Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction (ACDR) 2010
Hyogo, Japan, 17-19 January 2010

Conference Summary

The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction (ACDR) 2010 was held in Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan, from 17 to 19 January 2010. It was organized jointly by the government of Japan, the United Nations Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), and the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC), and was scheduled to coincide with the 15th anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 17 January 1995.

As many as 238 participants, including high level government officials from 28 countries, as well as representatives of 53 international and regional organizations, the academic community, the private sector, and civil society organizations attended the conference.

The participants expressed their sincere condolence and sympathy to the people and communities affected by the unprecedented earthquake in Haiti on 12 January 2010. This most recent catastrophic disaster attracted great attention of the participants during the discussion at ACDR 2010.

The key topics addressed at ACDR 2010 are outlined below. Included are some suggestions for follow-up actions, especially in relation to the Mid-Term Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 and the 4th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR), to be held 25-28 October 2010 in Incheon, Republic of Korea to discuss climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

1. Lessons learned from recent disasters in Asia

All kinds of disasters are taking a rising toll on people's lives and properties. In the realm of natural disasters, they have continued to plague Asia last year, including, most notably, the series of typhoons that swept across Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines and Viet Nam; the tropical cyclone which brought enormous damages to Bangladesh and India; the powerful earthquakes that hit West Java and West Sumatra in Indonesia and Bhutan; and floods that swept through India. Delegates from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam presented their experiences of and lessons learned from the recent disasters, sharing them with other member countries.

Addressing climate-related natural disaster risks

Among the many natural hazards that can occur, weather- and climate-related disaster risks, such as tropical cyclones and typhoons, strong winds, torrential rains, floods, and landslides have been increasing in terms of frequency and severity. As ACDR 2010 has been convened right after the 15th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15)

held in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009, the participants of the Conference expressed strong concerns about the critical and urgent need to integrate or link climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. This issue should continue to be explored throughout the process leading to the 4th AMCDRR to be held in October 2010 in the Republic of Korea, which will focus on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. The National Emergency Management Agency of the Republic of Korea in cooperation with UNISDR prompted countries to be further engaged in preparation for the 4th AMCDRR.

Addressing disaster risks in cities

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, which devastated cities and towns in Hyogo Prefecture 15 years ago, caused many deaths and widespread damage to highly advanced and intertwined administrative, economic, and social functions. Since then, Hyogo Prefecture has achieved a remarkable recovery, and the region has become a hub of disaster-related institutions and activities in Asia and beyond. The recovery process from the earthquake of an unprecedented scale has certainly provided valuable lessons that other countries or cities could utilize in upgrading their DRR activities.

The disaster risks of cities worldwide are likely to have increased rather than decreased over the past decades, especially in disaster-prone countries where more people have migrated into high-risk areas, and thus have become more exposed to natural hazards. Recent disasters that have devastated Metro Manila in the Philippines and Padang City in Indonesia clearly demonstrated such a trend. Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, stressed at her keynote address the importance of integrating disaster risk reduction consideration into economic and territorial development. Furthermore, the combination of high population density and very active seismic activity also continue to generate great earthquake risks in Asia. The vulnerability of the major Asian cities is indeed growing rapidly, and thus, effective urban risk reduction requires particular policy attention.

Transferring experience and lessons to the next generations so as not to be forgotten

The Conference participants underscored that transferring experience of and lessons learned from disasters is extremely useful for the next generations to be prepared for future disaster. Therefore, tools to transfer experiences and lessons of disasters in a consistent and systematic manner should be further utilized as one of the important efforts for that objective.

2. Progress and gaps in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015

Considerable progress has been made by countries to achieve the goals of the Hyogo

Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. This framework was adopted by 168 countries at the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005 held in Hyogo, Japan, in 2005.

Despite such progress however, the participants of ACDR 2010 acknowledged the strong need to accelerate the HFA implementation process in light of gaps and challenge facing countries as well as the ever-growing disaster risks related to weather- and climate-related natural hazards and the high vulnerability of Asian cities. To this end, individual countries must boost their efforts to strengthen the capacity to respond to and to deal with natural disasters not only at national level, but more importantly, at local and community levels. Such efforts should be complemented by bilateral, regional, and international cooperation. In this respect, activities like the DRR Policy Peer Review, a pilot project initiated by the ADRC this year, has been recognized as an effective tool for systematically facilitating the sharing of ideas, and existing good practices and lessons learned among member countries, and therefore should be further developed and strengthened for years to come.

3. Enhancing application of space technologies and other technological innovations to Disaster Risk Reduction

The participants indicated that steady progress has been made in recent years in the application of space technologies to disaster risk reduction in Asia. The representatives of China, Japan, Nepal, and ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) presented their recent experiences and practices of utilization of space technologies in disaster risk reduction. The ADRC's role as a mediator in receiving requests from member countries and forwarding them to space agencies under the framework of Sentinel Asia[1] has been greatly appreciated.

More recently, various activities have been initiated and relevant services delivered under the framework of the United Nations Platform for Space-Based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (UN-SPIDER), in which the ADRC serves as a Regional Support Office in Asia.

