

Guiding Principles



National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction



United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

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I. Introduction

A key objective for a global strategy aiming to reduce the impacts of natural and technological hazards is the development of national mechanisms for disaster risk reduction. These mechanisms are indeed concrete manifestations of political willingness and institutional recognition of disaster risk reduction as a relevant issue within the national interests. In order to be effective, these mechanisms, named generically here as “**national platforms**”, need to be built through a participatory process that includes multi-sectoral perspectives and actions, and a multi-stakeholder composition.

From its infancy, it has been important for the **International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction** (UN/ISDR) to pursue the concept of national platforms for disaster reduction, initiated under the framework of the **International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction** (IDNDR). The Committees and Focal Points established during the Decade proved to be key organizational mechanisms in many countries in expanding the understanding and perception of the importance of disaster risk reduction and in bringing together diverse professional interests committed to the subject of disaster reduction.

Some former IDNDR National Committees have even continued their work, broadened their scope, and evolved as national platforms beyond their expected role during the Decade. However, in many countries, there remains a pressing need to revitalize and strengthen national platforms, especially in those countries most affected by natural disasters.

UN calls for National Platforms for Disaster Reduction

In 1999, the Economic and Social Council, in resolution 1999/63, “called on all Governments to maintain and strengthen established national and multisectoral platforms for natural disaster reduction in order to achieve sustainable development goals and objectives, with the full utilization of scientific and technical means. It is indeed incumbent on each Government to decide on the form and structure of the multisectoral platform in its own country. Given the success of national committees and focal points for the Decade in a large number of countries, the Secretary-General strongly encourages all Governments to take the necessary measures to implement this appeal.”

Subsequently in paragraph 7 of its resolution 54/219 the General Assembly “calls upon Governments to continue to cooperate and coordinate their efforts with the Secretary General and the Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations systems, non-governmental organizations and other partners, as appropriate, to implement and to develop further a comprehensive strategy to maximize international cooperation in the field of natural disasters (...).”

As a successor arrangement following the end of the IDNDR, the ISDR Secretariat places a major interest in fostering the development and strengthening of national platforms for disaster risk reduction (NP for DRR). This work is indeed a priority for the ISDR Secretariat in order to ensure a successful implementation of the UN/ISDR.

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As part of its current efforts, the Secretariat has prepared these “Guiding Principles” as a reference document to assist the process of NP for DRR. This document is intended to provide guidance to plan, build, support or improve NP for DRR. Additionally, the principles are in keeping with present development efforts towards good governance and fall within the mandated scope of the UN Millennium Development goals and with UN/National/Development Partners CCA/UNDAF Development Framework.

The document draws on other similar experiences based on national needs for the creation of platforms in various fields of sustainable development. While the main purpose of the document is to provide overall guidance, it is also recognized the need for a tailoring process to adapt the principles to specific regional and country needs.

II. National Platforms for DRR

It is important to define the scope of the NP in relation to the realm of Disaster Risk Reduction. The ISDR glossary defines Disaster Risk Reduction as *“the conceptual framework of elements considered with the possibilities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development.”*

A National Platform for DRR can be defined as a national mechanism –adopting the form of a forum, committee, network, etc.- that addresses disaster risk reduction goals through a coordinated, participatory and iterative process of thoughts and actions. The process undertaken by National platforms for DRR encompasses situation analysis, formulation of policies and action plans, and the implementation, monitoring and regular review of disaster reduction activities. The emphasis of this process is on managing progress towards disaster reduction objectives rather than producing a “plan” as an end product.

From a development goal standpoint, National platforms for DRR work towards more resourced, effective and integrated efforts of risk reduction amongst national stakeholders¹ and amongst national, regional and international parties.

National platforms for DRR can serve as tools for informed decision-making, providing a framework for systematic thought and commitment to priority actions across sectors and territory. In accomplishment, they institutionalise processes for consultation, negotiation, mediation and consensus building on priority societal issues where interests differ.

