DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: A FRONT LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISPLACEMENT

BROOKINGS-BERN PROJECT ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT
AND
INTERACTION'S DISASTER RISK REDUCTION WORKING GROUP
JOINT SEMINAR

10 OCTOBER 2007

Welcome and Introduction
Beth Ferris, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is a vital defense against climate change and displacement, particularly in the current context of increasing numbers of disaster-affected persons. In the last two decades, for example, an estimated 200 million people have been affected every year by natural disasters. A significant portion of the disaster-affected community is also disaster-displaced, making them even more vulnerable to human rights violations. The *Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters*, developed by the RSG for Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), provides recommendations to humanitarian organizations on how to ensure that the human rights of those affected by natural disasters are upheld. Yet it is equally important to examine how the risk of natural disasters can be reduced and we need to think about practical steps which can be taken to mitigate the effects of disasters.

The number of natural disasters is increasing and although the international community has been working on DRR for many years, there is much to be done in terms of implementing effective policies. We hope the discussion today will both raise awareness and encourage organizations represented here to begin or to renew their efforts to reduce the human impact of natural disasters.

Disasters, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Reduction
Peter Walker, Director, Feinstein International Center at Tufts University

Today's humanitarian emergencies are a consequence of improperly managing complex systems. Natural systems (as all global systems) are becoming increasingly complex, multiplying the potential for disaster. This is a simple fact of the world in which we live.

Multiple forces are affecting the complexity of natural systems including the following: climate change, globalization, urbanization and migration, organized violence, and the phenomenon of "us and them". While the number of persons dying in disaster has decreased, the number of persons affected by disaster has increased. And yet, casualty figures are often emphasized in the media and by politicians.

Part of the challenge in addressing complex systems is the difficulty of predicting change. Change is not always linear – it can occur can occur gradually as in the development of famine or abruptly as in the Rwandan genocide.

It is difficult to plan for disasters. Projections of, e.g. the number of water-insecure persons, are difficult to determine far in advance. However, the closer one is to the projection date, the more clearly predictions can be assessed. Disaster planners are essentially dealing with risk assessment all day. Furthermore, the complex technical aspects of disaster prediction mean that a disaster's impact on human rights is rarely at the forefront of the discussions.

Returning to the forces which affect the complexity of natural systems, Walker notes the significance of rising economic inequality which is one of the negative consequences of globalization. Globalization is also a driver of urbanization which can have both positive and negative impacts on global systems. On the one hand, it can spur positive change through the emergence of social and economic movements. On the other, it can lead to increased human exploitation.

Another dangerous global trend is that violence is increasingly adopted as a preferred recourse, as opposed to being seen as a last resort. We see this in multiple forms of home and self-defense, terrorism, and banditry. This trend of a preference for violence is accompanied by a growing sense of social division, of seeing the world in terms of "us" versus "them." This may parallel divisions between the haves and have-nots as the divide between North and South demonstrates. However, we are also seeing divisions between public and private spheres and between bilateral and multilateral organizing which has a tremendous impact on the approaches to DRR.

The model by which we understand disasters needs to be changed. Disasters were typically perceived as a blip on the standard development curve. Today, we realize that this image is flawed – disasters can no longer be treated as an aberration Rather, most disasters are part of complex and protracted crises.

Practically speaking, this increase in complexity has implications for governments as well as people affected by disasters. Analysis of these global trends also has implications for governments; in today's world, foreign policy, trade and aid all overlap? Bilateral relationships between states, especially those that involve a state from the North and a state from the South, are returning more and more to a model which resembles the core-periphery interaction of metropoles and colonies of the past.

We need to move away from static cookie-cutter solutions to problems and to response to natural disasters. Aid agencies have not adapted the same flexibility and decision-making processes of successful multinational corporations like IBM. We are also facing a growing ideological dichotomy between wealth and justice. While, globalization has the potential to generate incredible wealth, this has not yet been accompanied by greater justice.

Hyogo Framework and International Commitments
Elina Palm, Liaison Officer, UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)

The tendency for leaders to be engaged *after* disasters strike is an unfortunate characteristic of state approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction. For example, planners of the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which took place three weeks after the tsunami, saw an increased response to the invitation to participate in the conference in the wake of the emergency. More sustained interest and involvement among political leaders is necessary to move forward in reducing the risks of disasters.

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), adopted at the 2005 World Conference, identifies ways to strategically and systematically reduce risks and vulnerabilities to disaster-affected communities. Its major strategic goal is to promote the incorporation of DRR into sustainable development. This is done by strengthening institutional capacities at all levels, but particularly at the local level.

Actionable priorities of the Framework are as follows:

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

The objective of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) is to reduce disaster risks and vulnerabilities worldwide by focusing on national and community institutions and mechanisms. The instrument for implementing this goal is the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA).

