

Recovery from Catastrophic Disasters - towards a safer world for all -

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Abstract:

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction presents a milestone opportunity to advance the international agenda for disaster risk reduction and publicize good practices to adopt a long-term strategic and systematic approach to disaster reduction, incorporating risk management practices as a fundamental responsibility of national planning and sustainable development policies. The adoption of a globally acceptable framework for disaster risk reduction, the conclusions of the review of the Yokohama Strategy and its Plan of Action and the programmatic outcomes of the WCDR should provide a quantum leap in global thinking, commitment to, and implementation of, disaster risk reduction, with the view to achieve the objectives of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals.

1. In recent years, there has been a growing acceptance that disaster reduction is an integral part of sustainable development, and that disasters caused by natural hazards and vulnerability to hazards are posing a great challenge to achieving sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals.

To face such a great challenge posed by disasters, it has become clear that more political and financial commitment are urgently needed to reduce disaster risks and address the root causes of vulnerability; root causes that include social, economic, environmental and technical-physical factors at national and community levels.

2. Disaster reduction efforts have to be increasingly promoted as an essential investment as well as both a development and a humanitarian priority, towards saving lives and livelihoods and to build resilient nations and communities to natural hazards. This is particularly relevant in the aftermath of a disaster....
3. Facts and figures available from CRED International Disaster Database show that disasters are on the rise since the 1970s, and so is the impact of disasters on people and economic development.
4. The global data on losses from natural hazards available show that more than 184 people are killed every day, in different parts of the world, by disasters caused natural hazards. And even though only 11 % of people at risk live in countries with low human development, these 11 % account for more than 53 % of the total recorded deaths.

In poor countries, not only are people likely to be killed by disasters, but also their economies are likely to suffer more losses - more than the current average of some 13 % of the GDP of these countries. It is therefore clear that sustainable development cannot be achieved without taking into account disaster risks and vulnerability to natural hazards.

5. The same applies to socio-economic development at community level. A community's sustainability cannot be achieved if the community is vulnerable to disasters caused by natural hazards. Therefore, disaster resilience has been recognized as one of the six principles for community sustainability.

There are many ways to achieve community resilience through structural and non-structural disaster risk reduction measures, including infrastructure enhancement, public awareness on risks, and increasing the effectiveness of early warning.

6. To address disaster reduction in a holistic and coordinated manner, the UN General Assembly approved the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction - the I.S.D.R. - in 2000. The International Strategy aims to build disaster-resilient communities by promoting increased awareness of the importance of disaster reduction as an integral component of sustainable development, with the goal of reducing socio-economic and environment losses due to natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters.

To achieve the goal set in the Strategy, the UN/ISDR Inter-Agency Secretariat is seeking to increase its coordination and commitment to support national and local efforts through policy advocacy, public awareness, information sharing and partnership building on the basis of the "UN/ISDR Framework of Disaster Risk Reduction", developed within the ISDR umbrella and with active participation by UNDP and stakeholders around the globe..

7. This Framework was developed over the years based on the evolving understanding on the nature of disaster reduction. The Framework shows that disaster risk reduction is an issue of great complexity and is everyone's responsibility. Disaster reduction is a cross-cutting issue involving major development sectors such as governance, water resource management, land use planning, education and environment. Therefore, the progress in or success of disaster risk reduction requires multi-level and multi-sectoral cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders, including development practitioners and disaster managers, in the context of social and economic planning and practice.
8. To achieve sustainable development and to further advance the process of disaster reduction, the General Assembly has decided to convene the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005.

The objectives of the WCDR are four-fold :

1. Conclude the ongoing review of the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy, updating the guiding framework on disaster reduction
 2. Identify specific activities aimed at ensuring the implementation of the recommendations made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development
 3. Increase awareness of importance of disaster reduction policies
 4. Share information, including on good practices, and identify gaps in order to advance the process of risk reduction
9. The WCDR, as a process, consists of three major components: inter-governmental process, knowledge exchange and public forum.

To ensure the adoption of the outcomes of the WCDR, a Bureau of five members was set up in Geneva early this year, representing the five continents. Under this mechanism, two open-ended inter-governmental preparatory meetings for the Conference have been planned. One was held on 6-7, May and another will be held on 11-12 October 2004. During the Conference, high-level roundtable talks will be organized to discuss and address three themes, which are: (1) Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction into Development, (2) Learning to Live with Risk: From Knowledge to Action, and (3) Emerging Risks: Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Urbanization.

The Thematic Segment for knowledge exchange emphasizes thematic policy discussions focusing on implementation, good practices and partnerships - which were and will be organized by interested organizations. To raise awareness within a wider public, exhibits, NGO forums and cultural activities will be organized during the Conference.

10. Through such a preparatory process, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction is expected to produce strategy documents such as political declarations and Programme for Action for 2005-2015 including objectives and priority areas for action and implementing mechanisms (quote some of the sections of the current drafts).
11. Many national, sub-regional and regional events, forums and conference are taking place- this being one such event- where important issues are discussed, which will be reflected in the outcome of the WCDR.
12. Major events from June to December this year include the gathering of national reports on disaster reduction. These activities and initiatives before and during the Conference will help
- to increase political commitment at national and international levels;
 - to set clear directions and priorities for action;
 - to agree on benchmarks, targets, indicators and framework for guiding disaster risk reduction; and

- to launch specific initiatives and partnerships for implementation.

13. The World Conference will be focused on five Thematic Clusters which are:

1. Governance: Institutional and policy frameworks for risk reduction
2. Risk identification, assessment, monitoring and early warning
3. Knowledge management and education
4. Reducing underlying risk factors
5. Preparedness for effective response.

14. The way forward largely depends on national Governments, which are in a position to create enabling environments for disaster reduction at both national and local levels.

At national level, an enabling environment for disaster risk reduction includes comprehensive policy, strategy, legislation, coordination framework and human and financial resources. To mainstream disaster risk reduction in sustainable development, it is important to establish a national platform with representatives from all major line ministries. Indeed, it is the understanding and support of these representatives from all major line ministries that enable the national coordination body for disaster risk reduction or disaster management to better address emerging risks such as climate change, public health and rapid urbanization.

16. “More effective prevention strategies would save not only tens of billions of dollars, but save tens of thousand of lives. Funds currently spent on intervention and relief could be devoted to enhancing equitable and sustainable development, which would further reduce the risk for war and disaster. Building a culture of prevention is not easy. While the costs of prevention have to be paid in the present, its benefits lie in a distant future. Moreover, the benefits are not tangible : they are the disasters that did NOT happen. ”

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General