



**ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS OF EXPERTS' WORKSHOP:**  
***Development Policies and Practices to Reduce the Impact of Natural Disasters:***  
Managing risks of natural hazards workshop for the  
First Inter-American Meeting of Ministries and High-Level Authorities on Sustainable  
Development  
**May 2006**

## Introduction

With the main objective of creating a series of proposals and recommendations to be considered by OAS Member States during the preparatory phase of the Inter-American Meeting of Ministries and High-Level Authorities on Sustainable Development, to be held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia on October 05-06, 2006, the OAS Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) helped organize a number of preparatory workshops, to provide technical and expert recommendations to address the three main themes to be addressed at the October 2006 Bolivia meeting:

- a) Integrated Water-Resource Management;
- b) Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Forestry and Tourism
- c) Managing risk of natural hazards, risk sharing and risk transfer arrangements of Natural Disasters

The Managing Risks of Natural Hazards workshop was held in Kingston, Jamaica, on April 18 and 19, 2006 with the local support from the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) of Jamaica.

At the workshop, a group of experts and specialists contributed to this report, by sharing their knowledge and expertise in order to bring forward policy guidelines, strategies, and priority actions in order to reduce natural hazards effects. The workshop preparation process emphasized the importance of governance-related initiatives, including broad representation from the public and private sectors, gender equality, and inclusion and respect of indigenous people. The discussion highlighted the following priority areas in relation to reduce the risks of natural disasters:

- (i) Identify projects, policies and cooperative partnerships that make progress in both risk mitigation and risk transfer, in particular, governance-related building codes and standards adaptation monitoring and enforcement, and land-use planning and zoning;
- (ii) Strengthen economic analysis associated with the benefits and costs of risk mitigation and risk sharing, and mainstream risk mitigation and expenditures in development and economic planning;
- (iii) Identify best practices in the adoption of risk mitigation technical standards;
- (iv) Identify specific risk sharing and risk transfer initiatives at the regional and sub-regional levels, including through insurance pooling.



- (v) Integrate a perspective of environmental protection, social equality and sustainable development with a gender perspective in natural disasters risk management.

### Context of the Meeting

During the IV Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata (2005), in which the main focus was "Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance", several actions were established through the Declaration and Plan of Action of Mar del Plata (2005) related to natural disasters. In the Declaration, the Member States expressed their concern over risks associated with natural disasters, and the devastating impact of such events on the lives, infrastructure and economies of the hemisphere. The Declaration calls for "action at the national, regional, and international levels to strengthen disaster management programs."

In the Action Plan, the Member States called for the unity of efforts to "substantially improve the capacity at the national, regional and hemispheric levels for risk mitigation, to implement cost-effective and robust early warning systems, and to enhance disaster recovery and reconstruction capabilities in collaboration with relevant international and regional institutions and the coordinated development of effective public-private catastrophic risk insurances systems".

<b>Initiative 1</b>	Calls to increase capacity for disaster preparedness
<b>Initiative 2</b>	Development of early warning and risk mitigation systems
<b>Initiative 3</b>	Development of post-disaster recovery and reconstruction
<b>Initiative 4</b>	Financial assistance as appropriate, particularly for disaster-prone countries, to reduce the impact of disasters.
<b>Initiative 5</b>	The Member States also support efforts under way to explore private and public sector involvement in comprehensive approaches to catastrophic risk insurance

### Agenda

A particular focus of the Inter-American process is to identify partnerships at the regional and sub-regional levels, including identifying specific priorities, gaps and opportunities in capacity-building, information exchange and technical cooperation in relation to risk reduction.

Given that the overarching focus of the OAS Ministerial Meeting will be sustainable development, a key priority of the April 2006 is to identify ways in which risk reduction measures can be mainstreamed into sector-specific planning, as well as cross-cutting fiscal, developmental and economic planning approaches.

Given the need to integrate risk reduction measures into specific sectors, the workshop agenda included the discussion of a limited number of sectors within which risk reduction efforts are underway. These included the tourism, education, and water management infrastructure sectors. The workshop agenda also included the discussion of how best practices in sector-specific risk mitigation can be extrapolated into other sectors.

Finally, the workshop agenda included the discussion to recommend opportunities for collaboration among OAS Member States in the area of risk reduction. This included opportunities to enhance the exchange of information and related coordination among different regional organizations, such as the recently-launched Comprehensive Disaster Management Plan under CDERA and other examples from North, Central, and South America.



