

ASIAN CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION 2006 BACKGROUND PAPER

1. Introduction

1.1 Composing the most disaster-prone region of the world and home to more than a third of the world's population, Asian countries suffer severe disasters every year. The increasing vulnerability of peoples in Asia is largely related to demographic conditions, technological and socio-economic changes, expanding urbanization, increasing settlement in high risk environments, and growing poverty, among other conditions. The recurrence of disasters and the prevalence of disaster risks present an enormous development challenge to all countries in Asia today. The detrimental impact of disasters seriously negates socio-economic gains of countries and puts human development at great risk. Disasters exacerbate poverty, destroy social infrastructures, degrade the environment, and cause political instability. Moreover, they deplete already scarce resources for humanitarian and development assistance. Thus, unabated disaster occurrences make sustainable development goals even more elusive. Yet, as these realities prevail, the world has further witnessed in 2004-2005 enormous human sufferings and large-scale devastations caused by the Indian Ocean Tsunami and the South Asia Earthquake.

1.2 In retrospect, the world community has been addressing the continuing concerns over disaster trends since the UN World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama, Japan in 1994 on the occasion of the mid-term review of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction 1990-1999. The conference adopted the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation and its Plan of Action, which served as the international blue print for disaster reduction. However, despite this and the unrelenting efforts by local, national, regional and international actors, disasters continued to affect an increasing number of people and exacted even larger economic losses. In 2001, the UN General Assembly endorsed the review of the Yokohama Strategy (A/RES/56/195). The review aimed at

identifying gaps and means of implementation towards charting the course of action of the international community for the next decade.

1.3 In 2005, the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) was held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, from 18 to 22 January. The WCDR marked the conclusion of the review of the Yokohama Strategy and its Plan of Action. The specific gaps and challenges identified in the review of the Yokohama Strategy were (a) governance: organizational, legal and policy frameworks; (b) risk identification, assessment monitoring and early warning; (c) knowledge management and education; (d) reducing underlying risk factors; and (e) preparedness for effective response and recovery. Moreover, the WCDR resolved to pursue the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and countries for the next ten years. The WCDR adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA): Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, which provides a clear and authoritative framework for pursuing disaster risk reduction and builds on other relevant multilateral frameworks and declarations. The framework provides for a set of priorities for various stakeholders of disaster risk reduction for the decade. (See 3.2 and Annex A: Hyogo Framework for Action.)

1.4 Following up on the WCDR, the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction was convened in Beijing, China, on 27-29 September 2005. It aimed to consolidate political support, commitment and action for the implementation of the HFA in the Asian region. (See Annex C: The Beijing Action Plan)

1.5 With these developments, countries in the Asian region are encouraged to introduce relevant and responsive initiatives and strengthen existing efforts in line with the accomplishment of the priorities for action of the HFA. Effectively, Asian countries are expected to facilitate the implementation of the HFA in the region, while

international and regional organizations shall further support this process.

2. Disaster Reduction Activities in Asia towards the WCDR

2.1 Since the UN World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama in 1994, the international community has undertaken increasing efforts to implement disaster reduction. The Yokohama Conference had also furthered international cooperation in this area and the Plan of Action adopted by participants had presented specific benchmarks and attainable objectives. In this context, countries in all regions have been working towards understanding the importance of disaster risk and vulnerability reduction and creating means and measures to counter the impact of natural and other hazards.

2.2 In pursuit of the Yokohama Strategy in Asia and with the heightened awareness for disaster reduction following the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, the Asian Natural Disaster Reduction Conference, a ministerial-level meeting of Asian countries, was held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan in 1995. It adopted the Kobe Declaration on Natural Disaster Reduction which included an agreement to consider the creation of a "system which has the functions of a disaster reduction center for the Asian region". The series of meetings that followed led to an agreement among 20 Asian countries to establish a center that would serve as the secretariat of the "system" forged during the Asian Disaster Reduction Cooperation Promotion Meeting held on 16-17 June 1997.

2.3 In this regard, the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC) was established on 30 July 1998 in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan. It was mandated to facilitate the exchange of disaster reduction experts from countries and international bodies, to accumulate and provide disaster reduction information, and to undertake research in international cooperation in disaster reduction. Upon establishment, ADRC was comprised of 22 member Asian countries, and four advisory member countries from outside Asia, and ADPC as an observer organization. Later, more

countries had joined as members: Armenia in August 2000, Kyrgyz, in July 2002 and Pakistan in July 2005. ADRC now consists of 25 member countries.

