

**Response to the United Kingdom's Department for International Development  
Multilateral Aid Review of  
The UN secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction**

### **Introduction**

1. The United Nations secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) welcomes the report of the Multilateral Aid Review (MAR) of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) as an innovative and critical contribution to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of international cooperation frameworks for the delivery of aid.
2. The definition of indicators to determine "value added" for multilateral systems is helpful along with the substantiation provided. The latter is important to fully understand how DFID will undertake future assessments.
3. The analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the multilateral system is very interesting and reiterates familiar issues, particularly on the perceived weaknesses; some of which require solutions that are not always possible for organizations in isolation. The collective MAR framework therefore offers opportunities for organizations to learn and improve effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of aid through international cooperation mechanisms.

### **Comments**

4. UNISDR notes the positive comments and concurs with some of the key areas of delivery identified by the MAR which require improvement. These areas reflect the findings of both a United Nations audit, as well as an external evaluation, requested by UNISDR in 2009 and presented in 2010 to determine management baselines. They have now been incorporated in a management-reform work programme which was developed early last year with key stakeholders including donors and is now under implementation. The programme will be further reviewed and adjusted in light of the specific findings of the MAR – particularly the need for reporting to be clearer as well as more systematic and results focused.
5. UNISDR, however, takes this opportunity to clarify a number of issues which may not have been properly captured by the innovative methodology developed by the MAR to assess a very complex system composed of organisations with different natures, mandates and with very diverse operational modalities.
6. The MAR places UNISDR among humanitarian organizations. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is **firmly situated in the field of sustainable development** and it also involves environmental programs and relief actions; this was confirmed by the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in the 1990s, followed by the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1999, and finally by the Hyogo Framework for Action, endorsed by the Assembly in 2005.
7. Further, DRR requires the concerted action of a variety of governmental and non-governmental actors across humanitarian, developmental and environmental fields. The **interdisciplinary nature of DRR initiatives** is still to be fully captured by national and international cooperation frameworks, plans and actions. Therefore, the UNISDR is concerned

that its classification as a humanitarian agency may contribute to the continued portrayal of DRR as a humanitarian issue.

8. Concomitantly, the classification of UNISDR as a **humanitarian organization**, together with entities like the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Food Programme (WFP) or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), suggests that the secretariat is being reviewed with criteria that are not fully suitable for an accurate impact assessment of its work.
9. UNISDR is **not an operational entity**; it is not an in-country resident organization; but it is indeed regionally based. It has around 90 staff between the main office in Geneva and five regional offices. The decision in the MAR to exclude differences in scale as a factor in the analysis therefore leads to an imprecise assessment of UNISDR's impact.
10. On the issue of national impact, UNISDR, **as an organization without country-based presence**, collaborates with countries through the Resident Coordinators' offices and a network of national platforms, whose establishment was called for by the Assembly in 1999. The secretariat also works with national focal points appointed by countries to facilitate the reporting on implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). UNISDR further supports regional cooperation frameworks and mechanisms to which countries are party. Therefore, the application to UNISDR of the criteria used for organizations with country-based operations may once again lead to a less than accurate appreciation of the secretariat's means and impact.
11. Turning to another issue which requires some clarification, in one area the MAR seems to suggest that UNISDR should strengthen its focus on "fragile states". Yet this somewhat contradicts another area in the Review which questions UNISDR's alleged country focus. At this juncture, it is critical to affirm that **UNISDR does not exclude any high-risk country** from its work and its engagement will depend on the focus of the United Nations country presence, as well as its ability to support DRR through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and other similar mechanisms.
12. Additionally, the question of UNISDR's country-presence has been frequently discussed. It is now emerging again in repeated calls for an **"accelerator" function** in support of the Resident Coordinators who are well aware of their responsibilities vis-à-vis DRR but lack coordination capacity and support from the wider United Nations system. Given the secretariat's current "business model", there is no capacity to assume this role; it can only continue to strongly advocate for proper operational support to be provided to Resident Coordinators.
13. On the issue of **partnership development and coordination**, UNISDR has globally leveraged action by, as well as built partnerships with and among, a large array of stakeholders which include governments, academia, the private sector, civil society and scientific institutions in order to raise the political profile of DRR, develop sound knowledge and catalyse actions to strengthen resilience at both country and community levels. The tangible results include: the holding of the biennial Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and Regional Platforms; the Global Assessment Report for Disaster Risk Reduction; the development of PreventionWeb; the HFA Monitoring and Progress Review process; the Mid-Term Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action; high visibility advocacy campaigns; as well as the first ever General Assembly Thematic Debate on Disaster Risk Reduction. The aim of the latter, which was held

last month, is to inform Government and private sector decision-making on planning for DRR and investing in prevention. In May of 2011, the Third Global Platform will be attended by high-level decision makers to discuss DRR investments at the local level.

14. At the regional level, **UNISDR works with governmental bodies and non-governmental networks**. Through advocacy and advice, it supports the development of legislation, action plans and political leadership for DRR. With the secretariat's support, the Arab Strategy was adopted by the League of Arab States, as well as the African Union Declaration and Plan of Action 2015. The fourth Asia Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held in October 2010. The second regional platform meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean is taking place in March 2011 at ministerial level.
15. Against this background, it is critical to continue developing assessment frameworks that are able to capture the effectiveness of such coordination and advocacy efforts, as well as the medium- and long-term impact at both country and community levels.
16. Furthermore, it is important to clarify that **UNISDR does not fundraise for partners** – it does not have the capacity and such activities would also warrant the introduction of a questionable administrative layer to finance DRR activities. At the same time, however, the secretariat does advocate for funding to be directly provided to DRR initiatives at global, regional and country levels. Moreover, while UNISDR channels small grants to mainly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and institutions for research and studies, in the current United Nations framework, the disbursement of such grants is a labour-intensive undertaking that should be reduced rather than expanded.

## Conclusion

17. In conclusion, UNISDR welcomes the United Kingdom's commitment to DRR, particularly DFID's intention to dedicate increased resources to country-level action, and expresses the hope that the Government of the United Kingdom will scale up its engagement in a manner that reflects a perspective that is not only humanitarian. **UNISDR looks forward to continued cooperation with the Government of the United Kingdom in bilateral and multilateral contexts** to raise the political profile of, and investments for DRR. The secretariat takes this opportunity to commend the excellent work of the many United Kingdom-based NGOs that are taking the lead in developing the practice of DRR as a development strategy.

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