Report - Technical Briefing on Terminology
4 Septembre 2015, 10.00-12.00
Room VII-Palais des Nations, Geneva

Chair & Moderator:
Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Panelists:
Tiina Luige, Chief of Environment and Multi-domain Statistics Section, (UNECE).
P.G. Dhar Chakrabarti, Distinguished Fellow, the Energy and Resources Institute, India.
Delilah Al-Khudhairy, Head of Global Security and Crisis Management Unit, Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizen, Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Commission (EC).

1. Background

The technical briefing on terminology provided an opportunity for Member States and other stakeholders to learn about and express their views on some key issues related to Terms and Indicators which may be addressed by the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group (OEIWG) on Indicators and Terminology relating to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) at its first meeting on 29-30 September. Three experts on terminology at the national and global level delivered presentations on the work they had undertaken in this field, their perspectives and experiences and issues for consideration during the OEIWG. The consultative process to update UNISDR's DRR terminology (2009)[1] led by its Scientific and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) was also outlined, including its background paper containing proposed updated terminologies[2], that may serve as a reference document for the OEIWG meetings.

2. Synopsis of presentations

a. SRSG Wahlström (UNISDR) provided a historical overview of UNISDR's DRR Terminology dating back to the first attempt as outlined in the publication *Living with Risk* (2004)[3]. In the intervening years, the terminology has been updated and translated into official UN and other languages and embedded into national legislation, policies and regulations globally, with the 2011 Mid-Term review[4] of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) highlighting how deeply its language and model has been incorporated. The expected updates would thus have important implications on countries choices in the formation of policies. The need for agreement on definitions was emphasized in order to align work appropriately and support cooperation across all stakeholders.

It was emphasized that the briefings, background papers and presentations were meant to serve as inputs to initiate discussions – they were the beginning of a process. The OEIWG, at its first session, would determine the scope and modalities of its work.

b. Tiina Luige (ECE) focussed on a holistic approach to terminology development and provided examples from UNECE's work related to DRR which in turn is related to many areas and disciplines (i.e. climate change, sustainable development, humanitarian assistance, standardization, education, insurance etc.). Each area has its own community (international organizations, government agencies, NGOs, business community etc.) with its own terminology. It is thus important to be aware of what is occurring in the different areas and to attempt to harmonize as much as possible.

[1] http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/7817
[2] http://www.preventionweb.net/files/45462_backgoundpaperonterminologyaugust20.pdf
[3] http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/657
[4] http://www.unisdr.org/files/18197_midterm.pdf

UNECE's work on standards and regulatory frameworks for DRR (closely related to DRR terminology) aims to raise awareness on how they can help address a broad range of risks. It also seeks to develop recommendations on how risk management can contribute to the design of regulatory systems as well as how risk management tools can be utilized in planning, developing and implementing regulations, especially as relates to disaster risk.

It was noted that action-oriented terminology, such as those developed by the ISO (e.g. ISO 31000 and ISO Guide # 73 dealing with risk management) and used widely by governments and industries, can facilitate communication across agencies in the case of disasters. A new task force under ISO Technical Committee 292 on security and resilience has recently been set up to assess the needs for standards in the implementation of the Sendai framework.

In the development of terminology, the establishment of terms need to be accompanied by definitions, classifications and typology. It was noted that in measuring disasters and extreme events, the types of definitions and terminologies needed by statisticians are much more precise, operational and practically oriented than in policy-making. However, in practice, countries use very different terms and identify disasters differently – as such, there is a lack of common definitions and classifications of disasters and extreme events for statistical purposes. Consequently, a task force was set up by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in early 2015 to clarify the role of official statistics in providing data on extreme events and disasters and to identify practical steps on how national statistical organizations can support disaster management and risk reduction.

It was emphasized that establishing terminology has practical implications and serves the purpose of developing a tool to work together. Work on terminologies needs to accommodate different lines of action and definitions need to facilitate cross-sectoral work and partnerships. However, it was cautioned that terminologies are not always applicable to everyone and depend on the context and purposes for which the terminology is used. Thus, while attempts to standardize and harmonize are welcome, it will not always be possible to come to one common terminology and classification that can be used across all areas – in such cases, attempts should be made to make the terms as compatible as possible. In developing DRR terminologies, it is also essential to promote and raise awareness of their use among the different communities utilizing them.

c. Dhar Chakrabarti (Energy and Resources Institute) stressed the cross-cutting nature of disaster risk management as multi-disciplinary (social, medical, agricultural, management, earth and communication sciences etc.), multi-sectoral (planning, finance, health, public works, defence, education, transport, rural/urban development etc.) multi-level (global, regional, national, local etc.) and multi-stakeholder (international and regional organizations, all levels of government, NGOs/CBOs, private sector, academia, media etc.). This has resulted in a whole of government and society approach as endorsed in the Sendai Framework. Subsequently, given the multitude of players, a common approach and understanding of various aspects of disaster risk management is vital.

