

Background Paper

Background

We live in a fast changing global environment where peril and risk to human society abound. Disasters maim and kill people. They destroy property and the environment. Asia has borne much of the brunt, accounting for 88% of the total affected population and 54% of all economic damages reported from 1975 to 2000. Yet, disasters occur and recur with lasting detrimental consequences, thereby exacerbating poverty, setting back economic progress, and impeding sustainable development.

As poverty prevails, population densities grow, and technological, environmental, political and economic change combine to increase disaster risks, many countries and local communities, especially in Asia, are becoming even more vulnerable to disasters. The current state of disasters has constantly challenged the effectiveness of existing approaches, strategies and mechanisms for disaster reduction.

While contemporary disaster management promotes the comprehensive approach that embraces all the phases of the disaster management cycle, the enormity of the disaster problem today and in the foreseeable future calls for a more proactive approach that ensures effective disaster reduction at all levels towards sustainable development. Particularly in Asia, the current situation has presented the critical need for a holistic and integrated approach to disaster reduction, which focuses on disaster risks and vulnerabilities, i.e. the underlying conditions of disasters, and emphasizes multi-level, multi-dimensional, and multi-disciplinary coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders. This approach has now evolved to be called the Total Disaster Risk Management Approach or TDRM.

The Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Kobe, jointly developed TDRM through a series of consultative forum and workshops in the region. Since its inception as a course of action at the First Consultative Meeting on Regional Cooperation in Disasters held in Katmandu, Nepal, in July 2001, the initial concept of TDRM had been presented to various organizations, academicians and disaster management practitioners, and further refined through the myriad comments received. Moreover, TDRM was introduced and appreciated during the conferences of representatives of Asian governments held in January 2002 in New Delhi, India, and by non-government organizations from Asian countries held in February 2002 in Kobe, Japan. It was also shared with and deliberated by important regional organizations in June 2002 in Bangkok, Thailand. In advocating for the adoption of TDRM at the country level, a regional workshop participated in by government delegates, was held in August 2002 in Kobe, Japan. Exemplified by best practices in Asia, TDRM was discussed extensively in the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction: Contribution to the Review of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action held in January 2003 in Kobe, Japan. More recently, in consideration of the immediate and long-term benefits of human resource development in disaster reduction, the International Training Programme on Total Disaster Risk Management was conducted in June 2003 in Kobe, Japan, attended by representatives of national focal points from 16 countries in Asia.

TDRM builds on the gains of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), subsequently, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, and other relevant endeavors. It integrates and complements existing knowledge and techniques on disaster reduction and risk management. Moreover, TDRM promotes effective integration of stakeholders' action and facilitates broad-based participation in policy and program development in disaster reduction and response as they relate with other development concerns, such as poverty reduction, land use planning, environmental protection, and social security, among others. Through the strengthened cooperation, collaboration and networking among governments, non-governmental organizations, international and regional organizations, and other critical sectors, including the private sector, academe and media, TDRM is expected to become an important strategy for effective disaster reduction and response in the region.

In view of the foregoing, ADRC and OCHA Kobe, supported by ASEAN Foundation, Cabinet Office of Japan, and United Nations University, shall hold the Asian International Conference on Total Disaster Risk Management on 2-4 December 2003 in Kobe, Japan. The conference aims to develop among all concerned sectors a strategic understanding of how to integrate TDRM into the national planning process and disaster reduction systems of participating countries towards sustainable development. It will emphasize the importance and relevance of TDRM to the pursuit of sustainable development through examples of best practice and current initiatives in Asian countries and the region, including effective disaster risk communication among stakeholders. It will also initiate discussions on effectively promoting TDRM and addressing the various constraints and challenges ahead for disaster reduction.

Development Objective

The Asian International Conference on Total Disaster Risk Management is the fourth in a series of multilateral and multi-sectoral forum that promotes the Total Disaster Risk Management Approach. Following the conference-workshops that introduced TDRM Approach to delegates of NGOs and national focal points for disaster reduction and response of Asian countries, this conference intends to further promote TDRM among non-traditional yet critical stakeholders and exponents of disaster reduction. Essentially, it aims to develop among all concerned sectors a strategic understanding of how to integrate TDRM into the national planning process and disaster reduction and response systems of the participating countries towards sustainable development.

Expected Outputs

The expected outputs of the international conference are the following:

1. At least 80 participants from Asian countries, representing government and critical sectors, shall have participated and appreciated the relevance of TDRM to sustainable development, its practical applications demonstrated by best practices and current initiatives, and the challenges in implementing TDRM at country level;
2. A set of reference materials on best practices and current initiatives on TDRM, including the proceedings of the conference; and
3. Establishment of a collaborative network of advocates and practitioners of the TDRM Approach at local and international levels.