Disaster Risk Reduction:
Implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)
An Action Aid International Briefing Paper

"Reducing disaster vulnerability may very well be the most critical challenge facing development in the new millennium"

James Wolfensohn,
Former President,
The World Bank

While many people are aware of the terrible impact of disasters throughout the world few realise that this is a problem that we can do something about.

Kofi Annan
General Secretary,
The United Nations[1]

Introduction

Disasters cost lives, destroy communities, wreck havoc on people's livelihoods and leave a lasting impact not only on physical infrastructure but also on people's psycho-social well-being. Although the number of deaths from disasters has dropped over the last ten years, more people are being affected and the economic consequences are becoming ever more severe. In development terms, disasters can have a devastating economic impact both at the household and community level as well as the national level, a trend, which is growing. During the 1990s an estimated 2 billion people globally were affected by disasters, triple the number impacted in the 1970s, while economic losses increased by a factor of 5 during the same period from $138 to US$629 billion.[2] If this trend continues it is estimated that by 2050 natural disasters could have a global cost of over $300 billion a year.[3] It is now recognised that if current trends continue, disasters will be a key factor in preventing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of 10 development targets to be achieved by 2015, all of which are both directly and indirectly affected by the impact of disasters, but most especially the over-riding goal of halving extreme poverty.

People are threatened by hazards because of their social, economic and environmental vulnerability. More lives are lost in poor countries and more poor people loose their lives in poor countries than their richer neighbours. The under-lying causes of disaster vulnerability lie in inequality, discrimination and exploitation. Vulnerability to natural disasters is also the result of weak institutions at the governmental level, with little enforcement power, making poor development policy decisions, which have the greatest impact on the poor.

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[1] See http://www.unisdr.org, 17/11/2005
[2] World Disasters Report 2002 (Geneva IFRC 2001) page 6
[3] Coping with climate change: environmental strategies for increasing human security (SEI, IUCN, IISD, 2001)

Disaster = Hazard x Vulnerability

In many countries poor planning controls mean urbanisation has taken place in an uncoordinated way without taking risk into consideration. Increasing population densities in cities and a pressure for land both in urban and rural areas mean people work and live in unsafe environments, for example near to flood-prone rivers or on steep hillsides. Environmental instability is increasing as forests are cut down, intensive mono-crop farming increases and environmental degradation robs the land of some of its ability to withstand severe weather conditions. Access to information is poor, especially for marginalised people, who are deprived of their ability to make informed decisions both in relation to risks but also in their response.

Numerous governments have failed to take disaster risk into account in formulating their development policies and practices and the result has been high costs in human and economic terms when a disaster does hit. Yet research shows that the cost of disaster reduction is much less than the cost of recovery from disasters. It is estimated that for every £1 spent on mitigation between £4 and £10 are saved in the costs of recovery.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Adaptation to Climate Change

The effects of climate change appear to be increasing the severity and frequency of natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes. Without adaptation to climate change, these hazards can turn into large-scale disasters. The livelihood systems of many communities are sensitive to changes in climate and their vulnerability is increased unless their social networks and the safety nets of supportive institutions remain intact.

There is overlap between disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change: both aim to address vulnerability to hazards, although adaptation to climate change focuses on responding to both extreme weather events and slow-onset changes in climates, whereas disaster risk reduction focuses more widely, not just on climate-related disasters.

Strategies for adaptation need to be integrated into all projects, not just emergencies work. Adaptation can mean small changes in project design to 'climate proof' work, such changes can make big differences in terms of long-term development. As such adaptation to climate change is an important element of disaster risk reduction.

The Approach of Disaster Risk Reduction

A risk reduction approach to disasters encompasses both preparedness and mitigation, and mainstreams these approaches into long-term development processes. It is a holistic approach to development that puts people and their communities at the centre. Risk reduction lies at the interface between humanitarian response to disasters and development. In many ways it is not a glamorous or easy alternative as it requires political will to invest in a planned and coherent way in building security at an individual,

community and national level. It requires a sound legislative framework that is enforceable at all levels, and integration into long-term planning, for example into the national poverty reduction strategies. There must also be clear budget allocation to enable implementation to be effective.

