Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
Second Session, Geneva, Switzerland
16 – 19 June 2009

REPORT ON INDIVIDUAL EVENT

Date of event:	18 June 2009	**Your name:**	Sandra Amlang/Josephine SHIELDS RECASS

Event type (tick the box):	**Event name (write the name below):**
☐ **Pre-session**	
☐ **High-level panel**	
☐ **Round Table**	
☐ **Informal Plenary**	
☐ **Special Event**	**Early Warning Early Action (SE35)**
☐ **Other**	

Number of participants - **Total: 60**

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1) Key questions or issues raised, main challenges or constraints identified (say, max 5):
There has been significant investment in early warning systems for high frequency events, and these have generally been working well. Should this be the case for what are usually considered to be *low probability events* (e.g, Myanmar cyclone and Indian Ocean tsunami)? How can we prepare for them?

Inextricably linked to vulnerability reduction, is the ability of communities to cope with climate variability and extremes – and unpredictability – due to climate change and continue to develop in spite of them. It is therefore essential that disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate risk management (CRM) adopt complementary approaches. How will this happen practically?

Cost-benefit analysis of DRR including early warning systems divergent schools of thoughts exist.

How to get governments on board, to allow for acting on early warning information in order to reduce the impact of hazards once there is a consensus on the thresholds that point to an impending emergency? Need for agreements on triggers and thresholds.

Correlation between certainty and inaction, and uncertainty and inaction as this relates to early warning information for example for seasonal events such as epidemics.

Concept of early action – how is it defined, and what can be done before disaster strikes – regardless of timescale?

How can early warning information be used to protect livelihoods across timescales?

There are 4 elements of early warning (ref. page 17 of the *World Disasters Report*) require equal attention. However, emphasis is also on the fourth element, relating to response capability, as this is usually minimized in the early warning cycle – if everything works well to the last mile, are people able to respond appropriately when they lack the necessary resources.

How can early action be achieved, when there is a profound lack of interest from donors and the media, despite the availability of reliable information of an imminent crisis, such as the current situation in the Horn of Africa, relating to the food insecurity situation.

2) Principal proposed solutions, messages or recommendations:
The level of investment in the development of the technical components of early warning - and advances in this area - has not been matched by sufficient developments in the human component building on traditional coping mechanisms. There is a need to address both components and increase investment in community-based approaches to early warning such as education and awareness raising. Inter-linkages between the technical components of EWS and community engagement is crucial.

To ensure the sustainability of early warning, it is recommended that existing networks and systems be used instead of establishing new ones. These should be available at all levels, with cooperation in coordination in their maintenance and functioning occurring across borders: and allowing for feedback from end users on the usefulness of the information.

In order to achieve additional technical accuracy for unpredictable and/or low frequency events a trans-disciplinary approach, including communities is recommended (e.g. using geologists, engineers, coastal ecologists for tsunamis).

Multi-hazard early warning systems, such as those existing in France, Shanghai, Italy and Cuba (WMO case studies – to be published in summer 2009) should be documented and shared.

Early warning, early action in a broader timescale must include earlier response in order to allow for early recovery and minimize the impact of hazards. Early action (e.g. mitigation activities, cleaning drains, planting trees, building sea walls) should happen before and after emergencies.

The focus should be on helping communities to reduce their risks.

Innovative approaches such as contingency/risk financing are to be used to increase the effectiveness of emergency response, and overall disaster risk reduction, using early warning information.

Need for increased attention to developing early warning systems for slow onset event such as drought.

3) Conclusions by the Chair of the event:
For early warning systems to be effective, the information has to reach at risk communities in a timely manner. This in itself is insufficient, unless they are aware of the actions that they can take to save lives and protect livelihoods, and safeguard their development gains. Early warning systems cannot exist in isolation, but are better used when they are linked at all levels. They can be sustainable only if their development or improvement is done using existing networks and systems, and fostering cross border cooperation. Early action has to include all timescales, in order to either prevent disasters, or at least reduce the impact of hazards on vulnerable communities. Innovative tools (such as WFP's proposed voucher, as well as its work on index and contingency financing for early recovery) represent a shift away from traditional emergency response, to one where early action is being taken using early warning information.

4) Your additional thoughts on the event:
Very active discussion.