

IRP Jointly Organized Earthquake Risk Reduction Conference in New Delhi, India, July 29-31, 2009

The International Recovery Platform (IRP), UNDP-India, ADRC, NDMA-India, and SDMC jointly organized the Regional Conference on Earthquake Risk Reduction held at India International Centre, New Delhi, India on July 29-31, 2009. Over 200 participants, including representatives from Earthquake Risk Reduction and Recovery Preparedness Programme (ERRP) country teams, technical experts, practitioners, and relevant stakeholders, gathered during the three-day to discuss experiences, share knowledge, and facilitate technical cooperation.

Activities on the first day (July 28) include:

(i) Messages from ADRC, SAARC, Embassy of Japan-India, UNDP-India, and NDMA-India. Two common messages were pointed. First, while SAARC region remains vulnerable to disasters, indigenous and universal knowledge on reducing risks is there. What need to be further developed are policies along these areas. Second, there is a need to further scale-up the role of communities in disaster risk reduction. The support of the Government of Japan in this area in ERRP countries has been recognized.

(ii) Plenary Session included overview of IRP, overview of ERRP, and country presentations. IRP emphasized the importance of "building back better" while ERRP focused on reducing earthquake risks through "structural" and "non-structural" measures that have been generated for earthquake risk mitigation. The country presentations showed two common challenges. One is the need to further strengthen capacities for assessing structural risks. The other is the need to strengthen capacities and strategies to enforce policies and programs to reduce earthquake risks.

(iii) Technical Session presented case studies of "build back better" from Gujarat (2001), Pakistan (2005), and Great Hanshin-Awaji (1995) earthquakes. Lessons drawn from these cases include imposing "standards" for better reconstruction of the "hardware" and also emphasized the need to recover the "software" aspect, which include livelihood, health, among others.

(iv) Group Discussions were focused on four areas. Group 1 discussed techno-legal framework for structural risk reduction. The group pointed that while building codes are already in place, "non-compliance" to these codes caused large number of deaths and damages when disaster strikes. The action point the group recommends is the active mobilization of national governments and local authorities in implementing Building Codes, Bye Laws, and Construction/Retrofitting Guidelines. Group 2 discussed dissemination of earthquake resistant-technology. This group recommends that

assessment tools for structural risks shall be effectively disseminated throughout South Asian region. This can be coordinated under the ERRP regional programme with the support of regional partners such as ADRC, UNDP, SDMC, and IRP. Group 3 discussed safety of lifeline buildings. This group emphasized that concrete action plans for safer schools and hospitals should likewise be developed and implemented. Thus, the action point is to administer a comprehensive review and develop corresponding action plan on the structural and non-structural measures undertaken by ERRP countries. Group 4 discussed emerging trends of earthquake risk reduction and preparedness. Management of urban risks, application of cost-benefit analysis, community-based and local-level strategies are the emerging trends. In view of this, the group recommended that community-based initiatives and local-level strategies for earthquake risk reduction (ERR) and integrating them into policy and practice at the national and local levels shall be considered by ERRP countries.

Activities on the second day (July 30) include:

(i) Plenary Session, wherein group outputs were presented. Twelve key points were identified from the group presentations: (i) national strategy, (ii) action plan, (iii) amendment of codes, (iv) indigenous technologies, (v) safety of new buildings, (vi) budgetary provisions, (vii) retrofitting, (viii) public-private partnership, (ix) risk insurance, (x) priority of urban areas, (xi) role of media, and (xii) community initiatives.

(ii) Panel Discussion 1 dwelled on the theme "South-South Cooperation and its Modalities in the Context of the Earthquake Risk Reduction". The key messages drawn from the discussion are: (i) Indigenous and low cost technologies need to be promoted, strengthened, and disseminated, (ii) Training, capacity building, and lessons learned have to be institutionalized, and (iii) State-Civil Society partnership should not be sidelined.

(iii) Panel Discussion 2 was about "Options and Opportunities for Vulnerable Zone Specific Earthquake Safe Building Technology and Possibilities of Technology Transfer". The key messages drawn from the discussion are: (i) There are various options and opportunities to reduce risks in vulnerable zones (e.g. indigenous knowledge and tools, existing regional mechanisms), (ii) Indigenous and local technologies can be transferred domestically and between countries in the region, and (iii) While there are ongoing certification processes for masons done locally, a regional certification mechanism can be thought of as well.

At the closing session, IRP concluded that the conference provided the venue for evaluating ERRP progress and formulating clear strategic actions to move forward. IRP emphasized that progress should be monitored, results should be evaluated, and follow through mechanisms for ERRP

programme should be designed to sustain its gains. IRP also extended invitation for representative of the South Asian countries to participate in the upcoming International Recovery Forum in January 2010 in Kobe, Japan.

Activities on the third day (July 31) include site visits to SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in India.