

## **Possible development of an Intergovernmental Platform for the Assessment of Disaster Risk – a scoping study**

### **Introduction**

At the 30<sup>th</sup> ICSU General Assembly (Rome, September 2011), the delegation of the International Union for Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG) submitted a resolution calling for ICSU's involvement and support, through the IRDR programme, for the setting-up of an Intergovernmental Platform on Disaster Risk similar in nature to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The draft resolution was declared non-receivable from a procedural standpoint. IUGG expressed its disappointment, since it felt that this was an urgent issue that could not wait until the next General Assembly. There was some discussion on the receivability of the resolution, a motion from the floor, duly seconded, to receive it, and a brief presentation on the subject by IUGG. Finally, a suggestion by the Chair that the substance of the resolution proposed by IUGG be referred to the ICSU Executive Board was accepted by the Assembly.

The ICSU Executive Board duly discussed the issue at its 107<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup> Meetings. At the latter meeting, it decided to invite the Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR) Scientific Committee (SC), working with the ICSU GeoUnions, to discuss with concerned ICSU Members and relevant United Nations (UN) bodies the need for an Intergovernmental Platform on Disaster Risk. It requested that a scoping paper be developed. The result of this brief exercise is presented below.

### **Background**

There are many international and intergovernmental bodies dealing with natural hazards and disaster risk reduction, but they are not well integrated, nor are they always aware of current scientific knowledge or best practices. Linking such programmes through an Intergovernmental Platform on Disaster Risk would achieve two main goals: first, it could provide a state-of-the-art assessment of scientific knowledge on disaster risk; second, it could help inform policy-makers and practitioners alike on disaster risk reduction opportunities, constraints, or gaps in understanding. The scope of an Intergovernmental Platform on Risk should "mimic" the scope of other assessment panels such as the IPCC and address a central question: what do nations/governments need to do to reduce the impact of natural hazards on society, environment and the economy? The work of such a Platform should be based on the assessment of scientific knowledge, data, information and methods of assessment designed to support the decision-making processes at all levels: local, national and international. Biennial reports would therefore need to be published that highlight the changing situations in individual countries, in a region and globally with respect to potential disasters.

## Developments within IRDR

At the fourth meeting of the IRDR Scientific Committee in November 2010 the proposal to develop some kind of global assessment mechanism was first introduced and discussed. By the following IRDR SC meeting in April 2011 an outline and basic requirements had been drawn up for an initiative that became known as the IRDR Assessment of Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (or AIRDR) project. Since then, a full work plan and budget have been developed for the project. AIRDR is being designed to bring about the first critical and systematic global assessment of integrated research on disaster risk, and will provide a scientific basis for the post-Hyogo Framework discussions foreseen for 2015.

The goals of AIRDR are to:

- provide a baseline of the current state of the science on integrated research on disaster risk against which to measure the effectiveness of multiple programmes;
- identify and support a longer-term science agenda for the research community and funding entities;
- create a mechanism for substantiating advances in the scientific evidentiary basis for supporting policy and practice.

The most important outcomes of AIRDR are to be a published report on Assessment of Integrated Research on Disaster Risk, with broad dissemination to the research, practitioner and policy communities; and a long-term scientific research agenda developed as a reference point for scientific input and financial investment in IRDR research.

Additional outcomes to be generated by AIRDR include:

- an AIRDR forum as a component of IRDR scientific conferences to engage the international scientific research community in developing new integrated research;
- stimulation of integrated research on disaster risk at national, regional and global levels;
- an understanding of the institutional and organizational barriers in different regions and countries that inhibit policy-relevant integrated disaster research, and of the opportunities for reducing such constraints;
- education and engagement of the next generation of researchers and practitioners as part of the AIRDR development process.

The two years' preparatory work for the AIRDR project have served to underline its potentially large and ambitious character: an undertaking that cannot be carried out in isolation with existing limited human capital and financial resources. An intergovernmental process with a longer trajectory and greater engagement from the global scientific enterprise would be needed to provide scientifically sound advice to governments on disaster risk reduction activities and their increased effectiveness.

