



World Conference on Disaster Reduction
18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

KOBE REPORT (draft)

High Level Round Table 3: Emerging risks: what will tomorrow hold?

The third high level round table was held on 19 January. The topics ranged from future and current trends, main emerging threats, effective strategies to reduce disaster risk

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

Facilitator:

Mr. Salvano Briceno, Director ISDR Secretariat

Speakers:

Dr. Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada

Mr. Michel Jarraud, WMO

Mr. Ashok Kumar Rastogi, Government of India

Mr. Joseph Kwabena, National Disaster Management Organization, Ghana speaking on behalf of

Mr. Thomas Broni (Deputy Minister of Interior, Ghana)

Mr. Daniel Biu, UN-HABITAT

Mr. Li Xueju, Minister of Civil Affairs of China

Developing countries and small island states are disproportionately affected by natural disasters

The existence of some small island states which heavily depend on tourism, agriculture and fishery can be severely threatened by natural hazards. Climate changes, like the rising of the sea levels, threaten our ecosystem and biodiversity. Ecosystems have to adapt to the climate change accordingly. We must agree on an agenda to tackle this phenomenon, work towards mitigation strategies and agree on benchmarks for reexamining disaster preparedness.

Losses can be mitigated by proper planning, establishing and implementing building codes, providing insurance for the poor, etc.

Disaster reduction requires political will and effective partnerships among all stakeholders.

Linking disaster reduction policy and sustainable development

China is faced with the worst combination of many disasters. The country suffers enormous economic losses and more than 200 million people are affected every year. This has a negative impact on sustainable economic and social sustainable development.

The overall capability of disaster reduction must be improved by efforts to eradicate poverty and rejuvenate economies through science, technology and education. Achievements are impaired due to population growth, urbanization, industrialization which forces many people to settling in areas of high risk.

Therefore we must strengthen efforts of risk management if we want to mitigate natural disasters and facilitate sustainable economic and social development.

The following six dimensions are vital in order to cope with the risk of natural disasters:

1. Research and formulation of policies on disaster reduction and management. Disaster reduction must be part of a strategy for sustainable development. Local governments need help improving their disaster reduction through national policy and financial support.
2. Risk ascertaining assessment and early warning: better exchange of information between communities and experts at local and national level, better communication between various organizations, governments, communities, etc., results of research must be put to practical use using high standard technology

3. More disaster reduction projects in high risk areas (landslide prevention, deforestation, desertification, flood control, etc.)
4. Education, advocacy and publicity on disaster reduction (increase awareness of public and private sector, provide a platform for exchange, install mechanisms to encourage media involvement)
5. Disaster preparedness and emergency plans
6. International cooperation. Make good use of international platforms for facilitating the exchange of knowledge. This knowledge must also be transferred to developing countries in order to improve their capacity.

Availability of risk assessment and early warning are key to manage risks

Disaster reduction strategies must be seen in the context of the current and emerging challenges and opportunities. Increasing economic losses and the unacceptable human toll are an obstacle to sustainable development.

Natural hazards will always occur. In order to prevent them from becoming major disasters, we need partnerships in global early warnings and disaster preparedness strategies, solidarity and political will.

A key to managing risks in the future is the availability of risk assessments and early warnings that can deliver more accurate advisories with longer lead times over all time scales. The World Meteorological Organization is committed to share its competence and knowledge relating to all kinds of disasters because disaster risk reduction is at the core of WMO.

WMO strongly recommends strategic alliances and partnerships to facilitate cooperation, advocacy and resource mobilization. It welcomes the German initiative for a 3rd conference on early warning in 2006. It is our duty and responsibility to create a culture of prevention and commit ourselves to the ambitious but attainable goal of reducing by half the loss of life associated with natural disasters of meteorological, hydrological and climatic origin in the decade 2010s.

We must move away from the concept of cost to the notion of investment: 1 \$ spent on preparedness now saves 7-10 \$ on disaster response later.

Yes, there are many competing issues like education, health, food security, etc. that money must be made available for but if a disaster strikes, it will affect all of these issues.

Raise awareness to increase disaster risk reduction

Disaster risks have a negative impact on society and the economy and threaten the UN Millennium Development Goals, development gains and human development in general. Risk profiles change rapidly, sound development choices (no human settlements on floodplain and improved quality of buildings in multi-hazard zones) are therefore extremely important. Vulnerability reduction and poverty alleviation must not be treated as two separate issues. Development can never be sustainable unless disaster mitigation is built into the development process. The process of development itself has a huge impact, both positive and negative, on disaster risk.

Trainings and capacity building activities will facilitate local disaster reduction. For instance, India is currently setting up a National Emergency Management Authority and a National Emergency Response Force has also been constituted. Under the National Human Resource Development Plan for Disaster Management a massive program of capacity building in the areas of local risk management, public education, specialist disaster response teams and risk mitigation and mass awareness campaigns has been embarked upon.

