▶ STRENGTHENING
DISASTER RESPONSE
PREPAREDNESS

▶ STRENGTHENING OCHA'S
DISASTER RISK ANALYSIS

▶ BETTER TOOLS FOR
DISASTER CONTINGENCY
PLANNING AND NEEDS
ASSESSMENT

**UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE
COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (OCHA)**

*Strengthening Disaster Risk
Reduction through Preparedness*
Concept Paper

Facts and Trends

Disasters are on the rise, both in number and intensity. The number of people living in disaster-prone areas continues to increase, as does their level of vulnerability. Climate change will exacerbate hydro-meteorological and oceanographic phenomena, and can lead to unpredictable consequences. Despite progressive developments in the regulatory environment, very little can be done to reverse or change this trend in the short to medium term. Recent disasters have shown that the effectiveness with which a disaster is managed will depend highly on how much effort has been put in preparedness measures. The Hyogo Framework for Action states that, "At times of disasters, impacts and losses can be substantially reduced if authorities, individuals and communities in hazard-prone areas are well prepared and ready to act and are equipped with the knowledge and capacities for effective disaster management".

Hyogo Framework for Action

The *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* was adopted by 168 Governments at the World Conference for Disaster Reduction, in Kobe (Japan) in January 2005 to achieve a "substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets". Governments committed to five priorities for action:

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

Priority 5 is distinctive as it links disaster risk reduction activities with the operational abilities identified with emergency/disaster management. Preparedness is concerned with (1) reducing or avoiding possible damages of potential or impending threats and (2) being ready to assist those who have been adversely affected by a disaster and need help beyond their usual coping capacities.

Implementing Priority 5 implies that other Priorities are addressed as it includes strengthening policy, technical and institutional capacities; promotion of dialogue, exchange of information and coordination; development of coordinated regional mechanisms, preparedness and contingency plans; establishment of emergency funds; and last but not least the development of mechanisms to engage the active participation and ownership of relevant stakeholders, including communities, in disaster risk reduction.

Strengthening preparedness is a key element of overall risk reduction strategy. Strong political commitment and support of all sectors is required.

Guiding Principles of Preparedness

- ❖ **Preparedness reduces the impact of disasters and saves lives**

- ❖ **Preparedness means strong and effective systems and structures in place to respond to needs of the affected.**

- ❖ **Preparedness should be based on sound risk analysis, early warning, monitoring and dissemination of information.**

- ❖ **Preparedness should be people-centered, people-focused and multi-hazard**

- ❖ **Preparedness should build capacity at the local level with links to national and international mechanisms**

- ❖ **Preparedness should devote particular consideration to needs of vulnerable groups**

Preparedness reduces the impact of disasters and saves lives

This is one of the fundamental affirmations of the Hyogo Framework for Action as it is widely accepted that disaster preparedness saves lives and reduces the negative impact on societies and economies. While the main responsibility for both preparedness and response to disasters lies with National Governments, the United Nations ISDR and OCHA are working together to support the implementation of Priority 5. While ISDR is working on advocacy, OCHA is using its network to promote preparedness at regional and national levels, with governments, UN country teams and Non-Governmental Organizations. The first and oftentimes most important responders to disasters are the people affected. They are often in possession of very valuable information, experience and coping mechanisms. It is therefore very important that strategies and plans take this into account and work with these communities in their development.

Community Based Preparedness - West Bengal, India

This community-based project was developed to prepare for a flood-based disaster, on the basis of floods that devastated the region in 2000. The project was based on the assumption that if prepared, responses would be more effective in reducing losses and damages. Using a participatory approach, each community prepared an action plan, including vulnerability maps, safe places, low risk areas, highly vulnerable areas and estimated number of families residing in each zone, the number and location of the vulnerable groups/populations such as the aged, disabled, lactating mothers, pregnant women, seriously ill persons and small children.

