



Env
Note

Healthy
Karen S



Ecosystems and Biodiversity Series



About IUCN

IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges.

IUCN works on biodiversity, climate change, energy, human livelihoods and greening the world economy by supporting scientific research, managing field projects all over the world, and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policies, laws and best practice.

Environmental guidance Note for Disaster Risk Reduction

Healthy Ecosystems for Human Security



The designation of geographical entities in this book and the presentation of the material, do not imply the expression of an opinion whatsoever on the part of IUCN concerning the legal status of a country, territory, or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of IUCN.

Published by : IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

Copyright: 2009 International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

Reproduction of this publication for educational or other non-commercial purposes is authorized without prior permission from the copyright holder provided the source is fully acknowledged.

Reproduction of this publication for resale or other commercial purposes is prohibited without prior written permission of the copyright holder.

Citation: Sudmeier-Rieu, K. and N. Ash (2009) Environmental Guidance Note for Disaster Risk Reduction: Healthy Ecosystems for Human Security. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, iii + 34 pp.

ISBN: 978-2-8317-1164-5

Cover photos: Front: Flooded village of Godadha, Bangladesh 2008 @Reuters/A. Biraj, 2008 Back: Post-tropical storm Stan, Mexico 2005 @ M. Calvo, IUCN-ORMA, 2005

Layout by : 100 Watt, St-Martin-Bellevue, France

Printed by : Poligravaria Arts Graphiques, Lausanne, Switzerland.

Available from: IUCN Publications
rue Mauverney, 28
1196 Gland,
Switzerland
Tel. 0041 22 999 0000
Fax. 0041 22 999 0020
books@iucn.org
www.iucn.org/publications

A catalogue of IUCN publications is also available.

Printed on FSC paper.

This note was developed to provide guidance on the benefits of and ways to **integrate environmental concerns into disaster risk reduction strategies (DRR) at the local and national levels**. As recognised and outlined under the Hongo Framework for Action priority 4: Reduce the Underlying Risk Factors, healthy ecosystems and environmental management are considered key actions in DRR. Although the field of disaster risk management has evolved to recognise the need for addressing development issues for reducing risk, the environmental dimension has not to date received adequate attention and practical guidance.

The questions we would like to answer with this guidance note are:

- **What are healthy ecosystems and ecosystem management?**
- **How can we integrate these environmental considerations into DRR?**

The rise in number and intensity of man-made extreme hydro-meteorological events is increasingly recognised as being the result of global and regional climate change. More broadly and importantly, the underlying risk factors of disasters are increasing: more people are living in vulnerable areas, such as low-lying coastal areas, steep hillsides, flood plains, near cliffs, or in forested areas on the outskirts of cities – most often out of necessity, but sometimes out of choice. Environmental degradation is reducing the capacity of ecosystems to meet the needs of people for food and other products, and to protect them from hazards. The people affected by reoccurring disasters are often the most dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, and the appropriate management of ecosystems can play a critical role in their ability to prevent, cope with, and recover from disasters.

Investments in sustainable ecosystem management or sound environmental management can offer **ability ability et ()-e ability ability-ofority un ospeople gey(pee**

The benefits that people derive from ecosystems, or ecosystem services are often categorised into four types:

- **Supporting services:**

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), a five-year international assessment initiative, clearly demonstrated the strong and varied links between human well-being, human security, livelihoods, health and intangible benefits such as equality and freedom of choice, with ecosystem services. The MA also highlighted that ecosystem degradation is undermining this link due to a number of human activities, mainly:

- **over-exploitation of resources** or higher demand for ecosystem goods than can be sustained, such as overfishing;
- **land use and land cover changes,**

or changes to habitats due to conversion to croplands and urbanization;

- **climate change impacts** are affecting ecosystems and exacerbating environmental degradation;
- **invasive alien species** are introduced species that compete and encroach vigorously upon native species, with the potential to degrade ecosystem services and cause severe economic damage;
- **pollution**, from chemical waste and agricultural inputs has severely degraded many ecosystem services, and continues to act as a major driver of change.

