

Conflicts and Natural Disasters: Bridging the Gap

Decades of development can be gone in a moment, whether a bomb drops from the sky or an earthquake fissures the ground. No region is exempt, and the number of countries in crisis or at risk continues to edge upwards. In today's wars, 90 percent of those who die are civilians, primarily women and children. Eleven million refugees wander the globe seeking protection, on top of 20 to 25 million people who are internally displaced. And when man does not strike, nature sometimes does, sending typhoons, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions and drought, to name only a few.

Conflicts and natural disasters often shine a spotlight on unresolved development problems. Failed states, poor infrastructures and populations already weakened by diseases such as HIV/AIDS compound the impact of catastrophes, or help bring them into being. It can become a vicious cycle, deepening poverty, spawning hunger, destroying livelihoods and the hope for a better life.

UNDP Responds

UNDP works on the ground in countries before, during and after catastrophes strike. In concert with governments and civil society, we analyze risk factors and set up early warning systems. Bridging the traditional gap between relief efforts and longer term development goals, we partner first with humanitarian agencies for recovery efforts as soon as the need arises. And then we continue helping, by supporting communities as they use national and international resources to rehabilitate themselves.

Throughout, we look for ways to address the root devel-

opment causes of conflicts and disasters, from encouraging sound institutions to opening economic opportunities to promoting the participation of women in reconciliation and reconstruction. For knowledge, we draw from our global network, which incubates and shares innovative approaches to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and disaster assessment and mitigation. All our activities integrate the UN's objectives for peace and security as well as development, including the MDGs. As the leader of the UNDG, we play a vital role in coordinating recovery assistance, and championing joint appeals to donors.

In 2002, our newly created Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery completed its first full year, with programmes now in over 60 developing countries. The Bureau assists UNDP country offices on natural disaster reduction, justice and security sector reform, curtailment of small arms, disarmament and demobilization, mine removal, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and post-crisis economic and social recovery. In Afghanistan, UNDP played an unprecedented role in mobilizing over \$75 million to cover the initial expenses of the fledgling Afghanistan Interim Authority Fund, and continues to provide such critical forms of support as aid coordination and assistance on constitutional reform. During 2003, we debuted the *World Vulnerability Report*, a major new contribution to advocacy that highlights patterns of natural disaster risk and vulnerability, and outlines strategic responses.

Haiti: Knowledge That Could Save Your Neighbours

Located in the very centre of the Caribbean, Haiti is prone

UNIFEM: Partner and Advocate for Women

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) supports innovative programmes to promote women's empowerment, security and rights. Within the UN system, UNIFEM links women's issues to national, regional and global agendas by fostering collaboration and providing technical expertise on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment strategies. Administered by UNDP, UNIFEM worked in 2002 in three critical areas: peace and reconstruction, economic security and women's human rights.

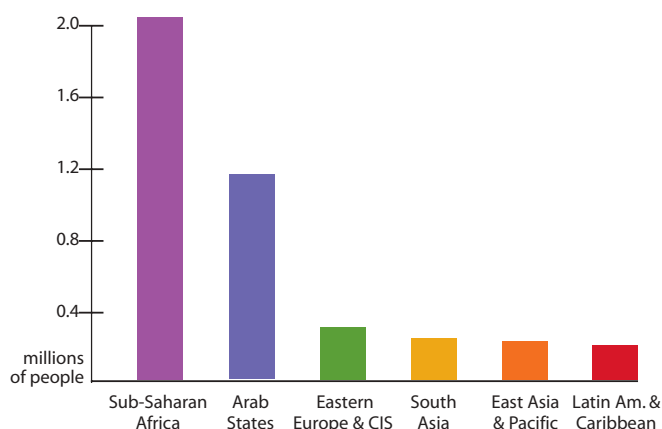
Support for women's leadership in peacebuilding and reconstruction resulted in women's participation in peace processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Sudan, and the mainstreaming of gender in constitutional and legislative processes in post-conflict countries such as Afghanistan and Timor-Leste. Advocacy through the Independent Experts' Assessment entitled *Women, War and Peace* contributed to efforts within the European Union to harmonize peace and security frameworks with those of the UN.