In order to be truly effective in protecting the lives and livelihoods of the poor, strategies for reducing risk need to be people centred. They need to build on people's local knowledge and cultural practices and apply tools that people can easily integrate into their lives. They need to be based on provision of full information, so people can make informed decisions.

Terminology in Disaster Risk Reduction[4]

Risk: The probability of harmful consequences or expected losses resulting from interact between natural or human induced hazards and vulnerable conditions.

Resilience: the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure

Hazard: a potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon or human activity that may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation. Hazards can include latent conditions that may represent future threats and can have different origins: natural (geological, hydro-meteorological and biological) or induced by human processes (environmental degradation and technological hazards)

Vulnerability: The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environm factors or processes that increase a community's susceptibility to the impact of hazards.

[4] Definitions taken from ISDR , Geneva 2005 http://www.unisdr.org/eng/library/lib-terminology-eng-p.htm

Historical Background to the Hyogo Framework for Action

Increasingly concerned about the impact of disasters, the United Nations declared the 1990s *The International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction*. This emphasis served to raise awareness at the national level, and focused on governments drawing up national disaster management plans. In 1994 the *Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World* provided guidance on reducing disaster risk and the impacts of disasters. However, approaches were mainly emergency response focused and did not look at long-term mitigation and preparedness as a way of dealing with disasters.

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) was set up to build on the gaps and challenges identified in the Yokohama Strategy. It sought to coordinate approaches at a local, national and international level with the aim of building disaster resilient communities by promoting increased awareness of the importance of disaster reduction as an integral component of sustainable development.

In January 2005 *The World Conference on Disaster Reduction* was held in Kobe, Japan. Coming as it did less than a month after the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the conference gained widespread attention as the world sought to respond to such a major disaster. The message of Kobe came loud and strong that disaster risk reduction is strongly linked to poverty alleviation and development, and as such disaster risk reduction needs to be mainstreamed. Out of that came a commitment by the world community to build resilience to disasters, through agreeing a ten-year action plan: *The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015*.

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015

The HFA is a ten-year action framework, 2005-2015. It aims to substantially reduce the loss of life as well as the social, economic and environmental losses caused to communities and nations as a result of disasters.
In order to achieve this, the HFA identified three strategic goals and as a means of achieving these goals, five priorities for action were also agreed as part of the HFA.

The Three Strategic Goals of the HFA

1. The integration of disaster risk reduction into sustainable development policies and planning at all levels, with special emphasis on disaster planning, mitigation, preparedness and vulnerability reduction.

2. The development and strengthening of institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels, especially the community, to build resilience to hazards.

3. The systematic incorporation of risk reduction approaches into the implementation of emergency preparedness, response and recovery programmes.

Five Priorities for Action of the HFA

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

Whilst placing the primary responsibility for achieving resilience on national governments, the HFA crucially notes the importance of the following:

- Participation by civil society, NGOs, community organisations, and voluntary groups as well as the involvement of the scientific community and the private sector;
- Strong regional capacities;
- Increased coordination at the national, regional and international levels.
- Integration of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) into other relevant international initiatives;
- Mainstreaming DRR measures into multilateral and bilateral development assistance programmes;
- The provision of adequate funding for the DRR work, specifically for the UN Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction.

