Enhancing Disaster Resilience in the Arab States: A Strategic Framework for the UNDRR Deputy Chief of Regional Office

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Introduction: The Imperative for Strengthened Regional Disaster Risk Reduction

The Arab States region faces a complex and evolving landscape of disaster risks, exacerbated by climate change, rapid urbanization, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. The role of the Deputy Chief of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS) is pivotal in steering efforts towards building resilience and achieving the goals of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. This publication outlines a strategic vision, informed by an analysis of regional challenges and global best practices, to enhance disaster resilience across the Arab States. It draws upon key UNDRR frameworks, regional assessments, and proposes actionable strategies for effective leadership in this critical domain.

The Deputy Chief will be instrumental in providing strategic guidance, fostering regional cooperation, supporting national DRR efforts, and ensuring the effective implementation of UNDRR's mandate. This requires a deep understanding of the regional risk context, strong leadership in programme management, and the ability to forge partnerships across diverse stakeholders. This document aims to provide a foundational analysis and a forward-looking plan to support these objectives.

The Sendai Framework: A Guiding Light for Regional Action

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 provides the overarching global strategy for reducing disaster risk and losses. Its seven global targets and four priorities for action offer a clear roadmap for countries and regional organizations. For the Arab States, the effective implementation of the Sendai Framework is paramount to building resilience against a multitude of hazards.

Scope and Purpose of the Sendai Framework

The Sendai Framework applies to the risk of small-scale and large-scale, frequent and infrequent, sudden and slow-onset disasters. These can be caused by natural or man-made hazards, as well as related environmental, technological, and biological hazards and risks. The framework aims to guide multi-hazard disaster risk management in development at all levels and across all sectors.

Expected Outcome

The primary outcome is the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods, and health. This also includes reducing losses in economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets of individuals, businesses, communities, and countries.

Goal

The goal is to prevent new disaster risks and reduce existing ones. This is to be achieved through the implementation of integrated and inclusive measures—economic, structural, legal, social, health, cultural, educational, environmental, technological, political, and institutional. These measures aim to prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disasters, increase preparedness for response and recovery, and thereby strengthen resilience.

Global Targets (to be achieved by 2030, compared to 2005-2015 baseline unless otherwise stated)

- **Target A:** Substantially reduce global disaster mortality, aiming to lower the average per 100,000 global mortality rate between 2020-2030.
- **Target B:** Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally, aiming to lower the average global figure per 100,000 between 2020-2030.
- **Target C:** Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP).
- **Target D:** Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, including health and educational facilities, by developing their resilience by 2030.
- **Target E:** Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.
- **Target F:** Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementing the framework by 2030.

- **Target G:** Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments for people by 2030.

Priorities for Action

Focused action is needed across sectors by States at local, national, regional, and global levels in four priority areas:

1. **Priority 1: Understanding disaster risk.** Disaster risk management must be based on a comprehensive understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions: vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets, hazard characteristics, and the environment.
2. **Priority 2: Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk.** Effective disaster risk governance at national, regional, and global levels is crucial for managing disaster risk reduction across all sectors. It ensures the coherence of national and local laws, regulations, and public policies, defining roles and responsibilities to guide and incentivize public and private sector action.
3. **Priority 3: Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience.** Public and private investment in disaster risk prevention and reduction through structural and non-structural measures is essential. This enhances the economic, social, health, and cultural resilience of individuals, communities, countries, and their assets, as well as the environment. Such measures are cost-effective, save lives, prevent and reduce losses, and ensure effective recovery and rehabilitation.
4. **Priority 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.** Experience shows that disaster preparedness must be strengthened for a more effective response, ensuring capacities are in place for efficient recovery. The recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction phase, which needs to be prepared for in advance, is an opportunity to "Build Back Better" by integrating disaster risk reduction measures. Women and persons with disabilities should publicly lead and promote gender-equitable and universally accessible approaches during these phases.

Guiding Principles for Implementation in the Arab States

The UNDRR ROAS, under the leadership of the Deputy Chief, should champion the guiding principles of the Sendai Framework, adapting them to the regional context. This includes emphasizing the primary responsibility of States while fostering all-of-society engagement, ensuring inclusive and risk-informed decision-making, promoting coherence between DRR and sustainable development, and advocating for cost-effective investments in prevention and resilience.

