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United Nations  
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction  
Regional Office, West Asia & North Africa (WANA), Cairo



## Middle East and North Africa Regional Inter-Agency Workshop on Disaster Risk Assessment Cairo, Egypt, 11-12 March 2008

### WORKSHOP REPORT

#### I. Background:

The number, frequency and scale of disasters and their impacts have been growing in the recent years affecting the lives and livelihoods of people world wide. With increasing vulnerabilities to natural hazards and the serious threats of climate change, all international, regional and national actors are challenged to take actions to reduce the risk from disasters. The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) is prone to various types of disasters caused by natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, drought and landslides. Disasters impose increasingly heavy human and material losses on countries in this region, which hamper their socio-economic development. Governments and other actors in MENA region have been developing various capacities targeting disaster preparedness and response, however, disaster risk reduction linked to national development processes is not yet integrated in the planning and policy paradigms in the region. Comprehensive and integrated approaches to disaster management and risk reduction are essential to effectively build resilience to disasters and reduce human and financial losses.

In support of regional and national efforts developing in MENA region to reduce disaster risks, the secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) and the World Bank initiated a regional initiative in 2007 under the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)<sup>1</sup>. This initiative included a regional stocktaking on natural hazards, stakeholders' consultations on regional cooperation opportunities, MENA Regional Risk Review 2007, and the *"First Regional Conference on Building Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction and Hazard Risk Management"* that was held in Cairo, Egypt from 18 to 21 April 2007.<sup>2</sup> The conference successfully achieved its main purpose of launching a longer-term regional partnership to promote an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR). The 1<sup>st</sup> regional conference concluded with calls for strengthening and supporting national, regional and international cooperation on disaster risk reduction in a multi-stakeholder approach and in close cooperation with regional organization in MENA. UN/ISDR and the World Bank were also

<sup>1</sup> Background and information on GFDRR is available on: <http://gfdr.org>

<sup>2</sup> Information and documentation of the conference is available on: <http://www.unisdr-wana.org/eng/regional-events/cairo-18-21apr07.html>

requested to continue supporting capacities development in the region with emphasis on risk assessment, hazard mapping, data collection and analysis and mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction in development planning. Following on work carried out in 2007-2008, the *"Second Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction"* is planned to take place in Sanaa, Yemen from 19-21 May 2008.<sup>3</sup>

## **II. Regional Inter-Agency Workshop on Disaster Risk Assessment**

The outcomes of the 1<sup>st</sup> regional conference of 2007, in addition to a number of other initiatives at national and regional levels, clearly defined the need for developing appropriate, region-specific tools and frameworks for risk assessment as a common regional priority across MENA. In order to facilitate the development of disaster risk assessment capacities in the region and also to prepare supporting technical background for the 2<sup>nd</sup> regional conference, the UN/ISDR regional office for West and North Africa, the World Bank, and the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport organized the *"Regional Inter-Agency Technical Workshop on Disaster Risk Assessment"* that took place in Cairo from 11-12 March. The workshop aimed at:

- Stimulating and facilitating discussion on the links between disasters and development activities across various sectors.
- Presenting different risk assessment tools and further clarify risk assessment concepts
- Analyzing the need and value of risk assessment across different sectors in the region
- Establishing an informal network of regional agencies involved in disaster risk reduction and risk assessment to further engage them and enhance regional cooperation in disaster risk reduction.

The two-day workshop benefited from a rich discussion among thirty-eight participants representing the League of Arab States, the UN Resident Coordinator Office, five regional organizations, eleven international and UN agencies and individual experts.<sup>4</sup> The opening remarks by the League of Arab States, the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, the UN Resident Coordinator, the World Bank, and UN/ISDR highlighted the importance of disaster risk reduction globally, regionally and nationally in light of increasing frequencies of natural hazards, increasing vulnerabilities and risks, and rapidly growing population in the Middle East and North Africa region coupled with fast urbanization. The opening session also emphasized that the *"Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters"* adopted in Kobe,

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<sup>3</sup> Information and announcement of the conference is available on: <http://www.unisdr-wana.org/eng/regional-events/yemen-21may08.html>

<sup>4</sup> Complete list of participants is available on: <http://www.unisdr-wana.org/eng/regional-events/cairo-11-12mar08.html>

Japan 2005 by 168 countries provide all actors with a comprehensive framework and guidance for reducing disaster risks.<sup>5</sup>

The workshop focused on the analytical and conceptual framework of disaster risk management as well as the practical tools and methodologies used in risk assessment including presentation of case studies. In addition, the participants discussed in three working groups the gaps, priority areas for work and improvement with respect to: (1) Disaster Risk Reduction in an Urban Context; (2) Disaster Risk Reduction, Environment and the Rural Context and (3) Contribution to Disaster Risk Reduction by International Agencies in the region. Throughout the two days, participants identified common areas of concern and common needs across different sectors in the context of disaster risk assessment and risk reduction. Moreover, participants agreed on the need to enhance regional information exchange and coordination to compliment each other's efforts and enhance effectiveness in addressing the common challenges in building resilience to disasters.

