

I. Background

1. The first Interagency Task Force meeting, held in Geneva in April 2000, established 11 priority areas for its future work. One of these areas was defined as:

⇒ Mainstreaming disaster reduction in sustainable development and in national planning; lessons learned for prevention from actual disasters

2. The Secretariat was requested to conduct preliminary research and consultations and to submit proposals to the Task Force concerning a number of issues, including:

- Mainstreaming disaster reduction in sustainable development and in national planning

The following paper does not intend to be exhaustive, but to provide a starting point for the Task Force members to engage in the discussion of the topic. It builds on the premise that the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction framework (Task Force members, other UN agencies, NGOs, Governments, academia and scientific bodies and the Secretariat of ISDR) provides an appropriate platform to pursue disaster reduction strategies as an integral part of sustainable development, as recommended by the first ISDR Inter Agency Task Force meeting in April 2000. The World Bank (Disaster Management Facility), OAS, UNDP, ADPC and others from the IDNDR framework are already engaged in advancing this discussion- as policy, as economic incentives, in the aftermath of disasters and in the reconstruction phase.

II. Rationale

3 The legacy of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction can be summarised as the promotion of an integrated, multisectoral approach to disaster reduction in the context of national development plans, rather than in the fact that the impact of disasters was reduced. From discussions and recommendations emanating during the last years of the Decade, three aspects stand out in terms of efforts to mainstream disaster prevention into sustainable development.

4. **First** of all, the need for recognition at all levels that disaster or risk reduction is a strategic concept that leads to the reduction of losses with respect to lives and property, as well as social and economic setbacks resulting from natural disasters. This concept is related to other strategic initiatives supported by the international community in the context of sustainable development, poverty eradication, the protection of natural resources, climate change, economic globalisation and the establishment of partnerships between public and private sectors

5. **Secondly**, the need for continued inter-disciplinary and cross-cutting partnership-building at all levels among scientific and social organisations, governments, the private sector, the media, NGOs, regional and international organisations, especially seen from a development perspective, is the basis for the adoption of disaster reduction as a mainstream activity in UN and governmental agendas. Public awareness and commitment of both public and private sector decision-makers constitute an effective means for its implementation.

6. **Thirdly**, the identification of mechanisms for countries to engage fully in the process, both globally and nationally, and to link disaster reduction to related strategies

7. Countries and people should increase their capacities and reduce their vulnerability through sustainable development. Therefore, governments at national and local implement planning processes to design projects aimed at guiding economic and social development over a given period of time. Sustainable development is the result of an integral planning process that incorporates (or should incorporate) a number of considerations regarding disaster hazards, such as vulnerability and threat reduction, strategies aimed at protecting the environment, economic growth and the improvement of educational levels and standards of living among the population.

9 Consequences and, at the same time, causes of disasters, that may be measured as vulnerability levels, such as the mass movement of people, vulnerable infrastructure, poor land use management, poverty, lack of education and public health, the increase in technological disasters, air and water pollution, and soil erosion, are linked to specific development patterns. Development efforts should reduce vulnerabilities, but instead in many cases they increase risk and destroy the traditional balance with nature without seeking to develop a new form of equilibrium. Poverty is also one of the main factors that contribute to an increase of the impact of natural disaster.

8 Economic losses, as another common and measurable indicator, caused by a major disaster often exceed the annual gross income of the country affected by such a disaster. The World Bank has stated that losses caused by disasters in developing countries, in terms of percentages of the Gross National Product (GNP), are 20 times higher than those in developed countries.

10 Resources lost as a result of disasters, in the form of damaged infrastructure or productive capacity, are resources lost for overall development. Reducing the vulnerability of economic and social infrastructure must be seen as a key part of development, not simply as projects to replace damaged infrastructure. For decades, resources have been wasted in rebuilding in the same conditions that contributed to the disaster in the first place, thus increasing vulnerability and generating new risks. Reconstruction processes represent a window of opportunity for implementing the necessary disaster reduction measures and policies.

11. Although disasters are assessed in human and social terms, their economic and political dimensions tend to exercise an important influence on decision making. Although the principles of disaster mitigation and vulnerability reduction are universal, their application depends on the prevailing culture, and the economic well being of the country in question. Consequently there are no standard solutions that fit both "developed" and "developing" countries.

