



United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction



Photo: GTZ

Promoting Disaster Risk Reduction

to save lives and reduce its impacts

WHO WE ARE

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) is a strategic framework adopted by United Nations Member States in 2000. The ISDR guides and coordinates the efforts of a wide range of partners to achieve a substantive reduction in disaster losses. It aims to build resilient nations and communities as an essential condition for sustainable development. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) is the secretariat of the ISDR system. The ISDR system comprises numerous organizations, States, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, financial institutions, technical bodies and civil society, which work together and share information to reduce disaster risk. UNISDR serves as the focal point for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) – a ten year plan of action adopted in 2005 by 168 governments to protect lives and livelihoods against disasters.



Photo: Jean P. Lavoie

Disaster Risk Reduction

Communities will always face natural hazards. Current disasters, however, are often a direct result of, or are exacerbated by, human activities. Such activities are changing the Earth's natural balance, interfering like never before with the atmosphere, oceans, polar caps, forest cover and biodiversity, as well as other natural resources which make our world a habitable place. Furthermore, we are also putting ourselves at risk in ways that are less visible.

Because natural hazards can affect anybody, disaster risk reduction is everybody's responsibility. Disasters are not natural and can often be prevented. Economic resources, political will and a shared sense of hope form part of our collective protection from calamities. The vulnerability of communities and nations must be reduced, building resilience in the face of hazards. When societies are prepared, the negative impacts of natural hazards that can lead to disasters can often be averted; and when disaster risk reduction is made a national priority, the loss of lives and livelihoods can be greatly reduced.

Furthermore, it is important that disaster risk reduction is perceived as a continuous undertaking in the context of different social, economic, government, and professional activities. Rather than being conceived as an area requiring highly specialized services or know-how focusing solely on issues of security or emergency response; disaster risk reduction should be regarded as a transversal aspect of development, involving all sectors of society and beginning with those who are most exposed to foreseeable risks.



Photo: J. J. Trelles

Disasters in the Americas

The entire western part of the American continent, from Alaska to Chile, forms part of what is referred to as the Pacific Ring of Fire, implying that the earth's crust is in a constant process of transformation. The volcanic and seismic activity, characteristic of Andean and Central American countries as well as of North America's western coast provide tangible evidence of this process. This is also true for the geological dynamics of the Caribbean Basin and of the Antilles in particular. While dynamics of geological origin can be said to have remained constant, climate and weather-related hydrometeorological phenomena have increased in magnitude and frequency.

In recent years, the Americas have experienced a significant number of disasters such as floods, hurricanes, storms, earthquakes, avalanches, volcanic eruptions and wildfires and others which have resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and hundreds of millions of dollars in material damages. Developing countries in particular have had a terrible price to pay in that disasters draw attention and resources away from other areas where they are desperately needed in order to overcome poverty.

At the global level, the number of people at risk has increased by 70 to 80 million per year. More than 90 percent of global demographic growth is taking place in developing countries and among population with the least access to resources and with greatest exposure to risk. Over the last three decades alone, an estimated 160 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean were affected by disasters triggered by natural hazards.

At present, many people in the Americas live in cities located in areas of seismic activity. As a consequence of poverty and demographic pressures, ever more people are living in areas prone to flooding and landslides. Poor territorial planning and environmental management as well as a lack of regulatory mechanisms increase risk, while at the same time exacerbating the negative effects of natural phenomena.



Photo: Zorka Espinoza

United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat

The secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) was created in December 1999 with GA resolution 54/219 as a successor arrangement of the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. In 2001, the General Assembly resolution 56/195 mandated the secretariat to serve as the focal point in the United Nations system for the coordination of disaster reduction and to ensure synergies among the disaster reduction activities of the United Nations system and regional organizations and activities in socio-economic and humanitarian fields.

In 2005 the GA, with resolution 60/195 endorsed the “Hyogo Declaration” and the “Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters” as adopted by the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, in January 2005. The Hyogo Framework for Action has tasked the ISDR secretariat with supporting the implementation of the strategic objectives identified therein. The ISDR secretariat is part of the UN Secretariat and reports to the 2nd Committee (Economic and Financial) of the General Assembly under the Sustainable Development program.

In 2008 the U.N. General Assembly concurred with the Secretary-General’s proposal to create the post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. The functions include: leading and overseeing the ISDR secretariat in the executions of its functions as entrusted to it by relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and the Hyogo Framework for Action, as well as policy directions by the Secretary-General; overseeing the management of the Trust Fund for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction; ensuring strategic and operational coherence between disaster-reduction and humanitarian disaster preparedness and response activities as well as socio-economic activities of the UN system and regional organizations; and carrying out high-level advocacy and resource mobilization activities for risk reduction and implementation of the HFA.

In keeping with the mandate of the UNISDR secretariat, the Regional Unit for the Americas strives to provide support to actors throughout the region, including North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, in fostering a culture of disaster prevention and contributing to build disaster resilient nations and communities. Our office is located in Panama City, Panama.



Photo: J. J. Trelles

What we do

We coordinate

international efforts in disaster risk reduction and provide guidance for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action. We also monitor its implementation and report regularly on progress.

We advocate

for greater investment in disaster risk reduction actions to protect people's lives and assets.

We campaign

to build global awareness of disaster risk reduction benefits and empower people to reduce community vulnerabilities to hazard impacts. Our current campaigns focus on safer schools and hospitals and more resilient cities.

We inform

and connect people by providing services and practical tools – such as the disaster risk reduction community website PreventionWeb (www.preventionweb.net), publications on good practices, country profiles and policy advice. The website of the regional office www.eird.org and HFA-Pedia <http://www.eird.org/hfa.html>

We organize

In coordination with Organization of American States a Regional Platform session every two years, bringing together all relevant parties involved in disaster risk reduction to assess progress on policy implementation.

We encourage

the establishment of regional and national platforms for disaster risk reduction, comprising multistakeholder committees or mechanisms as well as thematic platforms on key topics like early warning, recovery, capacity development, education, environment and others.

We promote

the effective reduction of climate risks through the integration of disaster risk reduction into policies and programmes for climate change adaptation.

We provide

a biennial Global Assessment Report, an authoritative analysis of global disaster risk and progress in disaster risk reduction. The 2009 report included a special focus on how and why disaster risk is concentrated in poor communities.

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)

Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) is the key instrument and global blueprint for implementing disaster risk reduction. Its overarching goal is to build the resilience of nations and communities to disasters by achieving substantive reduction of disaster losses by 2015.

The HFA sets out five priorities for action:

- **Make disaster risk reduction a priority**
- **Know the risks and take action**
- **Build understanding and awareness**
- **Reduce risks**
- **Be prepared and ready to act**

The ISDR System

The ISDR system supports nations and communities to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action. ISDR is a system of partnerships including governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions, scientific and technical bodies and specialized networks as well as civil society and the private sector. The ISDR system's basic structure includes a Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, a Management Oversight Board, an Inter-Agency Group that developed an ISDR System Joint Work Programme, thematic and regional platforms and the UNISDR secretariat.



HOW TO GET INVOLVED If you are...

A government:

Make reducing risk a priority in your most vulnerable areas and ensure funds for disaster risk reduction policies are in your national budget.

A practitioner or expert:

Share your knowledge, join community networks and contribute to information resources to reduce disaster risk.

An international organization:

Ensure that your programmes and activities are risk sensitive.

A donor:

Review your policies and provide for disaster risk reduction budgets in development programmes, humanitarian and disaster recovery projects.

A citizen:

Learn about risk in your own environment and join a social network to reduce and prevent your local risks.

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