



United Nations  
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction  
Regional Office for Arab States



# Progress in reducing disaster risk and implementing Hyogo Framework for Action in the Arab Region

Executive Summary 2009

## The League of Arab States and UNISDR Regional Review of Progress 2008-2009

A review of risk reduction and HFA implementation in the region led to the development of the First Regional Synthesis Report on the Progress in Implementing HFA in the Arab Region-2009

Commissioned and supported jointly by the League of Arab States and UNISDR. The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery provided additional financial support. Several UN agencies and regional technical organizations provided substantive input to this review.

The Regional Report was presented and discussed in a regional workshop that took place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia from 19 to 21 May 2009. Representatives from governments, regional organizations and UN agencies discussed the regional report and its findings and refined its recommendations. The regional workshop was hosted and supported by the Presidency of Meteorology and the Environment of Saudi Arabia under the auspices of HRH Prince Turki Bin Nasser Bin Abdulaziz, the Chairman of the Executive Bureau for the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment. The League of Arab States, the Islamic Development Bank and UNISDR have also supported the organization and undertaking of the regional workshop.

### Executive Summary

#### Background:

1. Responding to the alarming trends of disasters, 168 countries have adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Kobe, Japan 2005. Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) has been subsequently endorsed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/195. HFA is a ten-year global plan that reflects the intention and need to take a holistic approach in identifying and putting into action complex multidisciplinary disaster risk reduction measures.

2. States have the primary responsibility for their own socio-economic development and national development strategies and plans including disasters risk reduction, yet an enabling international and regional environment is essential to support the development of knowledge, capacities, and resources required to build resilient nations and communities. In that respect, regional organizations have a key role to play in fostering and enhancing regional mechanisms, resources and capacities that will contribute to stronger national capacities and progress in monitoring, assessing, and reducing disaster risks.

3. In the Arab region, the League of Arab States is taking the lead in promoting the integration of disaster risk reduction in key regional policies on climate change, environment and disaster management coordination mechanisms. It also supports and calls for the implementation of HFA at the regional and national levels and promotes the coordination of efforts towards implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR).

4. As monitoring and reporting is key to measure progress in HFA implementation, the League of Arab States and the UNISDR initiated the first review of progress on the implementation of HFA in the Arab Region and assessment of the current status of disaster risk reduction in the region.

#### Objectives and Methodology:

5. The first output of the regional review is the **“Regional Synthesis Report on Progress in the implementation of the HFA in the Arab Region”**. The Report provides the first step towards benchmarking current progress at the regional level on reducing disaster risk and implementing HFA. It also provides the linkage between national monitoring process on HFA implementation “HFA Monitor”<sup>1</sup> – as part of countries’ commitment to HFA - and global assessment processes that leads to development of the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction as a biennial global report, which was first launched in May 2009.

6. As the first regional review that identifies baseline information for future periodic monitoring and reporting on HFA and risk reduction progress, the 2009 review in the Arab region focused on:

- Identifying key trends, progress and good practices in the Arab region with respect to disaster risk reduction;
- Providing a succinct regional overview on HFA implementation that is based on available national data (country reports) and regional data (mapping risk reduction initiatives by regional organizations);
- Identifying main gaps and challenges facing the region to accomplish progress in HFA implementation;
- Proposing recommendations for future actions and prioritization of disaster risk reduction on the regional and national agendas.

7. The regional review uses the HFA as the main frame of analysis. The review is primarily based upon information presented in the national HFA progress reports in addition to reports from Djibouti and Somalia that focus on the drought analysis in these countries. The review also builds on contributions of the League of Arab States, its specialized organizations, and some UN agencies currently engaged and/or supporting regional disaster risk reduction programmes.

<sup>1</sup>To facilitate the national review process, an online tool – the ‘HFA Monitor’ was developed by UNISDR in early 2008 to enable countries to periodically monitor, self-assess and report on progress made in HFA implementation across the years and to establish country relevant baselines. The tool was launched on May 9th, 2008 and is hosted online on the PreventionWeb ([www.preventionweb.net](http://www.preventionweb.net)). It can be accessed by member states with a user id and password administered by the UNISDR.

### Arab Region Disaster Profile:

8. The Arab region is exposed to a range of natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, volcano, extreme temperature, sand storms, wildfire and cyclones. There is also an increasing risk from climate change including sea level rise and drought. Floods may be the most frequent event across the region but the most damaging in human and economic terms are earthquakes.

9. About 89% of the region is arid and semi-arid lands coupled with serious water scarcity challenges that add to the vulnerability of the population and the environment. Increasing risks and vulnerability are associated with intensive urbanization and rapid population growth across the region. Between 1980 and 2008, droughts, earthquakes, floods and storms had seriously impacted lives and livelihoods in the region affecting more than 37 million people and causing economic damage estimated at more than 19.8 billion USD.

