

Keynote Speech

Global Efforts on Disaster Risk Reduction

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Introduction

When I met Governor Ido about two years ago, he answered a question that I have been carrying around for the 20–25 years I have spent in disaster relief and response. Why are we constantly repeating the same mistakes and why do we not seem to learn from our experiences? Each disaster operation has individual characteristics but all the mistakes that we make we tend to carry into the future.



Governor Ido said his primary concern was that people forget. Forgetfulness and rationalizing experiences in order to cope probably comes from a deep human instinct to live. The Governor also made the point that this forgetfulness is a result of very superficial learning from the past.

Before talking about our future, let me look back on the past to remind you of how relatively young the disaster risk reduction movement is. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) commenced its activities in the year 2000. Prior to that, international activities for disaster reduction were conducted during the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR, 1990–1999). IDNDR saw the participation of many scientific institutions, which formed the strong scientific basis for the organization and approaches we have today. These activities produced diverse findings and, along with international cooperation and efforts by member states, led to the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005.

Now, I would like to talk about disaster trends, the history of the Hyogo Framework for Action, as well as the role and actions of the UNISDR. I will then showcase some global and regional disaster reduction activities and disaster reduction instruments, and share with you some early impressions from the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Global Trends of Catastrophic Disasters and Their Impacts

The Indian Ocean tsunami and earthquake in 2004 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 are two key disasters in the past decade that have initiated a paradigm shift in how we think about

disasters and how we orientate our future disaster related actions.

Both disasters had an unprecedented impact that no one could have imagined prior to their occurrence. Imagination is one thing I believe is necessary for technocrats and planners to enable them to identify existing risk accumulation and even begin to envisage future risks.

Now, let us look at some basic disaster trends. During 2011 alone, disasters killed many people, damaged houses, and destroyed roads and bridges. They also undermined development efforts. These catastrophes, which attracted worldwide attention, were just the tip of the iceberg.

Ten days from now, a new report on disasters and development in Asia (Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2012) will be published by the UNISDR and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), based in Bangkok. The report highlights Asia as the largest region in terms of population and geographic area, and the region that experiences a significant proportion of disaster losses. Seventy-five percent of people killed in natural hazards around the world in the past forty years were in the Asian region. This region has also sustained enormous economic losses resulting from disasters.

This concentration of disaster losses in Asia is largely related to geographical factors but also the economic development of the region. Rapid economic development and increasing disaster impacts creates an accumulation of disaster risk for the future. The key challenge for the international community is addressing the risk curve and overcoming these increasing risks. We are beginning to have an impact on the lives lost during disasters, however the economic livelihood and assets of these people and communities are still at risk of exposure, including critical and urban infrastructure which continue to increase as a result of urbanization.

South-East Asia is the region with the highest economic exposure to disasters. Another region that has rapid increasing exposure is South and South-West Asia. This is due to rapid economic growth which surpasses the establishment of mechanisms and institutions necessary to address increasing disaster risk. The exposure risk in East and North-East Asia is not as high as countries such as Vietnam, China and Japan have established sufficient measures for early warning and evacuation which saves lives and money.

It is important to note, however, that our records only reflect direct losses of public sector and what is insured. These records do not show losses encountered by the business sector or individuals, things that are not insured or are not reimbursable. Determining who ultimately pays for the disasters is an extremely important area that needs exploration. While governments carry a huge burden of the economic loss, they are not the only ones. Until we explore this area it will be difficult to encourage political leaders to place disaster losses at the forefront of decision making and priorities. .

The biennial Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction suggested that governments set voluntary targets for themselves for disaster risk reduction investment. As one of the examples, Indonesia invests in risk reduction and prevention from its own development budget and ensures it

filters down to the provincial and local level governments. However, it is difficult to track investment in disaster risk reduction and determine how successful it is because investment in other sectors also contributes to disaster risk reduction. If we were able to track all investment in disaster risk reduction it would serve as a useful tool to encourage investment by other governments.

