Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2016

Chair's Summary

Context: Asia facing a new stage of high economic growth

1. Asian countries are continually experiencing disasters caused by natural hazards. In 2015 alone, approximately 40 million people in Asia were affected by disasters. The most notable disasters were those triggered by earthquakes as experienced in Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as well as the floods that happened in Myanmar.

2. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) challenges that Asian countries will encounter for the next 20 years will not be the same as those in the past 20 years. The unprecedented economic growth, rapid urbanization, and increasing number of megacities are leading to higher vulnerability at various levels of society – community, local, national, and beyond national borders.

3. A single mega-disaster can overturn the miraculous growth and development in Asia, hence investing in disaster risk reduction must be a top priority in the development process. A closer collaboration among Asian countries along with the private sector and international institutions within the region and around the world is essential to achieve effective strategies to reduce and manage disaster risks.

4. To further guide local actions, countries in Asia need to be mindful of the global frameworks and agreements that were formulated based on lessons learnt from the ground and drawn through a highly engaging and consultative process, particularly: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, Sustainable Development Goals, COP21–The Paris Agreement, and other relevant regional frameworks and agreements.

5. It is in these contexts that the 12th Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction (ACDR 2016) was organized, and to gather insights to initiate a plan of action that helps address the key DRR challenges facing Asia within the next two decades.

Themes

6. The discussions at ACDR 2016 revolved around three themes:
   (i) Exploring all of Asia approach to face mega-disasters, including those beyond national frontiers, and the strategies to build back better in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction
   (ii) Strengthening and diversifying opportunities of human resource development for DRR, making it well adapted to new realities in Asia; and
   (iii) Enhancing approaches to community based disaster risk management (CBDRM) through science and technology tailored to the local demands

7. Asian countries need to be well prepared to collaborate in facing all kinds of mega-disasters and support each other in the recovery process. Many of the growing megacities in Asia are located in coastal areas, and are vulnerable to tsunami, cyclone, floods, and storm surge. Likewise, a growing number of megacities are vulnerable to earthquakes. Other hazards such as volcanic eruption in Indonesia, glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in Bhutan, and dzud in Mongolia pose disaster risks to the growing populations of those countries. To be well prepared, education and training – specifically those for national and subnational government officials, experts, and practitioners – need to be given greater emphasis to help address diverse types of disasters, including those beyond frontiers. The approaches to CBDRM also need to be enhanced by applying cutting-edge, locally-based, and low-cost technologies.

Strategic Options and Entry Points

8. The experiences from the Indian Ocean Tsunami 2004, the Great East Japan Earthquake 2011, the Thailand Floods 2011 and the Nepal Earthquakes 2015 offered key insights on what DRR policies and systems need to be improved, such as improving early warning system, risk assessment, evacuation, planning, and coordination systems. Build-back-better in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction can provide the opportunity to institute improvements by making both structural and non-structural

measures more resilient to disasters. The idea to systematically monitor long-term recovery process is also one approach to consider, as this allows governments and communities to review and readjust the implementation of recovery programs and projects.

9. *Session 1 outcomes*: Mega-disasters threaten Asian and world economy, so disaster impacts need to be minimized by: (i) enhancing DRR activities in all layers of society, strengthening collaboration between private and public sectors beyond national frontiers, (ii) encouraging greater participation of local communities, and (iii) promoting greater synergy among all stakeholders in sectors such as livelihoods, health, housing, and infrastructures – an affirmation that DRR is critical component of sustainable development. Regarding tsunami, the experiences in Thailand, Japan, and Maldives indicated that inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches to improve structural and non-structural measures against tsunami need to be pursued so that knowledge and lessons are not lost in the passage of time. Supporting the *World Tsunami Awareness Day* can be one of the entry points to raise the level of awareness among policymakers, practitioners, and general public. Additionally, knowledge sharing and collaboration among tsunami-prone countries in Asia and the Pacific will help inform the formulation of tsunami countermeasures. For countermeasures against other hazards, a comprehensive approach to DRR policies and programs in Bangladesh had reduced the number of causalities from cyclone. In Pakistan, flood management efforts have remarkably improved by allocating substantial amount for DRR budget. GLOF and dzud require global assistance since these disasters are outraged by climate change, so effective early warning system is an essential countermeasure to reduce impacts. Accurate assessment of hazard is the key countermeasure effort against earthquake in Armenia while the Hyogo Prefecture in Japan pioneered the *Creative Reconstruction* policy that enshrined build-back-better concept in reconstructing from the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake.

