



International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

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# Building a “Local Government Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction”

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## **Concept Note**

(DRAFT 0 - for the purpose of discussion)

Geneva, 07 May 2008



United Nations

## Context

By 2050, the world population is expected to grow by three billion people. Almost all of this growth will take place in developing countries, and particularly within their cities and towns. Rapid urbanization and resulting population densities will place an increasing number of people at risk in these areas. There is also growing evidence that poverty in urban areas is rising, and that the number of poor - and hence more vulnerable - people in urban areas is increasing at a faster rate than in rural areas.

If one looks beyond the statistics, however, the picture is slightly different. These urbanization and poverty trends are particularly relevant to the countries that are currently experiencing very high economic growth rates - such as China, India, Brasil and others - but may not necessarily reflect the situation in other countries, where rural poverty and the rural dimension of vulnerability still remain the major challenges to address.

Furthermore, the reality of households' livelihoods in developing countries often includes both rural and urban elements. Many urban enterprises, for examples, rely on demand from rural consumers, and access to urban markets and services is crucial for most agricultural producers. The same applies to a number of other areas, including access to and delivery of public services, where such distinction does not accurately portray the reality on the ground. When addressing disaster risk reduction at the local government level, therefore, one has to recognize the intimate connection between the urban and rural dimensions of vulnerability.

## Local Governments and Disaster Risk Reduction

Emphasis on DRR action at the local government level is now becoming stronger as cities of all sizes are subjected to rapid population growth, climate change, environmental degradation, and overall increased conditions of vulnerability. While cities<sup>1</sup> and complex urban areas currently attract more attention in reason of their high concentration of risk, local and regional authorities have an equally important role to play in medium and small-scale cities, towns, and local rural areas.

It is at the local level that development planning is expected to first take place, and the integration between DRR and development is supposed to be realized. At the provincial, district and municipal level<sup>2</sup>, local governments also serve the key function of ensuring a link between local, community-based organizations and central government authorities. Overall, local governments are very well positioned to reduce disaster risk in local areas, since they are familiar with (and sometimes responsible for) both the disaster risks experienced, as well as the resources and opportunities available to identify and manage those risks.

In recent times, a growing number of local administrations have incorporated DRR as an integral part of their responsibility towards their citizens, and developed sustainable development practices. Cities such as Istanbul, Bogotá, Manila, Quito and Cape Town, for example, are establishing processes and promoting concrete

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly mega-cities, with more than 10 million inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> The names and definitions of local government institutions vary quite significantly between countries.

DRR activities. Other interesting examples can be found at the provincial, district and other local levels.

In spite of this encouraging trend, however, little resources are currently committed at local levels of responsibility to support disaster risk reduction, despite evident advantages in doing so. With competing priorities and national agendas, often challenged by competition for funds, local officials often defer decisions and responsibility about disasters risks to central authorities. Indeed, implementation of DRR in local areas also relies on the central government establishing a national strategy that enables decentralized decision-making, and provides resources for local planning, assessment and intervention.

## **Justification and Added Value**

Since early 2005, a broad range of stakeholders including UNDP, UN/HABITAT, OCHA, UN/ISDR, the World Bank, ProVention Consortium, EMI, UCLG, ICLEI, Metropolis and other city associations, have been discussing the opportunity to develop a “Global Forum for Urban Risk Reduction” (GFURR), to advance DRR in the context of cities and megacities. Key meetings have been organized for this purpose in Geneva in July 2006, Kobe in April 2007, and more recently at the first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP/DRR), in June 2007.

As a result of this two-year consultation process, a broad consensus has been reached on the need to establish such a global mechanism<sup>3</sup>. Discussions during the last meeting organized in Geneva at the GP/DRR, however, highlighted an overall lack of ownership from the represented organizations, and the need for a strong leadership to bring the process forward. At the time of writing, a few parallel initiatives are being developed by different stakeholders as a follow-up to the GP/DRR discussions and previous consultations.

While all of these (and other pre-existing) initiatives can certainly contribute to addressing relevant DRR issues from different perspectives, none of them has emerged yet as a comprehensive, far-reaching initiative that could have a large impact on local governments, at all different levels. Furthermore, although emphasis on urban risk reduction is certainly important, efforts to mainstream DRR among local governments can not be limited to such specific context, and should also target local administrations at the provincial, district, municipal and other local levels. Reasons and advantages of doing so have been described in the previous sections.

In view of the above, and based on the understanding that the involvement of local and regional authorities in DRR processes can no longer be delayed, the UNDP Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (UNDP-SU/SSC), UNOSAT, and the UN/ISDR secretariat have entered into agreement to facilitate the development of a “Local Government Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction (LGA/DRR)” that will complement other existing capacities<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Proposed objectives of the GFURR include: to facilitate sharing of information and knowledge on urban risk reduction, coordinate existing activities in this area and raise greater awareness on the subject.

<sup>4</sup> Additional partners, including local governments and city associations, will be gradually invited to participate.

The active involvement of local governments in DRR processes, is seen as an imperative condition to “build the resilience of nations and communities to disasters”, as spelled out in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, by directly targeting local administrations, the LGA/DRR will facilitate a genuine ownership-building process, and avoid the creation of additional layers of bureaucracy and multiple organizational agendas. Finally, the LGA/DRR will adopt a comprehensive multi-hazard approach to DRR, as opposed to the traditional focus on specific hazards only (such as earthquakes and seismic hazards) that has characterized some of the initiatives so far.

## Overarching Goal

The overarching goal for building the Local Government Alliance for DRR is to contribute to the growing global effort to reduce the impact of disasters, and build disaster resilient communities through the engagement of local and regional authorities.

