early Warnings for All initiative, launched by the UN Secretary General in March 2022, which calls for every person on earth to be protected by early warning systems by 2027. UNDRR and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) are designated co-leads for the initiative, with UNDRR leading a pillar of activity to enhance global risk knowledge and integrate it into accessible, and effective early warning systems. This includes empowering decision-makers and communities to understand, identify, and respond to risks.

This C&S strategy will target children and youth, local communities, and media across the islands with the ultimate aim of ensuring that the concept of disaster risk is taken into consideration at every level of society. As the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 emphasizes, DRR is not a standalone issue: preventing new and reducing existing disaster risks is integral to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is thus essential to integrate risk reduction into decision-making, investment and behaviour across sectors, disciplines and geographies. This C&S strategy aligns with the global imperative of shifting from managing disasters after they occur towards developing a pre-emptive understanding of risk and how to manage it so as to minimize losses and enhance resilience.

1.2 Disaster risks

The Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework notes that the "unique challenges faced by the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries and small island developing states continue to hinder realization of the Framework outcome and goal" (UNGA, 2023a). Between 2012 and 2021 disaster mortality rates in SIDS averaged up to 13 deaths per 100,000, against a global average of 0.84 deaths per 100,000 of population.

Owing to their size, limited resources, and geographical isolation, Indian Ocean island states are particularly vulnerable to more frequent, intense disaster risks, and to the adverse impacts of climate change, placing additional burdens on national institutions, budgets and sustainable development. The islands of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles are prone to tropical cyclones, floods, landslides, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis with wide-ranging consequences for loss of life, injury, displacement, damage to infrastructure, and disruption of essential services.

Tropical Cyclone Freddy traversed the southern Indian Ocean for more than five weeks in February and March 2023, claiming more than 700 lives, leaving hundreds of thousands without food and shelter and causing massive infrastructural damage. In 2022, at least five storms and tropical cyclones struck Madagascar over the course of six weeks, causing considerable damage and affecting almost a million people (WFP, 2022).

2. Stakeholder research

Research was conducted to build a sound evidence base for the design of the C&S strategy, with the aim of identifying the most pressing communications and sensitization needs in the IOC region and taking stock of previous or existing initiatives and what lessons should be learned from them. This research was conducted via i) a desktop review of key background information, ii) an online survey, and iii) a series of virtual consultations.

2.1 Desktop review

This C&S strategy coincides with the midpoint of the Sendai Framework. The Midterm Review (MTR) of the framework's implementation, and the relevant Voluntary National Reports submitted by Member States that contributed to it, were among the key documents consulted during the research conducted to generate this strategy. (See Annex 1 for a full list of source documents.)

Heads of state and government attended a high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly in May 2023 dedicated to the MTR. This resulted in a Political Declaration (UNGA, 2023b) that called on Member States to strengthen comprehensive disaster risk governance, including by:

[p]romoting the full, equal, meaningful and inclusive participation and contribution of women, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as the role of youth, volunteers, academia, scientific and research entities and networks, business, professional associations, private sector financing institutions and the media, in all forums and processes related to disaster risk reduction and in the design and implementation of disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes, including for gender-responsive and disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction, in accordance with the Sendai Framework, and promoting also the engagement of children in disaster risk reduction, as appropriate.

Several of the MTR's recommendations and examples of good practices (UNDRR, 2023) were found to be particularly instructive in the formulation of this C&S strategy:

- **Mandate communication with and inclusion of at-risk groups.** This can include targeted outreach such as community consultations to ensure that at-risk groups are included in DRR decision-making processes. To further promote the inclusion of at-risk groups, governments can support the technical capacity of civil society organizations and local communities to participate in DRR processes. For example, the Community Disaster Response Program (CDRP) in Mauritius has been designed to develop the ability of local communities to respond to disasters and foster a risk-reduction culture by empowering volunteers in vulnerable areas.

- **Increase accessibility to risk information and ensure an all-of-society approach in DRR planning.** Governments should prioritize the translation of DRR information into the primary languages of local communities to ensure that everyone can understand, prevent and reduce risk, and can prepare and react appropriately to disasters. Having clear, simple and locally relevant instructions ensures that local communities understand and can thus act upon complex information. Information shared at the right time and in an understandable way by trusted sources can save countless lives and help keep people safe.

- **Use diverse communications technologies.** Utilising multiple communication channels, including various social media platforms, has shown to be effective in enhancing risk communication. Messaging strategy and design should be imaginative and carefully channelled via people's priorities and concerns, ideally being co-designed with communities itself. Creative, innovative communication is vital for gaining attention, helping people see things differently.

These recommendations echo the co-chairs' summary of the seventh session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction that took place in Bali in May 2022 in Bali (UNDRR, 2022). Among various steps needed to advance the implementation of the Sendai Framework, the co-chairs (H.E. Prof. Muhadjir Effendy, Coordinating Minister for Human Development and

Cultural Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction) said that:

Risk dialogue and communication should be stepped up. Creative solutions and digital transformation to address communication barriers should be encouraged to strengthen a contextually relevant understanding of risk. Context specific and community-friendly messages are needed. There is a need to promote traditional, local and indigenous knowledge and wisdom that have been tested and improved through generations across the world, to further strengthen scientific practices and know-how and enhance efforts on awareness-raising and education.