(modified from Miththapala, 2008)

Ecosystem degradation and loss have led to serious impacts on human well-being: these include reduced availability of goods and services to local communities, increased spread of diseases and reduced economic opportunities. This, in turn, is leading to loss of livelihoods, and reduced food security (Miththapala, 2008.)

Healthy ecosystems both reduce vulnerability to hazards by supporting livelihoods, while acting as physical buffers to reduce the impact of hazard events. As such, this natural infrastructure is in many cases equally effective in reducing the impact of hazard events, and are often less expensive than human-built infrastructure. Disasters also hamper development goals, and therefore governments, donors and development organizations adopt a precautionary

Five reasons why ecosystems matter to disaster risk reduction:

- **Human well-being depends on ecosystems** that enable people to withstand, cope with, and recover from disasters. Disaster-resilient communities, especially in rural areas, are based on healthy ecosystems and diverse livelihoods;
- **Ecosystems, such as wetlands, forests, and coastal systems can provide cost-effective natural buffers** against hazard events and the impacts of climate change. According to the World Bank (2004), investments in preventive measures - including in maintaining healthy ecosystems is seven-fold more cost effective than the costs incurred by disasters;
- **There are clear links between resource degradation and disaster risk.** Degraded ecosystems are unable to provide the benefits that help communities to reduce their vulnerability to disasters. In addition, many disasters are caused by reoccurring conflicts, which are based on competition for scarce natural resources and once a conflict has started it can also lead to additional environmental degradation;
- **Healthy and diverse ecosystems are more robust to extreme weather events.** Disasters can affect biodiversity through the spread of invasive species, mass species mortality, loss of habitat and poorly designed post disaster clean-up efforts. This may have a negative impact on progress toward achieving the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Millennium Development Goals;
- **Ecosystem degradation reduces the ability of natural systems to sequester carbon,** exacerbating climate change impacted disasters.

BOX 3

An analysis of 141 countries in the period 1981 to 2002 found that 41% (2007).

Examples and values of protective ecosystem services:

Regulating flood waters

Wetlands and peatlands provide storage space for flood waters, and there is growing evidence that maintaining vegetation and associated soil structure in local watersheds regulates the flow of rain water into streams and rivers, although this service can be overwhelmed with large-scale rainfall and flooding events.

Sri Lanka's Mutturaja lagoon marsh is a coastal peat bog covering over 3,100 hectares and an important part of local flood control as the marsh buffers and regulates flood water discharge into the sea. The annual value of this service was estimated at more than \$US 5 million, or \$US 1,750 per hectare (Emerton and Bos, 2004). Riparian and coastal vegetation also stabilises shorelines and riverbanks. The costs of losing vegetation along riverbanks has been estimated at up to \$US 425 per meter of bank (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 2005).

Reducing landslides, avalanches and rockfalls

In addition to providing improved aesthetics over engineering structures, forests are estimated to save between \$US 2-3.5 billion per year in disaster damage (UNISDR, 2004). Switzerland, for example, long ago recognised the value of 'protection forests' in reducing damage from avalanches, landslides and rock falls, and forests are a key part of the country's disaster prevention plan (Stolten et al., 2008). Health forests are less likely to be invaded by pests, invasive alien species and destroyed by natural hazards, and provide numerous additional benefits such as the storage of carbon, and the opportunity for recreation, timber production and non-timber products.

Improving coastal management and flood risk reduction

Intact coastal ecosystems - in particular mature, stabilised sand dunes, coral reefs, lagoons, salt marshes, and mangroves - play an important role in reducing flood damage during coastal storms (UNEP-WCMC, 2006). Coastal ecosystems are particularly effective in particular in reducing damage, as nurseries habitat for fish and other marine species, provide food, building materials and medicines which support the needs of communities for both disaster risk reduction and development (Parker et al., 2008).

