INEE Thematic Brief: Disaster Reduction

Definitions

Those causes that human beings have least control over have often been referred to as *natural hazards*, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis. However, we now know that many hydro-meteorological hazards, such as wind, and rain, are impacted by human behaviour as well – teaching us that *environmental stewardship* is of great importance to disaster reduction. The physical and social elements that human beings have had most control over are referred to as *risks*. These can be reduced through the systematic application of both expert and local knowledge, for example through constructing buildings to withstand ground-shaking, wind, and even flooding. Underlying social factors such as poverty, lack of education and safe sites for living, discrimination and marginalisation are often referred to as *vulnerabilities*. As societies reduce risks and vulnerabilities, they develop *resilience,* meaning the ability to bounce back quickly from all kinds of hazard impacts.

Disaster reduction (or disaster risk reduction) refers to systematic efforts to understand and reduce exposure to hazards, reduce physical and social vulnerability, and improve preparedness, coping and resilience. To the extent that we have not yet succeeded fully in risk reduction, response *preparedness* skills and provisions are also important.

Disaster Reduction as a Thematic Issue

Disaster impacts can include deaths, injuries, and the destruction of property, environment, livelihoods, community and cultural heritage. When it comes to the education sector, disasters threaten educational continuity and the safety and security of children. The goals of disaster reduction in the education sector are therefore to plan for educational continuity and child protection and to strengthen education for disaster prevention.

When in comes to education, disasters can have the following impacts:

- **Physical impacts on students and personnel** occur when students and education personnel are exposed to fatal or serious injury and disability in unsafe schools that are built in harm's way, or not built to withstand expected and recurring natural hazards.

- **Physical impacts on school facilities** occur when schools are damaged beyond repair, are unsafe, or even when they are out-of-use regularly due to flood, cold or heat, affecting educational continuity.

- **Economic impacts on school enrolment** occur when parents' loss of income or housing means parents cannot afford the direct costs of schooling, or require the children to take on new livelihood responsibilities, causing disruption to education. Furthermore, schools that are unsafe or damaged beyond repair require a level of reinvestment many times higher than the initial small incremental cost of building safely.

- **Educational impacts on students** occur where there are no plans for alternative locations and no contingency plans for educational continuity. Schools may be closed or quality of education may suffer due to lack of administration or staff, resulting in a loss of valuable instructional time. Destruction of school or identity records can prevent

appropriate credit, matriculation, and education continuity.

- **Psychosocial impacts on students and staff** are most severe when school communities lack the vital knowledge of the hazards they face and how to reduce their vulnerability and risks, and are not empowered to be part of the solution. Lack of prior empowerment can leave school communities ill-prepared to delivery psychological support and make it impossible for some children to re-focus on their studies.

Disaster–resilient education and safe schools are within reach. It requires cooperative efforts to assess local risks, and leadership to systematically reduce these risks and to assure that natural hazards do not exclude children from school.

Addressing the Thematic Issues in the INEE Minimum Standards

The INEE minimum standards addresses the following five key areas of concern to disaster prevention in the education sector: creating safe learning environments with safe location, construction and retrofit; maintaining safe learning environments with school disaster management; protecting educational access with continuity planning; teaching and learning disaster prevention and preparedness; and building a culture of safety. Examples of how these areas of concern are mainstreamed throughout the INEE Minimum Standards Handbook include the following:

- **Foundational Standards** emphasise that the planning of education can only be based on a clear understanding of all hazards to which the population is exposed and their awareness of and resilience to these hazards. Furthermore, the category stresses that local education action plans be created building on local knowledge and resources, and must focus on educational continuity, ensuring safe learning environments, creating relevant curriculum to prevent repeated risk exposure, and developing response capacity.

- **Access and Learning Environment** stresses that temporary and permanent school facilities must be located, designed, constructed, maintained and retrofitted, using international and/or local building codes for schools, in order to be resilient to all possible hazards. Furthermore, the category emphasises the need to develop and practice school disaster management or safety plans and drills, with school administrators, staff, students and parents.

- **Teaching and Learning** encourages the inclusion of hazard awareness, disaster risk reduction, and response-preparedness knowledge and skills in the training of teachers and within curricula in order to minimise and prevent the impact of future disasters.

- **Teachers and Other Education Personnel** states the need for teachers and other education personnel to receive training and support in disaster risk management and the maintenance of school safety.

- **Education Policy** underscores the need to focus on educational continuity and recovery within national education plans, and stresses the need to develop and implement policies prioritising safe school sites and facilities.

Additional Guidance

To learn about guiding principles and general steps on developing a plan for constructing and retrofitting disaster-resilient schools, read the **Guidance Notes on Safer School Construction** (2009), developed by INEE and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) at the World Bank. The full text in various languages can be found here: http://www.ineesite.org/index.php/post/safer_school_construction_initiative