

Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2020

Summary

Introduction

1. The Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction (ACDR) 2020 was held for the first time in an online format on 20-22 October 2020. An annually organized event, ACDR aims to promote the sharing of information and practices for implementing SFDRR and the SDGs, and to further enhance partnerships among ADRC member countries and various international and regional DRR organizations. ACDR2020 was organized jointly by the government of Japan and ADRC. The virtual ACDR2020 (<https://acdr.adrc.asia/>) was attended by 244 people from 22 member countries, representing DRR organizations, research institutes, universities, and the private sector. The agenda consisted of an opening ceremony, special presentation, keynote speeches, and two thematic sessions.

October 20: Opening Ceremony, Special Presentation, Keynote Speech

2. In his opening remarks, H.E. Mr. OKONOGI Hachiro, **Minister of State for Disaster Management for the government of Japan**, highlighted the importance of public assistance, self-help, and mutual aid, and introduced the government's collective efforts to eliminate vertical divisions and to share Japan's disaster response to COVID-19, touching on ADRC's visiting researcher program and the public-private partnership program. Next, H.E. Mr. **Rustam Mazarzoda, Chairman of the Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defense of Tajikistan**, the country which was originally scheduled to host the ACDR this year, expressed his hope that Tajikistan would be able to host an ACDR in the near future. He also noted the need to discuss new approaches to disaster response and DRR strategies for many disasters in Tajikistan based on the lessons presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, **Prof. HAMADA Masanori, Chairman of ADRC**, explained the rationale for holding the conference online, and outlined the themes of ACDR2020.

Special Presentation

3. In the special presentation, **Mr. NAKAO Akifumi, Director of the International Cooperation Division of the Disaster Management Bureau of the Cabinet Office of Japan**, reported on the current status of the disaster response to COVID-19, and on "Climate Action and Disaster Risk Reduction" strategies in the era of climate crisis. He also mentioned new initiatives that have emerged, noting how the current crisis presents an opportunity to analyze issues from multiple angles.

Keynote Speeches

4. The keynote speeches were given by four experts. First, **Mr. Sanny Ramos Jegillos, Senior Adviser of the Disaster Risk Reduction Bangkok Regional Hub of the UNDP**, reported on the multifaceted impacts of COVID-19 in the Asia-Pacific region, and outlined 10 lessons and best practices for recovery, including international and regional cooperation, effective governance, social protection, green economy, digital disruption and innovation, and funding to reduce multiple risks. Finally, he ended his presentation with the hopeful comment, "Our future is not as bad as we think."
5. Next, **Prof. ISOBE Masahiko, President of the Kochi University of Technology**, gave a presentation entitled "Two-level Framework of Coastal Disaster Reduction." He suggested that better coastal disaster reduction measures can be taken based on the characteristics of the huge tsunami resulting from the Great East Japan Earthquake. For the maximum level tsunami (Level 2), which has an extremely low probability of occurrence (once every 1,000 years), and causes enormous destruction, the goal should be to save lives through evacuation and to maintain minimum daily living and economic activity while tolerating some damage. For the type and size of tsunami that occurs more frequently, perhaps around once every 100 to 150 years, and causes less destruction than the Level 2 tsunamis (Level 1), the goal should be to prevent inundation and protect the economy and people's livelihoods using tsunami wall structures. It is likewise possible to protect

lives and property against the kind of storm surge damage that occurs frequently in Asian countries by developing and operating a two-tier DRR system.

6. **Prof. Arnold M. Howitt, Faculty Co-Director of the Program on Crisis Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School**, gave a video presentation due to the time difference, entitled “The Challenge of Concurrent Crises.” Due to the tendency of disasters to become more severe, frequent, and simultaneous, he pointed to the need for a critical incident management team that has two operational modes: responding to specific crises that have been experienced before, and responding to multiple, concurrent crises.
7. Finally, **Prof. Ian Robert Davis, Visiting Professor at Kyoto, Lund, and Oxford Brookes Universities**, gave a presentation on “Countermeasures to Tackle Risk Reduction and Climate Change from Intensifying Hazards.” His 12 countermeasures were developed in consultation with eight experts from six countries. He noted that the achievement of effective countermeasures requires integrity and consistency, courage, foresight, long-term perspectives, planning, humility, education, knowledge, authority, resources, local approaches, teamwork, creativity, alternative strategies, and faith.

