



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction**Second session**

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**Enhancing regional cooperation on disaster
risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific****Enhancing regional cooperation, knowledge and
capacity for disaster risk reduction in Asia and the
Pacific****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document discusses the importance of enhancing regional cooperation and capacity development for disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific. It provides a summary of four secretariat initiatives aimed at building regional knowledge and capacity for disaster risk reduction through regional cooperation and the progress made in implementing them. The initiatives discussed are: (a) the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report*; (b) the Asia-Pacific Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development; (c) the Regional Cooperation Mechanism for Disaster Monitoring and Early Warning, Particularly Drought; and (d) the launching by the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development of training modules on information and communications technology for disaster risk reduction and for climate change abatement. The Committee may wish to review the document and provide the secretariat with guidance on its future activities.

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I. The *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report*

A. Background

1. The Asia-Pacific region is susceptible to a large number and variety of natural hazards, with floods, storms and earthquakes being the most significant. The *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*¹ indicates that the top 10 countries with the largest number of people exposed to flooding are all in Asia. The absolute physical exposure to

¹ Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2009 *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate*. Available from www.preventionweb.net/gar09.

flooding is highest in Bangladesh, followed by China, Kazakhstan and India. Asian countries also have the highest absolute exposure to storms and storm surges, while Pacific island countries, with their small populations, have the highest relative exposure to these events, in particular Fiji and Vanuatu. One of the common features of the region is the high concentration of populations in areas of seismic activity. This situation, which is particularly prevalent in China, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, generates a very high absolute exposure to earthquakes. In comparison, relative exposure is high in small countries, such as Bhutan and a number of Pacific countries located in seismically active areas.

2. The region has continued to be hit by significant disasters: extensive floods in Pakistan and Australia in 2010, the 6.5-magnitude earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 22 February 2011 and the devastating 9.0-magnitude earthquake off the north-eastern coast of Japan and the associated tsunami on 11 March 2011. All told, these disasters affected tens of millions of people and caused extensive damage and loss of life. Continued efforts are needed to document these disasters in order to provide better analyses and policy options to reduce the risks associated with them.

B. Development of the report

3. In its resolution 64/2 on regional cooperation in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters in Asia and the Pacific, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary, among other things, to strengthen the role and capacity of ESCAP in the area of disaster risk reduction, and to facilitate, in cooperation with relevant United Nations entities, the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action² in the Asia-Pacific region.

4. The Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction at its first session, held in March 2009, recognized the importance of addressing issues and concerns related to minimizing the effects of natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region (see E/ESCAP/CDR/9). Several delegations recognized that disaster risk reduction was fundamental for sustainable socio-economic development and described their strategies, plans, programmes and recent achievements in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development policies.³ Recognizing the absence of a comprehensive regional publication on disaster management, the Committee recommended that a publication focusing on best practices and lessons learned in various aspects of disaster risk reduction and management in the Asia-Pacific region should be issued.⁴ A high-level round table on regional cooperation for disaster risk reduction recommended that the publication would focus, among other things, on best practices and lessons learned from specific national efforts, regional cooperation, champions for disaster risk reduction, trends and major events, socio-economic analysis of the impact of disasters and disaster recovery programmes.⁵

² A/CONF.206/6 and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2.

³ See E/ESCAP/CDR/9, para 23.

⁴ See E/ESCAP/CDR/9, para 6.

⁵ See E/ESCAP/CDR/9, annex I, para 17.

5. In a follow-up to the recommendations of the Committee, ESCAP developed the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report* jointly with the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). Assembling the publication was a multi-stakeholder effort with participation from disaster risk reduction organizations and experts in the region.⁶ In addition to ESCAP and UNISDR, the International Recovery Platform, the Disaster Management Centre of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and Practical Action volunteered to be the lead contributing organizations for respective chapters of the publication, while the National Emergency Management Agency of the Republic of Korea generously covered the costs of printing the report.

6. The first report, entitled *Protecting Development Gains, Reducing Disaster Vulnerability and Building Resilience in Asia and the Pacific*,⁷ was launched at the Fourth Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which was held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, on 26 October 2010.

C. Key findings of the 2010 report

7. The report indicates that, between 1980-1989 and 1999-2009, the number of disaster events reported globally increased from 1,690 to 3,886. Over the entire period, 45 per cent of those events were in the Asia-Pacific region. The report notes that the Asia-Pacific region and Africa experienced the largest increases in the number of disasters during the last decade. These increases could be related to many factors including increasing numbers of people exposed to hazards and improvements in the reporting and collection of data and information.