While DRR terminologies are derived from common words, they are endowed with specific technical meaning and interpretations in their application that has evolved over time with evolving knowledge and practice, with new terminologies being added to capture new elements, ideas and practices. Prior to the 1994 Yokohama Strategy, no common DRR terminology existed and countries interpreted terms in their own manner. Subsequently, in 2004, 45 DRR terms were defined in "Living with Risks" with another 11 added in the 2009 "UNISDR Terminology on DRR". Post-Sendai, 83 possible terms were identified in the background paper.

These terminologies have profoundly influenced national legislations, policies and plans of actions and marked a paradigm shift from conventional disaster management to new disaster risk management frameworks. Conventional disaster management simply dealt with managing the event of disaster (taken as a fait accompli) and focussed on ex-post (rather than ex-ante) response, relief and rehabilitation. The development of terms and indicators related to the Sendai Framework will facilitate the understanding of the variables of disaster risk (hazards, vulnerabilities, exposure,

capacity), with each variable having separate meanings. There has also been the quantification of total risks, which, when balanced against prevention (both absolute and relative prevention depending on country situations) and mitigation (structural and non-structural), leads to the determination of acceptable risk. While there can be some risk transfer through insurance (and other means), it is for residual risk that preparedness (response, relief, recovery, reconstruction) is essential i.e. risk preparedness should match the residual risk.

While countries have applied new terminologies in national legislations, policies, actions plans, guidelines and standards, there is a considerable level of national variation in application. Disaster management laws adopted prior to Yokohama (pre-1994) or Hyogo (pre-2004) generally do not include present DRR terminologies. In countries that are highly advanced in disaster risk management (Japan, USA, Australia, EU countries), while old disaster management laws are mainly focussed on emergency management, the DRR concepts and terminologies tend to be increasingly reflected in sectoral regulations, regulatory frameworks, policies and action plans. In the post-Hyogo period, 50-60 countries that enacted disaster management laws largely adopted DRR terminologies (particularly terms contained in the 2004 "Living with Risks" publication) with a certain level of local adaptation. There are also regional variations with Western European, Latin American and Caribbean countries adopting and applying DRR terminologies that are consistent with UNISDR definitions. While Eastern European, Asia-Pacific and African countries have adopted some of the new terminologies, the focus remains on emergency management.

As regards challenges that need to be taken into consideration when developing new terminologies, as national legal and policy frameworks on DRR have been developed post-Hyogo, if new terminologies are adopted that change the existing definitions, it will not be practical to expect the countries to amend national legislations (involving long and complex processes) to conform to the new terminologies - as such, coexistence of the "old" and "new" terminologies will be unavoidable. In this regard, it will be useful to assess how countries have adopted terminologies into their specific contexts (legal and governance structures) and how they can be supplemented with emerging terminology. Thus, there exists the possibility that in the course of the implementation of the Sendai Framework, some tensions between theory and practice may become more apparent. Such tensions can be resolved by developing the new terminologies as a standard, guiding, reference document to further better understanding by countries. Practical guidelines from words into action can also be developed to assist countries to supplement their legal and policy frameworks to further the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

d. Delilah Al-Khudhairy (Joint Research Centre, European Commission) provided an update on the latest consultative process to update the 2009 UNISDR Terminology on DRR. Both knowledge and a holistic approach are needed in updating DRR terminologies which play an important role in bringing together different policy areas, actions and actors. Terminology is thus an important tool which provides the minimum common language required to achieve effective DRR and is recognized in the Sendai framework in paragraph 48(c) which requests UNISDR to update the 2009 terminology in line with the terminology agreed upon by States, and paragraph 50 which recommends that the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group (OEIWG) on terminology and indicators consider the recommendations of UNISDR's Scientific and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) in updating the publication on terminologies. An agreed terminology is thus instrumental for the implementation of the scope, targets, indicators and monitoring framework of the Sendai Framework to show progress in achieving its overall expected outcomes by 2030.

Several terms (affected people, disaster, director disaster economic loss, critical infrastructure, basic services, multi-hazard early warning system, disaster risk information) appear in the seven Sendai targets, some of which have not been defined in the 2009 terminology. Monitoring progress on these targets require clear, non-confusing and relevant terminologies to help support the development of measurable indicators. UNISDR's STAG undertook preparatory work in this regard with an international team of 40 plus experts from various continents, organizations, disciplines and areas of

expertise. Consultations were carried out via workshops, meetings, teleconferences and email correspondence and followed the same process as for past updates.

Experts aimed for consensus in identifying: a) the most important terms to update from existing terminology; b) new terms appearing in the Sendai framework for which definitions had to be developed; and c) which 2009 definitions remained important in the context of Sendai's scope, targets, indicators and monitoring that should be revisited to identify potential definitions. The process was carried out in two phases: Phase 1 (August 2014 to February 2015) identified and systematically updated the definition of the top ten most used terms from the 2009UNISDR terminology on DRR; Phase 2 (post-Sendai) identified terms that were integral to the scope and targets of Sendai Framework and proposed new definitions where they did not exist.