Disaster risk reduction planning should be decentralized because greater transparency and accountability can be achieved on a regional and local level.

Tomorrow's society will be knowledge-based. Extensive research will have to be carried out to devise cost-effective and alternate means for safer habitat and production systems. National and global platforms for knowledge networking and management will have to be established for this purpose.

Resistance of buildings must be upgraded and improved. It is especially important to strengthen ageing infrastructure as well as build new one taking into account building codes and construction standards making these structures multi-hazard resistant.

Governments should put in place a comprehensive framework for risk reduction for development of early warning systems, improved land use and settlement planning, better management of natural resources, safer building practices, effective risk transfer mechanisms and innovative financing mechanisms to address pre-disaster protective measures and post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Finally, a bilateral, regional and international cooperation framework to facilitate the sharing of good practices, developing common strategies and exchanging of information needs to be established.

Common and comprehensive approach on a local, regional and national level

Developing countries are still unprepared. Africa's vulnerability is very high because many people are forced to live in disaster prone areas, troubled heavily by HIV/Aids, population explosion, poverty, the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, conflicts, etc.

Efforts have to be made on a national, regional and global level. African governments need to prove political commitment. Disaster management is everybody's business. More resources are needed and Africa must participate more in the efforts carried out by the international community. A comprehensive approach is needed: An effective early warning system is not enough, it is useless without corresponding infrastructure in place: We must teach people how to react if a warning is given. People must be educated in terms of all aspects of preparedness, prevention and mitigation.

Governments must take disaster preparedness more seriously. Capacity building and equipment and resource mobilization are essential for an effective response. In order to make communities less vulnerable to natural disasters, poverty reduction strategies must be implemented.

Emergency teams should be trained for an effective response. What is required are simple and down to earth solutions.

Because many African states are facing poor infrastructure development, insufficient preparedness measures, weak social cohesion and a lack of human and financial resources, response and recovery have always been very slow in Africa. Difficulties encountered by international humanitarian relief agencies are enormous. It is therefore important to enhance regional integration and for development organizations to adopt new strategies to manage disasters on the continent.

Cities as key actors in mitigating risk

The recent tsunami disaster illustrates the vulnerability of human settlements. Urban settlements are both unavoidable and irreversible. Cities hold incredible potential as engines of economic growth and social development but many cities are also affected by unemployment, violence, insecurity, substandard living conditions, poor sanitation, insufficient water supplies, pollution, poverty and diseases.

Many natural disasters are a result of inadequate urban planning, non-respect of building codes, population over crowding and proliferation of slums.

Risk leads to disasters which could be avoided if key conditions for prevention of urban risk were taken into consideration:

1. Urban poverty (unhealthy slums, no water and sanitation) is first to be associated with urbanization. It is possible to address this problem and UN HABITAT is working on this together with governments.
2. Poor people are often forced to occupy dangerous disaster prone areas which should not be built upon. Local governments must discourage this and provide alternative occupation of land.
3. Building codes must be realistic and binding. This is a matter of policy and sound governance.
4. UN HABITAT recommends that disaster management is decentralized. Urban risks involve complex problems which can not be solved at national level.
5. New technology, satellite imagery and early warning systems must be put into place. Geographical information systems, loss estimation planning and response systems, aerial high-definition television images should be applied and used.

Solutions lie in improving the decisions made in managing the growth and development of our cities, political commitment is the most important precondition to address urban risks.

Post natural disaster programs like reconstruction must aim at achieving sustainable development. Action needs to be taken for immediate events but also taking into account a long time perspective.

As cities are growing ever so fast, urban disasters may be the most tragic ones. Therefore cities can and should become the key actors in mitigating risk factors. Governments should therefore ensure that disaster mitigation and vulnerability reduction policies are cross-sectoral and integrated into poverty reduction strategies and development planning and policies.

The following comments came from the floor:

- All panelists referred to the necessity of capacity building. Developing countries, however, need assistance from developed countries in training human resources and developing this human resource capacity.
- There seem to be a discrepancy between amounts of funding announced and the ones allocated. However, it is more the humanitarian community who is concerned with the distribution of funds. There are different funding mechanisms in place for risk reduction (usually development funds). The challenge is now to establish a functioning funding mechanism for disaster reduction.
- Some concern was raised why comments on climate change have been bracketed in the draft outcome document. The panel explains that climate change is not the main issue at stake. The most important issue of this conference is how to reduce vulnerability.
- Peace plays a crucial role in building the capacity of communities because it will be difficult to raise the capacity in times of conflict despite of good intentions and available resources.
- Natural hazards provide a cause for civil unrest. Draughts and floods can cause large scale migrations etc. Therefore by reducing the risk of natural hazards the risk of war will also be reduced. Natural and man made disasters are very much interlinked.
- There is an emerging consensus that disaster risk reduction is something that needs to be addressed as a team.
- Current trends like environmental degradation, heavy impacts of floods, droughts, etc. increase the vulnerability of communities.