¹This refers to the five main stakeholder groups of a national community; those being public sector (government and statutory bodies), private sector (profit-oriented enterprises), N.G.O.'s and civil society (including individual community leaders), academic and research institutions and the media (Conventional definition of "multi-stakeholder" taken from IUCN's National Conservation Strategy (NCS) model).

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National platforms for DRR empower countries to address inter-related social, economic and ecological problems by helping them to build capacities, develop procedures and legislative frameworks; allocate limited resources rationally and present timetables for actions. Countries can greatly benefit a lot from developing effective national platforms both directly (as a result of reducing disaster risk) and indirectly (from the process itself). The added value of the synergy rising from coordinated international collaboration and exchanges materialises in a mutual benefit that works towards sustainable development.

An overall framework to guide and monitor disaster risk reduction can be found in the annexes². Such a framework provides a reference basis for assessing and monitoring achievements on DRR, and facilitates the work of national platforms when undertaking critical activities such as:

- establishing existing baselines;
- identifying existing trends;
- benchmarking progress;
- ascertaining challenge areas and concerns;
- redirecting and refining efforts;
- establishing best practices;
- setting forth accepted targets; and
- recording and reporting

The specific objectives of the National Platform for DRR process are:

- increased collaboration and coordination amongst national stakeholders;
- increased knowledge and visibility of national situations at the regional and international levels;
- increased levels of knowledge and skills in the global risk reduction community; and
- national leadership and commitment to the sustainability of the National Platform for DRR.
- further strengthened links between ISDR Secretariat and ISDR
- national counterparts in terms of implementing the Strategy
- credibility across different institutions and interest groups
- commitment to help the most vulnerable

Every country needs to determine, for itself, how best to approach its National Platform for DRR preparation and implementation depending upon the prevailing economic, social, political and ecological circumstances. In most situations, National Platforms will be developed in the context of existing mechanisms and processes. Building upon, strengthening, and perhaps realigning or redirected present structures, institutions and processes will enable more efficient and effective capacity-building.

² This framework can be found in UN/ISDR website (www.unisdr.org/dialogue)

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Existing disaster reduction national groups or committees will also have the opportunity to increase their access and linkages with other relevant bodies nationally, regionally and globally.

A “blueprint” approach for national platforms for disaster risk reduction is neither possible nor desirable. A National Platform for DRR can be designated howsoever a country wishes; what is important is the consistent application of the underlying principles and ensuring that economic, social and environment contexts are present in a balanced and integrated fashion. Additionally, national platforms must be flexible. Dynamic national situations, mainly in terms of political and economic factors, also require that the National Platforms be responsive and adaptable to change.

III. Lessons Learned from Similar Initiatives

Over the past decade, several national level comprehensive strategies for sectoral disaster reduction, economic growth, improvement of social welfare and environmental conservation, were formulated with accompanying national platforms or committees. These included: national disaster reduction plans, structural adjustment programmes, social development and poverty reduction strategies and joint National/UN/Development partners’ framework (CCA/UNDAF). National conservation strategies and national environment action plans are other examples.

Some were prepared on the basis of national needs. Many others, however, either were sponsored by multilateral financial institutions or were encouraged by global conventions with financial support provided for their formulation. Overall, these external motivations had mixed results. There were notable achievements in some areas, but serious shortcomings were common in many countries too. These included:

- a) the lack of clear and pragmatic vision;
- b) absence or limited national ownership;
- c) tacit creation, or too much focus on “document” production;
- d) inadequate or lack of public consultation in the identification of problems, setting of priorities and in general the whole platform / strategy process;
- e) lack of integration of the national platforms and their activities into the overall development policy
- f) lack of constitutional or legislative authority or professional legitimacy; and
- g) lack of resource commitment

IV. Principles for Effective National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction

The ISDR Secretariat suggests that guiding principles can be considered in the development of national platforms. Experience suggests a measure of success in effectiveness, when structures adhere to these. Additionally, the principles are consistent with good governance and fall within the scope of the UN Millennium goals.

