

Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Genf, 8.-13. Mai 2011

Side Event: Refining the Agenda? Disaster Risk Reduction in Times of Climate Change,

DKKV et al., Dienstag, 10.Mai 2011, Room 18, 12.15h - 13.15h

**Diskussionsbeitrag Botschafter Dr. Georg Birgelen**

**The humanitarian challenge of climate change and the role of disaster risk reduction**

The Federal Foreign Office is a committed supporter of disaster risk reduction. As the Ministry responsible for humanitarian aid, the Federal Foreign Office has a long standing history in promoting disaster risk reduction. Our engagement goes back to the first days of IDNDR (International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction) in 1990. It is based on our experience with humanitarian assistance and countless operations in the field. We know very well that it makes a difference whether or not disaster risk reduction measures have been brought to regions under risk.

In order to address existing needs and to promote disaster risk reduction, 10% of our annual humanitarian aid budget is earmarked for disaster risk reduction. The funds are mainly used to support projects in the field. However, we also support initiatives to further develop the conceptual understanding of disaster risk reduction and to enhance existing instruments. During the German EU Presidency in 2007 a study called “Integrating disaster risk reduction in European Humanitarian Assistance” was commissioned by the Federal Foreign Office. Later the revision of the SPHERE (“Sfir”) Standards was financially supported; Climate change and disaster risk reduction became integrated in the 2011 edition of this handbook. The two studies which provide the background for our discussion today are another example of our engagement. They pave the way for establishing synergies and merging existing know-how of different communities.

The PEER Review 2010 of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) acknowledged these efforts by stating: “It (Germany) is a major advocate for strengthening disaster risk reduction programming across the world, including creating and supporting structures at local, national and regional levels.”

Different roots and causes contribute to an increase of risk. Population growth and rapid urbanization, for example. Climate change might as well boost this already very concerning development. It will pose additional threats on people at risk. The number of disasters is on the rise. Weather related extremes are responsible for more than 75% of disasters. The increasing financial needs are obvious. The budget of the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) increased from 539 Mio € in 2002 to more than 1 Bn € in 2010. If this development is going to continue we might even reach a break even point where the humanitarian system will not longer be able to cover the basic needs of the victims of disasters. There is an urgent need for the “humanitarians” to address these upcoming challenges. The discussion has already started. The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance established a task force on climate change and became actively involved in the UNFCCC process.

We do not have any choice. In its study “The right to survive” (2009) Oxfam projected that until 2015 the number of people affected by so called natural disasters might increase by 50% compared to the average figures (1998 – 2007) and reach a number of 375 Mio people annually. Clearly more than half of them will be victims of climate related disasters. Based on this projection Oxfam concludes: “In short, new and existing conflicts, added to the growth in climate-related disasters, are likely to create by 2015 an unprecedented level of need for humanitarian assistance that could overwhelm the world’s current humanitarian capacity.”

This message underlines the urgency of our topic. We have to work on an improvement of the humanitarian system. A very popular way to achieve this, of course, would be to demand a further increase of the humanitarian aid budget. Let me call this the “quantitative approach”. However, in times of manyfold budgetary restraints nearly everywhere, it is doubtful whether this approach will be successful enough to cover all the shortcomings. Moreover, humanitarian assistance is not only about money. It is also about knowledge and people and the way people cooperate with one another. We need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the humanitarian system. We have to adapt to the upcoming challenges by scaling up the existing expertise and improving the flexibility of our system. I would call this the “qualitative approach”. To do so, it needs a thorough analysis of today’s situation and the development of projections on future demands for humanitarian aid. We could call this a mapping.

Let me give you two examples:

Preparedness measures, if implemented in a targeted way, can considerably reduce the adverse impacts of extreme events on the affected population. Community based preparedness is a key asset for disaster risk reduction. Preparedness could be enhanced by integrating upcoming changes into training and structures.

Early Warning is one of the most effective instruments of disaster risk reduction in order to save lives and livelihoods. In times of Climate Change we need to incorporate changing hazards, changing frequencies and changing lead times into Early Warning Systems. How can we best extend the warning time and come to “long term Early Warning”? Early Warning Systems need also to integrate creeping hazards which develop slowly but might reach a tipping point when they lead to a disaster.

These two examples show that there are quite some areas where further improvement is needed. At the same time scientific research and development in different sectors provide also promising potentials to enhance what is there.

Clearly this battle cannot be won by one actor alone. As the presentation of the two studies has shown, it needs both the humanitarian and the development sector working together. At least we should use the so called “window of opportunity” after a disaster to reduce the vulnerability and to strengthen the resilience of the affected population.

Climate Change is described as the biggest challenge for mankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To address this challenge we need to mobilise resources and to enhance existing instruments. Close cooperation of all actors involved will be a key precondition for success.

Thank you very much.