III. Related international strategies

12. The Rio Declaration, and the adoption of **Agenda 21** at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, lists the factors contributing to increasing vulnerability and establishes a roadmap for the mainstreaming of sustainable development and sound management of natural resources. Partnership building, environmental risk assessment and impact studies have since become common standards and requirements for development programmes. Nevertheless, the disaster and risk reduction component would need to be more clearly visualised in this process.

13. As part of the follow-up to Agenda 21, the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) initiated in 1996 a five-year programme aimed at the development of a core set of indicators of sustainable development for use at the national level. The major outcome has been the development of a methodology, incorporating 59 individual indicators in the field of sustainable development. IDNDR, at the time, was given the lead responsibility in initiating and developing indicators related to natural disaster preparedness and vulnerability. The final core set of indicators will be presented to the CSD at its 9th session in April 2001, as part of the discussions on the cross-sectoral theme, Information for Decision-Making and Participation.

14 The **United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)** constitutes a key component of the UN Secretary General's reform proposals since 1997, to promote the adoption of common objectives, time-frames and also improved collaboration between UN programmes and funds. It has been designed as the centerpiece of UN development co-operation at the country level. UNDAF should be the primary United Nations instrument to strategically respond to a country's development challenges and to the United Nations global agenda. The UNDAF should also work to strengthen the capacity of host governments to implement their development programmes and strengthen the relationship between UN System and the host government. Risk and disaster reduction are not normally part of the inter-agency working groups or Common Country

Assessments, nor are the principles embodied in the Yokohama Strategy for Action adopted by the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction.

15. The **Climate Agenda** is an inter-agency initiative which provides an international framework for the promotion of climate-related activities, including research and applications to meet the needs of society. One of the outputs of the Climate Agenda is climate services for sustainable development. This activity is expected to produce worldwide quality climate analysis products, seasonal and annual climate predictions, assessment of climate extremes for natural disaster preparedness as well as better access to climate services which will use these products. An area that still requires further strengthening is the understanding of the socio-economic and environmental impacts of climate variability such as El Niño and La Niña and prospective climate change as a key element in formulating national policies.

16. The **First World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction** convened in Yokohama, Japan, in May 1994 became a turning point for promoting the disaster reduction message and commitment. It led to the adoption of new strategies in the second half of IDNDR in the 1990s, that included major emphasis on social sciences; a focus on public policy; the development of regional approaches and regional networking; a distinct conceptual shift from emergency preparedness to the reduction of vulnerability and risk and the need for emphasis on the concrete application of natural disaster reduction as well as community involvement.

17. Other related strategies where development and disasters have been looked upon is the context of Small Island States and UNCTAD. Important recommendations in this respect was adopted at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados in 1992, and later considered in the Commission for Sustainable Development.

18. IDNDR established additional synergies with several global strategies of the United Nations system in the social and economic fields, and pursued the issue under a number of different agendas, such as in the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul, 3 to 14 June 1996). Reference was made to natural disaster reduction in both the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and in the World Food Summit Plan of Action. The Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations (UNGA resolution 50/6) refers, inter-alia, to the need for intensified co-operation on natural disaster reduction in order to foster sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice. The Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, as adopted by the Special Session of the General Assembly (New York, 23 to 27 June 1997) includes natural disaster reduction and the Yokohama World Conference in its chapter C.2 on "sectors and issues". The highest administrative co-ordination body of the United Nations system, established at the level of Heads of Agencies and chaired by the UN Secretary General, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), has recognised disaster reduction as an issue of global concern and of strategic importance for the UN system in the twenty-first century.

19. The number of institutions and organisations that have engaged in disaster management or disaster reduction activities during the last decade has constantly increased. The institutions involved are no longer limited to the humanitarian preparedness and response organisations as was essentially the case towards the end of the decade of the 80s.