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Important overarching guiding principles are:

- 1) Disaster reduction be regarded as an international issue within sustainable development;
- 2) National Platforms for DRR utilize a participatory process that includes multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral³ perspectives and action, with evident multi-stakeholder composition;
- 3) National Platforms for DRR directly affect positive change by concerted and coordinated efforts with particular regard to policy, planning and overall authoritative decision-making.

Additional specific guiding principles for national platforms for DRR are:

- Demonstrate added value to all parties
- Incorporate influential economic and political factors into decision-making
- Are backed by strong political commitment
- Reflect shared strategic and pragmatic vision
- Are nationally owned and country-driven process
- Build on existing processes and strategies
- Spearheaded by a strong institution
- Ensure the widest possible participation
- Anchor the development and tasks of the platform in sound technical analysis
- Are integrated and balanced across sectors and territories
- Link the short to the medium and long term
- Maintain coherence between budget and platform priorities
- Set realistic but flexible targets
- Link national and local priorities and actions
- Build mechanisms for monitoring, follow up, evaluation and feedback
- Give priority to education and public awareness
- Ensure continuity of the platform development process

The ways and means by which these principles are realized will be case-specific, and tailored in-country with international support as may be required.

V. Realizing the Principles

There are generally four groups of processes used to realize the Principles. They are political, participatory, technical and resource mobilization processes.

³ After conventional economic sectors and/ or ministerial or departmental divisions within the public sector, such as agriculture, finance, health, education etc. These will vary according to the government *in situ*.

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Political process involves ensuring strong political commitment from the top leadership of a country as well as from local authorities. Those responsible for spearheading the strategy should embrace disaster reduction fully and be devoted to promoting it on a continuous basis. They will also need to promote the development of related activities at sub-national levels (e.g. provincial, district, city, local community) and provide for effective working linkages among measures at different levels. A crucial requirement is the engagement of the Ministry of Finance and Planning as well as the Council of Ministers in the National Platform for DRR development process right from the beginning. National Councils of several leading advisors have also proved to be useful in bringing various stakeholders together to develop a National Platform for DRR.

Technical processes to formulate National Platforms for DRR involve various activities such as undertaking an assessment of the economic, social and environmental situation, identifying problems and setting clear priorities. In addition, developing an investment programme, and monitoring and evaluation, are also key activities. Specifically, technical processes include:

- a) developing the knowledge base;
- b) building on existing mechanisms;
- c) strengthening the technical capacity of the coordinating Secretariat;
- d) developing a methodological framework for the NP, including a set of disaster reduction indicators;
- e) establishing goals and objectives for the NPs, and setting broad targets for achieving objectives through appropriate fora, e.g. policy dialogues and roundtables;
- f) designing a system for harmonizing key economic, social and environmentally related policies; and
- g) building capacity for NP on a continuous basis.

Participatory processes imply the full involvement of relevant groups (government, private sector and non-governmental organizations as well as academic organizations and the media) in appropriate tasks including exchanging information, decision-making, and implementation. It is necessary to decide how much participation is possible and necessary. Mechanisms for participation need to be developed. The key steps to be taken are:

- a) designing participatory processes that are multi-layered and truly inclusive;
- b) identifying the participants;
- c) using the media effectively to create a forum for debate as well as for raising awareness;
- d) ensuring that participatory approaches are transparent and the responsibilities of various institutions are clear.

Resource mobilization processes involve the availability of adequate resources for the development of National Platforms for DRR and its planned tasks. These may

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need to be mobilized from both domestic and international sources, as appropriate. The key measures to be taken are:

- a) ensuring the availability of adequate domestic resources for all NP activities;
- b) engaging the private sector fully in the NP development and implementation process.
- c) involving the international donor community from the beginning; while the country remains in full ownership of the process (relations with donor countries need to be effectively managed for countries to benefit from those relations);
- d) preparing investment plans or a series of project proposals to develop effective National Platform for DRR or financial plans and proposals;

Donors and international finance institutions should adhere to these principles and should adopt flexible approaches that would enable them to support different components of the strategy process technically and financially.

