

SETTLEMENTS CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Floods information

The sequel of the recent event of El Nino have shown the devastating effects that floods have on the development of affected countries. Losses suffered by Asia, Europe and Africa are staggerin and seriously affect economic and social circumstances. It is estimated that the 1998 floods in Bangladesh caused losses of over US\$55 million in shelter alone. Rehabilitation costs are unaffordable and the country and communities have suffered a drastic fall in their living conditions and expectations for future development. The recent floods in Vietnam and India (Orissa) in 1999 only confirm the seriousness of the impacts of floods in Asian countries.

The intensity of natural hazards such as floods is exacerbated by unsustainable environment and resource use practices, including deforestation, inappropriate land uses and poor management of water resources. Understanding and responding to floods requires a comprehensive view of intervening environmental, social and economic factors. This calls for joint approaches by all relevant national agencies, as well as for the development of intergrated support strategies by international agencies with expertise on the subject, as UNEP and UNCHS (Habitat).

There is a close relationship in the way inhabitants, authorities and developers plan and build their communities in terms of form and function, and the ability of these communities to reduce their vulnerability to extreme natural events. The nature of this relationship demands that more attention is given to aspects of community development, such as where and how they are planned, how do they relate to each other, and the way they are inserted in their ecological mileu. This also includes community development patterns, configuration of infrastructure and services, and the involvement of the various actors on environmental management and regional development in the decision making process.

In many cases, the underlying causes of the intensity of floods and the vulnerability of settlements are common to countries facing similar environmental conditions and development patterns. The experience available on the subject in countries as China and India can be extremely useful to neighbouring countries facing similar problems. There are opportunities and benefits to be obtained by the establishment of horizontal technical co-operation and exchange mechanisms in flood mitigation and management. A suitable example of such initiative is the creation of the IDNDR/ECE Task Force on Flood Prevention and Protection in Europe. The Task Force aims at the development of guidelines for: flood prevention and protection in river basins and settlements;

environmental, social and economic assessments to minimise impacts; and awareness raising.

The present initiative aims at setting in motion a process leading to the establishment of similar technical exchange mechanisms among a selected number of countries in South Asia to mitigate the effects of floods and respond to them with their own increased capacities. Such mechanism could also serve as a model that can be replicated in other regions facing similar vulnerabilities to natural hazards. Countries envisaged to participate in the project include India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China and Vietnam.

"Prediction, Management and Mitigation of Floods for countries in South Asia ... continued"

Objectives

The main objective of the project is to assess issues of common technical interest and expertise available in selected South Asian countries for flood mitigation and management. Emphasis is given to aspects such as skill's development, joint assessments, development of management plans, technical support and awareness raising. It is expected that this initial activity will lead to the identification of possible areas of technical exchange and co-operation among the participating countries.

Outputs

National reports for the participating countries covering issues such as:

Assessments of needs in the areas of human settlements and environmental management within the context of flood prediction, management and mitigation in flood-prone areas in participating countries;

Institutional mapping and identification of stakeholders in the management of human settlements and the environment in regard to flood events and their impacts;

Assessment of capacities and expertise available in each country to plan for, and address flood events and their impacts of human settlements and on the environment.

Background

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Reports will be prepared by national experts to be recruited in consultation with the responsible government agency/ministry. The national reports will serve as background information for a Regional Workshop to discuss possible areas of technical co-operation among countries of the South Asian region.

Two regional workshops on flood mitigation and management. The workshops will take place in two of the participating countries. The first workshop will consist of a consultation with national partners on the scope and contents of the national studies. The second workshop will review the results of the studies and outline a strategy for the follow-up of their conclusions and recommendations.