Understanding the Disaster Risk Landscape in the Arab States

A comprehensive understanding of the specific disaster risks faced by the Arab States is crucial for effective regional DRR strategies. The UNDRR Regional Assessment Report (RAR) for the Arab States provides critical insights into this landscape.

Key Insights from the Regional Assessment Report (RAR) for Arab States

- **Evolving Risk Profile:** The region is witnessing an increasing complexity and interaction of human, economic, political, and natural systems, leading to more pronounced systemic risks. The traditional hazard-by-hazard approach to risk reduction is no longer sufficient.
- **Shift to Disaster Risk Management (DRM):** While progress has been made, the Arab region has generally lagged in the paradigm shift from reactive disaster management to proactive disaster risk management. This includes a balanced portfolio of prospective (preventing new risks), corrective (reducing existing risks), and compensatory (financial preparedness for recovery) risk management strategies.
- **Data and Assessment Gaps:** While knowledge of hazard frequency and severity has improved, comprehensive probabilistic risk assessments, yielding tools like loss exceedance curves, are not yet widely implemented across the region. This hinders the prioritization of DRR efforts and the understanding of potential cascading impacts.
- **Systemic Risks and Development:** Disasters are increasingly recognized as development failures. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, highlighted the region's vulnerability to systemic shocks, pushing millions into poverty and food insecurity. Risk-informed development is therefore essential for protecting development gains.

Prominent Hazards and Vulnerabilities in the Arab States

Hydrometeorological and Climatic Hazards:

- **Floods:** Despite relatively lower overall population exposure to high flood hazards in the Middle East, the concentration of populations and assets in vulnerable areas makes floods a significant threat. Urban expansion has exacerbated flash flood

risks. The 2009 Jeddah flooding, causing approximately 150 fatalities and affecting over 8,000 homes, serves as a stark reminder.

- **Tropical Cyclones:** Countries like Oman, Yemen, Somalia, and Djibouti are susceptible to cyclones originating in the North Indian Ocean. Cyclone Gonu (2007) in Oman affected 20,000 people and caused over USD 4 billion in losses. Cyclone Sagar (2018) led to significant economic damage and displacement in Somalia.
- **Droughts:** Droughts have had the largest cumulative impact in the region over the past 50 years in terms of mortality, affected populations, and economic losses. Countries like Iraq, Morocco, Syria, and Jordan have seen significant impacts on agriculture and livelihoods. Between 1900 and 2011, 28 major drought events affected 44 million people in the region.
- **Sand and Dust Storms:** These phenomena, driven by arid conditions and anthropogenic factors, cause damage to infrastructure, agriculture, and public health.
- **Wildfires:** Mediterranean countries in the region, such as Lebanon, face increasing wildfire risks.
- **Small Island Developing States (SIDS):** The Comoros and Bahrain face acute vulnerabilities to climate change impacts, including sea-level rise and intensified storms, with limited adaptive capacity.

Geological Hazards:

- **Earthquakes:** A significant portion of the Arab population (over 30%) resides in areas with medium to high earthquake hazards. Major urban centers in the Maghreb and Mashreq regions are located near active seismic zones, with a history of destructive earthquakes in countries like Algeria and Egypt.
- **Landslides and Tsunamis:** These also pose threats to specific areas within the region.

(Statistics and case studies are primarily drawn from the UNDRR Regional Assessment Report for the Arab States, Chapter 1.)

Infographic: Key Disaster Statistics in the Arab States (Placeholder)

[An infographic should be developed here to visually represent key statistics such as: Percentage of population exposed to specific hazards (floods, earthquakes, droughts); Economic losses from major disasters (e.g., Cyclone Gonu, Jeddah floods); Number of people affected by droughts over a specific period; Trends in disaster frequency/ intensity if available. This would require sourcing specific numerical data points and designing a clear visual representation.]