2.4 Furthermore, at the global level, the UN General Assembly in 1999 launched the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN ISDR) to sustain the initiatives and gains of the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990-1999). It builds on the lessons from IDNDR, the experience of the Yokohama Strategy, and the Geneva Mandate of 1999. The ISDR reflects a major conceptual shift from the traditional emphasis on disaster response to disaster reduction, and thus seeks to promote a "culture of prevention". The approach reflected in the ISDR is premised on an appreciation of the fact that the loss of life and destruction resulting from disasters are not inevitable and can be mitigated by reducing the vulnerability of communities to natural hazards. It recognizes that natural hazards in themselves do not inevitably lead to disasters, but disasters result from the impact of natural hazards on vulnerable social systems. In other words, natural disasters can be prevented through conscious human action designed to reduce vulnerability.

2.5 Since its launch, the ISDR has worked to shift the primary focus and emphasis from hazards and their physical consequences to emphasize more the processes involved in incorporating physical and socio-economic dimensions of vulnerability into the wider understanding, assessment and management of disaster risks. This highlights the importance of integrating disaster risk reduction into the broader context of sustainable development and related environmental considerations. In this regard, the ISDR provides a global framework for action with the objective of reducing human, social, economic and environmental losses due to natural hazards and related technological and environmental phenomena. It aims at building disaster resilient communities by promoting increased awareness on the importance of disaster reduction as an integral component of sustainable development.

2.6 In January 2000, through resolution 54/219, the General Assembly established two

mechanisms for the implementation of ISDR; the Inter-Agency Secretariat and the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction. This was reconfirmed in resolution 56/195 in December 2001. The General Assembly also called upon governments to establish national platforms or focal points for disaster reduction, and to strengthen them where they already exist, with a multisectoral and interdisciplinary approach.

2.7 In order to accelerate the adoption of ISDR strategies in Asia, the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC) and the UN OCHA Asian Disaster Response Unit in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, in cooperation with key stakeholders in the region, have initiated a series of consultations in 2001-2003. The meetings focused on how reducing disaster risks and responding to disasters could be accomplished more efficiently and more effectively together. The outcome of the discussions was a common understanding of the need to mainstream disaster risk management in all development activities and to set the agenda for a more coherent and proactive disaster management approach that addresses the underlying causes of disaster risks and the vulnerability of communities in Asian countries. To address adequately these needs, the key stakeholders in Asia have agreed to promote the Total Disaster Risk Management Approach or TDRM, as a holistic strategy for more effective disaster risk reduction and response in the region. As a regional strategy, it vigorously promotes disaster risk reduction and response through the implementation of disaster risk management and the promotion of multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders.

2.8 The development and adoption of the TDRM approach was the major course of action at the Consultative Meeting on Regional Cooperation in Disasters held in Kathmandu, Nepal, in July 2001. The concept was presented to various stakeholders in the region, including disaster management practitioners, academicians, and NGOs. Its first formal introduction was to official delegates of Asian governments in the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction held in New Delhi, India, in January 2002, and to delegates of Asian NGOs in a workshop on networking held in

Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, in February 2002. Afterwards, TDRM was shared to important regional organizations in a consultative meeting held in Bangkok, Thailand, in June 2002, and to government officials of Asian countries in a workshop held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, in August 2002.

2.9 As disaster risks and vulnerabilities increase with flawed development activities and the prevalence of extreme climate events, it has become urgent to promote multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral partnerships at all levels which TDRM advocates for. It has become also essential to build consensus on the need for international cooperation for disaster reduction and to determine the relative positioning of this cooperation within the general schemes of current international cooperation and development policies. In this regard, the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003 was held on 15-17 January 2003 in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan. The conference aimed: (a) to understand the achievements and challenges in disaster reductions 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.

2.10 In this conference, the following key issues emerged from the discussions as major concerns and challenges in the Asian region: (a) Urban vulnerability and disasters, (b) Adaptation to climate change, (c) Multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral cooperation to address emerging challenges, (d) Enhancement of information management capacity.

