

Report

Capacity-building seminar on “Collaborative Approaches and Solutions to Disasters Management Challenges for SIDS Municipalities in the Context of Sustainable Development”

Singapore, 10-12 November 2014

The Capacity-building seminar on “Collaborative Approaches and Solutions to Disasters Management Challenges for SIDS Municipalities in the Context of Sustainable Development” was organized by DESA/Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), in cooperation with OHLRS and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, in Singapore from 10 to 12 November 2014 to address SIDS’ Disasters Risk Reduction (DRR) management as these countries are located amongst the world’s most vulnerable regions, facing intense and frequent natural and environmental disasters including severe regular seasonal flash flooding inflicting significant damage on islands’ infrastructure. Moreover, the increasing impact of disasters is having a disproportionately high economic, social and environmental Small island developing states islands: according to UNISDR, six of the top ten countries with the highest proportion of annual average losses against their yearly production of gross capital are SIDS.

Twenty years after the Earth Summit, the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference highlighted the fact that not only the sustainable development of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) but even their survival and viability are intimately linked to their capacity to reduce the risks and the vulnerability and to enhance the resilience of their communities, buildings and infrastructure to, natural and anthropogenic disasters, sea-level rise and other impacts of climate change, not to mention their capacity to limit environmental degradation.

The Conference firmly placed disaster risk reduction on the sustainable development agenda and Governments called for “disaster risk reduction and building of resilience to disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication....”

More recently, in September 2014, at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, held in Apia, Samoa, it was recognized that sustainable development will not be achieved without sound, efficient disaster risk management in particular for SIDS’ municipalities. Member states also recognized that small island developing states continue to grapple with the effects of disasters.

It mentioned that the complexity and daunting nature of building resilience of municipalities and local communities in SIDS require a deeper collaboration among different stakeholders. Local governments/public utilities facing enormous resource challenges in building resilience and protecting their communities are increasingly looking towards collaboration.

The seminar brought together representatives from local and national Governments, IGOs, NGOs civil society, academia, the private sector, local communities, and the UN system including the world bank.

The seminar sought to:

1. Further identify major challenges facing municipalities and local authorities (including lack of institutional, technical and financial capacities and flood -protection infrastructure) and look at ways and means for strengthening the capacities of local authorities/municipalities to build resilience to natural disasters including through sharing of lessons learned and experience gained, having a better understanding of institutional and policy frameworks requirements, identifying gaps in policies and practices but most importantly finding viable and implementable solutions.
2. Promote peer learning through South-South and North-South knowledge exchange on experiences and good practices related to DRR, climate change and sustainable development and agree on areas where cooperation is most needed such as reliable data collection for risk analysis and monitoring; vulnerability assessments, knowledge exchange in integrated community development programmes. In practice, such collaboration or partnerships should create win-win solutions for SIDS municipalities/local authorities and all stakeholders including the private sector—if duly supported by appropriate policy frameworks.

Organization of the seminar

The three -day capacity-building seminar included lectures delivered by experts, presentations by participants and group discussions.

The seminar was **divided into the following eleven sessions :**

1. DRR Institutional and Administrative Frameworks in SIDS municipalities/local authorities including technology transfer and capacity building
(Exploring SIDS-specific Best Practice, Lessons Learned and Closing Gaps in building resilience)
2. Environmental Protection and Strengthening of Ecosystems
(Addressing the importance of environmental protection and ecosystem services (including mangroves, coral reefs etc) as a natural defence against natural hazards)
3. Multi-Hazard Risk Assessment – Knowing SIDS Specific Risks
(Including Visualizing Resilience: Using Mapping Tools to Plan for Hazards – including Climate Change. This session will also explore SIDS specific natural disasters and draw on specific lessons (including shortcomings) and best practice)
4. Infrastructure Protection, Building Regulations and Land Use Planning
(Investing and maintaining critical infrastructure such as transport, hospitals, shelters, electricity, water, telecommunications etc. that ensures resilience and minimises risk)

5. Protection of Vital Facilities: Education and Health

(Focusing on the resilience of facilities that provide essential social services during and in the aftermath of a disaster)

6. Training, Education and Public Awareness

(Innovative community based Public Awareness Strategies; exploring Social Media, Gamification, Mapping and other creative strategies for effective outreach)

7. SIDS specific Financing and Resource Mobilization for DRR

(Focussing on creative sources of financing for resilience that are accessible to SIDS and exploring the costs of building resilience in SIDS)

8. Partnerships for Effective Preparedness, Early Warning and Response

(Addressing the types of partnerships required for effective preparedness and early warning response including discussions on technology (ICTs))

9. Recovery and Rebuilding Communities

(Addressing priority areas for recovery and rebuilding communities including integrating disaster risk reduction criteria as a cross-cutting measure and the importance of community-based owner-driven reconstruction)

The last two sessions were dedicated to two presentations by Singapore on “Crisis Communications “ and “Media Management in a Crisis

In the beginning of each session (except for the last two sessions entirely organized by our partners from the Singapore Cooperation Programme) 3-4 speakers were invited to make a presentation (presentations were discussed and cleared by DESA before hand). Each session was followed by an open-ended discussion.

