World Conference on Disaster Reduction
18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE THEMATIC SEGMENT OF THE

WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION

Experts, practitioners, government officials, civil society representatives and the media gathered at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) in Hyogo-Kobe from 18-22 January 2005, in what is probably the biggest gathering ever on the subject of disaster risk reduction.

The Conference provided a unique opportunity to interact on the wide range of issues related to this area of work and identify good practices and success stories as well as constraints in their application, and ways to overcome these obstacles.

The secretariat has been collecting and compiling the presentations, reports and summaries of the various events of the thematic segment of the Conference, such as the high level roundtables, the thematic panels and sessions, the regional meetings, the public forum workshops and other events.

The objectives are, first to ensure that the richness and diversity of the discussions is captured in a systematic manner for dissemination on the website (www.unisdr.org/wcdr) of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). Second, this report provides a summary analysis of the information following the Conference. The outputs will offer guidance for the implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015* and *the Hyogo Declaration* adopted by the Conference.

Both the organization and compiling of the information were made possible through the leadership and support of many partners, in particular members of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction (IATF/DR).

The Summary Report of the thematic segment captures the nature of the discussions and provides an initial overview of the themes and salient issues emerging from the Conference.

22 JANUARY 2005

1.   INTRODUCTION

The human toll, economic losses and damage to infrastructure and housing and other infrastructure of the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean re-emphasised the need and importance of disaster risk reduction. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) addressed a number of issues relating to of disaster reduction within the context of sustainable development. The review of the Yokohama Strategy and its Plan of Action served as the basis for discussion.

Governance and policy frameworks, risk identification and assessment, knowledge management, underlying risk factors as well as preparedness for effective response were used as thematic discussion panels.

Government delegations, NGOs and other participants in the round tables, thematic panels and session discussions regularly emphasised the urgent need to move forward in the implementation of disaster risk reduction. The existence of resolutions, regional policies, known best practices, techniques and abilities were acknowledged but the need for concrete, visible and adequately funded actions towards reducing vulnerability and hazardous impacts were stressed.

2.   KEY ISSUES

Recurring themes emerged throughout the discussions. The need for education and capacity building in various countries, the use of information systems and development of capabilities, as well as the need for wider and more effective cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary relationships emerged frequently throughout thematic segment of the conference. In light of the recent tsunami disaster, emphasis was placed on the importance of information systems, related capabilities and their use to address multiple hazards.

The thematic panel discussions emphasised the need for specific and measurable targets related to accomplishment and the identification of associated means, resources and commitments to disaster reduction. Issues of scale in disaster risk management were commonly referred to, with prominence given to the recognition of different needs at different levels (e.g. global, regional, national, sub-national or local). The adoption and extent of goals and targets will have a significant impact on the successful application of disaster risk reduction at these different levels.

The most common recurring theme throughout the thematic segments was the necessity to mainstream disaster risk reduction into sustainable development practices and the linkage of related targets to those of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although the importance of these linkages has been widely mentioned, sparse definable actions towards achieving these outcomes were made.

3.   HIGH LEVEL ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

Three High Level Round Table Discussions addressed disaster risk in the context of international significance to current and future development practices and planning. They were organised around three topics: disaster risk as the next development challenge; learning to live with risk; and emerging risks. As they were presented in a plenary session, and their content was cross-cutting in nature, the most significant topics are highlighted here.

The urgent need for setting targets and indicators for disaster risk reduction, with a clear focus on local communities, was a dominant theme. There is a strong recognition of the need to make a definite link of any proposed targets and indicators to the Millennium Development Goals' (MDGs) targets. Clear and visible financial commitment was frequently noted as necessary to ensure that appropriate resources are available for countries engaged in disaster reduction initiatives. In this

regard, the British Government noted that 10% of their annual budget for humanitarian relief be earmarked for disaster risk reduction purposes.

The recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean had a significant impact on all High Level Round Table Discussions. The need for preparedness capabilities in general, but more specific in the form of a multi-hazard, globally implemented, but locally relevant early warning system was emphasised repeatedly. The need for better and relevant information, education and capacity-building was cited as being fundamental for all preparedness and warning systems to be effectively implemented. Investment in human capital through education and training is crucial for achieving any disaster risk reduction goals. Closer cooperation between governments, financial institutions, NGOs and communities is imperative.

3.1   Disaster Risk: The Next Development Challenge

Disaster reduction has yet to gain wide influence and sustained commitment on the political agenda. Participants in numerous sessions emphasised that these risks are likely to be exacerbated in the context of climate change and that risk reduction is essential to respond to this emergent challenge. Disaster risk reduction has easily become overshadowed rather than being associated as crucial to other prominent or pressing demands such as conflict resolution, poverty reduction and environmental protection. An implementation gap remains in many locations and circumstances between the ideals of disaster risk reduction and the realization of actual policies. This is exacerbated by the fact that the multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary, multi-level as well as the multi-stakeholder nature of disaster risk reduction is not always so clearly understood or fully represented in sectoral policies. A call was made to the international community to strengthen the current approach to disaster risk reduction within the United Nations' system and to organise its adequate recognition in relevant sectors.

3.2   Learning to Live with Risk

The foundation of the discussions was that education is crucial to advancing further development. Three specific interconnected realms underscored future risks: scientific and technological; environmental; and educational. It was emphasised that no sustainable development can take place without a concerted focus on education in natural disaster reduction. Knowledge about, and training in natural hazards must increase and contribute to the wider understanding and transmission of sustainable development, social and cultural values. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly with United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated as lead agency for its promotion, provides important impetus to further education and awareness globally in disaster risk reduction. The primary target group for disaster risk reduction training and education should be women and children, and the importance of the role of gender, was continually highlighted. Prominence also was given to the importance of risk education in schools and communities, with a strong participatory, community-based focus. Lessons from the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in Kobe, show that it is imperative to transfer the knowledge and experiences gained by the present generation to future generations in order to promote a culture and climate for disaster risk reduction. The role and the importance of harnessing traditional knowledge were emphasized.

3.3 Emerging Risks: What will tomorrow hold?

Developing countries, and especially small island States, land-locked and other particularly vulnerable countries such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are disproportionately affected by natural disasters.

Local government is often the most neglected, but most important sphere of government in disaster risk reduction. Local government's capacity in disaster risk reduction should be strengthened though national policy and financial support through development funding

specifically aimed at risk reduction. Disaster risk reduction planning at sub-national, in particular local level, should ensure greater transparency and accountability. Innovative financing strategies for local government can be explored and good practices from the international community must be shared widely.

A comprehensive approach is needed if disaster risk is to be reduced on a global scale. An emphasis on early warning systems is insufficient without corresponding sustained attention to awareness, preparedness and emergency response.

Greater recognition of cities and the urban risks associated with them is essential. While cities of all sizes hold the potential for economic growth and social development they also create new dimensions of risk. Urban risks need to be considered in terms of urban poverty and unchecked urbanisation, urban settlement patterns and land use, the development, and the implementation and enforcement of building codes and regulations. Concerns on climate change and its possible impact on cities-at-risk were also raised. The unplanned development and encroachment of cities on peri-urban areas and the impact on the environment will be a further challenge towards understanding urban risks.

4. THEMATIC AREAS

The thematic areas identified and used as the foundation for discussion are in line with the ISDR Framework to Guide and Monitor Disaster Reduction (see Table 6.1 Living with Risk: 2004). The framework firstly, aims to serve as a review mechanism for disaster risk reduction since the inception of the Yokohama Strategy in 1994, secondly, to shape priority areas for the period 2005-2015. These broader thematic issues were discussed during Thematic Panel Discussions which consisted of international experts in the respective fields. Each thematic area in turn was divided into different sessions in order to facilitate a more focussed discussion on the underlying aspects to the thematic area in question.