2.11 While the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003 identified that the above four areas require strengthening, the question remains: How could these objectives be achieved. In order to do so, it was necessary to identify concrete measures and actions responding to general objectives that were compatible with current international strategies and programs. This latter aspect was important to ensure that local and national undertakings were in consonance with internationally shared goals.

2.12 The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2004 held on 4-6 February 2004 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, emphasized that the important challenges today concern finding effective ways to translate disaster risk reduction concepts into practice, mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into national development plans and policies, institutionalizing disaster risk reduction programs at the community level, and filling in any existing gaps in the disaster reduction cycle. Concrete measures, tools and mechanisms need to be improved to achieve this aim. Conceptual frameworks need to yield specific programs of action focused on people and the actual needs of the communities.

2.13 In response to the emerging issues, concerns and challenges, the conference agreed that the following actions were important: (a) Comprehensive review of national disaster management situation; (b) Evolution of national policies for disaster reduction; (c) Investment in disaster reduction; (d) Communication and information management, and (e) Enhancement of partnerships.

3. WCDR and the Adoption of the HFA 2005-2015

3.1 The UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) held on 18-22 January 2005 in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, represents a landmark in worldwide understanding and commitment to implement a disaster risk reduction agenda. Governments, regional and UN and other international organizations, local authorities, NGOs and experts, as well as international financial institutions, reviewed the progress, shared good practices and experiences in the various fields of disaster risk reduction. The WCDR successfully channeled the heightened interest created by the devastating earthquake and tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004 into concrete commitment to disaster risk reduction. This commitment was captured in the Hyogo Declaration and the HFA adopted at the WCDR. It provides for a quantum leap in building capacities to reduce disaster losses as part of development and humanitarian

strategies. (See AnnexA: Hyogo Framework for Action, ANNEX B: Hyogo Declaration).

3.2 Specifically, the WCDR presented and adopted the following five priorities for action: (a) Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with strong institutional basis for implementation; (b) Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning; (c) Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels; (d) Reduce underlying risk factors; and (e) Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

4. Significant Progress and Remaining Challenges in Disaster Reduction in Asia after the WCDR

4.1 The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction (Beijing Conference) was convened in Beijing, China on 27-29 September 2005. It was organized to enhance regional cooperation in the implementation of the HFA. 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 tangible results of a set of time-bound activities which are of immediate concern to all Asian countries in their pursuit of poverty reduction and sustainable development. (See Annex C: The Beijing Action Plan)

4.2 Some Asian countries have been moving towards developing national platforms for disaster risk reduction and implementing strategies and programs in accordance with the HFA. These include India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, which have introduced steps towards the strengthening of their respective national disaster management systems and passage of legislation and laws for more effective disaster risk reduction.

4.3 National governments are encouraged to formulate their respective strategic national action plans for disaster risk reduction according to their established national priorities for the implementation of the HFA and to put in place a national mechanism for periodic review of the implementation of the plan. Through the

advocacy and facilitation of UN/ISDR and the support to governments of UN Country Teams, this mechanism 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.

4.4 Moreover, in Asia, ADRC has been playing a leading role for enhancing national initiative and capacity for the implementation of the HFA in the Asian countries through the various supportive efforts. These include the assistance for establishing a Tsunami Early Warning System in the Indian Ocean and the activities for fostering communities capabilities for disaster reduction in the context of Total Disaster Risk Management.

4.5 In addition to ADRC, there have been a number of other regional mechanisms and capacities available to support and facilitate disaster risk reduction and response at the national and community level. To implement the HFA, these existing mechanisms should be further strengthened, including expanding their service fields and cooperation among such mechanisms should be further developed. 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.

4.6 The ISDR Asia Partnership for Disaster Reduction (IAP) was launched at the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2004, and has evolved a valuable collaboration among member organizations. The members of the IAP are UNDP, UNESCAP, UN/ISDR UN/OCHA, (UN inter-agency partners for DRR) and two regional organizations, ADPC and ADRC. The members of IAP recently met in Bangkok on 5 August 2005 to review and redefine its role, to identify priority areas for action that will enable the partnership to contribute to the implementation of the HFA. The role of the partnership was to: (1) promote disaster risk reduction throughout the region by conducting strategic initiatives in target countries and sub-regions in partnership with other entities as required by each specific case; (2) develop a forum for discussion, experience sharing and

information exchange to allow dialogue and strengthen the individual characteristics for the partners and as a group; and (3) ensure that the recommendations in the HFA are adapted to meet the priority requirements of each country in the Asia-Pacific Region.

