
THE OPERATIVE ADVISORY BOARD OF THE GERMAN IDNDR COMMITTEE

Criteria for a status report of projects supported from Germany for the prevention of natural disasters in developing countries

The Operative Advisory Board of the German IDNDR Committee has so far conducted three meetings which concentrated mainly on the status report mentioned above. The preliminary results of this status report which should be kept up-to-date on a continuing basis have been compiled in a summary document. The next tasks of the Operative Advisory Board will be the drafting of a Decade programme on the basis of the experiences to date of the available know-how and the priorities to be set. Suggestions of the Scientific Advisory Board which lend themselves for immediate realization will be included in this examination.

Objective of the status report:

Establishment and continuous updating of a project catalogue documenting measures of German disaster and economic development co-operation agencies in the area of disaster

prevention which have been finalized or which are current or which are planned.

Criteria of the types of projects to be included:

From a theoretical standpoint a disaster prevention has to start on three levels of prevention:

- on the level of disaster preparedness so to be able to react in a timely and effective manner to disasters which will remain unavoidable also in the future; disaster preparedness will entail the creation of early warning systems, the establishment of disaster protection structures (shelters, food storage facilities) and the organization of an efficient disaster protection service etc.
- on the level of physical resistance against natural disasters by means of improving disaster security of buildings, careful selection of areas for urban settlement in disaster prone countries, erection of protective dams etc.
- on the level of socio-economical resistance against natural disasters by means of promoting the social infrastructure and raising of income.

In its practical application, this comprehensive theoretical approach will be subject to limitations since the aims of disaster prevention partly cut across other national and international special programmes like environmental protection, soil conservation, poverty alleviation etc. Such programmes which are also important for disaster prevention should continue to be supported in their current context.

These limitations are also at the basis of the targets and project catalogues formulated by the ad-hoc-Commission established by the Secretary General of the United Nations and further developed by the "IDNDR Think Tank Meeting", held in November 1990 in Rome. Accordingly, the following project targets should be principally promoted and corresponding projects should be defined.

1. Assessment of disaster potential

- identification of disaster-prone areas
- assessment of disaster potential, of disaster vulnerability and of potential damages

2. Early prediction and early warning of disasters

3. Disaster preparedness

3.1 Exchange of information on disaster-relevant data, co-ordination of disaster relief

3.2 Education and political mobilization

3.3 Creation of a disaster preparedness infrastructure (training, organization structure, disaster management plans, communication and transport networks etc.)

3.4 Construction, management, supply of storage facilities and other material supplies

4. Measures to reinforce physical disaster resistance

4.1 Planning, guidelines, technologies (non-structural measures)

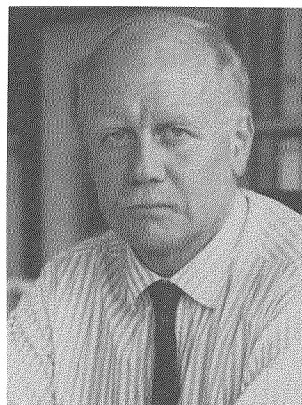
4.2 Civil work measures (structural measures)

These project targets should be prompted through training, advice, material supplies, credits and associated scientific studies. The status reports of finished, current and planned projects of German agencies in the area of foreign-oriented disaster prevention and economic development co-operation should be oriented towards these policy criteria.

The preliminary status can be obtained from:

Office of the German IDNDR Committee
c/o Deutsches Rotes Kreuz
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 71
5300 Bonn 1
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

United Nations General Assembly resolution 42/169 of December 1987 proclaiming the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction was supported and co-sponsored by a large majority of member countries and adopted unanimously. After studying this issue intensely I am fully convinced of the importance of political commitment to disaster reduction. We can realize an increasing number of disasters in recent years which dimension is getting bigger and bigger in terms of physical losses and casualties. This development is parallel to that of my personal field of work, namely environmental protection. Herein, the development shows clearly that the "System Earth" exceeds its carrying capacity for the first time in human history and threatens the future of mankind. Phenomena such as global climate change and destruction of tropical rain forests are only one aspect of the ecological pressure on the innate prerequisites of life. Desertification, soil degradation and the destruction of entire ecosystems are not so visible but they are increasing particularly in connection with the over-population and urbanization in the third world - all of which contributes to the vulnerability of our societies. But it is important to realize that these man-made



Prof. Dr
H.J. Karpe

aspects are also contributing to hazardous events and calamities. This means that disaster reduction must be seen in the context of environmental change and developmental issues. Also, the international co-operation must integrate disaster reduction into future concepts. One should point out that the co-ordinating secretariat, established in Geneva, has not been provided with adequate financial resources to fulfil its role. On the other hand, UN organizations such as WMO, WHO, UNEP and UNESCO, which I visited, have established their own programmes on disaster reduction, but co-ordination is missing.

