

INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL
DISASTER REDUCTION (IDNDR)

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**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IDNDR PLAN OF ACTION
AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL**

I. ACTION BY THE STC

1. In its First and Second sessions the STC considered the framework of action for the IDNDR defined by the General Assembly in its Resolution 44/236, and, in order to suggest an approach in defining disaster mitigation policies, adopted three targets which should be met by all countries by the year 2000 as part of their plans to achieve sustainable development (IDNDR/STC/1991/8, Annex V, pp. 37-42):

All countries vulnerable to disaster should undertake:

National assessment of risks.

National and/or local prevention and preparedness plans.

Global, regional, national and local warning systems.

2. At the same time the STC pointed out that in order to achieve these targets, progress must be made in strengthening national capabilities for disaster mitigation, including as a starting point, establishing National Committees and strengthening research and training facilities.

3. Within this context, and in order to provide a basic indication of actions to be undertaken for overall disaster reduction planning, the STC identified seven functional groups of activities:

Identification of hazard zones and hazard assessment.

Vulnerability and risk assessment, cost/benefit analysis.

Awareness at level of decision and policy-makers.

Monitoring, prediction and warning.

Long-term prevention measures, including non-structural and structural.

Short-term protective measures and preparedness.

Early intervention measures.

4. The implementation of these functional groups of activities would, of course, largely depend on each country's specific vulnerability situation and its progress in completing a national disaster mitigation plan.

II. ACTION INITIATED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

5. Based on the guidance provided by the General Assembly and the STC, over 100 countries have established National Committees or Focal Points, and are beginning to undertake updating, improving or elaborating national prevention and preparedness plans.

6. Developing these plans, as well as the drawing up of specific disaster mitigation projects as constituent parts of such plans, could, in many cases, greatly benefit from review and advice by international experts. At the same time, many national mitigation programmes should be integrated into subregional or regional approaches, depending on the geographical situation of individual countries and their exposure to natural hazards that extend beyond national boundaries.

III. PROGRAMME WORKSHOPS

7. An effective means to draw on available international experience in the formulation of disaster mitigation plans and to encourage regional and subregional co-operation, is through programme workshops. Such meetings could advance the preparation of national plans and related activities through the interaction of experts and exchange of data and experience.

8. Such workshops would bring together disaster mitigation officials from countries of a given subregion exposed to similar natural hazards and permit them to draw on the advice of experts specializing in various aspects of disaster mitigation. It would be expected that the participation of country representatives in the preparing plans and programmes in their region would be instrumental in bringing about a greater sense of urgency and a better understanding of methodology used in the formulation of national disaster mitigation programmes. Subregional institutions concerned with disaster mitigation and economic development would be represented and fully associated with this exercise.

9. The meeting of Latin American Countries on the IDNDR (Guatemala, 9-13 September 1991) and the OAU Regional Meeting on Disasters in Africa (Addis Ababa, 13-17 April 1992) exemplify one type of regional workshop that could make a important contributions toward achieving the objectives outlined above. Future workshops should build on this experience. It may be that larger meetings are most effective for promotional purpose, whereas smaller meetings are more suitable for providing specific advice in furthering the preparation of national plans.

IV. COUNTRY ANALYSIS

10. A subsequent step in promoting progress toward the targets set by the STC might be made by assisting in the preparation of national mitigation plans, as appropriate, on a country-by-country basis. If desired by a country, such a review could be assisted, in addition to in-country expertise, by a panel of outside experts consisting of about three members covering among them the areas of disaster mitigation, economic planning and sociology. STC members could participate in these panels, with other panel members being drawn from Specialized Agencies and other organization of the United Nations system, National Committees, or private consultancy. Members of the Special High-Level Council could also assist, perhaps as conveners or in the opening ceremonies in a promotional capacity.

