

## **Summary of the informal meeting on the transition from relief to development following natural disasters**

**Date: 28 February 2005**

### **Overview of the presentations by the panelists**

Linking recovery to sustainable development and the need to develop comprehensive approaches to countries in and emerging from crisis was the focus of the ECOSOC panel discussions held in New York.

The session was chaired by **H.E. Ambassador Munir Akram**, President of ECOSOC, who elaborated that while natural disasters represented one of the greatest humanitarian challenges, they often did not receive adequate attention. The frequency of such hazards often impacted developing countries more severely, leaving large segments of the populations vulnerable and chronically poor. Emphasis needed to be placed on a continuing response in the post disaster recovery and on the need to enlarge the boundaries of humanitarian assistance in order to contribute to longer-term rehabilitation of communities.

**Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom**, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, recently appointed the Special Coordinator for humanitarian assistance to Tsunami affected communities, stressed that the mobilization of relevant international aid, including banks, and the close cooperation between key humanitarian actors and national institutions, reduced the risk of a gap between relief and reconstruction. The role of international coordination and national leadership was also instrumental in increasing the efficiency of humanitarian relief. The ECOSOC could contribute to enhancing the coordination through its role in overseeing the work of its subsidiary mechanisms as well as through high-level policy debates. In addition, Ms. Wahlstrom noted that good humanitarian donorships enabled to increasingly focus on consistency and transparency by donors.

**Ms. Margaret Arnold**, Program Manager, World Bank Hazard Management Unit, noted that disaster prevention needed to be considered as an integral component of development rather than a humanitarian issue. Demonstrated experience from the World Bank showed that access to micro finance institutions could support disaster preparedness and risk reduction by decreasing vulnerability. Better coordination, training, flexibility within institutions, were necessary, as well as realistic goals for the recovery process. Emphasis needed to be placed on the need for more evaluations to improve response efforts, and the incorporation of disaster prevention needs into the countries' development plans.

**Mr. Praveen Pardeshi** highlighted UNDP's post disaster recovery experiences in Gujarat (India), and Indonesia, noting that the needs assessment was not always demand driven, as the stakeholder consultative processes were weak. He said that the key challenges for the international community laid in strengthening international and

national capacities. The challenge was that in disaster affected areas, local institutions lacked the capacity to manage large recovery programme;

Reaffirming the need to address the predicament of vulnerable communities and impoverished people living at risk, **Mr. Iain Logan**, Adviser at the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), stressed the importance of reaching vulnerable groups in aid delivery, in particular the elderly, women and children. Furthermore, he noted that this meeting was an opportunity to take forward the global commitment made at the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction 2005, to work with communities, governments, the United Nations and NGOs to build a culture of disaster resilience.

### **Summary of the discussion**

#### **National Ownership and Coordination**

- National institutions should take the lead in coordinating relief and reconstruction efforts. In countries with strong national institutions, i.e. regular training, competent staff, etc., the efforts are highly effective and cost-efficient. In these circumstances, international support should work in partnership with national efforts. However, in many developing countries local institutions lack the capacity to coordinate relief and reconstruction efforts. This leads to uncoordinated activities of NGOs that limit the impact of international assistance.
- In situations where local capacity to coordinate is weak, humanitarian assistance might be provided by the military, both domestic and foreign. As such, the military might be called upon to provide logistical arrangements (helicopters, ships, trucks, etc.) to distribute humanitarian assistance. The civil-military partnership should therefore be further discussed, in particular in regard to foreign military assistance.
- Communication with the public is essential in building trust between the donor-community and relief agencies. This should not only include providing public information on websites, but also audits on a regular basis so that donors have the confidence to provide funds to relief efforts.
- Through disaster relief efforts, new networks are created between aid agencies on a national, regional and international level. These networks can be used to support long-term development after the initial humanitarian disaster, like the support for the peace process in Aceh in Indonesia. This can also be useful in sharing best practices through “peer education”. This is all the more important as the international community does not adequately learn from previous natural disasters.

### Transition from relief to development as a continuum

- The livelihood approach is a key aspect of any transition process. This refers to the capacity to generate income from various sources, like informal trading networks, employment, farming, etc. The livelihood framework is useful as it indicates *when* households have the capacity to provide for their own needs and therefore aid becomes redundant.
- The capacity to generate income, as indicated by the livelihood approach, is strongly linked to the restitution of property rights following natural disasters. Appropriate policies should therefore focus on restitution of property rights, including settling land disputes and providing institutions to support informal trading networks, like the reparation of market stalls.
- The relocation of affected populations raises fundamental human rights questions including the right of people to live where they want and the obligation of government to provide essential services to them. These fundamental questions underscore the importance of a participatory approach and national ownership in the transition process.
- One of the challenges of the transition process, in particular with natural disasters that have high media exposure like the Tsunami, is that funding from private sources is immense. The public expects their funds to be used for relief efforts and not for reconstruction. Furthermore, funds allocated to natural disasters that receive high media exposures tend to divert financial means from other disasters, particularly in Africa.
- Another challenge is that funding from donor institutions needs to be spent in a specific timeframe. Experience demonstrates that the timeframe limitation imposed by donors is too short in regard to the reconstruction efforts, which can last up to five years. This underlines the need for good humanitarian donorship.
- Experience indicates that the first reaction of policy makers may be shortsighted. For example, the authorization by local officials to build houses on hilltops, increased the vulnerability of people to hillside mudslide, which is a more common hazard than floods. Fire is also a key danger in the post disaster phases.

### Incorporating risk reduction into development planning

- A key aspect in mitigation of future disasters is to mainstream risk reduction into public policy. This is important as disasters are often worsened by man made development processes. For example, urban slums are often located in hazardous locations (floods, landslides, etc.) as land is cheap. Therefore, the urban poor are likely to be affected the most by natural disasters.

- Mainstreaming disaster mitigation into the planning process leads to reduced vulnerability of a country. Development, and therefore income opportunities should be accompanied by disaster mitigation measures, like planting mangrove trees on beaches that might otherwise be used to attract tourism. These initiatives should be supported by the United Nations entities, World Bank and other international organizations.
- The international community should also support capacity building initiatives in regard to mitigating disaster efforts. This is essential as many countries that are affected by natural disasters are Least Developed Countries and/or Small Island Developing States. These capacity building initiatives should be mainstreamed into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). Furthermore, support to build capacity should also be provided through broader policy issues like an open and fair trading regime and debt relief.

#### Early warning system

- Within 12-18 months, there will be an early warning system in place in Asia. The long-term focus of such a system should be the creation of the “multi-hazard” as per the Kobe and Phuket conferences and commitments. The establishment of an early warning system will assist in revitalizing trust and boosting certain key economic sectors, such as tourism, which is vital for the overall recovery and reconstruction efforts.
- International experience indicates that early warning systems that are low tech, and local, are efficient and cost effective. These early warning systems are often community based. This could be complemented with high-tech solutions, like alarm systems that can be activated by satellite, which could be provided through technical cooperation.