



## Chapter 7. Challenges for the future

Throughout this review it is often repeated that there is a need for disaster and risk reduction to be an essential part of broader sustainable development concerns. As discussed in chapter six, the international development targets set for the year 2015 cannot be reached unless the heavy toll of disasters in human and economic terms is reduced. That is because vulnerability and risk to natural, technological and ecological hazards are driven by social, economic and environmental action. The subject has emerged as a main area of concern for governments in the preparatory process for the World Summit for Sustainable Development in August 2002.

It is important to remember that current development practices, however, do not necessarily reduce communities' vulnerability to disasters. Ill advised and misdirected development practices often increase the risk to disasters. The challenge of influencing and enhancing development plans, programmes and projects of bilateral and multilateral agencies is still great.

The international community equally bears a responsibility to motivate, and indeed to support, policies and actions in developing countries that pursue structured and evident disaster risk reduction strategies. As long as the only message that national governments receive from the international development « community » in connection with disaster risks is the equivalent of, « please prepare a consolidated relief appeal when there is a crisis », and that the costs and associated responsibilities for poorly managed risks are transferred to the international community, there will remain slight incentive for the seriously disaster-prone developing countries to embrace significant, internal, commitments or responsibility for sustained disaster risk management practices.

In this respect there is a crucial role for international organizations and the collective interests of the United Nations system, in concert with the influential bilateral and multilateral development assistance agencies to support, rather than undermining national initiatives and local efforts to develop capacities for improved disaster risk reduction. The persistent extravagance too often displayed in emergency assistance following an « international » disaster, in contrast to the much smaller ongoing commitments to support local endeavours of disaster risk reduction, is nothing less. There is accordingly a serious need for international policy-makers to proceed beyond rhetorical resolutions and to invest in considered, and sustained, measures of disaster risk reduction. This can, and indeed should, be reflected by the incorporation of risk factors – starting with systematic risk assessments – in both emergency assistance grants and the more fundamental development assistance programmes underwritten by the international community.

This approach, needs to be coupled with the demanding task of accommodating the short-term and immediate needs of developing countries while still maintaining an appreciation of the value of medium and long-term objectives demanded by *both* disaster reduction *and* sustainable development. Too often these linkages have been either obscured, or ignored, in practice. These issues become glaring in those countries where «development» is a fundamental element of simple, basic survival for the majority of the population. To be effective, disaster risk reduction can only be integrated into all relevant sectors of national social and economic interest : health, education, environment, agriculture, transportation, infrastructure, communications, public administration, planning – even security. Responsible governance, in fact.

The challenges and priority areas provided in previous chapters are not repeated here, but the priority areas for further strengthening include:

- Increased understanding of disaster risk. A cross-cutting need related to all sectors. It includes the shift in approach towards the development of risk management as an essential tool for planning and managing of development.



- Bringing the ecological sphere into disaster risk reduction. Disaster reduction has primarily focused on physical protection to hazards and the economic and social spheres of sustainable development. The challenge is to bring the ecological concerns in more strongly. Environmental degradation and global change call for a greater understanding of the links between disaster risk reduction and environmental management.
- Disaster risk reduction as a primarily national and local responsibility. Increased national and local commitment, including institutional organization in place. Cross-sectoral and policy cooperation is needed to build a culture of prevention linked to environmental and socio-economic activities.
- An increased decentralised approach to risk management. Community participation is essential to promote and push for increased national public commitment.
- Enhanced policy integration and development to ensure that all relevant sectors include risk management as a basic tool under the overall perspective and goals of sustainable development.
- Increased education, information networking and research on risk management and the development of tools to reduce the risk that are gender and culture-sensitive, adapted to different geographical and cultural contexts.
- Greater partnership-building at all levels, including the private sector, academic institutions and NGOs along with government as a main objective of national platforms to address disaster risk reduction in each country. For greater coherence and impact these efforts needs to be focussed and supported by methodological tools to establish links among initiatives, systematize and unify processes.
- Development of specific methodologies to reduce risk and vulnerability to disasters in areas such as environmental management, land-use planning, protection of critical facilities, financial tools and early warning. Take stock of existing tools and technologies and lessons-learnt.
- Measurement of progress. The fundamental challenge is to achieve a reduction in fatalities and property loss from disasters in a growing number of communities and countries. In order to do this it is essential to show evidence that disaster risk reduction is being understood, measures are progressively being put into practice and targets or benchmarks and indicators are developed.

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Crisis =  
threat + opportunity