**MAINSTREAMING RISK REDUCTION: SIGNS OF PROGRESS OR STATUS QUO?**

**The Socio-Economic impacts of Natural Disasters and Mainstreaming Hazard Risk Mitigation approaches:** Mainstreaming risk reduction refers to different sets of interventions and practices depending on the focus of the institutions and entities being considered. To be successfully achieved, mainstreaming requires more pertinent economic cost-benefit analysis, so as to engage ministries of finance and planning, as well as sector-specific agencies and ministries; existence of responsible focal points at the national level, implementation tailored to capacity building efforts, establishment of efficient information sharing mechanism, continuity in international and national interventions, and the existence of sustainable funding mechanism that take into account the private sector.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSAL:**

- Identify a clear body (champion) responsible for mainstreaming disaster risk management in each country.
- Each country should review their investment in disaster risk management, quantify how many proposed action items have been implemented or not and then prioritize what has received no action.
- Promote concrete programs that apply state policies, in particular, the adoption of on-going programs for monitoring and enforcement of building codes and standards that reduce risk in a cost-effective manner.
- Incorporate a gender perspective in natural disasters prevention.

**SECTOR-SPECIFIC: BEST PRACTICES AND OBSTACLES TO RISK MITIGATION**

**Tourism:** Costumers (tourists) demand reasonable levels of safety (risk management). Governments (local and national) have a common interest with the private tourism sector in assuring reasonable levels of safety. The government will have to enforce reasonable safety standards for the tourism sector and related providers in order to comply with their demands.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSAL:**

- The tourism sector must have an integrated vision incorporating multiple hazards.
- A priority for public and private sector must be "safety and security tourism": securing their infrastructure and their contingency plans are the first steps.

**Education:** Education is a vehicle for knowledge sharing concerning hazards, vulnerability, and contingency planning. It is a central component in creating a culture of prevention. The risk management activities for the education sector related to policies, planning processes, mitigation projects, and preparedness programs.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSAL:**

- At hemispheric and regional levels it is necessary to include risk management in the educational programs across the different levels of formal and informal education.
- Create a regulatory framework, codes, design and construction standards and certification to evaluate and reduce the vulnerability of the educational infrastructure.

**Water Infrastructure:** In addition to post-disaster flooding related to extreme weather events, as well as drought, communities often face high levels of water contamination and pollution in the aftermath of events, leading to immediate human health risks (such as cholera), as well as longer-term clean-up costs.



**RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSAL:**

- At the hemispheric and regional level, it is necessary to establish legal frameworks for water in irrigation, industrial and domestic usages.
- Conduct a study on the vulnerability of the water infrastructure to natural hazards that include the water infrastructure management, the role of water infrastructure in natural hazards mitigation, and the own vulnerability of water infrastructure to natural hazards.

**REGIONAL COOPERATION PRIORITIES IN RISK MITIGATION**

In the Americas, there have been a number of regional mechanisms and capacities available to support and facilitate disaster risk reduction and response at national and community levels. It has been acknowledged, accepted and appreciated in all regions that these mechanisms contribute to the promotion of the concept of disaster risk reduction and enhance the capacity of National Government officials and community leaders.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSAL:**

- Development of a multi hazard system that picks up early warning signals.
- Promote public participation in the decentralization process of hazards mapping and technical instruments.
- Emphasize the need of better coordination at international, national and local level for cooperation.
- Highlight the efforts of the OAS to create an Inter American Mechanism of disaster reduction on the need of reinforcing existing networks and the cooperation of agencies, NGOs, and civil society under different scenarios.

**SESSION FIVE: GOVERNANCE IN RISK MITIGATION**

**Supportive National Legislative Frameworks:** Among the most common definitions of good governance is its ability to support effective decision-making through the development and dissemination of information (such as hazard maps), and to ensure high levels of public and local participation.

**How to Enhance Civil Society Participation?** Public participation is a key factor for the effective structuring of a prevention and response system to natural disasters. Institutions such as organized communities, neighborhood organizations and non-governmental organizations, among others, should promote parallel programs in coordination with government bodies to consolidate the efforts directed at addressing and reducing the impact of natural disasters.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSAL:**

- Promote citizen participation into educational and training programs that involve governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and international agencies.
- Promote the creation of legal frameworks with more emphasis on citizen participation is the key to building systems and regulations dealing with prevention, mitigation and the response to disasters.