To strengthen women's economic security and rights, UNIFEM partnered with UN regional commissions and women's networks to gather gender-specific data for monitoring progress on the MDGs; backed initiatives to measure women's unpaid work in the household and family businesses in 18 countries; and organized analyses of the impact of national and local budgets on gender in 20 countries. With UNDP, UNIFEM helped to insert gender in poverty reduction strategies in several African countries and to monitor the gender dimensions of the MDGs in Cambodia and Kazakhstan.

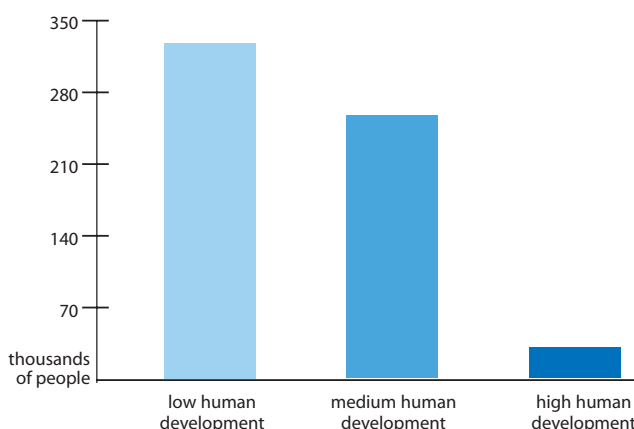
In promoting women's human rights and the ending of violence against women, UNIFEM scaled up its work on HIV/AIDS through partnerships with UNAIDS, UNFPA, ILO and UNHCR. UNIFEM's Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women has awarded \$7.8 million in grants to 147 initiatives worldwide.

THE POOR ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO CRISIS

Casualties from conflict, 1990–1999



Deaths from natural disasters, 1992–2001



Source: *Human Development Report 2002* and *World Disasters Report 2002*

to natural disasters: floods, hurricanes, droughts and earthquakes. Deep-rooted poverty and ongoing political and economic instability have left most Haitians with few options to avoid the unforgiving brunt of these catastrophes, much less to recover easily once they pass.

UNDP has been coordinating other UN agencies and working with donors, including the European Commission, to help Haiti better prepare itself in identifying the risks it faces, and develop concrete methods, even given its limited resources, to confront them. Since advance planning always saves lives, a comprehensive national system for risk and disaster management has been established in tandem with the government, the private sector and civil society, while a pilot Emergency Operations Centre, supported by the UN system, is devising ways to coordinate timely responses when threats arise.

Since a large percentage of Haitians live in villages or flimsily constructed slums, where they are the most vulnerable to ruin, UNDP has also joined with local authorities, businesses, churches and civil society to establish local committees with the knowledge to help their neighbours. Most people have little understanding of what to do when, for example, a hurricane hits. So committee members undergo training on where to evacuate, how to set up a local alert system, and how to disseminate information once a disaster begins. Taught in Creole, the local language, the workshops quickly attract volunteers—men, women and young people. They are eager to learn because they know from experience that Haiti is vulnerable. With the right information, people have a better chance to survive.

Eritrea: Restarting Local Economies After a War

After a three-decade quest for liberation and a bitter border war with Ethiopia, Eritrea emerged three years ago saddled with more than a million internally displaced people and refugees. Buildings and roads had been destroyed, mines littered the countryside, and prevalent drought withered both the land and livelihoods. To assist Eritrea in moving from relief to recovery, UNDP and a wide circle of partners embarked on the Post-War Emergency Rehabilitation (PoWER) programme, which is helping communities in war-affected regions of the country rebuild their lives.

One of a series of projects is taking place in the dramatic heights of the Qohaito plateau south of Asmara. UNDP and staff from the Irish aid agency Concern asked local communities to name their priorities. Honey and footpaths, they said. The footpaths, in use for centuries but nearly destroyed during the war, connect different villages to each other and to outside markets and services. Beekeeping is an ancient tradition—and had been an important source of income.

Fatouma Sale was one of many widows in the area barely scraping together enough to survive. Through PoWER, she soon found herself repairing the paths and producing honey from a hive at home, earning enough to support her six children. Today, not only has Mrs. Sale stopped worrying about fleeing the horrors of war, but she has also confidently set her sights on a better future for her community, her family and herself.