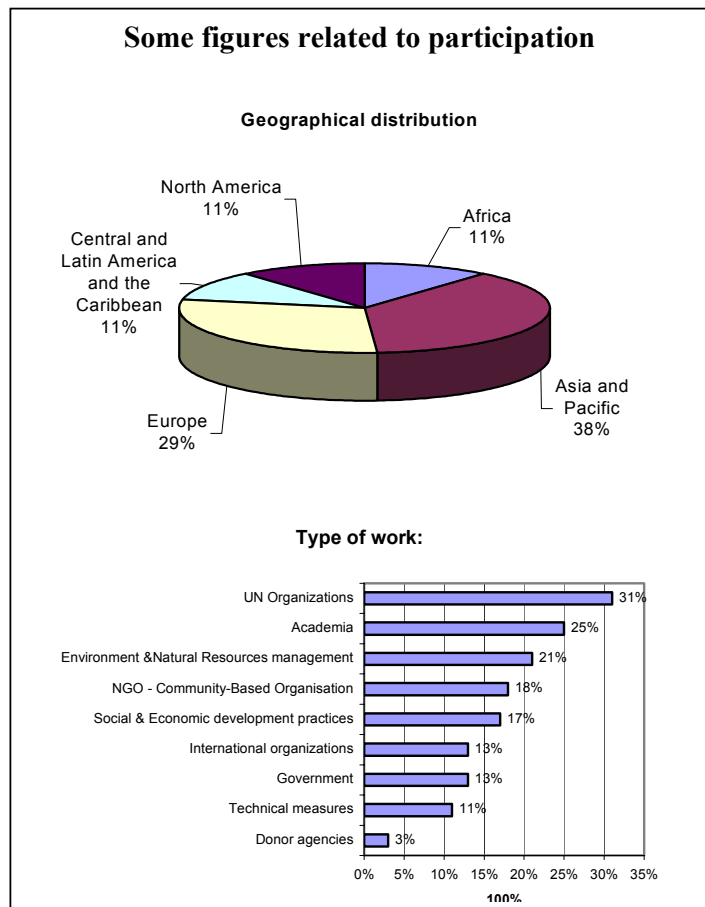**DISASTER RISK REDUCTION FRAMEWORK**
Synthesis of the UN-ISDR/UNDP online conference,
25 August - 30 September 2003

(Moderators' note: The conference email account will remain open until the end of October. After that participants are welcome to communicate on this subject through the ISDR general email address: isdr@un.org. Furthermore the conference website (www.unisdr.org/dialogue) will remain accessible for future reference for an undefined period of time.)

Dear Online Conference Participants,

We would like to thank once more all who have participated in this on-line conference on Disaster Risk Reduction Framework.

As you recall, the ISDR secretariat and UNDP have initiated a process to develop a framework to guide and monitor disaster risk reduction. The basic goal of this collective and iterative endeavour is to encourage and increase effective disaster risk reduction practices. The on-line conference, one of various consultations planned, had the specific objective to provide a forum for stakeholders to exchange views and identify the course of action needed to develop a framework for understanding, guiding and monitoring disaster risk reduction at all levels. It sought to bring into the process voices from varied professional, geographical and institutional groups.

Some figures related to participation

Geographical distribution

- North America 11%
- Central and Latin America and the Caribbean 11%
- Europe 29%
- Africa 11%
- Asia and Pacific 38%

Type of work:

- UN Organizations — 31%
- Academia — 25%
- Environment &Natural Resources management — 21%
- NGO - Community-Based Organisation — 18%
- Social & Economic development practices — 17%
- International organizations — 13%
- Government — 13%
- Technical measures — 11%
- Donor agencies — 3%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35%
100%

The Framework will be further discussed and disseminated through technical and political consultations in regional, national and thematic meetings. It is expected to guide the review of progress in disaster reduction during the last decade (since Yokohama Strategy and Plan of action, 1994). It is also expected to shape priority areas to target for the next decade, including the programme of action to be endorsed at the second world conference on disaster reduction (January 2005, Japan). The Framework will become the backbone for regular monitoring of progress at all levels, as well as for the dissemination of achievements and identification of areas for further action.

