

Disaster Risk and Climate Change

Climate change is expected to increase the severity and frequency of weather-related natural hazards such as storms, high rainfalls, floods, droughts and heat-waves (IPCC Fourth Assessment Report). Coupled with sea level rise, this will lead to more disasters in future – unless prompt action is taken.

Over the period 1995-2004, a total of 2,500 million people were affected by disasters, with losses of 890,000 dead and US\$ 570 billion costs. Most disasters (75%) are related to weather extremes (ISDR disaster statistics). Of particular concern is the fact that disasters have been increasing over recent decades, mainly owing to increased populations in hazard-prone locations, unplanned settlements and environmental degradation, but evidence is also mounting that climate change is a factor too, for example in more intense hurricanes, higher rainfall intensities and heat-waves.

Climate change is altering the face of disaster risk, not only through increased weather related risks and sea-level and temperature rise, but also through increases in societal vulnerabilities from stresses on water availability, agriculture and ecosystems. Disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation share a common space of concern: reducing the vulnerability of communities and achieving sustainable development.

ISDR and climate change

Governments have recognized the importance of coordinating climate change adaptation with relevant natural disaster risk reduction measures and the need to integrate these considerations in a comprehensive manner into development plans and poverty eradication programmes.

For several years, the ISDR secretariat has provided information and guidance on disaster risk reduction as a tool to manage climate risks and adapt to climate change, both to inform international policy deliberations and to assist governments and other parties to reduce climate-related vulnerabilities and risk, in line with the Hyogo Framework.

Key points include:

- Use the guidance of the Hyogo Framework for Action: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, agreed by 168 Governments in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan in 2005 to facilitate a systematic rather than project-based approach to adaptation to climate change.
- Scale-up the use of existing disaster risk reduction tools that have proven to be effective in dealing with climate-related events that will be exacerbated by climate change. These include vulnerability and risk assessments, early warning systems, land-use planning and building code regulation, and institutional and legal capacities.

- Ensure adaptation to climate change and disaster risk reduction are integrated into development planning in all sectors. Establish inter-ministerial committees and national platforms for risk reduction to ensure inter-sectorial, multistakeholder coordination.
- Improve capacities and services for knowledge transfer from science to practice and application to bridge gaps in risk management in climate-sensitive sectors.

ISDR secretariat focuses its efforts on these areas of action:

- Achieve recognition, understanding and specific policies at the international level on the synergies between reducing disaster risk and responding to climate change,
- Mobilize, guide and facilitate action at national and regional levels to integrate disaster reduction and climate change policies and practice, and
- Strengthen the capacities of the ISDR system and secretariat to support the integration of disaster reduction and climate change by all actors.

ISDR Asia-Pacific and climate change

The Asia Pacific Office of UNISDR works on two areas of work on the linkages between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation - these are high level advocacy - the promotion of the positive linkages at institutional and policy levels; and analytical work on finding out what makes good climate adaptation that also incorporates disaster risk reduction. In order to do this, a study of good and sound practices and lessons learned is currently being undertaken in Viet Nam and India, with plans for similar work in 2009 in the Philippines and Indonesia.

Ongoing activities include the launch of the Climate Resilient Cities pilot programme in Pune and Mumbai, India followed by an assessment of lessons learned, good practices and sustainability of the programme. In Vietnam, an analysis of the institutional and policy landscape at the national level has been completed and an analysis of the enabling environment related to the implementation and sustainability of ongoing work at the city and community level is underway. A high level policy forum on the linkages between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation is also planned to be organized by the Government of Viet Nam supported by UNISDR in September 2009.