4.1 Governance, institutional and policy frameworks for risk reduction

The Panel on Governance, Institutional and Policy Frameworks for Risk Reduction stressed the importance of good governance being the prerequisite for effective disaster reduction. Governance was basic to the findings of the Yokohama Review and remains a significant component of disaster reduction programming if economic and social development is to be sustained. The Panel stressed the importance of participation by all stakeholders in actions implemented to reduce disaster risks. Legal and regulatory frameworks are needed to ensure that governments have the authority to act.

Equally, the establishment of national and regional platforms to promote disaster reduction is central to ensure multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral and multi-level approaches. Platforms need the commitment of governments, strong leadership and guaranteed resourcing. Advocacy is important to ensuring that disaster reduction remains high on government agendas, particularly when it is competing with so many other priorities. It is the poor and excluded that are often the most vulnerable to disaster risks. If institutions and policy frameworks do not reflect the requirements and actively engage those who are most vulnerable, then effectiveness will be diminished. Governance for disaster reduction should promote community resilience. Mainstreaming disaster reduction means working at the local level. As disasters affect many individual communities, disaster reduction needs to be decentralised as much as possible, and involve all stakeholders.

The session placed emphasis on:
- Governmental responsibility to ensure the success of disaster risk reduction.
- Political commitment for disaster risk reduction being linked to clearly defined funding arrangements.

- The need to share international experiences and knowledge in good government for disaster reduction.
- The horizontal as well as vertical integration of disaster risk reduction issues at regional, national and sub-national level.

A number of significant targets were mentioned to be achieved by 2015:
- All new and revised global agreements consider disaster and risk issues and make appropriate recommendations.
- Every country has planned national follow-up to the WSSD Plan of Implementation and every least developed country (LDC) has included disaster risk reduction in its National Adaptation Plan of Action on climate change.
- Every country and regional entity has adopted a policy and strategic plan for disaster risk management, integrating disaster risk reduction explicitly into other mainstream sectoral policies and programmes.
- Every country has reviewed and updated its disaster risk management legislation.
- Relevant codes and standards are updated and published, accompanied by effective systems to ensure compliance.
- The citizen's fundamental right to the highest possible standard of security and protection against hazards is incorporated into legal or constitutional frameworks.
- Every country has reviewed and updated its institutional framework for disaster risk reduction to incorporate all relevant stakeholders at all levels, with roles, responsibilities and resources clearly defined and allocated.
- Formal systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of official institutional arrangements are in place, with transparent procedures and findings publicly available on a regular basis.
- The rights of all groups in society to participate in disaster risk reduction decision-making, policy setting, planning and implementation are explicitly recognized in policy, legal and institutional provisions, and the ways and means of such participation are defined.
- The right to information about hazards and risks and the effectiveness of measures taken to address them is set out in policy and law, and systems are in place to facilitate public access.
- Every country has an independent, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral national platform for disaster risk reduction that is recognized and supported by government.
- All formal planning processes of governments and other actors are amended to include hazard vulnerability-risk analyses as mandatory components in appraisal and approval.
- All significant disaster risk reduction initiatives are thoroughly and independently evaluated, and the findings are made public.
- Capacities in disaster reduction are assessed and reported upon by all stakeholder groups as a matter of course in project, programme and national-level reporting and evaluation procedures.
- Achievements in disaster reduction are reported in national MDG reports.
- All actors identify resources provided for disaster risk reduction in institutional and programme budgets, in both development and humanitarian sectors, and report regularly on their use.
- All donor assistance and lending programmes, including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), include a full analysis of disaster risks and make specific provisions for their mitigation.

Comments from participants indicated the need for financial resource allocations. Such allocations would be most effective when aimed at the local level, not neglecting the other implementation spheres. The planning and accomplishment of disaster risk reduction initiatives cannot be a strictly managerial matter; it should not lose sight of the wider principles of social justice, equity and rights that underpin good governance.

4.2   Risk identification, assessment, monitoring and early warning

The core element of this cluster's discussion was that risk is dynamic. It changes over time and the factors generating risk exposure stem from multiple hazards all of which are embedded in, and continuously evolving with, processes of social, economic, institutional and environmental change.   Efforts to reduce risk require multi-hazard approaches that respond in an on-going manner to the dynamic nature of risk and the array of local, regional and global factors from which it springs.   This common lesson underpinned presentations and comments by all panel members.