2.2 Online survey

A survey was developed to establish a knowledge baseline and obtain a snapshot of regional needs and how they varied between the four island states. The survey questions addressed a range of DRR-related issues, such as the most prevalent hazards, the level of risk awareness among different sectors of society (see Figure 1), the existence of early warning systems, and previous or ongoing awareness-raising campaigns.

Stakeholder respondents were selected by UNDRR, and the survey questionnaire was completed online by people across the region. The respondents represented a range of sectors including government agencies, youth groups, academia, the private sector and NGOs.

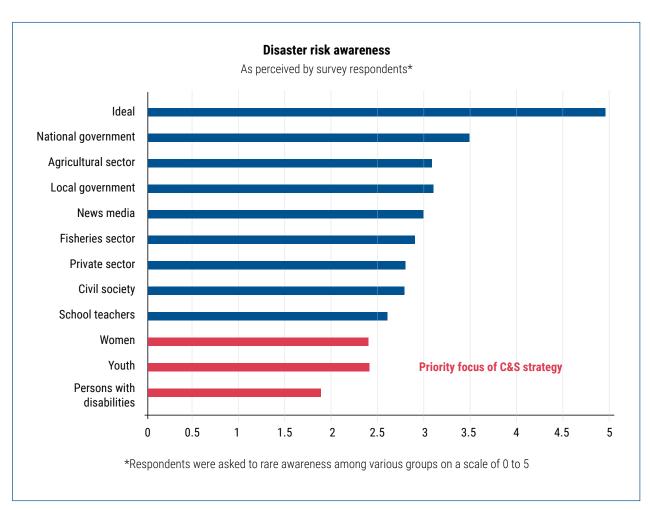**Figure 1:** Perceptions of disaster risk awareness Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles

Disaster risk awareness
As perceived by survey respondents*

*Respondents were asked to rare awareness among various groups on a scale of 0 to 5

Survey responses indicated that all four targeted countries in the region either have or are developing a DRR strategy, and that Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles also have national multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms and legislation related to DRR. In Madagascar, responses suggested that laws and strategies exist but still need to be put into effect to have more impact at the community level. Strengthening coordination and complementarity is seen as necessary to ensure the effectiveness of stakeholders' actions. The objective of the legislation is to implement disaster risk management while instilling a culture of DRR at national, territorial and sectoral levels.

Different kinds of public information campaigns related to disaster preparedness and prevention have been held in all four countries, variously run by national governments, NGOs and local associations, sometimes in partnership with each other. They cover a range of hazards (both individually and collectively, depending on the campaign), such as cyclones, tide surges, strong winds, droughts, epidemics and tsunamis. These campaigns used a variety of platforms, including TV, radio, social media, posters, SMS messages and school kits.

Most campaigns strived to be as inclusive as possible, although rural areas are sometimes left out and some respondents suggested the needs of persons with visual and auditory impairments were not systematically taken into account. Children who do not attend school were another group of concern.

Respondents agreed that there is some way to go before the general population integrates the concept of DRR into their everyday lives. As to who would benefit most from new information campaigns, responses included: people in remote areas, climate refugees, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

Finally, the survey asked respondents what should be prioritized to improve disaster risk awareness. Many of the survey responses emphasized the need to focus on preparedness and prevention rather than emergency response. Others across the region said priorities included gender-awareness, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, use of local languages, strengthening legislation, mainstreaming DRR at all levels of

governance, setting up dedicated teams at the national and local level to enhance risk awareness, linking indigenous knowledge with academic knowledge, and assessing risk vulnerability for all hazards.

2.3 Virtual consultations

Shortly after the survey was conducted, a synthesis of its responses was presented during a virtual consultation attended by stakeholders from all four island states. This consultation provided an opportunity to enhance the baseline knowledge via additional contributions from the stakeholders. Several smaller-scale consultations were subsequently held with representatives of government agencies and NGOs from across the region to delve deeper into a range of thematic areas.

2.4 Summary of key findings

As a result of the survey and consultations a number of general conclusions were drawn that inform the C&S strategy:

- There is a pressing need for greater awareness around DRR in all four countries targeted by the strategy. But although these countries are confronted with a broadly similar set of hazards, the specifics of C&S-related needs, priorities and dissemination preferences vary between states.

- Member States, UNDRR and partners are already engaged in several DRR campaigns and initiatives, and several of the assets which they have developed may be of use when rolling out this new C&S strategy. Of particular interest is the work that PIROI have done to develop character-based DRR storytelling targeted at young people.

- The most striking chord of unanimity from the groups was the conviction that the target audience for this strategy should be primarily young people, while ensuring the inclusion of women and persons with disabilities.

- Technical capacity for digital and mass communication varies considerably across the region. This was cited as an important factor to consider when designing the strategy.

2.5 Regional findings

2.5.1 PIROI/Red Cross

Beyond the member states themselves, the key stakeholder/partner in this initiative is the French Red Cross' Indian Ocean Regional Intervention Platform, or PIROI. Established in 2000, the aim of the PIROI initiative is to reduce the impact of disasters caused by natural and health hazards and the effects of climate change on the populations of the South West Indian Ocean. Disaster risk reduction strategies and awareness play a significant part in this strategy.