8. Disasters have affected all subregions in Asia and the Pacific. During the period from 1980 to 2009, South and South-West Asia witnessed the greatest number of disasters, at 1,238 events, followed by South-East Asia at 1,069. These subregions also experienced the highest number of fatalities, with figures for South-East Asia spiking as a result of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. However, East and North-East Asia suffered in terms of the number of people affected and the economic damage inflicted.⁸ Considering the smaller country and population size of Pacific island States, both human and economic losses were significant among this group.

9. People in the Asia-Pacific region are four times more likely to be affected by natural hazards than people in Africa and 25 times more vulnerable than people in Europe and North America. While the region generates 25 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP), it has suffered 42 per cent of global economic losses due to disasters. The region has 61 per cent of the world's population and has suffered a similar proportion of disaster-related deaths but has 86 per cent of the total population affected by disasters. Hence, the immediate challenge is to

⁶ Key contributing organizations and individual experts are acknowledged on pages ix-xi of the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2010*.

⁷ Available from <http://www.unescap.org/idd/pubs/Asia-Pacific-Disaster-Report%20-2010.pdf>.

⁸ Information contained here is from the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2010*. The information and data may change due to the August 2010 floods in Pakistan and March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

protect the development gains already made from the impact of disasters in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

10. The report is centred on the view that efforts made by Asia-Pacific countries to reduce vulnerability to disasters, though positive, have not been adequate. Disaster risks are increasing exponentially as a result of the compounding effects of inequitable economic growth patterns, population pressure and climate change. Consequently, activities to mitigate disaster risks must be scaled up and new multidisciplinary policy approaches need to be taken.

11. The report recognizes that disaster risks are increasing globally and tend to be highly concentrated in the middle and low-income countries, with the main driver being the rapidly increasing exposure to risk. It identifies three opportunities for reducing risk, namely: (a) making disaster recovery resilient; (b) improving the use of emerging technologies to ensure that efforts before and after disasters are more efficient and effective; and (c) leveraging regional cooperation with a view to the emergence of a commonly shared political will and action plans that prioritize the work necessary to reduce risks. The report also attempts to improve the understanding of disaster risks in the region through an analysis of historical data on disaster damage and loss.

D. Thematic focus of the 2012 report

12. The thematic focus of the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2012* will be guided by the recommendations of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction at its first session (see E/ESCAP/CDR/9). Hence, this report will continue to focus on the emerging socio-economic impact of disasters as well as best practices and lessons learned from national and regional efforts. It will also highlight the role of champions at the regional, national and community levels in promoting disaster risk reduction.

13. In the context of reducing risk, the forthcoming report will continue to focus on the need to reduce vulnerability amid increasing exposure to disasters. People who are constantly exposed to natural hazards are more likely to remain poor, perpetuating the vicious cycle of risk and poverty. Although vulnerability to disasters has been reduced in most of the subregions of Asia and the Pacific, this area needs to be investigated further due to the rising number of natural hazards and climate change.

14. Reports on the effects of disasters mainly dwell on lives lost and property damage while the scale of the indirect effects or adverse effects on the economy are poorly understood. The forthcoming report will attempt to highlight some of these effects, such as slowing GDP growth, rising indebtedness levels and wider fiscal deficits. The report will also analyse some of the social issues that often result during the post-disaster recovery and reconstruction phase. In particular, it will attempt to deal with emerging social issues and address inequalities that arise as Governments tackle the cumbersome task of rebuilding infrastructure. The report will also include more discussions on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in development planning, taking into consideration the complex and multifaceted nature of people's vulnerability to hazards and the status of existing institutions, policies and legislation that deal with disasters. An analysis of the social and economic effects of disasters, in particular an evaluation of the psychological impact will be included in the 2012 report.

15. The 2012 report will be linked to ongoing global events and publications that focus on social and economic aspects of disasters. It will also contribute to the biennial *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*.⁹ Efforts will be made to produce a global perspective on the one hand, and a community scenario on the other in order to make the regional report more comprehensive. The publication of the 2012 report will follow the same process used to produce the previous one. Its structure and content will be guided by an editorial committee supported by a voluntary group of professionals from ESCAP member countries. A high-level advisory council comprised of nominees from the Governments of member States may be set up to provide guidance to the drafting process and to approve the report. The launching of the report is expected to take place at the Fifth Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which will be hosted and organized by the Government of Indonesia in partnership with UNISDR in 2012.

II. Progress in creating the Asia-Pacific Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development

A. Introduction

16. The Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction at its first session recommended that the secretariat promote an Asia-Pacific gateway on disaster risk reduction and development for information sharing and analysis for disaster risk reduction, in collaboration with regional and other partners working in the field (see E/ESCAP/CDR/9, para. 9).

