

SUMMARY OF MID-TERM REVIEW ONLINE DEBATE

Topic 2: Less effective elements of the HFA

Dates: 5-9 July

Question:

What elements of the HFA have worked less well in reducing disaster risk in country X/region Y and why?

Sub-questions:

What were the three most critical factors that prevented effectiveness in the areas identified?

What are the specific constraints to start or increase investments in disaster risk reduction in country X/region Y?

Rationale

A significant amount of information about actions taken in implementing the HFA is available through the HFA Monitor and ad hoc specific studies. What is less clear is what is hindering HFA implementation in certain countries and regions as well as certain thematic areas? What are the main constraints and how can they be overcome?

The second online debate, organized as part of the Mid-Term Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) coordinated by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), aimed at exploring less effective elements of the HFA. It took place between the 5th and the 9th of July, 2010 on PreventionWeb.net, and was moderated by Ms. Bina Desai, UNISDR Programme Officer for the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Overall the debate sought new perspectives and insights by inviting participants to consider three specific questions: “what elements of the HFA have worked less well in reducing disaster risk in country X/region Y and why?”, “what were the three most critical factors that prevented effectiveness in the areas identified?” and “what are the specific constraints to start or increase investments in disaster risk reduction in country X/region Y?” It counted over 130 registered users, and saw the active participation of 27 individuals affiliated with international organizations, national institutions, research institutes, non-governmental organizations or expressing their views in personal capacity.

The following is a thematic summary of the major points raised in the course of the debate, as highlighted by the moderator.

Comments were made on a large number of issues and participants identified many gaps and barriers to progress against the HFA. Multiple contributions pointed to the problem of political will and commitment, and highlighted both governments and international community weaknesses in tackling issues of accountability, transparency and participation in administrative and decision-making

processes at the local and national levels. Some reinforced this point and stressed that top-down approaches failed to incorporate community representatives and civil societies into both planning and implementation. In particular, it was stated that the rhetoric of “inviting” communities into dialogue was not enough and that civil society as a whole needed to be taken seriously as a key actor in DRR.

Some contributions reiterated that continuing to focus on DRR policy at the national level could lead away from key development sectors on the one hand and delay local change on the other. It was in fact stressed that addressing the underlying risk drivers continued to be determined by the type and strength of governance systems available; in this context one participant highlighted that - in order to address both the risk drivers that translated poverty into disaster risk (e.g. poor land use planning and zoning implementation in flood prone urban areas) and the risk drivers that translated disaster impact into poverty (such as lack of access to social protection and risk transfer) - it was necessary to stop thinking of DRR as “a sector in itself (...) but more as a way to undertake development in hazard-prone areas”.

Several comments zeroed in on the issue of promoting DRR as a priority versus finding ways of promoting risk-sensitive development. In this connection some participants pointed to the difficulty of pushing for increased stand-alone DRR investment while demanding greater integration of DRR into development sectors, while others focused on the relationship between the HFA and national poverty reduction strategies, institutional reforms, MDGs inclusion, and international donor policies.

Some comments moreover highlighted the difficulties of comprehensive reporting on DRR. It was stressed that HFA Priority for Action 4 (Reducing the Underlying Risk Factors) presented specific difficulties, as many of the achievements that could be reported in this context tended to fall “under the radar” due to multiple factors. These included fragmentation of risk management across sectors and administrative units, lack of DRR awareness and capacity, and lack of multi-stakeholder engagement for HFA reporting.

As such, a number of participants discussed the difficulties of creating common systems to assess DRR progress and of developing indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of DRR activities. Overall the lack of common indicators - together with the need for contextual understanding of issues such as social vulnerability and differentiated capacities - were portrayed as major barriers militating against HFA progress. In particular, many stressed that it was necessary to promote evidence-based DRR policies and planning in order to address differentiated vulnerabilities among and within communities.

A few participants also referred to the issue of limited financing, and stated that such was a problem affecting a number of risk management areas. It was stated that comprehensive DRR remained severely under-resourced in comparison to investments in preparedness and response, and that it was necessary to discover what obstacles stood against developing “the kind of commitment that could be turned into higher budget allocations”.

Some moreover pointed out that progress was still very limited on cross-cutting issues such as gender inclusion. It was stated that the application of the label “vulnerable” to women effectively excluded them from many decision-making processes, and therefore that it was necessary to create incentives to promote programs and organizations formally engaging grassroots women as partners in DRR.

Other comments highlighted that DRR-specific laws at the national level played an important role for the success of the HFA, as they not only contributed to the setting of frameworks for DRR policies and programs, but also promoted monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Nevertheless, one participant writing from South Africa reminded the group that even the best legislation did not substitute for effective and well-resourced implementation plans. As such, on the whole DRR-specific laws were considered important in order to promote effective frameworks, yet not per-se sufficient to promote effective change at the community level.

A few participants in addition pointed to the need of creating social demand for DRR. In this regard there was much discussion on the role that civil society and the private sector played in creating critical awareness of risk and putting pressure on public service providers and government bodies. The involvement of the private sector - in particular international business - was considered fundamental as it was deemed to be "a key stakeholder for DRR". Moreover, some highlighted that education was crucial in order to create social demand. One comment in fact stressed that it was necessary to challenge both children and adults to become pro-actively engaged in DRR, and some participants reported on the success of existing initiatives such as UNEDRA, the University Network on Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa.

In the course of the debate many participants also raised different suggestions with a view to the future of the HFA. Some stressed the need to develop a stronger evidence-base for both the drivers of risk and those of risk reduction, and the creation of DRR systems able to include more successfully local risk and vulnerability information into planning systems. Others on the other hand suggested to closely observe key development sectors (e.g. environmental and natural resource management, agriculture and health) and other global campaign and resource mobilization efforts (such as in the areas of climate change and HIV/AIDS) in order to enhance HFA's effectiveness. There was also a recommendation to develop a global financing mechanism for DRR, together with direct-access funding streams for local organizations and communities.

Transcript:

Topic 2: Less effective elements of the HFA

Dear Participants,

We have entered the second week of our online discussion and are gearing up for heated, but hopefully constructive debate. This week's theme is particularly interesting in that we can all relate to it, yet do so in different ways. Each of us can think of a number of areas where we feel the HFA is not being implemented successfully - this week we want to explore WHY this is the case.

Progress against the HFA varies across the different priorities for action as well as across actors (state, regional and international organizations, civil society) and scales (community, district, municipality, national, regional). The last cycle of progress reporting by countries showed that good progress has been made at the level of national policy and legislation. However, progress in implementation has been significantly lower, particularly in harmonizing DRR, adaptation and relevant development policies; establishing integrated public investment systems; and enforcing land use planning and building codes in urban environments.

The mismatch between progress at national policy level and local implementation seems to exist across the globe; but it is expressed in very different ways within each country context. We would like to explore with you which elements of the HFA are less successfully implemented in your country or where you work. And most importantly, we would like to understand better why, you believe, those elements of the HFA have worked less well.

A review of existing literature, country and project documentation has shown that apart from major gaps between national and local level progress and a lack of institutional coherence across the sectors, there are a number of specific aspects of the HFA that are not considered a priority globally. As a consequence, several areas are not addressed sufficiently. These include:

- Difficulty of connecting local level risk assessments with a) scientific assessments and b) national level planning processes.
- Gap between increasing DRR awareness and lack of responsive governance, including a clear division of rights and responsibilities of communities, civil society, local and national government. This includes a lack of human resource development strategies at the national level.
- Serious funding gap at local level: even in country contexts where budgets are available both for ex-ante DRR as well as post-disaster response and recovery, these are often not devolved to the local levels with serious implications for timeliness of response etc.
- Issues of differential vulnerability and social inclusion/exclusion are rarely considered beyond the academic level: though we understand intuitively that different groups in society experience different levels and kinds of vulnerability we seem to be less able to address this by improved targeting of social protection and similar instruments.
- Limited progress on participation and coordination of different actors in planning and implementation of DRR

Therefore, this online discussion will include a critical review of the HFA's recommendations for both Priorities for Action and those for Actors (States, Regional Organisations, International Organisations). We look forward to hearing from you which critical tasks for specific actors outlined in the HFA are less

successfully implemented in your country. And why, do you believe, is there still limited progress in these areas?

