NATURAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT

A presentation to commemorate the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) 1990–2000

Edited by Jon Ingleton
We are grateful for the support and co-operation of many individuals and
government bodies who have volunteered their time and effort without remuneration.
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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL.

Almost daily, we are reminded of the threat of natural disasters. We cannot stop the forces of nature, but we can and must prevent them from causing major social and economic disasters. Natural disasters profoundly affect our efforts to achieve sustainable development. By their powerful impact on the supply of primary commodities, they disrupt market stability, leading to steep declines in national revenue. In many developing countries, five per cent of gross national product may be lost to natural disasters each year.

We can no longer afford, financially or socially, to rely only on the expectations of emergency relief when disaster strikes. Much greater attention must be paid to preventive strategies aimed at saving lives and protecting resources and assets before they are lost. The programme for the International Decade on Natural Disaster Reduction, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, has taken up this battle, combining resources, advanced scientific and technological development, information dissemination, human resource management and risk assessment in an integrated package. Agencies of the United Nations system such as the World Meteorological Organization, UNESCO and the World Bank have been particularly active in contributing their technical expertise.

As the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction comes to a close, it is essential that the aims of this initiative are continued. As more and more countries incorporate disaster prevention policies into national development plans, they are trying to enlist the help of educators, nongovernmental organizations, civil society institutions and private sector enterprises. Indeed, prevention begins with information. This publication will make an important contribution by encouraging the widest possible partnership, communication and exchange of information among all groups of society and all nations to ensure a sustained commitment to a safer world, a world more resilient to the impact of natural hazards and disasters.

Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations
Contents

Welcome dedication by Kofi Annan ........................................... v
List of Sponsors and Editorial Advisory Board ............................ xii
Editor's Foreword ...................................................................... xiii
Preface by Philippe Boudil, Switzerland .................................... xiv

I
INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION & COMMITMENT

Bill Clinton, USA ................................................................. 2
Godwin Obasi, WMO .......................................................... 3
Federico Mayer, UNESCO .................................................. 4
Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Brazil ........................................ 5
John Howard, Australia ........................................................ 6
Jenny Shipley, New Zealand .................................................. 7
P.J. Patterson, Jamaica .......................................................... 8
Viktor Klima, Austria ............................................................ 9
Pavo Lippinen, Finland ........................................................ 9
Hubert Ingraham, Bahamas .................................................. 9
Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe ................................................... 10

II
INTRODUCTION

The Financial Impact of Disaster ............................................ 12
Dr Gerhard Berg, Germany ....................................................

The Social Impact of Disaster ............................................... 15
Luis Rolando Duran, Panama .................................................

The Physical Impact of Disaster ............................................ 20
Dr John Zillman, Australia ....................................................

III
THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION (1990-2000)

The Goals and Aims of the Decade ........................................ 24
Terry Juggle, Switzerland ....................................................

Lessons from the 1990s: Disaster Loss Mitigation and Sustainable Development ................................................................. 28
James Bruce, Canada ...........................................................

IV
THE NATURE OF HAZARDS

KEYNOTE PAPER: The Nature of Hazards ................................ 32
John Rodrig, UK .................................................................

HYDROMETEOROLOGICAL HAZARDS

Topical Cyclone ................................................................ 34
Ricardo Alvarez, USA ........................................................

Flood .................................................................................. 38
Professor Dennis Parker, UK ................................................

Drought ............................................................................ 41
Professor Thomas Downing and Karen Baker, UK

Tornado .............................................................................. 44
Timothy Reinhold, USA ....................................................

Extreme Temperature ......................................................... 47
Christopher Adams, USA ....................................................

Lightning .......................................................................... 49
Richard Rikhil, USA ...........................................................

GEOLOGICAL HAZARDS

Earthquake ....................................................................... 52
Robin Spence and Robin Adams, UK

Volcano .............................................................................. 55
Russell Blong, Australia ....................................................

Tsunami ............................................................................. 58
Eddie Bernard, USA ...........................................................

Landslide ........................................................................... 61
Jose Chacon and Clemente Trigaran, Spain

Glacial ................................................................................ 64
Dr John Reynolds and Dr Shaun Richardson, UK

ENVIRONMENTAL & TECHNOLOGICAL HAZARDS

Wildfire ............................................................................. 67
Dr Johann Goldammer, Germany

Environmental & Social ....................................................... 70
Marita von Niederer Rothen-Wester, Switzerland

Technological .................................................................... 72
Peter Krejsa, Austria ...........................................................