The plan identified key elements at risk such as life, health, property, livestock and livelihood, resources required/at hand for reducing the level of risk and key activities that the community would do before, during and after the disaster. The project proved very effective, based on a comparison of damages and losses from floods in 2000 and 2004. In 2000, the village lost over 700 cattle while there was no loss in 2004; in 2000, nearly 3000 families had lost/suffered damage to some of their valuable documents while in 2004, none were reported. Another significant achievement was that the village relied primarily on themselves. Further, in 2004 there was hardly any disease outbreak.

Preparedness means strong and effective systems and structures in place to respond to needs of the affected. It should be based on sound risk analysis, early warning, monitoring and dissemination of information. It should be people centred, people focussed and multi-hazard

The first step is to assess current systems and existing resources so as to identify gaps and to provide the knowledge and motivation for improvements in disaster preparedness mechanisms. Assessments can reveal assets, resources and skills throughout government agencies and civil society, so that they may be mainstreamed to meet preparedness, response and recovery needs. Deficiencies can also be uncovered, triggering activities to address them.

Evaluation should consider available resources, legal and institutional frameworks, existing capacities, operational plans and procedures, as well as communications and coordination systems at every level in order to identify gaps. It should also consider recovery and reconstruction strategies.

Inventory of preparedness capacities and mechanisms
A pre-requisite to elaborate any preparedness strategy or plan is knowledge of existing legal and institutional mechanisms and frameworks, organizations, capacities and coordination arrangements, plans and activities in risk and disaster management. Another important aspect is of course resources and the need for national budget allocation.

Risk analysis, hazard monitoring and early warning
In order to know what to prepare for, and when, it is important to produce risk analysis profiles, multi-hazard maps indicating nature, location, intensity and probability of threats and scenario analysis for different hazards. It is extremely important that these take into account vulnerabilities and level of exposure of different parts of the population.

Equally important is to link to early warning systems and to response systems. These systems need to exist at national, regional and local level; they need to integrate all actors and reach all potentially affected. An early warning system is particularly effective when it considers local knowledge while encompassing international, regional and national levels.

Awareness raising, knowledge, information management and communications
Linked to early warning systems, but not limited to the dissemination of warnings is the understanding of hazards, preparedness and responses. It is important to look at how awareness raising can be included in the education system and also to ensure specific focus on most vulnerable populations.

As for information management, it should also include risk identification, monitoring, scenario analysis and warning messages. The system should provide information for planning and be accessible to all stakeholders. Furthermore there should be a mechanism to keep political leaders informed and to facilitate the decision-making process.

Preparedness planning
It is vital that all stakeholders are included in the planning process. Planning should be based on comprehensive information on hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities. It needs to include implementation mechanisms, actions and resources, and provisions on how to deal with international assistance. It needs to reflect that men and women are differently affected.

Systematic planning involving all actors is the basis for effective preparedness and critical to building a state of readiness and effective response. Good planning safeguards lives and livelihoods just as poorly developed plans can cause considerable problems in the event of a disaster. The objective of the planning process is not simply to produce a plan but to stimulate interactions resulting in common understanding and agreement, leading to plans that are well informed, endorsed and used with confidence. A good plan will have clear purpose and scope, well-defined responsibilities and standard operating procedures.

As part of the planning process, responsibilities should be formalized in legislation and/or national development plans. Organizations should support the plan through training, and should test plans and procedures. Effective plans cover management of information, resources and finances; public education; response readiness, alert/evacuation systems; among other.

The aim of contingency planning, as a specific part of the overall preparedness plan, is to ensure preparation for specific foreseen events. It is necessary to develop contingency plans for each type of likely hazard at, not only local and national levels, but also regionally and globally. The plans should cover operational components such as procedures and responsibilities, and resources required.

