RIO 2012 Issues Briefs

Produced by the UNCSD Secretariat No. 8

Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building

1. Introduction

Droughts are threatening food security in West Africa; sea level rise might take away the livelihoods of Small Island Developing States (SIDS); flash floods and mudslides inflict death and destruction on informal settlements in cities of a number of developing countries; severe heat waves have swept across Europe and Russia in recent years; and strong hurricanes have caused large economic losses in the USA and the Caribbean. Environmental degradation and climate change contribute to the increasing occurrence of disasters linked to natural hazards. No country is immune, regardless of the level of economic and social development. However, the vulnerability of communities and societies to disasters caused by natural hazards is closely and inversely related to the level of social and economic development. Sound disaster risk management has been recognised as an area deserving greater attention on the global sustainable development agenda.

This brief aims at providing an overview of the existing international commitments in the area of disaster risk reduction and resilience building looking into progress of implementation, remaining gaps and proposed goals within the context of sustainable development, with a view to facilitating constructive discussion around the issue in the course of the preparation for the UNCSD (Rio+20).

2. International Efforts on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building

1989 Given the increasing concern about the impact of disasters, the UN General Assembly declared 1990-1999 the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR)[1]. Initially, IDNDR was influenced largely by scientific and technical interest groups. However, the broader global awareness of the social and economic consequences of disasters caused by natural hazards developed as the decade progressed.

1994 The Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation and its Plan of Action[2] was adopted at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, building on the mid-term review of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

1999 The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) was launched[3] by the Economic and Social Council and endorsed by the General Assembly as an international framework for responding to the challenge presented to the international community by the increasing incidence and scale of disasters. UNISDR was created as an inter-agency secretariat of ISDR together with the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction. The UNISDR mandate was then expanded to serve as a focal point within the United Nations System for the coordination of disaster reduction and to ensure synergies among the disaster reduction activities of the UN system and regional organizations and activities in socio-economic and humanitarian fields. Further mandates are to promote public awareness and commitment, to expand networks and partnerships, and to improve knowledge of disaster causes and options for risk reduction, building on the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action and as follow-up to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.[4]

2002 The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, noted that "an integrated, multi-hazard, inclusive approach to address vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management, including prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery, is an essential element of a safer world in the twenty-first century."[5] The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation provided UNISDR and the Inter-Agency Task Force with a concrete set of objectives for integrating and mainstreaming risk reduction into development policies and processes.

[1] GA resolutions 42/169 and 44/236

[2] A/CONF.172/9

[3] General Assembly resolutions 59/231, 58/214, 57/256, 56/195, 54/219.

[4] Today, at the HQ level, UNISDR leads inter-agency country-specific and thematic discussions as well as contributes to the development of UN programming tools, such as guidelines on risk reduction for United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and post-disaster needs assessments. It regularly provides UN Country Teams with strategic and operational support for the development of country programs. It also develops a close partnership with the UN regional commissions, in particular the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). UNISDR is also closely associated with a wide network of scientific and development organizations researching on disaster risk and monitoring risk information, which also support the preparation of the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction.

[5] A/CONF.199/20, paragraph 37. See Box 1.

2005 The World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan and adopted the "**Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters**", which is currently serving as the guiding document in strengthening and building international cooperation to ensure that disaster risk reduction is used as a foundation for sound national and international development agendas.

2007 The UN General Assembly established a biennial Global Platform on disaster risk reduction[6] to support the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, allowing government representatives, NGOs, scientists, practitioners, private sector, IFIs and UN organizations to share experiences, identify remaining gaps, formulate strategic guidance and advice for the implementation of the HFA. Six Regional Platforms and over 80 National Platforms have also been established as multi-stakeholder forums.[7] Regional Platforms also assess progress but focus on the details of the regional plans of implementation and National Platforms act as the national coordinating body for disaster risk reduction.

3. Internationally Agreed Commitments and Plans of Actions[8]

At the World Conference on Disaster Reduction of 2005, the States and participating actors resolved to pursue for the following 10 years the "substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries."[9]

This pursuit was translated into **three strategic goals, five priorities for action and four cross-cutting issues** as shown in Table 1. It summarizes the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA), which still serves as the guideline for States, regional and international organizations, civil society, the scientific community, the private sector and various other stakeholders, to contribute to the achievement of the internationally agreed goals by 2015. Vulnerability is often concentrated among lower income countries or other groups. Special attention therefore needs to be given to disaster-prone Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Africa.

