

CLUSTER 4: REDUCING THE UNDERLYING RISK FACTORS

REPORT OF THE CHAIR TO THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SESSION OF WCDR 22 January 2005

Romania had the pleasure to chair this cluster 4 of the thematic segment of the WCDR. I would like to thank the UN agencies which took a lead role in this cluster namely UNEP, WHO, UNCRD and the support given by UN-ISDR Secretariat.

I would also like to thank the high level panelists for their excellent presentations and outstanding contributions.

The discussion paper prepared by these agencies identified the key issues and the way forward in this area. It greatly contributed to the enhancement of the fruitful debate in the plenary, giving us the appropriate guidance.

The final version of the discussion paper will benefit from the relevant outcomes of the ten sessions of the Cluster 4, which covered areas such as health, financing disaster risk, environment, community based disaster management, post-disaster recovery, protection of critical facilities, gender and sustainable livelihoods.

Reducing the underlying risk factors is indeed a critical cross-cutting issue that runs through all stages of the disaster management cycle and there is a evident linkage with the four other clusters namely Governance, Risk identification, assessment, monitoring and early warning, Knowledge management and education, and Preparedness for effective response.

There are a number of causal factors of disaster risk, arising from and associated with urban and rural development, such as land management, integrated resources management, industrial and economic development, health risks, and building and construction aspects. Social issues relevant at the community level, as well as gender issues, also play a role in understanding and reducing risk.

A number of key factors that compound the risk were identified: (a) development processes and the risk that they pose – for example, natural resource exploitation, urban development, environmental degradation, caused by a number of factors, such as soil erosion and deforestation; (b) structures exposed to disaster risk – for example, public infrastructure, residential housing, critical facilities such as hospitals, heritage assets; (c) institutional and financial framework and social setting – for example, building codes, financing and insurance

for disaster mitigation, community actions for prevention, poverty and livelihood etc. and (d) mechanisms to deal with risk, within the larger perspective of sustainable development.

The followings were identified as the main areas for focus in the future:

- Reducing vulnerabilities;
- Development of management tools and interventions;
- Promotion of financial risk-sharing mechanisms, particularly insurance and reinsurance, public and private compensation-schemes to victims.
- Building of capacities and partnerships through public-private partnerships in pre-disaster activities such as risk assessments and early warning systems.

The contributors to this thematic panel identified the following **seven primary issues** and emphasis was repeatedly given to their close interdependence: Good Governance, Partnerships: Community Based Disaster Management, Education, Community Health Care, Gender Issues - which is a critical aspect of a disaster plan – since women and children, who are more dependent on their immediate vicinity, are therefore more vulnerable, and Environmental Protection. The participants recognized the strong inter-linkages between the good environmental management and disaster mitigation. Hospitals and schools safety and retrofitting are also of an obvious importance so that lives can be saved and protected.

The outcomes from **collective learning exercises** were recognized as an important risk reduction tool, and planning teams at the local level to prepare disaster management plans should use these results. Some concrete examples were noted during the presentations and discussions.

The importance in building **effective operational partnerships** was taken for granted as the only sensible way forward if sustained progress is to be secured in risk reduction. Contributors cited the following typical examples:

1. UNCRD's Programme on Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM)
2. UNEP-ISDR Joint Global Programme on Environment and Disasters
3. UNEP-IETC's Programme on "Action for Environment and Disaster Mitigation (AEDM)
4. The ProVention Consortium that has forged effective links between the World Bank, IFRCS, Private Sector Bodies and Academia

Romania was pleased to chair this Cluster and I believe that the discussions held in the Cluster 4 will contribute to the outcomes of the WCDR.