

**Report on the Regional Consultation on Post-2015 DRR Framework (HFA2)
The 1st Arab Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction
19-21 March 2013, Aqaba, Jordan**

Background:

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), the global blueprint for building more resilient communities and nations, is approaching the end of its ten-year timeframe (2005-2015). International trend statistics reveal that despite significant efforts to reduce disaster risk more needs to be done to reduce present and future losses due to the adverse effect of natural hazards. While progress is being made in reducing accumulated risk of disasters at national and local level through the HFA implementation, all too often new developments continue to create vulnerability and greater risk from natural hazards. Net total disaster risk is therefore continuing to increase in both developed and developing countries. Continuing population growth, rapid urbanization and climate change will make risk reduction even more challenging in the future.

To reverse the current risk trend and reenergize commitment and effort to build the resilience of nations and communities to disasters, the Member States of the United Nations requested UNISDR to facilitate development of a Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction through United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/199.

UNISDR has launched wide consultation processes to engage various stakeholders and assess their perceptions on priorities for the Post-2015 Framework. Based on a February 2012 background paper, consultations have been and are being organized at global, regional, national and local level. These are being complemented by specific theme-based/ stakeholder-based consultations and two rounds of on-line dialogues (details can be found at <http://www.preventionweb.net/posthfa/>). The objective of these consultations is to identify key elements to be considered for the new disaster risk reduction framework. Based on the wide range of experiences of participants in areas related to disaster risk reduction and implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, consultations provide critical contributions towards adoption of a new framework by 2015. Taking place in all regions of the world, each consultation is part and parcel of a global process and contributes to shape a consensus based agreement singling out details of what should be priorities for DRR beyond 2015.

Initial Post-2015 consultations in Arab States

Two distinct national consultations in Beirut (June 2012) and Algiers (February 2013) have been held so far to discuss the post-2015 framework. Representatives of Arab civil protection authorities and mayors provided further advice on how to improve the Hyogo Framework's Priority of Action 5 on preparedness for response during a meeting of Mediterranean countries engaged in the PPRD South project (Lisbon, October 2012). Arab States delegates have also contributed to other consultations including the Africities meeting on urban resilience (Dakar, December 2012) and the 4th Africa Regional Platform (Arusha, February 2013).

The Regional Consultation at the Arab Conference for DRR in Aqaba:

The 1st regional consultation on HFA2 was organized as a main pillar of the First Arab Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction, which took place in Aqaba, Jordan from 19 to 21 March 2013. The Conference was co-organized by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and the League of Arab States (LAS). The Conference was hosted by the Aqaba Special economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Sumaya Bint El Hassan.

The Arab Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction provided the venue for the first regional consultation on the post-2015 Framework for DRR (HFA2). There were some 250 participants representing national and local governments as well as representatives of regional and international organizations, civil society and the private sector. This paper reflects the outputs of the Conference as it pertains to the HFA and HFA2 discussions.

A review of regional progress in disaster risk reduction and the implementation of HFA was presented and discussed by participants. This helped set the context for the HFA2 discussions that followed. Three main plenary panels were organized focusing on substantial aspects for resilience building as identified in the 2010 Hyogo Framework for Action Mid-term Review and on the key findings of the 2009 and 2011 Global Assessment Reports on DRR. In particular, the panels discussed: (a) Process, Emerging Issues and Governance; (b) Climate Change and Local Resilience, and; (c) Disaster Risk Reduction and Development Planning. The Panel discussions were followed by structured working groups' consultations around the following key issues:

- (1) Institutional Mechanisms, Governance and Accountability;
- (2) Climate Resilience;
- (3) DRR at Local Level;
- (4) Economics of DRR and Investment;
- (5) Integrating DRR into Development Planning.

Participants discussed various issues and concerns related to the implementation of the priorities outlined in HFA and acknowledged progress made on DRR in the region as well as gaps to be addressed. These issues and concerns are identified below as "Risk Drivers". Arab countries also reiterated their commitment to implement the HFA and to support the development of HFA2 as a continuation of HFA (2005-2015). They underlined the importance of moving beyond making recommendations to actual implementation of comprehensive DRR efforts. Participants requested that DRR plans should give a special consideration to the Palestinian State given that in addition to the risks of natural disasters, Palestine has to deal with major political challenges on a daily basis.

Recommendations from the Arab Region for DRR actions and HFA2:

The regional consultation allowed for rich discussions on globally evolving issues of concern with regard to disaster risk reduction and their implications on the Arab region. During the course of the three-day conference, a number of broad recommendations were proposed by participants

for consideration in HFA2 as well as for undertaking DRR actions regionally, nationally and locally. These recommendations revolved around four risk drivers that were identified by panellists and participants during the course of the Conference. These risk drivers are grouped under the following four key areas: (1) Governance of DRR; (2) Climate Change and DRR; (3) Urbanization and Unchecked Urban Expansion; (4) DRR Finances.

