



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

and response in urban settings

ISSUES: It is increasingly recognized that rapid, poorly managed or uncontrolled urbanization and inadequate governance in the cities and towns of the developing world are a major contributing factor, and in some cases the root cause, of humanitarian crises.

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is home to 8 of the world's largest cities out of the top 100 by population, housing over 60 million people. In the past five decades, major cities in 16 out of 22 countries in the Region have been affected by natural disasters alone, with over 250 000 deaths and over 35 million people affected.

High population density and largely unplanned growth have resulted in premature urbanization in mega cities. This rapid urbanization, coupled with emerging threats associated with climate change, poses serious challenges for the Region in terms of meeting demand for collective urban services, maintaining a sound natural environment and reducing physical, social and institutional vulnerabilities.

SOLUTIONS: Although emergencies are often unpredictable, much can be done to prevent and mitigate their negative effects as well as to strengthen the response capacity of communities at risk through vulnerability assessments, risk reduction and better emergency preparedness. Community-based disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness programmes are thus the critical interventions for reducing the impacts of emergencies and for linking disaster management with sustainable development.

Health Assembly resolution WHA58.1 (2005) and the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005–2015) both emphasize provision of technical guidance and support to Member States in building their emergency response capacities stressing a multisectoral and comprehensive all-hazard approach addressing all underlying risk factors including urbanization. Thus the linkage between disaster management and sustainable development within an urbanized context would also support efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

ACTIONS DURING 2010: World Health Day 2010 celebrations will showcase successful examples of community-based self-help interventions in times of emergency. Best practices in community-based disaster risk reduction at regional and global level will be highlighted through workshops and media events in collaboration with stakeholders including civil society organizations. WHO will continue its partnership with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and other UN and non-UN agencies for the Safe Hospitals Initiative, which aims at building resilient hospitals and other health facilities to ensure effective and efficient continuity in providing health care in times of disasters especially in urban settings. Support will be provided for the establishment of national frameworks to address health impacts of climate change and its integration in mainstream disaster risk reduction programmes in all countries.

THE WAY FORWARD:

- Emphasis will be given to integrating disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness capacities in national emergency preparedness and response programmes under a strategic approach that complements and synergizes the support to countries to address urban risks.
- Implementation of the regional strategy for emergency preparedness and response will be strengthened in order to mainstream emergency preparedness and risk reduction efforts in countries using an all-hazards approach.
- Capacity-building and material support to national and municipal authorities will be reinforced.
- Assessments will be conducted on humanitarian impact of climate change and respective mitigation and adaptation efforts within urban settings through community-based participatory efforts.
- The health facilities safety initiative will be expanded in countries of the Region including assessment and further development of the health facilities following the campaign launched in 2008–2009.



World Health Day 2010
Urbanization and Health



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