From an early stage, the PIROI initiative put young people at the centre of its DRR projects in Reunion and the Indian Ocean and over the years it has developed multiple educational tools to stimulate children's interest and participation. Inspired by local tradition and the local environment, these tools include children's story books, educational booklets, teaching tools, board games and innovative tools such as virtual reality and video games for smartphones and tablets. The narrative structure of these tools is based around the adventures of a series of animal characters, or mascots, each one of which represents one of the countries in the IOC region:

- Mande the bat in Comoros

- Mika the lemur in Madagascar

- Dood the dodo in Mauritius

- Timoun the turtle in Reunion

- Chico the bird in Seychelles

The use of this type of storytelling aims to advance risk awareness through the shared regional tradition of storytelling. PIROI's educational kit includes a pupil booklet for each child, consisting of a risk-specific knowledge base, and a series of fun learning activities (exercises, games); a "facilitator/teacher" booklet summarizing the knowledge elements to be conveyed to the children, and the educational programme for each session; a series of posters demonstrating safety precautions in cartoon form for each risk; a board game: Risk Péï; a story and accompanying booklet; a Happy Families card game; a range of "questions and answers" and scrolling message pens. To complement these school-based activities and reach a wider audience, PIROI runs awareness campaigns which include the broadcasting of prevention messages on television, radio and in booths, as well as volunteer-run information stands at public events and theme days.

At the regional level, PIROI's DRR programme supports national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in the implementation of a common methodology adapted to the context of each country in the region, which includes:

- Developing technical and institutional partnerships in DRR;

- The creation of prevention tools inspired by the local context and traditions;

- Community prevention and preparedness (multi-hazard approach).

Photo 1: Get To High Ground Campaign in Mauitius

Photo credit: UNDRR

2.6 Country-specific findings

2.6.1 Comoros

Volcanic eruptions were once considered the biggest natural hazards facing Comoros. But, with the gathering pace of climate change, drought, floods and rising sea levels have also become major causes of concern.

Comorian stakeholders noted that the country's DRR focus had yet to make the necessary switch from post-disaster reaction to prevention.

This was in part seen as being caused by funding constraints, with one interlocutor lamenting that it, "usually takes a disaster to strike before the money starts to flow".

As a result, awareness of DRR in Comoros is reported to be "moderate at best"; awareness varies hugely between demographic groups. In terms of C&S messaging, the recommendation is to focus on the nature of prevailing hazards, their impact, and what people should do when they strike.

Young people were identified as a key target group for any awareness-raising activities in Comoros because they tend to have a better understanding of the issues and they have the tools (online platforms for example) to spread awareness amongst others. Social media is widely used in the country and is seen as an effective way to reach the targeted populations.

Women's organizations and other community groups (especially those in coastal regions) can also be relied on to receive and share awareness communications. Many of these groups have WhatsApp groups that could be used to spread awareness messaging.

Schools in Comoros could also be used to distribute C&S material if permission is sought from local authorities (stakeholders offered to assist in such procedures). This has been done successfully with a public campaign aimed at reducing plastic waste. As part of a climate resilience project funded by the European Union, a consortium of two NGOs, Dayima and Araf, have installed hydrometric stations in various locations in the Comoros, including 16 schools, and trained local communities and youth groups in their use and their role in disaster risk reduction (Gazette des Comores, 2022).

2.6.2 Madagascar

Stakeholders reported that the main natural hazards facing Madagascar include cyclones, floods, drought, landslides and fires. The concept of DRR is said to be gradually gaining traction in Madagascar but there is a long way to go before all key actors are fully engaged. Low levels of disaster risk awareness were reported to be a particular issue among women, persons with disabilities, news media professionals, schoolteachers and those working in the agricultural and fishing sectors. A key recommendation was to adapt DRR messaging to the specific circumstances of different sectors of society and local cultural factors such as using local dialects and considering local habits and customs; another was to ensure affected communities were included in the planning of C&S initiatives.

Each year, the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction offers an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of DRR among regional and local government officials and the community and to encourage them to contribute to building a more risk-resilient nation.

The Government of Madagascar is taking steps to focus on resilience as a strategy to promote sustainable development, in concert with local and traditional authorities, civil society and the private sector. The Private Sector Humanitarian Platform (PSHP) is a non-profit business association that supports disaster management efforts in Madagascar by building synergies between various stakeholders, including the national disaster management office (BNGRC). In December 2022, the PSHP, the BNGRC, the Directorate General of Meteorology, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as well as humanitarian partners collaborated to launch a pioneering Business-led Emergency Operations Centre. The aim of the centre is to strengthen the capacity of Malagasy businesses to respond to natural hazard-related disasters such as drought and cyclones, and to better prepare local businesses, and to ensure effective collaboration between the private sector, and humanitarian partners and under the coordination of the government (Connecting Business Initiative, 2022).

