

**The Hyogo Framework for Action:
an instrument to reduce the impact of
disasters**

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In recent years, disaster risk reduction has grown in importance on the international agenda. Natural hazards, such as floods, drought, earthquakes, tsunamis, as well as epidemics, have had an increasing impact on humans, due to population growth, urbanization, rising poverty and the onset of global environmental changes, including climate change, land degradation and deforestation. Practitioners and researchers widely acknowledge that poor planning, poverty and a range of other underlying factors create conditions of vulnerability that result in insufficient capacity or measures to reduce hazards' potentially negative consequences. Thus, vulnerability contributes as much, if not more, to the magnitude of the disaster risk as do the natural hazards themselves. Many experts consider that action to reduce risk is now essential to safeguard sustainable development efforts and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Risk reduction is the frontline defense against disaster threats.

An increase in human casualties and property damage in the 1980s motivated the UN General Assembly in 1989 to declare the 1990s the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The aim of the IDNDR was to address disaster prevention in the context of a range of hazards, including earthquakes, windstorms, tsunamis, floods, landslides, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, locust infestations, and drought and desertification.

One of the main outcomes of the IDNDR was the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World and its Plan of Action, adopted in 1994 at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama, Japan. The Yokohama Strategy set guidelines

for action on prevention, preparedness and mitigation of disaster risk. These guidelines were based on a set of Principles that stress the importance of risk assessment, disaster prevention and preparedness, the capacity to prevent, reduce and mitigate disasters, and early warning. The Principles stemmed from the recognition that preventive measures are most effective when stakeholders at all levels are involved, and that vulnerability can be reduced by applying "proper design" and "patterns of development" focused on target groups. The Principles also stated that the international community should share technology to prevent, reduce and mitigate disasters, and demonstrate a strong political determination in the field of disaster reduction.

At its 54th session in 1999, the UN General Assembly decided to continue the activities on disaster prevention and vulnerability reduction carried out during the IDNDR. It thus established the ISDR, to be supported by the scientific and technical expertise and knowledge accumulated during the IDNDR. An Inter-Agency Secretariat and an Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction (IATF/DR) for the implementation of the ISDR were also established. Among its mandated tasks, the IATF/DR was to convene ad hoc expert meetings on issues related to disaster reduction. In February 2004, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 58/214, deciding to convene a second World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR). The resolution set out the objectives of the WCDR, which were to: conclude the review of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action with a view to updating the guiding framework on disaster reduction for the twenty-first century; identify specific activities aimed at ensuring the implementation of relevant provisions of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), adopted in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development; share best practices and lessons learned for supporting and facilitating disaster reduction within the context of attaining sustainable development, and identify gaps and challenges; increase awareness of the importance of disaster reduction policies to facilitate and promote their implementation; and increase the reliability and availability of appropriate disaster-related information to the public and disaster management agencies in all regions, as set out in the relevant provisions of the JPOI.

Following two preparatory committee meetings in May and October 2004, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held from 18-22 January 2005 in Kobe, Japan. During the second World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, 18-22 January 2005), more than 160 governments agreed upon the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. The Hyogo Framework carries a strong commitment and ownership of Governments and regional, international and non-governmental organizations to reduce the vulnerability to hazards by 2015.

The WCDR aimed to increase the international profile of disaster risk reduction, promote its integration into development planning and practice, and strengthen local and national capacities to address the causes of disasters that hamper development. The 168 States attending the conference adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters and the Hyogo Declaration. Delegates also took note of the "Review of the 1994 Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World and its Plan of Action" and adopted a "Common statement on the Special Session on the Indian Ocean Disaster: Risk Reduction for a Safer Future." The Hyogo Framework for Action was endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 60/195, and committed governments to five priorities for action, which were to: ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation; identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning; use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels; reduce the underlying risk factors; and strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

The Hyogo Framework puts forward three strategic goals which may serve as guiding principles in any efforts to advance future education for disaster reduction. It calls for the integration of disaster risk reduction into sustainable development policies and planning; the need to develop and strengthen institutions and capacities to build resilience to hazards; and the systematic incorporation of risk reduction practices into emergency preparedness, response and recovery programmes. Most importantly, it provides a basis that commits governments as well as regional, international, and non-

governmental organizations to reduce disaster risks through a range of possible approaches and activities presented in five priority areas for action:

1. Governance – to ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with strong institutional basis for implementation;
2. Risk identification – to identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning;
3. Knowledge – use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels;
4. Reduce underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood of disasters by involving 'mainstreaming' disaster risk awareness and management with other professional or sectoral subject areas;
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response.

In 2006, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs launched a consultative process to consider practical ways of strengthening the ISDR system and support governments in meeting their Hyogo Framework implementation commitments. As outlined in the UN Secretary-General's reports on the implementation of the ISDR the main aims were to extend participation of governments and organizations, raise the profile of disaster reduction, and construct a more coherent international effort to support national disaster reduction activities. A result of the consultations was the proposal to convene the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction as an expanded and reformed successor to the IATF/DR. The Global Platform would serve as the primary multi-stakeholder forum for all parties involved in disaster risk reduction in order to raise awareness on reducing disaster risk, share experience and guide the ISDR system.

The first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (Global Platform) was held from 5-7 June 2007 in Geneva, Switzerland. Approximately 1200 participants attended the session, including representatives from over 120 governments, 64 UN specialized agencies and observer organizations, and 54 non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The meeting represented the primary multi-stakeholder forum

for all parties involved in disaster risk reduction and aimed to raise awareness on reducing disaster risk, share experience, and guide the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction system.

