The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction:1990-2000

A Path Laid by IDNDR for Nations to Tread on

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Primary Themes & Objectives

Natural hazards continuously occur and shape the environ-ments on which our societies depend, but there is much that scientific knowledge and appropriate public policies can do to prevent human disasters resulting from them.

Disasters resulting from natural hazards are on the increase. Their number was three times higher worldwide in the past ten years than in the 1960's, economic losses were eight times greater, exceeding US $ 60 billion a year. For the three years 1993- 1995, the United States of America Sub-Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction estimated that annual losses from natural disasters in the country averaged one billion dollars per week. The Planning Commission of China estimates that the current national losses from natural disasters in China range between 4 - 8 per cent of gross domestic product, approaching at its most severe, the annual rate of national economic growth.

As disasters increase. It becomes clear that neither government authorities nor local communities themselves can continue to assume the rising costs of compensating citizens for losses incurred The only affordable solution lies in mitigation and prevention measures. Shared information is the begining of prevention, and partneship is crucial for the successful application of disaster prevention practices.

In recognition of the disastrous impact of natural hazards On vulnerable communities, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed, in its resolution 44/236 of 1989, the international Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR 1990-2000), With the objective to reduce, through concerted international action, the loss of life, property damage, and social and economic disruption caused by natural disasters.

IDNDR Goals

The IDNDR goals and objective are·

- To improve the capacity of each country to mitigate the effects of natural disasters, paying special attention to assisting developing countries in the assessment of disaster damage potential, and in the establishment of early warning systems and disaster-resistant structures capabilities.
- To devise appropriate guidelines and strategies for applying existing scientific and technical knowledge
- To foster scientific and engineering endeavors aimed at addressing critical gaps in knowledge.
- To disseminate existing and new technical information
- To develop measures for the assessment, prediction, prevention and mitigation of natural disasters through programmes of technical assistance and technology transfer, education and training, and to evacuate the effectiveness of programmes

By the year 2000, all countries are encouraged to have:

- Comprehensive national assessments of risks from natural hazards integrated into national development plans
- Mitigation plans of practical measures for application at natinal and local levels that address long-term disaster prevention, preparedness and community awareness
- Ready access to warning systems at global, regional, national and local levels

Mixed Action Plan 1998-99

Partnership for a Safer World in the 21st Century

While natural hazards that adversely affect the environment are inevitable phenomena, the resulting disasters can often be "prevented"

3The ability to reduce social and economic risks from natural and similar hazards requires the adoption of a global culture of prevention.

This can be accomplished by a total commitment to the development of effective disaster reduction policies and assured coordination by all actors working together for a common purpose: saving lives and reducing property loss through more extensive preventive application of scientific and technical knowledge.

This partnership for a safer world in the 21st century includes dedicated national disaster reduction committees and focal points, an eminent international scientific and technical advisory committee, programming interests of various departments and agencies of the United Nations system, as well as NGOs and private sector organizations.

Platform for the Future

The original aims laid out by International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), were established by Resolution 44/236 which were further elaborated in Yokohama Conference in 1994, provide the basis for the IDNDR Action Plan 1998-1999.

This Action Plan, initiated by the IDNDR Secretariat, is a strategic framework for the implementation of crucial activities that exemplify IDNDR 's objective to establish disaster prevention as an essential element of sustainable development policies Disaster prevention is by definition a multi-sectoral activity.

The escalating cost of responding to disasters and compensating victims for losses incurred is becoming too high for governments and local authorities The present tendency of relying exclusively on a response oriented approach to disaster needs to be replaced by strategic planning in prevention.

Objectives of the Plan of Action

The 1998-1999 plan has three major objectives·

- To evaluate progress in disaster reduction during the past ten years,
- To identify trends in natural hazards in order to project related risks into the 21st century,
- To shape future directions for sustained international and interdisciplinary commitment to disaster prevention, by identifying crucial programme functions and essential institutional responsibilities.

The Plan is built around five major themes. which the IDNDR Secretariat promotes through its advocacy, policy setting and coordination activities:

- Hazard, vulnerability and risk assessment,
- Disaster prevention and sustainable development,
- Effective early warning,
- Political and public policy commitment,
- Shared knowledge and technological transfer.

To implement the Plan, the IDNDR Secretariat has developed specific targeted activities such as the Radius initiative for urban seismic assessment, the El Nino interagency preventive approach, as well as annual worldwide promotion and information campaigns.