Photo 2: Madagascar's national disaster management office prioritizes preparedness

Photo credit: UNDRR

There have been public information campaigns about DRR and related initiatives in Madagascar, but the general public has not yet fully integrated the concept into their everyday lives. These campaigns have been disseminated via social media, TV & radio, school kits and special events. Local associations have also run campaigns related to cyclones, rising sea levels and tidal waves. As illustrated in Photo 2, early warning systems in Madagascar include the use of colour-coded flags that indicate how soon a cyclone is expected to strike at what steps people should take to protect themselves (Gouvernement de Madagascar, 2018). These colours correspond with different types of siren blasts.

Photo 3: Colour-coded flags used for cyclone early warning in Madagascar

Photo credit: UNDRR

It was recommended that future C&S initiatives focus on prevention-related activities, rather than emergency response.

The BNGRC has organized information campaigns on disaster preparedness, notably in relation to cyclones, that ran in local languages on TV, radio, social media and posters. Stakeholders suggested these could be built upon and updated and extended to ensure the worst-affected rural areas are more fully included in C&S initiatives. Children not attending school were identified as another priority target. The BNGRC itself indicated its desire to improve the following aspects of awareness-raising: message contents, choice of delivery channels, and how target audiences are prioritized.

A key impediment to effective C&S initiatives is the remoteness of many communities and the absence in many areas of mobile phone signals and internet connection. Again, stakeholders stressed the importance of sensitizing communities about the different types of disaster risks they face so that they become better equipped in terms of preparedness and prevention. The BNGRC, for example, expressed support for the idea of developing sensitization materials that could be distributed in local markets.

The voluntary national report that Madagascar prepared for the Sendai Framework MTR notes that the government has improved the availability of risk information and has renewed its governance framework to support the integration of DRR measures into policymaking. For example, a National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction was established in 2021 under the Prime Minister's Office, with the Emergency Management Prevention and Support Unit acting as its secretariat. The Platform is composed of government representatives from all sectors as well as university, private sector, NGOs, UN System, and financial and technical partners. Its aim is to ensure synergies of activities, raise awareness and advocate for DRR mainstreaming and integration.

One of the key challenges highlighted to achieve the 2030 objectives was the need to consolidate knowledge on risks to support better decision-making.

2.6.3 Mauritius

Stakeholders in Mauritius reported that floods, rains and cyclones were the main natural hazards they faced. These are among 41 hazards (not all of them natural) listed in the country's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Strategic Framework 2020 – 2030 (Government of Mauritius, 2020). This multiplicity underlines the importance of adopting a multi-hazard approach to DRR.

The strategic framework notes that Mauritius "has a well-developed warning and alert system for some, principally meteorological, hazards but also for tsunami, and is working in establishing a dam failure warning system."

During periods of heavy rainfall, for example, the authorities issue different levels of warnings based on the intensity and expected impact of the rain. These warnings are communicated through various channels, including radio, television, social media, and the official website of the Meteorological Services of Mauritius.

Stakeholders identified children (particularly primary school children), and persons with disabilities as the key target audience for awareness-raising initiatives. While the Ministry of Education would welcome sensitization being carried out in schools, there is currently a lack of appropriate tools to do this. A new potential avenue of engagement with youths engaged in secondary education is the National Forum for Colleges Mauritius, which was established in August 2022 to give students a structured way to communicate their concerns on a wide range of issues to national authorities (Government of Mauritius, 2022a).

Mauritian stakeholders favour a year-round approach to C&S on DRR. As one explained: "Once a disaster strikes, we have no problems reaching people with unlimited communications. But communicating DRR before disasters strike is much harder." Like stakeholders

across the region, those in Mauritius are keen for children to be imbued with a sense of DRR from an early age, when their minds are especially receptive to new ideas. To date, however, budgetary challenges and what can be described as a "creativity deficit" have hampered this objective.

In terms of specifics, Mauritian stakeholders welcomed the idea of putting up DRR-related posters in classrooms, some of which could be the winning entries of a national or even regional art competition. Noting the importance of fun and interactivity when it comes to effective communications with children, they also expressed enthusiasm about the concept of a board-game that could be printed on-site. Mauritian stakeholders stressed that all materials created as part of this C&S strategy must be available in French and/or Creole; they offered to help with the design of these products.

School timetables in Mauritius include activity periods in which visitors are invited to make presentations on a range of extra-curricular issues to enhance the broader education of pupils. Stakeholders suggested these periods offered an excellent opportunity to bring DRR storytelling into schools while similarly training/encouraging teachers to continually engage on DRR objectives.

In its Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework, it was noted that Mauritius had successfully introduced a national disaster risk reduction and management institutional structure including a robust emergency and crisis management mechanism (Government of Mauritius, 2022b). Disaster-proof architecture and up-to-date early warning systems had reduced risk for communities. However, challenges still remain with substantial development in risk-prone areas and limited institutional capacity and resources leading to obstacles sharing information across sectors.

Photo 4: Get To High Ground Campaign in Mauritius

Photo credit: UNDRR

2.6.4 Seychelles

Stakeholders in Seychelles reported similar natural hazards to those prevalent in Mauritius, with floods being the main threat, alongside landslides, coastal erosion, forest fires and tsunamis. They too, are keen on focussing C&S efforts toward young people, notably students enrolled in secondary and tertiary education.