10. Climate change adaptation, managing risk from sea level rise, drought risk management, floods risk management, seismic risk reduction and urban risk reduction are key issues for policy makers, scientific research and regional organizations.

### Disaster Risk Reduction in the Arab Region:

11. The League of Arab States (LAS) supports disaster risk reduction within its mission to seek the achievement of human security for the people in the Arab region. In accordance with its regional mandate and in line with the identified role for Regional Organizations in HFA, LAS has paid special attention to supporting and promoting risk reduction at the regional level through its technical secretariat and its specialized technical organizations. Disaster risk reduction has been integrated in key regional policies on sustainable development aiming at strengthening resilience to disasters through reduction of risks and vulnerabilities.

12. A major achievement was realized during the 20th session of CAMRE, held on 20-21 December 2008 during which CAMRE adopted decision (No. 295) calling for increased cooperation and coordination with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and placing the follow-up to the implementation of HFA as permanent agenda item for CAMRE and its subsidiary body the "Joint Committee for Environment and Development in the Arab Region". CAMRE urged Arab states to report on HFA implementation and to fulfil their commitments towards building resilience to disasters in the region.

13. Most recently, and at its extra-ordinary session on 24th May 2009, CAMRE adopted new actions for risk reduction as follow-up to the 1st Arab Summit on Socio-Economic Development. Member states approved the development of the 1st Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and called for the establishment of an Arab Regional Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction (at a ministerial and multi-stakeholder level) to further accelerate the implementation of HFA at regional, national and local levels.

14. Technical specialized organizations under the umbrella of LAS have been very engaged and supportive of advancing disaster risk reduction. The Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT), the Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (AC-

SAD), the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) have been incorporating disaster risk reduction in their projects and technical assistance programmes. Some of the regional initiatives on risk reduction include:

- The establishment of a Regional Centre on Disaster Risk Reduction – Training and Research jointly launched by AASTMT and UNISDR to support capacity development, training, studies and targeted research as well as enhancing knowledge and data on risk reduction in the region.
- The establishment of Regional Early Warning system for drought monitoring and forecasting by ACSAD, which became a major tool supporting regional and country activities on climate change adaptation strategies, food security and land use and planning.
- Database on water resources including rainfalls, rivers, dams, groundwater and water uses was established by AOAD to support risk reduction for the agricultural sector. An early warning system for Locust swarm (Insect Infestation) and floods was also established to support disaster management efforts regionally.
- Disaster risk reduction will be incorporated in ALO 2011-2012 plan focusing on occupational health and is calling for disaster risk reduction to be recognized as a key human right as its negligence affect people's lives and livelihoods. A trust fund to compensate affected people will be established by ALO.

15. UN and international organizations in the region - UNISDR, the World Bank-ISDR joint partnership under the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), UNESCO Regional Office for Arab States, FAO Regional Office for the Near East, OCHA Regional Office for Middle East and the IFRC Middle East and North Africa regional office – provide key support to countries, LAS, and civil society through technical assistance and capacity development, policy advisory services, research and tools development and advocacy for integration of disaster risk reduction in regional programmes and national policies on education, climate change adaptation, flood risk management, drought assessment and risk mitigation.

### Progress on HFA Implementation:

16. The progress on HFA implementation at the regional level was assessed based on the available 7 national reports and one thematic report as well as input from LAS, its technical organizations and UN and international organizations working in the region. The reports of Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Yemen on HFA implementations with in addition to Djibouti's drought risk reduction review report provide a general overview on progress across the region – however the limitation of data and information from other countries do not necessarily reflect a comprehensive measurement of progress.

17. Overall, there is some progress on political and national commitment to risk reduction, developing of institutional mechanisms and strategies, enhancing early warning systems and building preparedness and response capacities. The commitment, does not translate in most cases to operational capacities nor commitment of resources to effectively implement the strategies or integrate risk reduction in development plans. There is weak progress on education and public awareness as well as on collection, availability and accessibility of data and information risk and vulnerabilities, tools and methodologies for disaster risk reduction and multi-risk and multi-hazard approaches.

18. The below table summarizes progress towards the implementation of HFA priorities:

HFA Priority for Action	Overall Progress
1) Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National reports confirm that several countries have achieved progress in this area and that there is a trend to employ risk reduction concept. The shift from response to risk reduction varies from country to country and is related to governance capacity, socio-economic parameters.</li> <li>National policies and legal frameworks have been developed in some countries like Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Yemen.</li> <li>Resources are made available but on an ad-hoc basis in most countries and there is no clear instrument for obligatory allocation of resources to disaster risk reduction.</li> <li>Minor progress on community participation and delegation to local level. However, Comoros for example has an effective local legal structure for DRR. Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Syria include local level authorities in national committee planning.</li> <li>Most countries developed national coordination mechanisms, in some cases those are multi-sectoral platforms like in Bahrain and Syria. The countries like Egypt, Jordan and Yemen are enhancing their existing national disaster management capacities.</li> </ul>
2) Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National reports indicate that hazard assessments are sector-specific and hard to integrate since different sectors employ different methodologies and data formats. Reports also revealed the lack of consistent approaches and objectives of risk assessment from national to local levels.</li> <li>National institutes, universities and research centres in Arab countries and the specialized LAS organizations have been working on different activities related to identification and assessment of disaster risks. Yet, not with a multi-risk assessment approach.</li> <li>Some countries developed monitoring systems for seismic risks (Algeria), for earthquakes and floods (Egypt), and some assign risk focal points for monitoring and reporting across different government agencies (Bahrain, Jordan)</li> <li>Arab countries take account of regional/trans-boundary risks with efforts to enhance regional cooperation on risk reduction.</li> </ul>

