

The Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation

Introduction

In 2007, the Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) of the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (GS/OAS), with financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), established the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation (INDM), in compliance with a series of mandates and resolutions of the process of the Summit of the Americas and of the General Assembly of the OAS. The Network provides for a mechanism for the sharing and exchange of information, knowledge and experience with regard to natural hazard risk management.

INDM emerges from the need to: (a) assist OAS Member States with the sharing and exchange of information, knowledge, and experience on Natural Hazard Risk Management; (b) strengthen the planning and disaster management activities of the OAS in order to respond more effectively to the increasingly more frequent natural disasters that impact the Hemisphere; (c) provide for a mechanism to coordinate efforts and promote collaboration among the organizations of the Inter-American System, Regional Intergovernmental Organizations, International Organizations, Donors, Banks and Financing Institutions, and National Agencies responsible for the coordination of natural disasters management; (d) support the follow-up and implementation of the decisions of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR); and (e) coordinate the implementation, monitoring and periodic revision of the Inter-American Strategic Plan for Policy on Vulnerability Reduction, Risk Management and Disaster Response (IASP).

The INDM supports the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, in collaboration with the Global Platform of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction of the United Nations (ISDR-UN), by facilitating exchange of information and best practices in the region, and by promoting collaboration agreements among governments. Consequently, the INDM adopts the principles and guidelines of the Global Platform and the ISDR-UN.

The DSD/OAS, as the main forum for intergovernmental dialogue with regard to sustainable development issues, established the INDM as a tool to assist OAS Member States in advancing the *formulation and development of **public policy** related to natural hazard risk management*. In line with the principles and objectives of ISDR-UN and the commitments made by the countries of the Americas, the Network focuses its efforts in the exchange and sharing of best practices, and policy models that promote the ***mainstreaming** of natural hazard risk management into **sustainable development policy-formulation and planning***.

The Inter-American System –the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR)

OAS Member States, at the regional level, have committed to include in their national development plans, strategies for planning and preparing for disasters, the establishment of building codes, and the exchange of information and technical knowledge. The 1996 Summit on Sustainable Development, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, set the guidelines to comply with such commitments.

Over the years, the OAS has also been committed to the application of science and technology towards the mitigation of natural disasters, as well as towards the promotion of cooperation and information exchange regarding natural disasters. Policies have supported the implementation of disaster risk mitigation/risk reduction programs.

In 1999, OAS Member States, gathered at the General Assembly, resolved to create the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR), through resolution AG/RES. 1682 (XXIX-O/99). The Committee is chaired by the Secretary General of the OAS, and is comprised of the President of the OAS Permanent Council, the Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, the President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Director General of the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), the Secretary General of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH), the President of the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Director General of the Inter-American Agency for Cooperation and Development (IACD), the Chair of the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), and the Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM). The OAS Secretary General invites the member states, permanent observers, and representatives of national, sub regional, regional, and international organizations, he as deems appropriate.

The main purpose of IACNDR is to strengthen cooperation among the countries of the Hemisphere in attention and preparation of emergencies, by coordinating the international cooperation and the actions of the regional inter-governmental organizations that make up the Inter-American System.

Furthermore, the OAS Member States adopted the Inter-American Strategic Plan for Policy on Vulnerability Reduction, Risk Management and Disaster Response (IASP). The IASP seeks to: (i) reduce the loss of human life and property; (ii) improve emergency preparedness and response; (iii) improve financial protection from catastrophic loss; and (iv) make economic and social infrastructure more resilient for sustainable development and hemispheric security.

The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR-UN) –the Hyogo Framework for Action and the Global Platform

The Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR-UN), which reports to the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (UN USG), is the focal point in the UN System for disaster risk reduction. Its purpose includes the promotion of links and synergies for the coordination of disaster-risk-reduction activities, as well as the support for the integration of Natural Hazard Risk Reduction (NHRR) into sustainable development policy and planning. In order to achieve its purpose, the ISDR-UN promotes four objectives as tools towards achieving disaster risk reduction for all:

1. Increase public awareness to understand risk, vulnerability and global disaster reduction;
2. Obtain commitment from public authorities to implement disaster risk reduction policies and actions;
3. Forge interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral partnerships, including the expansion of risk reduction networks; and
4. Improve scientific knowledge about disaster risk reduction.

