

IMPLEMENTING THE IDNDR AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: THE JAMAICAN
EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The Jamaican National Committee for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction was launched in March 1990. The broad-based committee comprises representatives from some fifty public sector agencies, professional organisations, the private sector and tertiary institutions.

Interest in the Decade has been maintained at a moderate level, primarily by agencies involved in disaster mitigation programmes. However, because of various constraints no projects specific to the Decade have been implemented.

In order to overcome these problems a proposal has been made that agencies take into account IDNDR priorities when developing their normal programme activities and designate those activities which reflect the Decade's priorities as IDNDR activities. This approach has met with moderate success.

INTRODUCTION

The Office of Disaster Preparedness (ODP) is the Agency which has the responsibility for disaster management in Jamaica. At the declaration of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction the responsibility for implementing the Decade fell naturally under the ODP's umbrella. The agency pulled together a small working group to:-

- a) Draft the terms of reference for a national committee
- b) Make suggestions for the composition of a national committee

The Jamaican National Committee and the Decade were launched in March 1990 in a joint ceremony with the National Meteorological Services on World Met Day. The event received good coverage from the Media. The major newspapers carried a supplement containing messages from the Government as well as articles on the IDNDR.

APPROACH

In an effort to make the committee truly representative and as broad-based as possible some fifty organisations were invited to be members. This, however, made it impossible for the committee to work effectively. A strategy was needed which would retain the all-encompassing nature of the committee thus maintaining the concept of the Decade, but which would permit adequate dialogue and planning of programmes. It was then decided to split the main committee into four working committees which would be subcommittees of the main committee. The chairmen of these working groups and the Secretary of the National Committee form a steering committee responsible for day to day decision-making, programme review and planning. The working groups are:-

- i) Meteorological Hazards
- ii) Geological Hazards
- iii) Policy and Legislation
- iv) Public Education

These working groups were given the responsibility of submitting to the main committee proposals for programmes to be undertaken during the Decade.

CONSTRAINTS

All working groups except that on Public Education were convened at least once. Discussions among committee members soon revealed serious obstacles to the implementation of activities specific to the decade, however. Problems expressed were

- i) Lack of funding support for undertaking major projects specifically for the Decade. Such programmes could not be supported from agency budgets.
- ii) Inadequate staff for Decade activities if these were separate from other agency activities.

These were not the only problems to be encountered. At the national level the ODP undertook the responsibility of performing the functions of a secretariat as well as coordinating national activities without any increase in staffing or indeed in budget. This situation inevitably took its toll on the effectiveness of the national committee. Overall it seemed that unless some strategy could be devised to work within the constraints the entire Decade might go by without any achievements being recorded.

The solution found was three-fold:-

- i) For agencies already involved in some work with natural hazards, programme planning would be carried out within the context of the Decade, with due consideration of the Decade's priorities as outlined by the IDNDR Secretariat.
- ii) Any activities or programmes reflecting the Decade's priorities would be designated as IDNDR activities or programmes.
- iii) An effort would be made to encourage cross-sectoral activities thus involving those organisations which would not normally be involved in loss reduction but which could make a significant contribution to loss reduction and the Decade's priorities.

This idea has been accepted in principle by members of the committee and the Chairman of the Legislation and Policy sub-committee initiated discussions with the Insurance College of Jamaica and the Jamaica Association of General Insurance Companies on the role of the Insurance sector in mitigation. In December a forum on risk assessment technique was organised by the ICOJ, ODP and US AID. Public and private sector agencies were represented and a number of recommendations were made for follow-up by the ODP, ICOJ and the sub-committee. These agencies are presently continuing dialogue on joint programmes which can be carried out.

IDNDR DAY

IDNDR Day, 1991, was marked by the convening of two meetings by the ODP. The first was a consultation among agencies working at the community level. Several useful recommendations were made, common problems identified and solutions sought. The second meeting sought to bring together policy makers and senior planners with members of the private sector. This was moderately successful. The role of financial and insurance bodies in promoting mitigation and risk management was discussed at some length. The meeting provided the opportunity for the finance and insurance sectors to hear initiatives in loss reduction being made by public sector planning agencies.

PLANS FOR 1992-1999

At the January meeting of the National Committee the steering group was mandated to draft a programme of activities for 1992 to 1999, to establish priorities for these activities and to coordinate IDNDR activities among various agencies. The Committee decided that Public Information and Awareness are to be given high priority and instructed two members of the Committee to resuscitate the Public Information Committee.

PROGRAMMES DESIGNATED AS IDNDR ACTIVITIES

The Table below shows activities being carried out under the Decade's umbrella by various agencies.