A draft framework was proposed as to start the on-line discussion. The proposed Framework stemmed from the idea that a common 'convention' to define disaster risk reduction would be

useful to increase commitment and guide coordinated action for disaster risk reduction. Such a global 'convention' then could be applied to specific circumstances, as well as regional, national and local contexts.

The Framework was presented in a table format, constituted of five thematic areas and their associated components (column 1) and characteristics (column 2). Examples of criteria to develop benchmarks and indicators to measure progress and achievements against the thematic areas were also provided (column 3).

The Framework is expected to:

- provide a basis for political advocacy as well as practical action and implementation;
- reflect the multidimensional, inter-disciplinary nature of disaster risk reduction;
- relate to a variety of users;
- assist users in determining roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for their own contexts;
- assist users to highlight areas where capacities are to be developed;
- be adaptable to different hazard situations, and not be hazard specific;

- provide the basis for setting targets and benchmarks, adapted to different circumstances and contexts, against which progress can be measured and gaps identified.

In this synthesis, we will attempt to reflect the stimulating discussion and the breadth and depth of issues raised and arguments brought forward by an impressive group of participants.

Purpose of the online conference:

The purpose of the online conference was to exchange views on the development and use of a Framework for disaster risk reduction. The discussion was to spark dialogue along the following major areas:
1. discuss how to achieve ownership and wider participation, determine the possible audience (users and contributors), raise potential technical and political challenges;
2. get feedback on the content of the proposed Framework;
3. get feedback on the use of the Framework for monitoring and measuring progress or achievements in disaster risk reduction, including benchmarks and indicators.
4. Reflection on possible next steps to develop the Framework further.

Summary:

Participation Nearly 300 people registered with the on-line conference and approximately fifty of the participants contributed to the debate. Participants came from a wide variety of experiences, representing different continents and professional backgrounds. This diversity and the possibility for people "outside the margin of big name professionals" to express and share their opinions were appreciated by the participants. A participant list, including email addresses, will be kept on www.unisdr.org/dialogue for future reference as well as to facilitate communication among the participants.

A framework for disaster risk reduction was regarded as useful and timely by participants as it would establish some agreed fundamental principles that could be applied on a global basis for regional, national, local as well as institutional adaptations. On one hand, all were unanimous in agreement with the value of developing a Framework for disaster risk reduction and the value added from this online exchange of ideas. On the other hand there have been a number of different interpretations of what a framework is, its possible audiences and its uses.

Audience

The Framework was regarded as relevant and useful for all actors in disaster risk reduction from the international level such as the UN, to national decision makers and planners as well as local level actors, NGOs, civil organizations and trade/labour unions. Academia was mentioned as a contributor to develop the Framework which could also guide research. Some participants put emphasis on the local level, stating that all action and implementation should lie with the local authorities, communities and the civil society. Others stressed that influencing the decision makers and planners at all levels was essential for the dissemination and political acceptability of the Framework.

Use

The need for flexibility to accommodate different situations and levels came out of the contributions as the key to address different policy needs and operational issues. A universal and internationally endorsed framework can provide an organising tool to aid our understanding and guide action in disaster risk reduction. But it cannot directly solve all specific problems or prescribe solutions. Therefore it should not be confused with blueprints and instruction manuals. Caution was called to the fact that a framework that did not clarify responsibilities and accountabilities is likely to delay action and results.

One conclusion stated that any single framework must either be very comprehensive or simplified to be useful to all parties. A possible approach could be that of a high level summary document with a supporting process and appropriate material to make it meaningful to a broad range of disciplines, sectors and levels. The framework may be seen as a living document to be modified as issues emerge, knowledge expands and capacities change.

Challenges

Creating ownership and the lack of political commitment were also mentioned as challenges. All participants stated endorsement at all levels as the most significant constraint in progressing with the development and implementation of the Framework. Failure to attract the commitment of regional and institutional entities that would coordinate the necessary input to the development phase of the framework could hamper the process.

It was agreed in general that to be accepted, owned and effective the Framework should be developed by its potential users. The importance of political buy-in from regional organisations such as SOPAC, Africa Union, ECOWAS, and COMESA (Common Market for Southern and Eastern Africa) was raised as a means to increase national ownership. These and other regional entities can also improve regional coordination to develop and implement the Framework while international organisations such as the UN and the IFRC can play a similar role at the global level. Technical refinement of the Framework, on the other hand, will require participation of the professional, technical and scientific groups.

