

Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2004

4-6 February 2004

Siem Reap, Cambodia

Chair Summary

The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2004, consisting of the 6th ADRC International Meeting and the 3rd ISDR Asian Meeting, took place in Siem Reap, Cambodia on 4-6 February 2004 and was participated in by high dignitaries and officials from Cambodia and about thirty other countries, including ADRC member countries, along with representatives of the United Nations Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), representatives of various UN agencies and other international organizations. The Conference was honoured by the address by H.E. Mr. Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Cambodia, expressing his support for disaster reduction in Asia and for the Conference deliberations.

In addition, the 3rd ISDR Asian Meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Nhim Vanda, Senior Minister, First Vice President of NCDM, Cambodia, and H.E. Mr. Tatsuo Sato, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister, Senior Vice Minister of the Cabinet Office, Japan.

The conference aimed at building a framework for disaster reduction for Asia, within which short-term and longer-term measures to reduce risk and vulnerability could be proposed, including concrete solutions that could be incorporated into national and local policies. In addition, this conference was held as part of a series of international, regional and thematic events serving as preparatory consultations in view of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be held in Hyogo, Japan in 2005. In this sense, this event provided a unique platform to discuss and assess achievements, and identify challenges and concrete future action for disaster reduction. Characterized by open and substantive discussions in a cordial and cooperative atmosphere, the conference ended on a positive and successful note.

1. Challenges for Disaster Reduction in Asia in the 21st Century

Based on the deliberations of the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003 held in Kobe, Japan on 15-17 January 2003, it was agreed that while Asia as a region has made progress in reducing the impact of disasters, we still face major challenges which all the countries in the region need to reflect upon and address.

- 1) **Urban vulnerability and disasters.** Rapid urban growth, as a result of 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 other disasters. Recent large earthquakes in the region demonstrated that cities are highly vulnerable to natural hazards. Sustainable development requires measures to reduce urban vulnerability and disaster risks.
- 2) **Adaptation to climate change.** It is necessary to understand the long-term implications of climate change and variabilities and to mitigate their effects. The

rise in average temperatures caused by global warming has the potential of bringing greater variabilities in the number and intensity of cyclones, typhoons and El Niño-related disasters. Sea level rise and temperature increase will augment the risk of storm surge in islands and low-lying coastal regions and extend the liquefaction of alluvial lands in time of earthquakes. In addition, global warming is causing glacier retreat and snow melting as well as intensity and frequency of natural hazards, such as landslides, debris flows, and glacier lake outburst floods, and the physical and socio-economic consequences. Experts should investigate the correlation between weather and climate phenomena and disaster risk with a long-term view. In parallel, international cooperation should support efforts to establish and improve early warning systems for weather and climate phenomena at national, regional, and international levels.

- 3) **Multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral cooperation to address emerging challenges.** To address the problems mentioned above, it is vital to strengthen cooperation among various sectors, including those whose primary mandate may not explicitly include disaster reduction. Considering that aspects such as poverty and environmental degradation are the main driving forces of vulnerability, it is crucial to involve actors from various fields, such as education, media, environment, science and technology, business and finance, and socio-economic development planning, among others. 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. Sharing of information and networking among various stakeholders and role players are essential to ensure wider involvement and greater impact in policy and decision making. Furthermore, efficient dissemination of disaster risk information and early warning contributes to effective disaster prevention and mitigation.

A series of conferences and meetings were held after the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003, which discussed further measures to respond to the existing challenges in Asia. It was repeatedly emphasized throughout these events that a holistic approach to disaster reduction is indispensable in order to face the challenges mentioned above. Countries from the region should promote and integrate in their national planning processes comprehensive, integrated and strategic approaches to disaster reduction, such as the Total Disaster Risk Management (TDRM) approach, developed and promoted by ADRC and OCHA-Kobe; Comprehensive Hazard and Risk Management (CHARM) by SOPAC; and Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) by CDERA.

