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"From Disaster Management to Sustainable Development: How the Public Sector, Private Sector and Voluntary Organizations Can Work Together"

Main Committee Session

World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction

Yokohama, Japan 24 May 1994



A WHO contribution to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

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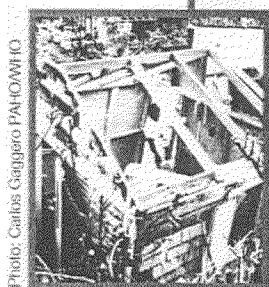


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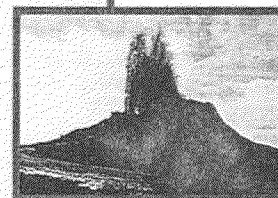


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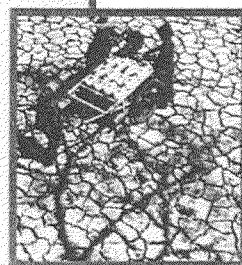


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Foreword

The World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction served not only as the mid-term review of an international campaign to reduce the impact of natural disasters, but as an unprecedented opportunity for change.

The World Health Organization took advantage of this opportunity to bring some of the world's leaders and innovators in disaster management and development to share their views and experiences with national delegations from around the world. It is the first time that a major international forum has addressed the issue of cooperation in disaster management and development between such diverse segments of society. It is WHO's hope that the outcome of this forum will stimulate the structuring of national approaches to emergency response in a way that enhances self-reliance and dignity and charts a path towards sustainable development.

While most people are familiar with WHO's mandate for development, not all are familiar with the mandate WHO has for emergency response. As the lead United Nations agency for health issues, WHO is mandated to shape, coordinate and implement health-related international emergency preparedness and humanitarian action programmes.

This mandate stems from WHO's Constitution — accepted by its Member States — which says that WHO should “act as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work” and that it should furnish necessary aid in emergencies at the request or acceptance of governments, or upon request of the United Nations. Just last year, national health delegates to the

Forty-sixth World Health Assembly expressed their concern “at the alarming increase in disasters...and the effect such disasters have on the health and well-being of the populations and health services of Member States.” They called upon WHO to undertake several major initiatives to “guide Member States in strengthening capabilities to prepare for emergencies and provide humanitarian assistance in the health sector.”

The reason behind this mandate is clear. Sound emergency management is vital if we want to safeguard national achievements in health and development. Health officials are concerned about the impact of disasters on development for many reasons. Disasters trigger high numbers of deaths, disabilities, injuries and diseases. They lead to an increase of psychological and behavioural disorders. They cause food shortages and nutritional deficiencies. They destroy local health infrastructure. They even disrupt routine health services well beyond the relief phase, since urgent post-disaster needs are often met by diverting scarce financial and human resources from existing health programmes.

In implementing emergency management policies for the health sector, WHO and Ministries of Health around the world have encountered many problems. Lack of coordination between the health sector and other emergency partners has led to duplication, gaps, confusion and inefficiency in the delivery of health services.

These lessons have led WHO to launch a new policy for emergency management based on three concepts:

1- Its comparative advantage as a “*health broker*” for emergency management, drawing upon the vast pool of qualified health experts at its disposal (over 100 technical programmes, six regional offices, over 100 country representatives offices, and over 1200 collaborating centres)

2- A *complementary* role (based on specialized health knowledge and authority), within an overall

UN framework of emergency management coordination (led by the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs) and in cooperation with the nongovernmental organization community; and

3- Linking emergency management policy to sustainable development practices, in order to help countries achieve long-term improvements in public health status — a key to sustainable development.

Concerned about ad hoc approaches to emergency management, as well as the lack of detailed knowledge and technical standards on the subject, WHO has been working closely with the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) to develop new policies, strategies and procedures for all aspects of emergency management — from prevention, mitigation and preparedness, to relief, recovery and rehabilitation that is consistent with long-term development.