Mobilisation of the necessary resources for its translation at the country level and the allocation of national budget for planning and implementation of disaster risk reduction are essential challenges. As one participant said, disaster risk reduction is often an afterthought in budgetary allocations with very little political clout.

It was affirmed that the key criteria of success would be the existence of an administrative structure responsible for disaster reduction with adequate budget allocation. Related to this, the lack of interest and resources for disaster reduction as an obstacle to its effectiveness was reiterated.

Among the more technical challenges mentioned, an important one is getting various inter-disciplinary groups to talk the same language. The importance was stated of '…being on the same wavelength, rather than getting bogged down in their own little corners' and raised concern that "everyone might try to pull the development of the Framework into their own special interest". It is also important to ensure sustainability of this initiative and monitor all activities related to the framework as we move along.

Linkages The importance of establishing linkages with relevant existing frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), PRSPs (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers), and UNDAFs (UN Development Assistance Framework) was also raised to ensure continuity and consistency for effective integration of disaster risk reduction into the development process.

Content There was a general agreement on the proposed five thematic areas and their associated components. In discussing these, most differences of opinion were in the area of **early warning** and **preparedness**. Proposals on the placement of early warning included as part of risk identification, knowledge management or preparedness. As for preparedness, some believed it did not deserve to be a thematic area of risk reduction and should be folded into other areas of the Framework. While others stated preparedness as the most significant and practical way of introducing risk reduction, and reducing vulnerabilities particularly at the community level. Few participants suggested the thematic area of risk management applications to be eliminated and integrated into other thematic areas. The great majority, however, regarded it as a useful theme and suggested further unpacking of its characteristics such as linkages with the MDGs, introducing diverse financial instruments and considering recovery as a means to introduce risk reduction.

Everybody agreed that risk identification was a crucial theme but the title was not regarded as capturing the differences between risk identification, risk analysis, risk evaluation and risk estimation. Some suggested hazards and vulnerability to be mentioned in this thematic title too.

Some **general comments and suggestions** applying to the whole Framework were made. These included:

a) Bring in evaluation, quality control or management as a cross cutting requirement applying to all components of the Framework, essential to increase effectiveness of disaster risk reduction;
b) Make the Framework more specific to disaster risk reduction as distinctive from frameworks for development;

c) Improve the Framework for programming purposes to reflect different stages of progress and implementation.
d) The need for political commitment to the Framework and to its adequate resourcing by the UN, other international organizations, national governments etc was again emphasized as the key for its successful implementation.

Detailed suggestions and editorial changes proposed on the components and characteristics by the participants are not repeated in this summary, but are available for reference in the topic summaries located under www.unisdr.org/dialogue.

It was said that benchmarks have to reflect the long-term dimension of disaster reduction work. Key to the success of disaster reduction will be its qualification as a development issue. Specific suggestions of benchmarks to record and measure progress and accomplishments for each thematic area have been limited. Many of the participants who commented on benchmarks and monitoring acknowledged that it is a complex issue. Significant work may still be required to clarify the purpose of benchmarks and ways of measuring progress against them. In discussing ways to measure and monitor progress the usefulness of introducing quantification in an area that has no intrinsic numerical values was questioned. A more qualitative approach of using "best practices" to measure progress against benchmarks was proposed. Using "lessons-learnt" type of analysis as a way to assess progress was also advocated.

Risk model

The need for agreed definitions and a conceptual model for risk reduction were stated as the starting point before moving into developing specific benchmarks and indicators. Several participants emphasized the need to explicitly incorporate coping capacity and mitigation measures into the conceptual model of risk. In the context of the discussion on risk modelling, the complexity and multi dimensional aspect of vulnerability and its assessment were raised. A word of caution came from one of the contributors who stated that a single mathematical formula would never capture all the variables involved in measuring risk or vulnerability, and that equations are imperfect reflection of reality.

This debate was useful to remember that any attempt to reduce disaster risks should be closely related to the analysis of risk. There are in fact a number of national, regional and global efforts, such as the IADB/IDEA Indicators Programme, to assess risk and to define vulnerability indicators. This Framework acknowledges the importance of risk identification as one of its key elements (see thematic area 2) for which these studies will provide a good base line to work from. However, we should bear in mind that the main objective of developing this Framework is not the identification of risk but rather to capture progress, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in reducing these risks.

