

**Background Paper for Session Workshop 4.1.1
“National Coordination Mechanisms – National Platforms
for Disaster Risk Reduction”**

1. Introduction

a) Disaster Risk Reduction as a national and local priority

National governments and their administrative units have a primary responsibility to protect people on their territory from the adverse effects of natural hazards. While providing essential direction, they complement the efforts and provide needed support to local communities in building resilience to disasters. National governments are also responsible for creating an enabling environment to implement disaster risk reduction measures.

The need to reduce the impacts of disasters is gaining recognition and commitment among governments worldwide, especially after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. By adopting the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 *“Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters”* at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan in January 2005, the 168 Governments present recognized their critical role in working with other actors to reduce disaster risks at national and local levels.

The Hyogo Framework’s first two Strategic Goals call for the *“development and strengthening of institutions, mechanisms and capacities to build resilience to hazards”* and for an *“integration of disaster risk reduction into sustainable development policies and planning”*. To ensure sustained commitments, the prioritization of disaster risk reduction in national policies is identified as a key step to reduce disaster losses and build resilience.

The first of the Hyogo Framework’s five Priorities of Action is to *“ensure that disaster risk reduction (DRR) becomes a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation”*. It details a set of related key activities including the:

- Establishment of institutional mechanisms for Disaster Risk Reduction (National Platforms) with designated responsibilities,
- Integration of risk reduction in various sectoral policies and planning,
- Adoption of risk related legislation,
- Decentralization of disaster-related responsibilities and resources, and the
- Implementation of measures to foster political commitment and community participation.

These actions are based on the understanding that *“countries that develop policy, legislative and institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction and that are able to develop and track progress through specific and measurable indicators have greater capacity to manage risks and to achieve widespread consensus for, engagement in and compliance with disaster risk reduction measures across all sectors of society”* (Hyogo Framework, paragraph 16). Successful accomplishment of these roles depends upon the participation and coordination of the widest possible range of stakeholders in a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder framework.

b) National Coordination Mechanisms / National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction

The Hyogo Framework’ call for the creation or strengthening of national integrated disaster risk mechanisms, and particularly refers to National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction. These Platforms are to facilitate coordination among stakeholders, advocate and raise awareness on

DRR and advance its integration in development policies. These functions are critical to build resilience to disasters, with responsibilities designated at national through local levels of any society. The coordination role of multiple sectors is an important one to ensure “a broad based dialogue at national and regional levels for promoting awareness among the relevant sectors.”

National Platforms or other similarly conceived “national coordination mechanisms” are currently evolving to meet the needs of individual countries. A National Platform for DRR can be defined as a nationally led forum or committee of stakeholders able to serve as an advocate of DRR at different levels of engagement. It can provide coordination, analysis and advice on priority areas requiring concerted action through participatory processes and should strive to become a coordination mechanism for mainstreaming DRR into development policies, planning and programmes. It can foster the development of a comprehensive national DRR system appropriate to each country guided by the Hyogo Framework.

The effectiveness of National Platforms will be enhanced to the extent that they are able to be multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary in nature, involving public, private and civil society participation. A National Platform also could include United Nations agencies at the national level. With this broad composition National Platforms can mobilize knowledge, skills and resources required for the various activities necessary to build resilience to disasters. By working together with Focal Points for the Hyogo Framework, National Platforms become the recognized formal contact for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) system at national level.¹

The establishment of National Platforms was initially requested by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in its resolution 1999/63 and in General Assembly resolutions 56/195, 58/214, and 58/215. These resolutions were adopted at the end of the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction (IDNDR, 1990-1999). National Platforms build on experiences gained during the IDNDR and in many cases have become revitalized in recent years.

In sum, an officially declared National Platform set up in line with the Hyogo Framework’s principles serves to galvanize all stakeholders for risk reduction at the national level drawing from several sectors and disciplines and to facilitate the implementation of risk reduction activities by this multitude of actors with a long-term vision and commitment. It should consequently serve as single entry point at national level and as such can play a role in raising efficiency and effectiveness of joint disaster risk reduction measures.

2. Current Status of National Platform formation

Between 2000 and 2006, Governments of 38 countries have officially communicated their National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction to the UN/ISDR secretariat. Twenty of these are in Africa, where previously almost no such multi-stakeholder fora for risk reduction existed. The number of National Platforms is considerably lower in Asia and Latin America, because of pre-existing, alternative disaster risk management set-ups. The National Platforms of China, Iran, Japan, The Philippines and Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador Nicaragua, and Panama are exceptions to this characterization. In Europe there has been a growing interest from Governments to set up or change the status of existing arrangements already focusing on disaster risk management to become designated National Platforms for disaster risk reduction.

