

Beijing Action for Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia

The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction (ACDR) was convened in Beijing, China on 27-29 September 2005 at the invitation of the Government of the People's Republic of China. A total of 385 participants attended the conference, which includes delegations from 42 Asian and South Pacific countries, of which 33 were represented at the ministerial level, and 13 UN agencies and international organizations. The meeting was organized to facilitate the implementation of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) outcome that is the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA).

The participants developed and herewith present the following Beijing Action for Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia to enhance regional cooperation in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action;

I. CONTEXT

Composing the most disaster-prone region of the world and home to more than a third of the world's population, Asian countries suffer disasters every year. The increasing vulnerability of people in Asia is largely related to the demographic conditions, rapid technological and socio-economic changes, hugely expanding urbanization and development within high risk environment, among other conditions. The impact of such catastrophic events in Asia as the frequently occurring typhoons and tropical cyclones, annual floods of increasing severity, the Bam earthquake in Iran in 2003, and especially the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 underline the costs of the loss of lives, livelihoods and material damages. Additional impacts go far beyond direct social and economic costs in the resulting and often long-termed psychological and frequently pervasive public health or environmental shocks to Asian societies.

Given the numerical magnitudes, professional talents and dynamic features of many Asian economies and their importance to world trade and

commerce, no country in the world today is immune to disasters. The current global concern about the rapid international spread of a possible pandemic disease such as Avian Flu is only one example that conveys both the urgency and the necessity of sustained investment in widespread public awareness on disaster risks and governmental commitments to disaster preparedness, response and reduction through regional cooperation.

Recurring disasters pose a great development challenge for all countries in Asia. The impact of disasters is on the rise and the need for relief assistance is increasing. Therefore, increasing emergency relief assistance reduces resources for development expenditure. Also, disaster events push socio-economically marginalized people into poverty, increasing their dependency on natural resources. This, in turn, degrades the environment and further increases their vulnerability to disaster risk. To break such a negative cycle and to sustain socio-economic development, disaster risk reduction should become an integral part of sustainable development, evident in all annual programming actions.

Meanwhile, there is now a clear understanding that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cannot be achieved without consideration of disaster risk, and that sustainable development cannot be achieved unless disaster risk reduction is mainstreamed into development policies, planning and implementation. It is widely acknowledged that disaster reduction perspectives should be incorporated into every country's national development plans and related implementation strategies. The good news, however, is that technology now provides the capability of and opportunity for better understanding of disaster risks and taking proactive actions to reduce disaster losses before they occur.

This context has influenced the outcome document of WCDR: the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. This document was adopted by the UN

Member States that participated in the WCDR, demonstrating a global commitment to disaster risk reduction in the context of development.

As a follow-up on the HFA, a number of initiatives are under way at national, regional and international levels. For example, the ISDR System has developed Strategic Directions for the ISDR System to Assist the Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. The Pacific Islands region has developed its Framework for Action 2005-2015 entitled An Investment for Sustainable Development in Pacific Island Countries. The Africa region has established an Africa Advisory Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and an African Regional Platform of National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction to implement its Africa Regional Strategy for and Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction.

In Asia, governments, at the invitation of the Government of the People's Republic of China, came together in Beijing in May 2004 to discuss disaster risk reduction in preparation for the WCDR. There they produced a document entitled Beijing Declaration on the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, advancing the outcomes of the regional meetings organized by ADRG, ADPC and ASEAN.

Since the WCDR, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Committee on Disaster Management is committed to strengthen the implementation of HFA through its ASEAN regional programme for disaster management. In August, ASEAN countries adopted the ASEAN agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, further enhancing regional cooperation among member countries. The ADPC Regional Consultative Committee (RCC) on Disaster Management in Hanoi in May 2005 adopted the Hanoi RCC5 statement on mainstreaming disaster risk management into development in Asian countries which committed member countries to mainstream DRM into national development policies, planning and implementation.

Now, from 27-29 September 2005, the Government of the People's Republic of China has hosted an "Asian Conference on disaster Reduction" to facilitate the implementation of the WCDR outcome that is the HFA. Participants have developed and herewith present this document "Beijing Action for Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia" in order to enhance regional cooperation in the implementation of HFA;

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE ASIAN CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION

The conference provides a platform for Asian countries to share and exchange best practices and lessons learned from disaster risk reduction;

elaborate priorities for action that may be considered by individual countries for implementation in Asia as identified under the Hyogo Framework for Action; and promote regional cooperation for disaster risk reduction in Asia.