Risk management is a continuous process.   Emphasis is needed to change from thinking of risk and vulnerability as static and understand the movement of this over time. From this common starting point, presentations by panel members highlighted a wide variety of specific lessons and insights from practical experience dealing with disasters and risk in their respective regions. Essential elements in moving from deliberation and analysis to action include the following:
- the critical need for integration across disciplines, sectors and national boundaries (particularly with respect to preparedness and warning);
- the need for global standards for warning and preparedness that are not determined by economic considerations alone.
- the importance of local mobilization in responding to disasters coupled with critical challenges in maintaining such capacity when disasters are infrequent; and
- the critical role community data collection can play in monitoring risk and vulnerability, addressing the challenges of integrating such data into national information management systems.

The session highlighted certain lessons learned such as:
- The critical role early warning can play in reducing the loss of lives.
- Whether or not the source of warning information is low or high technology, increases in early warning need to be coupled the development of critical local information (regarding both hazard and necessary response capabilities), evacuation infrastructure and community level education in order to be effective.
- Necessary baseline data are often missing or incomplete.   More importantly, while climatic and other physical science data are frequently available, the socioeconomic data required to understand vulnerability and to evaluate risk are generally absent and, often difficult to integrate.

Targets highlighted include:
- The development of actionable early warning and preparedness plans prepared for each vulnerable community by 2008;
- The establishment of policies to enable effective cooperation for data sharing and preparedness at national and international levels; and
- A 50% reduction in deaths from water-related hazards by 2015.

In the final discussion of this cluster, issues related to the quantification of vulnerability and adaptive capacity was raised that related directly to the core issues of socio-economic data availability and interpretation. Very often it comes down to using the window of opportunity after an event when decision-makers are more likely to provide resources. The ability of governments to reduce risk often depends on their ability to enforce risk reduction measures within all sections of the community as development and other dynamic change processes occur.   Dynamic responses to changes were acknowledged by the audience recognizing the importance of approaches that must address multiple hazards and reflect systemic and policy issues at local, national and international levels.

4.3   Knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience

Education for creating a culture of disaster resilience is an interactive process of mutual learning among people and institutions. It encompasses far more than formal education at schools and universities, and affects all aspects of life through the concerted effort to overcome universal barriers of ignorance, apathy, disciplinary boundaries and lack of political will present in communities. Education also involves the enhancement and use of indigenous knowledge for protecting people, habitat, livelihoods, and cultural heritage from natural hazards. Inadequate disaster reduction awareness and preparation repeatedly leads to preventable loss of life and damage in all major natural disasters. Preparation through education is less costly than learning through tragedy.

Education proceeds through direct learning, information technology, staff training, electronic and print media and other innovative actions to facilitate the management and transfer of knowledge and information to citizens, professionals, organizations, community stakeholders and policymakers. These are at their most effective when linked to community needs.

The following key principles apply:
- Promote knowledge and behavioural change on disaster risk through formal and informal education based on a complementary approach.
- Strengthen information and public awareness through media and civil society involvement for dissemination and implementation.
- Community empowerment through capacity building, and enhancing community resilience by building knowledge bases.
- Reinforce partnerships and cooperation on disaster risk reduction policy and strategy.
- Recognize the importance of traditional and indigenous knowledge systems, and utilize the information they contain.
- Disaster research needs to be incorporated in science policy for applied research and practice.
- An appropriate use of information technology, combined with community level training can bring the education process closer to implementation.

The session suggested the following targets:
- The incorporation of disaster risk reduction into curricula at all levels of education.
- The incorporation of disaster research in science policy.
- Initiatives undertaken at the grass-root levels should consider indigenous and traditional knowledge bases.
- Civil society organizations should conduct community education, training and capacity building activities.
- Development of communication strategy for disaster reduction.
- On-line and on-site disaster education curricula for practitioners and field workers.