All presentations are included in a dropbox :

["Disasters_Management_12_14_Nove_2014_SIDS"](#)

DESA prepared and submitted its report to the participants for their review and comments. The following final recommendations were discussed and endorsed by all participants.

Findings and recommendations

DRR Institutional and Administrative Frameworks in SIDS municipalities/local authorities including technology transfer and capacity building:

- There is a positive trend of moving from national to local and community based DRR strategies and approaches.

- Not all SIDS have municipal structures/systems to effectively interface with communities
- This generates new challenges including the need of linking them to national strategies. There is equally a need for increasing decentralization of risk governance, greater capacity development at local levels.
- There is a need for mapping and clarifying roles and responsibilities of different levels of government – including clarifying local responsibilities for land use planning and implementation.
- It is necessary to mobilize resources at local levels (including by the private sector and civil society), and to establish appropriate financing as well as incentive mechanisms, especially for private sector partners.
- Overall for DRR, there is a need for evidence based research, greater coordination of international and regional organizations actions at country level while at the same time insuring that poverty alleviation is addressed with a special focus on poor people with special needs.

Environmental protection and strengthening the eco-system:

- There is an urgent need for ecosystem based protection solutions, soft where possible (protective landscapes), hard only where necessary. These include sand suppletions, mangrove restoration etc. Multifunctional solutions are preferred, which can help obtain financing (multi stakeholder approach). It is recognised that most situations will require mixed solutions including soft and hard responses. Multi functional solutions should combine “safety, sustainability and beauty”
- There is a need for other eco-system based adaptation solutions such as reforestation.
- Disasters and climate risk solutions should be seen in a more holistic context. including within on-going development processes. In this context, there is a need to develop more resilient communities and economically stable communities. To facilitate such communities sustainable financing mechanisms need to be introduced.
- There is a need to take action based on what is known about the value of existing ecosystem services (see Maldives example). Action may be supported by PES (Payment for ecosystem services) solutions. These models should be scaled up and adapted to different contexts.
- Ecosystems play key roles in the reduction of disaster risks. Protecting conserving and sustaining the ecological resources is essential for SIDS.
- Particular attention needs to be paid to those eco-systems that support economic activity and how they may be affected by climate change and other hazards

Multi Hazard Risk Assessment– Knowing SIDS Specific Risks:

- There is a recognition of the important role of existing regional centres for data collection, modelling and analysis to understand the disaster risk, which is quite complex in SIDS context. However, there is also a need for greater focus on capacity development at the country level. More financial and technical support for risk assessment is a reality but sustainability of projects is only possible if they are part of national programmes. This requires building national capacities and not only rely solely on regional data and analysis centres.
- There is urgent need for a greater integration of strategies for risk reduction and CC planning schemes. This has started in several SIDS regions.
- To be able to improve the in-county capacities for risk assessment, it is important to move towards more open source software, easy to use tools and techniques so that these analysis become more affordable for SIDS
- There is a need to further recognise the importance of traditional knowledge in the conduct of risk assessment.
- There are successful models of learning through south-south cooperation, for example understanding the climate risk and monsoon forum for risk communication in Asia.
- Implementation of the risk assessment can be improved not only for floods but also for droughts by establishing minimum base line risk information.
- SIDS need to make greater use of GIS and statistics to support multi-hazard risk assessment in a cost effective way.

Infrastructure protection, building regulations and land use planning:

- There is a need for a mix of hard and soft measures. The decisions on “which and where” need to be site specific. This will include ecosystem based solutions and where possible appropriate technologies
- There is a need for adapted designs given the challenges of climate change and climate variability
- Actions are usually taken after disasters to resolve short term problems but they need to be decided with a long term vision. This can also obtain financing.
- There needs to be lessons in relation to appropriate siting for infrastructure (i. e. sand public services). This would also set the basis for more evidence based approaches to planning.
- Land use regulatory systems need to be updated and improved but they need to allow for site specific solutions – local ordinances- since solutions may need to be designed

and implemented at neighborhood level.