Strengthening the resilience of a community requires a holistic approach in terms of government and society. The San Francisco municipal government in California has developed a sustainability framework consisting of six principles around the core concept of a participatory process (including Environmental Quality, Social and Intergenerational Equity, Quality of Life, Disaster Resilience and Economic Vitality). Disaster risk reduction is not a sectoral issue, but a strategic issue. This framework highlights the strategic nature of disaster risk reduction, and it illustrates the necessity of a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach, as well as participation.

The Asia Pacific Disaster Report from 2012, based on approximately forty to fifty years of socio-economic data from the region, provides evidence that development is undermined by disasters. While development can reduce vulnerability, development can increase exposure due to the enormous growth of infrastructure located in hazard prone areas, as well as urbanization and health challenges. A key challenge in the post 2015 MDG process will be integrating disaster risk reduction into the development process and emphasizing that development is not an absolute positive or linear process, but is involved with risks.

From the experiences in Asia, it can be said that DRR investment can reduce vulnerability. It can be also said that setting target helps, land use planning, supply chain management, recovery process has a potential to reduce exposure.

A particularly important concept, which I hope will be a key domain considered in the development of HFA2, is the planning for recovery and reconstruction prior to a disaster occurring. Based on current knowledge and previous experiences it is possible to anticipate the recovery and reconstruction phases in order to facilitate recovery and reconstruction rather than starting from scratch, which creates huge problems with funding resources. Japan provides a lot of learning from this context based on the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Hyogo Framework for Action

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) is a global multi-stakeholder partnership. The original disaster reduction document set out through the Geneva Mandate on Disaster Reduction (1999) emphasizes that disaster risk reduction is placed within a sustainable development framework.

The ISDR is the successor of the IDNDR and will remain a relatively small organization with offices of approximately 5-10 people, except the headquarters. This is because the ISDR is a global

multi-stakeholder partnership with governments, local and national, as well as expert organizations. These partners are the ones which do the work toward risk reduction, whereas our primary function is to provide the international momentum, build political consensus, provide evidence and mobilize the partners towards successful disaster risk reduction. These functions are the direct results of the tasks Mandated to the ISDR by the General Assembly, which include “lead and coordinate”, providing “credible evidence” by working with partners, “advocacy and outreach”, as well as “communicating results” through the mechanisms of the ISDR (such as national platforms, regional platforms and global events). The agenda of the ISDR is what we like to call an ‘agenda in progress’ as reducing disaster risk will never be completed unless there is radical change in consumption patterns and sustainable living.

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), which you are well aware of, comprises three strategic goals, five priorities for action, as well as implementation and follow-up processes. The United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which was held in Kobe in January 2005, set up a monitoring system where each member state should report its progress of HFA implementation. The current cycle 2011-2013 is the third cycle. In the previous 2009-2011 cycle, 133 Member States participated. Not all UN Member States have submitted reports. This monitoring and reporting process is a learning process for the countries and also encouraged to be built on multi-stakeholder processes.

I would like to highlight what has been most successful and less successful.

Within the first Priority Area – Governance - many governments have reported much progress, particularly in developing national legislation and allocating budgets for disaster risk reduction.

HFA Priority Area 2—disaster risk identification – is doing relatively well. There is a lot of interest in risk assessment, however translating risk assessment into action is a challenge and requires continued work, perhaps even simpler methodologies.

HFA Priority Area 3, referring to public awareness and education has seen excellent progress. There has been enormous investment in this area in Japan. In many countries this is seen as the key element of risk management.

HFA Priority Area 4 refers to development and reduction of the underlying risk factors of disasters. This priority highlights all the major development issues such as infrastructure and climate change. We have seen the least progress in this priority area. This is the Priority Area we are primarily focusing on now and trying to motivate.

We have seen significant progress in HFA Priority Area 5—strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response. Many member states have strengthened their preparedness to cope with disasters and respond adequately, which is very important for the trust the public have in their government.