Lessons are contained in UNESCO's prior work on education and will be further advanced by the UN International Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The cyclone preparedness programme in Bangladesh was mentioned as one of the best models of public awareness and information, community education, training and alerting. Other important lessons learned relate to the importance of children as key agent in formal and informal education. A dual top-down (driven by government) and bottom-up approach (driven by communities) to disaster risk management has produced results. Recent experiences in both developed and developing countries show that disaster research should include field based knowledge sharing and implementation-oriented, multi-disciplinary cooperation among researchers and practitioners. The International Decade of Education for Sustainable Development provides an important opportunity to act together to enhance learning processes, and develop a culture of prevention and preparedness.

4.4   Reducing the underlying risk factors

The nature of this topic necessitates a multi-dimensional emphasis on risk, and for this reason relates to all other topics under discussion. A number of key factors that compound risk were identified including:

- development processes and the risks associated with them such as, natural resource exploitation, urban development, and environmental degradation.
- risks to physical infrastructure include inadequate land-use planning and lack of codes and their enforcement in public infrastructure such as housing, medical facilities and historical structures.
- institutional and financial frameworks and social setting – for example, financing and insurance for disaster mitigation, community actions for prevention, poverty and livelihood enhancement, and
- mechanisms to deal with risk, within the larger perspective of sustainable development.

Localized community-based disaster management is a critical aspect of risk reduction. Risk reduction measures are therefore most successful when they involve the direct participation of the communities most likely to be exposed to hazards. There is adequate experience to show that this succeeds if sufficient attention and investment are devoted to the subject. Disaster reduction is most effective at the community level where specific local needs can be met. Management tools must be linked to the promotion of financial risk-sharing mechanisms, particularly insurance and reinsurance, public and private compensation schemes to victims, and dialogue with the private sector to focus on vulnerable populations and communities. In this regard, building capacities and partnerships become imperative. Significant emphasis was placed on gender issues as a critical aspect of disaster risk reduction.

Areas of particular emphasis included:

- The role of different stakeholder groups in reducing vulnerabilities and risks.
- Although risks managed by national and local governments are well understood and mapped out, the risks that are managed by communities and businesses are often neglected.
- The development of management tools and initiatives to form a key link between understanding pre-disaster vulnerability and post-disaster relief and rehabilitation.
- The promotion of financial risk-sharing mechanisms to focus on vulnerable populations and communities.
- The establishment of national and regional insurance funds with international partnerships.
- Building capacities and partnerships particularly at local government level including pubic-private partnerships.

Lessons learned, good practices and institutionalised experience included:

- The key to evaluation of post-disaster assessments and response is to organize a government-led multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral collective lesson-learning exercise while the disaster is still fresh in the minds of officials and affected communities.
- Basic life skills and how to behave in certain hazardous conditions as part of all basic school curriculum.
- A better understanding of how the environment protects itself.
- Protecting critical medical facilities
- Development and implementing training and education programmes for professionals.
- Expanding from relief work to include elements of implement risk reduction.

The cluster suggested the following targets and indicators:

- The MDGs for health were emphasized as being the natural targets for community health
- Development should incorporate health factors that relate to disaster risk reduction.
- Specific benchmarks for safe building practices were suggested, as were land-use

planning regulations.

4.5   Preparedness for effective response

Much of the presentation in Cluster Five revolved around the challenges and opportunities that shape action, or its absence in "preparedness for effective response".   The importance, from a human and financial perspective, of enhancing the safety and well-being of hazard-affected communities has been accepted wisdom for decades.   However, it is only in relatively recent times that pre-disaster, safety-enhancing, interventions have assumed greater importance on the political and policy agendas of national, regional, and international level actors. There is growing consensus that it is unethical to ignore the human cost of inaction and its implications for the right to life and the safety of those who are often the most marginalized.

