

*Report from the workshop on Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction through Preparedness  
6 June 2007*

## **1. Introduction**

The workshop, chaired by Mrs. Margareta Wahlstrom, (deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator and assistant Secretary General), was organized around two panels of four experts each representing six countries: Ecuador, Germany (represented by the Global Fire Monitoring Center), India, Kenya, Switzerland (represented by the SDC neighbourhood volunteers projects in Turkey), Tajikistan, and IFRC and ECHO.

The workshop addressed strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction through Preparedness from the perspective of Best Practices at the local and national level and strategies to enhance, replicate or scale-up such initiatives.

## **2. Overview of the presentations**

### Panel I

**Ecuador** insisted on the need for building good, transparent and sharing of information and of community based approaches, local networks and the importance of building political and technical platforms. The principle of subsidiarity was outlined, meaning that national capacities should be put at the disposal of the local level when the latter's coping capacity has been exceeded. It is important to make use of already existing platforms that are well integrated into the communities instead of creating new ones. The need for expedited procedures for emergency projects was identified as a key element.

**IFRC** presented a community based preparedness project in Jamaica and how it mitigated the impacts of hurricane Ivan. The main features included participatory assessment processes, risk analysis, early warning, evacuation, retrofitting of houses and the development of local disaster response plans. The system has self-duplicated as other communities by their own have requested assistance in creating similar structures. The use of the Red Cross movement was useful in avoiding confusion between social and political action.

**Kenya** presented its innovative multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional approach to disaster management where all relevant ministries, departments, Agencies, NGOs, Civil Society and International partners are incorporated. The government has created a one-stop shop data centre of national inventory of resources and capacities available to all institutions. DRR has been mainstreamed into ministerial planning and budget process. Alternative farming strategies, resistant crops etc. was highlighted as a means of mitigation and preparedness. The key element of this approach remains community based.

**Germany** introduced the Global Wild Land Fire Project, and its activities and achievements as well as the specificities of fire hazards. It is a project for defining fire management strategies with community participation with the inclusion of training and the promotion of local coping mechanism. Benefits for the communities need to be identified and understood.

### Panel II

**ECHO** presented the donor perspective and their approaches and the importance of including preparedness into relief and into development and early recovery. Around 10% of their relief budget is dedicated to preparedness activities, through advocacy activities, mainstreaming, DIPECHO and specific projects against drought. She also highlighted the challenge of mainstreaming small local

community based initiatives into national and international systems. The regional level should not be seen as the substitute for the national level.

**Switzerland** presented the Turkish neighborhood disaster volunteer project. This project has trained 2653 people in 62 neighborhoods in Istanbul. It was mentioned that it is difficult to build such projects in urban rather than rural areas as Istanbul has 14 million people. The volunteers are certified for first assistance and could assist professional Search and Rescue teams when they arrive. They undertake public awareness and are now organizing their own training and other social service activities. The equipment provided to the teams is adjusted to the community needs and capacity.

**Tajikistan** presented a regional risk scenario based on threats to the natural dam of the Lake Sarez, which potentially have implications for neighboring countries. They also presented the REACT (Rapid Emergency Assessment and Coordination Team) as a best practice on coordination between governmental and non-governmental organization, as well as the international community can work together.

**India** pointed out the need to stay tuned to HFA, and stressed the fact that governments should undertake a paradigm shift to a holistic disaster risk reduction approach, ensuring inclusive and participatory process and assigning greater importance to prevention, mitigation and preparedness. Putting in place legal and institutional frameworks is crucial to ensure an efficient disaster management. However, the ownership of preparedness activities should remain with the community.

### 3. Summary of the discussions

The discussions focused on four main points:

**Community based approaches** were identified as the key element to ensure successful preparedness. Indeed, communities constitute the first responders and are also the ones that know their specificities and needs best.

However, in order to be sustainable and to reach an acceptable national level of preparedness, **political commitment and support to these initiatives is vital**, otherwise they will remain scattered. It involves the development of local networks and building political and technical platforms using, where possible, existing structures. Adequate legal and institutional frameworks were also recognized as an enabling factor.

Most experiences of successful preparedness activities relate to rural and limited community settings. **The participants stressed the need to replicate these best practices in highly vulnerable urban settings** where it is more difficult. Scaling up such projects has been recognized as a real challenge for preparedness implementation.

Governments, humanitarian and other organizations pointed out the difficulty of committing funds as preparedness shows benefits only after disasters, and other needs tend to get priority. Indeed, preparedness is often not included in humanitarian and other projects.

There is tension between preparedness measures and political and economic costs. Therefore **preparedness needs to be more manifest and show positive investment**. It is important to create political space in order to promote Disaster Risk Reduction.

### 4. Conclusions

Based on the above main elements of discussion, the session participants made a series of recommendations:

-Efforts from stakeholders should be focused on mainstreaming preparedness into all aspects of disaster management and to create political space to promote disaster preparedness. Indeed, advocacy for disaster preparedness is vital, and should highlight the benefits of such initiatives and projects, which aim at limiting the adverse impact of a disaster, and usually make the relief phase less heavy and costly.

-It is important to include preparedness activities into humanitarian projects, but it should not remain limited to this area. Indeed, preparedness should be approached with a longer-term perspective than the actual relief phase, and incorporated into early recovery and development projects as well.

-A focussed effort from the international humanitarian and donor community should be adopted, particularly to assist the “high risk, low capacity countries”. Best practices should be replicated into highly concentrated urban areas, where risks are often greater and preparedness activities less easy to implement. International organizations as well as donors should highly support such projects.

-A strong involvement of the local population as well as civil society is crucial for implementing successful and sustainable preparedness projects. Therefore, such projects should always have a multi-dimensional approach to disaster management, supporting and bringing collaboration between civil society, public and private actors.

-A strong and continuous commitment of all stakeholders is central to success. Political will from governments as well as the inter-agency community’s support towards priority 5 is crucial. Donors were also praised to give a greater focus and step-up their contribution towards preparedness.

Progress in all these aspects should be reported back to the next Platform.