FUTURE HAZARDS

Climate Variation ............................................................... 74
Ian Burton, Canada ............................................................

El Nino ............................................................................. 78
Michael Giantz, USA ........................................................

The Growing Complexities of Natural Hazards ..................... 80
Claire Rubin, USA ..............................................................

V
SOCIAL & COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY

KEYNOTE PAPER: Reducing Global Disasters .......................... 84
Andrew Maskrey, Peru ....................................................... The Perception of Risk:
Ways to Measure Community Vulnerability ............................ 87
Dr Ian Davis and Dr Nick Hall, UK

Pacific Island Vulnerabilities ................................................ 90
John Campbell, New Zealand ..............................................

Towards the End of the 20th Century .................................... 90
John Campbell, New Zealand ..............................................

Mapping Vulnerability-Participatory Tool Kits ...................... 94
Mihir Bhattachy, India ........................................................

Case Study: The Power of Education ..................................... 96
Linda Berry and David King, Australia
VI
RISK ASSESSMENT

Keynote Paper: The Evolution of Risk Assessment ...................................................... 101
Michael Eshleman, USA

The Risk Triangle ............................................. 102
David Crichton, UK

The Uncertain Nature of Catastrophe Modelling ...................................................... 104
John Major, USA

Insights into Flood Risk Assessment and Management ........................................ 106
Edward Evans and Peter von Lang, UK

Understanding Urban Risks ................................................................. 109
Anil Shetha, India

Reflections from Australia: A Risk Management Approach to Disaster Management 111
John Salmon, Australia

Case Study: Rain Floods in River Valleys: Risk Control, Protection and Insurance 114
Boris Gertsman and Mark Karayon, Russia

VII
FORECASTING, MONITORING & EARLY WARNING

Keynote Paper: Forecasting & Monitoring .............................................................. 118
James Pardoe, USA

The Use of Earth Observation Satellites for Disaster Management ....................... 121
Helen Wood, Levin Laustsen and Linda Meade, USA

The Public Communication of Warnings .............................................................. 123
Edward Gross, USA

Space Technologies for Disaster Management ...................................................... 125
Jerome Beqignin, Italy

Case Study: Renewal of the Warning Systems in the Netherlands ....................... 127
Benjamin Berenbein and A. Vredijk, Netherlands

VIII
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Keynote Paper: Highlighting the Need for Increased Preparedness ..................... 130
Emma Bomio, Belgium

The Nature of Health Emergency Management .................................................... 133
Dr Reinhold Flores, Switzerland

A Retrospective View of Public Understanding .................................................... 135
Shirley Mawleigh, USA

The Russian Experience ......................................................................................... 138
Dr Boris Porfierov, Russia

Preparing New York City for the Hurricane Threat .............................................. 142
Jerome Hazan, USA

Case Study: Planning for Emergency Power ......................................................... 144
John Swanson, USA

IX
DISASTER PREVENTION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Keynote Paper: Re-orienting Disaster Management Training ................................ 148
Anriko von Kone, South Africa

Environmental Management and Disaster Prevention ................................ .......... 151
Omar Cardona, Colombia

Climate Forecasting Applications ................................................................. 154
Komad Khatere and Arjamaderi Sabbeh, Thailand

Veterinary Disaster Management ........................................................................... 157
Sebastian Heath, USA

Case Study: Building for Safety in Bangladesh .................................................... 160
Robert Hodgson and M. Carter, UK

X
SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE & TRADITIONAL WISDOM

Keynote Paper: Scientific Knowledge, Technical Experience and Traditional Wisdom 164
Bakawali Bakawali, Senegal

Vulnerability Reduction of Infrastructure .............................................................. 166
Stephen Bender, USA

Mitigating Seismic Risk ......................................................................................... 169
Hareeb Shuh, USA

Warning and Evacuation Effectiveness in Malaysia ............................................ 171
Associate Professor Dr Chan Ngii Weng, Malaysia

Developing a Disaster Prevention Strategy in Jamaica ........................................... 174
Barbara Carly, Jamaica

