

Australian Country Statement Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction 14-15 July 2014

Introduction

Excellencies, Heads of Delegations, distinguished guests and participants; Australia is pleased to be a part of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

It is a significant opportunity for the international community to shape future disaster resilience efforts, as we build on the current Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) to the new international agreement for disaster risk reduction (HFA2).

The experience in Australia, as in other parts of the world, has been of increasing risk exposure due to various factors. These include urbanisation, accelerated economic growth, demographic changes, increasingly interdependent economic systems and supply chains and changing climate patterns.

Australian HFA implementation

Consistent with the HFA, creating a sense of shared responsibility across all sectors of society is key to Australia's approach to effective disaster risk reduction. We recognise that resilience can only be achieved if all levels of government, the not-for-profit sector, the community and business interests, have a shared understanding of the risks they face and work together to manage these risks. For this to happen, risk information must be communicated in a format and at a time that can inform decisions.

It has been three years since Australia's *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments, marking a distinct shift in our policy focus from 'response and recovery' to one more centred on 'preparation and mitigation'.

There has been a significant amount of progress in the areas of risk assessment, land-use planning reform, and public communication and warnings to improve risk-informed decision making.

Other key achievements have been in improved public warning capability; community engagement and participation; emergency management education and training initiatives; and emergency management research.

Nonetheless, despite having the resilience strategy in place, we recognise that our national funding arrangements remain weighted towards response and recovery. The Australian Government recently commissioned an independent inquiry into natural disaster funding arrangements to identify ways to address this imbalance and identify options that support mitigation and recovery in a sustainable way. We hope the inquiry will also provide useful insights for the global discourse on disaster risk reduction and we will bring these to the HFA2 process as they become available.

Disaster risk reduction is also an important element of the Australian aid program. Australia sees building resilience to disasters and other crises as a priority condition for sustainable economic development and growth, and ultimately poverty reduction.

- This is why we are working to gradually mainstream disaster risk reduction into our development and humanitarian programs in order to ensure we maximise the resilience of all our aid activities.
- Underpinning our work is building the capacity of partner countries to reduce disaster risks. We have worked collaboratively with countries in the region, including the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, to build institutional capacity to assess and manage hazards and risks.
- Key elements of our approach are making risk information available through open source and open access mechanisms and the recognition that science-based risk information is critical to sound decision making. This has included supporting development of disaster loss databases and implementing risk assessment methods, models and tools. In many cases, this work has led to other disaster risk reduction efforts or adoption of tools by local governments.

Views on HFA 2

Australia values the opportunity to contribute to the development of the HFA2. Australia agrees that we need to build on, rather than replace or simply replicate the HFA. We do not see HFA becoming redundant or being retired through the HFA2 process. However, while the HFA helped raise awareness and understanding, the gap between disaster risk reduction policy and practice still needs to be bridged. This is where we see the focus of the HFA2.

We also need to ensure that we synchronise the HFA2 with the full range of inter-related global dialogues, for example the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, to ensure that resilience and risk reduction are firmly embedded in the outcomes of these processes. In doing so, we want to see ownership of the disaster risk reduction agenda broadened.

To assist countries in implementing the HFA2 and enable risk-informed decision making, practical applications, tools and experiences need to be shared and used in capacity building efforts. It is not enough to improve data on hazards and risks – we need to be able to apply the analysis to develop and implement disaster resilient policy to effect change within governance frameworks.

We must ensure decisions on public and private investments are risk-sensitive from the beginning and avoid creating new risks as economies and populations grow.

Given these considerations Australia sees that the HFA2 should begin by recognising that:

- Reducing risk and building economic and social resilience to disasters is integral not only to saving lives but also to sustainable economic development.
- Disaster risk reduction is an investment not a cost and there is a body of evidence that demonstrates the return on these investments.

- People and organisations managing disaster risk need to be supported to make risk informed decisions.
- Business accounts for the vast majority of global investment. They must be encouraged to make disaster-resilient investments and to share their knowledge and experience.
- Vulnerable people are disproportionately affected by disasters and have insights in to how to strengthen their resilience and must be given a voice in decisions that affect them.

Furthermore, the HFA2 needs to be a practical framework that:

- Promotes disaster risk management strategies that prevent the creation of new risk, as well as mitigate existing risks.
- Encourages Governments to actively strengthen and enhance partnerships across all sectors and with all stakeholders to build disaster resilience.
 - o This involves creating an inclusive whole-of-community sense of responsibility and ownership of efforts to build disaster resilience. In Government it means building linkages between Ministries and throughout tiers of government.
 - o It includes enhanced community engagement and participation and strengthened engagement with the private sector as stakeholders in disaster resilience at the local level.
- Promotes better understanding of risk and translating that understanding into risk-informed decision making.
 - o This involves guiding governments in building effective ways to educate people about the risks they face and empower individuals, businesses and communities to exercise choice and assume responsibility for their own risk reduction.
- Encourages risk assessments to be placed in economic terms and to be backed by better tools for assessing the merits of different public and private sector investments. This includes:
 - o analysing funding mechanisms to achieve a more effective and sustainable balance of natural disaster recovery and mitigation funding that builds the resilience of communities for future events;
 - o undertaking risk assessments using a robust and consistent methodology that considers risks and vulnerabilities and capabilities across the social, economic, built and natural environments;
 - o developing partnerships with those who can effect sustainable change in policies and practices, including researchers, volunteers, not-for-profit organisations and community groups;
 - o managing consistent and accessible information from local, national and international sources; and

- disaggregated data and science-based tools.
- Enhancing the focus on vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, and consideration of gender perspectives so that disaster risk reduction effects become inclusive.
- Emergency management training and education, including schools based programs, to develop not only competent emergency management practitioners but also more disaster aware and resilient communities.

In relation to the HFA2 monitoring:

- We welcome the proposed indicators in each of the family groups at the input (Public Policy), output (underlying drivers of risk) and outcome (disaster loss and impacts) levels and look forward to the opportunity to feedback on refinements as the HFA2 process moves forward.
- We are supportive of a monitoring framework that encourages actors to be ambitious and aspirational while also remaining realistic about what can be achieved and when.
- Australia supports the proposed output indicators linking to the targets and indicators proposed under the sustainable development goals.
- HFA2 must be coherent with the concurrent processes with the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit Summit if we are to move towards a truly anticipatory approach to disasters.

Conclusion

I would like to acknowledge the important work and achievements of the UNISDR over the last decade – and particularly their role as custodians of HFA and now in the development of HFA2. Specifically I would like to acknowledge the coordination of the regional and global consultation process.

Australia is committed to working with partners in our region and globally to reduce disaster risk and looks forward to participating in this intergovernmental process and the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai next March.

Thank you.