



**COMMUNITY BASED DISASTER RISK REDUCTION
REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING,
WEST ASIA, MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA**

23-24 June, 2008

Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Cairo, Egypt



SUMMARY and PROCEEDING REPORT

1. Background:

Research and experience have proven that any increase of disaster resilience, to alleviate the risk of continuous losses of material assets and human lives, cannot be achieved without community based risk reduction measures. Ten of the most disaster prone countries in the world¹ are located in West Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and the devastating impact of the recent disasters have become self evident with the Cyclone Gonu (2007) effecting Oman, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan and the earthquakes in Bam (2003) and Turkey (1999). Apart from these occurrences, the emerging and apparent challenges of climate change add to the already high-risk profile of the region. The commitment to disaster risk reduction from the region was illustrated by the participation of regional and national entities, NGOs and governments in the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR II), in Kobe, Japan, January 2005. The Conference adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA)².

The governments and civil society organizations mentioned above have been developing various capacities targeting disaster preparedness and response, however, risk reduction is not yet well integrated into the planning and policy paradigms in the region. Comprehensive and integrated approaches with action at a community level are essential to turn policies in to action and strengthen resilience.

2. Summary of the Consultative Meeting:

The opening remarks by IFRC and UN/ISDR both highlighted the importance of disaster risk reduction globally, regionally and nationally, and how the increased threat of natural hazard in combination with amplified vulnerability is representing a threat to the livelihood of many communities in the region. The opening session also emphasized that HFA, is a guiding tool that can be utilized at community level and facilitate the linkage from local, national, regional to global level and vice-versa.

Furthermore, the two-day workshop benefited from a rich discussion amongst 32 participants representing the national and international NGOs, NGO networks and the red cross/crescent family. The consultative meeting was structured through four thematic sessions designed in a combination of panel discussions, presentation and working groups; (1) Risk Reduction a Global Priority with Local Action, (2) Sustainability of Local Initiatives, (3) Collaboration mechanism for Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction (4) Recourse Mobilization. The region is diverse and long stretched, from Tajikistan to Morocco; in spite of the diverse geographical belonging the participants throughout the two days identified communalities in concerns, challenges, strengths and capacities, with respect of the following;

¹ World Bank Hotspot study 2005: Turkey, Iran, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Tunisia, Kyrgyz Republic, Algeria, Tajikistan, Morocco and Lebanon.

² Full document and additional material is available on: <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/framework/>

2.1 Communalities in community based disaster risk reduction in the West Asian, Middle East and North African Region;

HFA was endorsed by the governments in the region, who thereby committed to the same three strategic goals and five priorities of action outlined in HFA. Furthermore, effective implementation of HFA and risk reduction requires support at local and national level, and a coherent plan of action and collaboration between local and central governmental institutions.

There exist several national and regional Civil Society Development Networks in the region. However, the concept of disaster risk reduction is relatively new, and not fully integrated into the overall development and poverty reduction agenda, thus advocacy of disaster management and risk reduction as a part of the development agenda is still needed.

More disaster risk reduction training and capacity building are required for community members and for organizations working with the communities. The existing efforts across the region are fragmented and expertise often not efficiently utilized. Regional expertise should be given a priority before seeking assistance from the outside; nonetheless external expertise like Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) in Bangkok should not be ignored.

Environmental concerns in general and climate change in specific are closely linked to disaster risk reduction. Still, little has been done at a community level in terms of climate change and disaster risk reduction; therefore the goal would be to scale-up the use of existing disaster risk reduction tools at community level, that have proven to be effective in dealing with climate-related events. These include vulnerability and risk assessments, early warning systems, land-use planning and building code regulation at a community level.

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 planning processes and frameworks at national and local level.

Gender sensitivity should be present when developing national and local policies and projects. Further, women and men, working together, can identify those hazards that are threats to their homes and livelihoods and work together to build safer communities.

Large areas in the region are highly urbanized and/or rapidly growing. This also increases the competition between urban development versus agricultural land use and rural development. The pressure on small scale farmers are therefore increasing as land resources are limited. Unsustainable land use practices can escalate the ecological vulnerability, and thereby provoke land degradation, floods, landslides which will in the long run decrease the ability to sustain the agricultural sector.