The Hyogo Framework for Action is a global road-map to disaster risk reduction for the next decade. Its goal is to reduce disaster losses by 2015 –in human lives and properties, and in social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and nations. Signed in January of 2005, at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, 168 governments adopted a 10-year plan to reduce the vulnerability of communities and social and economic infrastructure to natural hazards. The Framework is implemented through the Global Platform (formerly the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Risk Reduction, IATF/DR) with the participation of governments, UN agencies, and regional and civil society organizations.

The creation of an Inter-American Network would provide for a mechanism to support the development of a Regional Platform, by capitalizing on the advance of National Platforms in the Hemisphere, and the information, knowledge and experience –lessons learned and good practices, already acquired through the work of Inter-governmental Organizations of the Inter-American System, National Agencies, Agencies of the UN System, International Cooperation Organizations, NGOs, and organized groups of the Civil Society.

An Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation

Based on the general objectives established by the ISDR-UN and the commitments assumed by the OAS Member States, the Department of Sustainable Development of the GS/OAS created an Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation (INDM), as a hemispheric mechanism for the sharing and exchange of information, knowledge and experiences, and the implementation of synergies and cooperation for mainstreaming Natural Hazard Risk Management into sustainable development policy-formulation and planning at the national and regional levels. The Network serves as a mechanism for the implementation of the decisions of the IACNDR, and more particularly, for the coordination of the implementation of the IASP. The Network represents a tool for the OAS Member States, to define guidelines and coordinate efforts that strengthen local and national policy initiatives on integrated management of disaster prevention and reduction at the national level in the Americas.

In order to achieve its objectives it is necessary to implement activities that directly support and promote the Network and that involve stakeholders from all levels related to the mitigation and prevention of natural disasters, as well as vulnerability reduction and hazards risk reduction, preparedness, assistance and relief, and reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Since disaster risk reduction still depends on the commitment of organizations and authorities of the public sector, the manner in which these organizations establish their priorities must be taken in to account.

Network constituency –General membership

INDM membership includes relevant agencies and organizations involved in natural hazard vulnerability reduction, natural hazard risk reduction, and natural disaster mitigation. All the organizations of the IACNDR are part of the Network, including all the organizations of the Inter-American System and the UN System. Some of the international organizations that are invited to participate include: the ProVention Consortium, the International Strategy for Disasters Reduction (ISDR-UN), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Bank (WB), the World Health Organization (WHO), UNESCO, UNICEF, and Doctors without Borders (MSF), among others. Some of the national agencies for international cooperation that are invited to participate include the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the German Agency of Cooperation GTZ, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United States Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the Italian Cooperation Agency for Development, among others.

For the purpose of coordination at the national level, OAS Member States were invited to appoint an institution to serve as the National Operational Focal Point. Regional organizations, such as the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPRENAC), the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), and the Andean Committee for Disaster Prevention and Assistance (CAPRADE) are invited to participate as Regional Focal Points so as to coordinate actions in their regions.

Development Objective

The development objective of the INDM is to mainstream Natural Hazard Risk Management (NHRM) into economic and social development public policy and planning. It further adheres to the following strategic goals of the Hyogo Framework for Action:

- Integration of disaster risk reduction into sustainable development policies and planning;
- Institutional development and strengthening, and capacity building to increase resilience to natural hazards; and
- Systematic incorporation of Risk Reduction approaches into the implementation of emergency preparedness, response and recovery programs.

Mission

The mission of the INDM is to support the *exchange* of information and knowledge regarding past disasters, vulnerability reduction, preparedness and response practices and strategies, and natural disaster mitigation – so as to mainstream Natural Hazard Risk Management and Natural Disaster Mitigation into national and regional development plans and public policy; improve *coordination* of international cooperation and investment plans; and support the *implementation of multi-national agreements* for transboundary early warning systems and data sharing and exchange.

Principles

The INDM adopts the following foundational principles:

- Coordination and inclusiveness;
- Product-oriented dialogue;
- Value added –filling in gaps, and avoiding overlaps and duplication;
- Strengthening of inter-governmental regional organizations; and
- Capacity building at the regional, national and local levels.

In addition, the following overarching principles guide INDM action:

- Prevention and preparedness –saving lives and personal property, and reducing losses and damage to social and economic infrastructure;
- Community organization and local management –self-assessing risk of cultural, social and economic values, and utilizing ancestral knowledge and practices (bio-indicators for early warnings);
- Gender equity –assessing gender and age-specific vulnerabilities;
- Financial and Social Risk Assessment –investing in ex-ante measures; and
- Private sector involvement in all phases of risk management and disaster mitigation –forging public-private partnerships.

Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives of the INDM are as follows:

- To support the development of the National Platforms of the Hyogo Framework for Action, within a Regional perspective;
- To facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge and experience –lessons learned and good practices, among the OAS participating member States;
- To support the monitoring and revision of the Inter-American Strategic Plan for Policy on Vulnerability Reduction, Risk Management and Disaster Response – IASP, as to ensure that the progress and lessons learned from the various national and regional strategies are being taking into consideration; and
- To support the coordination of a regional agenda for the implementation of the IASP and the decisions of the IACNDR.

Organizational structure: INDM Management and decision-making body, Advisory body, and Executing body

The criteria followed for the proposed organizational structure for the INDM seeks:

- (1) To minimize the costs of administration and management;
- (2) To expedite the decision-making process;
- (3) To capitalize on the existing inter-governmental organizations and existing networks of the Inter-American System, and the UN System, while strengthening and building institutional and human capacity at the sub regional, national and local level; and
- (4) To ensure proper coordination and cooperation with the various global, regional and national initiatives.

Membership in the Network –INDM Members

Any governmental and non-governmental organization, international organization, international cooperation agency, private enterprise, and any organization of the civil

society that advocate, support and/or actively participate in Natural Hazard Risk Management, according to the principles, vision and mission of the Network, is invited to be member of the Network.

The membership is for the institutions, and not individuals. Once an institution becomes a member, the Head of the institution becomes its representative, unless s/he decides to appoint another staff member as the representative to the INDM. The representative may delegate the representation in another staff member of her/his organization whenever appropriate or needed. When a representative of an institution retires or leaves the institution, the Head of the institution becomes the representative until s/he appoints a replacement.

All the organizations of the Inter-American System and the UN System are invited to be members of the Network. Also, are all national institutions responsible for preparedness, prevention and mitigation of natural disasters; and all sub regional inter-governmental organizations, which act in coordination with national institutions.

Any member of the Network can invite any organization to be part of the Network at any time. Organizations interested in becoming members will need to send a letter with a brief background to the Technical Secretariat, c/o Department of Sustainable Development of the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States.

The Management Board

The Management Board is composed of five members, drawn from the IACNDR full-membership. The Board is co-chaired by two of its members.

One of the co-Chairs is the Head of one of the National Operational Focal Points of the OAS Member States, on the basis of a three-year term. The other co-Chair is the DSD/OAS Chief for NHRR. In order to provide continuity and ensure proper integration of the INDM within the DSD/OAS Program on NHRR, her/his term does not expire. Nevertheless, s/he can delegate her/his responsibility into any other member of the DSD/OAS, including the Director of the DSD/OAS.

The first co-Chair to represent the governments is selected from the National Operational Focal Points of the Caribbean Small Island States. To that end, the DSD/OAS, in its capacity as the Technical Secretariat of the Network, coordinates with CDERA and communicates the decision to all National Operational Focal Points. Successive co-Chairs to represent the governments will be selected on sub regional basis, in the following order: (1) from the Andean Community –with the assistance of CAPRADE; (2) from the Central American Isthmus –with the assistance of CEPREDENAC; (3) from South Cone countries –Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay; and (4) from North America, including Mexico.

All five members of the Management Board represent their institutions. Consequently, likewise the general membership of the INDM, when a member of the Board retires or leaves her/his institution, the Head of the institution becomes the member until s/he appoints a replacement.

The main *function* of the Board is to define and review the Work Program of the Network, its Budget, and Priorities. The Board is also responsible for coordinating efforts on fund raising and outreach, and review membership –including approval and dismissal of members. Finally, it is the Board’s prerogative to invite institutions and individuals to meetings and/or events of the Network, as they deem appropriate.

The Board meets periodically, whenever possible and always trying to minimize travel costs by taking the opportunity of conferences and meetings convened and organized by member organizations. Nevertheless, electronic means is used for regular business and decision-making. Decisions are made by simple majority. Any member of the Board may give her/his proxies to any other member on case-by-case basis.

The Advisory Council

The Advisory Council provides programmatic advice to the Management Board and its Chairmen.

