



UNITED NATIONS



**Mid-Term Global Review of the Implementation of the Programme of Action
for the Least Developed Countries**

Sectoral Report for the period 2001-2005

Disaster Risk Reduction in the Least Developed Countries in Africa

Submitted by the ISDR secretariat

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Introduction

Every year, more than 200 million people are affected by disasters caused by natural hazards, such as droughts, floods, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides and other natural phenomena. Global warming, environmental degradation, rapid urbanization, increased population densities and their concentration on hazard prone areas make the impact of natural hazards even worse. The consequences of these trends are especially important for least developing countries (LDC), land locked countries and small island developing states (SIDS) which are often affected disproportionately by natural hazards. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) held in January, 2005 at Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, presented a unique opportunity to encourage a strategic and systematic approach to reduce vulnerabilities and risks to natural hazards. The negotiated outcome of the conference, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015 adopted during the conference gave guiding principles, helped in prioritizing areas and provided practical methods to achieve disaster resilience for vulnerable communities.

The Hyogo Framework for Action made particular emphasis on the fact that efforts to reduce disaster risks must be systematically integrated into policies, plans and programmes for sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies, and supported through bilateral, regional and international cooperation, including partnerships. WCDR called upon the international organizations and financial institutions to assist developing countries in disaster risk reduction through appropriate means and relevant actions identified through the Framework for action. It also urged financially capable states to help developing countries with financial and technical assistance through bilateral and multilateral methods.

Disaster Risk Reduction in the African LDCs

Least developed countries are relatively more vulnerable to disasters due to low levels of human and socio-economic development. Out of 49 LDCs, 32 are in Africa. LDCs in Africa are highly vulnerable to disasters from natural causes, particularly from hydrometeorological hazards. The vulnerability of the people and their livelihoods in these countries remains high and is increasing because of endemic poverty, rapid population growth that often exceeds resources available to provide essential social services, prevalent infectious diseases and high rates of urbanization. The repeated exposure to disasters sustains the vicious cycle of chronic poverty and increased vulnerability. African leaders have in the recent past identified disaster reduction as a priority area of action crucial for both economic and sustainable national development.

Increased Regional Governance of Disaster Risk Reduction

During the preparation of the WCDR, AU/NEPAD and ADB jointly studied the disaster situation in Africa with support of UN/ISDR Africa. Based on the findings there were three major outcomes:

1. Africa Regional Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR);
2. Guidelines for Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Assessment into Development;
3. A Plan of Action for implementation of the Africa Strategy on DRR.

A brief description of the three outcomes is as follows:

1. The Africa Regional Strategy on DRR aims to:

- Increase political commitment to DRR;
- Improve identification and assessment of disaster risks;
- Enhance knowledge management for DRR;
- Increase Public Awareness of DRR;
- Improve governance of DRR institutions and
- Integrate DRR into emergency response management

2. *The Africa Guidelines for Mainstreaming Disaster Assessment into Development provides:*

- key principles for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in development themes and sectors, including poverty reduction, agriculture, environment management, water resource management, land use planning, infrastructure development, gender issues, HIV/AIDS & other health Issues and climate change adaptation.
- key guiding principles and guiding questions for governance and institutional aspects, risk identification, knowledge management, risk management applications, integrating disaster risk reduction in development investment decision making, preparedness and emergency management and integrating DRR in development themes and sectors.

3. *A Plan of Action for implementation of the Africa Strategy on DRR:*

- The Africa Plan of Action (from now on referred as Plan of Action) is a programme for the implementation of the Africa Regional DRR Strategy, and it uses guidelines as a tool.
- The Plan of Action focuses on activities underlining the strategic directions of the six objectives set by the Africa Regional Strategy on DRR.
- The Plan of Action is for a period of five years and it is in line with the five thematic priorities of the WCDR.
- The Plan of Action is being implemented at national, sub-regional and regional levels by the joint efforts of National Governments their Development Partners and with the support of the international community.

Actions for implementation of the HFA in Africa

To adapt the HFA in Africa, African Union (AU) has taken the lead and identified six areas for action as priorities for implementation of the HFA:

- Increasing Governments' commitment to disaster reduction (*HFA-PA 1&4*);
- Integration of the African Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction into development planning (*Crosscuts all HFA priorities*);
- Development of policy, legislation and institutional framework for DRR (*HFA-PA 1&5*);
- Enhancing Country Capacity for Disaster Risk Assessment (*HFA-PA 2*);
- Enhancing access to space-based technology for information necessary for mapping and forecasting natural and related hazards and vulnerabilities (*HFA-PA 5*);
- Inclusion of the knowledge of DRR in schools curricula (*HFA-PA 3*).

Disaster Risk Reduction Activities in Africa

To implement the HFA in Africa at regional, sub-regional and national levels, some activities have already being undertaken:

- Africa Regional Forum of National Platform Focal Points has been created and meets twice a year at regional level to share information, experiences and discuss HFA implementation at national levels.
- The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has developed strategic, policy and legal framework for sub regional DRR.
- The Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has developed a DRR training manual. It will conduct its second sub regional training workshop for government officials the seven member states during the month of May.
- An Africa Advisory Group (AAG) has been established with support from UN/ISDR and it meets twice a year to advise the RECs and AU and National Governments on concrete strategies for the implementation of recommendations of HFA.

- Higher Level Advocacy is being continuously carried out by joint efforts of Africa Advisory Group, UN/ISDR Africa and National Platforms, and the AUC requesting Heads of States and Heads of Governments to always include DRR concerns at every AU Summit and other International Agenda. Two Presidents held direct discussions with UN/ISDR Africa on how to implement the HFA, with one of the Countries (Madagascar) making \$20,000 contribution.
- Fourteen countries have established DRR national platforms and many more countries have requested for support to develop national platforms for the mainstreaming of DRR into their national development planning and programming.
- National platforms are making tangible progresses on DRR by developing national strategies/policies and integrating/starting integrating DRR into development programmes and sectors.

Main Constraints in advancing DRR in Africa

The following are the main that hamper the progress in DRR:

- Lack of capacity for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction at national and community level
- Lack of seed money for carrying out Africa Plan of Action which aims at implementation of the Africa Regional Strategy on DRR which was developed in line of the five areas of priorities of HFA
- Limited capacity and knowledge of disaster risk reduction by most UN Country Offices

Recommendations from Africa

To mainstream disaster risk reduction for sustainable development, we request the UN system, to do the following:

- Introduce and mainstream DRR into the General Assembly and ECOSOC agendas because sustainable socio-economic development cannot be achieved without addressing DRR;

- Increase the understanding of and commitment to DRR among the heads of UN Agencies and heads of UNDP Country Offices;
- Make DRR assessments an integral part of all development policy-oriented documents such as UNDAF and PRSP and a requirement for all development programmes;
- Increase the capacity of UN country office in DRR so that they are in a position to support national processes for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into national development policies and programmes;
- Increase the capacities of UN/ISDR regional presence and UN/ISDR capacity to guide National Governments in DRR planning for sustainable development.

Problems & constraints of ISDR Secretariat in assisting LDCs on DRR

1. Although LDCs in Africa are gradually understanding the necessity for DRR, they are still focused institutionally on disaster response due to the chronic poverty situation.
2. Unstable governance in LDCs in Africa leads to rapid turnover of government officials trained by UN/ISDR in DRR. As a result, lack of continuity forces UN/ISDR to repeat its advocacy work from scratch even though the resources available are limited.
3. Other UN bodies in Africa need to be sensitized on DRR, but their busy schedules and inadequate resources limit such initiatives.
4. Data and records of disaster occurrences and good mitigation practises is scarce in Africa, yet resources available to conduct or help conduct systematic data collection are inadequate.
5. LDCs in Africa still cannot afford general access to new information and communication technologies that would facilitate knowledge and information acquisition for DRR.

6. Language barriers both between LDCs (most of LDCs are in Africa) and inside LDCs (local languages) constitute a financial burden for the proper communication of the local community-centred cause that is DRR.

Plans, programmes of ISDR secretariat in 2006-2010

In spite of the tangible progress made by many countries, International investment in DRR would directly benefit LDCs. UN/ISDR secretariat will guide and support countries efforts to develop policies and strategies and integrate disaster risk reduction into development and the humanitarian sector.

UN/ISDR secretariat plans to carry out the following activities:

1. Keeping the momentum gained through higher level advocacy for disaster risk reduction
2. Translating the existing and future political will on disaster risk reduction into concrete actions at national level through national policy development, legislation, organizational mechanisms, budget allocation and programme/project activity implementation;
3. Engaging other UN bodies in Africa, civil societies, private sectors and international financial institutions in DRR and in the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction at all levels;
4. Fostering and increasing national ownership and leadership in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development policies and programmes.
5. Partnership with UN, regional, sub regional organizations, academic institutions and media in further advancing DRR and developing culture of prevention at all levels.
6. Strengthen efforts to make all documents available in other international languages used in LDCs in Africa i.e. French and Portuguese.

Conclusions

In order to speed up the implementation of Hyogo Framework for Action there is an urgent need for concentrated efforts by LDCs, their development partners, UN system organizations, international financial organizations, trade institutions, civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. In order to reduce poverty and implement Hyogo Framework for Action, African LDCs need to continuously mobilize both domestic and external resources. For effective and full implementation of the Brussels program, efforts have to be strengthened at the national, sub-regional, regional and international level.