Most Platforms of recent development have resulted from a nationally led participatory process informed by the “*Guiding Principles for National Platforms for Disaster Reduction*” developed jointly by the UN/ISDR secretariat and the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on behalf of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction. These principles were developed in response to renewed international calls for inter-disciplinary involvement to coordinate, guide and implement DRR with development partners working in close coordination with disaster risk management institutions. As such, the UN/ISDR

¹ The ISDR System comprises numerous Governments, UN organizations, bilateral partners and civil society organisations worldwide working together to reduce disaster losses, in lives and in social, economic and environment assets in line with the Hyogo Framework, as an essential condition for sustainable development. For further information please visit the UN/ISDR website at http://www.unisdr.org/eng/about_isdr/isdr-mission-objectives-eng.htm.

secretariat has renewed its efforts to support National Platforms and collaborates with other UN agencies in particular UNDP in support of the work in developing countries, and with many other regional institutions within the ISDR network.

The Guiding Principles provide a succinct overview of the rationale for establishing National Platforms, state principles for success, and express their objectives and major functions. They seek to provide additional experience about forming, managing and sustaining National Platforms for DRR. In October 2006, representatives of existing National Platforms and other government officials considering the establishment of new National Platforms reviewed these earlier guidelines. As a result, revised guidelines are now being published in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese.

Above-mentioned meeting of selected National Platforms and other national DRR officials was a useful dialogue as it began consultations among national coordination authorities. Similar meetings are planned at regular intervals. They will complement the dialogue already taking place at regional level, such as the one among African National Platforms and Hyogo Framework Focal Points facilitated every six months by the ISDR secretariat's office in Nairobi or the ones organized in collaboration with regional organizations in Europe and Latin America.

Experience with National Platforms for DRR shows, that where they are proactive and focused and have necessary political backing, they have made a difference in advancing disaster risk reduction. National Platforms played a critical role in:

- Achieving higher political commitment and engagement of politicians for disaster risk reduction (Costa Rica, Gabon, Madagascar, Nigeria...),
- Integrating DRR into national policy and legislation and development plans (China, Colombia, Djibouti, Kenya, Senegal, Uganda...),
- Promoting community participation in DRR through awareness-raising and capacity-building activities (China, France Germany, Japan, Madagascar, Nicaragua, Switzerland...),
- Engaging the media and private sector for DRR (Germany, Japan, Madagascar, Nigeria...),
- Enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation among line ministries, donors and UN agencies at country level (Costa Rica, Madagascar, and other National Platforms),
- Engaging the educational sector for promoting disaster risk reduction at school (Iran, Madagascar, Seychelles and many other National Platforms),
- Strengthening disaster preparedness and developing disaster contingency plans (China, Comoros, Madagascar...),
- Strengthening regional cooperation for disaster risk reduction (African National Platforms, China, France, Germany, Iran, Switzerland...)

National Platforms facilitated the coordination among partners and in some instances became truly participatory instruments involving the Governments, their technical services and civil society. They mostly include the Red Cross/ Red Crescent societies and a varying number of other stakeholders from among the NGOs, the private sector, academic and scientific institutions, the media, bilateral agencies and UN representatives. A broad composition helped to achieve above-mentioned successes.

However, there is no general pattern and the creation of a National Platform alone, does not necessarily lead to increased activities and greater effectiveness in implementing risk reduction. Several countries have found it difficult to actively engage in disaster risk reduction after the establishment of a National Platform. There are several recurrent obstacles that can limit initial efforts to create productive coordination platforms.

The majority of established National Platforms have been facing:

- Insufficient support from both the public and policy/decision makers and concrete political backing from higher government levels due to lack of understanding of the subject, constant political changes and changes of governments
- Lack of stable human resources and technical expertise
- Insufficient financial resources and know-how to integrate DRR into development programmes
- Institutional resistance to change from disaster response to sustained attention to DRR
- Lack of understanding of the goals and functions of National Platforms among National Platform members, leading to reduced interests of and commitments to National Platforms

In particular in Africa, hampered by poor understanding of or low priority for DRR at top policy and decision-making level, sometimes even by mere bureaucratic hurdles which delay their legal recognition, many National Platforms find it difficult to assert themselves, promote DRR and implement their agenda. In other countries, National Platforms have not managed yet to become inclusive by involving a larger set of DRR actors at national level. Consequently the range of measures to reduce disaster risks has been limited.