Case Study: A Perspective of Disaster Management in Turkey ......................... 176
Dr Yolit Gilhan and Olzay Erginay, Turkey

XI
INFORMATION DISSEMINATION & SHARED EXPERIENCE

Keynote Paper: Information Dissemination and Shared Experience .................. 180
Dr. Jitsuro Utomo, Japan

Information, Information and more Information ............................................... 183
John Owen-Davies, UK

Future Opportunities for Communication for Disaster Reduction at Community Level 185
Professor Peter Anderson, Canada

Improving Awareness ......................................................................................... 188
Timothy Rasdord, UK

Media: Accurate or Damage? ............................................................................... 191
Dr Marion Pindorf, USA

Internet Conferences .......................................................................................... 195

Case Study: IDL Processing Helps NESDIS Save Lives & Property .................... 196
Jon Snyder and Chris Duda, USA

XII
PUBLIC INTEREST, EDUCATION & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Keynote Paper: Public Interest, Education and Community Involvement ............ 198
Joseph Chong, Fiji

The Philippine Experience .................................................................................... 201
Lourdes Misting, Malaysia
XIII
POLITICAL COMMITMENT & POLICIES

KEYNOTE PAPER: Political Commitment .......................... 214
Neil Brition, New Zealand

Turning Political Commitment into Sound Practice ............ 217
Mike Evans, UK

A Political Commitment to Preparedness, Mitigation and Relief ... 220
Li Yanhua, China

Disaster Management in Nepal ................................... 223
Dr Meen Powalal Chherti, Nepal

Planning and Administration:
Frameworks and Case Studies ................................ 225
Professor Rae Zimmerman, USA

Public Policy: Protecting People and Property ............... 228
Peet Steenforth, South Africa

Case Study: Impact Building ..................................... 230
James Lee Witt, USA

XIV
ACADEMIC, PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL INSTITUTION INVOLVEMENT

KEYNOTE PAPER: Academic, Professional and Technical Institutions .... 234
Professor Mustafa Erdik, Turkey

Disaster Education in the School Curriculum .................. 236
Dr John Edstone, Australia

Training for Tomorrow ........................................... 239
Dr John Harrell and Gregory Show, USA

Natural Disaster Reduction Research ........................... 241
Herman Hulsman, Netherlands

Volcanic Hazard Management ................................... 243
David Johnston, Douglas Paton and Bruce Houghton, New Zealand

Case Study:
Seismic Reinforcement of Existing Adobe Housing ........ 246
Alberto Giesche, Peru

XV
FINANCIAL INVESTMENT & CORPORATE ENTERPRISE

KEYNOTE PAPER: IDNDR—The Day After ...................... 250
Alina Kreiter, USA

A Reinsurance Perspective of Risk Assessment ................ 252
Dirte Affer, Switzerland

Mitigating Property & Business Losses ....................... 254
Dr John Schneider, Baru Rea, Siamese Dameshvaran and Javier Perez, USA

Case Study: Corporate Preparedness .......................... 257
Stan Quintana, USA

XVI
PARTNERSHIP & PROGRESS

KEYNOTE PAPER: Laying the Groundwork ..................... 260
Harvey Ryland, USA

Understanding Urban Seismic Risk Around the World .......... 262
Cynthia Corbino, Rachel Donohoo and Corina Villacis, USA

Converging Approaches to Disaster Management ............ 264
John Newton, Canada

An International Disaster Recovery Business Alliance ........ 266
Mary Corrado, USA

Partnerships in Disaster Management .......................... 269
David Sanderson, UK

Case Study: A Working Example of a Public-Private Partnership ... 271
Dr David Mahogho and Richard Marnane, Bermuda

XVII
THE IDNDR IN RETROSPECT: AN ASSESSMENT

KEYNOTE Paper: The IDNDR in Perspective .................. 276
Walter Hays, USA

Progress and Challenges in Reducing Losses from Natural Disasters ... 280
William Hooke, USA

A Decade of Missed Opportunities? ....................... 284
Professor Gilbert White, USA

Case Study:
A Review of the Australian Achievements .................. 286
Alan Hodges, Australia

XVIII
THE CHALLENGE FOR A SAFER 21ST CENTURY

KEYNOTE PAPER: The Challenge for a Safer 21st Century ....... 290
Dennis Mitei, USA

