

Chairperson's Summary

Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003

--- Living with Risk: Towards Disaster Resilient Societies ---

17 January 2003

Introduction

The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003 was held in Hyogo Prefecture in Japan on 15-17 January 2003, with the participation of policy representatives, experts in disaster and risk management from 24 countries mainly in Asia and representatives of 26 international and regional organizations. The aim of the Conference was: a) to understand the achievements and challenges in disaster reduction in Asia, b) to develop the paradigm of regional and international cooperation, and c) to build disaster reduction capacity and propose guidelines to improve it for the Asian region, as a contribution to the review of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World. Frank and constructive discussion was conducted by the participants throughout the Conference and the following has been adopted as the Chairperson's Summary.

1. Perspective of a New Disaster Reduction Strategy in Asia

In Asia, there is a need to examine the following challenges:

1) Urban vulnerability and disasters

Rapid urban growth, as a result of the sharp economic development, is one of the main factors contributing to increased vulnerability to natural hazards in Asia. Unplanned urban growth results in a generalized increase in damage in case of earthquakes, floods and similar disasters. As the Great Hanshin-Awaji (Kobe) Earthquake in 1995 as well as other similar disasters in Asia demonstrated, cities are highly vulnerable to natural hazards. Once a disaster occurs, its direct and secondary impacts can become enormous. It is recognized that sustainable development, whether it is a developing country or an industrialized country, has to rely also on measures to counter urban vulnerability to natural disasters. Therefore, it is indispensable to undertake risk assessments based on vulnerability indicators, to build cities with reduced vulnerability, as well as to build capacity to recover from disasters and to reconstruct the affected urban areas rapidly.

2) Response to climate change

Additionally, it is necessary to respond to the effect of extreme climate fluctuations. For example, due to rise in average temperature caused by global warming, the number and intensity of cyclones and typhoons, or El Nino related disasters, such as droughts and floods, are anticipated to increase. In addition, it is pointed out that rise in sea level and temperature will increase the risk of storm surge in island and low-lying coastal countries and extend the liquefaction of alluvial lands in time of earthquakes. In this regard, it is suggested to carry out a research on the correlation between climate change and disasters with a long-term view as well as to strengthen international cooperation to establish and improve early warning systems at national, regional, and international levels.

3) Multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral cooperation to address emerging challenges

In order to confront the problems mentioned above, it is vital to strengthen cooperation among various sectors, including some whose primary mandate may not explicitly include disaster reduction. Considering that social aspects as poverty and environmental degradation are the main factors to increase vulnerability, it is crucial to involve in disaster reduction actors of various fields, such as education, the media, environment, science and technology, and development planning. In addition, cooperation with academic and scientific sectors is relevant for the study on the correlation between climate and disasters and the development of improved early-warning systems.

Furthermore, to strengthen comprehensive disaster reduction capacity at the community level, it is essential to enhance partnership among various sectors including national and local governments, and various public and private sectors of the society.

4) Enhancement of Information Management Capacity

It is necessary to improve the collection, organization and dissemination of data (statistics and other relevant data) on the human, social, economic and environmental impact of disasters in order to demonstrate to policy and decision makers that disaster reduction is cost effective and conducive to sustainable development.

The sharing of information and the networking among relevant actors in the information field is essential to ensure wider involvement and a greater impact in policy and decision making.

2. Recommendations of the Conference

In order to respond to the trends in the 21st century in urban disasters, climate change and

disasters, and to promote multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral cooperation to address emerging challenges, it is indispensable to build a framework of international cooperation, among others, in the following areas:

- 1) Urban vulnerability and disasters
 - Promotion of disaster reduction strategies at the community level, in particular, to reduce vulnerability in urban areas and to promote activities to ensure safety through the development of culture of prevention.
 - Promotion of risk assessment based on vulnerability indicators, to build cities with reduced vulnerability, as well as to build capacity to recover from disasters and to reconstruct the affected areas rapidly.

- 2) Response to climate change
 - Promotion of research on the correlation between climate change and disasters with a long-term view.
 - Establishment of improved early warning systems to reduce disasters caused by extreme events, such as floods and droughts.

- 3) Cooperation to address emerging challenges
 - Establishment and strengthening of cooperation between various sectors of the community, such as education, the media, environment, development planning, science and technology in order to reduce the negative impacts of disasters.
 - Participation of all sectors at the community level, such as the local governments, the private sector, NGOs, and other driving actors.

- 4) Enhancement of information management capacity
 - Improvement of data collection and dissemination.
 - Strengthening of information sharing and networking.

3. Outcome of the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003

Holding this Asian Conference in Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, where one of the most devastating earthquakes occurred eight years ago, has a symbolic significance. Japan is interested in sharing and exchanging the experiences and lessons learned from disasters with other countries facing similar challenges.

Various international and regional institutions located in Kobe working on issues such as

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disaster reduction, environment, health and medical care, confirmed during the Conference to cooperate together and to promote the enhancement of disaster reduction activities through the development of the Disaster Reduction Alliance.

ISDR, as the successor arrangement to IDNDR, is currently initiating the ten-year review of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action adopted at the World Disaster Reduction Conference in Yokohama, Japan in 1994, and the work is expected to conclude by the end of 2004. It has been planned to examine the achievements and shortcomings in each region of the world and in various related themes, such as early warning and El Nino. In this regard, this Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003 is the first event in the process to discuss the subject. The outcome of this Conference constitutes a valuable contribution for further discussion at the events planned during 2003/2004 as part of the ten-year review.
