



Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/SDPD/2017/WG.15/INF.1
24 October 2017
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Expert Group Meeting on Coordinating Responses to Climate Change
and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Arab Region

Beirut, 19-20 December 2017

Information note

I. BACKGROUND

The Arab region has been witnessing a changing climate during the past decades which caused extreme events and weather related natural disasters. These included flash floods due to intensive rainfall, heat waves due to exceptional warming and unprecedented high temperatures, heavy sandstorms, prolonged drought cycles, cyclones, sea level rise and coastal erosion issues, etc. The issue of disaster risk reduction (DRR) gained more importance in 1987, when the United Nations General Assembly declared the 1990s as the “International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction”. In 2005, the “Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015)” was adopted, and became the first internationally accepted framework for DRR. It was replaced in 2015 by the “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)” with ambitious targets and goals for DRR strategies. In parallel, the origins of climate change (CC) were discussed in 1979 during the first World Conference on Climate Change. In 2001, climate change adaptation (CCA) was first discussed during the seventh Conference of Parties (COP7) in Marrakech. In 2015, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change was adopted and focused, among other issues, on CCA, climate resilience, and assessment of “loss and damage” in cases where impacts are beyond the limits of adaptation.

CCA and DRR have traditionally been pursued along different tracks follow, and linking these two processes together faces many challenges and exhibit potential opportunities. While there are clear synergies that need to be exploited, there are also some mutually exclusive elements that need to be addressed separately. The Arab region faces numerous technical and institutional challenges in the integration of these two processes at both regional and country levels, which include lack of integrated disaster loss and climate-related hazards database; poor urban planning; incoherent policies and lack of monitoring and evaluation framework; and gap between research and policy-making.

To overcome the lack of integrated approaches in assessment of climate change impacts and vulnerabilities in the Arab region, ESCWA and LAS, in partnership with 11 other institutions, are implementing the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR). Within the activities of RICCAR, the disaster loss databases were developed in selected Arab countries by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction/Regional Office for Arab States (UNISDR/ROAS) in order to detect and assess historical trends of weather and climate related disasters and their socio-economic impacts. This inventory included key parameters such as type of disaster, frequency, spatial footprint of disaster frequency, the trend/time series of disasters, mortality, losses in assets and infrastructure, economic losses and their spatial distribution, etc.

In an attempt to link historical disaster loss databases with projected extreme indices and vulnerable areas generated by RICCAR, high frequency areas with high disaster risk under various climate change scenarios were identified and mapped. Based on the results of the surveyed six Arab countries, it was noted that weather related hazards constitute most of the disasters occurred in these countries (more than 80 per cent of total events), and are the source of most of the damage as 78 per cent of all economic losses in the region are caused by climatic events such as flash floods.

Disaster loss databases can play an important role in supporting climate change projections by helping in the identification of 'hotspot' areas where impacts are higher or more frequent than normal. The disaster losses, although reflect historical records, can be used as a proof for the vulnerable areas and regions for future climate change impacts using regional climate models as used in RICCAR.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objective of the meeting is to discuss linking climate change and disaster risk reduction in order to formulate integrated policies with respect to natural disasters which are being exacerbated by climate change. The meeting aims to:

- Present an overview of the CC and DRR global agendas and regional initiatives;
- Investigate possible connections between CCA and DRR (terminologies, assessment tools, modelling, time scale, institutional and legal settings, etc.);
- Present the methodology for possible linkage of the RICCAR extreme climate indices projections and historical Disaster Loss Databases for selected Arab countries;
- Discuss the analysis results of mapping and overlaying hotspot areas for both CC and DRR as a tool for validation of future impacts and to inform decision makers about highly vulnerable areas;
- Discuss measures needed to strengthen resilience for identified priority regions in selected Arab countries based on the analysis conducted;
- Present case studies on national initiatives and institutional settings for CCA and DRR in the Arab countries;
- Propose means of implementation to ensure efficient linkages between CCA and DRR (regional and national contexts);
- Introduce suggested areas for improved policy coherence across both fields and propose the way forward.

III. PARTICIPANTS

The meeting will gather experts in CC and DRR from the Arab region, in addition to representatives of a number of municipalities to share their responses to extreme events due to CC within a DRR context.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The Expert Group Meeting is organized by ESCWA in collaboration with UNISDR/ROAS.

The meeting will be held at the premises of the UN-House, ESCWA, in Beirut, Lebanon, from 19 to 20 December 2017.

V. LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

A block of rooms has been reserved for participants at the Markazia Suites Hotel in Beirut, Lebanon at a preferential room rate of US\$ 127/night for a single room, and US\$ 145/night for a double room, inclusive of breakfast, internet access and all taxes. The hotel is located within walking distance from the UN-House,

ESCWA, and close to restaurants and coffee shops. Kindly indicate on the registration form if you would like ESCWA to reserve a room for you at this hotel.

Participants are kindly requested to return their completed registration form to ESCWA. Sponsored participants should submit their registration form to ESCWA no later than Thursday, 16 November 2017 to allow time to make the necessary arrangements for their travel. Sponsorship cannot be assured for registration forms received beyond that date. Participants are responsible for securing their own visa for travel to Lebanon.

VI. LANGUAGE

Language of the EGM will be Arabic and English used interchangeably. There will be simultaneous translation.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence and inquiries concerning the meeting should be addressed to:

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