VI. Implementation of National Platforms for DRR Activities: General Strategy Suggestions and Checklist

A detailed implementation strategy for national platform for DRR development and operation will be specifically tailored by the respective participating countries. The main elements of this implementation strategy will likely include such tasks as:

- a) clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of implementing institutions and fully engaging them;
- b) action plans, specifying time frames for implementation;
- c) policies, legislation and regulatory frameworks;
- d) projects and programmes, mobilizing resources for their implementation; and
- e) effective public communication for ensuring broad ownership, and participation in a manner that minimizes conflict.

VII. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Effective implementation of national platform requires the monitoring of activities, and understanding what works or not. Putting in place an effective M&E mechanism is vital for the NP process. This would involve monitoring and evaluation of progress, outcomes and impacts. Process evaluation measures the implementation of activities and how effectively this is done. M&E of outcomes involves measuring the effect of the activities that have been undertaken, mainly the more immediate, tangible or observable changes. Impact assessment aims to ascertain the more long term and widespread consequences of the intervention.

Effective M&E for disaster risk reduction requires that it be: participatory, practical and reflective. Institutional learning is an important aspect of the M&E process as an organization analyses its own objectives and its capacity for achieving them. It is able to realize this through reflection on experiences and development impacts. The other element of the M&E process is the development of indicators, benchmarks or thresholds. These indicators could be quantitative and/or qualitative, and should

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reflect the status and trends of a particular process product. Based on these indicators annual reports should be prepared to enable stakeholders see progress made.

VIII. Sustaining the National Platform DRR process

The National Platform process is a cyclical and continuous process of planning, actions, learning, planning and actions. It is an adaptive process that would require putting in place mechanisms, policies, legal and institutional frameworks for coordinating and integrating the economic, social and environmental aspects of disaster risk reduction. The effective application of the NP Principles stated above are surely the best guarantee for success and sustaining the process. Key measures that need to be taken in this context are:

- a) developing a NP culture;
- b) institutionalization of the NP process;
- c) putting in place appropriate legal and enforcement mechanisms;
- d) public communication and effective participation;
- e) mobilizing, engaging and strengthening national capacity for continuous NP process.

Added value of the national platforms for DRR needs to be obvious to all participants. Disaster risk reduction still largely rests within the auspices of the public sector authorities and therefore first and foremost, the terms by which the public authorities will set priorities must be considered. In terms of accessing the completely vital factors of political will, leadership and resource commitment from national leaders, National Platforms must make sense economically and politically. The opinions of experts and academics and leading development organization will all have influence, but will not usually be adequate to arouse the critical mass of resources and energy required to realize the effective working and the sustainability of the Platforms.

IX. ISDR Secretariat and National Platforms for DRR

The Inter-agency Secretariat of the ISDR can play a critical role in the strategic process, including by:

1. providing technical assistance;
2. supporting convergence, complementary interests and coherence among different National Platforms for DRR initiatives;
3. facilitating exchange of information, experience, know how and expertise; and
4. developing common nomenclature and standardization of indicators and data and dissemination of information for disaster risk reduction

As one the global clearing-houses for disaster risk reduction information and the mandated UN focal point for DRR, the ISDR Secretariat is well positioned to undertake

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facilitating the development of national platforms for DRR, as it is a central depot for current information, knowledge and tools. As a UN organization with a global scope, the ISDR Secretariat is in a unique position as its partners and associated organizations are from both developing and industrialized countries.

Additionally, the ISDR Secretariat works with different types and scales of relevant organizations i.e. multi-lateral, bi-lateral, governmental, non-governmental, research and academic at local, national, regional through international levels. The ISDR Secretariat has established numerous partnerships, and various networks, which are based on the resultant process of the IDNDR and represent an accumulated wealth of global knowledge.