Strategic Priorities and Proposed Solutions for Enhanced Regional Resilience

Based on the regional risk assessment and the Sendai Framework priorities, the UNDRR ROAS, under the guidance of the Deputy Chief, should focus on the following strategic areas and implement targeted solutions:

1. Strengthening Risk Knowledge and Understanding:

- **Action:** Promote and support national and sub-regional multi-hazard risk assessments, incorporating climate change projections and socio-economic vulnerabilities. This includes advocating for the development of national disaster loss databases (DesInventar Sendai) and ensuring data is disaggregated by gender, age, disability, and other relevant factors.
- **Solution:** Launch a regional initiative to build capacity in probabilistic risk modeling and systemic risk analysis, partnering with academic institutions and technical organizations. Develop standardized methodologies and tools for risk assessment tailored to the Arab States context.
- **Infographic Idea:** A map of the Arab States highlighting areas with high exposure to multiple hazards, overlaid with data on vulnerable populations or critical infrastructure.

2. Enhancing Disaster Risk Governance:

- **Action:** Support countries in developing and implementing national and local DRR strategies aligned with the Sendai Framework. Facilitate policy coherence between DRR, climate change adaptation, and sustainable development agendas.
- **Solution:** Establish a regional platform for sharing best practices in DRR governance, including legislative frameworks, institutional coordination mechanisms, and public-private partnerships. Provide technical assistance for integrating DRR into national development plans and budgets.
- **Case Study Integration:** Highlight successful examples of national DRR strategy development or implementation from within the Arab States or other comparable regions.

3. Investing in Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience:

- **Action:** Advocate for increased public and private investment in risk reduction measures, including resilient infrastructure, ecosystem-based solutions, and social protection mechanisms.
- **Solution:** Develop and disseminate investment guidelines and tools for DRR, showcasing the economic and social benefits of preventive action. Facilitate access

to climate finance and other funding mechanisms for DRR projects in the region. Promote innovative financing solutions, such as catastrophe bonds or resilience bonds, where appropriate.

4. Improving Disaster Preparedness, Response, and "Build Back Better":

- **Action:** Strengthen regional and national capacities for early warning, emergency preparedness, response, and post-disaster recovery, with a focus on "Building Back Better" principles.
- **Solution:** Support the establishment and enhancement of multi-hazard early warning systems across the region, ensuring they are people-centered and reach the most vulnerable. Promote pre-disaster recovery planning and the integration of DRR measures into reconstruction efforts. Facilitate regional exercises and simulations to test preparedness and response capabilities.
- **Infographic Idea:** A flowchart illustrating an effective multi-hazard early warning system, from hazard detection to community action, emphasizing inclusivity.

5. Fostering Regional Cooperation and Partnerships:

- **Action:** Strengthen collaboration among Arab States, regional organizations (e.g., League of Arab States, Gulf Cooperation Council), UN agencies, civil society, academia, and the private sector on DRR.
- **Solution:** Organize regular regional platforms and thematic workshops to facilitate knowledge exchange, joint programming, and coordinated action. Support the development of regional DRR frameworks and mutual assistance mechanisms.

Conclusion: A Resilient Future for the Arab States through Collaborative Action

The challenges posed by disasters in the Arab States are significant, but not insurmountable. Through strategic leadership, robust partnerships, and a steadfast commitment to the principles of the Sendai Framework, the UNDRR Regional Office for Arab States can play a transformative role in building a more resilient future for all. As Deputy Chief, AHMED OSMAN, with a clear vision and a proactive approach, can significantly contribute to reducing disaster losses, protecting development gains, and ensuring that the region is better prepared to face the uncertainties of tomorrow. This requires a continuous effort to understand risk, strengthen governance, invest wisely in resilience, and enhance preparedness, all underpinned by strong regional and international cooperation.

References

- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (Date of RAR Chapter 1, if available, otherwise use general UNDRR citation). Regional Assessment Report for the Arab States, Chapter 1: Overview of disaster risk in the Arab region. [Link to PDF if available, otherwise general UNDRR source]
- PreventionWeb. Sendai Framework at a Glance. https://www.preventionweb.net/sendai-framework/sendai-framework-at-a-glance
- (Other specific sources used for statistics or case studies should be listed here)