(1) GOVERNANCE OF DRR:

In many Arab countries institutional gaps and challenges exist leading to impediment in DRR planning and implementation. These challenges include lack of human, financial, logistical capacity to plan and implement DRR coupled with weak institutional framework for disaster management, preparedness for response and emergency response. The region is dominated by highly-centralized government structures that undermine local authority efficiency, hinder local participation in decision making processes, and weaken direct and transparent relationships between citizens and local government. This is also compounded by weak coordination mechanisms across national institutions and across countries in the region.

Data on risk and vulnerabilities is critical to develop informed policies; however the region lacks comprehensive data and maps and struggles with inconsistent information across agencies and sectors. This problem is mainly due to the fact that scientific and academic institutions are not systematically linked to decision making process and applied research in the field of DRR generated from the region needs to be strengthened and made use of.

The lack of the needed policy framework for DRR in the Arab countries, coupled with lack of enforcement of rules and regulations that reduce and mitigate risk in most of the countries, is heightening the risks of disasters. A major challenge that exists is weak accountability and transparency at all levels, which is closely linked to the lack of resources, governance frameworks and necessary infrastructure.

Key Recommendations:

- DRR is a core development issue and enabler of development and should be viewed as such and implemented at the regional, national, and local level.
- A critical component for success rests on setting up the needed institutional framework such as an agency or committee that is mandated, authorized and resourced well enough to carry out its responsibilities.
- Strengthen capacities of all national and local institutions tasked with planning, managing or implementing disaster risk reduction activities.
- Equip governments with the information and knowledge base to enable them to identify and assess major risks and design a policy framework and DRR plans. The knowledge base should include: risk assessment, hazard mapping, disaster loss and vulnerability assessment, land use mapping and planning.
- Share risk information with the public via appropriate dissemination and education to increase effectiveness of government policies.
- Collaboratively develop and initiate early response systems that emphasize coordination between the various response teams, and development of response plans that are clear, realistic, and implementable with accountability measures at all levels.

- Establish laws and instructions to carry out risk assessments that inform DRR strategies.
- DRR planning should be undertaken in a comprehensive manner that engages all stakeholders; including government agencies, private sector, civil society groups as well as local communities. Specific recommendations in this regard, include:
 - o Identifying all the stakeholders and involved institutions (governmental, civil society, and local groups) engaged in determining and evaluating disaster risk.
 - o Decentralization and transfer of responsibilities and adequate resources to local authorities to support DRR implementation.
 - o Establishing a platform to engage the youth in the DRR process to take advantage of their energy, creativity, ideas, and support.
 - o Women are agents of change and should be viewed as such. There is a need to move beyond the perception of placing women in the “vulnerable” category and to start to actively involve them in the DRR process.
 - o Strengthen the engagement of academia and science in support of DRR actions, particularly through the promotion of applied research in DRR.

(2) CLIMATE CHANGE AND DRR:

Disaster risk is driven by climate change that can result in increased frequency and severity of hydro-meteorological incidents. The Arab region faces negative impacts from climate change manifested in droughts, desertification, flash flooding, and storms leading also to food insecurity. Arab cities and communities are expected to be increasingly exposed to coastal erosion, sea level rise, storms and flash flooding, among other climate related risks. Climate change will affect most of the 340 million people in the Arab region, but will be particularly challenging for the 100 million poor and vulnerable.

Major challenges facing the Arab region include water scarcity and rapid urbanization and population growth are exacerbated with risks associated with climate change. These challenges coupled with weak political commitment and inadequate capacity to implement DRR, pose a serious challenge to the region. Furthermore, the Arab Region is experiencing an increasing number of natural disasters likely due to climate change, and this trend is expected to increase in the future. Climate change is expected to exacerbate droughts in North Africa further straining limited water resources, increasing food insecurity and the vulnerability of communities which increases the complexity of urban risks. Another growing concern is the increased potential danger of conflicts over water and other resources in the future.

Key Recommendations:

- The global goals of disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and sustainable development have to be integrated into a comprehensive framework that is flexible, forward looking and able to address emerging risks in the Arab region. This integrated framework will merge the various initiatives and streamline efforts.
- Climate change does not take place in isolation; it is linked to the political and economic context of the region and its countries. Therefore, it is important to plan for adverse effects of climate change with a multi-sectoral and developmental approach.
- There is need for long term strategies to address food security and nutrition in the context of climate change risks and in view of the limited water resources in the region.

- It is important to have access to, and continuously assess climate data and information at regional, national and local level, where possible.
- Ensure that climate resilience is strengthened through disaster risk management plans that prioritize the most vulnerable populations and sectors.
- Adopt social protection and safety nets as a risk management mechanism for the most vulnerable people, to protect and strengthen the resilience of livelihoods.
- Engage local governments, mayors and municipal councils in building resilience to climate change at local level through improved city infrastructure and community awareness.

(3) URBANIZATION AND UNCHECKED URBAN EXPANSION

The Arab region is one of the most urbanized regions in the world and the trend is increasing. The situation is compounded by a number of factors including population growth, struggling economies and unplanned urbanization. Some Arab countries have mega urban centres that are burdened with extreme urban poverty, informal settlements and slums, which are often built with no planned expansion and in high risk zones. These settlements are vulnerable to losses from flooding, earthquakes, and landslides. The existing gaps in urban planning, housing and infrastructure in cities result in shortages of affordable housing and poor quality of building construction and are exacerbated by lack of enforcement of building regulations.