The Seychelles government has organized communications campaigns focusing on a variety of natural hazards, one of which specifically focussed on tsunamis. These campaigns ran on television, radio and social media platforms. They were aimed at the broad general public rather than being tailored to or adapted for people with visual/auditory impairments or other disabilities. One Seychellois survey respondent recommended that any future C&S campaign should specifically consider the needs of people with disabilities and the elderly. Another recommendation was to ensure that DRR initiatives contextualize the specific circumstances of targeted countries.

In its Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework, complacency among the Seychelles population was identified as one of the main risks:

"The lack of occurrence in disaster related incident in the Seychelles has led to a lenient and laissez faire nature amongst the population a mindset that 'we are always safe' when it comes to emergency/disaster related preparedness and response" (Government of Seychelles, 2022).

Photo 5: World Tsunami Awareness Day 2023 in Seychelles

Photo credit: UNDRR

3. Strategy

The purpose of this communications and sensitization strategy is to improve awareness and deepen understanding of disaster risk reduction in Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. The long-term vision is that risk be taken into consideration at every level of society and in all key decision-making.

3.1 Objectives

- **To improve awareness of disaster risks among the population**

- **To promote disaster preparedness and prevention measures while building resilience through collective action**

- **To identify barriers to engagement of target groups and provide support to remove them**

3.2 Strategic approach

- **Co-creation.** Assets and messaging will be developed in concert with their target audience. Resources will be adaptable, to ensure they can meet local needs, and will be easy and inexpensive to produce.

- **Harnessing the reach of influencers.** Target audiences will be reached by people they know, trust and listen to. Influencers – defined in the broadest sense as people who have credibility and a network – will be central to this. Awareness-raising will feel organic, rather than something that has been delivered in a centralized and top-down way.

- **Promoting inclusion and accessibility.** Every activation will cater for the needs of a diverse range of audiences, including under-represented groups. All assets will be fully inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities.

- **Being insight-led.** This strategy builds on existing good practice in the area of disaster risk reduction awareness-raising and has been informed by the insights of key stakeholders on the ground. An insight-driven approach to delivery will allow local partners the flexibility to focus on tactics and initiatives that are proven to be successful in their communities.

3.3 Target audience

In line with an overall ambition to promote universal awareness and understanding of disaster risk reduction, this strategy will focus on engaging demographics in the four island states who are likely to have the lowest levels of awareness and those who have the reach and credibility to influence them. Based on insights from stakeholder research, this strategy prioritizes reaching the following audience groups:

- **Children and youth.** The overwhelming feedback from stakeholders was that children and youth should be a priority target for the strategy. The vulnerabilities of children increase during a natural hazard and, according to UNICEF, children typically represent 50% to 60% of those affected by a disaster (UNICEF, 2018). As well as helping to protect children today, educating this audience group is also an investment for future generations, and in the long-term will help drive the culture of preparedness and resilience at the core of the DRR message.

Young people are often more receptive to new ideas and more likely to change their behaviour. By virtue of their connectivity to peers and broader communities via social media, they can be engaged in sharing information and promoting awareness to others. This audience group includes minors, schoolchildren, students and youth (defined by the UN as aged 15 to 24).

Photo 6: Get To High Ground Campaign in Mauritius

Photo credit: UNDRR

- **Local communities.** To drive reach it will be important to engage local communities on the ground, through a range of community groups and organizations. This will be achieved through a mix of events and using communication channels such as WhatsApp groups and/or radio, the most accessible form of communication, especially in rural areas. A local community focus will be essential for engaging harder to reach groups whose levels of awareness around disaster risk reduction may be among the lowest. These include people living in remote areas, climate refugees and older citizens. In "media limited" areas, methods of communicating about risk have often been established and trusted over generations. Risk communication initiatives can build on these, and may involve storytelling (UNDRR, 2022b).

Photo 7: Media stakeout at the Prime Minister's Office with Mami Mizutori

Photo credit: UNDRR

- **Media.** The media play a critical role in disaster response but, in spite of this, stakeholders identified a lack of awareness about disaster risk reduction among reporters. There is a need to better educate media, equip them with content and harness their potential to amplify disaster risk reduction messaging. The media audience group includes journalists, radio hosts, and community organizations and leaders who host information booths and share or publish news updates.

Across each of these groups **considerations will be made for persons with disabilities, and gender.** The UNDRR 2023 Global Survey Report on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters found that a majority did not have a preparedness plan. A considerable percentage of respondents were not aware of any arrangement for accessible information related to disaster risks and 86% of respondents reported not participating in community-based DRR decision making.

Persons with disabilities are likely to face additional challenges accessing emergency services, shelter, and healthcare. Raising awareness of their needs and rights in the context of disaster risk will help to promote a more inclusive approach to disaster management. Involving persons with disabilities in the planning and implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies will help to ensure that their unique perspectives and needs are taken into account and that they are not left behind in disaster response and recovery efforts.

