



United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
Regional Office for Arab States



THE WORLD BANK



Syrian Ministry of Local Administration



Regional Workshop on Urban Risk Reduction

Damascus, Syria, 4 – 5 November 2009

Background and Context

The frequency and impact of disasters are rising, with disproportionate impact on poor nations and vulnerable communities. Disasters threaten human lives and livelihoods as well as international and national efforts to advance socio-economic development and eradicate poverty. The risk of disasters caused by natural hazards is intimately connected to the process of development, which can increase or decrease the impact of disasters. Following the alarming trends of disasters, 168 countries have adopted the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Kobe, Japan 2005.

Since the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005, greater awareness of the importance of reducing disaster risk has emerged among different stakeholders. Overall, in the Arab region, there has been some progress on political and national commitment to risk reduction, developing of institutional mechanisms and strategies, enhancing early warning systems and building preparedness and response capacities. However, the commitment often does not translate to operational capacities or commitment of resources to effectively implement the strategies or integrate risk reduction in development plans. There is weak progress on education and public awareness as well as on collection, availability and accessibility of data and information risk and vulnerabilities, tools and methodologies for disaster risk reduction and multi-risk and multi-hazard approaches.

Globally, there has been a broad consensus on the essential role local governments can play to bridge the above gap. It is in fact at the local level that development planning is expected to first take place, and the integration between disaster risk reduction and development is supposed to be realized. Emphasis on disaster risk reduction at the local level is also becoming stronger as cities of all sizes are subjected to rapid population growth, environmental degradation and overall increased conditions of vulnerability. However, while cities and urban areas currently attract more attention due to their high concentration of risk, local and regional authorities have an equally important role to play in medium and small-scale cities, towns, and local rural areas.

In this context, UNISDR is preparing for the Biannual World Campaign for Disaster Risk Reduction 2010 – 2011 “Building Resilient Cities, Addressing Urban Risk”. This campaign will engage local governments and technical experts on urban development and planning all over the world to increase their awareness to urban risks and commit to activities that make urban development

sustainable. Climate change adaptation and safe schools and hospitals are focus areas of the campaign. The outcome document of the International Conference on Building Local Government Alliance in Incheon, Korea, August 2009, serves as a guidance note for the Campaign. (Please see annexed documents for Incheon Declaration and the Campaign).

This Regional Workshop on Urban Risk Reduction will be the first in a series of regional workshops on urban risk reduction aiming at improving the resilience of Arab Cities to disasters. There have been different experiences and wide spectrum of activities already in the region with focus on urban risk reduction, seismic risk reduction, flood mitigation, etc... However, there seems to be still a major gap in integrating risk reduction in city planning and in standardized approaches to risk assessment that is coupled with practical tools to reduce risk and vulnerability and make critical infrastructure in a city resilient to disasters.

The workshop is organized by UNISDR Regional Office for Arab States in collaboration with the World Bank and under the auspices of the Syrian Ministry for Land Administration and UNDP Syria.

Objectives of the Workshop

The regional workshop aims at facilitating sharing of knowledge and experiences on urban risk reduction practices, and identifying challenges and gaps, addressing first and foremost officials and experts working on the technical and planning level of urban development in order to establish a substantial platform of knowledge and tools to approach and engage local decision makers at a later stage during the campaign period. Through the workshop, a network will be established of committed stakeholders engaged in urban risk reduction. This network will support regional activities on urban risk reduction and can feed into and support global urban risk reduction activities; to observe the Global Campaign on disaster risk reduction and to establish a Regional Alliance of Local Governments that will connect to the Global Local Alliance Network.

The main objective of the workshop is to discuss and develop a consolidated and regional assessment tool of urban risks and vulnerabilities. This assessment tool will not only provide indicators to measure risks and vulnerabilities, but also a tool for finding sustainable solutions in a participatory manner. UNISDR and the World Bank have already developed a successful assessment tool for Asia, the City Primer that has been piloted in five cities in the Arab region. Findings from the pilot study, other existing assessment tools and inputs and experiences from the participants will frame the discussions of a comprehensive assessment tool relevant for the region. The core issues will be how to incorporate climate change adaptation and safe schools and hospitals.

The workshop aims at stimulating constructive debates on priority areas of common concern, but also at commitment for future efforts for urban risk reduction in the Arab States region.



