



Key Achievements and DRR Priorities within the League of Arab States system

Mrs. Fatma El Mallah
Advisor to the Secretary-General on Climate Change
Representative of the Secretary-General
League of Arab States

Introduction

LAS is an intergovernmental organization established in 1945 comprising 22 Arab States; 10 in Africa and 12 in West Asia. It is a system that includes around 20 specialized Arab Agencies, 13 specialized ministerial councils and 5 financial institutions.

Its main objectives are to enhance Arab cooperation and coordination in all relevant areas with the ultimate goal of establishing the Arab Common Market and Economic Integration.

I. Milestones of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) at Regional Level:

1. The Arab Cooperation Agreement Organizing and Facilitating Relief Operations 1990.
2. The Initiative for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region 2004
3. Arab Summit in Algeria 2005 established an Arab Coordination Mechanism between Arab countries and Arab Agencies in charge of disasters and emergencies.

4. The 2007 Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change referred to DRR in the context of Adaptation, stressed on reduction of *potential risks, use of monitoring and early warning systems, need for adequate preparedness to control disasters caused by climate change.*
5. The 2008 MOU between LAS and UNISDR constituted a turning point in advancing the implementation of HFA and integration of DRR in sustainable development policies in the Region.
6. Since 2008, DRR is a permanent item on CAMRE Agenda.
7. The agreement to establish Arab Center for the Prevention of Earthquakes and other Natural Disasters Risks, hosted by Algeria entered into force in January 2011.

II. Intra-Regional Collaboration on DRR

In collaboration with UNISDR Regional Office:

- a) The preparation of regional progress reports on the implementation of HFA in the Arab region (2009,2011).
- b) The holding of regional workshops to build and develop capacities to enhance national and regional implementation of ISDR and HFA.
- c) Active steps for the development of national platforms and a regional platform to enhance coordination and cooperation and build partnerships for the effective implementation of HFA.
- d) The preparation of the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, adopted by CAMRE in December 2010 and endorsed by the Arab Summit for Economic and Social Development in January 2011.

- **ACSAD:** regional early warning systems for drought monitoring, and establishing a desertification monitoring and assessment network.
- **AOAD:** early warning systems based on GIS for locust swarm and capacity building on disaster risk management.
- **ALO:** to incorporate DRR activities in 2011-2012 action plan.
- **AASTMT:** hosting Regional Center for Disaster Risk Reduction for Training and Research established jointly with UNISDR in Egypt.
- **CMAI:** enhance cooperation and coordination with Arab and international organizations in relevant issues to DRR.
- **The Permanent Committee of Meteorology** deals with several DRR activities related to the role of meteorology in reducing the effects of disasters.
- **Arab Council for Housing and Construction** adopted among others 2 DRR codes for reducing seismic risks and fire control.

III. Arab Strategy For Disaster Risk Reduction 2020

Disaster Risk

```
graph TD; A[Disaster Risk] <--> B[Main Hazards]; A <--> C[Key Vulnerabilities]; B --- D[+]; C --- D;
```

Main Hazards:

- Expansion of drought spells
- Frequent flash floods
- Climate change impacts including sea-level rise will likely affect many people in the region
- Risk of earthquakes and tsunami is real
- Rising frequency of sand and dust storms

Key Vulnerabilities:

- Rapid urbanization
- Fragile infrastructure
- Poor city planning and services
- Lack of social safety nets
- Increasing poverty
- Lack of public awareness
- Political agenda busy with pressing challenges

Purpose of the Arab DRR Strategy

ASDRR has a two-fold purpose:

- To outline a vision, strategic priorities and core areas of implementation for disaster risk reduction in the Arab region;
- To enhance institutional and coordination mechanisms, and monitoring arrangements to support the implementation of the Strategy at the regional, national and local level through preparation of a Program of Action.



5 Key Priorities of the Arab DRR Strategy

- Strengthen commitment for comprehensive disaster risk reduction across sectors.
- Develop technical capacities to identify, assess and monitor disaster risks.
- Build resilience through knowledge, advocacy, research and training.
- Improve accountability for disaster risk management at the sub national and local level.
- Integrate disaster risk reduction into emergency response, preparedness and recovery.

FOLLOW-UP to the Strategy:

League of Arab States, supported by UNISDR Regional Office in Cairo, and other partners, is currently developing a Program of Action to implement the Strategy. This Program will be debated and adopted at the first Arab Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, scheduled to take place, at the headquarters of the LAS, in Tahrir Square, Cairo, in September 2011

IV. Examples of cross-regional collaboration in context of climate change

- **The League of Arab States recognizes that climate change adaptation programs should focus particularly on the provision of the necessary infrastructure to reduce potential risks; and include appropriate mechanisms for risks insurance, improvement in the management efficiency of natural resources through the use of appropriate techniques and advanced monitoring, control and early warning systems, as well as adequate preparedness to confront disasters caused by climate change.**

■ **Climate change and DRR also included in activities of cooperation between the League of Arab States and the UN agencies (UNEP, ESCWA, UNISDR, World Bank, etc).**

Examples:

- **capacity building workshops (UNEP....).**
- **joint assessment of vulnerabilities and impacts of climate change on water (ESCWA....).**
- **Arab strategy on DRR (UNISDR....).**
- **flagship report on “adapting to a changing climate in the Arab region”(WB....).**
- **Collective efforts by Arab regional organizations and UN agencies in the region to draft the “Arab Plan of Action to Address Climate Change Issues” which highlights need for DRR in the adaptation mechanisms proposed.**

•Climate change related activities feature in the projects and programmes of cooperation between the League of Arab States and other regions (South America, China, EU) such as:

•joint cooperation between Arab & South American countries on space-based satellites and remote sensing in the fields related to the impacts of Climate Change on the environment and on the use of models for predicting regional climate change scenarios to reduce uncertainties.

•capacity building workshops and exchange of experiences (China).

V. Challenges and Opportunities to enhance cooperation for DRR in the Arab region

A: The main challenges

1. While the political will exists to address issues of DRR and several steps have been taken, the issue is still new to the region.
2. The need for good governance on the regional national and local levels.
3. The necessity of integrating DRR, with Climate Change policies, into national and regional policies for sustainable development.

4. Capacity building and the provision of adequate resources are elements that have to be addressed.
5. Raising awareness and building a culture of prevention and safety; and more needed efforts to reduce risk factors.
6. The need to enhance early warning systems to identify, assess and monitor potential hazards and disaster risks.
7. The concept of multi risk assessment is still not well developed.
8. Lack of information and knowledge sharing.
9. More investments are needed for DRR to include it in relevant processes and sectors.

B: Opportunities

1. The vision is clear and the political will is there.
2. Substantial achievements, though not enough, in the last five years on both the national and regional levels.
3. Positive endeavors to build partnerships and benefit from best practices and success stories.
4. Cooperation with relevant Arab, regional, and international organizations, particularly UNISDR, as well as with civil society.
5. Learning from other regions' best practices on integration of DRR and enhancing coordination.
6. A strengthened ISDR system supported by an autonomous and well resourced UNISDR is critical to advance DRR nationally and regionally.

Thank You

Fatma El Mallah
League of Arab States

fatma.elmallah@las.int
envsusdev.dept@las.int