



## KOBE REPORT (draft)

### High Level Round Table 1: Disaster risk: the next development challenge

The first high level round table was held on 18 January. The topics ranged from obstacles to and challenges for disaster reduction, shortcomings and achievements, lessons learned, good governance and the link between development and disaster reduction.

The following people participated in the above mentioned high level round table:

Facilitator:

Ms. Yvette Stevens, OCHA

Speakers:

Mrs. Sadako Ogata, JICA

Dr. Klaus Töpfer, UNEP

Mr. Gerry van der Linden, ADB

Mr. Zephirin Diabre, UNDP

Mr. Gareth Thomas, DFID

Dr. B. Hoffmann, GTZ

#### Targets and indicators

It is very important to come together and discuss disaster reduction. Disaster reduction measures have to focus on the poorest people because they have little to no resources to deal with disasters, which makes them particularly vulnerable. The link between poor people and disaster is a very direct one.

The tsunami disaster in Indonesia and elsewhere is not just an issue of money but also about the reconstitution of life and hope.

Example of Grenada is given where schools were refitted and strengthened so people could use them as shelters in times of emergencies. In that case it was possible to anticipate natural disaster and ensure that capital investment was protected and lives were saved.

It is crucial to work on prevention. It is time for the world to understand that we have had enough warnings and that now that most techniques are known how to protect ourselves they are actually implemented.

Therefore, it is vital to develop targets and indicators in the course of the WCDR in order to measure whether we are actually heading into the right direction.

The UN Conference in September 2005 will be an opportunity to see where we are regarding implementation and where risk reduction features on the international agenda.

#### Empowering communities

Mrs. Ogata gave an overview of obstacles and challenges involved in facing disasters.

In the wake of the Kobe earthquake 1995 and other natural disasters Japan has developed a range of disaster preparedness measures and also transferred them to other countries.

Disasters in one particular country most often affect many other countries as well.

The most important element in disaster preparedness is empowering communities. In Japan, for example, the local authorities functioned in close cooperation with the grassroots communities.

Empowering local communities is the key to risk reduction.

What need to be further reinforced are prevention measures, emergency preparedness and reconstruction activities. The importance of local government structures must not be neglected.

The challenge is to intervene earlier by speeding up the delivery process from the time the disaster hits to recovery and reconstruction.

### **Rethink the institutional structure of the international community and UN agencies**

The tsunami disaster is a wake up call for the international community. Natural disasters have been increasing in frequency and severity for the past decades. Natural disasters are hampering the way to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the fight against poverty.

The challenges are to try and figure out how international organizations could organize themselves more efficiently (Inter Agency Panel?), whether the current UN architecture is adequate and why disaster risk reduction has been neglected for such a long time. Both disaster preparedness technology and information and education activities are needed to boost disaster reduction. The UK is ready to support an early warning system for all common disasters for multiple use. It is essential that more funding is made available and more money is spent on disaster reduction measures and mitigation. 10% of response funds should go to mitigation. Disaster risk reduction measures must not always be expensive.

This is the largest conference of this kind ever and all eyes and ears are on us because of the tsunami disaster. People expect that the conference will produce some practical measures. It is a challenge we need to face up to.

### **Environmental assessments**

Though we are still mourning the victims of the tsunami, we must also look ahead. Risk reduction measures must be fully integrated into reconstruction efforts. Environmental capital must be analyzed. Investments now will lead to a huge return later.

The action (technology) that needs to be taken and that has been suggested several times in the course of this conference is not questioned, an early warning system is urgently needed. In addition, an ongoing environmental assessment, an efficient ecosystem management and investment in the environment are essential.

### **Integration of disaster risk management into development programs**

There is an urgent need to better understand the link between disasters and development and how to incorporate disaster reduction measures into development policies. The UNDP report "Reducing Disaster Risk- A Challenge for Development" (2004) provided the following four conclusions:

- Disasters can wipe out local gains.
- Disaster losses interrupt and even aggravate development
- It is the poor and marginalized populations who suffer the most.
- Development policies can determine whether disaster risk is being reduced or increased. (Some development policies, i.e. the tourism industry, can actually increase disaster risk!)

