



Local risk management in earthquake zones of Kazakhstan

Photo: UNDP Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2005

UNDP Kazakhstan
Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Kazakhstan
Red Crescent Society of Kazakhstan

Introduction

Due to the diversity of landscape, climate conditions and industrial infrastructure, Kazakhstan is at risk of high levels of natural and man-made disasters, in particular to strong and devastating earthquakes. Approximately 30 per cent (650,000 km²) of Kazakh territory is home to more than six million inhabitants and a high concentration of industrial facilities (40%) are located in the high seismic zones.

An estimated 200,000 residents in Almaty live in building types that are vulnerable to seismic hazards, and it is projected that up to one third of all residential buildings would be destroyed in the event of a catastrophic earthquake. This does not include public infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, power plants and other critical facilities, which are also at great risk. Given the unlikelihood that existing structures will be retrofitted to protect against seismic vulnerability, a comprehensive seismic safety programme must include building the capacity of local organizations to respond to emergencies. The framework outlined below not only advanced the critical educational messages being communicated under the Central Asia Region for Earthquake Safety Initiative (CARES!), but also promoted the response capacity of one of Kazakhstan's leading non-governmental organizations that have a proven track record in delivering disaster preparedness, response, and health services.

In response to an umbrella initiative of the UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, Disaster Reduction Unit (UNDP/BCPR/DRU), the Government of Kazakhstan and UNDP in Kazakhstan designed a joint project to support local risk management in earthquake zones of Kazakhstan.

Project brief

The project aims to strengthen the capacities of local communities to participate in early warning and preparedness for earthquakes, and to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to mitigate against the effects of natural disasters.

The project raises the level of awareness of the local population, decision-makers and public on natural, technological and environmental disasters, so that they can better understand the benefits of prevention and preparedness. It also promotes access to information for civil society on disaster response and decision-making.

This project is designed on the basis of partnerships between community-based organizations and various government bodies. These partnerships help to promote sustainable development through forging stronger linkages between disaster mitigation and broader development goals. The project is nationally executed. The Emergency Agency of Kazakhstan is the Implementing Partner and provides overall control of the project implementation. The Red Crescent Society of Kazakhstan and UNDP Country Office, in collaboration with BCPR, are responsible for selected project activities as described in the work plan. Other partners include: GEF/Small Grants Programme, UN OCHA, UN/ISDR, ADRC (Asian Disaster Reduction Center).

Project activities include:

- Training programmes (brochures with briefings and attachments) to teach students (grades 1-university) what to do in case of earthquake
- Trainings programmes at summer camps, children's village, orphanages, middle and high schools
- Brochures explaining what precautions to take in the event of an earthquake
- Non-fiction educational movies on natural hazards produced in Russian, English and Kazakh about earthquakes, mudslides and floods
- A film about disasters
- An educational cartoon to teach children about what precautions to take in the event of an earthquake. The cartoon is a computer animation available in Russian, Kazakh and English. Books and posters will soon be published using similar cartoon models
- Educational modules for grades 10-11 entitled "Learning to be safe if there is a disaster" which include computer presentations, resource materials and video clips, developed jointly by the UNICEF programme on "Health Care and Life Skills" and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- A training seminar (August 2005) for the instructors at pilot schools in Almaty (4) and South Kazakhstan oblast (6), as well as for the teachers and trainers of advanced courses in all oblasts of Kazakhstan

Lessons learned

Drafting the "Learning to be safe if there is a disaster" educational modules for children is still in the very early stages and needs to be continued. Furthermore, the first experience at the pilot schools proved that safety issues are crucial and school students and teachers are interested in working with this programme. Cooperation with UNICEF on the Project on "Health Care and Life Skills" proved to be the fastest way in which to merge educational modules into the educational process. The Project is being supported by the Ministry of Science and Education of Kazakhstan and provides for rapid implementation of the results achieved. In September 2005 the pilot schools started using educational modules that were drafted in June-August 2005.

The Ministry of Emergency Situations, jointly with the Red Crescent Society in Kazakhstan, is the coordinator of national activities in disaster preparedness and mitigation. The Red Crescent Society in Kazakhstan actively supports the Government, and a number of institutes belonging to the Ministry of Education and Science, UNICEF, GEF-SGP. However, it is necessary to expand the number of organizations involved in risk reduction and disaster mitigation.

Assessment of disaster preparedness and monitoring system are very strong components in disaster preparedness. Currently these components are not sufficiently developed. Self-organization of the population on the community level is also an imperative for the disaster preparedness. In this regards, it is extremely essential that the community take initiative and mobilize individual skills. NGOs can play an important role of catalyst in this process.

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