It is widely acknowledged that risk factors are on the increase. However, it is not readily apparent that there is an adequate understanding of the changing nature of risk and the implications of this for the design and development of future preparedness systems, or for actions that need to be taken to address underlying risk factors. This is particularly important in terms of disasters that are global in origin such as those associated with climate variation and change. For the most part, the hazards and the growing levels of risk associated with this phenomenon have not significantly been addressed from the perspective of disaster preparedness.

It is apparent that dynamic relationships between cause and effects intensify vulnerability increasing further exposure. The tenacity of the division, between so-called "natural" and "human-made" disasters, persists as does the relief-development divide. It is imperative that early warning and disaster preparedness systems, and their support needs to be more robust, strategic and better suited to the changing and multi-dimensional nature of risk. The utility and effectiveness of preparedness systems are contingent on a comprehensive and multi-sectoral risk analysis.

Future initiatives on early warning are context specific, have appropriate communication and coordination systems, are accountable, sustainable, and people-centered. It is important that initiatives to strengthen response preparedness at the international level do not detract from the mobilization of resources that are needed to scale-up support for disaster preparedness at the local and national level. Disaster risk needs to be addressed as a shared responsibility.

Primary Issues highlighted by this session include:
- Political will, and the commitment to develop risk-conscious and safer societies, are critical for the translation of available knowledge and expertise into tangible and well-functioning early warning and disaster preparedness systems.
- Governance systems, at the local and national level, that are trusted, transparent, accountable, and enjoy the confidence of hazard-affected communities, are key to a productive and synergistic relationship between community and national-level early warning and preparedness systems.
- Adequate investment in, and appropriate allocation of resources to, a people-centered preparedness system are fundamental to improved risk management for more resilient communities. As disaster risk reduction is, at core, a development concern, resources beyond those required for disaster relief (i.e. life-saving humanitarian needs) should be available in a more predictable and sustained manner in the future.
- The ability of the United Nations, and other actors at the international level, to define a strategic framework and agreed division of labour, for the provision of support geared to enhanced preparedness, is a crucial and urgent requirement.

The following indicators are suggested:
- The extent to which disaster preparedness is mainstreamed into different sectors, key services, and socio-economic development processes will constitute a key indicator of success.

- The incidence and quality of collaborative and joint planning by relief and development entities on the formulation or strengthening of national and local level preparedness programmes.
- The nature and number of reviews, undertaken by governments and civil society actors, of existing legislated and policy frameworks to identify and initiate action needed to address weaknesses in relation to roles, responsibilities, and capabilities.
- Increased financial and technical support for scaling-up the disaster preparedness capabilities of community-level structures so that vulnerable groups are more resilient and are better able to influence, and interact with, national-level disaster risk management mechanisms.
- The organization of reviews to examine existing regional preparedness mechanisms, including their legislated policy and operational frameworks, in order to identify best practices and potential common standards for subsequent dissemination, and mainstreaming as appropriate, within the regional context.
- Increased level of identifiable funding and annual budgetary allocations by disaster prone countries to strengthening preparedness at the local and national levels.

With a few exceptions, a general impression remains that much is to be done in strengthening regional response and preparedness initiatives so that geographical neighbours can respond with mutual support when needed. Such collaboration may, on occasion, boost ties and strengthen relationships between states and peoples. Coordinated regional approaches are essential to addressing a variety of risk factors.

4.6 Special Thematic Session: Technical Meeting on the Indian Ocean Tsunami

In consideration of the recent tsunami event in the Indian Ocean, a special technical session was held to support the enhancement of tsunami warning systems in the Indian Ocean by sharing experiences from the countries of the Pacific Ocean countries. The session reviewed existing tsunami early warning systems in the Pacific Ocean region to identify opportunities of the transfer of knowledge and technology.

It highlighted the importance of institutional and operational capacities in national and international systems. Reports from the Indian Ocean region revealed the necessity of such systems. The session recognized that a system should be established in which governments of the relevant countries have primary responsibility. It also emphasized enhancement of the warning systems of individual countries and the development of an international mechanism for coordination.

The session called for urgent actions in the next six months. Specific activities include meetings for international coordination, assessment of tsunami early warning capabilities, holding seminars in the different governments, and disseminating tsunami warnings on a provisional basis.