Radius: A World-wide Initiative to Reduce the Destructive Impact of Earthquakes in Urban Areas

Earthquakes are among the most deadly and destructive natural hazards. The seismic risk in urban areas is rapidly growing while the world is rapidly urbanizing.

The Secretariat of the IDNDR launched the Risk Assessment Tools for Diagnosis of Urban Areas against Seismic Disasters (RADIUS) initiative, with financial assistance from the Japanese Government, to reduce seismic disasters in urban areas, particularly in developing countries. The RADIUS Initiative aims to aid vulnerable communities reduce physical, economic and social damage caused by earthquakes, and to raise public awareness in earthquake prone cities.

Pilot Projects

The nine selected cities develop seismic damage scenarios and risk management plans for the cities with technical guidance from three international institutes, namely, Bureau de Recherches Geologiques et Minieres (BRGM, France), GeoHazards International (GHI, USA), International Center for Disaster-Mitigation Engineering (INCEDE)/OYO Group (Japan), and three international advisory committees. RADIUS also develops practical tools for urban seismic risk management, based on the lessons learnt and improvements defined during the implementation of the pilot project.

A technical manual for the urban seismic risk assessment will be developed, based on the analysis of the case studies. Guidelines will be developed in order to facilitate any earthquake prone city to conduct a RADIUS-type project

Exchange of Information

A comparative study on "Understanding Urban Seismic Risk Around the World" started in June 1995 to identify and compare the solutions and risk management practices of different cities. More than 70 cities are participating and are actively discussing issues and exchanging information through the internet forum

Information dissemination and international interaction at city level is an eminent aspect of the RADIUS Initiative The RADIUS home page was launched to provide any cities with clear and up-to-date access to all information concerning the RADIUS initiative. Reports from the pilot cities and associate cities are also available The address of the RADIUS home page is http.//www.geohaz.org/radius.

(Source : "Partnerships for a Safer World in the 21st Century", IDNDR Programme Forum, 1999 5-9 July 1999 Geneva, Switzerland, International Conference Centre of Geneva CICG)

HUDCO's Initiatives vis-à-vis Objectives of IDNDR

Recognising the fact that improvement and innovations in built environment can go a long way in reducing impacts of disasters HUDCO has been committed to make tireless efforts in contributing towards building safer shelters using three tiered strategies, (i) financing, (ii) promotion of disaster resistant technology and dissemination of information; and (iii) capacity building. Participation of communities, right from explored possibilities of translating traditional features and life styles of people to a physical form for better acceptability

- HUDCO being a financial institution has been emphasizing and committing itself to set up techno-legal and techno-financial regimes for adaptation of disaster resistant technologies in future development projects sanctioned by it.

- HUDCO has been the first organisation which stepped forward to encourage and initiate community participation in designing and physical planning process of the adopted villages of Latur and then in Jabalpur. Recently, it has taken a further step in Chamoli, in identifying NGOs for developing and disseminating knowledge in disaster resistant technologies.

- HUDCO's collaboration with KFW in disaster resistant rehabilitation projects and cyclone resistant rehabilitation projects at Latur and cyclone resistant reconstruction programmes in Andhra Pradesh has produced posture results.

- HUDCO has been able to produce user friendly guidelines on Do's and Dont's for shelter upgradation using disaster resistant technologies for different types of disasters. These have been prepared in local language and fairly illustrative for common man to understand.

- Habitat Polytechnic, under the chairmanship of HUDCO has initiated the process of involving communities in retrofitting and reconstruction of settlements and preparing them to strengthen theor shelter through self help, using demonstrated techniques on site.

- HUDCO is committed to disseminate, promote and demonstrate disaster resistant technologies by setting up building centres using locally availabe material. It had done so in Uttarkashi, Latur, Jabalpur, Andhra Pradesh and in Chamoli.

- HSMI, HUDCO has been building capacities of mixed set of professionals and administrators, through training workshops on the areas of mitigation and preparedness of disasters. The training has been able to provide common platform to initiate discussions across the table amongst the professionals and administrators and NGOs to be able to comprehend together, inbuilt issues and problems encountered by each, during crisis management situation

- HUDCO believes in partnerships and networking and therefore has taken initiatives of establishing collaboration between HSMI (its training institute) and Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, for conducting workshops, seminars. HSMI is committed to promote the cause of preparedness and mitigation.