Despite growing interest in the application of space technologies for achieving disaster risk reduction objectives among disaster management agencies and space agencies, the actual use of those advanced technologies is still limited to a few countries. The challenges involved in disseminating information to end users in less accessible locations have not yet been fully resolved. The good practices presented at the Conference, explicitly suggested its effectiveness in such fields as immediate damage survey, imminent rainfall forecast, and forecast of discharge which could improve vulnerability toward hazards. Thus, efforts to facilitate better use of space technologies in achieving disaster risk reduction objectives should be strengthened by raising awareness of their effectiveness among relevant

[1] Sentinel Asia is a project that provides satellite images of disaster-stricken areas to affected governments upon request.

institutions, and enhancing capacity building and human resource development in this field.

The application of space technologies is not the only advanced technology that can be effective in achieving disaster risk reduction objectives. Other advanced technologies, hard and soft, such as the state-of-art ICT, GIS, hazard mapping, risk assessment, should be further mobilized through cooperation among the countries concerned.

4. Strengthened sub-regional cooperation for disaster risk reduction

Asia has experienced many large-scale catastrophes in recent years, most notably the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, the Kashmir earthquake in 2005, cyclone Sidr in 2007, cyclone Nargis and the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, cyclone Aila and typhoon Ketsana in 2009. The impact of these disasters was so far-reaching that disaster response, recovery and rehabilitation could not be tackled by one country alone but instead required bilateral, regional and international cooperation. Very often, such supranational cooperation activities have been triggered by large-scale miseries.

Remarkable progress has been made in enabling cooperation at the regional or sub-regional levels, such as the development of ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) and SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), and the promotion of cooperative efforts in Central Asia, and among Japan, China and Republic of Korea and. Such regional entities have promoted institutionalization of their disaster risk reduction activities.

The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), which took into effect on 24 December 2009, is the first HFA-related binding instrument in the world and fortifies the regional policy on disaster management by giving priority to disaster risk reduction, and enables a more proactive regional framework for cooperation, coordination, technical assistance, and resource mobilization for disaster risk reduction. In line with the ASEAN Charter, the AADMER Work Programme 2010-2015 will also promote a more people-centered disaster risk reduction by including issues related to vulnerable groups such as children, elderly, and people with disabilities as well as gender perspectives.

In 2009, SAARC reached a broad consensus over a coordinated and planned approach to meet such emergencies of member countries under the aegis of the SAARC Disaster Management Centre's Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanism (NDRRM). SDMC has also been instrumental in developing the Vulnerability Atlas for countries in South Asia.

Reducing the risk of disasters associated with natural hazards in Central Asia has also been making steady progress, thereby preparing for the establishment of Central Asian Centre for Disaster Response and Risk Reduction with the endorsement from donors and

international organizations including the ADRC.

Lastly but not the least, Japan, China and Republic of Korea, sharing the view on the importance of promoting trilateral cooperation on disaster management, have agreed to holding trilateral heads of government agency and expert level meetings on disaster management in rotation.

5. The way forward

ACDR 2010 offered a valuable opportunity for policymakers and practitioners from ADRC-member countries and international/regional organizations to meet together and share their experiences and lessons gained in the process of implementing the HFA. It therefore provided important insights for the Mid-Term Review of the HFA as well as for ongoing preparations for the 4th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to be held in coming October. Especially, the following issues have been highlighted:

- First, there is a rapidly growing need to integrate or link climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction at all levels throughout Asia. This issue should be further explored in the process leading up to the 4th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) to be held in October 2010 in Incheon, Republic of Korea.

- Second, each country, region and international community should be more actively involved in efforts to mitigate urban risks. Mitigation measures such as land-use planning, management of disaster-prone human settlements, and developing knowledge and capacities for effective disaster management should be considered. Thus, the ISDR Global Campaign for Building Resilient Cities 2010-2011, “My city is getting ready,” should facilitate the active participation of a wide range of stakeholders, including local governments and civil society organizations, in activities to mitigate urban risks.

- Third, advanced technologies for achieving disaster risk reduction objectives should be further exploited by connecting research activities to practices and *vice versa*. They include space technologies as well as other technologies in relation to disaster risk reduction. To this end, it is vital to further strengthen policy-making, and institutional capacities at various levels from regional and national levels to local and community levels.

- Fourth, there still exist large gaps in terms of the capability to cope with the vulnerability to disaster and mitigate it between industrialized nations and industrializing nations. Thus, continued policy attention is required to enhance capacity of people and communities through training, education, and the sharing of sound practices, new technologies and thoughts, etc.

- Fifth, in light of the growing importance of disaster-related activities at the sub-regional level, sub-regional and regional cooperation should be further encouraged so as to better exchange knowledge about progress made and challenges faced and thereby strengthening cooperative and supportive relationships among countries within and between sub-regions.

In closing the Conference, the participants expressed their profound appreciation to the government of Japan as the host country and to the UNISDR and the ADRC as organizers, and reaffirmed their continued commitment to building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters.