

## **Aide Memoire**

# **Workshop on Governance Capacity and Natural Disasters: Enhancing Preparedness, Response and Rebuilding**

**26 – 28 August 2013, Honolulu, Hawaii**

### **Rationale and Purpose**

The Workshop on Governance Capacity and Natural Disasters: Enhancing Preparedness, Response and Rebuilding will be organized by East-West Center in partnership with the University of Hawaii and United Nations University to be held from 26 – 28 August 2013 in Honolulu, Hawaii. This workshop brings theoretical and practical expertise to address how governance mechanisms can be enhanced to address natural disasters. It engages leading experts on governance and natural disasters. The workshop will build on the successes and failures derived from past experiences towards better mitigating and recovering from future disasters.

### **Background**

Over the past decade millions of people have been directly and indirectly affected by natural disasters. In 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami had devastating effects on many Asian countries. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed human life, environment and property in New Orleans and the surrounding areas. In 2008, Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar hit already-starving villages in the Irrawaddy Delta. In 2010, the earthquake in Haiti created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in a country which had already been suffering from poverty, political instability and violence for decades. Several earthquakes in recent years have devastated various parts of China. In March 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake had disastrous impacts on communities, exacerbated by radiation leakage from the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor, thereby presenting a precedent-setting synthesis of natural and human-made disasters. In late 2011 a strong earthquake hit Turkey and massive flooding has affected Bangkok, Thailand.

Disasters follow from the interaction between potentially damaging physical events, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, with the individual and societal lack of awareness and preparedness, which often result from poor governance. Natural disasters are, therefore and necessarily, also human disasters. A lack or breakdown of governance capacity exacerbates the effects of disasters. There is a proven link between disasters, under-development and governance capacity - the poor are amongst the most vulnerable to disasters. One UNDP study (UNDP, 2004) shows that among the people exposed to natural hazards only 11 percent live in countries with low levels of human development, but 53 percent of the total number of recorded deaths are in these countries. Governance thus forms a critical underlying factor that affects the short and long-term consequences, which directly correlates to the success or failure of post-disaster management in its entirety.

This workshop will focus on how governance mechanisms can address future disasters. The world has become increasingly dynamic, but as scholars (Beck, 1985) have argued - more risky, dangerous, and correspondingly, more difficult to govern. Governments along with civil society need to make crucial decisions faster than before, but in an environment that has become increasingly uncertain. Is there a way out of such a vicious circle? With the progress in both science and governance in the last decades, the opportunities to predict, prepare and respond to disasters

have increased. Nevertheless, there is still governance deficit that often leaves impacted citizenry critical of the response structures. Natural disasters become less natural (van Ginkel, 2005) - they could be effectively addressed and managed (Parker, 1999). Governance, accordingly, becomes a central issue of importance, alongside science and technology towards mitigation and recovering from disasters.

Governance is the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. Good governance addresses the allocation and management of resources to respond to collective problems of the society. Interventions to improve governance can take place at the sectoral level (such as access to water and shelter) or systemic level such as strengthening the coordination mechanisms at the local, sub-national, national and global levels.

Natural disasters are crucial tests for good governance. They require the efforts of both government and civil society to mobilize action rapidly, taking both short term measures, such as rescue and recovery, and long-term measures, such as building preparedness, resilience, to mitigate future disasters. Governance capacity includes policies, structures and processes at different levels (national, sub-national and local) to make effective decisions. In times of emergency there is an even greater need for building the various levels of trust in government (Cheema, Popovski, 2010a), and the engagement of civil society (Cheema, Popovski, 2010b) to address the immediate needs of the victims, protect vulnerable groups and engage in recovery. Individual people, groups, civil society organizations and policymakers at the local, regional and national levels constitute the necessary governance structure for effective natural disaster management.

Government efforts to cope with disasters are often organized in terms of one or more of various phases of disaster management, including risk and vulnerability assessment, hazard detection, notification and alert, coordination of response and relief efforts, the management of evacuation and sheltering, and the provision of vital services and rebuilding. The nature of governance intervention might differ with different phases of disaster management.

## **Content and Methodology**

The workshop to be held in Honolulu will attempt to answer three questions:

- (1) What can be learnt from the successes and shortcomings of governance of previous natural disasters? The participants will examine what went right, or wrong, to identify the missing elements;
- (2) What factors contribute to successes and failures of effective governance responses to natural disasters
- (3) How can capacity, especially at the sub-national/regional and local levels, be strengthened and collaborative processes improved as to make governance of natural disasters more effective?

During the first and second day, the participants will present issues and country experiences, and identify best practices and emerging issues dealing with governance capacity and disaster management. The discussion will be holistic and focus on governance capacity at multi-levels and various phases of disaster management.

On the third day, the trans-boundary collection of experiences will form the basis for recommending governance policy, which – without being over-ambitious and one-size-fits-all. Specifically, the following dimensions of governance will be examined:

- development of an integrated national and/or regional urban policy framework for disaster management and effective mechanisms to coordinate disaster response;
- decentralization of functions and resources to regional and local units of government;
- political, financial and administrative accountability; adoption of codes, strengthening oversight institutions and monitoring;
- transparency, clarity of procedures, access to information, reporting, feedback;
- regulatory frameworks for community engagement in disaster mitigation, recovery and building resilience; joint initiatives to mobilize resources and public support to provide services to citizens, affected by disasters;
- building community resilience through participation of individuals, groups and organizations at the local and community levels in policymaking and program implementation .

Finally, an outline of the book proposal submitted to the Routledge will be presented. The proposal will include aims, key topics and book chapters and relevance of the book to bridge gap between theory and practice. The focus of the book is on sub-national and local level approaches, programs and cases of urban governance.

### **Participants and Outcomes**

Representatives of the following countries will be invited for the workshop: China, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, Singapore, Australia and Vietnam. Other participants will be resource persons and representatives of East-West Center and United Nations University. Two deliverables from the workshop are: first drafts of the book chapters to be submitted to Routledge for publication, and the Policy Brief on Governance Capacity and Natural Disasters to be disseminated to policy-makers and disaster management practitioners in Asia and globally through the networks of East-West Center and partner institutions.

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