

Workshop on Regional Cooperation among BIMSTEC Countries for Disaster Risk Reduction & Management

New Delhi 30-31 October 2006

Report

1. Background and the Context

1.1 BIMSTEC provides a unique link between South Asia and Southeast Asia bringing together 1.3 billion people - 21 percent of the world population, a combined GDP of more than a thousand billion dollars and a considerable amount of complementarities in terms of geographical contiguity, resource endowments, trade and economy.

1.2 BIMSTEC countries also share a history of common natural hazards which, more often than not, transcend political boundaries to affect multiple countries. Flood, cyclone, drought, earthquake and tsunami have become shared risks for all the countries of the region.

1.3 High population density coupled with a poor quality of life in large parts of the region have made it susceptible to various complex emergencies arising out of poverty, illiteracy, uncontrolled urbanization, inadequate access to services etc. These factors often aggravate the impact of natural hazards.

1.4 Despite the high level of vulnerability faced by the countries of this region to various hazards, efforts towards comprehensive disaster risk reduction initiatives have been, at best, inadequate. Most initiatives taken by individual countries have emanated from a top-down outlook, rather than a bottom-up approach facilitating the participation of vulnerable communities. Well developed institutional

structures exist in some countries, with others making the first initiatives to develop the same.

2. Regional Cooperation

2.1 Recognizing the need for a holistic approach to disaster risk reduction and management transcending geo-political considerations, the **BIMSTEC Workshop on Regional Cooperation on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management** organized in New Delhi, India on 30 and 31 October 2006 reiterate the need for proactive regional cooperation in all aspects of disaster management viz. mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation.

2.2 The Workshop noted that most initiatives transcending political boundaries have concentrated on bilateral arrangement especially in sharing of meteorological and environmental information and providing humanitarian and logistic support during disasters.

2.3 The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) had made some initiatives in the areas of environmental management under the SAARC Plan of Action on Environment adopted in 1997, but none of these initiatives focused on the multi-dimensional aspects of disaster risk reduction and management. More recently a Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management has been approved and a SAARC Disaster Management Centre opened in New Delhi.

2.4 Outside of the SAARC ambit, the ASEAN countries have adopted the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, Vientiane, 26 July 2005 to provide effective mechanisms to achieve substantial reduction of disaster losses and to jointly respond to disaster emergencies through concerted national efforts and intensified regional and international co-operation.

2.5 The workshop reiterates that BIMSTEC, as a unique bridge between South Asia and South East Asia, would be an effective forum for disaster risk reduction through concerted cooperation among all the nations in the region.

3. Agenda for Action

3.1 Recalling the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 59/279 of 19 January 2005 to strengthen emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster and the Hyogo Framework for Action set out by the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005, which, among others, stressed the need to strengthen co-ordinated regional approaches and cooperation mechanisms to prepare for and ensure rapid and effective disaster response in situations that exceed national coping capacities, the Workshop recommends the following Agenda for Action for effective regional cooperation among the member countries:

- a) Develop a mechanism for risk identification and monitoring of risk, vulnerability and capacities with regular updation through identified national institutions.
- b) Integrate comprehensive risk reduction and mitigation measures into national policy, development framework and bi-lateral and multi-lateral relationships with other countries in the region
- c) Develop regional systems of early warning especially for high impact disasters like floods, cyclones and tsunamis and promote community level dissemination for effective preparedness.

- d) Ensure quick and effective response to disaster situations to minimize losses to lives and property
- e) Provide all- possible humanitarian assistance to any member country affected by natural disasters, whenever such assistance is requested.
- f) Facilitate knowledge sharing through linkages with institutions working in the field of disaster management
- g) Promote symbiotic linkages among organizations involved in knowledge upgradation and capacity development within all stakeholders
- h) Evolve a system of documentation of the traditional cultural practices for coping with disasters and lessons learnt from each disaster event for sharing with regional partners.
- i) Support, facilitate and promote scientific, technological and other research for comprehensive disaster risk reduction.

4. Institutional Arrangement

4.1 The workshop recommends that appropriate institutional mechanism be put in place for coordinating the implementation of the Agenda for Action.

5. Adoption of the Report

5.1 The workshop adopts the Report and recommends that cooperation among member countries may be further intensified in the areas of disaster risk reduction within the ambit of the respective national frameworks, legislation and policy.