Bina Desai – Moderator
Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction
Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Dear all

I just wanted to let you know that I have recently submitted a number of answers to questions in the context of HFA midterm review. These questions were answered in relation to regional to global activities in fire management. On behalf of the Global Wildland Fire Network.

Please note that I noted some deficits when answering the first question (see also attached document for those who wish to have a closer look)

(1) Despite increased efforts mentioned above, the majority of national policies addressing wildland fires in the context of land use, land-use planning, agriculture and forestry, environment in general and disaster management / civil protection in particular, have not yet resulted in action and comprehensive implementation;

(2) Availability of finances / investments in fire management are still insufficient in most countries globally;

(3) Despite the fact that increasing attention is given to the need to concentrate investments in fire prevention, it is noted that still considerably higher resources are committed to fire response, including the use of high-tech assets, e.g. aerial assets, in situations where their efficiency is limited but politically desired (to show action).

I also said by answering question 2:

Although the work of the UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network is clearly committed to the goals of the HFA, the national reporting systems do not necessarily consider that fire issues are relevant to HFA.

And finally see my comments to the question 7.1:

Back in 2005 the proposal to the Ministerial Conference on Forestry at FAO was rejected to develop an “International Wildland Fire Accord” aimed at creating a voluntary (not necessarily legally binding) international agreement to increase the attention concerning the significance of wildland fire as a global issue, and to foster international cooperation in fire management. Instead, the ministerial conference requested the development of “Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines”. These voluntary guidelines address the action a country should take in order to gain control of the use, prevention and suppression of fire. However, similarly to the failure of developing a legally binding instrument to protect the World’s forests (“Forest Convention”) under the UN (UN Forum of Forest) there is a reluctance of countries to support this idea. While a voluntary instrument is still debated, the post-Kyoto Protocol arrangements foresees the REDD instrument (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in Developing Countries). REDD provides at least a partial opportunity to protect forest resources from destruction or degradation – and fire management is certainly required to

successfully do so, at least in some forest types. However, this instrument is restricted both geographically and in terms of vegetation types. Thus, the proposal of the UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network, facilitated by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), should be reactivated to develop an international agreement ("International Wildland Fire Accord"). It should be seen also as a complementary instrument to the HFA and endeavors to strengthen governance in the prevention and response to environmental emergencies, e.g. promoted by the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) under the leadership of UNEP-OCHA.

Best regards from GFMC

Johann G. Goldammer
The Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)

Dear participants,

The different attitudes of the countries to HFA (different prioritization) based on the individual circumstances of the states should not, however, influence the capacity to assess and report the progress in disaster risk reduction activities. Yet, it is observed in some countries of Central Asia that the central government, despite the economic hardships, borrows funds from IFIs, aiming to improve situation in the key sectors of the economy, e.g. reinforcement of a dam on a large river reservoir, with the primary objective being improvement of the irrigation regime and capacity of the reservoir. Such action, however, is not reflected in the HFA progress report as the activity pursuing HFA Priority IV - Reduce the Underlying Risk Factors, and is not viewed by the government as an action in the field of DRR.

This under-reporting and under-estimation may be explained by the low capacity of the government in the area of disaster management, the traditional underestimation and overlooking of DRR in the government programs, and the habit of reporting on accomplishments strictly within one institution. On the other hand, it also serves the proof that the report is not based on wide participation and input, and that the good activities of the government remain individual and separate.

Hypothetically, a country with such situation when reviewing the last five years of work, might overlook its own accomplishments, simply because the activities and projects were not titled as "DRR" but something else. Such situation may exist in a number of countries, and improving the reporting and planning of resources is offered for discussion.

Abdurahim Muhidov

Dear All,

Good day! Despite great efforts by the communities and institutions, disaster management is still a cause of concern. Approved by 165 United Nations member states in Kobe in January 2005, Hyogo Framework for Action provides precursor for global efforts to reduce the devastating consequences of natural disasters. It also provides guidance related to institution building, risk assessment and public engagement. However, some areas do differ from region to region where, perhaps, uniformity is difficult to achieve. One such area is study of social vulnerability. Social vulnerability mainly depends

on factors like population density, age, gender and social caste. Caste systems do differ in different areas; the assessment of social vulnerability may assume different ratings. Another area is capability or manageability. This is defined as the degree to which a community can intervene and manage a hazard in order to reduce its potential impact). It indicates the resilience of the community to hazards. Here also uniform indicator seems to be lacking.

Thanks and regards,

Pradip Dey
(Comments submitted in personal capacity)

Dear Participants,

"The higher scores reported in the GAR suggest that while awareness and establishment of policy may be moving ahead at the national level in Nigeria, there is an urgent need to now focus on action at the local level." - Views from the Frontline Full Report, 2009.

There has been national awareness especially with the effort of the National Emergency Management Agency [NEMA] at raising awareness of disaster risk through workshops and adverts providing contact details for key personnel in the event of an emergency.

There has also been greater governance shown by civil society organizations on DRR when compared to government and community representatives.

What is lacking is the incorporation of all stakeholders into the DRR process in terms of planning and execution of policy. This has been lacking. Its rather a top-down approach, so we need a mechanism through which key DRR actors especially at the international community can demand a transparent process for involvement of all stakeholders in the policy planning and execution.

For instance in most countries, regulatory agencies in charge of DRR do not have a civil society nor community representative component. Civil Society and community may, i said may sometimes be invited to participate in DRR workshops, period! Thats not enough, so how can civil society particularly be involved at the level of input into the policy planning and execution?

Our experience from the Views from the Frontline Survey indicates that:

- a. Actors at community level often don't communicate or work together
- b. Community members don't have the capacity or confidence to take initiatives or exercise leadership
- c. Community members often see local government as not understanding the local issues around DRR
- d. Government is sometimes distrustful of community groups and civil society, and may exclude them from political processes and decisionmaking.
- e. Civil society may be distrustful of local government and lacking in confidence to build relationships with policymakers

When we talk about DRR adaptation from a rural perspective and run across critical areas like land use act, it becomes a challenge. A challenge because most urban areas here still run traditional institutions - chieftaincy, religious etc and when these institutional concerns are not accommodated at the policy level, policy implementation can be thwarted and as such HFA suffers. So we need to

accommodate traditional knowledge and other stakeholder concerns at the highest level of administration to effectively ensure that HFA dividends gets to the grassroots.

Thank you.

Otu, Uwem Robert.
President
African Youth Movement

I personally think that the HFA per se effectively removes DRR from mainstream development and progress towards the MDGs. While the strategic goals of the HFA include the integration of DRR into sustainable development policies and planning, a disproportionate emphasis is still placed on emergency preparedness, response and recovery. Emphasising "Disasters" which in reality cause fewer losses than extensive risks, shifts attention away from the underlying cause of widespread suffering, namely poverty.

The GAR 2009 clearly identifies poverty and vulnerable rural livelihoods as drivers of risk. Risk assessment should not only focus on catastrophic major events, but also on the slow onset or creeping cumulative effects of smaller often unrelated events which rapidly undermine the fragile asset base of resource poor people.

We all know that essentially all disasters are human-made. A catastrophic event whether initiated by a natural phenomenon or human activities only becomes a disaster when those affected are unable to cope. The sensitivity, resilience and preparedness of the affected community (elements of their vulnerability) coupled with the intensity of the hazard determine the extent of the disaster. The severity of the disaster is largely determined by the vulnerability of the affected people. While poverty and vulnerability are not the same, the poorest are most often the most vulnerable.

The HFA while encompassing worthy goals, should strive for greater involvement in the abolition of poverty – the prime driver of risk. Instead of being seen as a stand-alone initiative whereby 168 signatory governments prepare for and do battle with cataclysmic events, the HFA needs to place greater emphasis on Priority 4, "Reduce the underlying risk factors".

Piet van den Ende

Dear Participants,

Always one to enjoy a good debate I share a few thoughts with you on why we may see a substantial increase rather than a substantial decrease in disaster losses by the end of the ten year Hyogo Framework in 2015 given the increasing upwards worldwide trend for disaster risk (concentrated in the rapidly growing cities in developing countries).

Whilst it is clear that the HFA has been useful in supporting the establishment of international, regional and national DRR policies it is also clear these policies are not resulting in enough action at the local level. Policies are being weakened by a lack of resources and capacity to carry them out. This is particularly the case at the interface between local government and affected communities; whilst

national governments are the primary actors in policy formulation, it is local authorities, local civil society and community-based groups that are the primary actors for converting policies into practice. Unfortunately, least progress has been made in addressing "underlying risk factors" - even though HFA Priority for Action 4 provides the greatest opportunity to reduce risk.