### **Risk assessment in MENA region:**

Participants in the inter-agency workshop highlighted **special regional characteristics** with respect to risk assessment and disaster risk reduction in MENA region. Some of those characteristics are:

- Large areas in MENA region are highly urbanized and/or urbanizing with growing risks and challenges for urban disaster risk reduction. This also increases the competition between urban land use and urban development versus agricultural land uses and rural development.
- Water is a precious and scarce resource in MENA that is being affected by climate change, which does not only increase the risk from natural disasters but also the potential for political conflicts.
- MENA region is very rich in human resources and capacities but efforts across the region are fragmented and often the expertise is not effectively utilized.
- The cultural context of disaster risk reduction plays an important role in perceptions and actions on the ground, hence it should be carefully considered and understood to be fully integrated in comprehensive disaster risk reduction frameworks and planning processes.
- Governments in MENA region are highly centralized bureaucracies, hence effective implementation of Hyogo Framework for Action and risk reduction measures require full support and collaboration from national institutions and systems.

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<sup>5</sup> Full document and additional material is available on: <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/framework/>

## Key areas of concern and action:

- It is essential to create an **enabling environment and appropriate political space** for disaster risk reduction, which could be possible through tapping on areas of serious concern in the region like water resources and climate change.
- **Scaling up efforts** is needed by all actors at the local, national and regional levels including comprehensive and integrated planning that mainstream disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in sustainable development.
- There is a need to **integrate and coordinate approaches** by international and regional actors towards building resilience to disasters and climate change with emphasis on better information flow and communication across and within agencies and practitioner community.
- Risk assessment, mapping of vulnerabilities and capacity development through **research and development** and the development of common tools and methodologies for disasters and climate change are essential areas that require coordinated and collaborative approaches by all actors, including tapping and supporting existing scientific and research capacities within MENA region.
- National strategies and **planning processes** should utilize the data, implement informed actions, and support systematic research on areas of concern like climate change.
- Multi-hazard regional and/or sub-regional **early warning system s** need further support to strengthen and develop as disaster risk reduction means.
- Developing **inventories of gaps and resources** with respect to risk assessment and risk reduction is needed, which will also help clarifying roles and responsibilities across the various sectors and starting from local to national and regional levels.
- Authorities, practitioners, researchers and agencies need a disaster risk reduction **"TOOL BOX"** that includes for example the scientific parts (data and information), pilot activities, models and good practices, training programmes, publications, guidelines, information on actors, sector-specific resources, etc.

## III. Recommendations and priority future actions:

- To establish **national and regional platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction** in the region and support countries that are already in the process of developing national coordination mechanisms and/or establishing national platforms. An expected role of disaster risk reduction platforms is to facilitate the collection and documentation of good practices, methodologies and tools and attempt to standardize and disseminate them to reduce risk and adapt to climate change. In addition, the Regional Platform could also attempt with experts and specialized organizations to improve risk assessment tools and methodologies by developing vulnerability mapping and documentation

and also monitor progress in implementation of DRR initiatives and delivery on HFA.

- To **bridge the technical and inter-agency efforts with governments and policy makers** in order to share the concerns, priorities and risks facing this region and debate necessary action steps for reducing disaster risks. This could be done through high level advocacy and stronger engagement of the decision makers in targeted regional events, which is necessary to bring disaster risk reduction into political space and also to bring politicians to disaster risk reduction. Experts and agencies need to think of decision makers as allies and as agents for action and implementation of policies.
- To support **specialized disaster management centers** in the region that can compliment each other and strengthen regional exchange of information and capacity development. This could also help in broadening the **scope of disaster risk assessment** to include industrial and man made disasters and climate change risk within the risk assessment framework depending on national priorities in each context.
- To ensure that **the link between disaster risk reduction vis-a-vie climate change and water stress in MENA region** is publically clear and stressed including the implications of on drought, environmental degradation and slow onset disasters. The strong link will facilitate bringing the disaster risk reduction into regional and national agendas to get countries on board for implementing Hyogo Framework for Action and mainstreaming disaster risk reduction while they are developing water resources management plans and climate change adaptation plans.
- To build **multi-stakeholder networks** in the region that engage universities and academia for integration of disaster risk reduction in the educational system and help build capacities and skilled professionals in the region. Media engagement is also essential to raise public awareness and knowledge of the risks.
- To develop **outreach mechanisms** to the specialized line ministries to ensure that disaster risk reduction is being addressed by the relevant actors and the right channels. Moreover, there is a need to utilize various regional coordination mechanisms and forums to maximize the impact of communicating the disaster risk reduction messages.

