International Conferences working towards a Post 2015 Disaster Risk Reduction Framework¹

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Abstract – At the conclusion of the UNISDR Scientific and technical Advisory Group report on ‘Using Science for Disaster Risk Reduction’ at the Global Platform in May 2013 (Southgate et al 2013), the UNISDR Scientific and Technical Advisory Group included the following recommendations - science should be key to the Post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (Hyogo Framework for Action, HFA2).

In the last week of March 2014, UK Collaborative on Development Sciences (UKCDS) and the Wellcome Trust hosted two days of meeting with senior representatives of international, regional and national institutions to discuss a new and strengthened mechanism to ensure science, engineering and technology are more effectively used in disaster risk reduction and the successor to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA2). The participants developed a joint Statement on establishing an international science advisory mechanism for disaster risk reduction to strengthen resilience for the post-2015 agenda and on their commitment to work together to ensure science, engineering and technology are embedded into disaster risk management.

This statement has been shared widely at the UNISDR sponsored Regional Platforms on Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa, the Americas, the Pacific, Asian and Europe between May and July 2014.

At the first Preparatory Committee Meeting for the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in July 2014 support for access to science and scientific methods and technologies as well for establishing an international science advisory mechanism for disaster risk reduction to strengthen resilience for the post-2015 agenda was also shown.

Keywords – disasters, disaster risk reduction, conferences, science, technology, post-2015 agenda

1. Introduction

Disasters destroy lives and livelihoods around the world. Between 2000 and 2012, 1.7 million people died in disasters and an estimated US$ 1.7 trillion of damage was sustained (UNISDR 2000-2012). Disaster risk reduction activities aim to reduce the human, economic and environmental costs of such disasters and science can play an essential role in these efforts, uncovering new ways to prevent, prepare for and respond to disasters and determining which technologies are most effective in reducing disaster risk.

As a result of scientific research, science and technology are already helping to save lives and livelihoods, via programmes to forecast floods, detect tsunami waves, prevent infectious disease outbreaks with vaccination and effectively communicate disaster risk to enhance community resilience (Southgate et al 2013).

But what is meant by ‘science’? Science is knowledge obtained through study or practice (Webster 1999). For disaster risk reduction, science is considered in its widest sense to include the natural, environmental, social, economic, health and engineering sciences, and scientific capacities are interpreted broadly to include all relevant resources and skills of a scientific and technical nature (Reid 2013). At the conclusion of their report on ‘Using Science for Disaster Risk Reduction’ at the Global Platform in May 2013, the UNISDR Scientific and Technical Advisory Group made the following recommendations:

(i) Encourage science to demonstrate that it can inform policy and practice
(ii) Use a problem-solving approach to research that integrates all hazards and disciplines
(iii) Promote knowledge into action

¹This article is a summary of the above mentioned conference with a special focus on proposed elements for consideration in the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
Science should be key to the Post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (Hyogo Framework for Action, HFA2). (Southgate et al 2013)

This paper summarises some of the recent conferences in 2014 that have been taking forward the role of science and technology in the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction.

2. Conferences Taking Forward the Role of Science in the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

In the last week of March 2014, UK Collaborative on Development Sciences (UKCDS) and the Wellcome Trust hosted two days of meetings with senior representatives of international, regional and national institutions to discuss a new and strengthened mechanism to ensure science, engineering and technology are more effectively used in disaster risk reduction and the successor to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA2).

Along with UKCDS, the Wellcome Trust, the International Council of Science, UNESCO and other partners, the UNISDR Scientific and Technical Advisory Group were part of a meeting where the role of science was addressed. It was noted that the role and value of scientific information in disaster risk reduction and resilience has long been recognised. However, it is vital that research becomes more directly actionable, coupled with more effective ways of providing evidence-based advice to support disaster policy and practice.

Given the coalescence in 2015 of three major international instruments, namely the Hyogo Framework for Action on building resilience to disasters; the Sustainable Development Goals; and the 2015 climate agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are under discussion, there needs to be an immediate step change in the use of science in these international efforts.

The participants developed a joint Statement on establishing an international science advisory mechanism for disaster risk reduction to strengthen resilience for the post-2015 agenda and on their commitment to work together to ensure science, engineering and technology are embedded into disaster risk management (UKCDS and Wellcome Trust 2014). This statement presents an action agenda for disaster risk reduction and resilience strengthening. The agenda proposes to:

(i) champion and reinforce existing and future programmes and initiatives for integrated research and the scientific assessment of disaster risk; and

(ii) establish and promote an international science advisory mechanism for disaster risk reduction to strengthen the evidence base to effectively reduce disaster risk and enhance resilience.