Water is a precious and scarce resource, especially in the Middle East and North African region, which does not only increase the risk of disasters but also creates a conflict of interest between the nations in the region.

Based on the communalities, the participants singled out following areas for further concern and action;

2.2 Areas of concern which require further action by regional players:

Sustainable changes at community level cannot be obtained without political support at national level. Thus, to successfully scale-up community based disaster risk reduction, a collaborative effort is needed, involving actors at the local, national and regional levels-presenting increased opportunities for grass-root organizations to participate throughout the process. Moreover, disaster risk reduction should not be seen as a separate area but rather an integrated part of social vulnerability, poverty reduction programmes and development planning to ensure that root problems are addressed.

The community needs to be involved throughout the project cycle; assessing the needs and capabilities, designing roles and responsibilities, build community capacity through community centers or forums, connect projects up towards local governments and entities. Only by having the community them self involved and responsible for the project can the project be maintained after ended project cycle.

Disaster risk reduction is still a relatively new concept in the region while climate change has for some time been recognized as a political priority. In order to succeed with disaster risk reduction at community level, a combined top-down and bottom up approach must be used to promote, advocate and create political space. As such, climate change might represent an appropriate entry point and political channel to strengthen disaster risk reduction at national and local level. Civil Society organizations should assist and work with the government to set the priorities and implement the policies, rules and regulations.

Risk Assessments conducted in the region have had a tendency to focus on hazards more than vulnerability. For the communities to build on the risk assessment it should be an in dept assessment which is developed in cooperation with the community itself and consider specific vulnerabilities of that particular community as well as the hazards. The reports from the risk assessment should present a set of recommendation to tackle the hazards and vulnerabilities identified.

Women and men are affected by disasters differently, and the response to their needs must take these differences into consideration. Women play a primary role in providing assistance to the family and the community in prevention activities as well as during disasters. They are disproportionately affected by disasters and face targeted gender-based violence and exploitation in the aftermath of disasters. Women are often left out of planning for the response and therefore the special needs of women and girls are not met –or met as an

afterthought. The special talents and skills of women should be capitalized to avoid wasting a valuable resource.

The seismic belt is going through the region from Central Asia, Iran and to North Africa. However, in many of the countries drought, floods and climate change are more visible threats, and this should be taken into account. Partnership and exchange visits between communities and countries with the same hazards would be of great value. Moreover, good practices should be systematically compiled and exchanged in all fields of disaster risk reduction. Considering the high level of illiteracy in the Arab region, public campaign and good practices ought to be promoted in alternative ways in addition to written format.

3. Recommendations:

- a. Systematically collect and promote good practices from and to the region;
- b. Develop an information sharing forum, online and/or mailing list, where the members can contribute to discussions, exchange of experiences and information;
- c. Inform, display and distribute available disaster risk reduction tools, to avoid duplications and utilize recourses for more pressing needs;
- d. Develop joined disaster risk reduction tool boxes for themes as; Risk Assessment and Monitoring, Education, Training, Media, Climate Change, Water and Early Warning;
- e. Create a regional disaster risk reduction data base and/or map over ongoing and past projects for community based disaster risk reduction;
- f. Develop disaster risk reduction terminology in Arabic;
- g. Develop and compile existing GIS maps of the region and make these maps easily accessible for all partners in the region;
- h. Establish a regional steering group to coordinate community based disaster risk reduction at a regional level and create a link between regional and global level;
- i. Conduct joined risk reduction training for staff of international and national civil society organization in order to build up the human resource capacities in the region;
- j. Employ the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction to bridge the effort between regional and global level, and thereby contribute to relevant global policies for disaster risk reduction;
- k. Link community based efforts with governments and policy makers in order to create a common basis for concerns, priorities and actions to reduce disaster risks;
- l. Build upon and included civil society organization in national coordination mechanisms, like the National Platforms for disaster risk reduction;
- m. Explore the possibility of establishment of new a Regional Resource Centre for disaster risk reduction and strengthen the existing centers;
- n. Ensure that the link between disaster risk reduction and climate change is explicit, including the implications of on drought, environmental degradation and slow onset disasters.