- There is a need to update, legislate, monitor and enforce building codes and standards.
- The need for urban mutability needs to be better defined and explored. There is no need to always replace what was there before a disaster.
- There are some examples of good practices in land use legal and institutional developments such is the case in the Seychelles where the planning committee have representation from Environmental experts and DRR officers.
- Insurance should be explored as a potential incentive for driving development practices.

Protection of vital facilities: education and health:

- There is a need for greater understanding of the dual role of public buildings such as schools and community centres for disaster relief. This requires that these facilities are disaster resilient and equipped with emergency utilities and possibly augmented facilities functioning specifically for periods of calamity. Schools need to be returned to their normal functions as soon as possible.
- There is a need to promote sustainable health centres equipped with water, renewable power and communications so they remain functional during and after a disaster.
- Some of these facilities may be built in disaster prone areas and this requires that there is mapping of these facilities and their characteristics so as to be able to analyse the potential effects under different scenarios (of intensity of earth quakes, for example) and emergency evacuation plans to safer facilities. It is important that private facilities/institutions be formally/officially engaged to network and augment emergency services both pre and post disaster periods.
- Information about the state of facilities and on the situation during real time emergencies need to be based on stakeholder engagement however this requires investments in maintaining sustainable networks.

Training, Education and Public Awareness:

- DRR related messages need to be simple, targeted and coordinated. The same message should be given by all agencies to avoid confusion. The use of simple graphics proved to be very useful. Everyone in the community
- It is important to know who has the mandate to communicate, to whom and what is to be achieved (need communication plans)
- Importance of engaging the media cannot be underestimated: the media are key players in delivering messages.

- Communities must have confidence in/trust the message and the messenger (use of celebrities is a good practice)
- Climate change messages need to acknowledge DRM as a means for mitigation
- Mapping underpins all areas of DRM and should be made available to the public
- Prevention, preparedness and mitigation are key to minimize risk. However a coordinated response is vital
- It is important not to rely on one communication tool only (i.e. SMS is more useful for region specific or slow set events. Cellular broadcast works for urgent national messages. Radio can be useful.
- The use of traditional knowledge in communication is highly recommended

SIDS specific Financing and Resource Mobilization for DRR:

- Existing funding is fragmented and needs to be consolidated. In some cases countries need to use funds more effectively and efficiently. Countries need to develop frameworks to obtain and expend funds with the support of the international community and regional agencies.
- Development partners should respond to SIDS DRR priorities.
- Countries have to build their own reputation and good financial procurement systems to access funds.
- Organisations such as the WB are moving also to more integrated approaches in their work in slums, providing economic opportunities for dwellers make them also more resilient to disasters.
- Explore use of debt forgiveness for climate adaptation and risk reduction.
- There are some issues in relation to the Risk pooling approach. There is a need to further explore whether risk pooling is diverting investments in countries.
- SIDS also need to inform and influence global policies for DRR. Stronger coordination and collaboration amongst SIDS is needed to influence global policies.
- There is a need to establish partnerships with non traditional donors.
- There is a need for stronger coordination between development partners and regional organisations.

- Access to international funding needs to be facilitated for SIDS vulnerabilities and limited capacity.
- Local resource mobilization needs to be better facilitated including involvement of the private sector.
- There is a strong need for build capacity of local authorities to access funds. Local resource mobilization needs to be better facilitated including involvement of the private sector.
- There is a strong need to build capacity of local authorities to access funds.

Partnerships for Effective Preparedness, Early Warning and Response; Recovery and Rebuilding Communities:

- Information role and responsibilities need to be clarified ahead of a period of disaster
- Early warning systems at country level need to be consistent and interoperable with existing international, regional and local systems
- Partnerships can provide leverage and access to wider networks
- Informed and timely decision making based on preparedness is key to survival
- There is a need to understand the situations of those at risk and work to ensure that they are better prepared
- Ensure that the social, emotional and cultural needs of displaced persons are considered in the recovery and reconstruction process- “Happy return” versus an “early return “
- The neighborhood community concept is important not only for happy return but also for preparedness.
- There is a need to have social structures in place before DRR is carried out
- Community capacity needs to be strengthened as sustainability of an intervention is a function of community cohesiveness.

Way forward

1. UNDESA jointly with ESCAP and relevant regional organizations to develop SIDS inter-regional initiative under the UN development account project.
2. Formalisation of cooperation by the three SIDS regions by December 2016 (including to

promote peer learning through South-South and North-South knowledge exchange on experiences and good practices related to DRR, climate change and sustainable development).