Table 1. Three Strategic Goals, Five Priorities for Action and Four Cross Cutting Issues of Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience

Three Strategic Goals
• The integration of disaster risk reduction in sustainable development policies and planning; • Development and strengthening of institutions, mechanisms and capacities to build resilience to hazards; • The systematic incorporation of risk reduction approaches into the implementation of emergency preparedness, responses and recovery programmes.
Five Priorities for Action
1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation
• DRR institutional mechanisms (national platforms); designated responsibilities • DRR part of development policies and planning, sector-wise and multi-sector • Legislation to support DRR • Decentralization of responsibilities and resources • Assessment of human resources and capacities • Foster political commitment • Community participation
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning
• Multi-risk assessments and maps: elaboration and dissemination • Indicators on DRR and vulnerability • Data & statistical loss information • Early warning: people centered information systems and policy • Scientific and technological development: data sharing, space-based earth observation, climate modeling and forecasting, early warning • Regional and emerging risks
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels
• Information sharing and cooperation • Networks across disciplines and regions; dialogue • Use of standard DRR terminology • Inclusion of DRR into school curricula, formal and informal education • Training and learning on DRR: community level, local authorities, targeted sectors; equal access • Research capacity: multi-risk; socio-economic • Public awareness and media
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors
• Sustainable ecosystems and environmental management • DRR strategies integrated with climate change adaptation • Food security for resilience • DRR integrated into health sector and safe hospitals • Protection of critical public facilities • Recovery schemes and social safety nets

[6]The Global Platform replaced the earlier Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction

[7]See http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/regional-platforms for more information on regional multi-stakeholder forums.

[8]Based on ISDR Summary of the "Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters", http://www.eird.org/cdmah/contenido/summary%20.pdf

[9]As per the final report of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (A/CONF.206.6).

• Vulnerability reduction with diversified income options • Financial risk-sharing mechanisms • Public-private partnership • Land use planning and building codes • Rural development plans and DRR
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels
• Disaster management capacities: policy, technical and institutional capacities • Dialogue, coordination & information exchange between disaster managers and development sectors • Regional approaches to disaster response, with risk reduction focus • Review & exercise preparedness and contingency plans • Emergency funds • Voluntarism & participation
Four Cross-cutting Issues
• Multi-hazard approach • Gender perspective and cultural diversity • Community and volunteers' participation • Capacity building and technology transfer
Source: ISDR (www.unisdr.org)

4. Progress of Implementation

Many governments have recognized that disaster risk reduction and risk management through concrete action and political commitment can accelerate development, protect investments and reduce poverty. Recognition is reflected in the outcomes of the 2010 MDG Summit[10], the 2011 Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries[11], and the High-Level Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States[12].

The Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (May 2011), as well as the Mid-Term Review of the HFA demonstrated that the international community has made some progress in addressing disaster risk reduction. Through more than 130 country reviews[13], progress has been reported by many governments, particularly in strengthening disaster management and the institutional and legislative arrangements and mechanisms that uphold it. Regional and sub-regional strategies, frameworks, plans and programmes have been developed. National and local government led initiatives have also proliferated and have made a substantial contribution to reducing disaster losses and increasing disaster resilience as well as protecting public assets and livelihoods. Examples include: (i) Social protection measures such as cash transfers that have been successfully adopted in Chile and Nicaragua as a strategy to reduce household vulnerability to disasters while tackling structural poverty. Similar social protection programmes exist in many countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean region with the potential for significantly increasing resilience; (ii) governments are also taking concrete steps to integrate disaster reduction in public investments and sustainable development plans; e.g., Peru has systematically integrated risk reduction into its public investment programme, amounting to more than US$10 billion in 2008 alone, (iii) several countries are building the much required evidence for national disaster risk management planning; e.g. Indonesia has developed the Indonesian Disaster Data and Information Management Database that is now used for national policy, planning and budgeting; and (iv) the Province of Albay in the Philippines has adopted a zero casualty policy and has allocated 4.5 percent of its 2010 budget to risk reduction and climate change adaptation.[14]

Despite some progress, the implementation is still not sufficient given the fact that the world's exposure to natural hazards is growing faster than its vulnerability to these can be reduced. [15] Effective implementation of the internationally agreed goals on disaster preparedness and resilience requires a cross-ministerial, multi-stakeholder and multi-hazard approach and there is still a long way to go to achieve this.

5. Way Forward

The UNCSD is seen by many stakeholders as an opportunity to go one step further in disaster risk reduction and resilience building. In particular, it has been suggested that Rio+20 could contribute in the following ways:

5.1 Incorporate Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience into Sustainable Development Goals

There is general support for greater political attention to disaster risk reduction within the context of sustainable development.[16] In particular, Japan calls for the formulation of a "Post-Hyogo Framework" to provide guidance beyond 2015, which should be "clearly integrated in the Post-MDGs"[17]. There

[10] A/RES/65/1
[11] A/Conf/219/3
[12] A/RES/65/2
[13] Preparing for Rio+20: Redefining Sustainable Development, UNISDR Discussion Paper 10 October 2011. See also www.preventionweb.net /english/hyogo

[14] 2011 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction
[15] Idem
[16] See submissions to Rio+20 from G77 & China, European Union & its Member States, Caribbean Community and Pacific Island Forum on www.uncsd2012.org
[17] See Japan's input to Rio+20 outcome document. http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/content/documents/113Japan.pdf

is also considerable support for the elaboration of a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at Rio+20 or at least to set a process in motion to this end to secure a post-2015 global sustainable development agenda. In order to ensure that any development gains are sustainable, it is important that disaster risk reduction and resilience building be integrated at all levels through integrated sustainable development planning across sectors, including but not limited to public infrastructure investments, sustainable agriculture, health, education and sustainable urbanization[18].

5.2 Build an enabling international environment

Developed countries are often better equipped financially and institutionally to adopt explicit measures to respond effectively and adapt to changes in exposure, vulnerability, and climate extremes than developing countries. Rio+20 should strive to maintain an enabling international environment, which encourages:

- The transfer of knowledge, technology and expertise to enhance capacity building for disaster risk reduction;
- The sharing of best practices and lessons learned;
- The flow of appropriate support to and between developing countries for enhancing governance for disaster risk reduction and awarenessat all levels.

5.3 Encourage better knowledge on disaster risks and improve access to information

Rio+20 could reinforce the importance of improved understanding and monitoring of disaster risks. This will require capacity building in the knowledge community and improved communication of information, including:

- Strengthening networks within and between scientific communities, experts on socioeconomic issues and practitioners working on disaster related issues;
- Mobilizing resources for capacity building to research, observe, analyse, map and, where possible, forecast natural and related hazards, vulnerabilities and disaster impacts;
- Developing early warning systems, disaster risk monitoring facilities and indicators, building on full and open exchange and dissemination of data at international, regional, national and local levels;
- Establishing national disaster loss databases that provide a comprehensive accounting of disaster loss and damage as well as probabilistic risk assessments;;
- Making sure relevant information is disseminated in an effective way to policy-makers, the general public and communities at risk, and integrated in their decision making processes;
- Enhancing research, statistical analyses and reporting on long-term changes and identifying emerging issues that might increase vulnerabilities and risks or disaster responsiveness of authorities and communities;
- Encouraging probabilistic risk assessments that allow for financial innovation on risk-sharing and insurance, to improve financial resilience.

5.4 Encourage social inclusion

Vulnerability to disasters has many drivers. Socioeconomic, demographic, and health-related factors as well as governance institutions can have a major influence on coping and adaptive capacity in local communities. Rio+20 should reinforce the message that:

- Communities and local governments should be empowered to manage and reduce disaster risk by having access to the necessary information, resources and authority to implement actions for disaster risk reduction;
- Disaster risk reduction should be included as an intrinsic part of formal and informal education, including adult education and community level awareness training.
- Adaptive social protection and safety nets can significantly reduce community vulnerability in disaster-prone areas, protect household's assets and ensure access to basic services in times of crises.

5.5 Encourage investment for disaster risk reduction

Donors, governments, UN system, IFIs and private sector should consider disaster risk reduction as an investment for safer future and sustainability, not as an additional cost.

The purpose of the Rio 2012 Issues Briefs is to provide a channel for policymakers and other interested stakeholders to discuss and review issues relevant to the objective and themes of the conference, including a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, as well as the institutional framework for sustainable development. For further information on this Brief, please contact Meng Li (li39@un.org).

[18] See UNISDR's World Disaster Risk Reduction Campaign 2010-2015, Making Cities Resilient:"My city is getting ready" at http://www.unisdr.org/english /campaigns/campaign2010-2015