Photo 8: Ms Berthe Vola (second to right) and group pose on 'Fixing the dunes' project site in Maroalomainty (Ambovombe), Madagascar, 21 June 2022

Photo credit: UNDRR

Insight from stakeholders also identified that, in some areas, women had lower levels of awareness of disaster risk reduction than men. Gender has an impact on vulnerability and exposure to disaster risk. The reports on the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework have pointed to gender equality in disaster risk reduction as lagging behind, hence remaining a high priority cross-cutting issue in its implementation. To address this, UNDRR, UNFPA, and UN Women will create a Gender Action Plan (GAP) for the remainder of the implementation of the Sendai Framework, through a multi-stakeholder consultation process. The GAP for the Sendai Framework will build upon progress made to date and identify key priority actions to accelerate implementation to 2030.

3.4 Advocates and influencers

Advocates and influencers who champion the cause of disaster risk reduction and share messaging among their networks and audiences will be crucial to the success of this strategy. A term coined by the 2022 Global Assessment Report on DRR, these "Knowledge Brokers" can play an important role in "translating" across sectors and aligning conversations with positive outcomes (UNDRR, 2022b). For the purpose of this strategy, influencers are defined as people with reach and credibility who are likely to be trusted messengers for sharing awareness-raising content. As well as amplifying reach, these influencers will be actively involved in developing and adapting assets to ensure that they resonate with their communities.

The target audience should ultimately become advocates themselves. Once they have been reached, they will be encouraged to share messaging among their peers. This cascaded approach will be essential for driving changes in attitudes and behaviours. For instance, it is well established that youth audiences are more influenced and likely to engage with content shared by their peers.

Table 1: Influencer groups

Influencer group	Role	Audience
Community leaders	Disseminate messages through events and various forms of communication, including, where practicable, digital channels	Local communities, children and youth
Radio hosts	Broadcast disaster risk reduction messaging (including public service announcements)	Local communities including those in remote areas
Teachers	Educate children on preparedness and prevention measures. Utilize resources including posters, quizzes, and printable games, and galvanize pupils to help create their own resources through competitions and classroom activities	Children and youth
NGOs and civil society organizations	Distribute resources and provide direct support	Local communities, with a particular focus on at risk groups

3.5 Key messaging

Risk reduction and resilience building are essential for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. Networks of local leaders, advocates and influencers on the ground are best placed to decide on the specific language and storytelling techniques which will engage and persuade their communities. These groups will have the autonomy to own the story they are telling, and the flexibility to adapt it to different demographics and cultures across the four countries.

3.5.1 Messaging framework

Rather than a prescriptive approach, these groups will be supported by a key messaging framework. A messaging toolkit will share key facts, examples and a suggested structure for local deliverers to create their own audience-specific messaging. The framework will propose the following structure for the development of key messaging:

1. **Know your risk:** understand the hazards that your country is exposed to and who is most vulnerable to them.

2. **Act on risk:**

   ● **Before a hazard emerges, try to:**

      i. **Prevent** the risks of natural hazards from causing a disaster, for example, when constructing new homes, avoid building in areas that could be impacted by hazards.

      ii. **Adapt to changing conditions, such as climate change.** When exposure to a hazard can't be avoided, try to reduce weaknesses and vulnerability. This includes reinforcing buildings from storms or using drought-resistant crops.

Photo 9: World Tsunami Awareness Day 2023 in Seychelles

Photo credit: UNDRR

iii. **Be prepared.** Not all risks can be reduced, so it is important to be prepared to face them when they emerge. This includes developing a disaster preparedness plan to enable early action, conducting evacuation drills, and building an emergency kit.

- When a hazard emerges:

i. **Stay informed.** Keep up to date with information and instructions from trusted sources, such as local authorities, emergency responders and official media.

ii. **Activate your preparedness plan and ensure no one is left behind.** For example, if evacuation orders are issued, vulnerable groups such as older persons, women, children, and persons with disabilities, may need special help to evacuate to safety.

3. **Act together:** in every phase of risk reduction and disaster preparedness, make sure you work together as a community to improve resilience to hazards. Disasters impact everyone, and everyone has a responsibility to reduce risks.

3.5.2 Call to action

The messaging toolkit will include guidance to support local deliverers to develop a call to action which will be included with the distribution and publication of every asset. These calls to action will help drive the overarching strategy objectives of improving awareness and promoting disaster preparedness through collective action.

For online assets, the call-to-action framework would be an ask for the audience to:

1. Share the post with their network

2. Pledge to start a conversation about disaster risk reduction with a friend or family member

3. Sign up to join a local community action or event

4. Assets and tactics

4.1 Core assets

The most tangible components of this C&S strategy are the following core assets:

- 5 social media videos

- 1 animation

- 5 static editable social media cards

- 5 public service radio announcement scripts

- 5 printable pictures for children to colour in

- 2 school quizzes (for primary and secondary schools)

The social media videos consist of short films about disaster risk in Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and the wider Indian Ocean Islands region. Through subtitling, they are accessible to both French and English speakers.

Photo 10: Get To High Ground Campaign in Mauritius

Photo credit: UNDRR

The animation, available in French and English versions, is designed to raise awareness of disaster risks and encourages viewers to make advance preparations for natural hazards. Animation is a particularly useful communications tool for engaging children and youth. It allows for the creation of visually appealing stories that convey important messages in the fun and interactive way that stakeholders have called for. Animation also allows for complex issues to be simplified and presented in a way that is easier for children to understand.

