

A set of guiding principles for implementing disaster risk reduction

(Source: UN/ISDR, 2007, *Words into Action: A Guide for Implementing the Hyogo Framework*, United Nations secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), Geneva, Switzerland, p.4-5)

Past experience in disaster risk reduction has led to the development of some basic principles that underpin or facilitate the achievement of effective disaster risk reduction. The following principles are offered as guidance for the users of the Guide. Many of them are explicitly recognized and emphasized in the HFA.

- **States have the primary responsibility for implementing measures to reduce disaster risk.** Disaster risk reduction needs to be an essential part of a state's investment in sustainable development. States have the power as well as the responsibility to protect their citizens and their national assets by reducing the risk of losses from disasters. States, however, cannot do the job alone. Effective disaster risk reduction relies on the efforts of many different stakeholders, including regional and international organizations, civil society including volunteers, the private sector, the media and the scientific community.
- **Disaster risk reduction must be integrated into development activities.** Disasters undermine hard-won development gains, destroying lives and livelihoods and trapping many people in poverty. States can minimize such losses by integrating disaster risk reduction measures into development strategies, assessing potential risks as part of development planning, and allocating resources for risk reduction, including in sector plans. Because of the enormous development losses suffered around the world from disasters, development banks and international assistance institutions now increasingly place importance on integrating risk reduction into development policies and practices. At the same time, disaster risk reduction is also being recognized by humanitarian actors as a fundamental component of their policies and programmes, in order to avoid the loss of lives and livelihoods and to reduce the need or extent of humanitarian response and relief.
- **A multi-hazard approach can improve effectiveness.** A particular community is usually exposed to risks from a variety of hazards, which can be either natural or human-induced in origin, and can stem from hydro-meteorological, geological, biological, technological or environmental forces. The resulting cumulative risk cannot be tackled effectively if actors plan merely for selected hazardous events. A multi-hazard approach involves translating and linking knowledge of the full range of hazards into disaster and risk management, political strategies, professional assessments and technical analysis, and operational capabilities and public understanding, leading to greater effectiveness and cost-efficiency.
- **Capacity-development is a central strategy for reducing disaster risk.** Capacity development is needed to build and maintain the ability of people, organizations and societies to manage their risks successfully themselves. This requires not only training and specialized technical assistance, but also the strengthening of the capacities of communities and individuals to recognize and reduce risks in their localities. It includes sustainable technology transfer, information exchange, network development, management skills, professional linkages and other resources. Capacity development needs to be sustained through institutions that support capacity-building and capacity maintenance as permanent ongoing objectives.
- **Decentralize responsibility for disaster risk reduction.** Many disaster risk reduction activities need to be implemented at provincial, municipal and local levels, as the hazards faced and the populations exposed are specific to particular geographic areas. Similarly, the administrative responsibilities to manage key risk factors, such as land-use zoning or building approvals, are often devolved to such scales. In order to recognize and respond to these

locally specific characteristics, it is necessary to decentralize responsibilities and resources for disaster risk reduction to relevant subnational or local authorities, as appropriate. Decentralization can also motivate increased local participation along with improved efficiency and equitable benefits from local services.

- **Effective disaster risk reduction requires community participation.** The involvement of communities in the design and implementation of activities helps to ensure that they are well tailored to the actual vulnerabilities and to the needs of the affected people. This informed engagement helps to avoid problems and secondary effects when hazard events occur. Participatory approaches can more effectively capitalize on existing indigenous coping mechanisms and are effective at strengthening community knowledge and capacities. They are usually more sensitive to gender, cultural and other context-specific issues that can undermine or empower particular groups and individuals to take locally based action. The incorporation of local perspectives into decisions and activities also helps to ensure that changes in vulnerability and perceptions of risk are recognized and factored into institutional processes, risk assessments, and other programmes and policies.
- **Gender is a core factor in disaster risk and in the implementation of disaster risk reduction.** Gender is a central organizing principle in all societies, and therefore women and men are differently at risk from disasters. In all settings - at home, at work or in the neighbourhood - gender shapes the capacities and resources of individuals to minimize harm, adapt to hazards and respond to disasters. It is evident from past disasters that low-income women and those who are marginalized due to marital status, physical ability, age, social stigma or caste are especially disadvantaged. At the grass roots level, on the other hand, women are often well positioned to manage risk due to their roles as both users and managers of environmental resources, as economic providers, and as caregivers and community workers. For these reasons it is necessary to identify and use gender-differentiated information, to ensure that risk reduction strategies are correctly targeted at the most vulnerable groups and are effectively implemented through the roles of both women and men.
- **Public-private partnerships are an important tool for disaster risk reduction.** Public-private partnerships are voluntary joint associations formed to address shared objectives through collaborative actions. They may involve public organizations such as government agencies, professional and/or academic institutions and NGOs, together with business organizations such as companies, industry associations and private foundations. Because the threats from natural hazards affect both public and private interests alike, private-public partnerships can offer opportunities to combine resources and expertise to act jointly to reduce risks and potential losses. They can thereby improve the resilience of communities.
- **Disaster risk reduction needs to be customized to particular settings.** States vary greatly in their political, socio-economic, cultural, environment and hazard circumstances. Measures that succeed in reducing risk in one setting may not work in others. Customizing involves making use of others' experience, for instance by reviewing the context of particular measures and the nature of good practices and lessons learned, and then tailoring these to implement policies and activities that are appropriate for the local contexts. An important aspect of customizing is an awareness of cultural diversity, recognizing the differences among groups of people in language, socio-economic and political systems, religion and ethnicity, and in their historical relationship with nature. Local socio-political structures and cultural conditions, such as kinship arrangements, customary rights, community and family networks and systems of leadership, nearly always persist during times of stress. It is important to take these factors as a starting point and to build on them when designing and implementing new policies and practices.