So why is this the case....

1. Is it a lack of national political ownership of the DRR agenda?
2. Is it a lack of awareness and understanding on behalf of vulnerable people of the risk they face?
3. Is it the difficulties of mainstreaming DRR into the relevant development sectors
4. Or is it more about a fundamental understanding of the causes of disaster risk?

Whilst there is truth in all of the above I want to expand more on the fourth question. According to the GAR vulnerability has improved considerably over the last few decades - the increasing trend in disaster losses is driven by the rapid increase in exposure. Accordingly, sooner or later we have to deal with the growth of exposure that is presently coupled with economic growth. Central to this are the related problems of poverty and livelihoods; Livelihoods is about the ways and means that people "make a living". Livelihoods are dependent on access to assets. And it is poor people, often with a lack of assets and alternative livelihoods options, in an attempt to gain employment are forced to migrate to urban centres where they are exposed to risk by living in hazard-prone areas with an inadequate "build environment" (physical infrastructure).

It is estimated by 2050 75% of the world's population will live in urban centres. Within this context the primary means for minimising risk lies in the design, location and construction of a build environment that is sensitive to natural risk conditions. And the key to building safer more resilient communities is to respect and understand the natural environment. In the words of E. F. Schumacher - the build environment should be designed and developed in balance with the capacity, scale and limits of the natural environment. Not surprisingly, understanding the natural environment and ecosystems is also vital in strengthening livelihood security and regulating hazards.

The cross-cutting issue here is "governance" . Governance is the means by which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate differences and shape economic, political and social interaction to meet their rights and entitlements. Good governance, in the sense of capable, accountable and responsive government working together with civil society and at-risk communities is critical to increasing public accountability, facilitate the integration of risk considerations into social, economic and environment sectors, opens political space to people to engage in policy dialogue, contribute indigenous knowledge, and negotiate access to assets essential for sustainable livelihoods. Nothing of significance can be achieved without the support and initiatives of responsible political leaders and governments - but let us not forget the primary responsibility of all governments is to protect the health, safety and well-being of all its citizens, and that it is the local community / authority that is the fundamental entity where resilience must be built.

Of course, aspects of the above are written in the Hyogo Framework. But if we are to get ahead of the disaster curve we need to develop an effective strategy that understand the leverage points, prioritises actions and scarce resources and is based on a deep understanding of the relationship between the core determinant that can either create or reduce risk. And given everything is related to everything else it is clear we need to work much closer than at present across the different levels and with other disciplines and associates (including the private sector) particularly those working on issues of governance, economic development, sustainable livelihoods, the natural environment and build environment. This will require clarity as to what is in- and out-of-scope of the Hyogo Framework for

Action, the formation of partnerships and alliances and strategic leadership to foster an inclusive vision and chart a way forward in times of increasing uncertainty and unpredictability.

Last but not least let us recognise that increasing risk can also be viewed as an opportunity, and the real opportunity climate change offers is to fundamentally change the way we currently do development" to create a better life for all.

Marcus

Marcus Oxley
Chairman
Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction

Dear Online-Debaters,

Thank you for this first round of excellent contributions to the discussion on limited progress and gaps. A number of pertinent issues have been raised, ranging from concrete suggestions for raising the profile and effectiveness of fire prevention, to discussions on the complexities of reporting DRR achievements, and the need to focus our DRR efforts on poverty reduction and local action. Reflecting on these, many new questions have come to the fore, which deserve our consideration.

In his contribution, Abdurahim Muhidov highlights the difficulties of comprehensive reporting on DRR. Particularly HFA Priority for Action 4 (Reducing the Underlying Risk Factors) remains notorious in that many of the achievements that could be reported under this Action, tend to fall under the radar – due to a high level of fragmentation of risk management across sectors and administrative units; a lack of DRR awareness and capacity; and a lack of multi-stakeholder engagement for HFA reporting.

Uwem Robert reinforces and expands on this and points to top-down approaches that fail to incorporate community representatives and civil societies into both planning and implementation in many countries. He states that the rhetoric of “inviting” communities into dialogue is not enough and that civil society as a whole needs to be taken seriously as a key actor in DRR.

A question to all of us then: do we agree with Uwem’s analysis of this limited ability to engage relevant parties? Are there other reasons we can think of for limited multi-stakeholder planning than those outlined by Abdurahim? And how can we overcome the problem of ‘under-reporting achievements in DRR’ – something that will become even more critical in the coming years?

Related, yet pushing these questions further even are Piet’s and Marcus’ comments on the fact that continuing to focus on DRR policy at national level may move us away from key development sectors on the one hand and delay local change on the other.

So where are the barriers to improving our understanding of disaster risk as a consequence of development and governance failures?

In fact, the Global Assessment Report 2009 showed that a number of governance factors, most importantly the lack of citizen’s access to political decision-making (voice and accountability) and limited political authority underpinning a large number of risk reduction initiatives, were identified as important drivers of risk. The Report pointed out that this will require a change in the culture of public administration towards a renewed effort to reorient the implementation of development plans, including risk reduction, to build on partnerships between public and private service providers, governments and civil society. Where are the key obstacles to this today?

In his comment today, Pradip Dey reminds us of another important issue: the lack of common indicators and the need for contextual understanding, especially of issues such as social vulnerability and differentiated capacities. I would like to invite Pradip and any of you to elaborate on this a bit further – is the fact that vulnerability is socially constructed a reason for limited progress against the HFA? Which elements of the HFA have the potential to address this?

Last but not least, Johann Goldammer, on behalf of the Global Wildland Fire Network, has highlighted key gaps that are relevant not only for fire prevention, but pertain to the context of all hazards. Johann specifically mentions limited financing: a problem raised in several other comments so far and a trend that holds true for a number of risk management areas. Comprehensive DRR remains severely under-resourced in comparison to investments in preparedness and response. The reasons are complex, yet fairly well known – or so we thought. But what are the real barriers here in developing the kind of commitment that can be turned into higher budget allocations?

The contributions so far have produced many more ideas than outlined above and I hope the discussion will continue in this vein. I look forward to your comments on the important issues raised and the many additional thoughts and ideas you all will have.

With best regards,

Bina Desai – Moderator
Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction
Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Dear all,

I have been reading through many of your comments and I agree with most of what has been said, I just want to say that it is not the issue of HFA and any other strategies and guiding procedures (which are extremely important and provide a vital guidance), but it is the willingness of governments to apply physical and social resilience into their societies and assets. There many articles that have been published about this such as:

- Achour, N. (2008) Post-disaster healthcare: What is missing? Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) Newsletter, 14(3), pp. 10-11.

Available from

[http://www.adpc.net/v2007/IKM/ASIAN%20DISASTER%20MANAGEMENT%20NEWS/2008/Newsletter_10-Mar_final\(V2\).pdf](http://www.adpc.net/v2007/IKM/ASIAN%20DISASTER%20MANAGEMENT%20NEWS/2008/Newsletter_10-Mar_final(V2).pdf)

- Achour, N. & Price, A.D.F. (2010) Resilience Strategies of Healthcare Facilities: Present and Future, Proceeding of the CIB World Congress 2010, May, Salford, UK. [Available from <http://www.cib2010.org/post/files/papers/629.pdf>]

The above articles discuss only the case of healthcare facilities but they can be extended to include the rest of assets/infrastructure.

Best wishes,

Nebil

Dr Nebil Achour, BSc MSc PhD
Research Associate
Dept. of Civil & Building Eng.
Loughborough University

Despite naming gender as a cross cutting issues that must be addressed in all 5 Priorities of Action, HFA implementation has been poor in this respect. One reason for this is that disaster risk reduction programs essentially classify women living in poor, disaster prone communities as being 'vulnerable'. The moment any group is labeled "vulnerable" it is immediately marginalized from decision making processes and treated as victims or aid recipients. If we flipped this around and saw grassroots women's organizations and efforts as part of the solution then we would see that grassroots women represent huge constituencies with capacities to build more resilient communities.

