

### Disaster Risk Reduction and Early Warning

Losses of life and property from natural disasters have grown significantly over recent decades, mainly because of population growth, landuse changes, and urbanization. Nearly a million people have died and 2.6 billion people affected over the last decade from disasters, mostly from storms, droughts, floods and earthquakes. Global annual disaster costs of 50 million US\$ are common.

In many developing countries, natural disasters are a serious handicap to development, destroying structures and livelihoods built up over many years, and sometimes leading to widespread hunger and conflicts. But the recent hurricane Katrina in the US and the devastating floods in Romania, Switzerland, Austria and Germany are yet another reminder that natural hazards are not just relevant for developing countries but a global threat.

Good early warning systems, ones that are people-centred and systematically organized, coupled with better preparedness and response mechanisms, can enable communities at risk to prepare well in advance and to react quickly to avoid losses of lives and livelihoods. Early warning systems contribute to protecting and supporting sustainable social and economic development.

At the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan in January 2005 ministers and other government representatives agreed on the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. The HFA includes the development and implementation of early warning systems.



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### The Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning

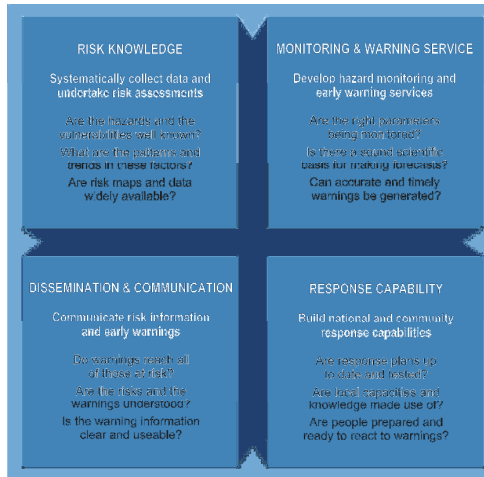
The Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning (PPEW) was founded in 2004 as a result of the Second International Conference on Early Warning (EWC-II) held in Bonn, 2003 to catalyze partnerships and action and sustain active dialogue on early warning and related risk reduction. PPEW was established by the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) with the support of the German Government. It is the newest addition to the Bonn UN campus.

The Platform is a key partner in organizing the Third International Conference on Early Warning to be held in Bonn, 27-29 March 2006, hosted by the Government of Germany under the auspices of the United Nations.

### PPEW's Aim

The reduction of the growing impacts of disasters through more effective early warning systems through supporting international action necessary to more systematic integration of technical early warning capacities into policy and practice. The platform advocates for better early warning systems worldwide.

PPEW strongly supports the concept of systematic people-centred early warning systems which comprises four key elements:



Effective early warning systems require strong technical foundations and good knowledge of the risks faced. Early warning systems must be people-centred with clear messages and dissemination systems that reach those at risk. Public awareness, education and practiced knowledgeable responses are critical for risk managers and the public.



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Early warning systems rely heavily on technical organizations such as the National Weather Services and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Early warning systems save lives, livelihoods and assets threatened by natural disasters such as storms, floods, droughts and famine, wild land fires, volcanic eruptions, cold spells, landslides, tsunamis, typhoons, and hurricanes.



The International Early Warning Programme (IEWP) has its origins in the Second International Early Warning Conference and was launched at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005. Many countries do not have effective early warning systems. The IEWP aims to stimulate and support international cooperation and systematic action to build globally comprehensive and people-centred early warning systems, in order to reduce the impacts of natural disasters.

The International Early Warning Programme provides an appropriate international vehicle to respond to the urgent needs of an international early warning system necessary to strengthen and interlink existing systems into a comprehensive whole.

### Tsunami Early Warning Project

The December 26 tsunami showed the tragic effects of having no warning systems in place. It was a wake up call for many. PPEW advanced a multi-partner project proposal to support the development of tsunami early warning capacities in the Indian Ocean region, in partnership with UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and other organizations.

US\$ 11m project is helping to implement and coordinate the core warning system as well as identifying the significance of integrating these technical elements into a risk reduction approach. The project partners with the numerous UN and other organizations that contribute to improving countries' disaster risk management and risk reduction, including early warning systems.

The tsunami project comprises activities which concentrate on five components:

- (i) Core system implementation
- (ii) Integrated risk management
- (iii) Public awareness and education
- (iv) Community-level approaches
- (v) Project coordination

The tsunami has pushed 2 million additional people over the poverty line. These are the ones who will be most vulnerable and unprepared when the next tsunami occurs. They will be living in the most vulnerable zones, will be less likely to receive warnings, and less likely to be educated on the correct measures to take. The Indian Ocean region remains at risk of tsunamis, as further large earthquakes are likely over the next few years.



### Better early warning systems - now!

After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the world was shocked to learn that if tsunami early warning systems had been in place in the region, many thousands of lives could have been saved. It has raised awareness of disasters, the factors causing them, and what should be done.

Now is the time to implement early warning systems for all and for all hazards as was asked by the UN-Secretary General Kofi Annan in the aftermaths of the Indian Ocean Tsunami.

- In his "Millennium Declaration in Larger Freedom towards development, security and human rights for all", he requested the UN/ISDR to undertake a survey of the world's early warning capacities and gaps. Governments are now reviewing their early warning systems for all hazards. The outcome report will be published in January 2006.
- The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) in January 2005 came up with a global Hyogo Framework for Action, which includes an agenda for better early warning systems.
- The new International Early Warning Programme (IEWP) was launched by UN/ISDR-PPEW and UN partners at the WCDR.
- The Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) is underway as a key element of global early warning.
- In July the Group of Eight (G8) issued a clear statement on the importance of early warning systems and disaster risk reduction.
- The Government of Germany and the UN/ISDR organize the Third International Conference on Early Warning from 27 to 29 March 2006, in Bonn, Germany ([www.ewc3.org](http://www.ewc3.org)).

## Early warning and preparedness saves lives, livelihoods and assets



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