17. Pursuant to the recommendation of the Committee, the secretariat developed the Asia-Pacific Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development as a web portal that promotes the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction into development planning to help mitigate the socio-economic effects of disasters. To assist countries in Asia and the Pacific in achieving this goal, the Gateway targets the information and networking needs of national disaster management authorities and line ministries that play a key role in promoting disaster risk reduction and disaster management at both the national and regional levels. The Gateway was launched during the second session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, which was held in November 2010.¹⁰

B. Challenges and gaps in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development planning

18. Many developing countries continue to focus on disaster management at the expense of disaster risk reduction; this hampers efforts to achieve the full intended outcome of the Hyogo Framework for Action. In addition, many national disaster management authorities in Asia and the Pacific were established relatively recently and therefore lack the capacity (human resources and knowledge) or experience to mainstream disaster risk reduction into development plans effectively, while regulations and laws pertaining to this issue are at a nascent stage in many developing countries

⁹ Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate: Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow* (Geneva, United Nations, 2009). Available from: <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/gar/>.

¹⁰ See E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/INF/7. See also E/ESCAP/67/9, para. 46.

of the region. The lack of research and analysis of the costs and benefits of investing in disaster risk reduction based on a commonly accepted methodology further compounds the difficulties in prioritizing disaster risk reduction in national policymaking. Not surprisingly, as a result, disaster risk reduction-related spending is often deemed an expenditure instead of an investment.

19. The Internet is not fully developed as a tool for offering resources to national disaster management authorities and line ministries in their efforts to mainstream disaster risk reduction into development planning. Currently, no website contains a concise overview of the relevant information needed for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into different sectors while information on policies, legislation and plans pertaining to the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction into development planning at the national level is not easily accessible. Meanwhile, many groups that are engaged in regional or subregional disaster management and disaster risk reduction initiatives do not access online networks and are therefore deprived of key information that is obtainable through online discussions and access to useful documents and events.

20. The above-mentioned concerns suggest the need for institutionalized policies that promote the implementation of activities and result in behavioural changes that increase the capacity of institutions. This type of capacity-building needs to be carried out over a long period of time. Within its overall mandate, the Gateway and its services are driven by the challenges and gaps identified above. While the Gateway is obviously not equipped to resolve long-term institutional challenges, it does provide a convenient, systematic, easy to access information tool for improving disaster risk reduction.

C. Scope and outreach of the Gateway

21. As part of the overall goal of promoting the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction into development planning in specific sectors and issues, the Gateway enhances regional access to information on good practices, policy options and programmes related to disaster risk reduction in socio-economic development. It provides member States and organizations with a common platform for information sharing, establishing networks, accessing technical services and facilitating regional cooperation. The contents of the Gateway are expected not only to be a valuable resource for national disaster management authorities and line ministries, but also to be of interest to academic and research institutions as well as non-governmental organizations involved in disaster preparedness and management.

22. In order to make the Gateway an effective network of networks and to avoid duplication of effort, three different types of partnership networks are envisioned: knowledge partners tasked with organizing and disseminating disaster risk reduction information; resource partners tasked with contributing services and needed technologies; and theme moderators, who will operate the Gateway's analysis and information pages in a manner similar to the way Wikipedia pages function. ESCAP will identify lead agencies and institutions to help manage these pages and promote online discussions.

23. More specifically, to ensure that that the Gateway functions effectively, the following strategies have been devised:

(a) To leverage online resources with a view to making available new information and analytical tools and opportunities that would help national actors identify gaps and cross-cutting issues relevant to mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development planning;

(b) To create an interactive regional web-based platform for disaster risk reduction which would enable practitioners to share information and participate in online discussions;

(c) To provide quick and easy access to networks and organizations that focus on disaster risk management, particularly disaster risk reduction, in the region. This would provide users with context-specific information and help them identify relevant focal points;

(d) To provide critical information on why mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into different sectors is important and showcase the different tools/approaches, and challenges for doing so;

(e) To facilitate regional-level analysis of disaster risk reduction trends and support information sharing among member States by providing a multilingual networking environment.

D. Regional cooperation and benefits

24. The objectives of the Gateway will be achieved through multiregional partnerships. Current and expected partners are the United Nations Development Programme, UNISDR, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Prevention Web. Potential partners include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the ISDR Asia Partnership on Disaster Reduction (IAP), Pacific Disaster Net, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community Applied Geoscience and Technology Division, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the University of the South Pacific.

25. The Gateway's association with ESCAP helps make it unique in comparison with other portals in the region. Through this association, the Gateway stands to benefit from the multidisciplinary work of ESCAP and from the secretariat's access to a wide range of information and statistics.

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