But also the international community has to improve its support to national processes and National Platforms. In a few instances, international partners seemed to have lacked enough oversight to ensure a systematic involvement or information sharing with National Platforms on the disaster risk reduction activities they are supporting in a country. In addition, there is a need for stronger guidance, support and visibility from the ISDR secretariat and the ISDR system.

In sum, from the experience so far, the following lessons can be drawn:

- *Establishing a multi-stakeholder National Platform is not easy, but sustaining the interests and commitment of National Platform members to DRR is even more challenging,*
- *The understanding of and commitment to DRR of National Platform Focal Points can make a big difference in disaster risk reduction at national level,*
- *Enhancing information sharing and knowledge exchange among National Platforms helps to advance disaster risk reduction at national level and sustain the interests of and commitment to DRR among National Platform focal points,*
- *National platforms are often constrained by financial, political and institutional limitations due to the lack of legal and official recognitions*
- *Gender concerns and needs have not yet adequately reflected in the work of National Platforms*

3. Global Platform's Session workshop on "National Coordination Mechanisms – National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction"

The Global Platform Session Workshop on National Coordination Mechanisms and National Platforms provides an opportunity for national authorities involved with DRR coordination to share experiences, to networking among themselves and with other interested stakeholders. Participants will take stock of progress in setting up and strengthening National Platforms through case study presentations and plenary discussions. Other forms of coordination that can advance DRR, as well as current challenges will be discussed. It is expected that the exchange will be an inspiration for national and local actions in countries, and can also help to inform the wider DRR community on building wider support for Disaster Risk Reduction in practice.

Key points for discussion:

The following provides two key questions participants are asked to address in the session workshop discussions.

1. What are the key issues and challenges to advance the establishment and operations of strong National Platforms / National coordinating mechanisms for DRR serving as factor of change?
2. What are the crucial activities to develop over the next two years (2008-09) for ISDR system partners to support national coordination mechanisms for DRR?

To answer those key questions, participants may discuss the following aspects and respond to the following questions:

Disaster Risk Reduction as a national priority

- Which strategies can be useful to develop prior disaster management focus towards a more comprehensive approach to disaster risk reduction?
- How can momentum and commitment for risk reduction be maintained, within the Governmental structures or within wider public interest especially over a longer time period without disasters?
- How to build a policy case for Disaster Risk Reduction vis-à-vis other development issues?
- How can National Platforms develop an effective communications strategy with the media?
- How could international cooperation and international partners help to keep the momentum?

Institutional Arrangements

- What are the necessary, or desirable, legal requirements for establishing a National Platform?
- Where can a National Platform be placed in a country's institutional structure for greatest impact and effectiveness?

Internal organization

- What would be a productive composition of a National Platform?
- What could be a "blueprint" or minimal structure of a National Platform? (Commissions, board, etc.)
- National Platform and local risk reduction – how to link the national with the local action?

Funding

- How to ensure a solid funding basis for national coordination of DRR activities?
- How to mobilize funds externally?
- The role of champions (goodwill ambassadors, stars, etc.) in raising awareness and mobilizing funds

Capacity building

- How can national and international partners assist in the strengthening of new and existing National Platforms and other coordinating mechanisms?
- Which capacities need to be built or developed further among National Platforms and National coordinating mechanisms?
- How to build capacities internally?
- How to expand collaboration and exchanges with other National Platforms and coordinating mechanisms?

Key activities

- What types of key DRR activities can provide expanded access for a new National Platform/ National coordination mechanism, or which may demonstrate good initial results?
- How can a National Platform mainstream crosscutting aspects like gender in disaster risk reduction?

4. Additional information for National platforms and National Coordination Mechanisms

UN/ISDR secretariat website: <http://www.unisdr.org/>

Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction website: <http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/>

- UN/ISDR (2007): Guidance Note for National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
- DKKV/ GTZ (2007): National Platforms for Disaster Reduction - Study on current status of disaster reduction, institutional arrangements and potential for national platforms for disaster reduction in 3 South and South East Asian countries (conducted by ADPC)
- UN/ISDR (2006): Words into Action: Implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action - Document for consultation (Draft November 2006)
- UN/ISDR (2005): Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters