

Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2017

Chair's Summary

Introduction

1. Asia remains highest in the world in terms of disaster indices. In 2017 alone, floods and landslides triggered huge disaster impacts in some South Asian countries notably Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. Typhoons, earthquakes, and floods occurred in Southeast Asia impacting Indonesia and Viet Nam. Avalanches, floods, storms, mudflows, and droughts were regularly experienced in Central Asian countries, and earthquakes remain the predominant threat in the Caucasus region. These varied hazards in Asia, compounded by the increasing impact of climate change, make the whole region vulnerable to disasters, incurring substantial financial cost and eroding any financial development gains made by countries.
2. In recognition of these changing conditions and disaster trends, ADRC member countries believe that there is a need to continuously improve their respective disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies and strategies so that these are aligned with development goals and targets. However, effective improvement and harmonization of DRR, climate change adaptation (CCA), and development policies is still a huge challenge for member countries in the region. It is in this context that the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction (ACDR) 2017 was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, the first ever to be organized in the Caucasus region, so that ADRC can explore greater linkages and collaboration such as bridging country-to-country cooperation in addressing similar challenges and strengthening the networks of countries with similar conditions.
3. At the outset of ACDR, the urgent need to further improve resilience was emphasized so that member countries can prevent hazards from becoming disasters. As a case point, more attention was given to Azerbaijan to understand its situation and learn from their experiences. In terms of policy, a draft law on "Population and Territories Protection from Emergency Situations" is being worked out, signaling the official start to creating the National Platform on DRR that will pull together all different actors towards a more coordinated effort. Remarkable policy improvements were also noted during the past decade, particularly in search and rescue, where state-of-the-art equipment and facilities were acquired and personnel capacity was enhanced through joint exercises and drills. However, Azerbaijan acknowledged that since disasters respect no boundaries, relying on the government's capacity alone is not enough to cope with the emergency and recovery demands in case of mega-disaster. In view of this, the government expressed its commitment to actively engage and welcome international cooperation efforts, such as supporting the Central Asia and South Caucasus Regional Plan of Action for Implementation of the Sendai Framework to help build greater resiliency.

Outcomes

4. The overall perspective of the messages shared at the conference was to consider adopting "whole-of-society" approach and "leave no one behind" principle in achieving the objectives of each session.

Session 1: Implementation of the Sendai Framework – national/local DRR strategies

5. This session examined the status of Sendai Framework implementation in Asia, particularly what priority activities were undertaken to enhance understanding of disaster risk, what policies and strategies were put in place to intensify DRR efforts, and how past lessons were integrated and mainstreamed in the government's DRR strategies, plans, and programs. The key messages, include:
 - **Updating DRR plans and strategies:** As reported in the case of Japan, DRR and resilience are the core elements for long-term economic and fiscal policies, infrastructure development, and land use. It signified that having an effective coordination mechanism among diverse policy plans as well as cooperation among different levels of governments is essential in order to fully integrate and mainstream DRR.
 - **Strengthening national DRR organizations.** As illustrated in the cases of Viet Nam and Malaysia, new authorities namely the Viet Nam Disaster Management Authority (VNDMA) and the National Disaster Management Authority (NADMA) respectively came about as a result organizational restructuring. Institutionalizing inter-ministerial or inter-departmental relationships is seen as key factor to obtain proactive support from all governmental agencies, as also indicated in the cases of Japan, Cambodia, and Mongolia.

- **Enhancing the utilization of evidence-based data:** The use of credible data is essential to achieve greater understanding of disaster risk as commonly reported by Kazakhstan, Nepal, Cambodia, and Azerbaijan. Accessing real scale data by using space-based technology and disseminating quality disaster risk-information to citizens through TV channels and social media networks were mentioned as examples of concrete actions that governments of member countries can undertake.
- **Exploring risk transfer instruments and investment:** Based on past lessons, Nepal highlighted the need to further explore options for risk transfer, including insurance and social protection. In Kazakhstan, one of the strategies has been investing in capacity development and resilient constructions by allocating substantial fund for these efforts.
- **Creating a forum or portal for information sharing:** In the case of Kazakhstan, the Ministry serves as Secretariat to the Regional Forum that comprised heads of emergency departments, and functions as knowledge and information sharing hub. Through this Forum, lessons in the regions are shared and applied in appropriate situations and contexts. In Nepal, a national online DRM portal was put in place to facilitate discussion, consultation, and obtain feedback on DRR planning and programming.
- **Measuring progress:** UNISDR reported that by using the Sendai Framework Monitoring system, member countries can measure the progress towards achieving the goals and targets. This system enables governments to demonstrate their respective progress in risk reduction. The monitor will also have linkages to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) reporting. Such coherence will help reduce burden on country reporting between global strategies.