As a member of STAG and to support the team of experts, the EC's JRC developed two corpuses (collections of written texts). The first was a statistical collection of 30,000 documents derived from different sources (scholarly sources, private sector, conference websites, PreventionWeb) and sectors, resulting in the identification of the nine most commonly used of the 2009 UNISDR DRR terminologies between the years 2000-2014 (Risk, Disaster, Response, Capacity, Hazard, Vulnerability, Mitigation, Preparedness and Prevention). The analysis also found that certain terms (climate change, adaptation, resilience) rarely used before the HFA became increasingly important following its adoption. The second corpus contained an analysis of 221 existing glossaries of definitions in English on disaster risk management collected from different sectors (IT, health, private sector etc.) to assess how they define the 2009 UNISDR DRR terms. The definitions were reviewed against the changing context and need of Sendai and adapted definitions were proposed. A factsheet was also developed for every single DRR term from 2009 as well as new emerging terms from Sendai, listing the most commonly found and unique definitions. This helped the experts to: review the context of the usage of the terms both within and outside the Sendai Framework; to explain the differences; to reconcile differences in opinion; and to explain the final choices made by the experts in deciding on which definitions they wanted to propose or develop for the terms.

The consultations process was tight with the bulk of the work being done post-Sendai. The collaborative process resulted in 81 DRR terms being proposed keeping in mind the scope, targets, indicators and monitoring framework of Sendai. Each term is further explained and complemented with examples and detailed explanations to illustrate its meaning and to place it within the context of the Sendai Framework. The results have been published in the background paper on terminologies which explains the update process, history and background and lists the proposed terms. This is a first step to facilitate the work of the OEIWG. In addition to reconciling the theory of practice, the challenge also remains to address the context and language in which these terms are used and implemented in different countries and by different communities. As terms have been reviewed only in English, it remains important to review appropriate DRR terminology in Spanish and French.

3. Synopsis of interactive discussions

a. Operationalization of terminologies

On the question from Member States on how to ensure that the terminologies developed can be made operational, the panellists highlighted four necessary dimensions from the Sendai Framework for the OEIWG to take into consideration to ensure that the terminology development process is grounded and practical: 1) scope and expected outcome 2) seven targets 3) indicator framework (which needs to be clear, realistic and measurable); and 4) monitoring framework.

It is the responsibility of National Statistical Offices to operationalize terms decided upon at the policy level and to produce data and indicators to inform policy decisions. However, operationalization can only occur when definitions of terms and indicators are clearly aligned. In this regard, there needs to clear channels of communication between the policy level (legislation) and operationalization and measurement level (statistical offices).

Operationalization of terminologies at the national level will also depend on the extent to which country level databases can be developed to measure the future indicators for the Sendai targets. In this context, how terminologies can support their implementation and operationalization must be given serious consideration and advanced through a bottom-up, practical, pragmatic and realistic approach.

b. Scope of terminologies in background document

On the question of how the scope of terminologies retained in the background document came to be defined, it was clarified that the Sendai framework provided the scope and it is significantly comprehensive as it incorporates all disaster risks. The question nonetheless remains to be answered as to whether all terms contained within the Sendai Framework will have to be defined or whether terms defined elsewhere can be adopted and referred to. It was noted that certain key terms like a definition for the "mainstreaming of DRR" was missing and choices will have to be made with regards to how much territory will have to be covered. The need to reduce ambiguity and avoid inventing new terms where useful terminologies exist was stressed and it was recommended that the use of controversial terms be avoided during deliberations.

c. Distinction in terminology use in differing platforms

It was noted that certain terms are used differently in different contexts and cannot be directly transplanted from one instrument to another. For example, "mitigation" in the context of DRR has a different meaning than "mitigation" in the context of "climate change". Guidelines had been produced by UNEP and UNISDR in this regard several years earlier to elaborate upon such distinction and may serve to further the avoidance of any misunderstandings in conceptualization.

d. Stakeholder involvement during preparatory process

It was clarified that in the preparation of the two collections of texts by the Joint Research Centre, the reports and documents from governments and development agencies available on Preventionweb were taken into consideration. Participating experts included scientists as well as practitioners from international organizations and advisors to governments on national planning.

e. Role of UN Regional Commissions

On the question of the role the UN Regional Commissions can play in the updating of DRR terminologies (keeping in mind regional variations in the adoption and application of DRR terminologies), it was clarified that as per Operative Paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 69/284, all UN system entities, which includes the UN Regional Commissions, are encouraged to make contributions to the work of the OEIWG.

f. Conclusion

The session concluded that in the development of terminologies, the OEIWG should, first and foremost, aim to reduce ambiguity, to communicate and understand each other and to be grounded in what already existed and needed to be achieved in practice. Sendai provided the scope while the background paper provided guidance to foster common understanding and cooperation. The final product needed to be practical and measurable, including the ability to measure positive progress.