Therefore we must alert policy makers to incorporate disaster risk reduction measures into development strategies and policies. Governments still very much focus on response measures only. UNDP is ready to translate this policy into action by

- Scaling up human resources and assigning experienced experts and volunteers in disaster prone areas.
- Improving risk information, coordinating disaster reduction better at all levels, developing goals, strategies and guidelines for disaster reduction.
- Engaging UN partners in disaster reduction management.

Disasters are global in character and therefore require a global answer accordingly.

### **From disaster response to preparedness**

Financial institutions like the Asian Development Bank are an integral part of disaster management. The ADB has a long history in supporting its member countries. In June 2004 the

Asian Development Bank developed a new emerging policy which encompasses a paradigm shift from response to risk reduction.

Financial institutions assist in the disaster management cycle by ensuring the sustainability of projects. Both poverty reduction and environmental protection are very much linked to disaster management. A close cooperation between governments, financial institutions, NGOs and communities is extremely vital.

The conference is held at a very critical time, it is an opportunity to “do the right thing”, i.e. rebuild the destroyed communities and make the world a safer place.

### **Implementation gap**

Even though a positive change has occurred at all levels (UN Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, local disaster risk management has increased), disaster risk has yet to gain the influence it deserves on the political agenda. In reality policy makers do not think about, and less so act on disaster reduction. There is a big implementation gap and disaster reduction leads a shadow existence because there are other more pressing issues such as conflict prevention, poverty reduction and environment protection. Some people still regard disaster reduction as a separate policy from development. Disaster reduction is still, if at all, only integrated into development policy after a disaster has occurred.

Societies struggle with preparing ahead for something that is not tangible for many of them or that might not ever happen.

However, development and disaster reduction must be linked and not seen as two separate policies. The UK is hosting the 2005 G8 summit and has adopted the theme of development. This will be a chance to also push risk reduction issues up on the development agenda.

In some countries well functioning networks exist already between NGOs, the media, national disaster risk agencies and other disaster risk platforms. However, there is still no systematic and regular dialogue going on between all the parties involved.

Many of the thoughts voiced here are not new, some may be unrealistic but it is important to have visions.

#### **The following comments came from the floor:**

- The cost of reconstruction is always much higher than prevention costs. It is time to achieve tangible results and stop simply voicing recommendations.
- Even though it is acknowledged that education is vital in disaster reduction, there are simply no resources and facilities available in many developing countries to put appropriate educational measures into place.
- Public awareness is an important element in disaster reduction. Intergovernmental and UN agencies are asked to help governments to train peers at local level.
- Observers of the tsunami do not see how the existing technology was put to use before the disaster hit. There was no international cooperation in this area. Some countries have the necessary resources and technology to react appropriately. A system should be created to prevent such a disaster in the future.
- The question was raised what made this conference unique and whether achievable commitments would be presented.
  - The panel hopes that a concrete timetable will be worked out in the course of the conference of when a global early warning system will be implemented. Another objective of the conference is to identify who will be responsible for monitoring and who will be responsible for implementation.
  - The WCDR is an opportunity to raise awareness on a new level, to share experiences back home, to mainstream disaster reduction into development and to learn how to get from response to risk management and from national risk reduction to global risk reduction efforts.
  - The WCDR is a chance to put disaster reduction higher up on the political agenda. We need to use this opportunity to push disaster reduction on the development agenda and try and raise the level of funding.

- Argentina put forward several proposals: Coordinate financial contributions in order to achieve greater synergies in funding, allocate the greatest funds to prevention programs, verify the outcome, use local components.
- Morocco suggests the elaboration of a legal instrument, i.e. a UN Convention for risk management to promote solidarity. Furthermore the possibility to develop and monitor risks needs to be enhanced and the most vulnerable countries must be assisted by the international community first.
- The question was raised whether an International Convention on Risk Reduction ought to be developed.