Drought, SimhuStorm and Fiegulation

Wildfires, land erosion, severe drought are expected to increase worldwide as a result of climate change (IPCC, 2007). (IPCC, 2007)

BOX 4

maintain soil structures, trap water and restore organic material, rendering soil more favorable to agricultural practices. Fire is a natural part of many ecosystems, and can enhance vegetation by controlling invasive plants and enhancing regenerative processes, especially in grazing lands. Where a reoccurring feature, fire is best managed

How can ecosystem management be integrated with disaster risk management?

Although disaster risk management, ecosystem management, development planning (and climate change adaptation) institutions each have their own specific set of stakeholders, goals and actions, a number of these are interrelated (see Figure 2). They each seek the overarching goal of sustainable development, human well-being and human security. Improved dialogue and specific coordinating mechanisms are being created between these spheres, although more effort is needed to achieve greater convergence. Likewise, conservation programmes can benefit from including risk and climate change considerations into project planning and monitoring. Below are examples of specific actions that can be taken to start bridging the gap between ecosystem-based management and disaster risk management.

Three previously separate institutional spheres need to converge to form new procedures for integrated disaster risk management. Ecosystem management becomes central to all aspects of disaster risk reduction, without which goals of

- **Conduct integrated risk assessments** (coupling physical risk, vulnerability and environmental assessments);
- **Implement ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation** that follow clear technical guidance and match local needs and priorities;
- **Incorporate environmental safeguards** into disaster emergency response plans, such as Rapid Environmental Assessments (see checklist below); (Modified from UNEP, 2009)

Engaging with stakeholders

Ecosystem management practices are the most successful when they involve communities as stakeholders and land stewards, such as community-managed marine protected areas, or community forest user groups. These environmental mechanisms can become especially relevant and effective for disaster risk reduction if they incorporate disaster risk assessments. To achieve this, there is a need to put into place mechanisms for consultations between environmental, planning and disaster management authorities. It is important to:

- **Build dialogues** and mechanisms for collaboration between environmental, planning and disaster risk management authorities and people affected by the decisions;
- **Include communities**, especially women, minorities, and people with disabilities in designing and implementing the above procedures.

Knowledge creation and exchanges

Capacity-building through awareness-raising, education and training are critical to changing attitudes and behaviors toward more sustainable environmental practices. As an example, ecosystem rehabilitation and restoration can be options in the aftermath of a disaster or to safeguard against new ones. However, successful ecosystem rehabilitation requires time, knowledge, resources and should be conducted in consultation with communities, appropriate technical advice, and based on local needs and priorities especially when natural restoration may be the most effective option.

designing and implementing community-based disaster risk reduction measures

5 years after the Indian Ocean tsunami - lessons learned from Sri Lanka

- Beach clean-up efforts led to the spread of invasive species, notably prickly pear (*Opuntia hirtella*);
- Dumping of debris from the cleanup into waterways and wetlands created pollution and drainage problems that hampered long-term recovery;
- Several transitional settlements were located in elephant pathways and near waterways, creating animal-human conflict and pollution of drinking water;
- In some instances, sand dunes and coral reefs that protected coastal communities from the tsunamis' full impact were used for building materials, thereby reducing coastal protection;
- Better coordination and information flow between environmental authorities, NGOs and disaster management authorities could have avoided several of these pitfalls;
- Women died and were affected in much larger numbers, likely due to restricted clothing and lack of swimming skills;
- Boats were improperly distributed post-tsunami, creating social tension and

- **Rehabilitate damaged ecosystems with native species and prevent the spread of invasive alien species;** these are non-native species that can invade habitats and agricultural land.
- Special provisions should be made for women, children and other vulnerable populations, according to Sphere Handbook charter⁵.
- **Rapid Environmental Assessments⁶** are useful to assessing the environmental situation post-disaster in a quick and low cost manner for more effective immediate and long-term recovery planning. (Modified from Miththapala 2008)

BOX 11

Key actions for ecosystem-based DRR:

Watersheds, forests and coastal zones are naturally linked – for example without adequate upstream forest cover, sedimentation can create severe downstream pollution and damage to coastal vegetation and coral reefs.

