

The 3rd ISDR Asian Meeting

Session Summary

6 February 2004

10:30-12:30 Panel discussion 2

Theme: “Review of achievements and challenges in disaster reduction in Asia
- seeking concrete and effective measures - ”

Since the decade of the nineties marked by IDNDR and its mid-term review, the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama in 1994, the international community has undertaken increasing efforts to implement disaster mitigation and reduction measures. In this context there has been a greater understanding of natural hazards and disaster risks arising from them as also vulnerability reduction along with better coping mechanisms to deal with disasters. Yet, the world is witnessing a steady increase in the number of affected people and material losses due to natural disasters.

In view of the above there is, therefore, an urgent need to discuss, debate and understand the causes of the trends and the emerging new challenges so as to move towards effective measures in the 21st century. It is imperative to examine the current development practices in order to devise means and tools of appropriate investments in various facets of development.

Objectives:

The objectives of the session were as follows:

- 1) To discuss and review the disaster situation in Asia along with efforts made by the countries and the international community to reduce the negative impacts of disasters.
- 2) To understand the underlying causes behind the trends of the increase in the number of affected people and material losses, increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme events.
- 3) To discuss and share the best practices followed in various countries and the region and identify better and more effective ways of their dissemination.
- 4) To promote a better understanding of the challenges to disaster reduction in Asia and encourage incorporation of appropriate policies in the national development process in the countries.

***Facilitator:** Dr. Le Huu Ti, Economic Affairs Officer, UN/ESCAP

***Rapporteur:** Mr. Satoru Nishikawa, Executive Director, ADRC

***Panelists:**

- Dr. Patrick Safran, Planning and Policy Officer, ADB
- Mr. Earl Kessler, Deputy Executive Director, ADPC
- Dr. Ian Wilderspin, IFRC Regional Disaster Management Coordinator for Southeast Asia
- Mr. Chiu-ying Lam, Director of Hong Kong Observatory, Vice-President of Regional Association II (Asia), WMO

***Commentator:** Mr. Thomas Brennan, Disaster Reduction Advisor, UNDP-Bureau for Crisis & Prevention Recovery (Bangkok)

Summary of discussion:

1. Achievements since the 1994 Yokohama Conference

The panel was provided with valuable information from the facilitator on the achievements in disaster reduction, emerging challenges to effective disaster risk management and the priority activities at the local, national and regional levels, based on the comments in the questionnaire distributed previously to the participants. Framework of disaster management, community based disaster management, risk management, information management, relief and recovery proved to be the most common achievements made in the countries in Asia. Emerging challenges and priority areas suggested are highlighted below.

2. Investment in disaster reduction

Recognizing that disaster reduction is a must for sustainable development, the importance of “investment for disaster reduction” was shared by the panel and the floor. The recent recognition of policy by an international banking institution provides opportunities for investment for “prevention”. These investments include those for the provision of relevant information, such as the basic weather information which will enable issuance of vital “warnings with a heart” to prompt people to take responsive actions, so as to minimize human and economic losses from disasters. It is also important to increase the understanding of people and policy makers of the necessity to invest for disaster reduction.

3. Integration of disaster reduction in development process

The panel took note that mainstreaming disaster reduction into national development plans and policies must be the first step to ensure sustainable development. This would involve various crucial measures such as the establishment of disaster management legislation and a national disaster management committee. Identification and evaluation of risk is essential to identify suitable measures for effective disaster prevention and mitigation. Institutionalising disaster risk reduction programmes at the community level is equally important. It was emphasized that the major challenge we face is how to translate disaster reduction concepts into practice and build a culture of prevention throughout the region.

4. Practical tools and standardization for action

It was recognized that the development of practical tools is essential for sharing information to encourage effective implementation of disaster reduction measures. The use of GLIDE is an example of practical tool to ensure the effective provision and sharing of disaster information. We also need to create standardization to widely share information. Transfer of scientific knowledge into practice is necessary so that people can use it for disaster reduction. Use of effective hazard maps, when they are used in an appropriate way, should increase the awareness of community and develop its disaster preparedness, thus contributes to effective early warning.

5. Urban vulnerability

Urban vulnerability in Asia is growing due to unplanned urban growth and rapid population migration into cities. Once a disaster occurs, its direct and secondary impacts can be enormous. Therefore, it is indispensable to incorporate measures to reduce urban vulnerability and risks to disasters. Introduction of comprehensive approach to disaster

reduction and integration of disaster management in the urban planning programme would be crucial to achieve sustainable development.

6. Highlighting success stories and best practices

Highlighting success stories and best practices is vital to ensure effective implementation of disaster reduction strategies. It was recognized that we need to learn from success stories and best practices in the region and should realize their positive impact.

7. Multi-sectoral and holistic approaches and “National Platforms” for disaster reduction

We need to promote multi-sectoral and holistic approaches to disaster reduction. This can be demonstrated by the Total Disaster Risk Management (TDRM) approach, which encourages involving all sectors of societies and communities such as, among others, development, agriculture, urban planning, education, media, and the academia, to apply proactive efforts for disaster reduction. Partnerships among them should facilitate the promotion of disaster risk reduction initiatives and the enhancement of public awareness as well as understanding of disaster risks. These partnerships may highlight their achievements and further voice the need for “investment for disaster reduction “. The challenge for the development of “National Platforms” for disaster reduction is to build this kind of proactive partnerships in each country.