

The 3rd ISDR Asian Meeting

Session Summary

6 February 2004

15:30-17:00 Senior policy makers panel

Theme: “Evolution of disaster reduction policies in Asia”

Disaster vulnerability is essentially a function of the way in which people interact with nature. This takes into account the development models, practices and paradigms followed in different countries. The key to success in disaster mitigation and prevention consists of various integrants such as alleviating poverty, protecting environment and natural resources, and addressing several other attendant issues along with involvement and cooperation of the community and all other stakeholders. It is also necessary to recognize that there are many common and overlapping issues for different interest groups in the society. Various issues and approaches towards disaster reduction, therefore, have to be discussed in the context of the overall development policy. In the light of these considerations, it is indispensable that national policies are evolved which are integrated and comprehensive and which mainstream disaster risk reduction into national development processes.

Objectives:

The session's objectives were as follows:

- 1) To discuss how to mainstream disaster reduction into national policy and development plan,
- 2) To identify concrete measures and actions to reduce the negative impact of disasters with a view to promote a culture of prevention and preparedness,
- 3) To encourage and enhance partnerships for disaster reduction among various sectors through sharing the best practices and to discuss how to implement them according to each country's situation.

***Facilitator:** Mr. Anil Sinha, Senior Expert, ADRC

***Rapporteur:** Mr. Haris Sanahuja, Programme Officer, ISDR Secretariat

***Keynote speaker:** H.E. Mr. Tatsuo Sato, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister, Senior Vice Minister, Cabinet Office, Japan

***Panelists:**

- H.E. Mr. Nhim Vanda, First Vice President, NCDM, Cambodia
- Gen. Melchor P. Rosales, Administrator, Office of Civil Defense, Philippines
- Mr. Francesco Pisano, Senior Officer, ISDR Secretariat

Summary of discussion:

Mr. Anil Sinha, facilitator of this panel, made a brief introduction to the discussion panel, setting the tone for the intervention of the panelists. Mr. Sinha highlighted that the various issues and different approaches, which characterize the disaster risk reduction process, reflect the cross

cutting nature of this subject. Basic ingredients for disaster risk reduction include alleviating poverty and managing the environment and natural resources. Therefore, the evolution of policies for disaster risk reduction should be discussed in the context of the overall development policies. Mr. Sinha added that it is imperative that national policies evolve in a participative way, involving all stakeholders, as a mainstream policy issue in the context of national development processes. He pointed out that policies must evolve in order to better address the complex scenarios that characterize modern societies. In that regard, Mr. Sinha also stressed that disaster risk reduction processes are influenced at both local and macro-levels, and therefore its policies should take into account both scales.

Mr. Sinha's opening statement was followed by a keynote speech and three presentations. Following, the main points from each panelist are presented, summarized by the rapporteur.

Keynote speech:

H.E. Mr. Tatsuo Sato, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister and Senior Vice Minister, Cabinet Office, Japan presented the experience of Japan applying the Total Disaster Risk Management approach (TDRM) that was initiated after the catastrophic impact of the Ise-wan Typhoon that hit Japan in 1959. He described the multi-hazard nature of Japan's geography and the need to address all kinds of hazards, from the aforementioned typhoon to snow avalanches. Mr. Sato explained that the implementation of TDRM has been the main mechanism for reducing the impact as natural disasters in Japan, supporting this statement with a statistical chart showing the disaster-related mortality figures from 1945 to date in Japan.

The key strategic pillars for the implementation of TDRM mentioned by Mr. Sato are:

a) a coordination mechanism at the highest political level; b) collaboration among stakeholders; c) public awareness; d) information, and e) investment for disaster reduction. A coordination mechanism allows for a clear identification of roles, and is backed by high political support. This is complemented by a Disaster Management Plan that provides a framework to advance the disaster risk reduction agenda in the country. Collaboration among stakeholders is ensured in order to bring together the different interests in the field. Public awareness is a focus area for TDRM (Mr. Sato mentioned the establishment of a Disaster Reduction Day as an example). Development of effective early warning systems and techniques as well as methodologies for risk assessments illustrates the focus areas for information. Investments in meteorological facilities and the construction of dams, with a prevention perspective, were also mentioned as examples.