III. RECOMMENDED PRIORITY AREAS AND EXPECTED RESULTS FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HYOGO FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION IN ASIA

The HFA sets three strategic goals and five priority areas in disaster risk reduction to reduce losses of lives and social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries from disasters. Asian countries have discussed and emphasized recommended priorities to be pursued under the five HFA priority areas, and also prioritized activities under each of those five areas, based on the common concerns and needs of all Asian countries.

As disaster risk reduction is a cross-cutting issue with great complexity, which requires understanding, knowledge, commitment and action, it should be addressed systematically with the active participation of all stakeholders, especially national governments.

As a first step towards reducing disaster risk and attaining sustainable development, Asian countries are encouraged to proceed in accordance with the HFA to achieve the tangible results of a set of time-bound activities (listed hereinafter), which are of immediate concern to all Asian countries in their pursuit of poverty reduction and sustainable development.

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with strong institutional basis for implementation

1.1 Promoting inter-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration is a must for effective disaster reduction actions. Disaster risk reduction is an issue of great complexity that requires close cooperation among stakeholders representing comprehensive skills and knowledge needed for disaster risk reduction and mainstreaming it into development planning and practice. Lines of official communication and public information flow throughout the society from high level officials to local communities at risk are essential elements of effective coordination and wide-ranging collaboration. In the last two decades, there has been, in all Asian countries, growing understanding of the need for a systematic approach to disaster reduction. This underscores the urgent need to establish or enhance national platforms for disaster risk reduction.

1.2 Building the resilience of nations and communities is primarily the responsibility of national governments and local community leaders. The sustained involvement of national governments and local community leaders is crucial to provide political direction and commitment, to create necessary enabling environments and to encourage national and local ownership of disaster risk reduction processes. The existence of appropriate national policies and legislation for disaster risk reduction at national and local levels is a demonstration of the commitment of national governments to pursue disaster risk reduction in the context of sustainable development. Civil society organization and volunteer networks such as National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are equally important for awareness raising and actions to create more resilient communities. National and local ownership, for both their parts, enable genuine and effective responses to respective national and local needs and realities, thereby promoting proactive participation at all levels of activity. Therefore, national governments are encouraged to take further actions to develop and review policies and legislation on disaster risk reduction at all levels, and promote national and local ownership of disaster risk reduction processes.

1.3 Providing resources on a continuing basis for disaster risk reduction is an investment for sustainable development. The current lack of understanding of disaster risk reduction results in limited commitment to allocate sufficient resources to reduce communities' vulnerabilities to disasters. This has partially

contributed to increased impacts of disasters and perpetuated the need for humanitarian assistance, hence slowing down the achievement of poverty reduction across the region. Therefore, when planning for countries' development goals, national governments are encouraged to invest adequate national resources for disaster risk reduction at all levels of activity and in addition to mobilize external resources through bilateral and multilateral cooperation;

2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning

2.1 Assessing and communicating disaster risks to decision-makers and the people at risk are the basis for disaster preparedness and risk reduction frameworks. Assessing disaster risks and communicating the results to all communities concerned contribute to efficient and effective coordination and collaboration among policy makers, educators, development practitioners and disaster managers. The results of a proper disaster risk assessment are critical for decision-making and public awareness for mainstreaming risk reduction into development practice, and for disaster early warning, preparedness and response. Therefore, risk assessment and communication are considered to be a central issue for national governments in the development of their respective disaster reduction strategies. In this regard, governments are encouraged to consider the policy aspects, organizational linkages and the technical capacities necessary for risk assessment.

2.2 Enhancing early warning systems is essential for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster preparedness and response, leading to a reduction in human and socio-economic losses. There have been more efforts to enhance early warning systems across the region, with strong focus on technical and scientific aspects. However, there is need to address the importance of the human dimensions of early warning, and how all relevant information can be communicated and integrated better into disaster prevention, preparedness and response. This is critical for the effectiveness of disaster early warning as efforts should ensure that people at risk are able to receive, understand and act to protect themselves. Therefore, more attention and efforts are recommended for linking all the main actors required for improved early warning systems, including politicians, scientists, information providers and people at risk.

3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

3.1 Integrating disaster risk reduction into formal and informal education systems is a profitable investment for changing people's thinking, attitudes and behaviour in reducing disaster risks. Disaster risk reduction is fundamental to socio-economic development. Therefore, introducing disaster risk reduction in educational systems is a long-term investment for sustainable development. In the short term, it helps to build a culture of safety and resilience across different gender and age groups. National governments are encouraged to take immediate action to introduce disaster risk reduction subject matter into formal and informal education programs and related training endeavors, giving appropriate regard for the transfer and use of traditional wisdom and local knowledge.

3.2 Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into sustainable development requires sufficient understanding, knowledge and skills among policy makers, practitioners and communities at risk. Short-term training on disaster risk reduction is an effective way to equip people with essential knowledge and skills required for mainstreaming the subject into their daily lives. The need for such training is enormous among development practitioners and disaster managers who are the key players in the implementation of disaster risk reduction at national and community levels. To address such an enormous need for effective training, national governments are encouraged to mobilize academic and training institutions to design and conduct training courses that address actual needs of communities at risk. Therefore, training of decision-makers, practitioners and community leaders is urgently required for the successful implementation of disaster risk reduction.

3.3 Sharing information and exchanging knowledge on disaster risk reduction builds capacities and a culture of safety. This has not been easy in Asia due to its great socio-cultural and language diversity, which poses a challenge to information sharing and dissemination even within a country. To face this challenge at national and community levels, national governments are encouraged to work with key stakeholders and elements of civil society already working at community levels to make persistent efforts to support and create means to enhance information sharing and knowledge exchange. Particular

attention should be given to the engagement of broadcasting and print media in different languages.

4. Reduce underlying risk factors

4.1 Addressing disaster risk reduction in the socioeconomic development process is a win-win situation for both governments and people in communities: Socio-economic development policies and programs have not yet taken sufficient account of disaster risks. Increasing the resilience of assets and development investments will provide significant socio-economic benefits. The concomitant reduced needs for relief will increase the availability of resources for pursuing development, and at the same time provide a very cost-effective means to speed relief at the time of need. It is crucial that disaster risk reduction perspectives and efforts are included in all sectors of national development plans and implementation strategies. Considering their importance for sustainable livelihoods and national growth potential, special attention should be considered for the fields of environment, infrastructure, shelter, agriculture, land use and water resources management and poverty reduction. Therefore, national governments are encouraged to take serious action to mainstream disaster risk reduction into development policies, planning and implementation.

4.2 Enhancing the resilience of critical facilities and infrastructure are integral to the realisation of disaster risk reduction policies and programs: The protection of critical facilities such as schools and hospitals is an essential part of the disaster risk reduction process. Locally valued cultural or religious facilities also hold great importance for community motivation and protection in times of emergency. Similarly, physical infrastructure such as transportation, communication facilities, shelter and the built environment can be identified for special protection. It is important to maintain the serviceability of these social and economic assets, as well as ensuring their continued availability at times of crisis to support the provision of emergency services when required.

4.3 Promoting the integration of climate-related disaster risk reduction into climate change adaptation at national and community levels helps to increase the effectiveness of human and financial resources and reduce possible future losses of those resources. Both climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are development issues that have similar objectives of building resilient

societies. In addition, the two issues face similar complexities and challenges and rely on the same types of measures such as early warning, disaster data, risk and vulnerability assessment, urban risk management, and policies. Disaster risk reduction is considered as a no-regret tool for adapting to climate change and selecting adaptation strategies that can bring quick win-win situations. Therefore, promoting the integration of climate-related disaster risk reduction into climate change adaptation reduces the compound impacts of climate change and disasters on people and their societies.

4.4 Sustaining poverty reduction efforts and investments requires their integration with disaster risk reduction. Poverty leads people to live in hazard-prone areas that are more vulnerable to disaster impacts, and weakens people's coping capacities during and after disaster events. Therefore, living in impoverished conditions create increased disaster risks, which leads to more poverty. By factoring poverty reduction measures into risk reduction strategies, national governments can provide improved protection to the poor, break the negative cycle and contribute to more sustainable poverty reduction efforts. The use of more tolerant crop varieties and more environmentally-sensitive cultivation practices are examples of simple measures to reduce poverty and increase disaster reduction at the same time. Integrating disaster risk reduction measures into poverty reduction strategies and actions are keys to accelerate poverty reduction. National governments are therefore encouraged to integrate disaster risk reduction into poverty reduction strategies and programs.