Disaster Risk Reduction programs are often narrowly focused on areas that are explicitly linked to disaster. DRR for the most part continues to be focused on structural issues and a little bit of risk mapping thrown in for good measure.. Improving water and sanitation or food security has often been left out of conversations on disaster planning. When grassroots women are asked about DRR or resilience, they will say that they are not involved in it. Yet there are organized women's groups working on health, sanitation, food security, protecting bio diversity and building institutional partnerships that improve coordination and cooperation with governments. All this is vital for the survival of communities in the face of disaster and climate change but goes unaccounted for, both by grassroots organizations themselves and policymakers.

DRR programs are also too narrowly focused on protection of assets (development is more about the accumulation of assets) but to keep poor people with a meagre asset base continually engaged in DRR on a long term basis requires that DRR be packaged along with development. i.e. asset protection has to be bundled up with asset accumulation.

Where grassroots contributions are building resilient communities, policymakers and planners have to take the next step and formalize the roles of grassroots women in risk reduction programs, create incentives that promote local and national programs that formally engage grassroots women as partners and provide resources for grassroots women to demonstrate their capacities to scale up vulnerability reduction strategies.

Suranjana Gupta

Dear Participants,

In respond to Q.3 Mid-Term Review.

I really want to share few thoughts with you, I wish that HFA has been utilize in international and national polices for better risk reduction.

Infact what is seem to me is commitment and seriousness of the governments through out the globe; of including DRR in their national polices, and implementation of the application. This is not the matter yet why they are not using scientific methods/assessment in regional/national level, on this level

priority should be given induction of DRR in national police through legislations. Then I hope the gap between DRR awareness would be less.

In new Law:

1 - DRR expert has to be appointed for the capacity building of institutions in concept of DRR and making viable planning for DRR implementation.(includes scientific assessment).

2 - Monitoring of projects on national and local levels.

The owner ship has be to given by any government to communities who's the real and first responders, civil society and local governments. Which will increase human resource development strategies. There is still problem arising in funding to local governments for DRR implications, mostly in developing countries; funds are allocated for post-disaster not for DRR, so this issue came under the making of DRR polices at national level. Still there is gap of coordination and knowledge management in between line departments, key stakeholder's and lack of trust in between vulnerable communities and government because of not implementation of serious and concert development strategies.

Regards

Kashif Inam Yousaf Zai
Project Manager
Disaster Preparedness

Dear Participants,

I wholeheartedly agree on Marcus's reading of the situation. Unless "Governance" is made central to the entire Hyogo Framework, none of the policies are going to move from rhetoric to action. I am speaking more with my experience in India- While the National level policy makers are usually quite pro-active in developing good policies, the translation of those into workable action/ activities decreases as one goes down the line from State to District to Block to Panchayath.

I would like to use the "push-pull" theory here, where the National level pushes it but a strong civil society demands it, thereby providing a strong "pull" mechanism. However, due to various reasons, the capacities for demanding rights or even taking decisions decrease as one goes lower in the administrative set- up.

Dr. John Twigg, in his "Characteristics of a disaster resilient community" has developed some good indicators for governance at the National level. Probably when one is relooking at the HFA, we should also look at developing strong indicators at regional and local levels.

If development and vulnerability are two sides of the same coin, then one should also explore linking up the indicators to the MDGs, thereby providing a mainstream impetus for reducing vulnerabilities.

with warm regards,
Annie George

Dear All,

The HFA has been a significant international DRR policy which has brought awareness to governments of their responsibilities in reducing impacts and effects of disasters. Thus, HFA's focus has been on the structure which generates and creates vulnerability to disasters. The assumption here is that communities with strong, functional DRR systems are likely to be more resilient than those with weak organizational structures. We have seen over the years great emphasis on the National Platforms and the Davos Annual Global Platform. The platforms have been useful in awareness raising; they have promoted debate on DRR policies and implementation frameworks. However, there are a few points, which have been already pointed by others but perhaps needing more emphasis.

1. The HFA's assumption of focusing on the macro (global and national structures) and ignoring the micro (local communities and household) is a source of tension cause for concern. Building resilient communities cannot be divorced from the agency of affected/target/beneficiary/at risk communities. The platforms or whatever structures, are hanging or hovering somewhere in the air without strong foundation. The starting point should have been the other way round - agency first and structure last. Like what Suranjana Gupta has already outlined - where are the so-called 'vulnerable' groups? where is gender? Where are the children? Where are the youth? Where are victims of HIV and AIDS? Where is the household?
2. The HFA has meagre funding streams as compared with the Climate Change and Adaptation. Thus, governments, particularly in the 'developing world', have been struggling to raise funds to meet the demands of their citizens in education and health provision. The implementation of five the priorities of the HFA becomes one of the less significant priorities of governments. As a result, the gloss reports that are submitted or shared at platforms like Davos do not reflect ground realities. In most cases those reports are authored by officials who have never been to some disaster prone areas due to lack of resources. They have to rely on the 'unsustainable' NGO resources for transport, allowances, stationery and IT facilities. In fact, some developing countries have not started implementing the HFA in real terms - they may start implementing it after 2015!
3. Allied to 2. is related to lack of evidence-based DRR policies. Lack of funding streams makes it difficult to conduct robust research programmes that would assist policy makers craft sustainable DRR policies. While most governments have crafted or are the process of crafting policies, in most cases these policies are difficult to implement because they are merely a modification of colonial policies that were modelled on the 1st and 2nd World Wars, and the Cold War.

Thanks

Dr. Bernard Manyena
Research Associate
Disaster and Development Centre
Northumbria University

Dear All

I am joining in the debate a bit late but I hope my contributions would be meaningful. I agree with the view that the HFA should not put more emphasis on macro global and national structures at the expense of micro (community/household level structure) where hazard impacts are greatest. I would like to propose that as we review the HFA in terms structures we prioritize putting in place community

based DRR systems. May be a combination of bottom-up and top-down approach would be ideal because the macro level is also important. We should "think globally but transform locally".

Although there is the global assertion and agreement on the importance of DRR on the argument that hazards/disasters erode/reduce development gains there is still a big governance gap on the part of most governments in terms of allocation of resources to put in place systems to safeguard development gains. Many government can't just delink from reactive approaches of response to emergencies as opposed to proactive DRR approaches of pre-empting adverse effects/impacts of hazards.

Joseph Mutsigwa
Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist
UNDP

Dear Madam,

Less Effective elements of the Hyogo Frame Work of Action

Names : Prof. Smita Kadam & Prof. V B Abrol, Saritsa Foundation, India

It is heartening to mention that Saritsa Foundation has transformed ideals of Hyogo Frame work of action in reality in its way of smaller contributions by reaching to 1,72,500 people especially children, women, disabled and most vulnerable poor who had no access to information for capacity building to reduce risks from disaster and impacts of climate change as a "Mobile University" in past 10 years. The teams of experts of Saritsa Foundation have been reaching to rural and urban poor in India, a dimension, which so far, has not been implemented in its genuine contextual understanding where vulnerability of poor has not gained needed impetus and attention.

In past 5 years, Hyogo Frame work of action has been an effective methodology to influence the influencers at national, state and local government's levels to evolve workable plans to reduce risk from disasters. Also experts, technocrats, academicians and civil society organizations under the leadership of UNIDSR have contributed volumes of information, technical knowledge, studies and statements for evolution of objectives, plans and strategies at national state and local government levels. Yet, this valuable process of "Trickle down" process has missed a vital component of Hyogo Frame work of action: the community partnership and preparedness.

There is a wide gap in the approaches adopted to mainstream the poor, especially women, school children and person with disabilities who do not have their values or identities as per envisaged priority in Hyogo Frame work of action. It has been visualized on the basis of analyzing action plans made and implemented so far by national, state and local authorities.

Poverty, disasters, inclusive and sustainable development are interwoven. The recognition of this factor has to gain needed importance because all effort of poverty eradication are pushed back by frequent disasters and impacts of climate change

This important factor does not appear to be taken in to account by the authorities who in India are mostly preparing people in local governance and developing mechanism to respond to disaster and relief without considering the partnership of the community in planning, decision making and relief operations. This is a well researched and experienced view.

One very important dimension of Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives has been a little ambiguous in sensitizing people in governance to give equal importance to build capacity of the communities for man made disaster like Terrorism, Chemical, Biological Nuclear Hazards, Fire and many forums of epidemics. This needs equal priority in the later half of the implementation of Hyogo Frame work of action.

How these lesser attended priorities can be taken care in the second half of the Hyogo Frame work of action?

The suggested ideas include :

1. UNISDR and other international, nations and states authorities have to adopt "Trickle up" approach to mainstream millions of women, children, persons with disability and vulnerable poor with specific accountability in utilization of allocated resources for the purpose.
2. It is vital that partnership of women, persons with disabilities and disadvantaged group of poor in Urban and rural India are given equal opportunities by creating local organization with support of committed, community leaders, community forums, religious organization and dedicated NOGs with missionary zeal who can reach to them at their "Door Steps" with experts to build their capabilities.
3. Encouraging millions of women, 70 millions persons with disabilities in urban and rural India, need access to information, education and training as well as skills to use local resources and local experiences to be resilient to disasters. This will need resources and transparent use. UNISDR and National Governments have to mutually achieve this objective.
4. Develop tools which can be used at grass root level
5. Have monitoring mechanism to quantify the planed progress
6. Vulnerable community in cities have to be made equal partners in the "Making Cities Resilient Campaign to Disasters" in spite of paucity of resources and will amongst local authorities. Saritsa Foundation has launched such a campaign as "Urban Risk Reduction Mumbai Initiative" – Safer Schools, Safer Hospitals and Safer Mumbaikars, where 30,000 schools children of 100 schools, 7500 communities representatives of Municipal wards, 1000 women participants, 2000 persons with disabilities and 250 Hospital staff employees are planed to be prepared during the period of 2 years. The campaign was launched on 14 October 2009 and progressing well. The similar campaign is planed to be launched as "Urban Risk Reduction Jaipur Initiative" in August 2011 for 2 years. Such innovative campaigns are to be replicated and supported to make the campaign a success.

Prof. Smita Kadam & Prof. V B Abrol
Saritsa Foundation
India

It would be good to see more 'prioritising' within the priorities for action of the HFA. These 5 priority areas cover just about everything related to DRR, making it difficult for governments (national and local) and communities to know where to start. Plus not all aspects of DRR are equally important everywhere. For coastal areas with low population density and high exposure to hurricanes and flooding, preparedness planning -including evacuations- is key to reducing disaster risk. Land-use planning and housing relocation programmes, while desirable, may seriously undermine coastal

livelihoods. On the other hand, in densely populated informal settlements with exposure to earthquakes, implementing land-use plans is clearly more of a priority. In both cases, a careful diagnosis of political and institutional frameworks is needed first in order to establish what is possible in the short vs medium-to-long term. Further research then is needed in order to be able to make more specific recommendations about how to promote DRR in different contexts.

Emily Wilkinson

Dear friends

Allow me to add my opinions about the bullet point below:

"Gap between increasing DRR awareness and lack of responsive governance, including a clear division of rights and responsibilities of communities, civil society, local and national government. This includes a lack of human resource development strategies at the national level." Bina Desai

Firstly, within the South African context, there is a huge gap between increasing DRR awareness and responsible governance. DRR is not a priority focus area of politicians at the local level and possibly even at the provincial and national levels, because disasters occur infrequently and as a result have little appeal for its promotion especially during a pre-election period. Issues of homes and sewerage, electricity and water infrastructure are the key buzz words and are the ones to most possibly attract voters. The benefits of creating a sustainable infrastructure for those risks identified and which would impact on the very continued supply of the resources are not even considered. This may mean that education of the communities is insufficient or even lacking. The international community needs to play a greater role in encouraging countries to tackle the challenges of reducing disaster risk through school programmes which provides a financial cash injection into schools (a reward) who have made a considerable difference in their communities to reducing disaster risk.

When one considers the many pieces of legislation available in South Africa and takes time to read it, one soon discovers that much of this legislation is geared towards reducing disaster risk on a wide front. However, the agencies that execute the implementation of these various legislations are not even aware of the fact that they are busy reducing disaster risk. This is then not reported to the National, Provincial or Municipal Disaster Management Centre. There is thus a need to strengthen reporting mechanisms, combined with education and information on how the legislation related to one focus area, say water, can and should be implemented, in order to better report on progress made in DRR.

The next concern is the lack of resources - not necessarily financial resources - but that too. Human resources which have a wide variety of skills through proper training and university programmes are a key element in reducing disaster risk. Humans interact with each other passing on vital information in reducing disaster risk and avoiding disasters. Many of the larger municipal entities in South Africa have reasonable numbers of human resources to deal specifically with all the components of disaster management including prevention, mitigation, response, recovery and preparedness. The large city type municipalities are able to utilise human resources to take DRR down to grass roots level in communities. But, some larger city type municipalities and most local municipalities have little human resources to deal with these matters and they struggle to get to terms with responding to minor humanitarian events resulting in them not finding time or the strength to also give of themselves to reducing disaster risk - which we all recognise as "The Prize". An example of this is one City that has three operational disaster management officials to service the city of between 2.5m and 3.2 million

people. Their efforts are likened to attempting to stir up the sea using a teaspoon. Why is this so? Again the lack of understanding by senior officials is a result of insufficient knowledge of disaster management and DRR resulting in other services receiving the greater share of the financial resources related to the appointment of human resources. Then the lack of adequately trained disaster management officials is added together with a dose of red tape and one has the perfect solution to not get anyone appointed to a position. Yet, these disaster management officials through the very work they do are ensuring that a community stays safe and can then vote when they need to do so. The challenge is much greater in District and Local Municipalities where more often than not the total staffing compliment consists of 1, to 4 people and this includes the administrative positions.

In conclusion, there is a strong need to increase capacity in disaster management so that the priorities of the HFA may be fulfilled. The need to increase knowledge of the benefits of DRR actions must be made priority by government so that it may be mainstreamed and so reduce the severity of disasters and increase capacity to effectively deal with them. It is fine to have laws on the statute books but one needs to implement them in a manner, with the necessary resources, which will cause them to make a difference.

Regards,

Anthony R. Kesten
South Africa
(personal opinion)

Dear All,

We've had so many insightful contributions today already, that I will aim to quickly highlight just some of the new points that were added to the discussion.

Some of the salient points made in earlier contributions were reiterated and supported by today's debaters. These include limited progress in building resilience and assets at the local levels, lack of funding for DRR, particularly at community level, and resulting low capacities for engagement of and with local actors. All of today's comments show once more that while experiences differ from country to country, several key problems are common across the globe. And this holds true for some of today's new aspects of the debate too:

Suranjana Gupta points out the limited progress on gender as a cross-cutting issue and the fact that often women are labeled "vulnerable" thus excluding them from many decision-making processes. Instead, she suggests, we should create incentives for programmes and organizations to formally engage grassroots women as partners in DRR.

Kashif Inam highlights the important role that legislation plays not only in setting frameworks for DRR policy and programmes, but also to ensure monitoring and accountability. In addition, Anthony Keston reminds us that even the best legislation does not substitute for effective and well-resourced implementation plans.

In his comment, Bernard Manyena's expands particularly on the need for evidence-based DRR policies and planning. Something that Smita Kadam and V B Abrol of the Saritsa Foundation are concerned with too as they share with us a compelling analysis of how rarely differentiated vulnerabilities among and within communities are addressed. If you haven't already done so, I invite you all to read their detailed recommendations for action.

Many other new and useful comments were made and I suggest we focus on these and the earlier comments made and respond to these in our next round of contributions. To start this off I'd like to pose two questions to all – one that directly refers back to some of the earlier top-line comments, and one, which gets us straight into the nitty-gritty of this week's topic:

1. Would you agree with Emily Wilkinson that we need to see more 'prioritising' within the Priorities for Action, based on solid context-specific diagnoses of disaster risk; or would you tend to side with Piet van den Ende, who has provoked us to think hard about whether our focus on disaster risk has made progress on the underlying risk drivers difficult if not impossible?
2. Building on the comments on key gaps, specifically around partnerships and funding, which of the related tasks for implementation and follow-up by key actors as outlined in the HFA (i.e. the second page of the Summary of the HFA) face particular constraints in your country/ area of work?

Bina Desai – Moderator
Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction
Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to concentrate on priority three of the HFA which deals with 'building knowledge innovation and education to build resilience at all levels through education' which is an excellent ideal and one which I believe can and should make one of the greatest impacts. However the way to achieve this has not been clear with the onus left to national governments to achieve. There have been publications that have highlighted good practice and in some cases these have come from governments, including the use of drills, educational material (of which there is an increasing amount of if you examine the prevention web online resources). However this does not guarantee the suitability of the resources or even if they are properly researched (i.e. accurate and giving the correct safety information), or whether they achieve their aims of helping recipients to change their behaviour and becoming safer citizens. Education should not be an all encompassing blanket, but tailored to the specific needs of the community. This means that adaptive and interactive materials that can be applied in a range of educational contexts - formal and informal, schools, clubs and societies (such as through the scout and guide movement) and community organisations. By 'interactive' this should mean engaging and allowing end users to want to become involved in practical action to help their family or community. If children and youth are challenged by resources instead of being taught a steady stream of didactic and unimaginative resources from a range of well-meaning INGO's, GO's and NGO's they are more likely to become involved in making themselves and their communities safer. However there needs to be the resources (both financial and institutional) to support their involvement.

Resources for these initial types of educational engagement need not be expensive and 'commissioned' from scratch in order to meet these aims. The social network that I set up two years ago and now with 200 members has examples of short video clips and resources for schools, clubs and societies. Please feel free to view at: <http://edu4drr.ning.com> We should also endeavour to encourage the creative community more to make a wide range of media to help reinforce safety and preparedness messages. Excellent examples where this has occurred in support of educational messages in the UK is the quiet beautiful seatbelt safety advert which can be viewed at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-8PBx7isoM&sns=em>

This has been viewed almost ten million times and provides an interesting talking point for anyone watching and sharing through social media sites like Twitter and Facebook. In the USA, at the time of the first Southern California shakeout, a local Arts college produced a series of adverts, posters, design, multimedia and videos which were then rebroadcast across news networks in southern California. These are just the sort of message that children and youth pick up on and share with their families and if followed up in class or at clubs and societies, may begin to have an impact.

By understanding the dangers and taking part in drills and exercises, it was children and youth that demonstrated appropriate behaviour when an earthquake did occur, some months later as shown in this short video: <http://edu4drr.ning.com/video/arnie-says-the-kids-are-all>

Finally, I believe that we should not be afraid to admit our own shortcomings when it comes to education for DRR. As an educator it is important to adapt and be flexible, so that if something is not working or a message or key concept not transmitted well or not understood, I can change small things so that it can be understood. I make mistakes, my students make mistakes, but we all endeavour to learn from them - I hope that as colleagues involved in this work we can also learn.

Kind Regards,

Justin Sharpe

Good day everyone,

Thoughts for the day following on from Bina's comments; An extensive evidence-base finds the principle opportunities for reducing disaster risk are to be found in addressing the underlying risk factors- governance; livelihoods (aka economic development); ecosystems; build environment; knowledge and education. Addressing underlying risk factors was the principle recommendation of the UNISDR GAR 2009. It follows that to do this effectively we need to understand the relationship between these different elements and thereby develop strategic alliances and partnerships to address these issues in a coherent, integrated way given all things are connected. We also need to stop thinking of DRR as a sector in itself (which makes us focus on disaster preparedness and response) but more as a way to undertake development in hazard-prone areas. The goal of DRR is to minimise the human, social, economic and environmental losses associated with extreme events. This fits directly with the first and primary (although not exclusive) responsibility of governments no matter what form that government takes - i.e. to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of all its citizens.

As commented earlier, at heart this is a governance rather than a technical issue. DRR is not a priority focus area of national and/or local politicians and the changes we are looking for in terms of policy reforms, responsive, inclusive and accountable governments, and adequate funding for building local capacities will not emanate from states alone. It requires a critically aware and engaged citizenry supported by a strong civil society working in partnership with local authorities and the private sector. This will only happen if DRR and public perceptions of acceptable levels of risk are made relevant to the more immediate needs and priorities of vulnerable people: health, livelihoods, housing, water, sanitation, education. Crucially for those concerned in promoting DRR it requires getting the balance right between top-down / bottom-up approaches - UNISDR biennial work programme remains heavily government-centric with an emphasis at regional and national levels- it is local authorities, local civil society and community-based groups who are the primary actors for converting policies into practice.

We also need to seize the opportunity climate change offers to change the way we do development, particularly economic development (its the economy stupid). Disaster prevention and response/

recovery provides highly leveraged entry points to influence development processes - no doubt these issues will be raised in subsequent debates. A doctor usually treats the patient where the pain is most acute

All this requires a reconfiguration of the priorities and strategies of the HFA to reflect what the evidence base is telling us - and then we need to invest our scarce resources to reflect this priorities. It means we need to understand the function advantage and strategic positioning of the multitude of different actors involved in driving through these changes - not least UNISDR. And last but not least we need to be able to measure the effectiveness of our endeavours by investing in monitoring outputs and outcomes at the local level.

Marcus

Marcus Oxley
Chairman
Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to draw your attention to one big sector which needs to be more involved in DRR, which is the private business sector, especially the international enterprises. The volcanic eruption in Iceland was one indication of how one disaster can affect the international supply chains and thus bring huge economic damage. In the last several years, there is growing interest towards Business Continuity Management among some enterprises. It seems that the enterprises may be keen on the continuity of their own operations. However there is a broader need for the businesses to be more exposed to the fact that they have a big role to play in DRR.

Satoru Nishikawa

Dear all,

Adding on previous discussion contributions, particularly by Justin Sharpe who said "Education should not be an all encompassing blanket, but tailored to the specific needs of the community", regional DRR education initiatives are of particular interest. One such initiative is UNEDRA, University Network for Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa.

UNEDRA brings together African and other experts interested in DRR research and education in Africa, to promote joint-programs within African institutions. Some of past UNEDRA activities are listed here: www.itc.nl/Pub/unu-dgim/UNEDRA-university-network/Overview-of-activities.html

Joining efforts between different educators across disciplinary and national borders is one way of improving HFA.

Regards,

Mlenga

Dear all,

Its really great to share the views based on the experiences and on-going situations. I do agree with the comments:

"not all aspects of DRR are equally important everywhere".

"These 5 priority areas cover just about everything related to DRR, making it difficult for governments (national and local) and communities to know where to start."

I would say, the 5 priorities cover everything. It is not making or putting the national or local government in difficulties but preparing them to arise to address the needs. Most of the governments (national and local) need supports to fit them.

Of course, the application of DRR practices differ disaster to disaster. It foes not mean that there are some "less important" issues included in the HFA.

Akhteruzzaman Sano
Management Adviser
Save the Earth Cambodia

Dear Participants,

Yesterday, a number of you responded with thoughtful comments and contributed new facets to this discussion.

I would urge you all to read Justin Sharpe's excellent post on DRR in education and explore the link to the social network he set up. There is a wealth of interactive and tailored education material on the site, illustrating what Justin means by resources that challenge children and adults to become proactively engaged in DRR. Similarly, Mlenga Fanuel shares with us information on UNEDRA, the University Network on Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa. I for one would be very interested to hear more about the latest activities of the network.

Marcus, in his second comment, takes us right to the heart of many of the comments made in this discussion: he reminds us that addressing the underlying risk drivers will continue to be determined by the type and strength of governance systems available. If we are to address both, the risk drivers that translate poverty into disaster risk (e.g. poor land use planning and zoning implementation in flood prone urban areas) and the risk drivers that translate disaster impact into poverty (such as lack of access to social protection and risk transfer), there is clearly a need to stop thinking, as Marcus puts it, "of DRR as a sector in itself (...) but more as a way to undertake development in hazard-prone areas". He also discusses the role that different actors, including the UNISDR, should have in this process; it may be worth exploring this more and I invite you all to respond to his thoughts.

Finally, Satoru Nishikawa flags up an important issue: the need to involve the private sector, in particular international businesses, as a key stakeholder for DRR. He sees examples such as the recent volcanic eruption in Europe as opportunities to start engaging the private sector beyond pure business continuity management.

Once again, thank you all for your active participation in this debate and I look forward to another day of inspiring comments and contributions.

With best regards,

Bina Desai – Moderator
Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction
Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Dear all,

The HFA in its current forms a voluntarily framework has generated interests and engaged various entities to take part of the disaster risk management at various levels. However, many governments are still paying lip service to DRR, evidence is in the small budgets/resources allocated by national governments to DRR interventions or lack of adequate integration of DRR in development planning. Therefore the role of civil society and communities remain significant in educating and mobilizing government entities to support DRR initiatives, policies etc. HFA provides such a venue to do so if communities are empowered to influence the political will of governments.

Good governance, gender equity, social justice (to understand all types of social and economic vulnerability), conflict resolution are key issues in mainstreaming DRR successfully in development and shall remain. Moreover, emphasizing "disaster" in the HFA terminology provides a pretext to consider DRR as an emergency intervention and as the role of the humanitarian sector and not as a development matter.

Mohammed Khaled

Dear all,

I have very much appreciated comments submitted this week and certainly learning a lot from everyone's unique experience. A further reflection on Marcus's comments on DRR as "more a way of undertaking development in hazard-prone areas"- I wondered to what extent are the various development sectors - health, agriculture, environment, etc. - already undertaking programmes and activities which contribute to DRR but not necessarily regarding them as DRR. I think the point of Marcus is really to identify and build on existing and available tools and approaches which can be further enhanced with a DRR perspective.

For example in the environmental sector, there are already a number of available ecosystems-based management tools/approaches, such as integrated water resource management (IWRM) and coastal zone management and even protected areas management, which are already directly and indirectly contributing to hazard mitigation and regulation (i.e. floods). But environmental managers do not necessarily regard what they are doing as "DRR". The question is where can a DRR perspective then add further value to existing approaches and practice? For instance, additional risks due to climate change and variability may be further incorporated into the IWRM strategy. The idea is to bring DRR and development sectors working much more closely together and build on existing experience and practice – this would lessen pressure on local and national stakeholders to undertake "DRR" by itself.

This then leads me to a broader question on what effective institutional mechanisms would facilitate addressing these DRR-development linkages. Are Regional and National Platforms on DRR effective? or are there other existing institutional bodies involving development sectors - for health, for water issues, environment etc - which could easily serve as entry points for promoting risk reduction.

Thats all for now - looking forward to hearing others' perspectives.

Marisol Estrella
Project Coordinator - Disaster Risk Reduction
United Nations Environment Programme

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to draw your attention to the ground realities of communities at risk. I can recall the discussion and expert views during the world conference in 2005 in Kobe Japan which resulted HFA. We all accept that the more poor are more vulnerable to disasters. The five priority areas are very meaningful and are relevant for achieving resilience of communities and nations. In many countries almost all the 5 priority areas are equally important. Having said that, the implementation of the priority areas although required but are not realistic. Most of the highly vulnerable countries are poor, dependent on foreign aid, conflict affected and social injustice are prominent. In such scenario the implementation of the 5 priority areas are simply not realistic within the time frame of 2015. For example the priority area 4 "Reduce the Underlying Risk Factor". This is very difficult job. It involves good governance, conflict resolution, Gender and Social inclusion, Social Justice, stable government and social sector reform etc. In in south east Asia, one of the most disaster prone region, meaningful implementation of the HFA five priorities by 2015 seems over ambitious and not realistic. Even the governments at the national and local levels have the well for mainstreaming DRR approaches into the overall government institutions, planning and programming. But most of the time these governments are under sourced to implement the intention effectively.

Based on my experience I would like to conclude that the 5 priority areas are relevant to achieve the resilience of communities and nations but; 1) The timeframe of 2015 is not realistic, due to various underlying factors such as the impact of Climate Change, population growth, urbanization and global warming induced risks. On one side the DRR practices tries to reduce the risks but on the other hand these factors are further contributing to the increase in risks and vulnerability of people livelihood. 2) Limited resources for DRR. We are witness of few other global issues which have achieved consideration of the donors and developed some kind of mechanisms for mobilizing resources globally for example the Climate Change, peace and conflict resolution, and HIV&AIDS etc. However there is no such mechanism for DRR mobilize resources globally except GFDRR. I think organizations such UNISDR and the Banks should play a more active and convincing role for putting mechanisms for resource mobilization.

Having very good action plan (HFA) with limitation of the resources cannot be effective. There should be some mechanism that make the governments, the Banks and the big businesses to put certain percentage of the annual budget for DRR in every particular country.

With best regards

Ghulam M Sherani
Disaster Risk Management Advisor
UNDP, Nepal

My comment refers to "mismatch between progress at national policy level and local implementation" (para.2 of Moderator's Opening Message) and comment by Bina Desai of 07/07/2010.

Priority Action 2, Paragraph 17 says "The starting point for DRR lies in the knowledge of the hazards and vulnerabilities...followed by action taken on the basis of that knowledge". However "Knowledge on hazard and vulnerability" alone is not enough for action especially allocation of fund by decision-makers. This is one of reasons for the problem pointed out by the Moderator and Bina Desai as mentioned above. It is essential for decision-makers (financial authority, political leaders) to know the effectiveness of DRR to which the fund should corresponds.

Paragraph 17, (1) (b) proposes as a key activity "Develop systems of indicators of disaster risk and vulnerability ...and disseminate the result to decision makers..." I would propose that the key activity (b) should be expanded to include "evaluation of effectiveness of DRR activities on the basis of assessment of risk and vulnerability" and the result should also be provided to decision-makers.

To this end, I would also propose that common indicators and methodology should be developed with the initiative of international organizations in the framework of ISDR.

Hidetomi Oi

Dear All,

I concur with Mohammed Khaled's view that using the term 'disaster' makes DRR humanitarian and emergency centric rather than a term widely connected to wider development concerns. Although following debates such as Quarantelli's 'what is a disaster?' there has been some agreement on the definition of 'disaster', it still remains a common language word which means different things to different people. The term disaster to a non-technical person is synonymous with a natural hazard, punishment from God or nature. In this way a disaster is related to being reactive rather than being proactive to an emergency. Emphasising terms such as risk, vulnerability and resilience (although still controversial) can shift attention from 'disaster' to fundamental issues in the disaster equation. Therefore it might be important to use terms which are appropriate in each context and sometimes without necessarily using, if not avoid, the 'high sounding' 'fashionable' Western disaster discourse.

As I also pointed out in my previous contribution, Mohammed Khaled and others DRR argue that DRR remains a low priority for governments. In some countries Civil Defence or Civil Protection structures are small units within Ministry Departments and sometimes staffed with less than seven members, with a paltry budget and sometimes with no vehicles allocated. It is my hope that governments will increase allocation of resources to DRR as a result of HFA awareness. However, the emphasis of DRR on good governance, gender equity, social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution etc will remain problematic to governments, particularly in developing countries. These themes are in most cases viewed in a negative sense of being anti-government and oppositional politics. The current emphasis means DRR is likely to remain peripheral to governments - it is most likely to remain an NGO issue.

Thanks,

Dr. Bernard Manyena
Research Associate
Disaster and Development Centre, Northumbria University

Creating critical awareness on perceptions of risk, raising public demand and mobilisation amongst vulnerable people can put pressure on local governments, who in turn can put pressure on national governments to fulfil their mandates. This becomes more effective when supported by advocacy actions at national, regional and international levels substantiated by a credible evidence base underpinned by independent policy monitoring. This becomes even more effective when these actions happen in a collaboratively in-country and across countries, vertically and horizontally coordinated with other cause-related actions - climate adaptation, food security, poverty alleviation. Civil society in partnership with others can help support and facilitate this process.

Marcus Oxley
Chairman
Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction

Salam to all,

In areas such as the middle east and Africa, conflicts of all sorts constitute the underline cause of vulnerability to various hazards and increases their exposure to risks. Conflicts render people vulnerable due to their humanitarian consequences and impacts on all aspects of social, economic, infrastructure and mobility (displacement/refuge) aspects of affected populations. Often, big donors are implicated in such conflicts by either taking sides, keeping silent or actively taking part of the conflict. Aid agencies in their good intentions may cause perpetuating these conflicts by addressing the humanitarian needs resulted from the conflict without tackling the root causes; occupation, terror, exploitation by international cooperation of natural resources, discrimination of all types. Often, aid agencies perpetuate or exacerbate existing vulnerabilities (increasing risk) and even creating new hazards. Examples are plenty around the world such as the Occupied Palestinian Territories, (the Israeli wall and military checkpoints) hinder people from accessing water and land and render them food insecure, and do not allow developing infrastructure (if don't destroy it) which is necessary to reduce risks. In Ethiopia, donors have been supporting humanitarian interventions including food aid while we all know that the country's main problem is structural manifested in poor governance; however, donors still not ready to address the root cause and willing to continue addressing the symptoms. In DRC, the eastern part is very rich by all type of natural resources, fertile land and water, but the population is so vulnerable and faces several hazards and under a huge risk. We can't deny that the misery in DRC is very much related to the exploitation of the existing resources. DRR and HFA will need to emphasize (accountability) the ethical and moral responsibility of all actors (states, international community, and aid agencies) to address the root causes of vulnerability and risks associated with conflict. DRR actors shall hold themselves and each other accountable to the results of their interventions that may perpetuate vulnerabilities and increase disaster risks.

Best,

Mohammed Khaled
Regional emergency coordinator
CARE - East and Central Africa Region

Dear colleagues,

I would like to elaborate on my previous message regarding the involvement of the private sector/enterprise. One of the significance of HFA is the call to various sectors to be involved and call to the policy makers that DRR is a must for sustainable development of their countries. However it is always the case that DRR is not regarded as the priority topic in the national political agenda unless there is a tragic disaster hitting the country. How can we draw better attention of the policy makers prior to a tragedy?

Major private businesses draw their mid-term planning and take various risks for consideration. If they better recognize Disaster Risk as one of the major risks which they face, and if they duly recognize that there are ways to reduce Disaster Risks, and if their governments can take action to reduce risks, they might want to voice their concerns on disasters to the political leaders. The recent Iceland volcanic eruption can be a good wake-up call to major businesses. The taxes they pay are usually one of the major components of the gov't budget. Therefore this might be another way to implement HFA, especially in the new emerging economies.

I have been involved in mobilizing the business sector involvement in DRR activities in Japan. The business sector has vast resources, they can inform their employees of the importance of preparedness, they can develop new technologies and products which can save lives, they will notice that in drawing their own business contingency plans they need to think of the Disaster Risk of their business partners and supply chains and neighborhoods... and more.

I recall that in the first Global Platform there was active participation by the World Economic Forum. If we can revitalize the interest of such groups this may open another gateway to mobilize support for implementation of HFA and DRR.

Satoru Nishikawa,

Dr. Eng.

Director of Water Resources Policy

Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism

Japan

Dear all,

Greetings from Bangladesh!

I tried to go through all your comments which is very much appreciated as our country is very poor and disaster risk country. As a developing country, donors have been supporting humanitarian interventions including food aid while we all know that the country's main problem is structural manifested in poor governance; however, donors still not ready to address the root cause. Government also does not want to do that. I think, all country's Government should take a long time action plan, including NGOs for making the DRR most effective.

Best wishes,

Quazi Baby

Executive Director

PDAP – Bangladesh

Dear all,

Apology for not yet contributing to the debate as I have been occupied these days to finish my PhD thesis on Institutional Vulnerability Assessment and the Governance of DRR.

Many of you have touch directly and indirectly the issue governance and institutions and how they shape the DRR. I am interested to see the volatility in institutional commitment (or sometimes termed as political will). I see political will as varibel that trully volatile in nature, as volatile as the stock markets and politics in development countries. Some of you may also be aware of the Driving Change approach from DFID, as I am also interested to see how it works out in the practical terms.

Will contibute to the discussion later.

Just want to share my four-page paper (attached).

ABSTRACT: Combining disaster risk reduction (DRR) and governance together as a concept is a rather new academic exercise. There is emerging growth of works on disaster risk governance but the prevailing works still need new efforts. This paper is a pioneering work as a new definition of disaster risk governance including a new framework “Institutional Vulnerability Assessment” will be introduced. It is supported by empirical evidence from global scale assessment using quantitative measurement.

In general, I am also interested to see the debate on how institutions change. Personally, I am buying the discourse based institutionalism, because it offers the room for the other actors such as CSOs and non government individuals including the media to play roles in support for sustainability of DRR action.

Thanks and all the best,

Jonatan Lassa
PhD Candidate
United Nations University
Institute for Environment and Human Security

I appreciate Marcus's statements for awareness starts with the information base and staff available to maintain that information base on vulnerabilities and future growth. It is essential that there be practical recommendations that come from the HFA. It is clear from recent efforts that an information base at the local level is just not there, stuffed on drawers and non-inclusive in its content should there be one. It would be very useful to have a strong push to get this going. Otherwise planning is political.

Regards,

Earl Kessler

Dear All,

The HFA progress review (conducted by Views from the Frontline in 2009) at local government, CSO and community perspectives bear the witness that the local governments could realize their

importance of the HFA issues to consider, public dialogue polarizing that they are the part and parcel, CSOs are mobilizing stronger network (commendable example is VFL), people started to think push forward the regional nodes, national entities and local level movements where government, non-government and private sectors are trying to come up with a vibrant initiatives But the limitations and challenges are following them that concludes on the comments from Marcus, like; there is a burning need of creating critical awareness on perceptions of risk, raising public demand and mobilisation amongst vulnerable people can put pressure on local governments, who in turn can put pressure on national governments to fulfil their mandates to enhance the process.

Akhteruzzaman Sano
Management Adviser
Save the Earth Cambodia

Dear Friends and colleagues

Greetings From Iran

I am sorry that I have not been able to participate much due to internet complications in Iran, although we are a disaster prone country and have many problems from earthquake to flood and desertification. I agree very much with our friend from Bangladesh, we have received a lot of help from international agencies specially in the last few devastating earthquakes, but the way of distributing help has not been satisfactory according to local people who are still suffering after many years. One of the biggest problems is the confrontation of the government with the NGOs which are considered allies of the west and also the social sciences and environmental issues which directly help the resilience of the local people are becoming taboos more and more and cannot be tackled, so instead of helping people, lakes are being dried ,desertification is increasing more and more rapidly and poverty and forced immigration are rising every day so although we count ourselves professionals who want to be counted out of politics, in reality the decision making bodies in the countries should be taken into account if we want to make the DRR most effective because even NGOs are useless if they are banned from working due to governmental policies so we need to involve the high ranking decision makers although we need to act from local levels.

Best,

Solmaz

Dear Debaters,

Our second week of the online debate has been full of thought-provoking contributions. Comments were made on a large number of issues and you identified many gaps and barriers to progress against the HFA. By way of closing last week's discussion, I'd like to flag some of the recurring themes and the main points you have made – and hope that we will find a way of taking these forward in the next two weeks of debate and beyond:

Development as a starting point

Several comments revolved around the issue of promoting DRR as a priority versus finding ways of promoting risk-sensitive development. You pointed to the difficulty of pushing for increased stand-

alone DRR investment while demanding greater integration of DRR into development sectors. This included a number of ideas on institutional reform, questions on the relationship between the HFA and national poverty reduction strategies, and international donor policies, including the MDGs.

It's the politics, stupid!

Unsurprisingly, many of you pointed to the problem of political will and commitment. This included a discussion of a lack of will on the side of both governments and the international community in tackling issues of lack of accountability, transparency and participation in administrative processes and decision-making at local and national levels.

While many of you see 'poor governance' as the key factor underlying and exacerbating disaster risk, you also pointed to the need of creating social demand for DRR. There was much discussion, in this regard, on the role that civil society and the private sector play in creating critical awareness of risk and putting pressure on public service providers and government bodies. Further, several contributions and discussion streams on the need to remind ourselves, policy-makers and practitioners of the moral responsibility to address the root causes of vulnerability.

Need for common indicators and benchmarks

A number of you put forward concrete suggestions for developing benchmarks for DRR investment and implementation. But you also discussed the difficulties of creating common systems to assess DRR progress and of developing indicators that evaluate the effectiveness of DRR activities that are embedded in development activities.

Future Outlook

Many more issues were raised and extremely interesting comments made, but let me just close with flagging some of the suggestions for the next years that you have put forward over the last few days:

- Develop practical recommendations from the HFA and build a post-2015 framework (based on HFA) that focuses on addressing underlying risk.
- Set up systems that include local risk and vulnerability information more successfully into planning systems.
- Learn from key development sectors such as environmental and natural resource management, agriculture and health and identify clearly added value of DRR.
- Learn from the example of other global campaign and resource mobilization efforts such as in the areas of climate change and HIV/AIDS and develop a global financing mechanism for DRR.
- Set up direct access funding streams for local organizations and communities.
- Develop a stronger evidence-base for both the drivers of risk and those of risk reduction.

I would like to thank you all again for your active participation and for sharing your rich experience. We hope that you will stay engaged throughout the next two rounds of discussions; continuing later today with this week's theme "Integration of Climate Change into the HFA" – surely one to generate a lot of debate!

With best regards,

Bina Desai – Moderator

Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction

Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction