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**DISASTER MITIGATION AND PREVENTION POLICIES
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Preparation for the World Conference
on Natural Disaster Reduction
Yokohama, May 1994**

organized by the

Development Policy Forum
of the
German Foundation for International Development (DSE)

in cooperation with the

Secretariat of the
United Nations International Decade
for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR)

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Foreword

The Berlin meeting held on 25 to 28 January 1994 was seen as part of the process leading to the mid-term evaluation of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction at the World Conference in Yokohama, Japan, May 1994.

The discussion focused foremost on policy aspects of the correlation between disaster preparedness and mitigation on the one hand and sustainable development on the other. The meeting's deliberations took into account that a stronger policy is needed at national and international level to give weight to the relevance of disaster preparedness for sustainable development.

The contributions and recommendations summarized in this report underline the goals to be reached during the forthcoming years of the International Decade and stress the political and moral responsibility of governments for developing, supporting and implementing policies which entail the participation and coordination of state agencies, local authorities and non-governmental organizations to effectively prevent, mitigate and prepare for disasters in addition to efficient emergency relief measures once disaster has struck.

The conveners hope that the findings and recommendations of the Berlin Round Table will be of help in the political process initiated by various governments, international and non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the World Conference in Yokohama in May and beyond.

We are very grateful to Brian Ward for his enriching contributions, advice and involvement in the preparation of the meeting and for finalizing the report and to George Ritchie for his spontaneous assistance.



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I. INTRODUCTION

The meeting constituted an informal policy dialogue at executive level aiming to contribute to an update and review of activities, progress and deficiencies, observed during the first half of the United Nations International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR).

Discussions were designed to focus on policy aspects of the correlation between disaster mitigation and sustainable development, recognizing that further consolidation is needed at national level in order to achieve a better understanding of its relevance.

Through the enhancement of a continued dialogue better comprehension was sought of the vital role national, regional and international activities in disaster mitigation and prevention have to play in safeguarding sustainable development and environmental protection worldwide.

It was felt that an informal discussion between government officials in charge of national disaster mitigation activities in disaster-prone developing countries and other focal points, representing the international community within and outside the UN system, would help in defining further steps to be taken at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction in Yokohama, Japan, in May 1994, and beyond. The findings and recommendations of the meeting will be made available to the Preparatory Committee of the World Conference and other concerned national and international parties for consideration. They are intended to be supplementary to national reports being prepared by governments.

The meeting began with policy addresses by the Deputy Director General of the German Foundation for International Development, Peter Sötje, the representative of the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Deputy Director Ulrich Popp, the representative of the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Senior Counsellor Klaus Holderbaum and by the Vice Chairman of the German IDNDR Committee, Director General (rtd.) Winfried Böll.

A substantive introduction to the discussion by the former Director of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, Bangkok, Brian A. O. Ward, reviewed recent changes in the pattern of disasters, developments in disaster-prone developing countries, and changes in the pattern of international cooperation.

It was realized that the level of vulnerability to disasters is relative to the state of development. The increasing problems of environmental degradation, urban migration, mega-cities, technological hazards and complex emergencies aggravate the situation and make the burden of disasters a major cause for concern. Disaster-prone societies are not necessarily limited to developing countries though these remain the most vulnerable.

II. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and recommendations relate to the following six topics:

1. Disaster reduction and development policies
2. Awareness, advocacy, education and training
3. Strengthening national capacities
4. Cooperation and coordination
5. Science and technology
6. Funding

1. DISASTER REDUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Resolution 44/236 of the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, proclaiming the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, was based mostly on the technical and scientific understanding of natural disaster prevention. UN Resolution 46/182 of 1991, stressed the essential importance of economic growth and sustainable development for the prevention of natural disasters and other catastrophies. The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro drew special attention to the socio-economic causes of natural disasters e. g. poverty, population growth and environmental degradation. Indeed, socio-economic and ecological indicators are pointing to a growing disaster vulnerability in the world. Disaster vulnerability cannot be reduced in a sustainable way without implementing the Rio recommendations expressed in Agenda 21.

It is increasingly clear that technical and organizational measures for natural disaster reduction can only have a major impact if they are integrated in the broader policies of social and economic development.

RECOMMENDATION 1

It is recommended that

- 1.1. Governments be urged to make disaster reduction an integral part of development planning and to make clear policy statements for disaster reduction in their national development plans.
- 1.2. Multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors make clear policy statements on disaster reduction in relation to their development support plans.
- 1.3. National and international agencies responsible for development planning should play the leading role in the promotion and implementation of developmental activities aiming to reduce vulnerability to disasters.

2. AWARENESS, ADVOCACY, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

No programme or management breakthrough can succeed without high-level political commitment. Creation of the political will which results in

decisions to commit resources to disaster reduction programmes is a priority and it could be a major outcome of the World Conference in Yokohama.

There is a need to raise the levels of knowledge of policy makers, government administrators, development planners, UN agencies, non-government and other agency workers concerning the essential role that disaster preparedness, mitigation and prevention play in sustainable development policies. There is a consequential need to heighten the level of awareness of these relationships amongst these groups.

It is also necessary to raise the profile of IDNDR, its objective, goals and activities. Those working in the preparedness/mitigation field must consider how to tackle this problem. Decision-makers should be aware of their responsibilities.

The lack of focus on preparedness and mitigation issues, in comparison with the intensive coverage of response and relief, gives cause for concern. When disasters occur, policy makers and the news media are often over-influenced by the immediate impact, response needs and activities generated by the disaster event. It is important that in the pre-disaster phase their awareness of the value and effectiveness of disaster mitigation should be enhanced.

To ensure this, IDNDR National Committees and the Secretariat should place additional emphasis on the development of materials and methodologies to encourage greater awareness of mitigation opportunities amongst senior policy and decision makers.

To improve the opportunities available to the 125 countries which are committed to participate in IDNDR there is a need to develop effective public awareness programmes concerning the objectives and potential national advantages deriving from the IDNDR programme.

A common major problem at the local level is getting people to understand and co-operate in disaster mitigation measures. Sustained public awareness programmes, directed at local communities have proved successful in a number of countries; lessons from these activities need to be shared more widely.

An increase in public awareness has major benefits. Public awareness of risks, and the opportunities for coping with these risks, is a foundation of successful mitigation strategies. Public information and awareness programmes, the news media and all other possible outlets must be aimed at the creation of self-reliance and self-help amongst vulnerable groups. A range of communication methods, both technical and cultural, involving all public information systems, should be applied. This process should include the introduction of programmes in schools.

Experience has shown that there is a considerable communication gap between those sections of society that are vulnerable to disasters, mainly the

poor, and those with responsibilities in public administration and scientific and technical fields for disaster reduction.

To a large extent, the raising of levels of understanding amongst policy and decision makers concerning the advantages of disaster reduction and mitigation must be based upon case studies of disaster reduction projects which quantify costs and benefits.

Investment in human resources development through appropriate training in order to improve professional capabilities is at least as important as investment in technology and engineering measures. Disaster mitigation and prevention policies are not only a technical and scientific problem; they are also one of education and awareness.

The development of human resources should not be limited exclusively to personnel involved in disaster management but should also be directed to the needs of communities and individuals at risk.

To overcome the perception barrier which hides from the vulnerable communities the actual extent of their exposure to hazards, various courses of action are possible for example: national and local meetings on risk evaluation and vulnerability reduction under government leadership with broad and intersectoral participation including the information media; and round-tables and exchanges of information between the responsible authorities, scientists and the media in order to stimulate the latter into playing a constructive function in improving general awareness of disaster mitigation policies.

RECOMMENDATION 2

It is recommended that

- 2.1. Effective standards of disaster prevention and reduction are to be achieved through full employment of all resources at both the international and national levels, with integration into programmes of government, training in staff colleges, institutes of public administration, universities and schools with the objective of creating:
 - national commitment and the political will necessary to implement and to maintain programmes of disaster prevention and reduction;
 - professional responsibilities and capabilities in all relevant sectors;
 - public awareness and community self-help and reliance.
- 2.2. A small series of case studies should be developed which provide examples of the cost-benefit of successful disaster reduction programmes in different regions of the developing world and address various disaster types (rapid and slow onset, natural and man-made) to support programmes of awareness building and government commitment.

3. STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CAPACITIES

The largest share of the losses caused by a disaster is borne by the stricken country, particularly by children and the elderly, being especially vulnerable to the impact of disasters, and to women, which not only are mostly heavily affected by hazards, but also play an active instrumental role in the relief/development continuum. This indicates that no disaster-prone country can be left out of the process of integrating disaster reduction into development planning.

Disaster relief activities should call for full national mobilization in supporting the efforts of the victims themselves, and increasing the capacity of the country as a whole to help itself in the future. Local initiatives and creativity must be supported and encouraged in order to develop a self-reliant community capable of limiting the impact of a disastrous event by its own means.

In some countries the cost of the actual and potential impact of disasters is growing faster than their GNP. Given the relatively scarce resources available for development assistance, it is essential to include disaster reduction measures in any development programme in order to avoid an increase of vulnerability through the development process itself.

The active participation of the affected people from the grass root level is an indispensable measure to decrease vulnerability to natural disasters and is a prerequisite for any successful disaster mitigation and prevention policy. In developing countries particularly, disaster reduction is mostly a local issue to be tackled with full knowledge of local conditions. Non-governmental organizations and community based groups have proven to be of great value in mobilizing active participation by the people in disaster situations. Trusted by the affected people due to their very commitment and involvement in disaster mitigation, awareness-building and relief, the strengthening of their capacity and utilization of their expertise are to be seen as important building blocks in the establishment of a coherent national network for disaster mitigation and response.

There is a need for individual countries to adapt, rather than adopt, the framework of IDNDR. National Committees have an important seminal and advocacy role to play in identifying and promoting national issues.

RECOMMENDATION 3

It is recommended that

- 3.1. Governments ensure that national socio-economic development plans clearly define responsibilities in all sectors for disaster reduction.
- 3.2. Greatest possible use be made of peoples' natural coping mechanisms. Their experience and understanding of local conditions and hazards must be regarded as an important resource and fully exploited by government planners and others. The capacity and experience of non-

governmental organizations are a vital resource and deserve a broader support.

4. COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

Existing mechanisms to stimulate international partnerships and continuing support of national programmes for disaster mitigation should be strengthened in order to emphasize that external assistance is complementary to national strategies.

The concept of balanced development, involving concurrent and linked investments in physical assets, sustainable use of natural resources and human assets, has convincingly shown that this not only promotes effective development but also contributes significantly to disaster reduction. It should, therefore, be applied as widely as possible.

Particular attention should be paid to supporting the activities of those dedicated individuals (the “torch bearers”) who are responsible for many of the achievements in disaster reduction in many countries. Their position could be strengthened by international assistance designed to facilitate their work, e.g. by providing access to information, networking and supporting technical cooperation in areas which are identified as critical and appropriate in regard to the needs and economic situations of their countries.

A major priority for donor countries is to promote and support human resources development as well as institutional building in disaster-prone developing countries through their routine development activities.

To this end there should be investment in human assets and building of networks for disaster mitigation in vulnerable countries and also in the international domain.

Partnerships are particularly important between developing countries. Technical cooperation among developing countries can produce good results and should be pursued vigorously.

Providing coordinated support to disaster reduction activities as part of the development process is a challenge to the whole system of UN agencies. The IDNDR Secretariat can play an important advocacy role.

RECOMMENDATION 4

It is recommended that

- 4.1. All parties involved in disaster reduction activities, national and international, be urged to pursue actively partnerships and networking for coordination and cooperation.
- 4.2. International and bi-lateral agencies be urged to identify and provide explicit support to national agencies and individuals (the “torch bearers”) who have demonstrated dynamic initiative and leadership in promoting and implementing disaster reduction.