H.E. Mr. Nhim Vanda, First Vice President, NCDM, Cambodia, presented the experience of the National Committee for Disaster Management, NCDM, as a clear example of evolution of disaster reduction policies in Cambodia. He also endorsed the keynote speech by Mr. Sato, explaining that the elements of the TDRM approach followed by Japan are very relevant to advance the disaster reduction policies in Asian countries.

He stressed that disaster management is the key for sustainable development, and has to be linked with other critical agendas, such as that of poverty reduction. Mr. Vanda highlighted that there are enough methodologies and sufficient experience in the field of disaster management, but what is needed is implementation. In order to achieve that, there are two main foundational elements:

- 1- Political commitment at all levels, with a long-term perspective. In that sense, having a strong agency as NCDM is a big step ahead.
- 2- Partnerships provide an effective means for implementation of disaster reduction policies. Again, Mr. Vanda highlighted the importance of NCDM in Cambodia in fostering the establishment of partnerships around a strong institution with high political backup. The recent collaboration between UNDMT and NCDM for the development of joint needs assessment methodology was mentioned as a concrete example of partnerships.

Mr. Vanda explained that the main hazards affecting Cambodia are floods and droughts, and pointed out that poverty is an overriding feature of the overall vulnerability to these hazards in Cambodia. Finally, he added that partnerships for disaster reduction become critical when tackling the trans-boundary nature of risks as exemplified by control of floods in the Mekong River.

Panels:

1. Gen. Melchor Rosales, Civil Defense Administrator and Executive Officer, National Disaster Coordinating Council, Republic of the Philippines, presented the experience of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), showing a very clear evolution of the focus of ASEAN, from a relief to disaster reduction approach and a clear recognition of the links between disaster reduction and sustainable development. The ACDM embraced a regional vision “of disaster-resilient nations, mutually assisting and complementing each other, and sharing a common bond in minimizing the adverse effects of disasters in pursuit of safer communities and sustainable development.” This vision is reflected in ACDM’s mission that specifically addresses the enhancement of disaster management, prevention and mitigation, in addition to response and recovery. Gen. Rosales underlined the components of the current ASEAN Regional Program on Disaster Management: 1) cooperation among member countries; 2) capacity building; 3) sharing of information and resources; 4) engaging external partnerships; 5) public education, awareness and advocacy.

Following this regional analysis, the panelist presented the experience in advancing disaster reduction policies in the Philippines. The panelist identified the establishment of a legislative framework as the first and basic step to advance disaster reduction as a policy issue within the development agenda. Such a framework should address four main aspects that are the key for implementing disaster reduction policies: a) planning; b) programming; c) budgeting; and d) coordination. In relation to coordination, Gen. Rosales emphasized that the importance of having a “National Disaster Management Office” to act as a “mover and shaker” for the integration of stakeholders and sectors in the disaster reduction field. Finally, he highlighted the need for a focus in education and awareness as primary forces for advancing the disaster reduction agenda, including the public, government, business/commercial sectors, from national to local scales, as target audiences for this endeavor.

2. Mr. Francesco Pisano, Senior Officer, ISDR Secretariat, United Nations, focused on the perception of disaster reduction as a “mainstream policy issue.” In his view, this is not necessarily the case in all relevant sectors of the international community. In that regard, he elaborated on the prevailing thinking as to how to make disaster reduction an internationally recognized priority. He

argued that two *schools of thought* existed: a) one that sees the integration of disaster reduction in mainstream policies through the channel of other mainstream activities which receive international support (poverty eradication, sustainable development, etc); and b) one that tries to promote disaster reduction as an overarching priority with the intended purpose of *shifting* some international funding towards implementing disaster reduction measures. He argued that a mix of the both should be pursued.

The panelist stated that the main obstacles to advancing disaster reduction policies are, at the global level, a general misapprehension of disaster reduction in the context of other internationally accepted priorities, and, at the national level, a relative lack of political commitment combined with a lack of political responsibility. As a consequence, the issue is assigned a relative low priority level. This generates poor allocation of resources for its implementation. To overcome this, a mentality shift is required in several areas that he summarized as follows: "from reaction to pro-action; from hazard to vulnerability; from prepare to respond to being prepared to prevent and relieve; from generating risk to living with risk, etc." Some of the main actions fronts that need particular focus on are: a) financing disaster reduction both internationally and nationally; b) incorporating disaster reduction as part of education curricula; c) creating appropriate legislative frameworks; d) fostering participation and partnerships; and e) advancing research with a focus on next threats.