National Platforms

A cornerstone of the HFA has been support for the establishment of multi-sector national platforms with designated responsibilities at all levels from the national to the local. Although the establishment of national platforms was called for as long ago as 1999 in an Economic and Social Council resolution, [5] not all countries have actually managed to set them up, others set them up during the1990s but they were never fully functional. In response to this situation the ISDR has produced a working paper *Guiding Principles: National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction,* as the first in a series of documents aimed at guiding the creation and development of National Platforms.[6]

[5] ECOSOC resolution 1999/63. Also General Assembly resolutions 56/195, 58/214 and 58/215.
[6] See http://www.unisdr.org/eng/country-inform/ci-guiding-princip.htm

Cross Cutting Issues

Gender is recognised as a cross cutting issue which should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including risk assessment, early warning, information management and education and training. Other cross cutting issues include a multi-hazard approach; cultural diversity, age and vulnerable groups all as considerations in disaster risk reduction planning; community and volunteer participation and capacity building technology transfer.

The promotion of a culture of prevention, including adequate resources for disaster risk reduction must underpin all national efforts so that there is coherence across all sectors and policies and in order to ensure that all citizens from the poorest and most marginalised to the wealthy elite can take steps to protect themselves and work to also protect their wider community.

ActionAid International and Disaster Risk Reduction

ActionAid's emergencies work starts from the premise that poor peoples' vulnerability to disasters is a key factor dictating the impact of emergencies. Disasters are not exogenous and uncontrollable; they arise from people's vulnerability to hazards. Disasters can be reduced and in some cases even prevented by reducing this vulnerability. [7]

A people centred disaster risk reduction approach lies at the heart of ActionAid's emergencies work. In our work with marginalised and excluded communities we have repeatedly seen poor people excluded from risk reduction measures as a result of weak and ineffective state institutions, corruption, lack of transparency and a lack of political will to put the needs of poor people at the top of the agenda. This experience has led to an analysis that good governance is a cornerstone for successful implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies. As a result, ActionAid has called for governments to promote an eight-point key policy approach for people centred governance.

ActionAid's eight-point approach to people centred governance

- ***Participation**:* In order for development policies to adequately meet the needs of the poor and excluded, governments need to find ways of ensuring that vulnerable people participate in accountability and decision making processes.

- ***Accountability*:** Governments must be held accountable for the promises they make and the policies they put into or fail to put into practice. This lies at the heart of people-centred governance for disaster risk reduction.

- ***Decentralisation:*** Strengthening local government helps to ensure that decision making is appropriate, and enhances government accountability.

[7] See, for example two ActionAid case studies on Cuba and Bangladesh at the end of this paper.

- ***Freedom of and access to information:*** People need to have access to adequate information on policies, rights and important government decisions to ensure participation in disaster reduction.

- ***Legally enforceable obligations:*** Government policies and their obligations towards protection of their citizens in relation to disaster reduction need to be legally enforceable; without this it is all too easy for governments to evade their responsibilities.

- ***Access to justice*:** Justice for all, based on an appropriate legislative framework is essential to protect all citizens, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable.

- ***National coordination and cooperation:*** In order for disaster reduction to be effective there is a need for national level cooperation between the many different organisations and institutions involved.

- ***International cooperation and coordination***: Because disasters do not respect international boundaries, agreements, which ensure trans-national accountability, are important to promote safety across borders.[8]

ActionAid has been one of the leading agencies advocating for better disaster risk reduction policies and practices at the international level. It played a key role in lobbying at the Kobe Conference in January 2005, as well as participation in the follow-up and implementation mechanisms. It is currently the only International Development NGO member of the ISDR Inter-Agency Taskforce for Disaster Risk Reduction. This is the main forum within the United Nations system for devising strategies and policies for the reduction of natural hazards. This includes identifying gaps in disaster reduction policies and programmes and recommending remedial action as well as providing policy guidance to the ISDR secretariat [9]

ActionAid International is also working with identified ActionAid Country Programmes in key disaster prone countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to participate in the implementation mechanism laid out in the HFA. We will support partners at the local and national levels to define the specific priorities for implementation on an individual country basis and monitor progress.