For ease of reference, the current five activities that an international science advisory mechanism could include are summarised below:

- producing periodic reports on current and future disaster risks and on the status of efforts to manage such risks at global, regional, national and local scales.
- monitoring progress toward internationally-agreed targets for reducing disaster losses and building resilience to disasters.
- providing guidance on terminology, methodologies and standards for risk assessments, risk modelling, taxonomies and the use of data.
- convening stakeholders to identify and address demands for scientific research, information and evidence on disaster risk and resilience.
- enhancing the communication of complex scientific information and evidence to support the decision-making of policy makers and other stakeholders.

This statement has been shared with colleagues at the following UNISDR Regional Platforms and in each section below the support for a science mechanism is summarized from the relevant statements:

- At the 5th Africa Regional Platform And 3rd Ministerial Meeting For Disaster Risk Reduction, Abuja (Nigeria), 13 – 16 May 2014, Summary Statement - Africa’s Contribution To The Post-2015 Framework For Disaster Risk Reduction (UN 2014a), it was stated in point 10: 'The establishment of regional mechanisms that enable more active engagement of a wider range of science partners (including health and agriculture) can support broader efforts to establish an international science advisory panel for disaster risk reduction and to bring scientific, local and indigenous knowledge within a common framework of understanding.' From the supporting statement from the Scientific, Technical and Academic Communities in Disaster Risk Reduction (5th African Regional Platform, Abuja, Nigeria), it was noted amongst other issues that there was a request for 'the establishment of an International Science Advisory Mechanism for DRR to strengthen resilience' (UNISDR, 2014a).

- At the Fourth Session of the Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas 26-29 May 2014, organised by UNISDR Regional Office for the Americas (UNISDR - Americas) and the Republic of Ecuador, through the Secretariat of Risk Management and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the Communiqué of Guayaquil, Ecuador IV Session of the Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction Guayaquil, 29 May, 2014 it was stated in point 34 that 'integrate knowledge and information for formulating evidence-based risk management policies. To do so, access to interdisciplinary scientific inputs must be ensured for all actors, with consideration given to local identity as well as conditions regarding culture, gender and special needs. The establishing of a scientific-academic mechanism is desired, with the support of governments, in order to advise country authorities and strengthening exchange networks' (UN 2014b). In the reflections of the representatives of the scientific, technical and academic sector who participated in the Fourth Session of the Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
in the Americas, they called to ‘Promote the establishment of an intergovernmental scientific mechanism for disaster risk reduction to strengthen the evidence base to effectively reduce disaster risk and enhance resilience. The mechanism will provide scientific information and evidence to support countries and other stakeholders in the implementation of programs and monitoring and validation of progress on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the context of the post 2015 sustainable development agenda and the successor to the Hyogo Framework for Action. The mechanism will draw on existing programs, initiatives and resources and introduce new elements where appropriate.’ (UNISDR 2014b).

• At the Sixth Session of the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management The Way Forward: Climate and Disaster Resilient Development in the Pacific 2-4 June 2014, Suva, Fiji MEETING STATEMENT, organised by from UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, UN Development Programme, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, European Union, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, it was noted that ‘further investment in monitoring systems and scientific research and their practical applications in informing decision-making in disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and low carbon development’. (UN 2014c).

• At the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, hosted by the Royal Thai Government in collaboration with UNISDR and held Bangkok, Kingdom of Thailand 22 – 26 June 2014 the outcome was summarised in the Bangkok Declaration on Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia and the Pacific 2014 (UN, 2014d), In this Statement it was knowledge ‘the important role of science and technologies in promoting risk prevention and risk reduction by strengthening the capacities of national, sub-national, and local governments, as well as collaboration among the science community, decision makers, and practitioners with a view to promoting a stronger science interface with policy and practice for disaster risk reduction and resilience’ (UNISDR , 2014d). This was reinforced by the Statement of Voluntary Commitments of Asia Science, Technology and Academic Stakeholder Group for the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction 22-26 June 2014 Bangkok, Thailand which recommended ‘support for the establishment of an international science, academia and technological advisory mechanism for disaster risk reduction to strengthen resilience for the post-2015 agenda’ (UNISDR 2014c).

• At the European ministerial meeting on disaster risk reduction: towards a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction - building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters 08 July 2014, Milan, Italy they noted that they ‘recognize the role of science and technology and the complementarity of disaster risk reduction and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation as policy goals and approaches to prevent and address risk, vulnerability, and the impacts of hazard events and climate change on people and society’ (UN, 2014e) In the section on recommendations for the post-2015 Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction: they stated that they ‘Encourage a more systematic and reinforced science-policy interface, including foresight to address future risks and challenges’. (UN 2014e)

The statement has been shared at other science meetings of note. These have included:

• the International Symposium on Disaster Medical and Public Health Management; Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action held at the George Washington University, Washington D.C., May 21-22, 2014;

• the Integrated Research on Disaster Risk Programme, sponsored by the International Council for Science (ICSU), the International Social Science Council (ISSC), and UNISDR, in partnership with the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST), hosted the 2nd IRDR Conference, under the theme ‘Integrated Disaster Risk Science: A Tool for Sustainability’, 7 – 9 June 2014 in Beijing.

