

Disaster Management in Africa: Challenges and Perspectives for Human Security

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Tomorrow (29 October), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1043rd session on 'Disaster Management in Africa: challenges and perspectives for human security' at the level of Heads of State and Government. This session takes place under the chairship of Mozambique, which also hosted a virtual meeting of the Committee of Ministers Responsible for Disaster Risk management from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 26th May 2021 with the aim to review progress on regional Disaster Risk Management programmes and ensure effective coordination at the regional level.

The session is expected to have two segments, an open and a closed session. In the open session invited guests will deliver their statements. Following the opening Statement by Felipe Jacinto Nyusi, President of the Republic of Mozambique and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of October, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, is expected to make remarks. Further remarks are expected from the President of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, in his capacity as the AU Champion for Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, as well as President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, in his capacity as the Leader of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSOC). AU Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, Amira EL Fadil, and AU Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development,

Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, are scheduled to deliver presentations.

This session comes on the heels of the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, which is observed on 13 October to raise awareness about disaster risk reduction. This year's commemoration took place under the theme of 'international cooperation for developing countries to reduce their disaster risk and disaster losses', the sixth target of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. The session also takes place ahead of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, which is scheduled for 31 October-12 November 2021. As Africa bears the brunt of climate change but has contributed least to climate emissions, the summit may also present an opportunity to remind commitments around climate finance and adaptation.

This high level engagement on disaster management becomes all too important as Africa continues to face evermore frequent disasters and increasing vulnerability with a devastating repercussion on the lives and livelihoods of its people. According to World Risk Report 2021, Africa has the second highest disaster risk next to Oceania while it is the continent with the highest overall societal vulnerability—12 of the 15 most vulnerable countries in the world are located in Africa. The risk has been evident from multiple disasters that hit the continent in recent years including the volcano eruption on Mount Nyiragongo in the city of Goma in DRC, locust swarms and flooding in Horn of Africa, cyclones and storms that led to heavy rains and flooding in Southern Africa countries such as the Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. 90 percent of the major disasters in Africa have been climate related.

Over the years, the AU has put in place policy and institutional frameworks to effectively respond to the increasing disasters confronting the continent. The African Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (ARSDRR), which

was adopted by the Assembly (Assembly/AU/Dec.38) during its third ordinary session held in July 2004, guides the continent's disaster risk reduction efforts. The AUC has further developed the Programme of action (PoA) for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. To address the humanitarian consequences of disasters, the Union also adopted, among others, the Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa and the Common African Position (CAP) on Humanitarian Effectiveness that shaped Africa's new humanitarian architecture.

On the institutional aspect, the African Risk Capacity (ARC)—a specialized agency of the AU established in 2012—comes at the center of Africa's 'disaster risk architecture'. The ARC aims to help African governments improve their capacities to better plan, prepare, and respond to extreme weather events and natural disasters by combining the concepts of early warning, disaster risk management, and risk finance. The Special Emergency Assistance Fund (SEAF) is also established to support African countries affected by drought and/or famine although it needs to be replenished. The African Humanitarian Agency (AUHA) is also expected to facilitate coordination in humanitarian response. The African Standby Force (ASF) is another mechanism that has the mandate to respond to natural disasters.

While there are notable progress in terms of laying down the necessary structures to address disaster risks in the continent, many challenges remain. One of the significant challenges in this respect is, as captured by Lesley Ndlovu (CEO African Risk Capacity Limited) in her recent remarks on the international day for disaster risk reduction, that 'disaster response is extremely slow and inefficient and, by the time governments and NGOs have raised enough money to respond meaningfully, the problem has become much worse, and more funding is needed'. In most cases, not only the response

is 'slow and inefficient' but also it is largely reactive focusing on relief and immediate rehabilitation while ignoring preventive disaster reduction measures.

Hence inadequate early warning system and the gap in translating early warning to early action remain critical hurdles. As captured in the notes prepared for this session, 'in most countries, early warning systems are sectoral in nature and hardly coordinated'. A positive development in this respect is a recent conference convened this month by the AU Commission to validate a Multi-Hazard Early Warning/Early Action (MHEWS/EA) Framework. The development of the Framework is a step forward in building the resilience of African countries as it ensures a functional early warning system. It is also to be recalled that the Council, at its 864th session held in August 2019, suggested the 'establishment of command centers which operate on a 24 hour basis to closely monitor and timeously issue early warning alerts on impending natural disasters', something that the Council find it worth following up in terms of strengthening the early warning system.

Inadequate funding has heavily affected disaster management. Not only there is a huge gap between the needs of people at risk to disasters and the available funding but also most of African countries and the continental mechanisms lack sustainable and predictable funding as they rely largely on external sources. Though there is an Assembly Decision to increase AU Humanitarian Fund from 2% to 4% of member states' assessed contributions, meant to ensure predictable and sustainable resources for the AU to enable fulfil its humanitarian responsibilities, its practicality and buy-in from member states remain questionable. As indicated in the notes prepared for tomorrow's PSC session, there is a growing trend of establishing uncoordinated disaster specific funds, and hence there is a need to embrace 'multi-hazard funding mechanisms'.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. Among others, while

commending the existing AU structures that are established to address disaster risks, the PSC may emphasize on the need to operationalize and strengthen the capacity of these structures, and in this respect, there much to be desired from member states in supporting the mechanisms. In addition, the Council may also stress the importance of enhancing coordination among the plethora of AU mechanisms for disaster management to ensure complementarity as well as avoid duplication of efforts. The PSC may underscore the importance of shifting the focus from treating the effects of disasters (reactive measures) towards a proactive approach that is more economical and efficient. On the funding challenge, the Council may stress not only on the need to rely on Africa's own resources in the spirit of pan-Africanism but also highlight the imperative of diversifying sources of finance, as well ensuring predictable and sustainable funding for the AU to effectively discharge the expected role in addressing disaster risks. In this regard, the Council is likely to explore options to raise funds from non-traditional donors from non-traditional donors including African civil society, private sector and the diaspora, in addition to traditional sources of funding. The Council may further reiterate its support for the upcoming African Humanitarian Summit and Pledging Conference in Malabo, which is expected to serve as impetus to operationalize the African Humanitarian Agency and mobilize required financial resources to address the ever growing humanitarian needs of the continent. In relation to building effective early warning system and bridging the gaps between early warning and early action, the Council may also urge for the finalization of the Multi-Hazard Early Warning/Early Action (MHEWS/EA) Framework and the development of Continental MHEWS/EA Situation Room, which are pivotal in providing operational guidance on Multi-Agency and Multi-Sectoral coordination and communications at member states, regional and continental level. Finally, the Council may reiterate its 864th session which underscored the need for the 'Regional Standby Forces to reinforce their engagement in

responding to natural disasters'.