The importance of monitoring and evaluation of impact of projects on reducing risk was pointed out as a means to understand long-term benefits of programs. A good example given was the lack of comprehensive evaluation of effectiveness of education and awareness raising programs. It was also stated by one contributor that much more work is needed to identify, compare and review different assessment methodologies before practical guidance on how to measure progress can be given. Specific undertakings relevant to measuring disaster reduction were mentioned such as the project by the Provention Consortium of the World Bank, currently managed by the IFRC, titled "Measuring Mitigation: Methodologies for assessing natural hazard risks and the net benefits of mitigation".

Issues not addressed:

In the course of discussion on monitoring and measuring achievement against benchmarks a number of questions remained not addressed. Political challenges involved in reaching an agreement on benchmarks and targets, and their subsequent monitoring received no attention. Setting targets to be monitored against and the very process of monitoring and reporting on progress can be a politically sensitive area.

Another related area that received limited attention was the methodological aspect of monitoring and measuring. While there was some debate on quantifiable versus best practices and lessons learned type of approaches, specific suggestions were not made on the pros and cons of different methods of assessment. Examples from other disciplines such as environmental monitoring may yield some interesting models to adapt.

Participants made no suggestions on the question of how to engage the donors and get their commitment to support disaster reduction under the Framework. In this regard, showing benefits of investing in disaster reduction might be the key to leverage interest. Studies in progress by the Provention Consortium on the Net Benefits of Mitigation, and by the Tear Fund on the Policy and Practice of Selected Institutional Donors in Natural Disaster Risk Reduction can become useful tools.

Next steps:

Different audiences may require different kinds of products and benchmarks. What has emerged so far as the potential users can be grouped as international level and national/local governments, technical groups, communities at risk and civil society organisations.

Marketing   Marketing of the Framework is essential for its success. The selling, buy-in and ownership need to go hand in hand with development of content. The communication and selling of the Framework can encourage organisations and individuals to interpret, adapt and mould a flexible framework according to their particular context, which will result in increased ownership. To facilitate this individuals, organisations, communities, agencies and governments should be able to recognise their roles and responsibilities somewhere in the Framework. One suggestion to increase global endorsement of the Framework was to utilize relevant meetings/conferences around the world for consultation and dissemination. But we were also warned that changes and commitment do not come through conferences but through regular use, evaluation and feedback.

Several participants recommended a graphical representation of the Framework including roles and responsibilities for action. Use of the word 'Framework' was challenged but no alternative was suggested. It was recommended that the Framework should acknowledge the interdisciplinary and intersectoral nature of disaster reduction, the success of which lies in the collaboration among diverse groups of people. The need to reflect linkages and bridges to other programmes where disaster reduction benefits and contributes was posed as a question.

We were reminded that disaster risk is not operating in isolation and that communities and practitioners have to deal with many types of risks coming from sources other than natural disasters. Risk management measures and resources are often multi-purpose and shared therefore the Framework, while maintaining its focus on natural disaster risks, has to acknowledge the wider context of risk. Attention was called for the most vulnerable countries where disaster risks and chronic vulnerabilities are closely linked, and are part of the poverty cycle.   Without proactive and effective involvement of the donor countries it may be unrealistic to expect poor countries to make significant progress on many aspects of disaster reduction.

Follow up suggestions

Several inspiring suggestions were made on activities and initiatives to assist in the further development and use of the framework:

- Create a consultative team of wide representation to oversee development of the framework; organise peer reviews; conduct a consultative team workshop to finalise it.
- Create thematic working groups to produce detailed working documents on various aspects of the framework and its future applications;
- Compile case studies, best practices, standards and an inventory of human resources to build up the framework
- Conduct regional and national stakeholder consultations for dissemination and feedback;
- Disseminate the framework through various media and meetings; brief decision makers, parliamentarians, legislators, donors, private sector on their role and potential contribution.

The need for greater focus on the human aspect of disasters and risk management in the Framework as well as all other associated documents was called upon. Otherwise the Framework may remain too "sanitized" and may not reflect its ultimate objective of reducing human suffering.

As one participant suggested the message to be communicated to the disaster reduction community regarding the Framework could be along the lines of " It's your framework – make it yours".

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UN/ISDR and UNDP online conference on a Framework for disaster risk
Reduction