4.5 Integrating risk reduction measures during relief and post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction requires good understanding, knowledge and skills about disaster risk reduction among humanitarian workers and others engaged in rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. This is a prerequisite for ensuring the safety of people in disaster-affected areas and prevents them from being exposed to future disasters. Therefore, national governments are encouraged to make the utmost efforts to increase hazard resilience of all reconstructed assets and integrate disaster risk reduction into disaster response and recovery activities. Such actions can enhance the long-term benefits of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

5.1 Developing currently relevant contingency plans and making them available are critical actions for effective disaster preparedness and response at regional, national, sub-national and communities levels. Best practices available show that contingency plans help both disaster managers and relief workers to better respond to disasters and contribute to the reduction of human casualties and sufferings. However, most countries in Asia have not yet engaged themselves in developing contingency plans, nor have yet developed incentives to encourage their development and wider application. Therefore, relief assistance and coordination activities in disaster-affected areas have been reported as insufficient and less effective. To reduce the loss of human lives and suffering, national governments are encouraged to prepare, review and modify contingency plans regularly for efficient and effective disaster response at community and national levels. Cooperative contingency planning is particularly important in preparation for response to large-scale or trans-boundary disasters which may exceed national capacities.

5.2 Being the most populated and hazard-prone region of the world makes the Asian population vulnerable to severe disaster risks. This means each disaster affects large number of people and constantly challenges existing emergency response capacities. Therefore, while promoting disaster risk reduction, national governments are encouraged to provide resources to enhance the capacities of both government officials and community leaders in the coordination and management of disaster response. By equipping them with skills and tools for damage assessment and needs analysis, emergency response abilities at local levels can be expanded significantly.

IV. NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

At the high-level round tables, ministers and other heads of delegations informed the conference participants on innovative initiatives in their respective countries to advance disaster risk reduction in the context of the HFA. These will be summarized in an annex of the conference proceedings.

National governments are encouraged to formulate their respective Plans for Action according to the national priorities for the implementation of the Hyogo framework for Action and to put in place a national mechanism for periodic review of the implementation of the Plan of Action. Eventually, this should set in

motion a process for the development of a commonly agreed set of indicators for measuring the progress achieved at local, national and regional levels.

V. REGIONAL COOPERATION MECHANISMS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

In Asia, there have been a number of regional mechanisms and capacities available to support and facilitate disaster risk reduction and response at national and community levels. It has been acknowledged, accepted and appreciated in the region and beyond that these mechanisms contribute to the promotion of the concept of disaster risk reduction and enhance the capacity of National Government officials and community leaders. Some specialized disaster reduction oriented mechanisms have also been established, such as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC), Typhoon Committee and the Panel on Tropical Cyclones. And some sub-regional cooperation initiatives, such as the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), ICIMOD (International Center for Integrated Mountain Development), MRC (Mekong River Commission), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), and also the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) are working and willing to support national efforts in disaster risk reduction.

Asia hosts a number of regional offices of the UN, international and bilateral organizations. As it also is the most disaster-prone region, many of these institutions are working vigorously to promote and support disaster risk reduction and to mainstream related programs at various levels of activity. National governments are encouraged to pursue further cooperation and wider collaboration with these organizations so that all available resources can be used in the most productive way. Asian countries may wish to work jointly with elements of the United Nations System, especially noting the regional offices of UNDP (UN Development Programme), ISDR (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction) and OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) which have the combined mandate to coordinate disaster risk reduction, capacity building and response. Additional opportunities to facilitate the implementation of the "Beijing Action for Disaster Risk Reduction" and the monitoring of its accomplishments can be realized through collaboration as may be applicable

with ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) as a regional mechanism.

To implement the Hyogo Framework for Action, these existing mechanisms should be further strengthened, including expanding their service fields. Efforts should also be made to explore the possibility of establishing regional/sub-regional technical supporting capacities and facilities to help build the resilience of nations and communities. In these processes, national governments are encouraged to work closely with relevant international organizations, development, technical assistance and funding agencies, and to avail of the experience and opportunities presented by other existing mechanisms.

It is recommended that Asian countries take advantage of the inter-governmental conferences on disaster risk reduction foreseen in the coming years, such as the meeting organized by ADPC, ADRC, ACDM and others, to discuss the progress made.

The government of the Republic of India has offered to host the Second Asia Conference on Disaster Reduction some time in 2007 or some other date mutually convenient to the participating countries. This would provide a good opportunity to review the progress achieved in the further implementation of Hyogo Framework of Action and Beijing Action for Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The participants of the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction express their appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of China in hosting this ministerial conference. It has been a productive opportunity to affirm the political commitment of decision makers in Asia and the Pacific to advance disaster risk reduction processes in their respective countries through the collaborative exchange of information, experiences and their initiatives. The participants of ACDR value China's longstanding and extensive experience in understanding, assessing and mitigating disaster, and benefited from this opportunity to learn from this rich body of knowledge and experience.

The participants noted proposals and suggested initiatives outlined by the host country and other participating countries for future regional cooperation

endeavors that will advance disaster risk reduction for the people of Asia, and encourages further consideration of these proposals. Enditem