October 21: Session 1: Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Measures and Challenges to the Intensifying Disaster Risks

8. **Dr. Manzul Kumar Hazarika, Director, Geoinformatics Center, Asian Institute of Technology**, moderated this thematic session, which recognizes the challenges to intensifying risks. He said that each country adopts various kinds of countermeasures for DRR, depending on the situation and available resources.

Presentation from Member Countries

9. **Ms. Myat Moe The, Department of Disaster Management, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Republic of the Union of Myanmar**, reported that managing cyclone risk remains challenging. One of the measures introduced was the development a platform called MUDRA which provide data to ministries and line agencies. Some concrete actions include the building of 236 multipurpose shelters and establishment of disaster management fund both at the national and sub-national levels.
10. **Ms. Nguyen Thi Xuan Hong and Mr. TANAKA Yasuhiro, Vietnam Disaster Management Authority, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam**, jointly reported the challenges brought by flooding. While structural measures such as embankments are put in place, suitable legal framework as well as the development of a Comprehensive Flood Management Plan are also pursued.
11. **Mr. Umar Fikry, National Disaster Management Authority, Maldives**, reported that coastal erosion is becoming a big challenge due to the effects of tropical cyclones and storm surges. Countermeasures are being deliberated, noting that as the temperature rises by 2 degrees, the coral reefs will be disappearing from the Maldives in the next 12 years.
12. **Mr. Kamalov Jamshed, Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defense, Tajikistan**, institutional capacity of the national platform could face a challenging in implementing its National Disaster Risk Reduction Plan 2030. So, the platform intensively collaborates with other agencies in pursuing various disaster prevention projects (e.g., ADB, the World Bank, JICA, and the King Salmon Foundation).
13. **Mr. TAKAHASHI Kazuaki, Ministry of the Environment, Japan**, reported the challenges pose by climate change and corresponding mitigation activities, such as the government support in achieving zero greenhouse gases by 2050. Other actions he mentioned are distributed energy supply system, adaptive reconstruction, embankment, tree planting, climate change adaptation law, climate change adaptation plan, and climate change assessment report.

Presentation from Experts

14. In support of the DRR measures of ADRC member countries, some partner organizations showcased new technologies. **Prof. Cees van Westen, University of Twente**, introduced digital technology for disaster prevention that is implemented in Tajikistan in collaboration with UNDP and the Government of Japan. This technology simulates future scenarios through risk assessment and mapping, and uses a multi-hazard framework.
15. **Dr. Mizan Bustanul Fuady Bisri, United Nations University**, introduced a knowledge management tool, 'CARI' (<https://caribencana.id>), an online search engine that could locate locally-relevant knowledge on DRR. This tool addresses the gaps of fragmented and scattered knowledge that overlooked locally existing information.
16. **Mr. Keith Paolo C. Landicho, AHA Centre**, reported various platforms at AHA Center that are used to monitor and analyze disasters. One of these is the ASEAN Science-based Disaster Management Platform (ASDMP), which is interactive research portal that has access to thousands of disaster research products in Southeast Asia. It connects policymakers with scientists and researchers (e.g., VDMA in Vietnam connects with JAXA and AIT) to share disaster information for facilitate an effective response.

Commentary

17. **Dr. Manzul Kumar Hazarika** introduced other papers that were not presented in this session. Armenia submitted a report on risk evaluation based on the experience of the Spitak earthquake in 1988. Bangladesh issued a report on the latest hazards due to abnormal weather. Nepal reported on its Strategic Plan for DRR (2018-2030). He also briefly summarized all presentations. He highlighted that: 1) Tourism income is decreasing as a result of issues arising from climate change in Maldives; 2) In Tajikistan, Strategic Plan 2030 is one way of ensuring the implementation of specific DRR missions. He also acknowledged new approaches and technologies that DRR experts from partner organizations shared, such as use of ICT for decision support system, online portals, and search engines for local knowledge on DRR. And he suggested to strengthen networking between the national governments and DRR experts for better DRR efforts in Asia.

October 22: Session 2: Disaster Preparedness and Response Measures Amidst COVID-19

18. **Prof. ISHIWATARI Mikio**, University of Tokyo, moderated this thematic session, and said that "Disaster Risk Management (DRM) authorities in Asia are facing difficulties in managing disasters in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic because most of the systems are not prepared using multi-hazard approach."
19. **Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, adviser to the Prime Minister in Malaysia**, stressed in her keynote the importance of "future-proofing our systems against complex challenges". Taking care of the environment is one way to future-proof the DRM system, she noted, stating that "environmental protection is disaster management".

