

The German Committee to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

- Disaster vulnerability, organization and activities of
the German IDNDR-Committee -

Introduction

By Resolution 44/236 of 22 December 1989 the United Nations General Assembly designated the 1990's as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). IDNDR is the 13th decade adopted by the United Nations after the Second World War. Among the previous Decades were the Decade for Women, for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation, etc..

Resolution 44/236 provides an overall programme for the reduction of disaster vulnerability as well as the establishment of national IDNDR Committees in each country. On an initiative of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs the German IDNDR Committee has been set up in September 1989. The Committee comprises development and disaster relief organizations, private companies, science and research institutions as well as media and politicians.

1. Legal Form and Structure of the German IDNDR-Committee

The German IDNDR-Committee has been founded as a private organization without legal capacity. The Committee is constituted by different private member organization and members "ad personam". Representatives of various Ministries are invited to the meetings of the Committee as guests. Some member organizations, due to their political and financial dependency on public funds, can be considered as being semigovernmental organizations and ensuring governmental influence on the Committee. This influence becomes also evident through the financing of Committee activities by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the experience of the two first years the private organizational structure of the Committee has turned out to be efficient. The private status and the simultaneous backing of the committee by the government guarantee a relatively flexible radius of action. Extracts of the association's statutes have been published in the brochure of the German IDNDR Committee.

The composition of the German IDNDR Committee has recently been reshaped and is now integrating private companies and disaster relief and development agencies as well. The Committee is at present composed of 28 members. 9 members belong to the field of disaster relief and development assistance and further 9 to science and research. The German Weather Service, which - in cooperation with the WMO - is executing important projects in the field of early warning systems can be regarded as a member of the first group. The German Space Agency (DARA) promotes satellite projects in the context of early warning. The German Red Cross, the Federal Institute for the Technical Aid Service (a civil defense organization)

as well as the German Agro Action

(organization for the development of rural areas) are important organizations in the field of disaster preparedness, whereas the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) are more involved in long-term disaster reduction. Additional organizations of disaster relief and development assistance as for example CARITAS, the Organization of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Bank for Reconstruction are not members of the Committee but of its Operational Advisory Board.

The private industry is represented in the German IDNDR Committee by the Federation of the German Industries, the Gerling Insurance Company and the Federation of the German Construction Industries. Politics and media are represented by 7 members.

2. Mandate of the German IDNDR-Committee

The annual budget for the Committee (235.000 US \$ in 1991) proves that the German IDNDR Committee is not able to support projects neither in Germany nor abroad. Therefore the German IDNDR Committee cannot be concodered as yet another disaster preparedness

or development organization but as an organization whose purpose is to promote and coordinate the action in the field of disaster reduction. It is the mandate of the Committee to:

- sensitize public awareness for the need of disaster reduction in Germany and in developing countries
- convince political authorities in Germany as well as disaster relief and development assistance organizations to become more involved in disaster reduction
- improve the coordination of german disaster relief organizations acting in Germany and abroad
- to gain the support of reinsurance companies as well as telecommunication-, space- and construction industries for IDNDR initiatives
- harmonize the German IDNDR programme with international IDNDR activities.

In Germany itself major IDNDR tasks will be the improvement of the national disaster preparedness system, the establishment of an efficient management system for large-scale disasters caused by technical facilities and the improvement of disaster management structures in the recently integrated eastern part of Germany. These issues are already integrated in current programmes and don't necessarily need - at least not in the operational field - the additional support of the German IDNDR-Committee. Nevertheless the possible disastrous effects caused by climate change is most likely to become a challenge of the German IDNDR Committee in national and international context.

The main concern of the German IDNDR Committee is focussed on a German contribution to the reduction of disaster vulnerability in developing countries. But a stronger involvement of German assistance in this field will only be possible if convincing cost-benefit rates and social impacts of such preventive projects can be highlighted. No special funds for disaster reduction projects have been made available by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation up to now. That means that disaster reduction projects have to compete with other development projects.

The IDNDR objectives overlap in part with various other national and international special development programmes, such as for environment, provision for basic needs and soil conservation. Therefore the programmatic priority of IDNDR should be focussed on activities, which haven't received sufficient consideration until now, such as:

- assessment of disaster risks and vulnerability
- disaster preparedness
- strengthening of the physical resistance to disasters by structural and non-structural measures.

Nevertheless all organizations engaged in disaster reduction are called upon to point out the interdependence of poverty and disaster vulnerability as often as possible and to emphasize the fact that technical solutions alone cannot reduce the vulnerability of developing countries.

3. Organization of the German IDNDR-Committee

The German IDNDR Committee meets twice every year. The ongoing activities of the Committee are followed up by the executive board (6 members), and by the Secretariat of the Committee, which comprises 4 part-time employees. The composition of the advisory boards is illustrated in the brochure of the German IDNDR Committee. These boards meet 5 or 6 times a year. Apart from the staff of the Secretariat, all Committee and board members work on a voluntary basis. Only travel expenses and costs for special studies carried out by Committee or board members are reimbursed. The activities take shape in meetings, political initiatives, organization of workshops and colloquiums, in the elaboration of project-proposals, etc..