Housed in Canva, the social media cards all deliver the same succinct message: "Risks don't have to become disasters. Know your risk and be prepared". Using a range of stylized graphics, they apply this message to cyclones, droughts, floods, tsunamis and volcanos. The cards are very editable by end users, who can, for example, replace the English/French text with vernacular languages and add their own logos. The cards thus meet the need – repeatedly expressed in the stakeholder survey – for customizable and localizable content.

The English and French radio scripts, designed to be broadcast as 20-second public service announcements,

cover cyclones and floods and drive home the message: "Be prepared".

The two quizzes, geared to primary and secondary school pupils, each consist of 20 questions related to various aspects of natural hazards and disaster risk.

4.2 Toolkit

All the assets will be made available for download from an online "toolkit" hosted on a dedicated page on PreventionWeb, UNDRR's global knowledge sharing platform for disaster risk reduction and resilience. Housing the assets together in a single location will help ensure consistency of messaging across a diverse range of communication channels and audiences.

4.3 Building on the success of PIROI

As detailed earlier in this document, PIROI have created a lot of educational tools targeted at youth. Their project has been running for over 20 years and the design, implementation and execution has been impressively comprehensive. This strategy can be used to cross-promote their existing initiatives. Original content and tools produced as part of this strategy will draw on PIROI's work. They are fully supportive of this approach and willing to share assets as required.

4.4 Inclusion and accessibility

All assets will be fully inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities in line with the UNDRR guidelines. Assets and the toolkit will all adhere to the following principles:

- Use clear and simple language that is easy to understand, avoiding the use of complex jargon or technical terms.

- Promote accessibility by using readable fonts, contrasting colours, and appropriate spacing to make sure that content is easy to read for people with visual impairments. Captions and transcripts will be provided for all video content.

- Provide Alt Text to describe all online visual content, helping persons with visual impairments to understand the context of the images.

- Drive inclusion at events, supporting deliverers to consider the need for outreach to be accessible for everyone including persons with disabilities.

5. Delivery methods

5.1 Social media and digital outreach

Across the four countries there is considerable variation in rates of internet and cellular phone access and social media usage. However, while digital cut-through may be relatively low in Madagascar, for instance, there was still a consensus across the stakeholders that social media assets would be a valuable tool for this strategy.

The target audience of youth are disproportionately likely to be online. Sharing assets and messaging on social media provides an opportunity to reach young people at scale, while providing a relatively easy, and measurable, way for them to be advocates for disaster risk reduction by sharing awareness-raising content among their peers.

Table 2: Internet and Mobile Cellular subscriptions

	People using internet in 2021 in % of the population	Mobile Cellular subscriptions in 2021
Comoros	27%	853,449 (equivalent to 103,8% of the total population)
Madagascar	20%	16,279,633 (equivalent to 56,3% of the total population)
Mauritius	68%	1,971,300 (equivalent to 155,7% of the total population)
Seychelles	82%	183,840 (equivalent to 185% of the total population)

Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU) accessed at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS?end=2021&locations=MG-KM-MU-SC&start=1990&view=chart

6. Implementation

There will be three distinct phases to the initiative, starting with a social media activation, building up to school engagement, and then culminating in a programme of wider community and outreach. This will help maximize the longevity of the assets being created and also aligns to the influencer-led strategy: each phase represents an opportunity to recruit more influencers, who will help to maximize reach. This increases the likelihood that the target audience will see and hear messaging and assets from multiple different sources that they trust. (For instance, a parent may learn about it from their child's school, before hearing more in a radio broadcast.)

Pilot phase

Ahead of a full rollout of this strategy, a relatively small geographical area in one of the countries should be identified to run a pilot using the toolkit and following a scaled-down version of the three-phase plan. Lessons learned from the pilot phase can help inform the wider implementation of the strategy and toolkit and be presented to partners across the four island states.

The following activities will take place up until the end of the project in September 2025:

Table 3: Social media activation (phase 1)

Date (all TBC)	Activity	Lead
	Identify platforms such as PreventionWeb and UNDRR social media accounts to disseminate information on disasters and disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.	UNDRR and IOC
	Identify online influencers to share content.	
	Reuse the toolkit materials for key initiatives and dates International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, World Tsunami Awareness Day, Early Warning for All, Africa Climate Summit, COP, to maximize reach.	
4–5 weeks before launch	Generate ideas, consult then finalize ideas for social media cards. Begin creating the graphics and text content for each piece.	UNDRR
3–4 weeks before launch	Finalize the localized designs of each social media card. Proofread and edit text to ensure it is accurate and error-free. Schedule the release dates for each piece.	Governments and partners
2–3 weeks before launch	Share the first social media card on social media platforms. Start promoting the film launch and encourage followers to share and engage with the content.	Governments and partners
1–2 weeks before launch	Release the second and third social media card. Continue promoting the film and sharing behind-the-scenes content or teasers to generate buzz.	Governments and partners
	Release the fourth social media card. Share more detailed information about the film and its storyline to build anticipation.	
	Launch day: Release the film along with the final social media card. Encourage followers to watch the film and share it with their own networks, along with their thoughts and feedback.	Governments and partners
	Amplify school and community outreach activity on social media channels.	Governments and partners

