

# **DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND PREVENTION IN RWANDA**

## **Disaster Profile in Rwanda**

Disaster context in Rwanda is mainly linked with natural, man-made and mixed disasters. Many cases of disaster are particularly linked to the geographic, historical and socio-cultural aspects of the country. Rwanda has limited cases of disaster resulting from natural hazards, but has sometimes experienced localized flooding and landslides and drought. There are also disasters resulting from epidemics, road accidents, forest fires and social conflicts. In the past 10 years, a mass population displacement occurred as a result of conflict (1994 war and genocide), and was followed by the reception and resettlement of many returning refugees. The volcano which erupted in January 2002 on the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, also led to the displacement of people from the Democratic Republic of Congo on a temporary basis.

## **Institutional arrangements**

A national policy on disaster risk reduction and prevention in Rwanda was formulated in 2002 and approved by the Cabinet in July 2003. From the policy, a national body on Disaster Risk Management was put in place in July 2004, and is functioning as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Local Government.

Priority axes and strategies of the National Disaster Management Policy were made according to the kind of disasters appropriate to the country and the region. These include:

- Developing disaster risk management institutional mechanisms,
- Building national capacities on disaster management,
- Developing information and early warning integrated systems,
- Developing long-term financial mechanisms,
- Mainstreaming disaster management in national programmes (poverty reduction, community development, environment protection ...).

The Strategic Plan of Action of the National Policy on Disaster Management contains three phases in disaster management: prevention/mitigation before the occurrence, response in case of disasters, and rehabilitation after the occurrence.

Implementing mechanisms of the Policy include:

- Coordination of disaster management based on the following:
  - sharing of information,
  - synergies in programmes

- getting together all strategic and technical operations and plans
  - legislation (not yet elaborated)
  - planning at the national and provincial levels, followed by sector plans for disaster management,
  - partnerships with international, regional and sub-regional organizations,
  - resource mobilization,
  - Financial management to reduce the costs.

On the disaster reduction/prevention side, there is a national body in charge of coordination and multi-sector aspects (National Service for Disaster Management). It consists of services from the Presidency Office, the Prime Minister's Office and line ministries:

- Ministry of Local Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs,
- Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock,
- Ministry of Infrastructure,
- Ministry of Lands, Environment, Forests, Water and Natural Resources,
- Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning,
- Ministry of Defense,
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation,
- Ministry of Gender and Women in Development
- Ministry of Health,
- Ministry of Internal Affairs

### **Disaster Management structure and functions in Rwanda**

In normal cases, disaster management issues are dealt on by the National Service on Disaster reduction (SNRGC) at the central level. This body is assisted by the National Council for Disaster Management (CNGRC) headed by the Prime Minister and includes ministers and ministers of state of line ministries. The CNRGC is a main structure for political coordination on matters regarding disaster management. It guides MINALOC executing ministry via the SNGRC. The latter deals with daily coordination and implementation of activities in line with disaster management.

The SNGRC gets assisted by technicians from line ministries, UN Agencies, the civil society, and the private sector, in a Technical Assistance Committee (CAT). Members of the CAT will not only provide tools and technical assistance according to their area of expertise, but also their expertise with regard to the nature of disasters.

It is expected that after the creation of disaster management structures at the central level, there will be the creation of structures at the provincial and district levels. However, to avoid overload and duplication, it is expected that disaster management at the district and city entities level be done through already existing administrative entities. At the provincial and Kigali City level, there will be a Provincial Committee on Disaster Management (CPGRC). Partners (UN Agencies, civil society organizations and the

private sector) will individually intervene at this level. The CPGRC will consist of representatives from CNGRC line ministries and the representatives of the concerned non-government organizations at the provincial level.

### **Who does what in case of disaster occurrence**

Permanent structures for Disaster Management have the coordination and daily management responsibility to react in emergency cases. The CPGRC is more concerned at the time of occurrence. However, all existing bodies will be in a task force to be put in place for the management and coordination, at the local and central levels, of all activities linked to the disaster that occurred. This task force is also known as the Emergency Technical Committee (CTU), chaired by the Director of SNGRC, and closely works with CNGRC, CAT and CPGRC of the affected Province. The CTU is based at the provincial level and members are drawn from disaster management existing bodies at the central and local levels, depending on the nature, the extent and the place of occurrence of the disaster. Representatives from MINALOC, and the Rwanda Red Cross technicians will always be part of the team.