The secretariat, of the German IDNDR Committee is integrated into the headquarter of the German Red Cross in Bonn, but the Committee and its Secretariat are politically and technically independent of the Red Cross.

4. First Results of German IDNDR Activities

The Scientific Advisory Board has started its activities with an overall inventory of German scientific contributions in the field of disaster research concerning: psychology, sociology of disasters, earthquakes, volcanoes, land slides, floods and droughts.

This study is soon going to be published (in German) as well as a summary (in German and English). In Addition major issues for a future research programme have been fixed.

The Operative Advisory board has elaborated a "status report of projects of German governmental and non-governmental organizations in the field of disaster reduction in developing countries", which is also available in English. This status report is to be revised annually. This report shows that Germany has already supported various disaster reduction projects in developing countries in the past. But the german committment to disaster reduction should indeed be intensivied during the ongoing decade. One of the most important tasks of the Operational Advisory Board will be the improvement of coordination of German relief activities abroad. Furthermore it is intended to initiate special IDNDR projects in developing countries in cooperation with member organization of the advisory board.

The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs has supported different IDNDR initiatives like UNDRO's computerized information and communication system (UNIENET), the establishment of the IDNDR Secretariat in Geneva, the constitutional meeting of the "United

Nations Scientific and Technical IDNDR Committee" in March 1991, the PAHO IDNDR Conference for American countries in Guatemala in September 1991, the training course about seismological risks for experts from developing countries in Potsdam (September 1991), etc. The German government hopes that other industrial countries will also support such international IDNDR activities in the future

The Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation has agreed to study special IDNDR projects and to support them, if appropriate, under given political and financial constraints. Furthermore a special IDNDR research programme based on programmatic proposals of the IDNDR Scientific advisory board of the German IDNDR Committee has a chance of being approved by the Federal Ministry of Research and Technology and by the German Science Foundation in the next year. The same Ministry is going to establish a research institution in Potsdam (near by Berlin), specialized in the research of the lithosphere. The tasks of this institution will include the development and maintenance of modern technologies for disaster reduction in the field of seismological hazards. Already in the past Potsdam has , in cooperation with UNESCO, run training courses of 4 weeks about seismology and risk-assessments for experts of developing-countries. About 250 persons have attended the 12 courses organized between 1980 and 1990 (50 experts from Latin America. The council of ministers of the European Communities has adopted a "special programme for research and technological development in the environmental area" in June 1991; 75.8 million ECU of this programme are allocated to scientific research about causes, mechanisms and impacts of natural disasters and technological risks.

The German Association for Earthquake Engineering (DGEB), a member of the German IDNDR Committee, has, on the request of Latinamerican geologists, revised and translated into Spanish a guideline for earthquake-resistant building, originally designated for earthquake resistant building in Baden-Württemberg (in southern Germany). This manual will be published in some weeks.

The German Space Agency, which recently has become a member of the German IDNDR Committee, has proposed 3 pilot-projects - in the context of the ERS (European Remote Sensing or Earth Resource Sensing Satellite) launched by the European Space Agency in July 1991. It is planned to implement these projects in cooperation with the Dornier-Company, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation and various universities. These 3 project-proposals refer to monitoring of coastal and tidal processes, desertification monitoring and disaster management.

The following tasks will be of priority for the German IDNDR Committee in the future:

- to define the research programme of the Scientific Advisory Board
- to initiate well founded project proposals of developing countries in the field of disaster reductions, for presentation to the German Government or NGO's, with corresponding requests for support
- to support initiatives aimed at improving coordinations of disaster relief activities carried out abroad by various German organization
- to introduce the issue of disaster reduction into television, the press and the radio, particularly on the occasion of the World IDNDR Day on 9th October,
- to organize workshops and colloquiums on different subjects, such as "environmental destruction and vulnerability to disasters" (from 11 to 12 November 1991) and "the role of the German industry in the IDNDR" (early 1992), etc.
- to elaborate IDNDR documents for the purpose educating pupils of secondary schools of the 4th to 6th forms

5. Further prospects

With respect to the different development and environment programmes which do overlap with IDNDR, it might be difficult to obtain the appropriate political momentum for IDNDR in the international and national community. Neither the report of the German Government about the cooperation with developing countries published in 1990 nor the "World Development Report 1991" of the World Bank mention the IDNDR or deal with problems IDNDR is concerned with. But on the working level the World Bank and other international organizations have started to integrate disaster reduction more actively in their ongoing programmes.

Anyway, disaster preparedness, disaster mitigation and prevention are becoming more and more important. No doubt, natural disaster reduction will be a world wide challenge; it will receive more and more political attention and occupy interests as well as financial and human resources.