

NGO comments on the WCDR Draft Programme Outcome Document of 21st December 2004

The following comments reflect **Tearfund, Christian Aid** and **ActionAid**'s concerns about the content of the draft programme outcome document of 21st December 2004. **Tearfund, Christian Aid and ActionAid have significant combined experience in working with communities affected by disasters.**

For further information please contact Sarah La Trobe: sarah.Latrobe@tearfund.org
Tel: +44 (0)20 8943 7962.

1. Disaster risk reduction as a national priority

In the 9th August draft outcome document, under the objective '*Ensure disaster risk reduction is a national priority with a strong organisational and policy basis for implementation*', a priority for action was:

Integrate risk management and risk reduction into development policy and planning at all levels of government, including in poverty reduction strategies and sector and multi-sector policy and plans. (Para.10.1 (v), p.4).

This action has been removed from the current draft programme document. It is crucial that it is reinserted, given that one of WCDR goals is the integration of risk considerations into sustainable development policies, planning and programming.

2. Programme document language

Some of the language in the current programme outcome document is very weak in terms of defining the required levels of government commitment and necessary resources (together with accompanying targets). The draft programme outcome document of 9 August 2004 stated:

...while considerable progress has been achieved in the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy since 1994, the number and scale of disasters generally have increased, and there remains an urgent need to take more systematic and concerted action to address disaster risks... (Para. 5, p.2).

Yet this urgent need to take systematic and concerted action is not adequately reflected in the current programme document. It is of particular concern that in section F, *Resource Mobilisation*, states are merely '*invited to undertake...actions to mobilise the necessary resources to support implementation of this Framework for Action*' (Para. 31, p.20). Being 'invited' is not sufficient. As stated in Agenda 21, providing developing countries with the means to implement their commitments will serve the

common interests of developed and developing countries and of humankind in general.

Recommendations for textual changes

1. Para. 27 (section IV, B) currently reads '*All States should endeavour to undertake...tasks at the national and local levels...*'. We recommend it reads **should undertake...**
 2. Para. 28 (section IV, C) currently reads '*Regional organisations...[should] alt. [are invited to] undertake the following tasks...*'. We recommend it reads **should undertake...**
 3. Para. 31 (section IV, F) currently reads '*States...are invited to undertake the following actions to mobilise the necessary resources...*'. We recommend it reads **should undertake...**
 4. On page 6 it is stated, *[Recommended] priorities for action 2005-2015*. We recommend it reads **Priorities for action 2005-2015.**
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3. Climate change

It is of great concern that all reference to climate change has either been removed from the current document or bracketed. According to the IPCC, climate change is likely to compound existing and future food and water pressures and increase the frequency and/or severity of extreme events such as floods, droughts and cyclones. It is crucial that the climate change community and the disaster reduction community recognise disaster risk reduction as a vital component of climate change adaptation, and work together to advance both fields and avoid duplication of activities.

The link between climate change and increased disaster risk was noted by governments at UNFCCC COP 10 in Buenos Aires, December 2004. This link must be formally recognised at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, both in the outcome document and the political declaration.

Recommendations for textual changes

1. Para 7 (Section 1, Preamble) of the 9th August version of the programme outcome document should be reinserted into the current document.
 2. We propose that the brackets be removed from Para 20 (i) (c) and Para 29 (i).
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4. The need to prioritise and strengthen local-level action

We know from experience that interventions such as local-level disaster mitigation and preparedness measures, based upon appropriate vulnerability and capacity assessments that encourage the strong participation of affected groups, saves lives, livelihoods and people's assets.

Therefore, building capacities at the local and district levels, in the most disaster-prone countries, must be at the heart of efforts to improve disaster risk reduction. All legislation, policies, procedures and activities must be explicitly linked to this objective if we are to make a difference to the lives of those most affected by disasters. The international community needs to create an enabling environment, with supportive structures, that will enable the large-scale implementation of local-level interventions.

Local-level actions including capacity building should be given a high priority in the agenda and outcomes of the WCDR, in line with the Yokohama Strategy which states, *'The development and strengthening of capacities to prevent, reduce and mitigate disasters is a top priority area to be addressed...'* (Principle 4, p.6). This issue is also reflected in the draft review which states, *'A much more proactive approach to informing, motivating and involving people in all aspects of disaster reduction in their own local communities, must be noted as a priority of disaster reduction'* (Para. 48, p.11) and *'...reducing disaster risks at local levels should be a principal goal...'* (Para.117, p.22).

Recommendations for textual changes

Additional text is required to strengthen the focus on community-based action. Paragraph 17 (iii) should include:

1. **Promote the development of community-based participatory Disaster Risk Management Plans, (incorporating emergency preparedness and response, and vulnerability and hazard reduction) through NGO and local government efforts**
2. **Undertake Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment (hazard, vulnerabilities, capacities inc. coping mechanisms) at community level to inform analysis and Disaster Risk Management Plan design & implementation.**

5. The need for committed financial resources

Overcoming the barriers to mainstreaming risk reduction (issues of institutional ownership, prioritisation, structural funding frameworks, lack of knowledge and cultural divisions) will require appropriate funding mechanisms. This need is clearly stated within the draft review of the Yokohama Strategy: *'It is ironic to note that despite the many calls for mainstreaming disaster reduction into development planning, specifically designated resources to realise these objectives from development budgets are extremely limited, whether sought in national or through international financial mechanisms. Initiatives that encourage the explicit commitment of development funds for disaster reduction practices need to be supported as a matter of priority.'* (Para.40, p.10).

Yet in the current programme document there is no 'explicit commitment of development funds' in the form of specific resource targets in relation to the stated objectives / desired actions. Instead, Member States are merely (and ambiguously) invited to mobilise the necessary resources to support implementation of the

Framework of Action (see previous point 1, page 1). Therefore, the current programme document does not reflect Yokohama principle 10: *'The international community should demonstrate strong political determination required to mobilise adequate and make efficient use of existing resources...in the field of natural disaster risk reduction'*.

6. The need for targets and timeframes

Targets or timeframes for any of the priority actions are noticeably missing from the current programme document. Therefore, actions do not fulfil SMART criteria (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound).

Good governance requires participation and accountability. With respect to participation the important role of civil society organisations in mobilizing sustained interest / engagement with the affected communities and fostering the efficient use of resources must be sufficiently recognised.

With respect to accountability, this involves finding mechanisms by which governments and their partners' performance can be measured and by which they can be held to account for their actions. Within the current document it is apparent that governments and associated inter-governmental organisations are reluctant to set any risk reduction targets (together with corresponding resources indicators) to measure their level of commitment to this strategy. Interestingly, this was precisely the point Kofi Annan referred to at the IDNDR closing conference in Geneva in July 1999: *"the numbers and cost of disasters continues to rise.... We know what has to be done, what is now required is the political commitment to do it"*.

There must be substantial improvement in the current programme outcome document linked to a firm commitment from member States to provide the means to achieve the intended goals. In the wake of the enormous tragedy of the Asian tsunami, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction must be seen to take concrete steps to ensure that the number of natural disasters, and associated human and material losses, does not continue to rise.

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