WHO's strong support for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and the Yokohama Conference falls within this strategy of cooperation with DHA to address the urgent needs posed by disasters. This support to IDNDR, however, is not new. It is for these same reasons — a desire to work in partnership to reduce the tragic toll of disasters — that WHO displayed strong support for a UN-led disaster reduction programme since the idea was launched in the 1980s.


Just as DHA is developing interagency mechanisms to deal with emergency relief, recovery and rehabilitation, it is WHO's hope that the newly incorporated IDNDR programme can develop into the sorely needed international coordinating framework for policies and strategies related to emergency prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

WHO devoted considerable resources to the Yokohama Conference, including organization of two main committee sessions, secondment of staff to the IDNDR secretariat, logistical and technical support

(through its Regional Office for the Americas) to IDNDR staff in Latin America, and major support (through WHO's Pan-African Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response) to draft a common African position on disasters for Yokohama and beyond.

WHO hopes that the outcome of the Yokohama Conference will serve as a catalyst for the changes needed to improve coordination and complementarity for disaster management at both national and international levels.

Hence WHO's contribution is not only consistent with its policy and mandate for leadership, cooperation and complementarity of action in emergency management, but is indicative of its commitment towards building **"A Safer World for the 21st Century."**



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Background and Acknowledgements

This book contains the proceedings of the Main Committee Session of the United Nations World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction.

The session examined how governments, NGOs and business can establish effective policies and strategies for disaster management cooperation that are integrated within a process of sustainable development.

Included in this book are adapted versions of presentations by government, NGO and industry leaders. Among the themes discussed were comparative advantages and limitations of government, NGOs and business in disaster management partnerships; links between disasters and development, using common approaches for various types of disasters; the issue of information; and roles for donors.

Following an introduction by WHO, the book presents two views from the public sector, three from the NGO perspective,

and two from the private sector. One public sector presentation touches on general coordination issues, the second one on specific coordination issues related to the provision of research and technical services. Among the NGOs are perspectives from the Americas, Africa and Asia. For the private sector, one presentation concentrates on the insurance industry (due to its special interest in prevention and preparedness) and the other on general areas of cooperation with the private sector, based on lessons learned from risk management. Collectively, the panellists provide a glimpse of the range of people in society who are touched by disasters and willing to work towards common solutions.

The book also includes highlights from the question and answer session with the audience; observations by the session chairman; analysis from the session commentator, and session conclusions. Annexes include background information about WHO and emergencies, concepts linking emergency management to sustainable development, and the conference declaration and plan of action.

■ About the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction

The UN conference took place from 23-27 May 1994 in Yokohama, Japan. It brought together approximately 5,000 government officials from disaster-vulnerable countries, multilateral and bilateral donors, UN agencies, private firms and scientific organizations to discuss the relationship between emergency management and sustainable development.

The conference served as a mid-term review of the United Nations International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. It also provided an opportunity for countries, regions and international bodies to jointly define a strategy and action plan for disaster reduction to the year 2000 and beyond.

The Main Committee Session, which took place on Tuesday, 24 May 1994, was organized and sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO), Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action, Emergency Preparedness and Planning Programme.

The WHO-sponsored session formed one element of the

conference programme coordinated by the secretariat for UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, part of the UN Department for Humanitarian Affairs.

The conference programme featured

- technical sessions, organized by various UN agencies and other international bodies, which explored in-depth specific themes related to disaster management,
- plenary sessions, which provided a forum primarily for national governments;
- main committee sessions, organized by WHO headquarters and WHO's Regional Office for the Americas, which examined themes and policies of concern to all participants

■ Organization of the Main Committee Session

Because the scope of the session topic extended beyond that of any one organization or sector of society, WHO established two consultative groups in order to design and develop the themes for the session.

■ Planning Committee

WHO held two planning meetings in January 1994 in order to develop topics and select appropriate speakers. Participants included Mr. Jon Bennett, NGO Coordination Project Office, International Council for Volunteer Agencies, Mr. Gunter Fischer, Privatization and Enterprise Development Unit, UNCTAD, Mr. Albert Fry, Business Council for Sustainable Development; and Mr. Cyril Ritchie, Conference for Non-Government Organizations. UNICEF and the IDNDR Secretariat members (those responsible for NGO and private sector links) participated as observers.