Watershed management

Watershed management is necessary for agricultural, environmental, and socioeconomic development. The physical and biological resources of watersheds provide goods and services to people, including water protection, attenuation of disasters by regulating runoff, protection of coastal resources and fisheries, protection of the environment and protection of productive lowlands. Watershed management programs need to build on existing environmental initiatives.

- When located in floodplains, structures should be built to withstand flood damage, to prevent floodwater contamination, and to avoid disruption to river courses, river banks and vegetation;
- Intensive agricultural activity should not be permitted on slopes greater than a specified percentage reflecting land stability;
- Clear cutting of forests should be limited with forest conservation and sustainable forest management prioritised;
- Institutional bodies, such as River Basin Organisations should be formally established to address land use conflicts, and staff trained in conflict-resolution;
- Public participation of both men and women should be increased in management decisions;
- Effective management plans and enforcement of environmental and zoning regulation are critical;
- Regional environmental impact assessments are needed to ensure that cumulative impacts of economic activities are sustainable.

⁵ www.abuhrc.org

⁶ (www.abuhrc.org)

Forest management

Forest management is required to balance demand for forest products with the ecological requirements of forests, while ensuring other key benefits for livelihoods, notably by stabilizing steep slopes and reducing soil erosion. Although listed separately here, forest management is often integrated into watershed management.

- **Protect and improve the forest environment through increased vegetation;**
- **Help alleviate poverty by generating income through increased tree cover and related activities;**
- **Increase forest resources;**
- **Establish community-driven economic activities based on forest plantation;**
- **Increase multiple uses for land; and**
- **Create popular awareness about sustainable forest management.**

Coastal zone management

Ecosystems such as coral reefs and coastal mangrove forests can adapt to change and recover from storms and floods and still provide services of protecting the coast and absorbing pollution. But once these ecosystems are put under pressure by coastal development, they may lose their resilience. Coastal zone management strategies being considered in the Asia-Pacific region after the 2004 tsunami highlighted the continuum of inland areas, coasts, and oceans. Below are some key entry points.

- **Replant coastal forests and restoration of mangroves, which have been taken up as a part of the environmental recovery process.**
- **Restore and maintain the health of the coral reefs and seagrass beds.**
- **Maintain and/or develop mangrove belts as buffer zones for coasts and coral reefs.**
- **Protect wetlands and watersheds to minimize sedimentation.**

(Modified from DEWGA, 2008)



An island village, Fiji

Protective Effects of Coastal Vegetation during the 2004 Tsunami in Sri Lanka

The tsunami in December 2004 hit large parts of the Sri Lankan coastline. In addition to more than 30,000 fatalities the waves also affected valuable coastal ecosystems such as lagoons, mangroves, and salt marshes. To check the hypothesis that coastal vegetation saved lives by reducing the energy of the waves, a survey was carried out in Balapitiya, a densely populated town at the southeastern Sri Lankan coast. In the hinterland



- 2.7 National resources-related policies and environmental legislation (forestry plans, integrated coastal zoning management plans etc) include and implement risk assessments
- 2.8 National Sustainable Development Strategies include and implement risk assessments
- 2.9 Public and private infrastructure investments that include enforceable EIAs and risk assessments
- 2.10 Financial incentives in the form of tax rebates, subsidies, and other monetary and non-monetary rewards are for investments in ecosystem restoration and sustainable environmental management that emphasize ecosystems as part of disaster risk planning.

3. Ecosystem-based management and DRR

Risk assessments are integrated into:

3.1

6.5.4 Coverage of live coral reef ecosystems

6.5.5 Area of healthy mangroves as buffer zones as measured by area, density and depth

7. Threats to ecosystems are monitored

7.1 Climate change impacts

7.2 Conversion of ecosystems for urbanization and agriculture

7.3 Fragmentation of habitats

7.4 Slash and burn agriculture

7.5 Over harvesting of forest products

7.6 Desertification

7.7 Industrial logging/ illegal logging

7.8 Overgrazing/ cattle ranching

7.9 Invasive Alien Species

7.10 Soil erosion

7.11 Eutrophication: overuse of fertilizers

Sources:

U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development (2007)

Cardona, Inter-American Development Bank, (2005)

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005)

Convention on Biological Diversity

Environmental Vulnerability Index (2004)

Increasing numbers of extreme events causing casualties and affecting populations are weather and climate-related. However, climate change, although often cited as the culprit of rising numbers of disasters, is one of several factors increasing disaster vulnerability and environmental degradation.