Response mechanisms

As part of preparedness activities it is necessary to assess existing response mechanisms and to identify needed improvements. Response mechanisms need to be familiar to populations and well coordinated with NGOs, civil society and international response. It should include assessment teams, evacuation procedures, search and rescue teams, Operations/Command Centres, procedures for emergency facilities (hospitals, distribution systems, communication facilities), preparations for reception centres and shelters, procedures for emergency programmes for logistics, as well as public information and media strategy. Resources need to be identified, available and accessible. Networks of volunteers with sufficient resources should be identified and based on grass-root organizations. Emergency contingency funds and rapid procurement process need to be established.

Assessing National Disaster Response Capacity in Mongolia

At the request of the Government of Mongolia, OCHA mobilised a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team in 2004. The team met with stakeholders engaged in disaster preparedness (including the National Disaster Management Agency, Ministries involved in response, city authorities, disaster protection units, fire fighting units, State Reserve, Police, Urban Development and Public Utility Agency, Nuclear and Energy Commission, local authorities, donors, international agencies, non-governmental organisations and the International Federation for the Red Cross and Red Crescent as well as the Mongolian Red Cross).

The findings were presented to the Disaster Management State Services and to the UN Resident Coordinator. A follow-up mission was carried out in 2005 to take stock of progress, to identify impediments and to prioritise outstanding issues. The second mission also considered the UN's engagement in disaster management including support in networking with international structures. It was found that all parties had made important progress. The assessment report was an important instrument on how to organise the national emergency authority. All were determined to ensure recognition of the newly formed National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA) as the key entity for disaster management and coordination. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies also used the report as a tool to review their plans and prioritisations.

Preparedness should build capacity at the local level with links to national and international mechanisms and should devote particular consideration to the needs of vulnerable groups

A common understanding is important because experience has shown that effective response depends on the extent to which actors prepare and operate in a coordinated and timely manner, avoiding gaps, duplications of effort and parallel structures. Different political, cultural and socio-economic environments call for different arrangements and mechanisms, but whatever the setting, effective management and coordination requires clarity of functions and authority, division of labour, as well as leadership. It also includes coordination between local and central authorities, between internal and external actors and within and between sectors.

An important feature of effective preparedness is strong appreciation of who is vulnerable and why and of measures to strengthen the resilience of disaster-prone communities. This people-centred approach needs to be sensitive to gender, culture and other context-specific issues that can empower or undermine particular groups and individuals.

Community-based preparedness in India

Samiyarpettai and Pudupettai are two villages on the south coast of Tamil Nadu in India and both are almost identical in size and development levels. However, during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, Pudupettai lost four times more lives than Samiyarpettai. A couple of months before the Tsunami, Samiyarpettai had taken part in preparedness training and awareness raising programmes designed to build community capacity through involvement and participation of volunteers.

Samiyarpettai, had been chosen for the programme as it was prone to floods, droughts and earthquakes. The training and initiatives at the village level included the constitution of Village Disaster Committees, the elaboration of Village Disaster Management Plans, training of teams on search and rescue and first aid, conducting mock drills, teaching villagers about higher safe spots and how to prevent drowning. This basic training turned out to be essential to survive the 2004 tsunami for many villagers.

Key Challenges

Political commitment

One of the most important factors determining if preparedness is adequate or not, comes with the level of political commitment. It is a sad truth, though with great exceptions, that commitment and realisation of the importance of preparedness comes after (and ends rapidly) a disaster, when it becomes tragically clear that much damage and losses could have been avoided. The Hyogo Framework for Action and other initiatives on preparedness are important steps in the process of harnessing this support, and conferences and meetings are excellent opportunities for governments to share their experiences.

Funding

Another major challenge is of course the funding aspects. It is sometimes difficult to argue for limited funds being spent on preparedness, when so many pressing issues need funds, and it is yet again not until after a disaster that it is realised that money spent on preparedness represents substantial savings in the amount needed for response. The sheer scope of hazards that some countries face, or the size of vulnerable populations make this even more difficult.