11. The extent and timespan of these reviews would depend on the size and hazard exposure of each country; they probably could be accomplished in one to two weeks. With regard to the subject matter, the review could focus on progress in meeting the IDNDR targets, which is primarily a matter for national authorities. In addition, opportunities could be identified for technology transfer and sharing of knowledge and experience among countries. Furthermore, attention could be given to the selection of demonstration projects and to their promotion. Also, recent natural disasters could be analyzed to derive data and lessons to reduce the impact of future events. To this end, visits to the scene of a disaster might be useful for identifying measures that could have reduced the impact.

V. NATIONAL DISASTER MITIGATION PLANS

12. The following disaster reduction measures should be considered in the preparation and review of national disaster mitigation plans:

a) Prevention:

- Incorporation of mitigation aspects into new development projects;
- elaboration of hazard- and risk-assessment maps for vulnerable areas;
- preparation of guidelines and manuals on land-use practices;
- adoption and enforcement of building codes for the design, location, and construction of hazard-resistant facilities;
- strengthening of disaster-resistance aspects in existing medical and education facilities;
- construction and location of new schools and hospitals to avoid or resist natural hazards;
- protection of cultural property and natural resources against disaster hazards;
- mitigation training programmes;
- research on methods for overcoming population resistance to mitigation.

b) Preparedness:

- Identification of state and local preparedness needs and capabilities;
- training of interdisciplinary, multijurisdictional teams for response, recovery, and reconstruction;
- completion of post-disaster case studies for all major and selected small disasters;
- improvement of emergency coordination and communication among government, schools, business and industry, volunteer groups and others;
- development of procedures for managing volunteers and donated resources;
- identification and promotion of demonstration preparedness projects; and
- involvement of the utility and other lifeline industries in preparedness planning.

c) Public Awareness and Education:

- Information on household survival plans, precautionary measures, and emergency supplies;
- community planning, education, and preparedness action by hospitals, churches, schools, business, neighborhood organizations, and other groups;
- protection of school children and their families through information on natural disaster preparedness, warnings, and response;
- incorporation of disaster reduction in the education of all relevant professions;
- procedures for informing the public before, during, and after a disaster through the media (press TV, radio).

d) Prediction and Warning:

- Modernization of national weather prediction system;
- improving the prediction of atmospheric and hydrologic hazards;
- expanding the monitoring of volcanoes and research into the possibilities of earthquake prediction;
- coordination and strengthening of public and private partnerships for dissemination of warnings;
- introduction of new technologies, such as the most advanced telecommunication capabilities to ensure broader dissemination of early warnings;
- research on the reception and response time of individuals and organizations to warning messages;
- research on the effectiveness of national networks that disseminate warnings.

VI. COUNTRY RESPONSIBILITIES IN INTEGRATING DISASTER MITIGATION INTO DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

13. The General Assembly has reaffirmed in its Framework of Action for the Decade, the primary responsibility of each country in protecting its people, infrastructure, and other national assets from the impact of natural disasters. Indeed international financial and technical assistance can only provide limited help; the main action to reduce vulnerability to natural disasters must be initiated and pursued at the country-level. The importance of disaster mitigation must first and foremost be recognized politically as a national priority and responsibility of concern to all government institutions in their respective areas of action under the leadership of a coordinating entity.

14. Of special importance is the link with development planning as it is recognized that the extent of a country's exposure to natural and others hazard is necessarily a function of its development process. Vulnerability often increases by man-made actions, such as construction of dwellings in dangerous areas, inadequate protection of infrastructure for essential services, implementation of development projects with insufficient regard to disaster scenarios and their potential consequences to the surrounding population and environment.

15. To protect itself against such mounting hazards each country must review in the development and planning context, the vulnerability of planned or ongoing development projects so that these are designed to support national disaster mitigation efforts rather than countering them.

16. Every country should aspire to an integrated multidisciplinary programme to reduce the impacts of natural hazards with an in-built strategy to learn from past disasters and to optimize benefits to be derived from international cooperation. The ultimate measure of the Decade success will be the improvements achieved in the pattern of human life and in the preservation of property and natural resources.