



The risk of dying in a flood or tropical cyclone in the Pacific region is today only a third of what it was in 1990 says a United Nations report titled *Revealing Risk, Redefining Development*. This 2011 edition of the *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR11)* will be launched in Auckland (New Zealand) on 3 August at the Third Session of the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management.

The Pacific Platform is the region's foremost gathering of over 200 national and regional disaster risk management stakeholders. Officials from 22 Pacific island countries and territories will meet with experts to address concerns relating to reducing the risks of disasters and the impact of climate change affecting regional development.

A major objective of the platform is to endorse a "roadmap" for development of a regional policy framework for disaster risk management and climate change adaptation.

The GAR11 shows that globally mortality risk associated with weather-related disasters has decreased. This trend is mainly due to improved preparedness and response capacities in the Asia and Pacific region. Disaster related economic losses, however, are increasing across the globe, critically threatening the economies particularly of small island development states, also in the Pacific region, and even outstripping wealth creation across many of the world's richer nations. The absolute value of global GDP exposed to tropical cyclones tripled from US\$525.7 billion in the 1970s to US\$1.6 trillion in the 2000s.

Small Island Development States and Land Locked Development Countries together comprise about two thirds of the countries with very high economic vulnerability to disasters. They also comprise about two thirds of all countries with extreme limitations to benefit from international trade. In the case of small islands, economic development may be set back by decades due to disaster impacts. Countries with small and vulnerable economies have the highest ratio of economic loss to capital stock and often have very low national savings, which constrains their capacity to absorb impacts and recover. In contrast, the impact of major disasters on high-income countries such as the USA is imperceptible, even with huge economic losses such

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as the US\$ 125 billion lost in Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The floods in Australia and the devastating earthquake that hit Christchurch, New Zealand in early 2011 show how the economies and populations of developed countries are becoming more exposed. The recent events in Japan point to new and multi-dimensional risks that need to be anticipated.

While global climate change is an additional driver for many of these events, they also expose unresolved development problems that governments could and should address. Where countries proactively address disaster risk, they can achieve astonishing results. The massive earthquake that hit Christchurch, New Zealand, on 3 September 2010 destroyed only 500 buildings and no lives were lost, while an estimated 154 people were killed by another earthquake in the same city on 22 February 2011. The relatively low casualty rate in both events reflects tough building regulations, strict enforcement, and experience in managing earthquakes.

In light of the economic scenario currently affecting all regions, governments now need to decide how they can tip the balance so that the scale of public investment no longer dwarfs necessary investment in disaster risk reduction. They must also decide now on how much risk they are willing to retain and how much they can afford to transfer through insurance and similar instruments.

There is a growing momentum around disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptations among governments of high risk nations, including in the Pacific. The Kingdom of Tonga, for example, has stepped up to the challenges ahead by endorsing the world's first National Action Plan that integrates Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation placing both at the centre of national development planning.

"This Global Assessment Report shows us, without a doubt, that risks are accumulating in all economies. We ignore it, literally, at our peril. This report only confirms what we already suspected and I think we're beginning to realize that it is time to band together and take the action necessary to stem the widespread economic and developmental losses we are witnessing," says Andrew Maskrey, coordinator of the report. The report also points to drought risk as mainly the product of economic decisions and social choices.

The report also gives a revealing overview of trends and patterns in disaster risk globally and regionally drawing on inputs from almost 100 governments and regional inter-governmental organizations about their progress in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action. Importantly, the report showcases many examples of countries that have succeeded in managing their risks and provides concrete guidance to governments on how to reduce disaster risk through immediate steps and in the long-term.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon launched GAR11 globally on 10 May at the Third Session of the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction held from 8-13 May 2011 in Geneva, Switzerland. Since its global launch, the GAR has also been rolled out in 23 cities: Bangkok (Barbados), Beirut (Lebanon), Bridgetown (Barbados), Brussels (Belgium), Cairo

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(Egypt), Canberra (Australia), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Hanoi (Viet Nam), Incheon (Republic of Korea), Jakarta (Indonesia), Kuwait City (Kuwait), London (United Kingdom), Manila (Philippines), Miami (United States), Nairobi (Kenya), New York (United States), Oslo (Norway), Panama City (Panama), Rouseau (Dominica), San Salvador (El Salvador), Tokyo (Japan), and Washington D.C. (United States).

Source: UNISDR