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"Disaster Prevention, Awareness Raising and Future Challenges in the Context of German Development Cooperation"

Munich Re Foundation Symposium "Worldwide Disaster Prevention – Awareness is the Key"

Akademie Schloss Hohenkammer, Munich, 16. – 17. November 2005

Dear Mr Loster, Mr Briceño, Mr Michel and Mr Schaar,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is both a pleasure and an honour for me to participate in this international panel, and discuss with you a number of observations, thoughts and concrete issues concerning 'Worldwide Disaster Prevention and Awareness'.

The natural disasters of the recent weeks and months have shown to the world that it is not only developing countries which are brought to their knees by disasters.

Though the material damage sustained in industrialised countries is higher than in those countries with a low Gross Domestic Product, 97 per cent of the globally documented victims of disasters are located in developing countries.

Poverty is the chief cause of disaster-related deaths.

This is why we have to look at the linkages between disaster prevention and development cooperation.

As Managing Director of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit or GTZ- a German organisation with 30 years of experience in international cooperation for sustainable development - I am pleased to present to you our experiences in the field of disaster prevention.

In my speech I will focus on three aspects:

Firstly: Disaster risk management is an important element of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Secondly: The reconstruction phase offers a key opportunity to implement risk-reducing measures.

And thirdly: The key to worldwide disaster prevention lies in combining public and private-sector interests, and channelling them into concerted implementation of the Kobe resolutions.

My first thesis is that the integration of disaster risk management into poverty reduction and development cooperation is a necessary precondition for sustainable development.

Disasters often aggravate poverty by causing under-nourishment, diseases, homelessness or even armed conflicts. They destroy positive development outcomes. In many of our partner countries they constrain economic development.

Conversely, societal developments increase people's vulnerability to disasters. In countries prone to extreme hazards this is caused by the marginalisation of populations, the misuse of power and corruption, and the colonisation of flood-prone areas and steep slopes.

Increasingly, natural disasters in our partner countries are acting as obstacles to development cooperation efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

GTZ is responding to this challenge by integrating disaster risk management into development efforts.

Now let me come to my second point: The reconstruction phase is the key opportunity for integrating risk-reducing measures into measures for sustainable development. Nevertheless, we already need to consider sustainable development at an early stage during the emergency relief phase.

In the aftermath of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean last Christmas, GTZ – on behalf of the German Government - did of course respond immediately by delivering emergency aid. Our regional offices in Sri Lanka and Indonesia with our regional expertise and existing partner structures enabled us to respond to the immediate needs articulated by our counterparts.

This local political and cultural knowledge was especially important as both of the countries hardest hit, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, are also badly affected by conflicts.

GTZ reconstruction activities in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand provide good examples of how to integrate disaster prevention measures into reconstruction and recovery.

The immediate post-disaster phase is the time when institutions and the population are particularly amenable to preventive approaches.

GTZ is utilising this 'window of awareness' to assist the population, the government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector not only in coping with the damage, but also in reducing vulnerability and the future disaster risk.

For example in Thailand we are supporting local institutions in creating emergency plans and establishing a local early warning system. We are promoting sustainable coastal zone management, as well as school education and professional training for provincial administrations, municipalities, NGOs and the private sector.

In Indonesia we have helped expand an already existing decentralisation programme to strengthen local structures and develop disaster risk management capacities. In Aceh, risk-reducing building technologies and risk-preventive land-use planning are being integrated into the reconstruction of houses, schools and health centres.

In Sri Lanka, the ministry of education has asked us to provide advisory services on the integration of disaster risk management into curricula and teacher training.

On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), we are coordinating the capacity-building component of the efforts to establish the German-Indonesian Tsunami Early Warning System in the Indian Ocean, in cooperation with the United Nations University (UNU), the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) and Capacity Building International (InWEnt).

In the process of integrating disaster risk management into reconstruction and recovery, GTZ can draw on a wealth of experience: gained for example in the context of El Nino in Peru and Indonesia in 1997 to 1998, Hurricane 'Mitch' in Central America in 1998, and the floods in Mozambique in 2001.

The last point I wish to make today is that: Of course awareness raising is a necessary precondition for disaster reduction. But the key to worldwide disaster prevention lies in combining United Nations, bilateral, governmental, non-governmental and private-sector interests in disaster prevention, and channelling them into the concerted implementation of the Kobe resolutions.

With the ending of the United Nations International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), in 1999 Kofi Annan called for a paradigm shift from the prevailing 'culture of reaction' to a 'culture of prevention'.

This means we have to institutionalise a way of thinking or better still a way of acting for disaster prevention.

What is the role of German development cooperation in raising awareness of the need for disaster risk management?

GTZ is advising German development institutions on how to mainstream disaster risk management in development cooperation sectors that are vulnerable to disasters or can contribute to their reduction.

We have several programmes in Latin America, Southern Africa and Asia that integrate disaster risk management measures like risk assessment, disaster prevention and mitigation, and preparedness, on various levels and in various sectors.

Let me give you an example:

In Mozambique - one of the African countries most frequently and most seriously affected by natural disasters - the GTZ programme for rural development in central is helping integrate disaster risk management measures into the development planning of regions at risk.

For the Búzi district a participatory risk analysis was first carried out that identified approximately one third of the district's population as being endangered. Subsequently, various measures and activities for disaster prevention and disaster preparedness were implemented. Among the measures were:

- the construction of new settlements on higher ground further away from the river,
- the inclusion of cyclone-resistant construction measures in the reconstruction activities,
- a disaster preparedness simulation, and
- the implementation of early warning systems.

The vulnerability of the population to flood and cyclone hazards has been lowered significantly by the disaster risk management measures implemented.

As a result of their training and involvement in the development process, the status of community members in relation to the various authorities has grown. They are no longer perceived as helpless beneficiaries, but rather as active partners.

Despite several success stories in our activities for disaster reduction, we face the same obstacles time and time again.

As a result of fierce competition between important political priorities, disaster reduction is often not on political agendas. Hence there is a lack of investment and corresponding funding for implementation.

Although national, regional and international networks and cooperations for disaster reduction have emerged, there is still no systematic dialogue on strategies between multilateral and bilateral organisations and among public and private institutions.

It would be of great benefit to worldwide disaster reduction, and would cause no overlap, if a public-private type of regular dialogue were to be established.

Private enterprises should be aware that disaster prevention measures help ensure their economic survival, and may offer economic opportunities too. Locally, the diversification of production and income are both an efficient way both to reduce risk and vulnerability, and to increase private turnovers.

In the long term, the active involvement of the private sector in disaster risk management will be a major factor in sustaining disaster risk management.

If the United Nations, bilaterals, governments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector together were to join forces and begin to press for implementation of the Kobe resolutions – only then do I see a real chance for worldwide disaster reduction.

Closing words

This symposium, organised by the Munich Re Foundation, is an important step not only toward cooperation for awareness raising, but also toward cooperation as the key to worldwide disaster prevention.

At this point, Mr Loster, allow me to thank you cordially for your invitation.

I wish all of us a lively and interesting discussion that takes us forward in our concerted efforts to meet the challenge of worldwide disaster reduction. Thank you very much for your attention.