



United Nations  
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction  
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## Main messages of the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction

### Primary Message:

#### ***Invest today for a safer tomorrow***

Investing in disaster risk reduction will help reduce poverty, safeguard development and aid climate change adaptation, with favourable impacts on global security, economic stability and environmental sustainability.

Disaster risk reduction is an investment towards building a more secure, stable, sustainable and equitable future for (us) all.

### Secondary Message:

There may be a missing link at both the international and national level(s) between the policy and strategy frameworks for disaster risk reduction, poverty reduction and climate change adaptation, but when disaster risk reduction is fully integrated into all global, regional and national climate change and poverty reduction strategies, disaster risks are reduced and development gains secured.

### Summary of Key Findings of the Report:

Disaster risk is increasing due to three main risk drivers that will be exacerbated by climate change impacts: unplanned urbanisation, vulnerable rural livelihoods and ecosystem decline. Unless this trend is reversed through the adoption of integrated policy frameworks, increased investments and more effective institutions and partnerships, the world will not achieve the Hyogo Framework for Action's strategic goals by 2015 and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals will be seriously compromised. The report highlights existing solutions and proposes a 20-point risk reduction plan.

1. Risk is concentrated intensively. The risk of both mortality and economic loss in disasters is highly concentrated in a very small portion of the earth's surface. For example, 75% of global flood mortality risk is concentrated in three populous countries: India, China and Bangladesh.

2. Risk is unevenly distributed. Developing countries experience a hugely disproportionate share of the risk. Risk is configured by a range of drivers related to a country's economic and social development. These include not only income and economic strength but also governance factors such as the quality of institutions, transparency and accountability.

3. Rapid expansion of weather-related disaster risk. Weather-related disaster risk, covering both large and small scale events, including floods, hurricanes/cyclones, landslides etc., is rapidly increasing. Development-related processes such as the growth of cities and the expansion of agricultural frontiers into previously sparsely populated areas are all connected to the expansion of weather-related disaster risk.

4. Disaster risk is increasing fastest in low- and lower-middle income countries with rapidly growing economies. Rapid economic and urban development have concentrated people and economic assets in hazard prone cities, fertile river valleys and coastal areas, often in the absence of risk reducing capacities, policies, institutions, planning and regulatory frameworks.

5. Impoverished countries and their citizens have far higher levels of mortality and relative economic loss risk than the rich. Disaster risk cannot be explained by the level of a country's economic development alone.

Other factors, such as the capacity of a country and its institutions to manage and reduce disaster risk and its levels of human development, also influence risk levels.

6. Small and vulnerable economies are least resilient. Disasters tend not to significantly impact economic growth in countries with large economies. Hurricane Katrina, which hit the southern United States in 2005 and Japan's Kobe earthquake ten years earlier, are two examples. However, the reverse is true in territories where economic activity is constrained, such as small island states.

7. Global disaster risk may be falling. In absolute terms, and assuming constant hazard levels, global disaster risk increased between 1990 and 2007 – by 13 percent (mortality) and 35 percent (economic loss), in the case of floods. However, relative to the size of the global population and GDP, risk may actually be falling.

8. Low-intensity damage to housing, local infrastructure, crops and livestock interrupts and erodes livelihoods, is spread extensively across many countries and occurs very frequently.

9. Unplanned urbanisation increases the intensity of run-off during storms and heavy rains. Instead of being absorbed into the ground, greater volumes of rainwater are channelled into drains, culverts and streams. Informal settlements typically occupy land deemed unsuitable for more developed forms of residential or commercial use, such as low-lying flood prone areas, landslide-prone hillsides or ravines, exposing people to hazard. Houses are built and modified without reference to hazard resistant building standards. In many cities and particularly in informal settlements, there has been an underinvestment in drainage systems. Floods caused as much by deficient or non-existent drainage as by the intensity of rainfall should not be attributed to 'natural' hazard.

