

**Abstract of speech by
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At the Public Forum
Winning Against Disasters
Role of Education, Development and Community Action
For Sustainable Development**

Disasters are a development issue and one of growing importance

Natural hazards and related technological and environment hazards have grave impacts on the social and economic development of the World Bank's client countries, wiping out the gains in poverty alleviation and economic growth. With annual GDP losses due to disasters averaging between 2 and 15 per cent of the national annual GDP of the affected countries, the issues of disaster reduction, good governance, economic growth and poverty reduction are closely linked. The issue of risks becomes more critical as trends in the last decades show increased number and severity of catastrophes associated with population growth, rapid urbanization, densification of use of fragile lands, environmental degradation, climate change and variability.

Winning against disasters is a key dimension of Human Security and Poverty Reduction

Poverty reduction measures focus on generating greater opportunities for income and asset creation (livelihoods), access to basic services (health care, education, water and sanitation etc) and, in these respects contribute to enhance the ability to

cope with hazards. In a complementary fashion, disaster reduction approaches enhance risk awareness at all levels, and foster community mobilization to better cope with hazard risks, and ensure preparedness and mitigation planning: awareness, preparedness and planning best enable the poor who are most affected to protect their lives and their livelihoods. Therefore risk reduction should always be one of the central objectives of national development strategies, and more generally should represent a core dimension of prudent public management, committed to the safety of all citizens and especially attentive to the greater vulnerability of the poorest.

The World Bank and other development partners are promoting a proactive and strategic approach to winning against disasters

In order to achieve sustainable disaster reduction in countries at high risks, the World Bank has adopted a multi-pronged strategy for disaster reduction which includes promoting risk reducing development strategies and strengthening global and regional partnerships for mainstreaming disaster reduction in all spheres of development. The distribution of global and regional disaster risks are now public knowledge, thanks to the Natural Disaster Hotspots Study carried out by the World Bank and Columbia University. Yet a lot remains to be done at the country level

- (i) to stimulate the knowledge and awareness about risks
- (ii) to develop actionable economic evidence for investment in pre-disaster mitigation and preparedness activities and

- (iii) to mainstream disaster reduction in poverty reduction strategies.

Winning against Disasters requires giving special attention to the poorer countries

Low level of economic development shortens the time horizon for planning, reduces decision making to a reactive mode and exacerbates the impact of disasters. Poor countries do not have domestic resources to absorb shocks. On the other hand, disasters have marginal effects on the population and economic activity as a whole in developed countries. Governments in developed countries are able to rely on their domestic resources to manage the risks and absorb the impact of disasters. While in the case of **Argentina**, the largest disaster loss was only **6.7%** of the tax revenue, this was 293 % and 499% for **Honduras** and **Nicaragua** respectively. Loss as a percentage of net domestic credit was 166% for Honduras and only **2.8%** for **Argentina**." In the developed (and emerging economies), governments do not have probability of ruin. Governments in developed and emerging economies deal with their risk by relying on their own resources as is evident from above, while poor countries are unable to internally spread the cost of loss.. The resilience of the economy determines the extent of the development impact of disasters on a country. More clearly put, the level of development of a country is closely associated to its capacity of countries to manage shocks and mitigate against disaster risk. The weaker economies of low and middle income countries have a special need for managing and reducing hazard risks.

Mainstreaming disaster reduction into development processes is key to enhancing development effectiveness

Mainstreaming signifies integrating disaster reduction into development processes: it requires firstly the comprehensive mapping and analysis of risk, vulnerability and capacity;

the analytical evaluation of disasters impact on economic growth and poverty outcomes ;

the development of national disaster risk reduction framework, including the identifying cost-effective mitigation investment opportunities, the training and capacity building etc.,

These are the areas in which the World Bank is now helping its client governments in a systematic fashion through the new global partnership between ISDR and the World Bank, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR).

Risk awareness is the first key to the resilience of communities and nations

It needs to be pursued through integrated human resource development programs especially in countries at high disaster risks. Building holistic capabilities for risk identification and risk reduction entails the roll out of national strategies for awareness generation, public education and training. Public education programmes at elementary, secondary and tertiary levels should include understanding of hazards and risks, preparedness and mitigation actions that can be taken at household and neighborhood levels. It is heartening to note that some partner countries, and not necessarily the richest or better endowed, have already substantially engaged and succeeded in doing so. Different national policies, such as

National education policy, National Training Policy, National Policy on Administrative Reforms etc should provide for introduction of disaster reduction in education and training programmes at all levels including the following:

- ❖ **School education and safety:** The introduction of disaster reduction in the school curricula helps building an informed society and ensures higher degree of preparedness in schools. Strengthening of existing school building and making sure that new school facilities are disaster-resilient should be integral to education sector development strategy. National building codes should be subjected to a focused review to ensure appropriate standards in design and construction of education infrastructure and consistent enforcement. Many countries have already taken steps in this direction.
- ❖ **Technical education:** Engineers and architects are responsible for design and execution of housing and infrastructures as per the national building codes and safety standards, curricula of the undergraduate and graduate technical courses should include hazard mitigation technologies. National Policy on Technical Education should address this issue. In most of the countries prone to multi-hazard risks, this is not the case. For example, earthquake-resistant designs and construction are not included in undergraduate engineering and architecture courses in many developing countries.
- ❖ **Medical education and safety of health facilities:** Emergency health management including mass casualty management following disasters requires the highest degree of preparedness in health facilities. This aspect is

currently not included in the graduate and post-graduate courses on medicine of most developing countries.

Introduction to emergency health management in the curricula facilitates preparedness in the health facilities which is the most crucial disaster response function in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Structural safety of the health infrastructure to cope with multiple hazards has to be addressed and health sector reforms strategies need to be enforced. Revision of existing building codes to provide for special structural and non-structural standards for health infrastructure urgently need the attention of national and local authorities, and enforcement of the code require commitment and good governance.

Risk awareness and education are critical to the Public Administration and Management

Federal, provincial and local (municipal) civil services play a critical role in designing and implementing poverty reduction strategies. In most of the developing countries, crisis and risk management are also the responsibility of the civil service. Introducing disaster reduction and emergency management in the induction and refresher training programmes of the federal and provincial civil service helps countries develop a strong bureaucracy to effectively deal with emergency situations and integrate hazard risks in development planning. National Training policy should address this as an integral part of public management capacity enhancement programmes.

Effective decentralization is a condition to community empowerment, awareness, preparedness and resilience

Local governments and communities at the 'disaster fronts' are the first responders in emergencies: their capabilities critically affect the initial response to a disaster. The adoption of risk reducing strategies by local governments in the planning and implementation of development programs, such as education, health, water, electrification, transport, is crucial in preventing hazards from becoming disasters. Only local governments can effectively facilitate bottom-up planning (community-based hazard risk management) to enhance the coping capacity of the communities and to empower them through transfer of knowledge and resources. This responsibility is seldom matched with delegation of resources (funds, functions and functionaries) locally by federal or state governments. The ongoing work in defining institutional and legal mechanism for hazard risk management shows a clear trend towards empowering local governments and communities in a growing number of developing countries.

Good governance is essential for winning against disasters

Only empowered local governments can be accountable to their citizens, and only good governance can produce transparency, all critical elements to risk awareness and management and post-disaster response and recovery. Policy, legal and institutional mechanisms should be designed accordingly, and Education, Development and Community Action are the building blocks to closing this loop between the global knowledge about risks, the development policies for Human Security and Poverty Alleviation and winning against disasters in each community.

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