Table 4: School outreach programme (phase 2)

Date (all TBC)	Activity	Lead
	Enlist the support of Ministries of Education in the region to promote the initiative among schools in the Indian Ocean islands States. Establish a framework for running a national competition among school pupils to design the best disaster risk reduction poster.	Governments
	Distribute the youth toolkit featuring educational materials among teachers, ahead of the start of term.	Governments and education leaders
	Interactive sessions run in classrooms using ideas and resources from the toolkit. This can include quizzes, games, stickers, competitions, class discussions, posters and short film screenings.	Education leaders
To coincide with IDDRR/WTAD	Winner of the national disaster risk reduction art competition announced, with promotion in the media.	Education leaders

Table 5: Community and media engagement (phase 3)

Date (all TBC)	Activity	Lead
	Identify and enlist local organizations to partner with in the running of local events. The range of groups and organizations identified will ensure inclusion and accessibility for a range of different demographics including people living in remote areas, women and persons with disabilities.	Governments
	Community engagement events held across different parts of the Indian Ocean islands to promote community-based disaster risk reduction initiatives. Community groups encouraged to share messaging online and in WhatsApp groups.	Governments and community leaders
	Identify key trusted media outlets and reporters who will provide the biggest reach.	Governments and community leaders
	Partner with local radio and TV stations to create disaster awareness-raising programmes and share the public service announcement. Media stories can be developed based on local activities like the films, competitions and community outreach events.	Governments and community leaders

7. Evaluation

Feedback will be gathered through a questionnaire (see Annex) distributed to key stakeholders at the end of the project (i.e. September 2025). This is designed to establish how well the strategy performed against its objectives and led to increased knowledge and awareness of DRR. It will also draw out feedback on what went well and what could be improved for future DRR awareness-raising initiatives. Key performance indicators to measure will include:

Awareness

- Number of people reached through the communication and sensitization strategy.

- Level of understanding of DRR among the population before and after implementation of the strategy.

Collective action

- Number of people participating in RDRM-IO communications activities.

- Level of understanding around DRR before and after implementation of the strategy.

Identified groups

- Number of people from the identified groups reached through the communication and sensitization strategy.

- Levels of understanding of DRR among identified groups before and after implementation of the strategy.

- Number of people from identified groups participating in disaster preparedness activities and events.

- Level of understanding around DRR among identified groups before and after implementation of the strategy.

In addition to benchmarking and end-of-delivery surveys, additional metrics will be tracked throughout to periodically monitor the effectiveness of the strategy and local delivery tactics in each island state. These metrics include:

- Online views of the videos and social media cards

- Social media reach and engagement

- Downloads of toolkits and resources

- Numbers of participating schools and community organizations

- Volume of media coverage achieved – number of mentions and estimated reach

- Attendance numbers at community events

- Feedback from target audiences, including groups identified as at risk and most in need of an inclusive approach

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Annex: Evaluation questionnaire for stakeholders

This questionnaire is designed to assess the extent to which the DRR communications and sensitization strategy developed as part of Building Resilience and Improving Institutional Capacity in Indian Ocean Island States for Disaster Risk Reduction" component of the "Resilience Building and Disaster Response Management in the Indian Ocean (RDRM-IO) Programme" met its objectives and contributed to increased knowledge and awareness of DRR. It will also draw out feedback on what went well and what could be improved for future DRR awareness-raising initiatives. Your participation will therefore be greatly appreciated.

Name:

Organization:

Job title:

Country:

Email:

1) Strategy objectives

On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 5 (very much so), to what extent did the strategy meet the following objectives:

a) Improve awareness of disaster risks among the population:

Additional comments:

b) Promote disaster preparedness and prevention measures while building resilience through collective action:

Additional comments:

c) Identify barriers to engagement of target groups and support to remove them:

Additional comments:

Approximately how many people were reached through the strategy and its core assets?

Was the strategy successful in reaching its target audiences (children and youth, local communities, media)?

Was the strategy (and its components) sufficiently inclusive of and accessible by at-risk groups, such as persons with disabilities?

Did the strategy contribute to increased participation in DRR-related activities and events?

Do you have suggestions as to how could future iterations of the strategy could better meet these objectives and, more broadly, accelerate DRR in your country/region?

2) Core assets and toolkit

On a scale of 0 (not very useful) to 5 (very useful) please evaluate the following aspects of the strategy's core assets and provide any additional comments, such as whether and how you the assets were used and distributed and any feedback you received:

    a) Videos:

    Additional comments:

    b) Radio scripts:

    Additional comments:

    c) Editable/localisable graphic cards:

    Additional comments:

    d) School quizzes:

    Additional comments:

e) Animations:

Additional comments:

f) Colouring book/pages:

Additional comments:

g) Toolkit:

Additional comments (for example, was the toolkit sufficiently user-friendly?)

Do you have suggestions as to how core assets in future iterations of the strategy could better meet the strategy's objectives and, more broadly, accelerate DRR in your country/region?

3) Other comments:

Do you have any other comments about the strategy not covered by the questions above that could help inform future iterations? Any lessons learned?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!