

**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, scheduled to coincide with the 15th anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 17 January 1995. 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).

As many as 238 participants attended the conference, 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.

The participants expressed their sincere condolences and sympathy to the people and communities affected by the unprecedented earthquake in Haiti on 12 January 2010. This most recent catastrophic disaster was given a great deal of attention by the participants during discussions 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 upcoming 4th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR). The latter is to be held 25-28 October 2010 in Incheon, Republic of Korea to discuss climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

1. Lessons learned from recent disasters in Asia

All kinds of disasters are taking a rising toll on people's lives and property. Natural disasters 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 that caused an enormous amount of damage in 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 the lessons those countries learned from these recent disasters, sharing their experiences with other member countries.

Addressing climate-related natural disaster risks

Disaster risks related to climate change are clearly on the rise. With ACDR 2010 having been convened right after the 15th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15), which was held in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009, the conference participants expressed strong concerns about increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and their consequences. Mr. Kenzo Oshima, JICA Senior Vice-President,

stressed, at his opening address, a growing need to pay a serious attention to coping with these threats and their impacts in the short, medium and long term.

The issue of linking climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction should continue to be explored throughout the process leading to the 4th AMCDRR to be held in October 2010 in the Republic of Korea. The National Emergency Management Agency of the Republic of Korea, in cooperation with UNISDR, encouraged ongoing preparations 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 process of recovering from this earthquake, which was of unprecedented scale, has certainly provided valuable lessons that other countries and cities might be able to 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 increased their exposure to natural hazards. Recent disasters that devastated Metro Manila in the Philippines and Padang City in Indonesia clearly demonstrate this 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 during her keynote address the importance of integrating DRR considerations into economic and territorial development efforts. Furthermore, the combination of high population density and ongoing seismic activity also continue to generate great earthquake risks in Asia. The vulnerability of the major Asian cities is indeed growing rapidly. Thus, effective urban risk reduction requires particular policy attention.

Transferring experiences and lessons to the next generation so they are not forgotten

The conference participants underscored the importance of transferring experiences and lessons learned from disasters to the next generation to ensure that future generations will be better prepared for future disasters. Therefore, tools for transferring those experiences and lessons in a consistent and systematic manner should be further developed and utilized.

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

Considerable progress has been made toward achieving 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 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 challenges facing the signatory 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 their capacity to respond to and deal with natural disasters not only at the national level, but more importantly, at the local and community levels. Such efforts should be complemented by bilateral, regional, and international cooperation. In this respect, 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, good practices, and lessons learned among member countries, and therefore should be further developed in the years to come.

3. Enhancing the application of space technologies and other technological innovations to DRR

The participants indicated that steady progress has been made in recent years in the application of space technologies to DRR in Asia. Representatives of China, Japan, Nepal, and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) presented their recent practical experiences with utilizing space technologies in DRR. The ADRC's role as mediator in receiving requests from member countries and forwarding them to space agencies under the Sentinel Asia¹ framework 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 DRR 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 highlighted the effectiveness of these tools in such tasks as immediate damage surveys, imminent rainfall forecasting, and the forecast of river discharge, which could improve hazard vulnerability. Thus, efforts to promote the better use of space technologies in achieving DRR objectives should be strengthened by raising awareness of their effectiveness among relevant institutions, and

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

enhancing capacity building and human resource development in this field.

Space technologies are not the only form of advanced technology that can be effective in achieving DRR objectives. Other advanced technologies, both hard and soft, such as the state-of-art information and communications technologies, geographic information systems (GIS), hazard mapping, and risk assessment systems should be further mobilized through cooperation between 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, and cyclone Aila and typhoon Ketsana in 2009. The impact of these disasters was so far-reaching that disaster response, recovery, and rehabilitation efforts could not be tackled by one country alone but instead required bilateral, regional, and international cooperation. Such supranational cooperation activities often have been triggered by large-scale human suffering.

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, as well as efforts between Japan, China and the Republic of Korea. These regional entities have promoted the institutionalization of their DRR activities.

The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), which went 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 DRR. It also enables a more proactive regional framework for cooperation, coordination, technical assistance, and resource mobilization for DRR. In line with the ASEAN Charter, the AADMER Work Programme 2010-2015 will also promote a more people-centered DRR approach by including issues related to vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and the disabled, as well as gender perspectives.

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

Steady progress has been made toward reducing the disaster risks associated with natural hazards in Central Asia, thereby preparing for the establishment of a Central Asian Centre for Disaster Response and Risk Reduction, which has been endorsed by donors and

international organizations including the ADRC.

Last but not the least, Japan, China and the Republic of Korea, all recognizing the importance of promoting trilateral cooperation on disaster management, have agreed to host trilateral meetings between government agency heads and experts in disaster management, on a rotating basis.

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 October. Particular emphasis was placed on the following issues:

- First, there is a rapidly growing need to integrate or link climate change adaptation and DRR at all levels throughout Asia. This issue should be regarded as a matter of great urgency, and thus, further explored leading up to the upcoming 4th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR).
- Second, each country and region, as well as the 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 DRR objectives should be further exploited by connecting research activities to practice and *vice versa*. These include space technologies as well as other technologies related to DRR. To this end, it is vital to further strengthen policymaking, and institutional capacities at various levels from the regional and national levels to the local and community levels.
- Fourth, there is still a large gap between industrialized and industrializing nations in terms of their ability to cope with and mitigate disaster vulnerabilities. Thus, continued policy attention is required to enhance the capacity of people and communities through training, education, and the sharing of sound practices, new technologies, and innovative ideas.
- 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. This would facilitate the exchange of knowledge about progress made and challenges faced, thereby strengthening cooperative and supportive relationships between countries within sub-regions and between sub-regions.

Individual countries and the international community as a whole should make greater efforts to address disaster risk and to close the existing gaps, particularly in developing countries that have weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

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.