In October 2005 ActionAid was awarded funding from the Department for International Development (DFID) to implement a five-year project in 7 countries on disaster risk reduction through schools. The project, working in Nepal, Malawi, Haiti, Ghana, Kenya and Bangladesh aims to reduce people's vulnerability to natural disasters by contributing towards the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action by making schools in high risk disaster areas safer, enabling them to act as a central point for disaster risk

[8] People Centred Governance: Reducing Disaster for Poor and Excluded People; an ActionAid and Ayuda en Accion policy briefing for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. January 2005

[9] For further information see http://www.unisdr.org/eng/task%20force/tf-functions-responsibilities-eng.htm

reduction, and institutionalising the implementation of the HFA within education systems.

ActionAid's community-based tool: Participatory Vulnerability Analysis

At the community level ActionAid has developed a toolkit, Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA), to assist field workers and communities to analyse people's vulnerability, draw up action plans, mobilise resources and enact appropriate policies, laws, and strategies to reduce their vulnerability to disasters. PVA seeks to establish the links between emergencies and development, recognise developments or events at national and international level and how these impact on communities' vulnerability and use outputs of local level analysis to inform national and international level action and policies. It is based on the idea that communities know their own situations best and so any analysis should be built on their knowledge of local conditions. PVA can empower communities to take charge of their own efforts to identify and address their vulnerability. Leading on from this, PVA aims to motivate communities to enable them to find opportunities to enhance their resilience by seeking to change limiting ideas and circumstances, thereby seeking to reduce their vulnerability.

ActionAid's experience in using PVA as a methodology for analysing vulnerability produces some real benefits. Amongst these are:

- It reveals different aspects and causes of vulnerability whilst also offering mechanisms for follow-up;
- It increases effectiveness of emergency and development activities in the long-term using vulnerability as an indicator by either categorising poor people into groups according to levels of vulnerability, thereby allowing better targeting or being used to establish a baseline for new projects;
- It addresses cross-cutting themes like HIV/AIDS, gender, food rights, etc by providing an in-depth understanding of vulnerabilities which unveils the dynamics of power, inequality and discrimination;
- It is a springboard for women's empowerment;
- It reduces differences in approaches of locals and outsiders, merging them to create acceptability and ownership for both the community and development facilitators;
- PVA can help to make future vulnerabilities more predictive.[10]

[10] For more information see Participatory Vulnerability Analysis: A Step by Step guide for Field Staff, ActionAid International 2005, visit http://www.actionaid.org.ul/788/emergencies.html or email pva@actionaid.org

The Future

As international awareness of the need to mainstream disaster risk reduction considerations into development strategies grows, ActionAid will continue to support our civil society partners around the world to work with national governments to ensure that they implement the Hyogo Framework of Action as part of this effort.

ActionAid's Recommendations for Action

As part of its work to push forward the agenda for integrating disaster risk reduction into national government policies and practices ActionAid makes the following general recommendations:

Donor Governments:

1. Donor governments should continue to support the efforts of United Nations agencies engaged in disaster risk reduction and most particularly the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

2. At a bi-lateral level donor governments should ensure that their own policies and aid practices mainstream disaster risk reduction and encourage recipient governments to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action.

3. Donor governments should develop their own disaster risk reduction strategies and ensure their own compliance with the HFA within their own countries.

4. Donor governments should work to encourage people centred governance, both within their own administrations as well as within recipient countries. This must include encouraging participation, accountability access to information, and justice as well as developing decentralised government and national and international cooperation and coordination.

International Financial Institutions:

5. The International Financial Institutions (IFIs) must mainstream disaster risk reduction into their long-term strategies.

6. The IFIs must strengthen their analytical tools for assessing vulnerability to disasters and build safeguards into the projects they support so as to minimise their negative impact.

Civil Society:

7. Civil Society organisations, including NGOs, community organisations, and scientific and academic organisations must continue to research applications for disaster risk reduction, publicise the need for coherent approaches by their

national governments and work in coordination with governments to ensure that the Hyogo Framework for Action is implemented. They must also work to create an active and informed civil society, which will demand that their governments fully mainstream disaster risk reduction.