Preparing for 21st Century Catastrophes .................... 293
Ralph Kent, UK

Global Natural Catastrophes:
Prospects for the Next Millennium ........................... 296
Professor Bill McGuire, UK

The RADIUS Initiative ........................................ 298
Kenji Okazaki, Switzerland

Integrating Natural Disaster Management ..................... 302
Bernardia Moller, Philippines

Natural Disaster Reduction in the 21st Century ............. 304
Robert Hamilton, USA

Case Study:
The Future of Disaster Management in Central America .... 308
Jorge Dengo and Manuel Dengo, USA

References to the text ........................................... 312
Alphabetical list of contributors ............................. 319
Yokohama Message ............................................. 320
Editor’s Foreword

I have lost count of the number of times that, upon introducing the title of this book, *Natural Disaster Management*, the response has been a raised eyebrow of scepticism or even a short burst of laughter. One might forgive the postman's comment 'rather you than me', but when corporate and organisational leaders tried to convince me that we were fighting a lost cause, the incredible need for this book become only too apparent. Even more alarming is that the efforts of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction have had to overcome this inherent cynicism many more times over, and magnified to many degrees.

However, for every sneer there has also been someone with the vision and belief that an initiative like this can be truly worthwhile, and that with patience, effort and downright bloody-mindedness, visible and tangible success can be found. One only has to scan the pages of this book to see that many of these visionaries have contributed their time and effort for, without exception, no financial gain, to share their experiences and pass on the lessons they have learned in our pursuit of managing natural disasters. This should inspire hope and belief in us all. Why? Because we can manage natural disasters. Depending on the hazard, its occurrence may be inevitable, but in every single case, the hazard need not lead to disaster. We need not build communities on floodplains, or construct fragile structures in earthquake prone regions, and we can educate our communities on how to preserve their lives and property when an extreme natural event takes place. In publishing this book, our simple aim is that more individuals are better prepared.

The opportunities for you, the reader, to gain from those whose unique position has enabled them to contribute to this book would not exist were it not for a small selection of brave organisations who have invested financial resources into making this book happen. We are delighted that they are able to profile their products and services within these pages and hope they benefit from doing so. We are also indebted to those governments who have embraced the IDNDR and taken positive action in the effort to achieve its lofty goals. In addition to the wealth of contributors that are listed in the following contents pages, we have received the support of more individuals, too numerous to mention, whose help and advice have combined to increase the worth of this book. It is with deep regret that I learned that one of our most dedicated supporters and a proactive member of our Editorial Advisory Board, Mohammed El-Sabh, IAPSO Commission of Natural Marine Hazards, passed away some months before the completion of Natural Disaster Management. We are proud to dedicate this book to his efforts towards our common goal.

As a genuinely collaborative piece of work, *Natural Disaster Management* may not ease the reader through its chapters with the uniform and consistent turn of phrase of a single author text. Rather, the rich diversity of authors has resulted in a book that probably does not lend itself to being read from cover to cover in a single attempt. This is a strength, not a weakness, as it offers a rare chance to view the same problem from many different perspectives, at the same time helping us to understand the varied, and sometimes conflicting, set of challenges that are faced by different communities throughout the globe. I hope that, whatever path you tread through this book, you take away something useful.

Jon Ingleton
Editor
Preface

As the twentieth century comes to a close, the subject of disaster reduction is at an important point on the world agenda. Especially important are the respective roles for facing the challenges which it poses for our professions and our societies. Perhaps 'poised' is not too strong a word to describe the position in which too many countries find themselves, as they face the risks of natural hazards in the near future. After the wide-ranging disaster experiences of recent years, more countries recognise now, more fully than before, that the risk of disasters is too important to be consigned only to planning eventual emergency relief measures. However, the seeming demands to employ disaster reduction measures can also appear, at first glance, to be so sweeping in their implications that they may easily deter us from taking methodical steps that can lead to long-term commitments.

By reflecting on the past ten years of the global initiative of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, we should recall what the United Nations General Assembly emphasised in its founding resolution of the IDNDR (UNGA, 1989). There, it emphasised the importance of adopting an integrated approach for disaster management in all its aspects to initiate a process towards a global culture of prevention. It is now even more evident ten years after the IDNDR resolution that the escalating costs of natural disasters cannot continue to be tolerated, or absorbed. Several highly visible, recent natural disasters such as Hurricane Mitch in Central America, the effects of smoke, fire and haze on three continents, the worst floods in over a hundred years in China, and the global effects of El Niño provide a foretaste of perhaps more severe, and possibly more frequent, disasters that we can expect in the future.