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/199 requests that UNISDR facilitate the development of a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/211 called for two Intergovernmental preparatory meetings (PrepComs) to be held on:

• PrepCom1: 14-15 July 2014, Palais de Nations, Geneva, Switzerland
• PrepCom2: 17-18 November 2014, Palais des Nations; Geneva, Switzerland

The Science and Technology Major Group Statement, which was delivered by Rudiger Klein, ICSU-IRDR, for the Preparatory Committee – First Session (Geneva, 14-15 July 2014) for the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR 2014d) stated

"as a key element for an action agenda for the post-2015 world, the establishment of a mechanism that would enhance closer interaction between the S&T actors and decision-makers in the public domain. In line with the recommendations of the 2013 Global Platform for DRR, and with support from the regional consultative platforms in Africa, Asia and the Americas, we invite all governments and all stakeholders involved in the 3rd World Conference on DRR, to support our call for an international science advisory mechanism that will result in more evidence-based DRR strategies and better-informed DRR investments by governments, donors, and businesses alike.

The Science and Technology Major Group Statement...
went on to state:

“The international science advisory mechanism for disaster risk reduction here proposed seeks to enhance the resilience of communities by recognising: (1) the growing and increasingly uneven incidence of disaster risk that demands special attention for capacity building in SIDS and LDC’s without, however, neglecting the exposure of middle and high-income countries; (2) the need for mutual reinforcement of DRR and SDG’s in strategies for development cooperation, notably through capacity building and education at all levels; (3) the role of awareness-raising and transparency in the use of evidence with the help of educational, and monitoring efforts and cross-sectoral engagement, as well as, very pragmatically, (4) that best use be made of the existing programmes and instruments that already generate and communicate S&T evidence for DRR.”

Additionally at the 1st Preparatory Committee Meeting (PREPCOM) for the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, 14-15 July 2014, Geneva, many governments were requesting more support for science, knowledge transfer, databases, monitoring and analysis.

Of note is the statement from the UN: ‘Joint UN Statement – 1st Preparatory Committee Meeting (PREPCOM) for the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, 14-15 July 2014, Geneva’ (UNISDR 2014e) which stated that 'Strengthening science and research that informs disaster risk reduction policy and practice. In this regard, the UN system supports the proposed creation of an international science advisory mechanism to strengthen the evidence base for the implementation and monitoring of the new framework’

3. Conclusions

The time line to the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to be held in Sendai Japan in March 2015 is short. This 5th International Disaster and Risk Conference IDRC Davos 2014 ‘Integrative Risk Management - The role of science, technology & practice’ is a vital meeting on the pathway.

Many other conferences and meeting are being held including the League of Arab States Regional Platform 14-16 September 2014, the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction to be held in Madrid, Spain in October with the second Preparatory Committee meeting in November. Another meeting’s of note is the Tokyo Conference on International Study for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience: Towards a new science and technology to consolidate disaster risk reduction and sustainable development to be held on January 14-16, 2015 which is being organised by Science Council of Japan and The University of Tokyo. More meetings are on the agenda and these too will take us towards Sendai.

Most importantly all of these will help to support the statement in the Chair’s Summary (UNISDR 2013) from the Global Platform May 2013:

“It is expected that HFA2 will recognize the need to govern disaster risk reduction and resilience through clear responsibilities, strong coordination, enabled local action, appropriate financial instruments and a clear recognition of a central role for science.”

References


UNISDR (2014e) Joint UN Statement – 1st Preparatory Committee Meeting (PREPCOM) for the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, 14-15 July 2014, Geneva (the Joint Statement by the UN System delivered at the First Preparatory Committee Meeting of the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) which was prepared under the aegis of the UN High Level Programmes Committee Senior Managers Group on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience (HLCP/SMG). The HLCP/SMG oversees the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience - members are FAO, IAEA, IFAD, IFRC, ILO, IMO, IOM, ITU, UNAIDS, UNCCD, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHABITAT, UNHCHR, UNICEF, UNISDR, UNOCHA, UNOPS, UNOOSA, UNWOMEN, UNWTO, UPU, WFP, WHO, WMO and the World Bank. Available at: http://www.preventionweb.net/files/globalplatform/jointunstatement[1].pdf [accessed 28 July 2014]


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