



SAUDI ARABIA

Activities in Disaster Preparedness

Disaster Context

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies 2.24 million square kilometres in the Arabian Peninsula. Its topography consists of deserts, plateaux, and mountains, with an overall desert-oriented feature.

In a period of about three decades, the government has invested its large oil revenues into extensive and rapid infrastructure development and expansion. To diversify the national economy, huge industrial complexes and industrial infrastructures were established, and domestic and foreign investments have been highly encouraged.

During the development expansion, the government has recognised the imperative to integrate disaster management and mitigation into the development processes. Also, the government has realised that responses to relief and emergency situations are no longer viewed as charitable acts. In the mid-1980s, the General Directorate of Civil Defence in the Ministry of Interior was designated as the sole institution responsible for disaster- and emergency relief related activities.

The country is vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters. This is in part due to a lack of technical capabilities, outdated disaster mitigation plans, unsafe clustering of industrial complexes, the heavy traffic of oil tankers in the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea, the threat of terrorism, and an absence of disaster-related databases and early warning systems.

This vulnerability has been demonstrated during several recent events. During the Gulf War of 1991, the explosion of the oil wells in Kuwait and oil spills in neighbouring territories threatened Saudi Arabia. All affected countries consolidated their resources and took measures to recruit specialised foreign firms and expertise to control the spills and rehabilitate the damage.

Floods sometimes occur in some valleys after heavy rains and impacts are relatively limited. The country experiences frequent sand and dust storms but with no major losses of lives or to properties.

Project Title

Not applicable at this time.

Sectors

- Capacity-building
- Infrastructure development
- Disaster preparedness

Funding

UNDP contributed \$50,000 from TRAC 1.1.3 funds for preparedness of crisis management.

Partners

- UNDP and UN country team
- Ministry of the Interior

Programme Activities

The General Directorate of Civil Defence was only recently designated as the major government institution responsible for overall disaster-related management, planning, policy formulation and implementation. Since that time, the General Directorate has been able to institutionalise its new responsibilities into its organisational and operational structures. In spite of this, it has not yet reached a desirable technical level nor has it established essential facilities.

In 1990, the General Directorate sought UNDP technical support. A preparatory assistance project was formulated and expected to lead to a subsequent larger project. The Gulf War delayed the project's implementation until late 1991. This technical support yielded the provision of several advisory missions.

UNDP initiated two follow-up efforts, but they did not materialise due to funding obstacles. More recently, the General Directorate requested technical support from UNDP on a relatively larger scale. The required documents are in the process of preparation.