



VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing 85 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. Seeking to involve its members in information, training, advocacy and lobbying, VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and rehabilitation and disaster preparedness and promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

VOICE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Disaster Risk Reduction

And Climate Change Adaptation in Humanitarian Aid

– June 2009 –

VOICE (Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies) is a network representing 85 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)¹ working group involves agencies among the leading DG ECHO partners in the field of DRR from across the European Union. The following recommendations are based on the work of the working group.

Context

It is anticipated that the global cost of disasters could exceed \$300 billion annually by the year 2050². Similarly, estimates from the OECD³ show that up to 50% of development assistance in some countries may be at risk because of climate change⁴ impacts⁵. The VOICE DRR working group members are deeply concerned about the upward global trend in 'natural' disasters and associated human and economic losses. Climate change is increasing the number, unpredictability and severity of extreme events. These trends have made the international community realize how urgent it is to significantly increase efforts to reduce risk and vulnerabilities and prevent further disasters.

In recent years a number of European Union (EU) Member States have taken significant steps to try to reduce the impact of disasters on vulnerable populations through integrating DRR into their aid policies and practice. The recent communications of the European Commission, which outline an EU strategy for supporting DRR in developing countries and an EU strategy for minimizing and adapting to climate change, represent further achievements in terms of mainstreaming these issues in European policies. The DRR working group welcomes these developments which ensure an increased contribution from the various services of the European Commission, and improved coordination across EC institutions.

However, the EU's climate package that came into law in early 2009 is still insufficient both to slow the rate of global warming and minimize the impact on lives and livelihoods of vulnerable populations throughout the world. There remain weak linkages and inadequate coordination between DRR and Climate Change Adaptation⁶ (CCA) policies and practices at EU and international levels, although it is widely accepted that considerable benefits would be achieved through better integration. Both DRR and CCA strategies aim at reducing vulnerabilities to future disasters and closer cooperation would improve effectiveness and quality of DRR and CCA programmes.

Taking also into account previous publications of the VOICE network on DRR and LRRD⁷ and in particular the VOICE Policy Recommendations on DRR in the EU Humanitarian and Development Aid policy of July 2007, VOICE makes the following recommendations based on the expertise of its members.

¹ Disaster Risk Reduction refers to the conceptual framework of elements considered with the possibilities to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development. (UNISDR Terminology, 2004)

² The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR), Statement, 2002

³ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

⁴ "Climate change": change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods (UNFCCC Convention, 2004)

⁵ Agrawala S (ed) (2005) Bridge over Troubled Waters, Linking Climate Change and Development. OECD, Paris.

⁶ Adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities (UNFCCC Glossary, 2005)

⁷ LRRD stands for "Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development".

Recommendations

1. DRR must evolve to meet the needs of a changing climate:

- ***Integrate changing risks in strategies and programming:***

In the humanitarian context, DRR has demonstrated its effectiveness to deal with current climate variability – the existing climate related shocks and trends having significant impacts on the lives and livelihoods of the world's people, and particularly the poorest and most vulnerable. To remain effective in the face of human-induced climate change, the DRR community needs to better comprehend the full range of humanitarian impacts of climate variability and integrate the changing risks within its strategies.

- ***Link local knowledge with climate science:***

Effective DRR should remain based on local knowledge, and built upon local level participatory analysis of vulnerabilities and capacities, but scientific climate information should be brought to the service of communities, in an accessible form, to inform their analysis and support the identification of sustainable solutions.

- ***Develop more accurate forecasting and early warning systems:***

More accurate projections of changing hazard scenarios and related impending events at all levels are needed in order to tackle the humanitarian challenge posed by climate change.

2. CCA must learn from and build upon the experience of DRR:

- ***Build on experience from the humanitarian sector***

The CCA community should build on existing tried and tested principles and methods of DRR, and complement existing programming. The understanding of how to build resilience to current challenges should form the basis of building resilience to the future challenges of a changed and changing climate. CCA practitioners should link into activities started during emergency phase.

- ***Adopt people-centered and participatory approaches:***

The experience of DRR programming in crisis affected areas is that effective adaptation needs to be built upon participatory and community-based approaches. Humanitarian NGOs believe that poor people and communities are central to address the humanitarian impact of climate change in developing countries making it essential to support people-led processes to undertake climate risks assessments and identify routes to resilience.

- ***Build on local capacity:***

To be sustainable, adaptation will need to be built upon local capacities and locally appropriate technologies. New technologies should build on local and indigenous knowledge systems, instead of replacing them, and support should be given for local level innovation.

3. Coordinated strategies must be designed and implemented:

To achieve a coordinated, effective response, as espoused in the recommendations set out above, VOICE DRR working group further recommends the following:

- ***Policy makers and practitioners from the DRR and CCA sectors should work together*** in order to ensure that a coherent and comprehensive approach emanates from complementary policies. In furtherance of this, the European Union should promote the following as priorities:

- Support the DRR community to engage in climate change negotiations more effectively;
- Promote closer integration or convergence of DRR and CCA departments and functions within multilateral bodies, EU Member States and institutions, and civil society organizations;
- Support the generation of integrated knowledge, experience and guidance.

- ***The European Union, its institutions and Member States should coordinate*** to enable long-term approaches and funding sustainability. In furtherance of this, the EU should promote the following as priorities:

- Integrate DRR and CCA into EC programs and strategies as well as in the guidance and delivery of respective funding mechanisms;
- Urge and support developing countries and their governments to place priority on DRR and CCA within their political agendas.