**INTERNATIONAL DECADE
FOR NATURAL DISASTER
REDUCTION - IDNDR**

**THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
AND
DISASTER PREPAREDNESS**

The issues are so critical that the success of the Decade is contingent on the support of national Governments and institutions. The wealth of expertise of a reunified Germany in this area is important and significant. With our scientific and economic potential it is incumbent on us to assume responsibilities for key issues of disaster reduction in a manner similar to our military responsibilities in UN peace-keeping measures.

Although Germany itself is endangered by hazardous natural events (I recall the flood in the city of Hamburg in spring 1990 and also in-

dustrial accidents), most threats are concentrated in the third world.

The German Committee with its scientific and operative advisory board consisting of non-governmental and semi-governmental institutions, must demonstrate strong practical experience. The main task of the national administrative office should therefore be the presentation of German capacities at the international level to ensure a strong input for the dynamic development of the IDNDR. The basic conditions for that task were provided by the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs through funding and staffing of the secretariat; individual tasks will be shown in the strategic study and discussed by the Board. The education of the public at large through articles, exhibitions, workshops and meetings is crucial for the "broker-function" to provide information and communication. In particular the private sector (for example insurance companies, construction and industry planning) with its technological and financial resources, must be fully involved in that dialogue to ensure financial support

Professor Dr H.-J. KARPE,
Director of the Institute for Environmental Protection of the University of Dortmund and member of the board of the German IDNDR-Committee

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION

The main focal points of the German IDNDR Committee

1. Importance of disaster relief and mitigation

1.1 The increasing vulnerability for natural disasters

The number and extent of hazardous natural events and calamities have been increasing this century, especially during the past decades. Developing countries are particularly affected in that population explosions in those countries have increased the vulnerability for natural disasters. Although the international community has made significant progress in reducing human suffering caused by natural disasters such as severe storms, floods and droughts, material losses have increased. Additionally, public awareness has sharpened. The increasing magnitude and scope of natural disasters stresses the need for a intensified preparedness to handle such events. This is the basis for the proclamation of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

1.2 National aspects of disaster relief and mitigation

So far, Germany has only been marginally affected by natural disasters. But the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide and methane) into the atmosphere, mainly caused by the industrialized countries, may lead to global climatic change affecting all countries. "Although there is no ultimate scientific evidence about the extent and after-effects of climate change, there is no doubt that the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases will change the global climate in one way or another. Despite uncertainty about the effects of climate change, there is a high likelihood of disastrous events" (Peace Report 1990 of the Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung, Forschungsstätte der Evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft, Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg, page 28). "Human settlements most

endangered by climate change are those already affected by floods, droughts and storms today. The populations of developing countries, islands, marshes and semi arid regions are particularly vulnerable to them" (German Bundestag, 3rd Report of the Study Commission for the Protection of the Earth's Atmosphere of 24 May 1990, page 156).

The higher risk for natural disasters resulting from climate change requires a drastic reduction of the greenhouse gas emissions and the implementation of appropriate economic policies in industrialized countries.

1.3 Developmental aspects of disaster relief and mitigation

It becomes more and more evident that the growing vulnerability of developing countries to disasters is mainly man-made: expanding populations are resulting in an increasing number of hazardous natural events and calamities (droughts, floods) and populations are hence exposed to those events at accelerated levels.

The causes for such vulnerability are interrelated and include:

- population explosion/increasing density of human settlements,
- overburdening of ecosystems and the resulting ecological pressure,

- lack of knowledge about available technical counter-measures for disaster and mitigation,
- lack of political commitment in developing countries to introduce counter-measures.

The World Commission for Environment and Development, better known as the Brundlandt Commission, has taken a critical look at the interdependence of vulnerability for disasters, underdevelopment and ecological pressure in its report "Our Common Future", published in 1987:

"A world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes"
(page 25, paragraph 27).

" All major disaster problems in the third world are essentially unsolved development problems"
(Odd Grann, Secretary-General of the Norwegian Red Cross at a WCED Public Hearing in Oslo, page 43).

"The number, scale, frequency and impact of natural and human-caused disasters are mounting"
(page 316, paragraph 56).

Disaster mitigation for the disaster-prone areas of the world must therefore be based on three different levels of reduction:

- assessment of disaster risks and vulnerability,
- disaster preparedness by creating the necessary lo-

- gistic and organisational conditions for early warning systems, relief and rescue activities, etc.,
- the physical resistance to natural disasters by retrofitting of buildings in disaster-prone areas, careful selection of sites for urban settlements, creation of embankments and levees against flooding, reforestation, etc.,
- the socio-economic resistance to natural disasters by development of social infrastructure and income resources.

Any disaster mitigation strategy which focuses solely on technical aspects is only suitable for highly developed countries such as Japan, New Zealand or the USA.

Such technical-oriented strategy could close the technical gap which exists in developing countries by the application of appropriate technologies, but it can not avoid that increasing poverty, the alarming environmental situation and the unequal development will create additional disaster potentials. Unless the problems of development are solved, there is a danger that such a narrow oriented disaster relief strategy will have only temporarily beneficial effects.

Initiatives for better integration of disaster preparedness with development planning and co-operation will encounter resistance in the following areas:

- possible public scepticism or resistance as a result of an excess of international "Decades";
- administrative strain due to new programmes and activities,
- with regard to international relief assistance in the event of a calamity, there is a commonly held opinion by political leaders in the third world that there is actually no need for specialized programmes focused on disaster preparedness;
- lack of experience in quantifying the costs and benefits of such counter-measures,
- integration at the informal level.

2. Future focal points of the German IDNDR Committee

It is important to mention that the German Committee for the IDNDR is an independent body not affiliated with other organizations involved in disaster relief and international co-operation.

The most important tasks for the next few years will be

- to convince local authorities in the Federal Republic of Germany responsible for development and environment programmes, that there is a need for intense disaster reduction through public relations, political representations, seminars, and studies for example;

- to influence those responsible for development and environment policies to integrate disaster mitigation into their programmes,
- to co-ordinate scientific and operational activities in the area of disaster reduction at the national and - as far as possible - the international levels,
- to encourage the insurance industry, other industries and non-profit organizations to co-operate in disaster reduction,
- to initiate pilot projects in connection with those tasks.

In Germany, the possible devastating effects of disasters caused by climate change will most likely be in the forefront of the Committee's activities. It is not intended to launch new scientific and political programmes in connection with the framework convention on climate change under discussion, but to urge the elaboration of disaster scenarios to alert the public at large and the political authorities to the risks of climatic and environmental change and the necessary action to be taken.

At the international level, developing countries should be assisted in their efforts to better withstand the effects of natural or technical disasters.

Such assistance could be achieved through:

- support of projects to reduce disaster vulnerability,
- integration of disaster reduction criteria in the planning and implementation of development projects.

Disaster reduction will only become politically acceptable if it is possible to demonstrate the resulting economic and social benefits.

The aims of the IDNDR partly overlap other national and international programmes for food security, afforestation, erosion prevention and poverty reduction. These important aspects of disaster prevention should be promoted further. The main thrust of such programmes should therefore, be concentrated on the areas such as:

- disaster preparedness;
- physical resistance to natural disasters.

All concerned organizations are called upon to stress that being vulnerable to disasters is also a consequence of underdevelopment and that disaster prevention is thus primarily an aspect of development. This vicious circle cannot be broken through technical measures alone, but through strategic solutions to the development crisis.

3. Political and institutional establishment of the IDNDR targets in the Federal Republic of Germany

It will not be easy to achieve an appropriate political thrust at the national level given the existing and overlapping specialized programmes in the area of development and environment. The Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs has taken an important step, but the establishment of the Decade within other political areas related to development, environment, research and internal affairs has yet to be accomplished. Special political emphasis must be given to concerted international action for reducing loss of life, property damage and economic and social disruption caused by natural disasters.

The efforts of the German IDNDR Committee are currently concentrated on the political and institutional integration of the targets of the Decade into various policy areas. The integration of the Scientific Advisory Board into the German Science Association (DFG) has created the first institutional establishment for research activities.

Christian EIKENBERG
Head of the Administrative Office
of the German IDNDR-Committee

