

## Human Security Policy Briefing Note 2 DRAFT

# DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### What is Disaster Risk Reduction?

Natural disasters are not uncontrollable, random events. Their impact, and even occurrence, is dependent on people's vulnerability and their ability cope with these hazards. Disaster Risk Reduction, or DRR, is a relatively new conceptual framework within the development field that encompasses the prevention and mitigation of, and preparedness for, natural disasters. The framework links traditional emergency relief work with long-term development work.

DRR has come out of a broad consensus that development cannot be sustainable if the risks of disasters on populations are not tackled head-on. Rapid urbanisation, environmental degradation and pressure for land means more and more people are living and working in unsafe environments. Poor access to information for many means people are not aware of the hazards surrounding them, or what they could do about reducing the risks they face.

What's more, research is showing the links between climate change and the increasing severity and frequency of natural disasters. There is an obvious overlap between DRR and adaptation to climate change.

It is now recognised that if current trends continue, disasters will be a key factor in preventing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly the over-riding goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015.

The key moment in global recognition of the urgency and relevance of DRR came in January 2005, less than a month after the Asian tsunami killed over 250,000 in a largely preventable disaster. At the Kobe *World Conference on Disaster Reduction*, 168 countries signed a ten year action plan – The *Hyogo Framework for Action* (HFA) – to build global resilience to disasters (see box 1).

#### Box 1: the 5 priorities for action of the HFA

1. Ensure that DRR is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels
4. Reduce underlying risk factors
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

### Who is doing what on DRR?

The HFA places primary responsibility on national governments to achieve resilience through DRR. However, civil society, the scientific community and the private sector all have important roles to play.

The **UN**, recognising the need for international coordination, formed the **International Strategy on Disaster Reduction (ISDR)** to coordinate local, national and international efforts to build disaster resilient communities and to raise DRR up the public agenda. This is the main forum within the UN for devising policies and strategies to reduce natural hazards. ActionAid is the only NGO member of this forum.

In 2005, **DFID** announced that in future 10 per cent of funds spent on disaster relief will be invested in initiatives to reduce the impact of disasters and in 2006 published their policy: "*Reducing the Risk of Disasters*".

**ActionAid** is one of the leaders in DRR, specialising in a 'people centred approach' which puts communities at the helm of identifying local hazards and reducing risks. Spearheading this is an ambitious DFID funded project "DRR through Schools" that, over five years, will reach 15,000 children and their communities through

56 at-risk schools in 7 countries. The key tool for this project is PVA – *Participatory Vulnerability Analysis* – which assists field workers and communities in analysing local risks and drawing up action plans.

## What's the problem?

Many governments and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have failed to take DRR into account in development policy – and much less put this into practice. The result: increasing loss of life and livelihoods when disaster strikes. DRR activities are often sidelined as 'specialist' or seen as additional to existing commitments.

The main obstacle therefore in mainstreaming DRR is political will. Investment is needed in a planned and coherent way to build a 'culture of safety' in individuals, communities and all levels of government and other institutions. There is also a lack of a sound legislative framework to make sure government policies on DRR are legally enforceable.

## What ActionAid says

### **“DRR should be integrated into existing development commitments – it is not a specialist side issue”**

It is estimated that for every one pound spend on mitigation, between four and ten pounds are saved on disaster recovery. Cost should therefore not be an obstacle to integration of DRR strategies and policies.

**Key message:** DRR is a cost effective way for governments to contribute to existing development goals

### **“Put people at the centre of disaster risk reduction strategies”**

DRR strategies cannot be lead by the boardroom – they must be guided by people with knowledge of local hazards and cultural practices. Assessment tools must be used which can be easily integrated into real lives and information must be available at all levels in accessible formats.

**Key message:** Good governance is a cornerstone of successful DRR strategies

### **“Donor governments must encourage standards of participation, accountability and access to information and justice in recipient countries, and lead by example”**

Governments must be held accountable for the promises they make and the policies that are put – or not – into practice. This is no more the case than for DRR policies and strategies.

**Key message:** Governments to decentralise and strengthen local governments so decision making and accountability on DRR is improved

### **“Donor governments and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) must support DRR”**

Adequate funding must be afforded to UN DRR initiatives. Donor governments and IFIs must integrate DRR policies into bi-lateral agreements to encourage the implementation of the HFA commitments and must develop their own policies in their own countries.

**Key message:** Donor governments must continue and increase support for UN agencies engaged in DRR, and lead the way in integrating DRR policy and practice

## Further Information

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This briefing note is based on Disaster Risk Reduction: Implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action - An ActionAid Briefing Paper (2006). For more background on ActionAid and DRR, download this document at [www.actionaid.org.uk/100261/disaster\\_risk\\_reduction.html](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/100261/disaster_risk_reduction.html). The key online DRR resource is [unisdr.org](http://unisdr.org).