#### IV. Follow-up and next steps:

Participants appreciated the opportunity for engaging and participating in a two-day discussion over risk assessment and disaster risk reduction in the region. The **role**

**of the UN/ISDR secretariat** has been recognized especially in facilitating and coordinating the work and effort of the various stakeholders at the regional level, which will also support enhancing coherence and effectiveness in addressing risk reduction and the implementation of Hyogo Framework for Action at the national and regional levels. The information resources being developed by UN/ISDR such as the regional website [www.unisdr-wana.org](http://www.unisdr-wana.org) and the disaster risk reduction global portal [www.preventionweb.net](http://www.preventionweb.net) will also facilitate dissemination of information to, from and within the region.

Monitoring and reporting national and regional progress in implementing Hyogo Framework for Action and reducing disaster risks is very important for all actors. MENA region and stakeholders will collaborate closely with ISDR system partners to facilitate regional and national input to the first Global Assessment Report 2009 being coordinated by UN/ISDR secretariat. The Global Assessment Report is expected to establish a credible and widely accepted reference point for information on global disaster risk patterns and trends. It will also increase understanding and awareness of the mutually supportive relationship between development and disaster risk reduction by specifically focusing on links between disaster risk and poverty trends.

The *"Second Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction"* is planned to take place in Sanaa, Yemen from 19-21 May 2008, and will provide further opportunities to elaborate on actions needed to address the concerns and challenges identified throughout this workshop and previous initiatives. The second regional conference will also bring policy makers and technical experts together so that the gap becomes closer between research and scientific findings on one side and policy making and planning processes on the other side. There is no doubt that creating an appropriate political space for disaster risk reduction is very essential to advance risk assessment and risk reduction.

## **V. Annexes**

- Workshop Concept Note
- Workshop Agenda
- List of Participants



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## Middle East and North Africa Regional Inter-Agency Workshop on Disaster Risk Assessment Cairo, Egypt, 11-12 March 2008

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### **BACKGROUND**

1. The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) is prone to various types of disasters caused by natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods and drought. Disasters impose increasingly heavy human and material losses on the countries of this region which hamper their long term socio-economic development. The recent earthquakes in Algeria, Iran and Morocco, and droughts and floods in several other countries of the region, are just examples of various disasters which are becoming a regular occurrence in the region and cause considerable damages and losses.

2. The countries of the Middle East and North Africa have developed considerable capacities in the area of disaster preparedness and response, but long term disaster risk reduction and prevention planning linked to national development processes still are new paradigm in the region. The long term measures for disaster risk reduction become even more important considering its link with some other global challenges like climate change.

3. To support the efforts of the countries of Middle East and North Africa on disaster risk reduction at national and regional levels, the Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) and the World Bank initiated a regional programme in 2007 under the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR). This programme included a regional stocktaking on natural hazards and risks as well as consultation on possibilities for cooperation at regional levels. The first component of the programme resulted in the Middle East and North Africa Regional Risk Review, and the second component resulted in the **"First Regional Conference on Building Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction and Hazard Risk Management" that was held in Cairo, from 18 to 21 April 2007**. The conference was very successful in achieving its key objective of bringing together, for the first time in the MENA region, representatives of governments, practitioners, NGOs, donors

and academia from institutions across the MENA region currently involved in disaster management. It also included guests from other regions (i.e. Latin America and Asia), both as guest speakers and resource persons. It is noteworthy to mention that 72 participants attended the conference, representing governments from 12 countries and 17 different development agencies active in the region. In order to further engage the key regional stakeholders and Disaster risk reduction practitioners in the process of identifying priority focus areas to be addressed by the regional conference, starting with a focus on data gathering and generation at both regional and national level. As a result of some consultations and also based on the generous offer of the Government of Republic of Yemen to host this event, it was agreed to hold the **"Second Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction" in Sanaa, from 19-21 May 2008.**

4. In order to develop **Disaster Risk Assessment** capacities in the region and also to prepare the technical background for the Yemen Conference, a **Regional Inter-Agency Technical Workshop on will take place in Cairo from 11-12 March** with a focus on Disaster Risk Assessment Tools.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

1. The outcome of Cairo Conference in April 2007, and results of a number of other initiatives at national and regional levels point out the need for developing appropriate tools and frameworks for assessment of risk of natural hazards. A number of tools and methodologies have already been developed, but there is a need to tailor these to the demand from the region.