In addition, Dr. Gilbert White, Natural Hazards Center, University of Colorado at Boulder, generously provided advice and background material. Additional material was supplied by the World Federation of Engineering Organizations,

London and the Insurance Institute for Property Loss Reduction, Washington, DC.

■ Panellists Workshop

In order to prepare for the Main Committee Session, a week-long workshop was held from 28-31 March 1994 with the panellists or their representatives. The workshop served to develop each presentation with the speakers in depth, explore common themes, and coordinate presentations for the session.

The workshop was preceded by a research phase conducted by WHO's Emergency Preparedness and Planning Programme, including collection of relevant background documents and dissemination to panellists in order to facilitate their presentations.

Workshop facilitators included:

- Mr. Hal Fleming, Director, Disaster Information Resource Programme, Volunteers in Technical Assistance, US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
- Mr. Kevin Lyonette, Director, Sustainable Development, WWF International
- Dr. Samir Ben Yahmed, Coordinator, Emergency Preparedness and Planning Programme, Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action, WHO
- Mrs. Natalie Domeisen, Technical Officer, Emergency Preparedness and Planning Programme, Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action, WHO

The Emergency Preparedness Programme of WHO particularly wishes to express its appreciation to Mr. Hal Fleming and Mr. Kevin Lyonette, who provided guidance to WHO and the panellists not only during the workshop, but also during the months of preparation that preceded the conference.

The organization of the Main Committee session and production of this book has been made possible by the financial support of the government of Italy ■

Preface

speeding aid to victims of disasters, we have yet to devote similar attention to prevention, mitigation and preparedness programmes which would reduce suffering, economic loss and the cost of response. The International Decade on Natural Disaster Reduction, therefore, has played the pivotal role in creating awareness and interest in these issues. The World Conference in Yokohama brought together over two thousand practitioners, policymakers and diplomats to explore ways of increasing commitment towards these goals.

■ Equal footing

The World Conference session on public sector, private sector and voluntary organization collaboration was unique in bringing together leading experts to exchange views on pre-disaster planning and disaster reduction. Business and industry spokespersons have rarely appeared in a UN forum on equal footing with those from UN agencies, governments and voluntary organizations.

We learned through this exchange, for example, that the insurance industry can be a dominant force in disaster mitigation strategies, by structuring insurance premium costs to correlate directly with effectiveness of building codes and urban planning in disaster-prone environments. We also

learned that business and industry can be effective through community education and outreach programmes to encourage employees, their families and their neighbours to take measures before disaster strikes, as well as to take appropriate health and safety steps during a crisis.

In many communities throughout the world, interaction between the private sector and community orga-

nizations is taking place. Through local service clubs such as Rotary in Madras state and in Bombay, business has begun to participate with government agencies in joint disaster planning. Such is also happening in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and in Quito, Ecuador. In Jamaica, hardware chains support social

Our world is increasingly interdependent. Disasters — whether the result of natural phenomena, the collapse of organized society or the failure of man-made technology — affect us all: governments, private sector, and community organizations.

In a short span of time, advanced communications and information systems have enabled us to map storms and drought by satellite, to relay warnings to remote villages and to more effectively respond to a crisis. Our world has become small. Every isolated, once-forgotten corner is accessible by satellite, PC modem and the electronic news media. An emergency manager with a communications system no bigger than a suitcase will soon be able to summon supplies and other assistance from any remote spot on earth.

Data bases in disaster assistance agencies throughout the world will be able to exchange vital information with each other on weather forecasts, emergency medical capacity, location of buffer stocks, and status of food shipments.

While we have become more sensitized to the need for

***Interaction between
the private sector
and community groups
is happening the world over.
But much of the cooperation
in disaster reduction remains
undocumented.***