



KOBE REPORT (draft)

THEMATIC PANEL 5

“PREPAREDNESS FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSE”

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1. Summary of the Panel's presentations

Much of the discussion within the context of Cluster Five revolved around the challenges and opportunities that shape action, or lack thereof, on the central theme of "preparedness for 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 also 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 as well as action that needs 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 change. For the most part, the hazards and growing level of risk associated with this phenomenon have not been addressed from the perspective of disaster preparedness.

It is also apparent that the dynamics of the relationship between cause and effects intensify vulnerability that, in turns, contributes to additional exposure to threats. However, the tenacity of the division, between so-called "natural" and "man-made" disasters, persists as does the relief-development divide. Such compartmentalization distorts the analysis of risk and factors responsible for vulnerability. It also works against the development of strategies and programmes that are adequate to the task of reducing risk.

It is widely recognized that early warning and disaster preparedness systems, and the support available for these, needs to be more robust, strategic and better able to deal with 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. Assessments of threat should take account of current and projected trends in relation to natural and other hazards as well as vulnerability levels. Risk assessments should also review coping mechanisms including the extent to which they are sustainable and in harmony with the natural environment.

The recent surge in commitment to the development or strengthening of multi-hazard early warning systems is welcome. It is important that future initiatives on early warning are context specific, have appropriate communication and coordination systems, are accountable, sustainable, and people-centered.

Experience shows that well-functioning preparedness systems should build on, and contribute to, the resilience inherent in communities that are sensitive to, and equipped to deal with, disasters. Indeed, the level of awareness of hazard-affected communities, and their level of engagement in preparedness systems, will largely determine the extent to which early warning, precautionary, and response measures prove effective. Feedback from Mozambique notes that when communities are involved in risk, hazard and vulnerability mapping their level of awareness and readiness increases. An aware community is also an empowered as well as a safer community.

It is well understood that communities are on the front line in terms of confronting risk and coping with disasters. However, a high proportion of disasters that occur with significant loss of life and assets, do not make international headlines. As a result, intense media coverage of mega disasters contributes to stereotypes and myths that are at odds with reality and undermine efforts to strengthen resilience to disasters at the community level. 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.

It is difficult to dispute the assertion that an effective response is contingent on an adequate preparedness system. It is equally difficult to discount the centrality of high level and sustained political commitment to those preparedness systems that have proven their effectiveness in reducing the number of lives lost to disasters; Cuba, Bangladesh and

Ethiopia are pertinent examples that also demonstrate what is achievable in low-income settings. Other significant factors include legislative and policy frameworks that allow for diversity and decentralized decision-making while simultaneously ensuring a well-coordinated and cohesive preparedness and response structure. In addition, evidence from different locations point to the importance of maintaining access to basic services so that vulnerability levels do not increase.

With a few exceptions, a general impression is that much remains to be done in strengthening regional response and preparedness initiatives so that geographical neighbours can respond in a timely manner when needed. Such collaboration may, on occasion, have the additional value of boosting ties and strengthening relationships between states and peoples. It is also apparent that coordinated regional approaches are essential to addressing a variety of risk factors including, for example, flooding.

It is also important that national level disaster preparedness systems are familiar with, and linked to, international-level rescue and relief arrangements. The latter should be clearly defined, predictable, and available to assist when catastrophic events overwhelm capabilities at the national and regional level. There is strong consensus on the need for a more unified, coherent, and concerted approach to early warning and disaster preparedness by international level actors. At a minimum, there needs to be clarity on the overall institutional framework. There is also a strong demand for common standards, agreement on terminology, readily available tools and guidelines, as well as predictability in the type and level of support available both in the pre-disaster and immediate onset phase.

It is widely acknowledged that, in general, disaster preparedness systems are seriously under-funded. Disaster risk needs to be addressed as a shared responsibility. It is, therefore, important that the donor community and disaster-prone countries work together to identify appropriate mechanisms and arrangements that would allow for consistent and long-term funding that is earmarked for strengthening disaster preparedness systems within the larger context of improved disaster risk management. As risk reduction is, primarily, a development issue it is important (a) that this is integrated into ongoing development processes and (b) that funding for disaster risk management is additional to current humanitarian and development spending.

Failure to advance on the disaster risk reduction agenda will impede the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. This, in turn, will contribute to a cycle of increased vulnerability, marginalization and exponential growth of risk factors.

2. Primary Issues

- 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 and more resilient communities. As disaster risk reduction is, at core, a development concern, resources that are additional to those needed to address 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.

3. Suggested Indicators

- 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 legislative and policy frameworks in order to identify and initiate action needed to address weaknesses particularly in relation to roles, responsibilities, and capabilities concerned with disaster preparedness at the national and local level.
- Increased support, financial and technical, 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 legislative, 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 level.

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