20. Important development organisations such as UNDP, the World Bank (Disaster Management Facility and the ProVention Consortium) and regional development banks, among others, have formulated their own policies and action plans for disaster reduction, with emphasis on sustainable risk reduction as an essential component to consolidate sustainable development. Units or departments that deal with the trans-sectoral issue of disaster reduction, from humanitarian assistance, disaster preparedness and prevention to science and policy are now to be found in most UN agencies and in many governmental institutions. The Inter American Committee for Natural Disaster Reduction has adopted the topic and the Inter-American Task Force for Follow Up on the

Santa Cruz de la Sierra Summit, has already established a Working Group on Mainstreaming Disaster Reduction in Development

IV. Recommendations

21. Much remains to be done to mainstream disaster reduction into sustainable development and national planning processes and put into practice arrangements and actions that really will reduce the social and economic impact of disasters. A stronger national commitment to disaster reduction, including the necessary political will and legal framework is needed, as was pointed out by the IDNDR review and the ISDR Inter-Agency Task Force. Resources would need to be allocated for disaster prevention activities, not in isolation, but as part of investments in development initiatives. The future demands major synergy between environmental protection and disaster reduction.

22. The Task Force may consider setting up a new Working group to deal with this priority, or alternatively may wish to designate some key members from different constituencies to elaborate specific proposals that could be adopted by the various organisations comprising the TF, and supported by the Secretariat.

Key issues for action that the Task Force may wish to address:

23 Task Force members and organisations within the UN system should commit themselves to disaster reduction as part of the strategy of the UN system aimed at achieving sustainable development, natural resource protection and sound environmental management, by:

- a) incorporating the issue into their development agendas and to assist countries and other counterparts to do the same, with a special focus on policy enhancement and the introduction of the issue at the sectoral level;
- b) establishing inter-agency working groups on risk reduction and disaster management as a thematic area within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process and Common Country Assessments (CCA). The ISDR Task Force should provide inputs for this exercise, especially through the members of the United Nations Development Group and the already existing working group in this context, under the leadership of UNDP, where guidelines for risk assessment and reduction at the country level is being developed. and
- c) working actively for the topic to be more clearly identified for follow-up in the Agenda 21 framework and at the international and national level.

24 Discuss an appropriate inter-governmental mechanism for countries to report on risk reduction status at the national or regional level, on a periodic basis, on progress achieved and shortcomings experienced in the area of incorporating disaster reduction into national planning. The ISDR framework, supported by the Secretariat, could provide guidelines for such periodic reporting and the UN System at country level could support the development of these reporting arrangements. **Possible Milestone:** Definition of validity of reporting mechanism and publication of a periodic "World Risk Report" or similar document.

25. Discuss how Environmental Impact Reviews might systematically include a chapter on disaster proneness, using standardised hazards and vulnerability indicators and methodologies developed under the ISDR framework to assess risk, as in the case of the IATF working group, which has already been established under the leadership of UNDP. The regional economic commissions should be informed of the initiatives undertaken under the ISDR framework with a view to encouraging them to include these indicators in their annual country and regional reviews.

26 ISDR Framework partners should be present at as many international fora and development meetings as possible, to pursue the inclusion of disaster reduction in their agenda. This would include a presence in the preparatory processes for meetings such as the up-coming Least Developed Countries Conference in March 2001 (UNCTAD) and support existing efforts in this respect by UNDP, FAO and others, the follow-up process to Agenda 21 and the Earth summit 2002; among others Task Force members and countries are the most important channels for this undertaking, although the Secretariat should also actively seek to participate in such fora.

27. The ISDR framework should continue to improve the core set of indicators for vulnerability and risk for sustainable development, initiated by the Commission for Sustainable Development. **Milestone:** Adopted indicators in CSD to be used by countries and agencies.

28. The Secretariat of ISDR should closely monitor the agenda for these undertakings, in order to facilitate the activities of the task force members, member countries and other relevant bodies. The Secretariat should also keep all current and future partners informed of on-going initiatives. The major responsibilities for this activity will, however, remain with Task Force members, who should keep the Secretariat informed in order to enable it to ensure effective reporting and information sharing. This will enable the Secretariat to carry out one of its main functions, which is to Craft the UN message on disaster reduction. **Milestone.** Up-dated circulation and contact lists at the Secretariat; updated agenda on undertakings and publication and circulation of monthly Highlights and publishing of information and discussions on the ISDR web.

29 **General milestone.** An increased partnership to adopt action plans for disaster reduction as part of sustainable development plans, as result of the mainstreaming of the issue in a manner that will lead to a measurable reduction in the impact of disasters in terms of saved lives and protected assets.

V. References

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- UNDP-Emergency Response Division and Recovery Programme
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- IACNDR/OAS Report of May 2000
- ProVention Consortium
- Agenda 21