2. Recommendations of the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2004

The conference emphasized that the important challenges we face today concern finding effective ways to translate disaster risk reduction concepts into practice, mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into national development plans and policies, institutionalising disaster

risk reduction programmes 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 programmes of action focused on people and the actual needs of the community.

In this connection, the Government of Japan expressed its readiness to support and facilitate the development of meaningful and productive international cooperation in the field of disaster reduction through activities such as receiving trainees, dispatching experts, and assisting disaster reduction programmes, among others.

In order to be able to respond to the emerging issues, concerns and challenges and to address them adequately and effectively, the conference agreed that the following actions are important.

1) Comprehensive review of national disaster management situation

The conference encouraged all countries to initiate a process for a comprehensive review of the existing frameworks for prevention, mitigation and response to disasters. This may be done bearing in mind the hazards and risks to which each country is exposed and analysing the relevant vulnerability.

2) Evolution of national policies for disaster reduction

Based on the above review and with political commitment at the highest level, countries may initiate a process of designing an integrated national policy for disaster prevention and mitigation. This should provide a basis for the development and further strengthening of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation and collaboration and the national mechanisms for disaster reduction. Moreover, it may be necessary to undertake a national planning exercise involving consultation with and participation from all relevant sectors, groups and stakeholders, with a view to mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into national development plans and policies and the overall sustainable development process.

3) Investment in disaster reduction

- Investment for disaster reduction in structural as well as non-structural measures in all relevant sectors is essential to ensure sustainable development in the Asian region. It should consider how to transform disasters into opportunities for sustainable development, how to make the private sector work for the poor, and how to mobilize sustainable relief.
- In view of the fact that early detection, forecasting and warning of weather and climate phenomena constitute a fundamental enabler of disaster reduction activities, that capability embodied in national meteorological/hydrometeorological services should be factored into the non-structural measures deserving national investment, as an element of infrastructural development of countries.
- Given the critical importance of human resources in national development, investment in the development of human resources will help build local capacities for disaster reduction in all sectors of society. Moreover, it is important that education and training for disaster risk reduction address the emerging concerns and issues related to women and children, teachers and students in schools and colleges, and practitioners and managers at the work place.

4) Communication and information management

Effective management of disaster risk depends on a series of actions involving various stakeholders with adequate sharing and exchange of information among them with a focus on highlighting best practices and sharing lessons learned. Countries should endeavour to enhance information management capacity, including efficient and effective early warning generation and dissemination, and to consider establishing disaster resource networks involving various stakeholders. Efficient sharing of information and networking among stakeholders and other relevant actors could facilitate and ensure wider participation and involvement in policy and decision making.

5) Enhancement of partnerships

Partnerships and collaboration among all stakeholders at all levels were recognized as an important mechanism for disaster reduction. They need to involve not only national and local governments but also the private sector, mass media, academia, NGOs, international and regional organizations, among others, to facilitate the promotion of disaster risk reduction initiatives. Cooperation with academic and scientific sectors, and UN specialised agencies such as WMO is relevant to the study of the correlation between weather and climate phenomena and disasters, and the development and improvement of corresponding early-warning systems.

Partnerships formed on the basis of shared and clear cut objectives enhance and complement the respective capacities of sectors and organizations involved, thus facilitating the pursuit of development the promotion of disaster risk reduction initiatives in all sectors of society and enhance public awareness and understanding of disaster risks. This will, in the long run, facilitate increased community awareness and participation.

This conference is part of a series of international and regional events serving as preparatory consultations for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be held in Hyogo, Japan in 2005. The World Conference is expected to mark a major milestone of global efforts towards a safer world. In this sense, this event provided a unique platform to identify challenges and concrete future action to mitigate the negative impact of disasters in our region and one important contribution to the World Conference.

The Conference paid tribute to the Government of the Royal Kingdom of Cambodia for their generous hosting of this important event.