

Foreword

Disaster reduction accelerates genuine development

During the last years of the '80s, the so called "decade of lost opportunities for genuine development", it became evident and accepted world-wide that recent disasters in Africa have wiped out whatever development that was achieved by the poorest countries of the continent.

"Natural disasters in an increasing number of disaster-prone developing countries have become a formidable obstacle to national development; in a number of countries, the cost of disaster damage has amounted to, in recent years, more than 3% of GNP per year. If, in addition, one takes into consideration that the rate of population growth in these countries often averages around 4% per annum, it appears that a rate of growth of the economy as a whole of more than 6% is needed just to maintain the country at the same level of relative development. Since disaster-prone developing countries rarely achieve economic growth rates surpassing 6%, the conclusion is that natural disasters constitute not only a humanitarian problem, but also a problem of development containing the seed of economic and social dislocation unless appropriate disaster preventative measures are included in the national economic and social planning process." ⁽¹⁾

Whenever disasters strike, development plans are either dropped or postponed in the poorest countries: Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Sahelian countries are good examples. At the same time: "There are some countries in a state of permanent disaster, the Sahelian countries, in which the ecosystem is so fragile that even small fluctuation in climate, political upheaval or even relatively minor natural disasters can have deadly repercussions for these countries' citizens." ⁽²⁾

The observation of such phenomena lead the management of the WHO Panafrican Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response to concentrate in 1990 even more than 1989, on disaster reduction tools such as support to national disaster management plans, development of disaster training curricula, action-research on disaster reduction, strengthening of an information network with main attention to disaster data bases, documentation collection and distribution, and information sharing by appropriate mechanisms.

At the end of the second year of activities the WHO Panafrican Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response is widely recognized to be a prime catalyst and the coordinating institution of a wide network of national and international institutions of a multisectoral and multicentred cooperation for African disaster reduction.

I am glad to introduce this report to all those who are concerned with the African path toward "the health for all Africans when disaster strikes" which is our goal. A lot has been done, a lot remains to be done.

Criticism, suggestions and, most of all, further support and cooperation will be most welcome in the years to come.

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⁽¹⁾ UNDRO, *Disaster Prevention and Mitigation: Land Use Aspects*, Vol 5, United Nations, New York, 1978, p.2.

⁽²⁾ L.H. Stephens and S.J. Green (eds.), *Disaster Assistance. Appraisal, Reform and New Approaches*, Macmillan, London, 1980, p.44.

Table of Contents

Plan of Action of the WHO Panafrican Centre for EPR 1990 - 1991	3
Training	4
Documentation Collection, Information Distribution and Publications	9
Meetings and Conferences	17
Research Studies and New Projects	20
International Cooperation	23
Personnel in 1990	25
Financial Statement 1990	27
Abbreviations	28

Plan of Action of the WHO Panafrican Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) 1990 and 1991

THE GENERAL objective of the WHO Panafrican Centre for EPR may be described as follows: to prevent health hazards and reduce the adverse effects of disasters on health and health services by strengthening national capacities for disaster preparedness and response.

Targets to be reached by the end of 1991 consist of the following:

25% of the Member States will have updated their policies, strategies and plans of action on emergency preparedness and response within the health sector,

25% of the Member States who do not currently have a national disaster preparedness plan, will have formulated their own national health EPR plan.

By the end of 1991 the World Health Organization will have plans in place that will enable Member States to mobilize the necessary human and financial resources and establish structures that meet the needs of Member States in their EPR activities. WHO will organize in September 1991 in close collaboration with the OAU General Secretariat and other UN agencies a regional meeting on disasters in Africa to identify project priorities at national, sub regional and regional levels. These projects will be implemented during the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) (Res. CM/Res - 1253 (LI)) of the OAU.

The major planned activities of the WHO Panafrican Centre in the region over the next two years may be summarised as follows:

- * drawing up of regional and country profiles
- * reviewing and updating aspects of health emergency preparedness and management in Member States
- * support to Member States in strengthening national capacities for disaster preparedness and management
- * promotion of technical cooperation among Member States
- * support to training activities
- * development of guidelines on emergency health management

- * identification and mobilization of resources for carrying out EPR activities
- * provision of an adequate and appropriate response to emergency situations
- * identification of indicators for the assessment of adverse health situations arising from disasters
- * coordination and liaison with other agencies
- * improvement of communication links
- * support to Regional Offices in the formulation of a roster for national and international experts with prior experience in EPR activities
- * participation in activities of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Technical Group on Emergencies in Africa

The above mentioned activities to support Member States will be carried out in close collaboration with the OAU General Secretariat, other UN agencies NGOs and bilateral organization.

The overall programme management of the WHO Panafrican Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response is a multidimensional and intersectoral initiative. It involves close coordination and cooperation with many sectors. The programme is mainly technical and managerial in orientation. In addition to its liaison and network building functions it serves the Member States' disaster reduction capabilities.