THEMATIC CLUSTER ON GOVERNANCE

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The Governance Cluster consisted of a Panel and ten thematic sessions. Throughout, the importance of good governance was recognised as the prerequisite for effective disaster reduction. Governance was at the heart of the Yokohama Review and it remains a significant component of disaster reduction programming if economic and social development is to be sustained. The Panel stressed the importance of participation by all stakeholders in actions implemented to reduce disaster risks. Legal and regulatory frameworks were needed to ensure that governments have the authority to act.

Equally, the establishment of national and regional platforms to promote disaster reduction is central to ensure multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral and multi-level approaches. Platforms need to have the commitment of governments, strong leadership and guaranteed resourcing. Advocacy is important to ensure that disaster reduction remains high on government agendas, particularly when it is competing with so many other priorities. However, it is the poor and excluded that are often the most vulnerable to disaster risks. If the institutions and policy frameworks established for disaster reduction do not reflect and actively engage with those who are most vulnerable, then effectiveness will be diminished. Governance for disaster reduction should promote community resilience. Mainstreaming disaster reduction means working at the local level. Disasters affect communities, implying that the implementation of disaster reduction needs to be decentralised as much as possible and involve all stakeholders, particularly those whose vulnerability is greatest.

Among the thematic sessions were two that particularly stressed the importance of focusing on the poor and vulnerable. The session on accountable and transparent governance, prioritised accountability in decision-making and access to information and justice, promoting national co-operation in the process. The session on community-based disaster risk reduction made advocacy an important tool, while international co-operation between communities as an element of knowledge-sharing was also given priority.

Another recurring theme was the integration of disaster risk reduction into development planning. This was recognised particularly by the International Financial Institutions that stressed the importance of the incorporation of natural hazards into the strategic planning process. National systems for disaster risk management were the focus of another session and the need to have in place strong and active institutions for disaster risk reduction was advocated, whether these related to policy frameworks, plans or legislative systems.

In the discussion on disaster reduction indicators, particularly safer critical facilities, the political commitment to the provision of safer cities, including the reduction of risks in such facilities as hospitals, schools and water supplies, was a major concern. Here also, strong emphasis was placed on adopting indicators that are achievable, visible, easily measurable and have a high social impact. Additional urban priorities came from the session on megacities, addressing the root causes of vulnerability in human settlements. In these urban areas local implementation remains the weakest link in disaster risk reduction. The strengthening of services requires the strengthening of the administrative structures with a mandate to provide safer and more sustainable living environments. Discussions on local governance as a precondition for effective disaster risk reduction stressed the importance of municipal responsibilities, noting that participation by all stakeholders to foster transparency and accountability was a prerequisite.

The session on disaster prevention and adaptation to climate change discussed as a component of governance the need to explore the contextual linkages between disaster prevention and adaptation to climate change in order to promote a more comprehensive approach to current and future climate risks that would maximise the benefits for the process of sustainable development. An integrated approach to managing risks was suggested for the vulnerable populations of mountainous regions, stressing the importance of thorough risk assessments and the achievement of sustainability by taking into account all elements, including social, economic and ecological.

All sessions, including the panel discussion, offered suggested targets and indicators. Among these were participation, decentralisation and the need for enforceable policies. Other targets included the need for sound institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction, the right to access information on hazards and risks, the establishment of independent national platforms and the need to include the analysis of hazards, risks and vulnerabilities in all formal planning processes and programming frameworks of governments.

The discussions embraced the need to ensure that governance in all its dimensions must be forward-looking to anticipate changes, new conditions and uncertainty. The capacity of governance systems and structures to adapt and respond to rapid significant changes – in particular to the disaster risk implications of rapid urbanisation and climate change – requires continuous analysis and debate, a debate that should not be detached from those on other political, economic and social processes. The planning and accomplishment of disaster risk reduction initiatives should never be a purely managerial matter; it must never lose sight of the wider principles of social justice, equity and rights that underpin good governance.