Anyone can access online progress reports on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for

Action. I am sure you will find them very interesting. These progress reports comprise self-evaluations of participating Member States. Made available is also a summary of the second reporting cycle for Asia.

The biennial Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR) consolidates the progresses in disaster risk reduction and disaster modeling, including financing as one of the key areas. The 2011 GAR focuses on public investments, while the 2013 GAR will focus on private investments. The GAR is important for strengthening advocacy for disaster risk reduction.

The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (forum) is held every two years in Geneva to regularly discuss the progress of implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and other various issues. The fourth session will take place in 2013 and will serve as a staging point for the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2015. At the fourth session we will discuss what has been achieved over the last eight years with civil society, government and researchers, as well as how we can use our achievements to define as the basis for the post-2015 agenda.

Our Efforts for the Future

The post-2015 agenda is attracting a lot of attention compared to 2005 when the forum was held in Kobe. Many countries and actors around the world want to be involved in redefining a disaster risk reduction framework by using their experiences and suggesting focus areas. There is a very broad consultation process underway through national, regional and international platforms and meetings. Through various discussions, we will explore how we can use our experience and the lessons learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake to reduce disaster risks in the future.

The Hyogo Framework for Action requires all stakeholders to participate in its disaster risk reduction efforts. This framework has strengthened networks between national and local governments, mayors, parliamentarians and the private sector. The HFA recognizes that women, young people and children have special needs and play an important role in disaster situations. The elderly, people living with disabilities and men must also participate in disaster risk reduction efforts as stakeholders. We have requested academic and scientific organizations to engage more in our disaster risk reduction efforts as advisory committee members. NGOs, civil society organizations and community organizations are also important stakeholders. If there are some organizations that I have failed to include, please be sure to tell me.

The Government of Japan has expressed its intention to host the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in early 2015. The conference agenda will include mechanisms for budgeting, planning, fiscal instruments and risk transfer in disaster risk reduction and preparedness programs, all of which are needed by individuals, as well as the public and private

sectors. Since climate change can exacerbate disaster risks, many governments suggest that the agenda should also include how we can create stronger integration between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

Urban areas are great centers for great economic growth and many people want to live in big cities. However, the rapid development of urban areas generates greater disaster risk. Thus we must consider how we can support safer development in cities. Japan has done extraordinary work in creating safer cities, however even then hazards occur which are unforeseeable. This presents even greater challenges for less affluent countries in reducing their disaster risks.

Bangladesh has made extremely good progress in managing the risk created by cyclones, however, there is now great concern regarding a potential earthquake in Dhaka, which has high population density. They have started by creating a good emergency response system prioritizing saving lives, safe hospitals, safe schools, establishment of evacuation routes and rescue plans, and only gradually will they be able to deal with the underlying risk factors.

Other concerns include governance issues including institutional arrangement — what is required of a disaster risk reduction system and where disaster risk reduction should be situated in the government. In many countries, the responsibility of disaster risk reduction issues are assigned to a unit with relatively less authority compared to other units of the government, making it difficult to drive the agenda under comparatively weaker priorities and leadership. It has the potential to become an increasing national priority by listening to the current discourse of different governments.

In my view, local governments may be most dynamic and practical mechanism for disaster risk reduction. Their practical daily work, with the support of their central governments can potentially accelerate current disaster reduction efforts. Local governments need to continue their disaster reduction efforts with the support of their national government, collaborating organizations, and partners. These ideas are currently being discussed and will emerge within the next year.

The most poorly performing indicator in the implementation of the HFA is the integration of gender considerations. Despite the HFA highlighting gender as a cross-cutting issue, and reporting countries recognize its importance, many governments are not aware what they should do specifically. We would therefore like to focus on gender-related efforts under the HFA in 2013 and 2014 so that we may have better reporting on this gender indicator in the next reporting in 2015.

The (in)Visible Force of Resilience

October 13, the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, is a day for advocacy and to raise public awareness about the importance of disaster risk reduction. On this day each year, many countries and partner organizations conduct various activities in line with that year's theme. Last year's theme was "Children and Young People." This year's theme is "Women and Girls: the

[in]Visible Force of Resilience.” The word “invisible” implies that the force is present but is unrecognized and has not yet been fully utilized. Various activities will be conducted worldwide today and tomorrow to emphasize and mobilize the strength and untapped role of women in communities, including leadership roles. The biggest gap currently is that there are not enough women in planning and management of either emergency relief or risk reduction and recovery. The issue we want to highlight is to what extent women are influencing risk reduction and recovery systems and how are they involved in these processes. Women are agents of change, skills and education. They need to participate to shape the future of their communities and countries and are quite often important examples of resilience.

Let me give you some inspiring examples of women who have demonstrated their great power. There is a Japanese woman named Hiroko Mirura. After she lost her home and husband to the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, she began revitalizing the economic life of the community by organizing 400 women to return to work processing *wakame* seaweed. Another example is Ms. Chaluay Kawaonag, who lives in Bangkok and suffered the floods last year. She showed leadership in her community by providing food and support for people to ensure they could help other people. In Odisha, a state in India which is a very poor region in many ways, a group of women conduct support activities for very poor communities. In Iwate Prefecture, Japan, there is an organization that focuses on support for single mothers, a particularly vulnerable group in a crisis situation. The organization provides support for single mothers in the form of day care services and work, as well as probably moral and mental support. We must strive to make the contributions and efforts of women visible.

Progress of Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action

The HFA progress report summary, which I mentioned earlier, is just one of many instruments which have been developed based on the HFA. Others include “Words into Action” which is a guide to the implementation of the HFA; “Indicators of Progress” shows how to measure the progress of HFA implementation; there is a guideline for “National Platforms for Disaster Reduction”; the biannual report on evidence and development; as well as many good practice publications.

With the aim of supporting local governments working on disaster risk reduction, we are now conducting the Making Cities Resilient Campaign, based on the HFA. Hyogo Governor Ido was one of the first champions and there are already five participating cities in Japan. This campaign is the large advocacy campaign to date with 1,100 participating cities around the world. Sendai city joined in July 2012 after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

The campaign is centered around ten essentials which local governments can do in disaster risk reduction, including: put in place organization and coordination to community roles and

responsibilities, assign a budget, identify critical infrastructure, assess the safety of all schools and health facilities, ensure construction and land use are risk-compliant, education and training, early warning systems, and focus on social infrastructure and have the capacity to support and ensure the involvement of the community. We have published this handbook for local government leaders planning to conduct risk reduction activities. It is simple and illustrates how to get started. It is accompanied by a self-assessment tool. This program facilitates city-to-city learning experiences which we have seen in Asia by involving many organizations, for example one in Kobe, Hyogo in November 2011 with participants from the Philippines.

One thing which I would like to highlight as a very impressive gesture from Japan, which was appreciated by the international community, is when the Japanese Vice-Minister for Disaster Management came to the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction in May 2011 and shared Japan's experiences relating to the Great East Japan Earthquake only two months after it happened. The Vice-Minister also took this opportunity to invite the rest of the world to learn from this experience and begin considering issues like this for the World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015. Additionally, Japan has offered many opportunities for interaction and shared learning such as the Sendai Dialogue and World Ministerial Conference on Disaster Reduction in Tohoku in July 2012.

The key point I would like to leave you with is that the preparation of the governments and organizations that attend the World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015 will greatly surpass what we saw in Kobe at the formulation of the HFA. They will have very clear experiences which they want to build on in regards to how we should manage disaster risk over the next twenty-five to thirty years. The big challenge will be whether our imagination and science can give us a sense of what we should plan for. I personally think yes, and I also believe that many of you need to contribute to that discussion.

Thank you.