The risk of suffering from a particular disaster depends on the size and frequency of the hazard event but even more on the vulnerability of people, often linked to environmental degradation and governance issues. Disasters are not caused by extreme events themselves, but occur when a society's capacity to cope with an extreme event is overwhelmed or mismanaged. For these reasons, the terms 'natural disaster' and 'natural hazard' have increasingly become misnomers (Heitt, 1997; Wisner et al., 2004; Abramovitch et al., 2002).

Unfortunately, available economic statistics on disasters do not reflect lost agricultural land and livelihoods in developing countries. The more common and chronic disasters - shallow landslides, recurring flooding, rising sea levels, drought, and impacts of invasive species - impose the greatest costs on poor populations, and yet are not mirrored in official statistics on disasters. These small, cumulative disasters are most often those grounded in land use and pressure on natural resources, and are therefore often the most avoidable through appropriate ecosystem management.

Even if the number and frequency of extreme events increases, the magnitude of disasters can be reduced through adopting integrated approaches that combine development processes, disaster risk reduction measures, and ecosystem management. Combining

International environmental frameworks, conventions and agreements relevant to DRR Risk Management Indicators

UNESCO World Heritage Convention (Paris, 1972)

Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
Established **by parties to protect cultural heritage and natural heritage, from damage and destruction**, including those caused by disasters.

Agenda 21 (1992)

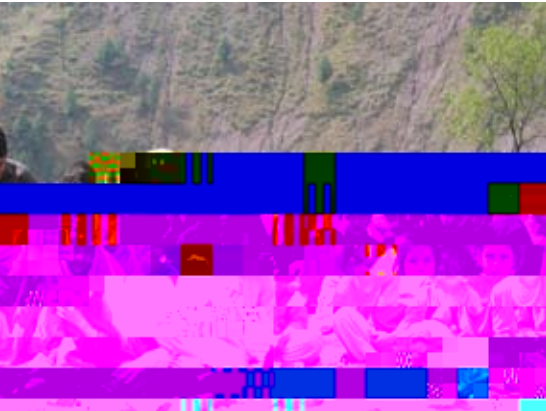
Adopted by 168 countries in 1992, establishes sustainable development as a main policy goal. Especially relevant to disaster risk reduction is Chapter 7: Promoting Sustainable Human Settlement Development, which refers to developing a **culture of safety** in all **countries, especially those that are disaster-prone** (paragraph 7.60).

Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) (COP 6, the Hague, the Netherlands, 2002)

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has been ratified by 190 Parties. In decision VI/26 (2002), the COP adopted the Strategic Plan for the CBD. This so-called 2010 Biodiversity Target was subsequently endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit. The Summit also highlighted the essential role of biodiversity in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and the 2010 Biodiversity Target has been incorporated into the MDGs. Of relevance here is the focal area within the 2010 target of: **maintaining ecosystem integrity, and the provision of goods and services provided by biodiversity in ecosystems, in support of human well-being.**

Convention to Combat Desertification (1994)

Relating specifically to drought, Part II of the Convention (on General provisions), paragraph 2, states that: In pursuing the objective of this Convention, the Parties shall:
(d) promote cooperation among affected countries Parties in the fields of



3Áz²; OÙÁgof||@Á||Yqz ÚÚot i O'zà O'Ùzø²



INTERNATIONAL UNION
FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE

WORLD HEADQUARTERS
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland, Switzerland
mail@iucn.org
Tel +41 22 999 0000
Fax +41 22 999 0002
www.iucn.org/ecosystems
ecosystems@iucn.org