### **Risk Reduction in Sectoral Plans/Initiatives**

The Government of Rwanda has adopted a sectoral approach for all ministries. Disaster Risk Reduction/Prevention concepts do not directly come out as such in all sectoral plans; however, different sectoral policies include disaster risk reduction as an integral part in their respective area of intervention (water resource management, poverty reduction, climate change, education, development planning).

The Ministry of Lands, Environment, Forests and Natural Resources sectoral policy document describes mechanisms for natural resources management and environment protection.

Major challenges in natural resources management in Rwanda are linked to overpopulation as compared to available resources (lands, water, wildlife, flora, forests, mineral sites...) in degradation for so long. Special measures need to be taken to avoid the worst in the future as far as ecology and socio-economic aspects are concerned. Rwanda has so far elaborated an environment policy and laws in resources management and protection to ensure the sustainability in the use of natural resources protection of life ecosystems for present and future generations. Priorities in this domain are:

- land management (construction laws, planning the use of national lands)
- Water management (rain water, waste waters,)
- mines management (prevent earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, mineral resources exploitation)
- forests protection (planting new and various species of trees)
- Environment protection (mainstreaming disaster management in all socio-economic activities).

MINITERE is conducting a study on climate change through a project financed by the UNCBD

Education programmes include sensitization about disaster risk management in primary schools (Elementary Science and Technology). At the secondary (high) school level, there is a department on Hygiene and Sanitation, and ecology and environmental sciences courses are included in programmes of many secondary school departments. Universities in Rwanda do not have specific faculties teaching disaster management as such. However, there are related courses such as geography, natural sciences, economics, pedagogy, administrative and social sciences at the university level.

### **Disaster Risk reduction in national plans**

Disaster risk reduction is indirectly reflected in national plans for the implementation of the UN MDGs, Poverty Reduction Strategy Document, national adaptation plans, environment national plan of action, and in the plan of implementation of the WSSD. The disaster reduction policy was conceived after the elaboration of many of these national orientation documents. However, there is an effort to mainstream disaster reduction in these documents to avoid negative consequences that may appear. It is also worth to mention that the PRSP focuses on 6 key priority areas: rural development and food processing, human development, economic infrastructure, good governance, private sector development and institutional capacity building.

### **Building codes and seismic risk**

Seismic risk is practically nil in building codes although Rwanda is very much exposed. The recent Nyiragongo volcano eruption and earthquakes that followed have drawn the attention of Rwandan leaders but related building codes have not followed. This point is however reflected in the National Policy on Disaster Management.

### **Budget for Disaster Risk Reduction**

Rwanda has included disaster management in their annual budget for the first time in 2004. Disaster management was allocated \$52,635.00 in the 2004 annual budget as running costs for the National Service for Disaster Risk Management recently created. This budget is included in the Ministry of Local Government, Community Development and Social Affairs budget. In addition, UN Agencies and NGOs have budget lines for risks in their programmes/projects.

The private sector, the civil society, NGOs and media play a great role in disaster risk reduction. In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, UN Agencies and NGOs played a remarkable role in the humanitarian response. They are nowadays more involved in sustainable development which is also a means to disaster prevention. The private sector and civil society are also involved in the response by assisting the victims, and in the efforts for prevention. They have for example participated in the elaboration of the Contingency Plan for Nyiragongo.

It is also worth to mention the role of an ad hoc committee for response to the Bugesera (in the South of Rwanda) drought in 1999. Some people originating from the region have met to set up strategies to put an end to this famine frequently observed. The Committee aimed at looking for means to respond to the immediate emergency and set up sustainable measures for prevention for further famines.

Collaboration between the Government and the Civil Society on Disaster Management is not yet effective enough and may become effective with the implementation of the policy which has been jointly prepared. There is also a permanent Disaster Management Task Force (DMTF) that monthly meet including all concerned institutions (UN Agencies, NGOs and the Government ...).

The implication of academia and media is still needed as they are the major mobilisers, trainers and informers.