Key Recommendations:

- There is a need to assess urban risks and develop appropriate programs to reduce these risks. Important areas of focus include urban planning, development of suitable construction methodology, building knowledge and applied research and strengthening regional cooperation and partnerships to strengthen resilience of cities and towns.
- Develop comprehensive urban development plans as part of a regional or national plan that incorporates climate change adaptation, proper urban planning and enforcement of construction codes.
- Making cities and housing infrastructure more resilient is a vital government measure to mitigate economic and human loss. This is particularly important for critical infrastructure such as dams, water plants, power plants, and critical buildings including hospitals and schools.
- Ensuring that buildings constructed are designed and built in a manner that withstands the particular disasters that the city is exposed to. This action includes:
 - Developing appropriate building construction codes particularly for cities susceptible to earthquakes and floods;
 - Training and building the capacity of engineers in the required fields;
 - Educating the public and building a culture of prevention;
 - Enforcing codes and regulations by subsequent checking and auditing.

(4) DRR FINANCES

Governments in the region are suffering from tight budget constraints and the financial situation of low income countries is especially challenging. Many countries are also experiencing mounting debt concerns with very limited opportunities for public investment in DRR.

Furthermore, there is limited engagement of civil society groups, local communities and the private sector in the development of DRR strategies and plans from the early stages.

The Arab region also has evident disparities across its states. While the oil rich countries may have the financial resources to invest in DRR initiatives, developing and financially challenged countries are very vulnerable to disaster due to poorly built housing and underinvestment in DRR infrastructures. While several regional development funds have existed for decades in the region - with focused programmes on development and poverty reduction, DRR remains at the periphery of their investments.

Key Recommendations:

- It is critical that governments, communities, businesses and people across the Arab region, start to view DRR initiatives as an investment and not as a cost. DRR is much more cost effective than financing response, recovery and reconstruction activities following disasters.
- To mitigate the harsh effects of disasters, comprehensive risk financing strategies need to be developed and governments need to invest more in community resilience activities.
- It is important to undertake risk assessments and expected damage/loss assessments to facilitate development of appropriate reduction, mitigation and response mechanisms. Risk Financing Strategies should be built on these assessments.
- The private sector, especially the insurance and construction sectors, need to be integrated into the process and mobilized to make use of their risk management knowledge and capabilities.
- Establishing national risk financing strategies which focus on: (a) Allocating specific DRR budgets nationally and locally, (b) promoting financing mechanisms informed by experiences gained by such initiatives as the Islamic Cooperative Insurance and through tax restructuring and private sector incentives.

Conclusions of the Regional Consultation on post-2015 global DRR Framework (HFA2)

The First Arab Conference for DRR acknowledged that disasters inflict dire human and economic losses that slow down development. Its harsh effects on countries and communities are often difficult to recover from. . Consequently, it is critical that governments, communities, businesses and people across the Arab region start to view DRR initiatives as an investment and not as a cost. Once this shift in thinking happens, implementing effective DRR programs and increasing community resilience can be expedited and facilitated. .

The Arab representatives reaffirmed their commitment to reducing disaster risks and to accelerating progress on HFA implementation and DRR in Arab countries. They underlined the importance of undertaking concerted actions on DRR, including by carrying out a thorough assessment of progress and gaps in the implementation of the current HFA in order to inform and scale up DRR efforts as part of HFA2. Representatives also reiterated the importance of continuing to implement the current HFA, recognizing that it still offers a comprehensive platform for action. However, representatives also recommended that the HFA2 should be

strengthened to improve governance and accountability, capacities, knowledge and awareness as well as access to increased resources.

All stakeholders in the region emphasized the importance of improving governance and accountability mechanisms for DRR including through strengthening national coordination mechanism and adopting a multi-stakeholder approach that engages all key ministries including finance, planning and other key sectors. Stakeholders called for prioritizing DRR at the highest level of government, embedding transparent monitoring and reporting arrangements, and promoting decentralization that focuses on the strengthening local capacities.

Resources and financing of DRR remain a critical challenge for central and local government. The resources base could also be expanded through stronger engagement of civil society, academic institutions and scientists, as well as the private sector. The important role of youths in promoting creative solutions and building awareness in the Arab region was also underlined.

A resilient infrastructure to mitigate flash floods and seismic risk was recognized as a priority that requires the stronger engagement of cities and municipal councils. Urban risk management with enforced regulatory mechanisms will enhance resilience of cities and towns in the region. It's critical to also mainstream and integrate heritage concerns into national and local disaster risk reduction policies and plans to promote mitigation.

To effectively reduce losses from disasters and protect development investments, there is a need effectively link DRR to sustainable development planning. The Arab representatives also called for DRR to be strongly reflected in the post-2015 international development agenda "MDGs/SDGs". They placed particular emphasis on the climate resilience agenda taking into account climate change associated risks such as drought, which adversely affects prospects for sustainable development and food security in the Arab region.