Disaster Preparedness Saves Lives: Cuba's Hurricane Michelle Experience

In 2001 Cuba experienced the fiercest hurricane in half a century, with winds of 225 kilometres an hour. Yet only 5 people died as a result of Hurricane Michelle, because the country has a well-organised civil defence system. As warnings of the impending hurricane circulated 700,000 people were evacuated to emergency shelters. Electricity and water supplies were cut to avoid sewage contamination and electrocution from fallen power lines, and people were advised to store water and clear potentially hazardous debris.

Although many people lost their homes and crops and infrastructure were damaged; emergency response that normally lasts several weeks was virtually eliminated and national and international aid was able to concentrate on rehabilitation. [11] Prior to this, in 1998 Cuba had established an Institute for Physical and Spatial Planning, which includes responsibility for building codes and risk zoning to reduce vulnerability of households and critical infrastructure.

[11] *World Disasters Report, IFRC Geneva 2002*

Action Aid Bangladesh: Case study of community based DRR[12]

Disasters are a major impediment to development in Bangladesh, where much of this low-lying country is prone to cyclone damage and flooding as a result of tidal surge. In the 1990s an average of 17,000 people died annually as a result of natural disasters with 14 million affected each year.

ActionAid Bangladesh has been working since 2001 in a comprehensive disaster preparedness and emergency response programme using the Intensive Community Disaster Preparedness Programme (ICDPP) working with poor communities living in the highly vulnerable Char Islands.

The ICDPP focuses on 3 primary activities:

- Enhancing community skills and knowledge in preparation for cyclones and other hazards
- Ensuring participation of vulnerable communities in cyclone shelters
- Reducing the impact of cyclones in the coastal belt.

The components of the programme, all working at the community level include:

- Community based disaster management training as well as exposure to first aid and rescue techniques
- Developing equipped and active community volunteers: each village team includes a cross section of the population and volunteers have 1-band radios to track disaster related messages.
- Ward based contingency planning, including mapping prepared using PVA and Participatory Rapid Assessment techniques. The mapping is then displayed prominently on boards in every ward so that everyone can access it.
- Children's programme on disaster preparedness, including curriculum based teaching and learning, and using children as multipliers of disaster message dissemination amongst family and friends.
- Disaster Day observation
- Reactivation of shelter management committees. Over 2,000 schools-cum-shelters or multi-purpose cyclone shelters have been built, although a further 3,000 are required.
- Networking and research: Coordination at all levels is key to effective disaster risk reduction
- Tree plantation campaign

Results have included well prepared, informed and organised communities, with active leadership teams, well equipped with radios for warning, which fisher folk

[12] Shashanka Saadi, *Community Based Risk Reduction and Poverty Alleviation: A case study from a coastal Char of Bangladesh* November 2005 prepared for Workshop on Strengthening the Resilience of Local Communities in Coastal Areas to Water Related Disasters, Copenhagen, November 2005

can also take advantage of for planning their work, and shelters well maintained and managed.

Quotes from partners and participants:

- *Ours is a Char area surrounded by rivers without any embankment, no other agency, or NGO is in operation here and government assistance is out of the question'*

Teachers of Modhukhali, non-government primary school Baro Baishdia

- *Our approach to disaster, particularly cyclone and storm surge has been changed; in addition to getting exposure to different aspects of cyclone and various issues associated with it, the training exercise has encouraged us to practice several preparatory and mitigation measures to minimise the risk and reduce damage and loss in the event of a cyclone. We have been imbibed, following the training, to maintain solidarity during crisis period, mobilise resources, cash or in kind to forestall emergency, listen to and give importance to storm warning signals, prepared mentally for trekking to cyclone shelters or killa for temporary safety, etc. The learning achieved from the training makes us stronger for any future emergency.*

Manipara community in Boro Baishdia

International Emergencies and Conflict Team
ActionAid International
January 2006