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Twinning of National Platforms - « A European Perspective

Concept Note

55th Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents, Istanbul

Twinning of National Platforms

The issue of the twinning between National Platforms (NPs) was discussed at the last meeting of European National Platforms and HFA focal points held in Paris **(**24-25 April 2008).

From the meeting discussion it emerged that the concept of "twinning" between NPs was not clear and that a note capturing this notion would be welcomed.

As a result, this document was developed in order to provide guidelines on the definition and concept of twinning between national platforms. This revised version of the draft concept note has benefited from inputs from European NPs and Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) focal points. These partners entrusted the United Nations, secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) to include their inputs so that it can be used as a reference for NPs and HFA focal points in Europe and other regions.

Context: The Hyogo Framework for Action

The Hyogo Framework for Action highlights the need to exchange and collaborate on disaster risk reduction issues at the national, regional and international level. Among its many emphases in this regard, the following general considerations capture the spirit of exchanges applicable also to cooperation among national platforms:

In the general considerations:

> (b) …in the context of increasing global interdependence, concerted international cooperation and an enabling international environment are required to stimulate and contribute to developing the knowledge, capacities and motivation needed for disaster risk reduction at all levels;
>
> (h) There is a need to enhance international and regional cooperation and assistance in the field of disaster risk reduction through, inter alia:
>
> - The transfer of knowledge, technology and expertise to enhance capacity building for disaster risk reduction
> - The sharing of research findings, lessons learned and best practices

In Priority 5 of the HFA:

> b) Promote and support dialogue, exchange of information and coordination among early warning, disaster risk reduction, disaster response, development and other relevant agencies and institutions at all levels, with the aim of fostering a holistic approach towards disaster risk reduction.

As the above outlines, cooperation among NPs can be a key tool to consolidate and strengthen efforts at national level and to reach out to influence regional and global developments with relevance for DRR. In particular newly established national platforms can learn from the experiences of confirmed national coordination mechanisms and gain more visibility through international engagement. Cooperation among national platforms

is particularly valuable, if each coordinating mechanism can share experiences on domains not yet explored of fully mastered by another national platform.

Cross-fertilization can take the form of exchanges, visits, workshops or result in more formal cooperation agreements.

"Twinning" of national platforms: Sharing of experiences amongst multi-stakeholder national coordination mechanisms

The twinning arrangement can be defined as a bilateral exchange between national platforms, groups of platforms or entities, which occur, possibly in a multilateral context, under the common cause of disaster risk reduction. These exchanges can be formal or informal and build on existing exchanges or be newly established for this purpose. Although the content of the exchanges shall remain flexible based on the individual circumstances of the cooperating mechanisms, they should be result-oriented, structured and work towards achieving tangible objectives as agreed on by the participating parties.

Twinning can occur between national platforms, national platforms to be, HFA focal points and HFA focal points to be. Furthermore, it can occur in the European context, between European countries and countries outside of Europe, as well as entirely within other regions of the world.

Supportive of the beneficial effects of twinning, the Council of Europe (EUR-OPA) and the UN/ISDR secretariat and other ISDR system partners actively support and encourage bilateral agreements among national platforms through regional and global meetings and encourage bilateral arrangements, which contribute to a strengthened ISDR system on disaster risk reduction.

Overall objective of "twinning"

The overall objective of "twinning" is to strengthen and promote cooperation between national platforms. The intention is to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more national platforms, based on topics and/or needs and understandings, which will involve direct communication as an *interactive* process, which will enable both partners to *learn from each other's experiences*.

Even though communication can take place in any form or shape, experience has shown that it can be mutually beneficial when country visits are arranged to serve as a catapult for further exchanges. Such country visits are highly encouraged because they provide an effective way of producing a relatively quick and in-depth assessment of current circumstances within a country while providing for good relationship building based on face-to-face exchanges amongst partners.

Why "twinning" is essential

Twinning will allow for more rigorous/systematic information sharing between national platforms in order to achieve increased coordination as well as a bridging on the knowledge gap between more and less experienced NPs on a regional and global scale.

This, in turn, will promote a more even and coordinated playground for disaster risk reduction in the global arena.
It will also provide more leverage to NPs at their own country level – hosting or organization of international exchanges and events including workshops serves to be better recognized. It will enhance the regional and international collaboration and finally it could prove to be of cost-efficient given the channeled energies based on previous experiences and lessons learnt.

Characteristics of "twinning"

The following characteristics[1] are identified in describing twinning among NPs:
Twinning is Flexible. It encompasses as many modes of learning and ideas to be shared as there are organizations with skills to learn and solutions to share.
Twinning is Collaborative. It builds human and institutional capacity through a process of joint action rather than a one-way transfer of information and resources.
Twinning Gets Results. It multiplies opportunities for problem solving by helping organizations disseminate best practices and replicate successes.

Activities that "twinning" can incorporate

Bilateral cooperation between countries can take on diverse forms depending on the individual circumstances and characteristics of the countries. In practice, twinning activities can evolve around two concepts:

A) existing national platforms working together on selected issues (thematic collaboration), or

B) exchanges between an existing national platform with a national platform to be (structural guidance).

Twinning under Concept A is based on a thematic approach and will allow for countries that are prone to similar types of hazards and vulnerabilities or have similar strategies in regards to disaster risk reduction to benefit from combining each other's knowledge and building on each other's experiences. In many instances, dialogue between two national platforms can serve to fill a gap of information that is sometimes created when networks become too encompassing to cater to individual countries' needs. It can also turn into a more structural approach with the development of joint projects regarding 2 countries or support from one national platform in developing/implementing a project in the country of a national platform.

Twinning under Concept B is based on a structural approach and can translate into three levels:

1. Interest from a country to learn more about how existing national platforms developed in order to advance on their own development of a national platform

[1]The characteristics mentioned have been developed by the EU in relation to the twinning programme developed in May 1998. For further info see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/institution_building/twinning_en.htm

(many countries currently developing an NP have expressed interest in this sort of information). In this context and to facilitate direct interaction between NPs and HFA focal points, the UN/ISDR secretariat-the Council of Europe and DKKV have developed *a document* summerizing structures, aims and activities of existing national platforms in Europe.

2. Interest from a country developing a national platform to build on other European national platforms' experiences related also *to activities and exchanges of technical nature* (e.g. Montenegro's interest in establishing contact with the members of a European Network of NPs (Germany, France and Switzerland)); and

3. *Concrete support envisaged and expressed between a national platform* to be and an existing national platform (this is the case between Italy and Albania, where Albania would like to build on the Italian Civil Protection (national platform coordinator) experience and support in restructuring their Civil Protection system from a legislative, structural point of view).

Although Concept B involves one country providing guidance to another country, it is in no way a one-way communication process. As the past has shown learning is a mutual process based on communication of challenges, experiences and results. In this context, countries with more experience with certain types of hazards can provide valuable information and advice to their partners.