No country in the world will be devoid of the risk of natural hazards, but it will be up to each one of them to decide what measures are necessary, feasible, and affordable to embrace acceptable levels of protection against social and economic disasters. However that cannot, or should not, be accomplished in isolation. As the Yokohama Strategy stated in its Introduction, "...each country bears the primary responsibility for protecting its own people, infrastructure and other national assets from the impact of natural disasters, and accepting in the context of increasing global interdependence, concerted international co-operation and an enabling international environment are vital for the success of these national efforts" (Yokohama Strategy, 1994). We have all, through increasing contact and shared concerns, come a long way in raising awareness of an issue which can no longer be ignored. Much also remains to be accomplished, together.

With burgeoning cities around the world, disregard for the continuing demands that rapidly growing societies place on the natural and physical environments on which they depend, and the elusive achievement of sustainable development which many emerging economies seek, hazard awareness and risk management practice will have to be incorporated into national planning processes. Demonstrated practical experience, expanding scientific knowledge, and advances in technological applications also provide us with the abilities and the resources to reduce our exposure to risks.

If we are to protect the social resources and economic assets of our societies, we must embrace prevention as a public value. It requires a broad awareness, passed between generations, and a collective discipline embodied in numerous trades and professions. While sympathies may result from a humanitarian imperative, success can only be realised through practical means of reducing human vulnerability, safeguarding the environment, and seriously pursuing the fundamental principles of sustainable development. Disaster prevention does not respond to an event; it is rather a process. It proceeds, over time, sustained by the informed decisiveness of political commitment, the investment of resource allocations, and the application of knowledge tested by experience.

We have to look resolutely towards the future as we develop policy instruments which can motivate communities to accept the fact that expenditure which protects infrastructure of even greater value constitutes a positive investment. New organisational relationships become both necessary and possible, as the functions of hazard awareness and disaster prevention are recognised as being multi-dimensional, involving many skills and abilities. Modern communications and the explosion of information access around the world provides the basis for rapid and extensive exchange of ideas and experience. The early warning of threats becomes more possible than it has ever been before. All of these are opportunities, but only if we seize them.
First there has to be a common recognition of mutual interests in protecting collective resources, livelihoods, infrastructure, and assets that we call a society. Partnership becomes essential. Effective risk management for the future can only proceed if it is multi-sectoral, but yet integrated in the comprehensive planning and resource allocation that characterises all public effort. To be sustained, this will call for on-going commitments to the assessment of hazards and vulnerabilities, the fullest application of prevention measures where feasible, the informed use of preparedness arrangements where necessary, and the availability of effective and rapid response in the case of need. However, the misplaced reliance on the latter needs of responding to the effects of a disaster alone, without first seeking to prevent loss and damage in the first place, raises serious questions as to responsible governance.

For all of these reasons, I have the greatest appreciation that Natural Disaster Management has sought to demonstrate the number/diversity of hazard awareness and risk management efforts being pursued around the world. This volume admirably serves to demonstrate what is being accomplished in furthering the original objectives of IDNDR, as well as the promises for even greater opportunity in achieving disaster prevention in the future. The publication of this book has been a productive partnership, between the publisher, the IDNDR Secretariat and over one hundred authors — to achieve a common aim of demonstrating the practicality of efforts to reduce the likelihood of natural disasters. The articles demonstrate both the feasibility and the reach necessary to work towards a safer 21st century.

Most importantly though, I believe that the real story of successful natural disaster management is that it is a composite effort of many people doing their daily work, learning from their individual mentors, and teaching their students or successors. Information has been shared between colleagues, and among organisations. As the following articles demonstrate abundantly, all of the people described are necessarily attentive to hazards and dedicated to their professional roles in reducing risks. They are not waiting for something to happen first, or relying on it not happening at all. They have made their personal investments. They are doing it now.

Philippe Boullé
Director, IDNDR Secretariat

Philippe Boullé, Director, IDNDR Secretariat, Switzerland