Nations need to develop and “own” their approach to risk reduction, as one size cannot fit all; policy champions are needed; and the development of carefully considered legislation takes time. The key challenges include: clearly identifying governance at the national level; strengthening planning processes at local and regional levels; sustainable financing; effective regulation following legislation; and maintaining political will.

The private sector’s experience in public-private partnerships for disaster risk reduction is extremely important in terms of leadership. Reducing risk to hazards is essential to ensuring business continuity. The private sector’s capacity to identify actions that would attract political support can be underpinned by understanding how capital markets can alleviate and transfer risk. There are positive steps for building resilience through public-private action and can be set out in four mutually reinforcing key risk mitigation levers: monitoring, assessment and communications; damage control planning; risk transfer; and socio-physical strengthening. Specific actions for business under each of these levers include: enhancing communication between businesses about best practices in disaster risk reduction; educating tomorrow’s business leaders; considering the business case for protecting workforces in vulnerable countries through enhanced infrastructure both at work and at home; incentives for business engagement beyond regulation; the need for international codes for the built environment; the potential for a global funding pool with commercially and humanitarian driven elements; and the importance of engaging community and local representatives in order to enhance disaster risk reduction outcomes and advance business objectives. Business may assist in moving disaster risk reduction higher up governments’ agendas, particularly the role of public-private partnerships. The active engagement of partners and partnerships is a source of ISDR’s strength.

Local authorities are on the disaster risk reduction frontline. Real implementation happens at the village and city level where the lack of funding is a barrier to implementing disaster risk reduction. There is a need for concrete actions to assist the developing world and to move from ideals set out in the Hyogo Framework to action at national and local level.

Disasters cost billions every year, but as we know well, every dollar spent on preparedness measures saves at least four dollars on response. Disaster risk reduction must be part of national dialogue and become community culture. It is a process based on changing behavior. According to James Lee Witt, building disaster-resilient communities requires mainly: public-private partnerships; risk assessment; prioritization and mitigation; and celebration of successes.

The benefits of disaster risk reduction are well understood but national governments are not taking action and should be more accountable. Clearly identifying core responsibilities within governments and developing an international set of indicators to assess countries' performance against disaster risk reduction best practice would be a step forward. There is a need for a results-based approach to disaster risk reduction. There are extensive risks in mega-cities where inhabitants are both "crucibles of risk, and agents of progress". There is a necessity to establish appropriate incentives and a need to empower women to be fully involved in taking decisions at all levels. Getting politicians engaged is crucial to having national plans implemented. Policy initiatives are not moving fast enough. Regulatory frameworks must be addressed. Risk management, reduction and synergies should be encouraged through on-the-ground, performance-based partnerships.

Although humankind has experienced many disasters throughout its history, natural hazards do not have to be fatalistically endured. Disasters only occur when natural hazards meet human vulnerability. People often believe that nearly all environmental disasters are disasters caused by natural hazards when in fact they are the result of human actions, such as unsustainable use of natural resources, unplanned urban growth, lack of

awareness and institutional capacities, insufficient land use planning, housing, infrastructures located in hazard prone areas, ecosystem degradation, and so on.

On the global scale, there are millions of so-called eco-migrants who leave their homes every year because of the destruction of natural resources that once guaranteed their livelihoods. The potential for political instability from drought, famine or forced migrations as a result of disasters is enormous and growing very fast. Millions will be forced to flee their homes and seek new lands for agricultural production. People affected by well-publicised environmental disasters like the 8 October 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami or the U.S. Gulf Coast hurricanes benefit from the mobilisation of private and public sector generosity and humanitarian relief. Countless millions of others around the world, however, are uprooted by gradual environmental change like desertification, land degradation and sea level rise. This environmental disruption can take many forms: brutal or slow-onset, natural or man-made, due to a single or cumulative change. For example, the projected impacts of drought and global warming in the drylands of Africa are overwhelmingly negative and it will have significant impacts on human livelihoods, health, water resources, agricultural production and food security, as well as nature-based tourism. Chief among the slow-moving disasters is land degradation or desertification, where croplands and pastures – because of mismanagement enhanced by changing climate – can no longer support the people that live there. Millions of people in Africa and Asia have been forced off their land, and where states cannot cope, the international community has to step in.

Only by embracing global approaches in team efforts can we solve the global problems that threaten the planet and our future. All relevant actors coming from different development sectors, disaster management systems, business sector, academic, scientific and technical support organizations are proceeding to ensure effectiveness in translating the hopeful expectations of the Hyogo Framework into the practical measures at the international, regional, national, and community levels, and tangible activities by which progress in disaster reduction must be measured.

The ISDR system is vital to providing support for national disaster risk reduction efforts. We should immediately document those countries at greatest risk; mainstream policies to reduce losses in development efforts; increase our investment in risk reduction; and strengthen institutions through partnerships. The Natural Hazards Center can certainly make a substantive contribution to his effort and we look forward to an increased collaboration in that regard. To be sure, the challenges we face are vast. Disaster risk reduction is one of the most urgent issues of the twenty-first century. This need should be met with purpose and urgency using the Hyogo Framework as the tool and the strengthened ISDR system as the vehicle to implement disaster risk reduction in partnerships at all levels, by all sectors and disciplines.