## **IUGG/ICSU and IRDR Joint Efforts**

Throughout 2010-2011 the ENHANS (Extreme Natural Hazards and Societal Implications; [www.enhans.org](http://www.enhans.org)) project headed by IUGG and involving several ICSU GeoUnion Members, GOOS, IRDR and the AGU, conducted a series of workshops that placed special emphasis on the importance of research on extreme natural hazards and disaster risk mitigation in the most vulnerable regions of the world. The project partners approved a declaration (<http://www.enhans.org/about/Declaration.pdf>) that called for the establishment of an intergovernmental body to undertake an assessment of hazard-related, policy-relevant research.

In 2011 initial conversations were held with UNESCO by both IUGG and IRDR on separate occasions. UNESCO expressed interest in such an initiative. It was noted by UNESCO that in order to succeed the project would need the strong support of at least several UN Member States.

Following the invitation of the Executive Board to IRDR to take forward discussion of the substance of the IUGG draft resolution submitted to the 30<sup>th</sup> ICSU General Assembly, the IRDR Scientific Committee examined the issue at its seventh meeting on 11 May 2012. Several members of the IRDR SC felt that an Intergovernmental Platform on Disaster Risk could serve as an important interface between the scientific community and policymakers. However, the Committee noted that the IUGG proposal was very similar in substance to IRDR's own AIRDR project. It was also recognized that the establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel would be, of necessity, long and complicated, require one or more UN Member States as active champion(s), and an appropriate UN specialized agency or body as a suitable political channel. It was also acknowledged that the cost of an Intergovernmental Panel would be significantly more expensive than the AIRDR project as initially proposed.

### **Current activities**

In 2013, IUGG and IRDR both met once more, separately, with UNESCO. Despite senior staff changes, UNESCO continues to support the basic idea. Members of the UNESCO Secretariat have spoken with the representatives of several of its Member States, who have expressed interest, but none has agreed to commit to support such an initiative.

The IRDR programme continues to seek financial support for the AIRDR initiative. The IRDR SC believes that AIRDR would serve as a solid base feeding into the work of an Intergovernmental Platform, but that, due to the lower costs involved, it may prove more appealing to would-be funders. AIRDR has been included, in an abbreviated form, in a proposal that IRDR has submitted to UNISDR in support of the development of the latter's *Global Assessment Report (GAR) 2015*. Additionally, Prof. Susan Cutter, IRDR SC Vice-Chair and co-Chair of the AIRDR project, has begun assessments of English-language research literature.

## Recommendations and challenges

### Recommendations

At the conclusion of the brief scoping exercise, it is recommended that the following actions be taken:

1. That a “champion” or multiple “champions” be found amongst national governments to support the creation Intergovernmental Platform prior to 2015. ICSU’s relationship with the Belmont Forum, National Members, Unions and UN specialized agencies must be leveraged for this to be a success.
2. Essential to be included in and support by the HFA2. IRDR’s relationship with UNISDR, IRDR National Committees (especially Japan as they are hosting the HFA2 negotiations) must be leveraged to ensure the inclusion.
3. Support for the AIRDR project identified with the help of ICSU and the Unions. This project could form the baseline for any Intergovernmental Platform.
4. That any process established might have IRDR as its principal actor.

### Challenges

There are several key challenges the project faces:

1. It is essential for the creation and success of any Intergovernmental Platform for the Assessment of Disaster Risk that individual governments support it both politically and financially.
2. The concept of an Intergovernmental Platform must be included as part of the post-Hyogo Framework for Action agenda, as well as the new Sustainable Development Goals agenda for 2015. If it is not included in these global initiatives it will be difficult to get started.
3. There is a continuing lack of awareness and support from key funding agencies on issues relating science to disaster risk reduction.

An Intergovernmental Platform would match with the IRDR goals. However, IRDR does not have strong intergovernmental support at present and there has been a tendency to shift the IRDR focus into new knowledge generation and out of advocacy and awareness. The formation of an Intergovernmental Platform would tend to support all aspects of the IRDR mandate – advocacy, awareness, and knowledge generation.