5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Effective measures for protection against disasters can only be achieved by the integration of policies in science, research and technology with those in economics and development.

Most of the methods for improving disaster resistance and preparedness are available for application. However, significant gaps exist in the application of new and old technologies to disaster reduction and the understanding of natural processes in disaster management practice. There is an absence of an effective interface between scientific capacities for prediction and warning and those government departments and public services responsible for taking administrative action in response. Strong support for integrated research on the chain from the prediction of natural hazard potentials to the long-term effects on human beings and the environment in the aftermath of disasters is required both for its general aspects and for its application to specific situations.

Research directed to improving standards of construction and urban planning, as well as the development of appropriate technical preventive measures must be encouraged and supported. It should draw upon the experience existing in local communities.

Studies indicate a widely recognized need for improved data banks concerning resources and capabilities and the information systems necessary to make these available to disaster managers. Such databases and information systems have direct relevance and similarities to those essential to development planning. Although primarily important at the national and sub-national level, such databases and information systems have relevance to disaster management and reduction programmes at the regional and international levels. In consequence the development of disaster management databases and information systems will greatly benefit from international collaboration and coordination with the objectives of ensuring compatibility and a working interface between different administrative levels and between manual and computerized systems.

Although not included in the framework established in 1989 for IDNDR, technological disasters are becoming a cause for increasing concern in currently industrializing countries and will call for serious attention. Mechanisms need to be developed for addressing these problems.

RECOMMENDATION 5

It is recommended that

- 5.1. In order to improve decision making, the scientific basis of understanding of disaster causes and effects should be strengthened through integrated research. This should involve physical and social scientists.
- 5.2. National and international networking and cooperation among the scientific and other disciplines should be promoted. In addition, spe-

cific partnerships among research institutions between developing countries as well as between developing and developed countries should be established for joint activities.

- 5.3. Mechanisms should be developed for addressing the growing concern of currently industrializing countries with regard to technological disasters.

6. FUNDING

This is one of the most difficult areas, being particularly the case in recent years when relief for complex emergencies has absorbed an increasingly large share of national and external funds. To counterbalance this trend, which does not lead to lasting results in development and disaster reduction, the scope of humanitarian assistance funds should be more flexible and not exclude more permanent disaster reduction measures and long overdue preparedness activities. Co-financing for disaster reduction programmes, including research, among donors could also be a mechanism for sustaining national commitment to specific disaster reduction measures, which should be initiated in those moments when attention to vulnerability is high, that is after disastrous events.

Country economic reports and other bi- or multilateral analyses should include the status of disaster vulnerability as critical data. The example set in this context by the Asian Development Bank in supporting disaster mitigation activities could be replicated elsewhere.

Common minimum standards (e. g. disaster legislation, national disaster plans, disaster financing) for internationally funded counter-disaster activities should be formulated and adopted in consultation with experts from developing and developed countries.

Recognizing that disasters — natural as well as man-made — and absolute poverty are mutually reinforcing, an appeal was made to develop “safety nets” in favour of people suffering from absolute poverty and the aftermath of natural disasters. This scheme, targeted to minimize the social impact of disasters to the poor, might be designed similar to the concept introduced in the World Bank’s approach to reduce poverty.

RECOMMENDATION 6

It is recommended that

- 6.1. International and bilateral agencies be urged to rationalize the way they fund disaster mitigation, preparedness and rehabilitation programmes to ensure maximum flexibility and coherence.
- 6.2. Developed countries expand their development support activities to include disaster mitigation and reduction objectives, and ensure that the provision of disaster relief will not be at the expense of funding of long-term development.

- 6.3. “Safety nets” should be developed in the context of international development cooperation and national legislation, to reduce the impact of disasters on the poor and preventing the build-up of a cycle of poverty through disasters.