## Proposed Objectives and Activities

In order to reach this goal, the LGA/DRR will aim to achieve the following objectives:

1. To facilitate knowledge and information sharing on DRR between north and south, south and south, urban and rural local governments.

Although some interesting examples of DRR implementation are emerging at the local government level, there is a need to further promote these practices and encourage their replication and enhancement among local and regional authorities. The LGA/DRR will provide a platform to facilitate dialogue and exchange among local government representatives from different backgrounds, socio-economic contexts and geographical areas.

2. To raise awareness and encourage the active role of local and regional authorities in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction.

One of the major challenges for local governments is to understand the value of disaster risk reduction as an important criteria for the economic and social well-being of their own citizens. The LGA/DRR is expected to play a key role in this area, and to also increase the recognition of local governments’ contribution to reducing disaster risks and vulnerabilities. The LGA/DRR will facilitate the development of common position statements to be presented at the GP/DRR and in other international conferences and fora on disaster risk reduction. Overall, the LGA/DRR is expected to raise the profile and increase the visibility of local government actors at the national, regional and global levels.

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<sup>5</sup> The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 is a 10-year action framework for DRR adopted by 168 Governments during the January 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction. For more information visit [www.unisdr.org/hfa](http://www.unisdr.org/hfa).

3. To improve local governments’ understanding of central governments (and vice versa), particularly with respect to DRR strategies and implementation.

This will be another key function of the LGA/DRR. By making the case for increased DRR-action at the local government level, for instance, the LGA/DRR will encourage dialogue on issues related to effective decentralization and empowerment of local government authorities. It may also facilitate the development of expressions of political will among local and regional authorities, which could mobilize attention and resources at the national and international levels.

4. To ensure the coordination of DRR actions among relevant stakeholders, improve the efficiency of use of resources and avoid duplication of activities.

While developing the LGA/DRR, particular attention will be paid to ensuring a high-level of complementarity with other existing initiatives, and allowing for a better coordination of activities and efficient use of resources destined to this area of work.

## **Strategy for Developing the Local Government Alliance**

The strategy for building and sustaining the Local Government Alliance for DRR will involve the following four steps:

I. Taking stock of existing initiatives and drafting a concept note for the LGA/DRR (November-December 2007).

The concept note will explain the rationale for building the Local Government Alliance and outline a proposed strategy for its development. This document will also serve as a background reading for the consultative meeting with local governments that will be held in May 2008, as per step II below.

II. Building ownership and leadership by a small group of local governments through a consultative process (January 2008, and beyond).

UNDP-SU/SSC, UNOSAT, and the UN/ISDR secretariat will organise a consultative meeting with local and regional authorities to hold initial discussions on the potential scope of the LGA/DRR, its proposed objectives, activities, governing structure and membership criteria. The consultative meeting will be held in May 2008, and will possibly be hosted and facilitated by a local government authority.

The meeting is expected to emerge with substantive comments and observations on the LGA/DRR proposal, and a shared understanding of and commitment to the LGA/DRR. Such consultative meeting will be followed by regional consultations with local and regional authorities, consultations with national level actors (see step IV below) and other relevant GP/DRR stakeholders.

III. Establishing an initial “Advisory Group” for the LGA/DRR (May-Jul 2008).

Following up on the consultative meeting, UNDP-SU/SSC, UNOSAT, and the UN/ISDR secretariat will facilitate the establishment of a temporary “Advisory Group”, which will guide the development of the LGA/DRR during the initial phase. Members of the proposed Advisory Group shall have demonstrated a strong commitment to DRR advocacy and implementation at the local level. The proposed Advisory Group will serve as the initial driving force of the LGA/DRR, until the holding of a broader meeting to be held in November 2008 (see step IV below).

IV. Holding a broader meeting to discuss and agree on the way forward (November 2008).

UNDP-SU/SSC, UNOSAT, and the UN/ISDR secretariat will organise the above meeting with support from the LGA/DRR Advisory Group. The meeting will possibly take place back-to-back with the World Urban Forum (attracting some 10.000 participants every two years), which will be held in Nanjing, China, on 3-7 November 2008. The meeting shall discuss, among other things, the proposed structure and governance mechanisms for the LGA/DRR, and decide on the way forward. The meeting could also be the venue for the official launch of the LGA/DRR, based on the level of commitment and ownership reached by its members at that time.

Further meetings will be organized in due course, leading to the second session of the “Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction”, June 2009 (see proposed timeframe below).

Finally, it should be noted that the UN/ISDR secretariat will designate a focal point to facilitate the development of the Local Government Alliance, under the supervision of the UN/ISDR secretariat Senior Coordinator for Advocacy and Outreach. The focal point will facilitate the process of establishing and developing the LGA/DRR during the initial phase.

**Proposed Timeframe**

Date	Activities	Outcomes
Nov-Dec 2007	Develop a draft concept note for the LGA/DRR	Rationale for building the LGA/DRR discussed and proposed strategy for development outlined.
May 2008	Hold a preliminary consultative meeting with local government representatives	Substantive comments and observations on the LGA/DRR proposal received. Shared understanding of and commitment to the LGA/DRR reached.
May-Jul 2008	Establish an initial “Advisory Group” for the LGA/DRR	Advisory Group established, providing guidance during the early stage of development of the LGA/DRR.

Nov 2008	Organise a broader consultative meeting during the 2008 World Urban Forum - Nanjing, China, 3-7 November 2008	Proposed structure and governance mechanisms for the LGA discussed, and agreed upon. Possible launch of the LGA.
2009 (Date TBD)	Global Urban Risk Meeting - Incheon, Korea	TBD
Jun 2009	Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction - Geneva, Switzerland, 15-19 June 2009	TBD

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