



## INTERNATIONAL DISASTER REDUCTION DAY

Last week, our article introduced the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, noting that disasters often follow natural hazards, and their severity depends on how much impact a hazard has on society and the environment. On October 13, Guyana will join the rest of the world in observing this day under the theme ***"International cooperation for developing countries to reduce their disaster risk and disaster losses."*** This is the sixth of the Sendai Seven targets, or what is referred to as Target (f): "Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of the present Framework by 2030".

**Quick fact:** The city of Sendai in Japan was founded in 1600, and is known for its green spaces. As such it is called "The City of Trees."

Over the past decades, the number of natural disasters has quadrupled. Not only are there more floods, cyclones, hurricanes, droughts and earthquakes, but their severity is predicted to increase as a result of climate change. Glaciers and ice caps are continuously melting, rainfall patterns are changing, drought conditions are affecting more and more of the world's land mass, crops and water resources are becoming depleted.

The impact of non-climate-related disasters, such as earthquakes is also increasing because of urbanisation and population growth. The impacts of these phenomena not only affect the populations of the countries within which they occur, but all the people who inhabit the Earth. Every inhabitant of our planet therefore, should be involved in some way in the observation of International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The year 2021 promises to be a make or break year when it comes to delivering on the policy agenda agreed on in 2015 regarding our efforts to tackle climate change. Without real action on reversing trends on climate and biodiversity loss in the next ten years, extreme weather events will be overwhelming, especially for developing countries.

**Quick fact:** According to [conservation.org](https://www.conservation.org), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) shows that average global temperatures in 2020 were 1.76 degrees F (0.98 degrees C) warmer than the 20<sup>th</sup> century average — making it the second-hottest year on record. In fact, the seven warmest years in the 1880-2020 record have all occurred since 2014.

The recent la Nina flood conditions has resulted in significant economic losses and negative impacts to development. The losses suffered in the agriculture sector and the number of lives affected due to the floods of 2005 are difficult to forget. The Civil Defense Commission has received reports of more than 25,000 households impacted by flooding

in more than 300 communities across all regions of Guyana since May 18, 2021. By May 21, some 1,400 homes had been flooded. It was estimated between 7,000 and 8,000 homes have now been damaged.

According to research by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) in 2021, out of 16 countries in the region, 9 out of 10 people are affected by disasters. The estimated economic losses were a minimum of US\$53 billion. The 16 countries which includes Guyana, its immediate and regional neighbours such as Venezuela and Belize, etc.

Our vulnerability, notably for food security, poverty reduction and agriculture development could be further diminished due to the impacts of climate change, particularly on Guyana's low-lying coast.

### **EPA's role in disaster risk reduction**

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) mandate is to oversee the effective management, conservation, protection and improvement of the environment. This requires the Agency take the necessary measures to ensure the prevention and control of pollution, assess environmental and human health impacts of economic activities, and the sustainable use of natural resources.

EPA's Emergency Response forms part of Guyana's action to reduce the severity of environmental disasters should they occur. The Agency also works closely with the Civil Defense Commission (CDC), the coordinating agency for disaster management in Guyana, on a number of initiatives to raise awareness, and craft policies to prepare communities and households to manage impacts.

The CDC has embarked on a number of initiatives to strengthen and enhance Community Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) in vulnerable coastal, hinterland and indigenous communities across Guyana. The project entails the incorporation of CBEWS into the already implemented Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) system in hazard-prone coastal, hinterland and indigenous communities in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Strengthening Disaster Management Capacity of Women in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Commonwealth of Dominica Project. Further, a number of target specific public education and awareness campaigns are being conducted to help us all understand disaster risk management a little better, and what we can do to contribute.

**For additional information on Disaster Risk Reduction, contact can be made with the Civil Defense Commission (CDC) at Thomas Road, Thomas Lands, Georgetown on Telephone numbers: 226-1114, 226-8815, 225-5847 or 226-1027 or visit the website at [www.cdc.gy](http://www.cdc.gy)**

***You can share your ideas and questions by sending letters to: “Our Earth, Our Environment”, C/O ECEA Programme, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia, GEORGETOWN, or email us at: eit.epaguyana@gmail.com. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram and subscribe to our YouTube channel.***