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Expected outcomes

The workshop is expected to contribute to the following:

- Common understanding achieved of existing knowledge, practices and challenges on urban risk reduction, including cities' resilience to climate change and resilience of critical infrastructure including safe schools and hospitals measures.
- Substantive and consolidated basis developed for a regional risk assessment tool (including information shared on existing tools), which will then be applied in a selected number of cities.
- Regional elements for the strategy of the World Disaster Reduction Campaign 2010-2011 are discussed and agreed upon.



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WORKSHOP AGENDA

Day 1: Wednesday, 4 November 2009

08:00 – 09:00 Registration

09:00 – 09:30 Opening and Welcoming Speeches

United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (Luna Abu-Swaireh,
UNISDR Regional Office for Arab States)

United Nations Development Programme (Zeina Ali-Ahmad, UNDP Syria)

H.E. the Minister of Local Administration in Syria, Dr. Tamer Al-Haja

09:30 – 10:00 Introductions of participants and objectives of the workshop

10:00 – 10:20 Disaster Risk Reduction, Global and Regional Context (Luna Abu-Swaireh, UNISDR)

10:20 – 10:30 Disaster Risk Reduction UNDP Country Programmes in Arab States (Zubair
Murshed, UNDP-BCPR)

10:30 – 10:45 *Coffee break*

10:45 – 12:30 **Session 1: Urban Risk Reduction**

Chair of Session: Dr. Ma'an Chibli, Mayor of Aleppo, Syria

- World Campaign 2010-2011 on Urban Risk and Resilient Cities (Luna Abu-Swaireh, UNISDR)
- Urban risk reduction initiatives by World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (Asmita Tirawi, World Bank)
- Open Discussion

12:30 – 13:30 *Lunch*

13:30 – 15:00 **Session 2: Risk Assessment existing tools and prospects for regional application**

Chair of Session: Abeer Zeino, Environment Team Leader, UNDP

- "City Profile" – Climate and Disaster Resilience Initiative in Asia. (Dr. Rajib Shaw, Kyoto University, Japan)



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- "City Primer" – Climate Resilient Cities: A Primer on Reducing Vulnerabilities to Disasters. Pilot Application in 5 Arab Cities to be introduced (Asmita Tirawai, World Bank)
- "E-Atlas" and "Hospital Safety Index" tools for building resilience. (Dr. Qudsia Huda, WHO-EMRO)
- City risk assessment tool for the Arab region, why and what? (Guro Kjerschow, UNISDR)

15:00 – 15:30 *Coffee break*

15:30 – 17:30 **Session 3: Mainstreaming urban risk reduction in city planning**

Chair of Session: Gamal Gab-Allah, Head of Housing and Water department in the Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development Division in the League of Arab States.

- Preventing major urban risk and cities development strategies (Dr. Ali Madibo, Arab Urban Development Institute)
- Progress, experiences and challenges – Cities Experiences to be illustrated from: Syria, Turkey, Algeria
- Open discussion to solicit input from participants on additional experiences, practices and challenges.

20:00 Introduction and a tour in the Syrian National Center for Risk Reduction. (note that pick-up transportation arranged at 19:30 leaving from the Sheraton Hotel)

~~~~~**Dinner hosted by Syrian Ministry of Local Administration**~~~~~



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**Day 2: Thursday, 5 November 2009**

- 08:30 – 10:30    **Session 4: Making a City Resilient**  
 Chair of Session: Ghimar Deeb, Democratic Governance and Crisis Prevention Team Leader, UNDP
- Role of local authorities and localizing Hyogo Framework for Action (Dr. Rajib Shaw, Kyoto University, Japan)
  - Urban planning and management: tools for disaster risk reduction (Dr. Ahmed El-Kholei, Menofia University, Egypt)
  - Building resilience and reducing urban risk in Palestine (Dr. Jalal Al-Dabeek, An-Najah University, Palestine)
  - Open Discussion
- 10:30 – 10:45    Coffee Break
- 10:45 – 12:00    **Session 5: A Regional Risk Assessment Tool**
- Working groups discussion on gaps and priorities for action towards risk assessment and reducing urban risk in the region and regional contribution to global efforts including the 2010-2011 World Disaster Reduction Campaign. (break-up into 3 working groups)
- 12:00 – 12:30    • Feedback and discussion from working groups
- 12:30 – 12:45    Coffee Break
- 12:45 – 14:00    **Session 6: The Way Forward – Partnership for Urban Risk Reduction**  
 Chair of Session: Dr. Erfan Ali, Director of Systems and Plans, Ministry of Local Administration in Syria.
- Presenting a short film "Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow"
  - Wrap-up of key issues discussed and presentation on recommendations for next steps.
- 14:30            Lunch ~~~~~ Workshop Closes ~~~~~