4.7 More recently, on the recommendation of the WCDR and in support of HFA, the International Recovery Platform (IRP) was launched in May 2005 in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, with Japan's support to address the emerging gaps and constraints in post-disaster recovery. Through collaboration and cooperation among key UN Agencies (UNDP, ISDR, OCHA and ILO), ADRC and other stakeholders like the World Bank and the IFRC, the IRP intends to develop mechanisms, tools and guidelines for efficient and effective recovery process in disaster affected countries. As one of the initial projects, the IRP Secretariat, or the "Kobe Hub", is currently building a database for good practices and lessons observed from past disasters and recovery experiences. This initiative is part of the development of a cross-disaster knowledge management kit in support of better and more effective post-disaster recovery interventions. Similarly, a "Geneva Hub" is focused on initiatives to enhance recovery operations, while another, "Turin Hub", is coordinating capacity building related activities.

4.8 In view of the enormous recovery requirements following the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the UNDP/BCPR has launched its Regional Program on Capacity Building for Sustainable Recovery and Risk Reduction in Tsunami Affected Countries. This is a regional project on capacity building in post-tsunami recovery, which has disaster reduction components supportive of the HFA. Its planned outcomes are: (a) improved information management systems of post-tsunami recovery and disaster reduction efforts; (b) learning tools and initiatives available to the region for building post disaster recovery and disaster risk management capacity; and (c) enhanced effectiveness and coherence of multi-hazard, end-to-end early warning systems at the local level.

4.9 Over the years, WMO a specialized

technical agency of the United Nations, through the coordinated network of the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services, has worked to develop the global operational infrastructure for observing, detecting, research and forecasting of the weather-, water- and climate-related hazards in support of national early warning systems. With a deep commitment to fostering partnerships for advancing the HFA particularly related to the second HFA high priority are (i.e., identifying, assessing and monitoring risks and enhancing early warnings) WMO, through its crosscutting Natural Disaster prevention and Mitigation Programme has developed a multi-hazard strategic plan. Through a coordinated approach of its ten scientific and technical Programmes and strategic partnerships, WMO is working to promote the critical benefits of early warning systems as an integral part of the national disaster risk management policies and improving and expanding capacities for hazard early warnings, developed and issued by NMHSs, in support of disaster risk reduction activities in the countries.

4.10 UN/OCHA has also been vigorously supporting capacity building programs for strengthening national and regional preparedness for effective disaster response. It has also facilitated the capacity enhancement of UN Country Teams for contingency planning and coordination of phased interventions for disaster reduction and response at the country level.

5. Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2006 (Republic of Korea)

5.1 The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2006: Towards the Realization of the Strategic Goals of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015 is hosted by the Government of Republic of Korea and jointly organized by the Governments of the Republic of Korea and Japan, the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC), the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN/OCHA).

It is slated to be held in March 2006 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, about a year after the WCDR and six months after the Beijing Conference.

5.2 For its aims, the ACDR 2006 shall review the current status of the implementation of the strategic goals and priorities for action in accordance with the HFA, with a view to ensuring sustainable social and economic development in the Asian region. The ACDR 2006 shall also provide the participants the opportunity to be exposed to relevant guidelines and tools to assist in the implementation of disaster risk reduction activities in the context of the HFA.

5.3 The expected outcomes of the ACDR 2006 include: (a) Enhanced awareness of the participants on the priorities for action of the HFA, as they are expected to facilitate the implementation of the HFA in their respective countries; (b) Identification by the participants of the impediments in their respective countries and their concrete and practical measures for the successful implementation of the HFA; (c) Defining national strategies and support mechanisms for HFA implementation; (d) Defining coordination requirements and priority actions for HFA implementation in specific Asian countries and appreciation of the Strategic National Action Plan (SNAP) (to be introduced by UN/ISDR) as an important support mechanism; and (e) Enhanced cooperation and collaboration among governments, the United Nations system, other international and regional organizations, NGOs and other stakeholders towards ensuring smooth implementation of the HFA.

5.4 Additionally, the participants are expected to recognize and consider themes related to the emerging roles of women and their empowerment in disaster risk reduction.

ANNEXES

- A The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)
- B The Hyogo Declaration
- C The Beijing Action Plan