Response Measures Presentation from Member Countries

20. Notable disaster response measures during the pandemic were reported in this session. In the Philippines, **Dir. Claudio Yucot, Office of Civil Defense Regional Office V**, reported that his office introduced new practices in responding to typhoon Ambo (Vongfong) in May 2020. For example: (1) suspected COVID-19 cases were segregated from the evacuation area; (2) separate facilities were designated to take care of suspected COVID-19 cases; (3) occupants of the evacuation room must be either members of one family or people who know each other from the same neighborhood; and (4) no media was allowed at the emergency operations center.
21. In India, **Mr. Sandeep Poundrik, IAS**, reported that the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), in anticipation of the cyclone season (e.g., *Amphan* in May 2020), developed a *GIS-based Decision Support System* (DSS) platform to manage disaster in the midst of COVID-19. This platform has a geo-enabled dashboard for the public, where State Disaster Management Agencies (SDMAs)

and other stakeholders can access information related to COVID-19 cases, logistics, resources and surveillance.

22. In the Republic of Korea, **Mr. KANG Jinmo** reported that the Ministry of the Interior and Safety (MOIS) developed a New Guideline for the Temporary Shelter to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 that outlines quarantine measures (e.g., use of public buildings and town halls as temporary locations) prior to facility operations as well as the stockpiling of hygienic supplies (e.g., sanitizers and facemasks). This prevented the spread of coronavirus during the heat wave and typhoon disasters during the summer.

Preparedness Measures Presentation from Member Countries

23. Enhanced preparedness measures have also been put in place in many countries. In Armenia, **Ms. Syuzanna Vardazar Kakoyan** said that the Ministry of Emergency Situation (MES) integrates COVID-19 response in the *Risk Analysis and Emergency Response Plan*.
24. In Nepal, **Mr. Beda Nidhi Khanal** said that the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) is strengthening the institutional coordination between its disaster response system and COVID-19 management system as part of its disaster preparedness measures.

Presentation from Experts

25. Partner organizations have also been innovating in extending support to DRM institutions. **Ms. Helen Mould, OCHA**, reported that OCHA-ROAP supports countries through the implementation of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), particularly in identifying the needs across 12 countries in the Asia-Pacific and in securing financial support for plan implementation.
26. **Prof. SHIBASAKI Ryosuke, University of Tokyo**, reported that his center developed an open-source software application called “Mobipack” that serves as a decision support system (DSS) tool for managing COVID-19 as well as other disasters.

Commentary

27. Presentations in this session offered several insights, and **Dr. Khamarrul Azahari Razak, University Technology Malaysia**, summarized as follows: (1) responding to disasters in the midst of pandemic requires multi-level collaboration and enhanced multi-hazard preparedness efforts; (2) an integrated disaster risk management approach is needed in complex crises; and (3) cooperation with civil society is crucial to enhance community-level disaster preparedness and response.

Other Thematic Papers

28. Moderators of thematic sessions respectively acknowledged other papers submitted for the conference but were not presented due to limited slots. For Thematic Session 1, other available papers are from **Armenia, Bangladesh, and Nepal**. For Thematic Session 2, other papers are from **Kazakhstan, Singapore, and GeoThings**. All submitted papers are accessible at the ACDR website <https://acdr.adrc.asia>.

Conclusion and Way Forward

29. This conference, which served as kick-off meeting for a continuing discussion on two the thematic issues, showed that in Asia, most governments have introduced adaptation measures to reduce the impact of intensifying disaster risks as well as address the ‘concurrent crises’ in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the discussions of these issues at the conference, some initial suggestions were already recommended as way forward:

- In addressing intensifying disaster risks, new approaches and technologies (such as use of ICT for decision support system, online portals, and search engines for local knowledge on DRR) may be promoted

- In addressing disaster management challenges in the midst of COVID-19, the multi-hazard approach may be promoted, especially through knowledge management and lessons learned sharing of best practices
30. Further discussions on the issues will continue at the conference website <https://acdr.adrc.asia> to gather more inputs as well as deliberate the way forward. The discussions will culminate into a final report that will be released in March 2021.

Closing

31. On behalf of the Government of Japan, H.E. **Mr. AKAZAWA Ryosei, State Minister for Disaster Management for the government of Japan**, thanked over 240 participants from 22 member countries, partner organizations, and general public who actively joined the virtual conference. Likewise, on behalf of ADRC, **Dr. OGAWA Yujiro, Executive Secretary of ADRC**, expressed gratitude to member countries and partner organizations for sharing reports and case studies. He further encouraged the submission of additional reports in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the Asian experience.