HFA Priority for Action	Overall Progress
3) Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many reports, studies and scientific research exist, but often stays at the academic or research level.</li> <li>Information systems are neither necessarily accessible at all levels nor comprehensive.</li> <li>Data on disasters (after the event) exist in many countries but very minimal data on vulnerabilities and risks.</li> <li>Many countries consider highly the importance of integrating DRR in school curricula and public awareness activities, but very little products exist with absence of national strategies on this.</li> </ul>
4) Reduce the underlying risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A reasonable level of commitment recognizing the need to integrate DRR in environmental plans, land use and natural resources management.</li> <li>Some countries implemented social development policies to reduce vulnerability of populations most at risk (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt)</li> <li>Arab Ministers responsible for the environment agreed on integration of DRR in regional sustainable development agenda and development of appropriate strategies accordingly.</li> <li>Disaster risk issues are incorporated in construction codes in region-wide policy and implemented in some countries.</li> <li>Post-disaster reviews are routinely undertaken to incorporate lessons learnt into plans and policies and assess disaster risk impacts on development projects.</li> </ul>
5) Strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disaster management policies and institutional capacities are developed in most of the countries with protocols also for regional coordination.</li> <li>Major focus on disaster management from the operational and emergency response aspect with weak integration of DRR.</li> <li>Contingency plans are in place in most countries with some governments carrying out regular drills and training.</li> <li>Lack of resources for adequate preparedness-particularly at local levels.</li> <li>Lack of exiting permanent emergency funds for response and recovery.</li> </ul>

**Future priorities to address existing gaps and challenges:**

19. Developing a holistic focused approach on disaster risk reduction that also considers a paradigm shift in policies and operational mechanisms from the response culture to the prevention one need to be more considered.
20. Strengthening of research capabilities, data availability and information resources to enhance the knowledge base on disaster risk reduction in the region. This should include region specific studies on risk, impact of disasters, and cost-benefit analysis on risk reduction to inform policies. As well as the development of tools for vulnerability assessment and risk identification for national and local levels.
21. Addressing disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change adaptation, which includes integration of DRR in national adaptation plans, regional framework on climate change adaptation and undertaking region-wide comprehensive study on risk reduction and climate change adaptation with a view on capacities and needs.
22. Advancing efforts to establish and/or strengthen national multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms (e.g. National Platforms) for disaster risk reduction and officially declare them when existing to lead by example.
23. Emphasizing the role of education and public awareness and developing appropriate products for children, schools, universities, general public and media.
24. Recognizing the strong linkages between risk reduction and poverty reduction and integrating risk reduction measures in poverty reduction and development strategies.
25. Enhancing coordination and collaboration between various regional networks, specialized organizations and centres as well as with international institutes and benefiting from experiences on risk reduction inside and outside the region.
26. Allocating appropriate resources, human and financial, to enhance capacities and implement strategies and plans for disaster risk reduction with crucial need for sustainable funding mechanisms to support countries implement HFA.

**Main Recommendations:**

27. To undertake regular and periodic review of progress in implementing HFA in the region building on the 1<sup>st</sup> review undertaken in 2008-2009 and disseminating findings on gaps and challenges as well as good practices widely across the region to ensure adequate attention and follow-up by countries and regional actors.
28. To ensure that risks from disasters are addressed in the context of a changing climate and a multi-hazard and multi stakeholder approach with particular emphasis on enhancing national coordination and regional coordination as well as exchange of information in that respect.
29. To develop an Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction that outlines the regional vision, priorities and action programme as well as technical and financial mechanisms to support the implementation of the Strategy at the national and local levels. The regional strategy will build on the existing commitments of Arab countries demonstrated in policies adopted by the League of Arab States as well as in the various regional strategies and programmes for DRR already developed in Africa, Asia and Euro-Mediterranean regions where Arab countries are actively engaged.
30. To organize an Arab Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction, on a biennial basis inclusive of a multi-stakeholder participation as well as a ministerial segment. The conference should take place within the first quarter of 2010 to inform the Arab Summit of 2010 and to be facilitated by the League of Arab States and the UNISDR.