

Challenge of Bam Earthquake – road map for safer communities –

Kamal Kishore

Regional Disaster Reduction Advisor, South and Southwest Asia
Disaster Reduction Unit, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Abstract:

The Bam earthquake of 26 December 2003 was amongst the most devastating earthquakes in Iran in recent decades. The earthquake killed more than 30,000 people, rendered more than 75,000 people homeless and severely damaged or destroyed about 85% of the houses, commercial units, health facilities and administrative buildings in the city of Bam and surrounding villages. The 2,500 year-old historic citadel of Bam, an internationally known heritage site, was almost completely destroyed. The economic prospects of the Bam region and the livelihoods of its people were also dealt a severe blow.

Rebuilding of Bam in all its dimensions — social, economic, physical, cultural — poses a big challenge over the next at least two years. Given the magnitude of the disaster, it will require large amounts of financial resources, skilled human resources and innovative institutional arrangements to accomplish a sustainable recovery. The Government of Islamic Republic of Iran is making every effort to meet this challenge. The UN system in Iran is providing technical support to the government on a range of issues including: sharing of experiences from other large-scale reconstruction programmes; institutional arrangements for the management of reconstruction programme; urban redevelopment and planning; appropriate earthquake resistant building technologies; community-based shelter sector recovery; livelihood restoration and economic revitalization of micro enterprises; and conservation of cultural heritage.

The devastating effects of the Bam earthquake have brought back into focus the fact that Iran is highly vulnerable to natural disasters. It is important that disaster risk reduction concerns are incorporated in the recovery programme so as to reduce future disaster risks. This is also a good opportunity to promote risk reduction practices in not only Bam but also other areas of the country that are equally or even more vulnerable to earthquakes and other natural disasters. It is hoped that the experience of Bam earthquake will lead to renewed efforts towards all aspects of disaster risk reduction in the country. UNDP is now working closely with its government counterparts to develop and implement a five-year disaster risk reduction programme in Iran.