After six months the development of an international coordination function should enjoy priority. An integrated strategy should also be developed for the establishment of a tsunami early warning system. Comprehensive seminars concerning the tsunami early warning system should also be held to promote sharing of the observational information for the operation of the tsunami early warning system.

5. REGIONAL ISSUES

5.1 Regional session: Geographical proximity – common threats

The participants agreed that the challenge is to minimize the losses that affect development. While the fundamental concept to guide the actions is that learning to live with risk is a necessity, there was consensus that the principal approach should be the integration of disaster risk into

socio-economic development processes with four pillars: 1) Mainstreaming of disaster management, 2) Advocacy to incorporate disaster management into development programs, 3) Strengthening of institutional capacity, and 4) Support to research efforts, including those that incorporate information technology and knowledge management.

In the case of Latin America, disasters in the region have been drivers of change. As a result processes have moved from response to preparedness, then to mitigation and preparedness, and finally to the relationships between disasters and development. The constant presence and use of regional mechanisms has been instrumental in influencing national policies. However, the growing number of agencies involved in disaster reduction makes it increasingly complicated to coordinate activities. Disasters do not require new institutions but require existing institutions to rethink the way they work. It was suggested that a regional approach is the most effective mechanism to achieve effective risk reduction.

In Africa, while the number of disasters and affected people are steadily increasing, fatalities have declined dramatically due to better response capacities in the region as well as more effective international assistance. A similar situation has occurred in the Caribbean were the number of facilities due to hurricanes has declined significantly, illustrating the effectiveness of early warning systems. It has also been observed, however, that poverty still reduces the effectiveness of all of these risk reduction programs.

Since natural disasters know no boundaries, regional initiatives are the most effective and logical risk reduction mechanisms. Given that, exchange and dissemination of information and good practices become crucial issues. In this sense, mechanisms should be implemented to ensure the quality and reliability of information as well as to guarantee its effective dissemination.

The participants justified the importance of regional cooperation by pointing out that it is the most effective way to link national and international efforts, generate well-established political, policy and institutional frameworks, and provide sustainability to risk reduction activities. Additionally, by working together, national or local organizations or initiatives have the weight they could never achieve if they worked individually.

5.2   Central America

The Central American Regional Session was coordinated by the Central American Center for Natural Disaster Reduction (CEPREDENAC). While the region has been considered a pioneer in conceptualizing regional collaboration, it was recognized that actions to reduce the risk associated with natural disasters are still to be implemented. Challenges include mechanisms to increase collaboration and better coordination at regional level in order to move from conceptual frameworks to actual actions.

The participants highlighted the fact that the region's economies are moving towards the establishment of free trade agreements that may have social effects that could increase social vulnerability to disasters. Given this, recommendations were made emphasizing especial attention to the poorest strata of society and paying specific consideration to the cultural and ethnic differences in the region.

There was general agreement that any proposed plans or strategies must be concrete, measurable, and realistic. There is an urgent need in the region for evaluation of the actual impact of the work that is being done in order to optimize resources and make the necessary adjustments. The (Hurricane) Mitch +5 meeting was a first step in that direction. Decentralization of risk reduction initiatives and programs is required to better reflect and respond to the local needs. Capacity building programs for local authorities and institutions are a priority of any proposed regional program. There was consensus on the need to consider disaster risk reduction as a development issue and not as a humanitarian issue. Risk management should be an integral component of development programs.

The international agencies working in the region expressed their preference to support and promote regional efforts to increase the impact of risk reduction programs and strengthen the existing regional frameworks and institutional structures.