Since its adoption, the HFA has made visible progress at the national, regional, and international levels. Within the national context, HFA focal points have been established in 106 countries and five territories. At the same time, national, multi-sector platforms for disaster reduction have been initiated in 40 countries. Ministerial-level agreements are being developed in several regions and sub-regions including Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. The "Madang Framework for Action 2005-2015," an initiative endorsed by leaders at the Pacific Islands Forum (October 2005), is one such example.

At the international level, the HFA provides a global framework for DRR. It has been endorsed by several UN agencies, including WHO, UNDP, and UNICEF. Some donors are revising budgets for humanitarian funding. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID), for example, now allocates 10 percent of its humanitarian funds to DRR. DRR initiatives have developed by a number of international agencies including the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the World Bank. ISDR has also created global awareness campaigns based around important thematic topics. The 2006-07 campaign is "Disaster Risk Reduction Begins at School" and 2008-09 will focus on hospitals and health.

However, nearly three years after the adoption of the HFA, vulnerability continues to increase. Rising sea levels and climate change add to existing risks. ISDR is stronger than it was three years ago, thanks in large part to its new partnerships. While governments are taking action, there is still a delay between adopting policies and translating them into concrete measures.

Case Study: Colombia
Walter Ricardo Cotte, Director General Socorro Nacional Sociedad de la Cruz Roja Colombiana (Colombia Red Cross)

Risk Reduction in a Conflict Situation & Climate Change Influence
The case of Colombia provides some very useful insights when looking at DRR. The country is at continual risk for a multitude of natural and man-made disasters including: floods, landslides, seismic hazards, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, hurricanes, attacks on oil and gas pipelines, aircraft accidents, car accidents, and armed conflicts.

There are several forces affecting Colombia's current risk: poverty, corruption, armed conflict, disasters, and vulnerability. Some of the major problems associated with poverty are hunger, malnutrition, and homelessness. There are cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of children while other children become involved in armed conflict. Over 2 million people have been displaced from their homes in the last decade, and land mines continue to claim two or three victims every day in Colombia.

The Red Cross is one part of the humanitarian picture in Colombia, and works within its capacities to reduce risks and to assist in humanitarian response and recovery programs. The Colombian Red Cross (CRC) is present in 31 departments, 230 municipalities, and works with 126 supportive groups. It participates in public, private and community spheres, recognizing the need to build local capacity. The organization is impartial, neutral, and independent.

The CRC promotes risk reduction through the following activities: vulnerability and risk maps; monitoring and early warning system; prevention and education; hospital and health emergency plans; preparedness at the community level, including schools; and local networking and team-building. All of CRC's policies and activities focus on capacity building and planning with people on the ground.

CRC Recommendations to the Government are as follows:

Policy
1. Develop a risk management national policy
2. Update the 46 /1988 law and decree no. 919 of 1989
3. Revise and update the 49 law from 1948
4. Provide incentives and sanctions with respect to risk management

Administrative
1. Facilitate the arrival of international aid
2. Provide disaster management funds

Discussion

Discussion began with the question of where Disaster Risk Reduction falls in terms of the humanitarian aid – development spectrum. Several participants noted their frustration with the current paradigm that categorizes efforts such as DRR or poverty alleviation into either long-term development or short-term emergency aid sectors, or "silos," as one person termed them.

Another participant noted that there has been a tendency for DRR to fall largely into the realm of the humanitarian aid community and questioned why there wasn't more emphasis on this within development agencies. Isn't this really about building resilient communities?   While DRR is not often recognized as a development activity, unfortunately, many donors also say that it is beyond the scope of emergency relief. Thus, DRR seems to fall between the cracks.

One of the negative consequences of the gap between organizations working in different fields is that it can limit or inhibit analysis of program planners. For example, the genocide in Rwanda came as a surprise to many in the development field, but not to those working in the field of human rights.

There is a need for DRR to be mainstreamed into on-going work to a much greater degree which requires assessment of vulnerability. In the current environment, we know more about endangered species than we do about the vulnerability of our schools, hospitals, etc. Understanding the vulnerability of local infrastructure is key – we need to know who is at risk.

There also needs to be more cooperation and crossover among organizations working in the areas of development, humanitarian aid, human rights, and so on. Darfur is a good example of a case that is being approached in a holistic, multi-pronged fashion.

One area that needs greater development is collaboration with the private sector. One NGO representative noted that they have had good experiences working with

neighborhood enterprises. Corporate risk management can have interesting spin-offs as well. For example, another participant noted that when the Coca-cola corporation realized that water was the most expensive ingredient in its product, it examined ways to protect local water supplies. We need to push corporate owners and operators to be conscious of the risks posed to the communities working in or near their factories.

Another participant questioned the basic assumption of DRR – that local communities need to become more resilient – in light of the failures to achieve sustainable development. If we were able to do development right, the risks from disasters would be reduced. Somehow it doesn't seem fair that we are expecting local communities to take responsibility for reducing risks from disasters.