10. Livelihood vulnerability is an underlying driver of disaster risk and poverty in many areas. Many rural livelihoods still depend heavily on agriculture and other natural resource sectors. Rural farm-based livelihoods are generally characterized by low input and low output agriculture due to constrained access to productive assets such as land, labour, fertilizers, irrigation facilities, infrastructure and financial services. Opportunities for processing and adding value to agricultural production are also often limited by asset constraints, trade barriers and lack of access to markets. Historical patterns of land distribution and tenure tend to discriminate against the poor who may only have access to marginal and unproductive land

11. Ecosystems provide people with substantial benefits or services. These include provisioning services such as energy, water, food and fibre for urban and rural households, as well as regulating services such as mangrove swamps that can mitigate floods and storm surges. Most ecosystems have been modified intentionally or otherwise to increase the supply of certain categories of services; and institutions have been developed to govern access to, and use of these services. However, because ecosystems produce many services simultaneously, increasing the supply of one service can frequently lead to a decline in others. Thus, increasing the food supply can impact flood regulation, where mangrove swamps are 'converted' to shrimp farms.

12. Climate change trends: A rise of 2°C in the planet's surface temperature from pre-industrial levels has the potential for catastrophic collapse in ecosystems with a disproportionate impact on the most impoverished. Adverse changes are already occurring in the amount, intensity, frequency and type of precipitation, resulting in drought, floods and tropical storms. Changes in the climate threaten to undermine the resilience of poorer countries and their citizens to absorb loss and recover from disaster impacts, such as decreases in agricultural productivity, water and energy stress, and increasing incidence of disease. This combination of increasing hazard risk and decreasing resilience makes climate change a global driver of disaster risk that will increase the impact of disasters on the poor. In short, addressing disaster risk reduction requires fully integrated climate change adaptation.

13. Progress towards achieving the 'priorities for action' contained in the Hyogo Framework for Action remains mixed. In a recent self-assessment, 62 countries reported mixed success in implementing the HFA. There have been significant advances in strengthening capacities, institutional systems and legislation to address deficiencies in disaster preparedness and response. Early warning enhancement is also improving but there is little progress to report on the crucial imperative of mainstreaming disaster risk reduction considerations into social, economic, urban, environmental and infrastructure planning and development. As a result, global economic loss risk is growing at a faster rate than mortality risk. For example, early warning

and preparedness can help to evacuate people before the onset of a cyclone, but housing, infrastructure and schools that are not structurally resistant can be damaged or destroyed.

### **'We know what to do'**

1. Focus development policy on addressing the underlying risk drivers in an integrated manner Failure to address in an integrated manner the three key risk drivers - poor urban governance, vulnerable rural livelihoods and ecosystem decline, underpinned by weak social protection and the burgeoning threat of climate change – will result in dramatic increases in disaster risk and associated poverty outcomes. However, an integrated approach to addressing these drivers can reduce risk, protect human development and facilitate climate change adaptation. Rather than an expense, this has to be seen as an investment towards building a more secure, stable, sustainable and equitable future.

2. Invest to reduce risk and protect development. Major investment is required in order to address the underlying risk drivers in any meaningful way. There must be an increase in the resources available for both climate change adaptation and those pledged for the Millennium Development Goals. Investment in infrastructure and employment creation can provide such opportunities, for example, improving drainage in flood prone areas and constructing disaster-resilient buildings. Any increased public spending in the context of economic stimulus packages must provide for risk-reducing infrastructure (especially all new developments) as well as other measures that address the underlying risk drivers. Further, it is essential that the capacities of disaster prone countries to develop the policy and governance frameworks necessary to organise and manage all these measures be strengthened.

3. Build on existing systems for public administration to incorporate innovations into the governance of disaster risk reduction. Countries need to strengthen their governance capacity to manage investment to address the underlying risk factors, and ensure that disaster risk reduction is incorporated into such investment. Without a firm and authoritative governance system, even large investments in development may have little tangible effect or even prove counter-productive. If the governance is consistently effective, however, small investments in disaster risk reduction can produce huge benefits. Investing today to strengthen capacities is vital if future generations are to enjoy a safer tomorrow.

4. Accelerate efforts to avoid dangerous climate change impacts. The December 2009 Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change will provide an unprecedented opportunity to establish an effective multilateral framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support climate change adaptation. Such an outcome is essential if potentially catastrophic increases in disaster impacts and associated poverty outcomes are to be avoided, particularly in disaster-prone developing countries.