5.3   Africa

The objective of this session was to discuss mutually beneficial issues concerning the environment and disaster risk reduction in Africa. The adoption of the African Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) in 2004, the Plan of Implementation as well as the Guideline for Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction in Development were highlighted as some of the significant progress made in Africa in the past year. Mention was made of the establishment of nine new national platforms to promote disaster risk reduction. These platforms enhance multi-sectoral collaboration, and assist in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development practices. Furthermore, it was noted that various networks for disaster risk reduction were established between national governments, NGOs, journalists, sub-regional organizations and disaster risk reduction experts. It was emphasized that the momentum gained in Africa over the past two years needs to be maintained. The activities of the UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery's Disaster Reduction Unit in Africa were also discussed. An increasing number of African governments are proceeding to establish national platforms and incorporating disaster risk reduction into national development policies. To further this purpose the ISDR and UNDP encouraged states to engage them as active partners in this regard.

The activation of the Plan of Implementation into concrete outcomes and tangible results came to the fore. Participants felt strongly that the WCDR should be used more effectively to raise the awareness of disaster risk in Africa. There is also a strong need for information sharing and collaboration which could be facilitated by the ISDR in Africa.

Some of the most significant comments made by participants present were:
- Supports were voiced for the establishment an early warning system located in Africa.
- A collaborative information sharing network is suggested in order to build a knowledge base and share information.
- Silent disasters like HIV/AIDS must not be forgotten because they do not attract as much media attention as other disasters.
- The role of women in environmental protection and implementing the ISDR was emphasized.
- Disaster risk reduction must be linked to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

5.4   Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

The objective of the session was to reach a conclusion on the strategies and activities for improving disaster risk reduction in SIDS and to convey their experience for consideration in the development of future frameworks for action in advancing global disaster reduction. SIDS' uniqueness results from the frequency and intensity of natural and environmental hazards and related disaster risks and their increasing impact. Their vulnerability is increasing. The resilience of SIDS has not kept pace with their increased exposure to risks and as a result they face disproportionately high economic, social and environmental costs. Some of the root problems SIDS face range from a dependency on international trade, limited employment and livelihood possibilities, costly infrastructure and administration, limited institutional capacity and natural resources, poverty, high freight costs due to geographical isolation, risk of loss of biodiversity, limited disaster response alternatives, and an increase in the risk of pollution due to shipping and tourism. These circumstances exacerbate the exposure to natural hazards and the inability to respond to crisis events.

The meeting emphasised the need to define approaches of national intra- and inter-regional collaboration in implementing the outcomes of the Kobe, Hyogo WCDR. The common goals and collective commitments in the Barbados Programme of Action, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals should be consistent with the outcomes of the Kobe, Hyogo WCDR.

The recurring theme of the integration of disaster risk reduction and development practices were also a point of discussion. In light of the recent tsunami disaster, additional attention was given to the need for effective early warning systems for SIDS in line with the Barbados Programme of Action and the recently agreed Mauritius Strategy for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

5.5   Asia

The session was organized by the ISDR Asia Partnership. The session's theme was recent regional efforts on disaster reduction and role of regional action in implementing WCDR outcomes.

The three objectives for the session were to:
* discuss and identify how the WCDR Programme of Action would be implemented at the national and regional levels in Asia,
* discuss what the expectations of countries are from the regional institutions for supporting the implementation of the WCDR Programme of Action, and
* discuss how regional intergovernmental cooperation organizations and regional institutions and IAP would facilitate the implementation of the WCDR Programme of Action.

After recognizing that Asia is, by far, the geographical region most heavily affected by natural disasters, the participants recommended a shift in emphasis from post-disaster reaction to pre-disaster prevention and indicated that risk reduction actions should be immediately adopted by policy makers. Unfortunately, it was recognized that there have not been adequate intra-regional mechanisms to facilitate coordination, research, training and information sharing. Many participants expressed their hope that recent catastrophic disasters such as the Bam earthquake and the Asian Tsunami would provide the necessary momentum to natural disaster risk reduction programmes across the entire region. Multi-country disaster risk reduction initiatives should be developed to increase the impact of these programmes and optimize the available resources. Regional disaster reduction mechanisms should be developed for implementing the plan of action to be produced by the WCDR. These mechanisms should focus on the establishment of early warning systems, mechanisms for the assessment of regional expertise, training programmes at all levels, and utilization of newly available information such as satellite imagery.

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