

# 10 Essential Ingredients

*People-centred early warning systems must encompass 3 essential aspects: they must be reliable, they must reach the entire population even in the most remote areas, and they must be part of a chain within which people can take appropriate and timely action to protect themselves and their assets.*

- 1. The right to know:** Everyone has the right to know about an impending hazard. It is essential that early warning systems reach the entire population and that their message is clearly understood.
- 2. Multidimensional analysis:** This should include a variety of factors such as the geo-political context, the level of poverty in the country and the extent of marginalisation and exclusion of different social groups. Key factors such as socio-economic status, local occupations, patterns of migration, geographical isolation and social exclusion as well as the level of education in a country determine people's ability to access information. Not all countries have the same capacity to implement the dissemination of information.
- 3. Investment in disaster reduction is crucial:** Investment to tackle the causes of vulnerability to disasters is vital. How people act on information provided to them is determined by the level of investment of disaster preparedness for individuals, households and institutions. Early warning is a pre-condition for disaster reduction, but without a parallel investment in disaster preparedness, early warning systems will not work. People need to know not just that a hazard is imminent but how to act on the information in order to save themselves.
- 4. Build on existing local structures:** Early warning systems must not seek to replace existing local institutions and structures such as mosques, churches and community organisations. Rather, they must seek partnership with them to reach the entire community.
- 5. Build on existing and appropriate information systems:** These systems are those which people can respond to themselves and share within their community. Messages and the systems which deliver them need to be clearly understood at all levels of society. People-centred early warning must provide information in a form



people understand and recognise, using the medium most accessible to the highest number of people. This is different in different circumstances but may include local radio, television or text messaging, as well as traditional systems such as whistling and blowing sirens.

- 6. Local ownership is crucial for systems to function:** The people at risk of disasters should participate in the design and maintenance of early warning systems. In so doing, local awareness building will be far more effective.
- 7. Building leadership:** Community and local government leadership with a focus on prioritising disaster preparedness and response to early warning must be developed.
- 8. Accountability to act:** Governments at all levels have a responsibility to their populations to act on early warnings. They must be held accountable for their actions and for ensuring that early warning systems reach the entire population and are acted on in a timely fashion. The involvement of government officials down to the local level is therefore key to ensuring a people-centred early warning system.
- 9. Local knowledge of indicators:** This at the community level is a valuable resource and should be an integral part of any modern early warning system. Local knowledge and experience must also be strengthened by supplementing them with public education on secondary risks.
- 10. Early warning through schools:** This is possible if children are taught about issues such as hurricane hazards and all that is associated with them, such as flooding and landslides. Pupils can continue to spread awareness through their families and into their wider communities. As adults they will in turn be informed and more receptive to information.

*ActionAid is a unique partnership of people who are fighting for a world without poverty, in which every person can exercise their right to a life of dignity. We work with poor and marginalised people to help eradicate poverty by overcoming the injustice and inequity that cause it.*

For further information about ActionAid's work on disaster reduction, please contact:

**act!onaid**  
**international**

The International Emergencies and Conflict Team

Phone: +44 (0) 207 561 7561

or

visit our website at:

[www.actionaid.org.uk/100261/disaster\\_risk\\_reduction.html](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/100261/disaster_risk_reduction.html)