10. *Session 2 outcomes*: There is an increasing need to develop greater capacity to face and manage mega-disaster risks in Asia. Effective utilization of existing resources and facilities for capacity development need to be promoted through regional cooperation. Forging stronger collaboration of relevant organizations and agencies may be considered to respond to the various training and education needs. At SAARC, the *South Asia Disaster Knowledge Network* and the *Digital Vulnerability Atlas* were developed as tools to enhance DRR planning of national disaster management authorities of the region. In the Philippines, a national standard for education and training system has been designed to professionalize all capacity development activities on disaster risk reduction management. The training on urban search and rescue by the Singapore Civil Defense Force (SCDF); the academic degree course offering on disaster risk management by University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM); and the Visiting Researcher program of ADRC are some of the existing initiatives that enhance human capacities and develop more professionals in DRM. Options for way forward may include the following actions: (i) sustain the platform for sharing of information and experiences among countries and regional institutions in Asia, including strengthening of linkages from regional, national, and subnational levels; (ii) prioritize addressing capacity needs, and allow DRR stakeholders to have greater access to good practices, user-friendly technologies, and lessons from past experiences; (iii) institutionalize and harmonize education and training programs by stocktaking and mapping all training facilities as well as allocating regular budget; (iv) design and adopt a regional resource mobilization plan for effective delivery of education and training programs; and (v) formulate an effective country-to-country coordination mechanism for knowledge and information exchange.

11. *Session 3 outcomes:* CBDRM needs to be strengthened by applying advanced technologies to help communities better address the emerging DRR challenges. The utilization of on-site visualization using light emitting sensors, international standard for landslide early warning system, unmanned aerial vehicle or drones, and integrated information communication technology platform are options to upgrade CBDRM approaches. However, these advanced tools and technologies should not be prescribed, instead, make them accessible for communities to decide which tool/technology best fits the needs and capacities of the local situations. The following actions may be considered as way forward: (i) encourage communities to invest in DRR through science and technology; (ii) formulate and adopt cost-effective schemes to support communities interested in advanced technologies; and (iii) promote collaboration with private sector to create new markets for high-tech products or hybrid of advanced/low technology for DRR – public-private partnerships can be one of the possible schemes to explore, as this can lead to positive cycle of job and market creation in Asia.

About the Conference

12. The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction, 25-26 February 2016 at Duangjitt Resort in Phuket, Thailand was participated by 98 delegates from 24 ADRC member countries, observers, and partners. Messages at the opening ceremony highlighted the following: ADRC aims to take proactive role in addressing the DRR challenges for the next 20 years; UNISDR emphasized that smaller but frequent disasters must also be given importance in designing countermeasure strategies since its cumulative impacts are massive, and that new hazards needs to be integrated with the old hazards and align the strategic plan with the Sendai Framework; The Government of Japan committed to continue its leadership role in DRR efforts in Asia and around the world; and the Government of Thailand places highest priority on safety, and is putting into action the guidance of the Sendai Framework in promoting collaboration nationally and internationally to avoid experiencing similar impacts of 2004 Tsunami and 2011 Floods. The conference was jointly organized by ADRC, Government of Japan, Government of Thailand, and in collaboration with UNISDR. Key officials from these institutions delivered the opening speeches.