2. By bringing together some of the main users and "clients" of the risk assessments, represented by agencies and institutions as well as researchers and scientists from Arab region working in different sectors, with risk assessment experts and with international agencies who may be able to provide their expertise, experiences and services related to risk assessment, the intention is to generate a forum for analyzing and debating the characteristics that risk assessments should have in order to be relevant for development work and analysis in the region.



## **OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP**

- To discuss links between disasters and activities in different development sectors.
- To present risk assessments as a tool and discuss its use by professionals in different sectors.
- To analyze what kind of questions a risk assessment must provide answers too, in order to be of use for people working in different sectors in the Middle East and North Africa region.
- To establish an informal network of regional agencies involved in disaster risk reduction and risk assessment, in order to maintain their interests and engagement in disaster risk reduction in future.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

- Regional organizations and institutions with a potential stake in disaster risk reduction.
- Selected number of relevant development agencies active in the region and IFRC.
- Individual experts in disaster risk assessments.

## **DATE**

11-12 March 2008

## **VENUE**

Cairo Branch of the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport  
Higher Studies Complex, Block 1167 off Mosheer Ahmed Ismaeel Street,  
P.O. Box 20231, Masaken Sheraton, Cairo, Egypt



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## **MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL INTER-AGENCY WORKSHOP ON DISASTER RISK ASSESSMENT, CAIRO, EGYPT, 11-12 MARCH 2008**

### **AGENDA**

#### **Day ONE: Tuesday 11 March**

##### **Welcome and opening**

9.30- 09.35 Welcome by Dr. Mohammad Farghali, Director General of Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport

09.40-10:00 Opening remarks by:

Dr. Fatma El-Mallah, Director, Sustainable Development and Environment, League of Arab States

Mr. James Rawley, United Nations Resident Coordinator, United Nations Egypt

Ms. Rosanna Nitti, Regional Coordinator for Disaster Risk Management Middle East and North Africa, the World Bank Group

Mr. Mostafa Mohaghegh, Head of Regional Office, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), Regional Office West Asia and North Africa, Cairo

##### **Session 1: Disasters and Development – From Business as Usual to Risk Management**

10.00-10.30 Disasters and sector impacts in MENA region,  
Dr. Mostafa Tolba, Chairman of Arab Forum for Development and Environment

10.30-11.00 Disaster Risk Management, Concepts and Approaches,  
Mr. Andrew Maskrey, Coordinator, Global Risk Assessment Report,  
United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction,  
secretariat Geneva

11.00-11.30 Break

**Session 2: Disaster Risk Reduction, perspectives on what a shift in approach will require**

11.30-13.00 Working groups: What will be required for sectors to engage more in risk management?

Working Group 1: Disaster Risk Reduction in an Urban Context

Working Group 2: Disaster Risk Reduction, Environment and Rural Context

Working Group 3: Contribution to Disaster Risk Reduction by International Agencies in the MENA region

13.00-15.00 Lunch break

15.00-17.00 Reflections on the working group discussion in plenary

**Day TWO: Wednesday 12 March**

9.00-9.15 Summary of Day 1

**Session 3: Disaster Risk Assessment Tools and Methodologies**

9.15-9.45 Application of a disaster risk assessment in Urban Planning and Management, Professor Djillali Benouar, Director, Built Environment, University of Bab Ezzouar, Algeria

9.45-10.15 Disaster risk assessment and climate change adaptation,  
Mr. John Harding, Programme Officer, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, secretariat Geneva

10.15-11.00 *Currently available disaster risk assessment tools:*

Mr. Eduard Tchan, Deputy Head of Zone, Middle East and North Africa, Amman  
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Mr. Jaser K.Rabadi, Regional Representative for West Asia, Bahrain,  
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

Dr. Nail Momani, Professor of Seismic Risk Management,  
Hashimite University Amman, Jordan

11.00-11.30 Break

11.30-13.00 Discussion: *How existing disaster risk assessment tools and methodologies can be tailored to the need and priorities of Middle East and North Africa region?*

13.00-14.30 Lunch break

#### **Session 4: Way Forward, Next Steps**

14.30- 16:30 Discussions:

*Cross Country collaboration for Disaster Risk Assessment as an initial step to strengthen Disaster Risk Reduction network for MENA*

*Global Risk Assessment Report 2009 (GAR), contribution from MENA region*

*Regional Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, Yemen , 19-21 May 2008, themes and issues to carry forward*

16.30-17.00 Final remarks and closing



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**Middle East and North Africa Regional Inter-Agency  
Workshop on Disaster Risk Assessment  
Cairo, Egypt, 11-12 March 2008**

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