

The Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN): Promoting Networking and Collaboration Among Non-Governmental Organizations of Asian Countries

Towards Total Disaster Risk Management
Core Group Meeting
Asian Disaster Reduction Center, Kobe, Japan
01 December 2003

Background

In view of their detrimental impact on poverty, environment and socio-economic development, natural disasters are now considered as one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable development and social security of nations. In fact, there have been recorded instances when the damage wrought by a single disaster exceeded the country's annual gross domestic product. 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 adverse consequences, effectively impeding sustainable development. Therefore, disaster reduction has become a critical requirement for attaining sustainable development.

By all indications, the trend towards more frequent and severe disasters is expected to accelerate in the near as vulnerabilities and disaster risks increase. Many countries and local communities, particularly in Asia, are becoming even more vulnerable to disasters as poverty prevails, population densities grow, and technological, environmental, political and economic change altogether increase disaster risks. Moreover, disaster risks are further engendered by extreme depletion of water resources, rapid and unplanned urbanization, global climate change, and unabated degradation of the environment, among others. This worsening state of disasters inevitably challenges 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 and emphasizes multi-level, multi-dimensional, and multi-disciplinary coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders. This approach has been known as *Total Disaster Risk Management Approach* or TDRM.

In accordance with TDRM, networking and collaboration among stakeholders in disaster reduction and response, including governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and regional organizations are encouraged. Initiatives that endeavour to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster reduction and response activities through complementation, integration and cooperation are promoted. Especially, in enhancing local capacities, particularly in vulnerable communities, the involvement of NGOs is deemed important and critical.

The critical role the NGOs have assumed in disaster reduction and response, including humanitarian action, and in complementing other development programs of government, has been widely acknowledged. However, while more and more NGOs are involved in disaster reduction and response efforts in Asia, networking and collaboration among them has been weak because of the lack of resources and mechanisms for interaction. Yet, networking and enhancing the capability of the NGOs remains an important strategy for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster reduction and response activities at the local level. These activities include public education and the exchange of relevant information, knowledge and techniques on disaster reduction.

The Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) and the United Nations – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in Kobe, believe in the strategic importance of promoting networking and collaboration among NGOs of Asian countries for disaster reduction and response in the region. The NGOs of Asian countries are most familiar with the hazards, languages, customs and

the environment at the local level and possess a wealth of experiences in disaster reduction and response. Moreover, networking and collaboration among the NGOs will facilitate the further strengthening of local capacity and enable them to be the exponents of disaster reduction and response initiatives at the local level.

In this regard, the ADRC and UN OCHA, supported by the ASEAN Foundation, had jointly conducted the Regional Workshop on Networking and Collaboration among Non-governmental Organizations of Asian Countries in Disaster Reduction and Response in February 2002 in Kobe, Japan. This initiative endeavoured to enhance the capacity of focal NGOs in Asia and to provide them with a forum for sharing views, experiences and best practices and for promoting cooperation among them.

Committed to sustaining the gains of this initial workshop, ADRC and UN OCHA, jointly convene this Core Group Meeting on NGO Networking and Cooperation in Asia, on 01 December 2003 in Kobe, Japan, to pursue the collective aims of the network of NGOs, which the participants themselves have named the *Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network* or ADRRN.

Objectives

The core group meeting shall have the following objectives:

- (1) To review the recommendations of participating NGOs in the conference workshop of February 2002;
- (2) To discuss strengthening of collaboration and cooperation among NGOs of Asian countries through the ADRRN, including goal and its advantages to members;
- (3) To develop specific programs and implementation strategies for fostering and facilitating networking and collaboration; and
- (4) To identify priority actions and activities.

Expected outputs

1. Review of recommendations of the conference workshop of February 2002
2. Inputs on promoting and strengthening NGO cooperation through ADRRN network development
3. Presentations on NGO programs and activities and views on strengthening national and regional networks
4. Specific programs, strategies and activities to foster and facilitate networking at local and international levels; and
5. Statement of understanding of the participants on the adoption of courses of action.