IDNDR ACTIVITIES IN PROGRESS

ACTIVITY	AGENCY	NEEDS
Earthquake Awareness Programme (300th Anniversary of the Port Royal Earthquake)	ODP	-
Development of Landslide Awareness brochure.	ODP, Department of Geology, University of the West Indies	Printing
Upgrading of High Risk Map of Jamaica	Geological Survey	Printing
Discussions with Insurance Sector on Risk Assessment and Development	Insurance College ODP, US AID/RHUDO	-
Meeting on Earthquakes	ODP (Partners will be accepted)	Sponsorship
Flood Risk Mapping	UGround Water Auth.	-
Automatic Flood Warning System	"	
Community Flood Warning System	"	
TRAINING		
Development of Hazard Awareness Packages	ODP	Printing
Module on Disaster Mitigation for the Insurance Industry	US AID/ODP ICOJ	-

CONSTRAINTS

Constraints to the full implementation of IDNDR projects have been mentioned briefly. They are not unique to Jamaica. Indeed, they are similar to those mentioned in the Report of 16 October 1991 as having been identified in the reports on Gaps and Priorities from various countries. Two in particular will be mentioned here.

Inadequate Funding

This is a chronic problem which is the basis of many of the other problems. Generally, all government funded institutions operate on restricted budgets. This affects all aspects of the disaster reduction process. Scientific agencies cannot fund instrumentation thus data gathering on hazards is minimal, gaps are found in data bases and prediction, forecasting and modelling are inaccurate or impossible. Projects which install expensive equipment which agencies cannot maintain after the end of the project are only a partial answer to the problem. For the Decade, transfer of technology must mean transfer of appropriate and "sustainable" technology.

Inadequate Staffing

The problem here is not one of quality but of quantity. Few Caribbean countries will be able to dedicate a full-time member of staff to the Decade's activities. It is likely that the situation which obtains in Jamaica will be repeated. The ODP acts as secretariat and a member of staff must carry IDNDR activities in addition to normal responsibilities. The situation is probably more difficult in those countries which do not have an organisation dedicated to disaster management and whose Disaster Coordinator holds a full time job. Cross training of staff in allied agencies and development of adequate networks for disaster reduction is essential in such cases. Decade priorities must take into consideration the institutional capabilities of small disaster-prone states and ways of strengthening disaster management capability in their context.

SUGGESTIONS

I have deliberately avoided the word recommendations for this section. In fact there is not much one can recommend. The Panel of Experts and the Scientific and Technical Committee have done a sterling job in addressing programme planning for the Decade. There really is very little to add. What I will do here is to put a slightly different perspective to some of the Decade's priorities and then to make some suggestions.

Political Support

The establishment of the Special High Level Committee will certainly encourage political support for the Decade. However further support can be gained by convening some IDNDR meetings in developing countries. The suggested 1994 meeting comes immediately to mind. Convening a meeting in the third world will:-

- focus interest in the Decade
- sensitise senior planners and policy makers
- encourage political support for loss reduction planning
- encourage development of policy on disaster reduction

in countries which might not have adequate political support for disaster management programmes. Integration of disaster reduction concepts into planning and policy at the national level will only be successful if it receives support at the highest levels.

Community Level Warning Systems

Remote communities removed from access to large scale or centralised warning systems can benefit from community warning systems based on local history and indicators familiar to the community. Development of these types of "appropriate technology" systems should be encouraged and emphasised during the Decade.

Community Risk Mapping

Community risk mapping and hazard zonation studies can be carried out based on community memory. This will have two important advantages :-

- (i) Involvement of the community in the hazard zonation exercise thus increasing their awareness of disaster reduction concepts.
- (ii) Production of preliminary hazard zonation and risk maps at low cost. This ensures that more communities will have some kind of map on which development or response planning can be based.

A desirable offshoot of this is the preservation of community memory concerning hazards and their effects, and input of this local knowledge into community development planning thus incorporating mitigation concepts into community development

activities.

Micro - Assistance Projects

A mechanism could be set up for providing small sums of money or short term technical assistance where needed. For example, an agency may be able to develop public awareness material from in-house expertise but may lack funds to print it. It could be printed by an agency in another country, and become the property of the IDNDR for distribution to any country needing it. The cost of printing would be relatively low - say two or three thousand dollars and might not involve the exchange of money, just the provision of the service. A similar programme can be put in place for exchange of expertise. An agency might be able to second a staff member to another country for a few days with the host country providing logistical support and the donor country or a third country providing travel costs. These persons would not be considered consultants and so would not receive a fee as such but would continue to receive their salary and per diem.

Information Transfer

The hard currency cost of subscriptions to Journals is often beyond the means of small agencies involved in disaster management. However, access to these journals is important if they are to keep abreast of current thinking in the field and are to benefit from the experience of other countries. Subscriptions to some of these journals could be waived for specific countries for a specified period during the Decade, say two years. This will not only increase the flow of information but will have the added bonus of encouraging submission of articles to these journals by these agencies thus making the transfer of information two-way.

SUMMARY

The slow start to our activities is in no way indicative of our support for the Decade. The Jamaican Committee fully endorses the concept of a Decade dedicated to reducing the global toll of disasters. We continue to seek innovative ways of overcoming difficulties so as to successfully undertake programmes reflecting the priorities and objectives of the IDNDR.

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The Ministry of Local Government consented to granting time away from the Office of Disaster Preparedness.

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