Session 2: Effective Emergency Response to Survive in Mega-Disasters

6. This session dwelt on how to further promote effective emergency response, with emphasis on search and rescue, for extreme scenarios like mega-disasters or small-scale local rural disasters. It examined: what improvements in human resources development (HRD) programs are needed to make search and rescue effective in the face climate change, urbanization, and poverty; how to enhance search and rescue capacity beyond designated borders; and how to leverage support from the private sector in the area of search and rescue. The key messages, include:
- **Adopting inclusive approach to emergency response:** The case of Azerbaijan showed that professionalization of staffers and responders, adoption of modern state-of-the-art equipment, and utilization of advanced communication facilities contributed to effective search and rescue operations. However, the changing impacts of emergencies, including remote forest fires, posed greater challenge that requires adoption of a more inclusive approach to emergency response that engage other sectors (e.g. communities, private sector, and international partners) in the planning and implementation process, and at the same time, maintain international exercises and networking such as through the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) activities.
 - **Conducting Integrated Disaster Management Exercise:** Drills and exercises on disaster response can be modified using different scenarios to assess readiness and capacities. In Thailand, the regular conduct of Integrated Disaster Management Exercises (IDMEx) facilitated synergies and improvement of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The IDMEx also facilitated the identification of gaps and limitations, which were addressed in the process, including the option to use elephant in response operations.
 - **Establishing or maintaining a training center:** Maintaining a training center for emergency response, such as in the case of Kyrgyzstan, can be an option to ensure professionalism of responders through regular training and retraining rescuers. The training center does not only facilitate continuous improvement of professional skills and expertise but it also develop and expand the number of responders and experts.
 - **Strengthening regional training program:** There are many recognized regional centers in Asia that have portfolios on disaster emergency response. The ADPC is one of these centers that member countries can link with, particularly on enhancing technical capacities. Some member countries like Bhutan and Bangladesh had already availed these portfolios, and the lessons were applied in their respective contexts.

Session 3: Advanced Technologies facilitating DRR and CCA

7. This session further explored the application of advanced technologies to facilitate DRR and CCA. It looked into how the new innovative tools can be brought down to the community level, and to ensure that these are user-friendly and accessible. The key messages, include:

- **Utilizing ICT tools:** As shown in the ADB supported project, the use of ICT can enhance DRR activities in developing hazard maps, crisis maps, and OSM base maps. The utilization of these tools strengthens collection, sharing, and application of disaster information at the community level.
- **Exploring new hazard-specific technologies:** The “LiDAR” was presented by Niigata University as one of the technologies for landslide monitoring and early warning system, which can be easily made accessible to local residents in landslide-prone areas. In Bhutan, community-based monitoring, early warning system, drills, and continued education were introduced and practiced to address inadequate level of awareness in the communities and to prevent devastating impacts from GLOF.
- **Applying space-based technology:** As presented by JAXA, space-based technologies, including the application of remote sensing and web-based GIS technologies, are reliable tools in aiding emergency response and recovery planning at different levels. For wider application, greater collaboration with stakeholders and private sector is needed to make these technologies more accessible, use-friendly, and applicable.
- **Advocating lifestyle changes:** Spaced-based images, as shown by RESTEC, can be utilized to advocate lifestyle change and support impacted communities through the “Wear You Are” project. It is a web-based on-demand printing of t-shirt or iPhone cover case to promote awareness and donation.

Conclusions

8. Affirming that disasters do not respect international boundaries, the conference recognized the increasing importance of regional cooperation. It is crucial to intensify networks in the region, and at the same time, bridge cooperation from Caucasus to Asia Pacific, Central Asia, and Eurasia. The networks need to be expanded not only among national government officials but also those in the subnational governments and relevant sectors. Overall, the conference came up with following conclusions:
 - **Strengthening DRR plans/strategy and governance:** The conference upheld that DRR and resilience are the core elements for economic and development policies, and that improving governance is indispensable in the entire DRR efforts. The decisions on DRR by authorities need to be based on credible data, and the process of planning and implementing the plans and programs require inter-ministerial cooperation and private sector support.
 - **Advocating closer collaboration in emergency response:** The conference advocated leveraging support from existing regional training organizations, programs, and forums to address emergency response issues, including search and rescue, early warning systems, and capacity development. Mutual support and collaboration in the areas of emergency response, prevention, preparedness, and development policies need to be intensified through synergies with the private sector. Some of the key actions to consider include: advancing assessment and management methods which meet the current needs and capabilities of member countries; and creating the right formulation and implementation of land development projects which takes into account regional disaster management.
 - **Science and Technology:** Recognizing the relevant contribution of science and technology, and acknowledging the report from Japan that new technology can help predict the occurrence of earthquake and other hazards, the conference affirmed the importance to further explore advancement in science and technology in order to reduce the impacts of future disasters. Specifically, advanced technologies for early warning system as well as for search and rescue need to be advocated.

Way Forward

9. **From 8th AMCDRR in Mongolia to ACDR2018:** ADRC member countries committed to continuously engage in the preparatory processes, including the forthcoming Asia Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) co-hosted by the Government of Mongolia and UNISDR, to remain updated with recent trends and developments in DRR and CCA. Member countries expressed support to the AMCDRR and to track progress of the actions recommended in this conference.
10. **Towards 20th Anniversary of ADRC:** The ACDR 2018, on the occasion of ADRC’s 20th anniversary, is viewed by member countries as an opportunity to examine the achievements and contributions of ADRC in disaster risk reduction as well as venue to launch future programs and activities. Additionally, back to back activities such as the JAXA’s Sentinel Asia JPT meeting, and other events, shall be coordinated within ACDR 2018.