



## Glossary

The following terms may help you navigate through this information kit.

### Climate change

Refers to a statistically significant variation in either the mean state of the climate or in its variability, persisting for an extended period (typically decades or longer).

### Disaster

A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

*A disaster is a function of the risk process. It results from the combination of hazards, conditions of vulnerability and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce the potential negative consequences of risk.*

### Disaster risk reduction (disaster reduction)

The conceptual framework of elements considered with the possibilities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development.

### Early warning

The provision of timely and effective information, through identified institutions, that allow individuals exposed to a hazard, to take action to avoid or reduce their risk and prepare for effective response.

*Early warning systems include of three primary elements: (i) forecasting of impending events; (ii) processing and dissemination of warnings to political authorities and population; and (iii) undertaking appropriate and timely actions.*

### El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

An irregularly occurring pattern of abnormal warming of the surface coastal waters off Ecuador, Peru and Chile. This coupled atmosphere-ocean phenomenon is associated with the fluctuation of intertropical surface pressure pattern and circulation in the Indian and Pacific oceans, called the Southern Oscillation.

*La Niña is the opposite of an El Niño event, during which waters in the west Pacific are warmer than normal and trade winds are stronger.*

### Environmental degradation

The reduction of the capacity of the environment to meet social objectives and needs.

*Some examples include: land degradation, deforestation, desertification, wildland fires, loss of biodiversity, land, water and air pollution, climate change, sea level rise, ozone depletion.*

### Hazard

A potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon and/or human activity, which may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.

*Hazards can include latent conditions that may represent future threats and can have different origins: natural (geological, hydrometeorological and biological) and/or induced by human processes (environmental degradation and technological hazards).*



## Hydrometeorological hazards

Natural processes or phenomena of atmospheric, hydrological or oceanographic nature, which may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.

*Examples of hydrometeorological hazards are: floods, debris and mud floods; tropical cyclones, storm surges, thunder/hailstorms, rain and wind storms, blizzards and other severe storms; drought, desertification, wildland fires, temperature extremes, sand or dust storms; permafrost and snow or ice avalanches.*

## Mitigation

Structural and non-structural measures undertaken to limit the adverse impact of natural hazards, environmental degradation and technological hazards.

## Preparedness

Activities and measures taken in advance to ensure effective response to the impact of hazards, including the issuance of timely and effective early warnings and the temporary removal of people and property from a threatened location.

## Prevention

Activities to provide outright avoidance of the adverse impact of hazards and means to minimize related environmental, technological and biological disasters.

## Public awareness

The processes of informing the general population, increasing levels of consciousness about risks and how people can act to reduce their exposure to hazards. This is particularly important for public officials in fulfilling their responsibilities to save lives and property in the event of a disaster.

*Public awareness activities support changes in behaviour leading towards a culture of prevention. This involves public information, dissemination, education, radio or television broadcasts and the use of printed media, as well as, the establishment of information centres and networks.*

## Risk

The probability of harmful consequences, or expected losses (deaths, injuries, property, livelihoods, economic activity disrupted or environment damaged) resulting from interactions between natural or human induced hazards and vulnerable conditions.

Conventionally risk is expressed by the notation

Risk = Hazards x Vulnerability

## Sustainable development

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable development is based on socio-cultural development, political stability and decorum, economic growth and ecosystem protection, which all relate to disaster risk reduction.

## Vulnerability

A set of conditions and processes resulting from physical, social, economic, and environmental factors, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards.