

RESILIENT CITIES: Disaster Risk Reduction in an Urbanizing World

Progress made in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action

ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment Side Event
Tuesday 13 July 2010 at 1.15-2.45 pm
United Nations Headquarters, New York (conference room #6)

Organized jointly by UNISDR, UN-HABITAT, and IFRC
Co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations and the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations

"I urge local authorities to accelerate all efforts to make cities safer to prevent the loss of lives and assets." (...) "We need support and participation of local leaders: mayors, governors, county chiefs."

UN Secretary General BAN Ki-moon, Incheon, 11 August, 2009

Background

More than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas. Cities are lifelines of society and engines for economic growth. They are centers of technology and innovation and they serve as living evidence of our cultural heritage. However, rapid urban growth poses many challenges to city authorities and if not well managed, cities can also become generators of new vulnerabilities adding risk to disasters. Today, almost a billion people live in slums or marginal and informal settlements without access to basic services and often on high-risk areas. In addition, failed infrastructure, environmental degradation and challenges posed by climate change - including sea level rise - make many urban dwellers more vulnerable to natural hazards.¹

The risk of disasters is increasing globally and is highly concentrated in middle- and low-income countries.² A number of recent disasters, such as earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and China (we can update this section later.) have reminded of the devastating effects of natural hazards in urban settings and underscored the need to ensure that the human-built environment is resilient in the face of an array of potential hazards, both seismic and climatic.

Governments have already recognized the importance of reducing urban risk. The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters calls on governments to: 'Incorporate disaster risk assessments into the urban planning and management of disaster-prone human settlements, in particular highly populated areas and quickly urbanizing settlements' (Section 4, iii, n). it also states that "the issues of informal and non-permanent housing and the location of housing in

¹ ISDR campaign kit: Making Cities Resilient 2010-2011: My city is getting ready!

² United Nations, 2009 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate

high-risk areas should be addressed as priorities, including in the framework of urban poverty reduction and slum-upgrading programmes.”

Urban risk reduction delivers many benefits. When successfully applied as part of sustainable urbanization, resilient cities can help reduce poverty, increase growth and employment opportunities, deliver greater social equity, fresh business opportunities, more balanced ecosystems as well as better health and improved education. Reducing disaster risk and increasing resilience of urban settlements to natural hazards can also have positive effects and accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Reducing losses through initiatives targeted at mitigating hazard and reducing vulnerability should be a priority for disaster risk reduction, alongside efforts to integrate development goals into disaster response and reconstruction.

Local governments – key actors for building resilient cities

Mayors and local governments hold key positions in building resilience to disasters. Mayors provide leadership for the well-being of their constituencies. Local governments deliver essential services such as health, education, transportation and water. They issue construction permits, manage public works and plan their urban development, all of which provide opportunities to ensure reducing community’s vulnerabilities and risk to disasters.

Civil society – essential partners for sustainable urban risk reduction

Civil society - including the national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, which operate as recognized auxiliaries to their public authorities in 186 countries - plays a complementary role in urban risk reduction. They provide the indispensable link between public authorities and citizens, and are present in vulnerable areas before, during and after emergencies and crises. The range of support they provide includes, services to vulnerable groups, capacity building, community outreach, social mobilization, advocacy, and awareness raising regarding risk reduction (e.g. health and hygiene promotion and safety and resilience).

Objectives of the side event

The side event will discuss current initiatives related to urban risk reduction, from selected cities, including contingency planning for floods and earthquakes in cities, research on urban risks, and sheltering in complex urban environments, as well as inform about global initiatives such as the Global Campaign Making Cities Resilient – My City is getting ready!, and the UN-HABITAT and IFRC Risk Mapping Project. It will also have the following specific objectives:

- 1) increase the knowledge and awareness of urban risk issues and solutions, as well as the role of local governments in addressing disaster risk
- 2) raise political profile of disaster risk reduction in urban settings and to create stronger linkages between national and local policies in this area
- 3) share the experiences and lessons learnt from partnership between municipal authorities, civil society organisations and urban residents in increasing disaster resilience, and use these as a basis for developing concrete recommendations.

Guiding questions:

The following questions will frame and guide the presentations and discussion during the event:

- 1) Do we know our Risks? Can we identify and map our risk areas?
- 2) What needs to be done to reduce disaster risk in urban settings and how can national governments support such initiatives?
- 3) How can urban risk reduction help in achieving the Millennium Development Goals?
- 4) Can disasters be avoided? What are the main challenges in building back safer after a major urban disaster?
- 5) What are the key issues in urban risk reduction, and how can these be addressed?
- 6) How can linkages between national and municipal policies be created and used to strengthen DRR?

Modalities

- the side event will be co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Japan and Indonesia and the ISDR system partners (UN-HABITAT, IFRC and UNISDR)
- Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction will act as the host, together with the sponsoring Member States (Japan and Indonesia)
- Sandwich lunch will be served before the event

Tentative Agenda

- 1.15 Opening remarks
- 1.30 Panel discussion on urban risk reduction (10-15 min each speaker)

List of Panelists:

- Mr. Antonio Rosquillas, Civil Protection Office Director, City of Tijuana, Mexico
- Mr. Leslie Voltaire, Head of Haiti Reconstruction Commission, Haiti
- Mr. Umesh Dhakal, Executive Director, Nepal Red Cross Society, Nepal

- 2.15 Comments, Q&A
- 2.40 Summary and closing remarks

Current initiatives related to urban risk reduction:

UNISDR:

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) is working with its partners to raise awareness and commitment for sustainable development practices that will reduce disaster risk and increase the wellbeing and safety of citizens. ISDR partners have launched, in May 2010, a new Global Campaign: *Making Cities Resilient – My City is Getting Ready!*. The campaign will seek to convince city leaders and local governments to commit to a checklist of Ten Essentials for Making Cities Resilient and to work alongside local and national authorities as well as grassroots networks. For more information: <http://www.unisdr.org/english/campaigns/campaign2010-2011/>.

UNHABITAT:

Risk Identification and Risk Mapping in Cities Project serves two purposes; disaster risk reduction and disaster response/contingency planning. The concept is that the usually chaotic situation (at all levels) that results from the impact of a disaster, makes it difficult to provide quick and efficient response. Therefore, it makes sense to develop in advance strategies for responding to these situations, which at the same time provides enough information to reduce the risk of this to happen (i.e. slum upgrading activities as a way of reducing vulnerabilities DRR). These strategies, when based on realistic and accurate risk estimates, provide information that local authorities (and other city stakeholders) can use for DRR and response planning. In short, the ultimate goal of this initiative is to improve capacities to predict, reduce risk and manage disasters when these are inevitable.

IFRC:

Around the world, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are working with municipal authorities and other civil society partners to address urban challenges by aiming at their root causes. They focus on promoting diversity, reducing discrimination, and joining in efforts to provide social services, and to ensure that adequate protection, preventive health-care, education and disaster risk reduction measures are taken. Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers are at the heart of the Movement's endeavours to strengthen urban communities before, during and after emergencies. Underlining IFRC's engagement in this area, urbanization was chosen as the theme for 2010 World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day. In addition, the organization is researching and contributing to new thinking on urban resilience, including the 2010 edition of the *World Disasters Report*, to be published this fall, which will focus on urban risks.