Membership is by invitation of the Management Board, and on individual basis. It includes specialists from all the IACNDR full-members –PAHO, IICA, IDB, and main donors, such as CIDA, USAID, OFDA, and the GEF, among others. Additional members may be invited as the Management Board sees it appropriate.

The Advisory Council meets on *ad-hoc* basis, as the Management Board deems necessary. Travel and lodging expenses are covered by each member, unless specific funding is provided. Likewise the Management Board, regular business and consideration of any organizational or technical matter is conducted by electronic means.

The Technical Secretariat

The DSD/OAS acts as the Technical Secretariat of the Network, being responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the decisions of the Management Board. The Technical Secretariat also supports the Management Board in all administrative matters.

The DSD/OAS appoints a NHRR specialist who acts as the Technical Secretary and reports directly to the co-Chairs of the Management Board.

National Operational Focal Points

All 34 OAS Member States are invited to appoint a *National Operational Focal Point* for the purpose of coordinating and acting as liaison with pertinent organizations – governmental, non-governmental and private, within their national territories. The *National Operational Focal Points* are the national institutions responsible for preparedness, prevention and mitigation of natural disasters.

Likewise general membership, members are the institutions and not their associates. Communications are then with the Heads of the institutions. Nevertheless, they can delegate on any other staff, whenever they deem appropriate or necessary.

The main function of the *National Operational Focal Points* is to serve as liaison in their countries with other governmental institutions, non-governmental institutions, private enterprises, and organizations of the civil society, for the purpose of: (1) preparing a government position to a certain issue; (2) delivering or collecting information or data; (3) identifying the appropriate organization or expert to participate in thematic forums or

technical meetings; and (4) coordinating and executing an activity of the Network in their national territory, including technical meetings, conferences and seminars, data collections or distribution of educational and informational material, and virtual forums, among others.

Regional Focal Points

Those inter-governmental organizations, such as CDERA, CEPREDENAC and CAPRADE, which act in coordination with national agencies, are invited to act as *Regional Focal Points* for the Network, for the purpose of coordinating the Network activities and supporting the national agencies within their sub region of competence.

The Network seeks to strengthen these sub regional inter-governmental organizations, and works with them in the pursue of sub regional government agreements and positions, which in turn would be communicated to global and hemispheric mechanisms and forums, such as the ISDR-UN and the IACNDR.

Pool of Experts

The *Pool of Experts* consists of a thematic-specific set of expert groups. Experts and specialists are invited to sign up for being part of thematic-specific groups, as to provide for a knowledge/expertise *tank* that can be consulted or called upon to assist in the development of policy papers, sub regional or regional discussions, drafting of a project proposal or a policy, or reviewing a case study, project or program execution.

Participation in the *Pool* does not entail any financial or specific-time allocation commitment, but only being available for consultations, peer reviews, and *ad-hoc* technical events –virtual and non-virtual. Some of the activities for which experts in the *Pool* may be called upon are:

- (1) Limited-time virtual forums. In these cases, experts may be asked to make a brief presentation of case study, practice, piece of legislation, technical report, scientific research, or any other relevant information before a Web-cam, and become available for a short period to answer questions or provide further information. In these cases, experts may be also be asked to act as moderators;
- (2) Product-oriented virtual forums. These forums are established for the revision and further discussion of a paper or document. These forums may last few days or weeks, and experts in the *Pool* might be asked to provide advice or comments, or act as moderators or presenters;
- (3) Technical Reviews. Experts may be asked to peer-review a document or paper;
- (4) Technical Writings. Experts may be asked to draft technical or policy papers, contribute or provide comments and/or information;
- (5) Technical Meetings, Conferences, Seminars, and Workshops. Experts may be ask to participate as moderators, panelist, speakers or participants at these events. Their participation may involve the drafting of presentations and background documents, or reference cases for discussion.

Travel and lodging expenditures which might be involved in some of these activities are covered with specific funds. They can be part of the INDM Technical Secretariat budget or contributions from donors and/or members of the Network.

Some key services and goods under development

- Web-based Dynamic Institutional Mapping Tool (DIMT);

- Comprehensive Dynamic Calendar of Events (CDCE);
- Geographic-specific Thematic Sub Regional Forums (Central American Isthmus, Caribbean Small Island States, and the Andean Community); and
- Inter-Agency Coordination (Inter-American and UN Systems)