

# Building Resilience for All



Photo: AIDMI.

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.*

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

It is well known that disasters kill, maim and cause widespread devastation in the communities they strike. An additional feature of the chaos wrought by disasters is the loss of years of precarious developmental progress. Therefore, disaster risk reduction (DRR) is indispensable for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals. Since DRR is a cross cutting issue, the essence of effective DRR essentially lies in building resilience for all the stakeholders in the global humanitarian landscape.

This issue of *Southasiadisasters.net*, focuses on the important theme of 'Building Resilience for All'. It highlights the actions that are needed and the best practices that are prevalent among humanitarian agencies across the globe to build the resilience of the most marginalised and neglected groups. As eclectic as the field of resilience building, this issue contains a wide array of experiences and opinions on this important theme. The voices captured in this issue range from UNOCHA's changing role in Asia Pacific to the emergence of the global south in the global humanitarian system as donors and from the experience of Bangladesh in managing polders for flood control to the role of the education institutes in creating a skilled and trained professionals.

Containing opinions from some of the most respectable humanitarian practitioners from around the world, this issue of *Southasiadisasters.net* is both engaging and thought-provoking. It is a must read for all who seek to understand the challenges and opportunities of building resilience for all. ■

- Kshitij Gupta, AIDMI

## BUILDING RESILIENCE

# Changing UN OCHA in Asia Pacific

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, has called for a World Humanitarian Summit to be convened in 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. The lead up to the Summit provides an opportunity for everyone involved in humanitarian action to have a say on how our collective endeavours can be made fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century; safeguarding principled humanitarian action while looking to increase its effectiveness; ensuring that this action reduces vulnerability and improves risk management; identifying where and how new technologies and other developments can enhance humanitarian response, and focusing specifically on serving people who are caught up in the horrors of conflict.

It's been 25 years since the last big shake-up of the humanitarian system and so it's high time to examine where we are and figure out how we can move forward most effectively to meet that core humanitarian objective – saving lives. Seismic shifts have taken place in Asia and the Pacific – driven by the lessons we learn from each successive crisis. Cyclones in Bangladesh; tsunami waves in the Indian Ocean and Japan; earthquakes in Iran, China, Japan; floods almost everywhere and the ever-present and insidious impact of climate change, rapid population growth, urbanisation, price hikes and

so on. Governments are working hard across this region to put into place institutions and systems to better manage disasters. There has also been a far less positive tendency to conflate humanitarian action with disaster management. They are not the same thing and it is important that we continue to stress that humanitarian action must be based on the internationally accepted principles – especially in situations of conflict, of which there are, sadly, all too many in this region.

OCHA has been charged by the Secretary-General to support the organisation of the World Humanitarian Summit. From consultations and discussions with a wide array of partners in this region we are seeing a number of emerging factors: (i) prioritizing the most vulnerable people and those suffering from acute humanitarian distress; (ii) localizing preparedness and response; (iii) building resilience to protracted crises, in particular through joint humanitarian and development action; (iv) reinforcing humanitarian action in situations of conflict; (v) being financially fit and agile; (vi) making the international humanitarian system better-suited for the new generation of crises; and (vii) better understanding risk and the economics of response.



Oliver Lacey-Hall

- UNOCHA is organizing the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016.
- This summit will be a key opportunity to deliberate upon the humanitarian challenges that ail the Asia Pacific region.
- OCHA is working closely with all stakeholders to evolve suitable legal frameworks, accountability and communication structure to help the Asia Pacific overcome these challenges.

Most of these points are not new. But in the context of the Summit preparations, they are coming primarily from national and sub-national partners- who also confirm that they place their trust in known partners rather than distant international humanitarian agencies. These emerging factors are forcing international organisations to rethink their role and their place in humanitarian action. The international humanitarian system has much to offer. But in order for it to be seen as useful, supportive and enabling of national action, its rhetoric, positioning and power relations need to be fundamentally adjusted - trust needs to be built anew and this is a slow and painstaking process.

OCHA's regional and country offices in Asia-Pacific are working with international agencies, national authorities, civil society networks,

NGOs, the private sector, militaries and, where we can, affected people, to support change, to build trust and to be taken seriously as a partner. We are taking steps to help where we can - supporting development of clear legal frameworks for humanitarian action, trying to meet greater demands for accountability to and communication with affected people, working together to better prepare for and manage the risk of disasters and crises, and - perhaps most importantly - simply reaching out to those who want to engage with us. We know that the environment in which we are operating is changing - we must change with it to best serve the people whose needs are greatest.

My office is promoting structured regional, sub-regional, national and local dialogue through the World Humanitarian Summit process and through its own regional

humanitarian partnerships agenda. But we still see a need to listen more carefully, to try and understand what the region wants and where and how we can help to deliver. Coordinated humanitarian action saves more lives than uncoordinated action. Making sure we have the right people in the room to support the emergence of a new and more inclusive humanitarian endeavour in this region is a key priority for my office. In this context, the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit regional consultation for Central and South Asia, to be held in August 2015, will be a key stepping stone in our endeavours. I hope that you will support this important consultation and help us to provide bold and far-reaching recommendations on the road to Istanbul in 2016. ■

- **Oliver Lacey-Hall**, Regional Director, Asia and the Pacific with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Thailand

## NEW TRENDS

# The Emergence of the Global South in the International Humanitarian System



Jacinta O'Hagan

For many decades, humanitarianism and the international humanitarian system has been regarded as the province of the global North. Western states and organizations have been the principal actors in the humanitarian system and dominated its core institutions. This, however, is changing with actors from global South becoming increasingly important and visible actors. Though the United States and the European Union remain the largest donors, humanitarian assistance from non-DAC (Development Assistance Committee) states rose from some \$34 million in 2000 to \$2.3 billion in

2013.<sup>1</sup> The Gulf States are amongst the top non-DAC donors, but there have also been substantial increases in humanitarian assistance provided by states such as Turkey, China and India. India, for instance has shifted from being a recipient of humanitarian assistance to that of aid provider.<sup>2</sup> We are also witnessing the growing prominence of Southern NGOs, such as Mercy Malaysia and the Indonesia - based Muhammadiyah.

What are the implications of this growing diversity for the international humanitarian system? It could be viewed as demonstrating

a healthy pluralism in humanitarianism, but there are concerns of diversity fuelling the fragmentation of the system. Traditional doors are concerned with the weak integration of new actors into the institutions and structures of the system. Only Japan and South Korea are members of the DAC, and only Japan, South Korea and Brazil are members of the Good Humanitarian Donor. Traditional donors are further concerned that new actors from the global South operate different models of assistance that could undermine the principles and

1 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, 2014, p. 34.

2 India's humanitarian assistance has risen from \$330,000 in 2003 to just over \$2.6 million in 2013. Source: OCHA "Financial Tracking System: tracking Global Humanitarian Aid Flows". [www.fts.unocha.org](http://www.fts.unocha.org). Accessed 29 December, 2014.

practices of the system, which are typically viewed as based on the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. For instance the predominance of the state in China's Humanitarian System and its preference for government to government assistance are viewed as potentially undermining the independence of humanitarian assistance from broader political objectives. The prominence of faith-based organizations in the humanitarian sector elsewhere in the global South has been viewed as potentially undermining principles of impartiality, as is the tendency of actors from the global South to be more likely to provide assistance in cases of natural disasters rather than complex emergencies.

For their part, actors from the global South have been concerned with the domination of the humanitarian system by Western actors and the degree to which they have set the standards of what constitutes legitimate humanitarian action. This has led to the accusation that the international humanitarian system is not "truly universal" but a Western hegemonic discourse, reflecting broader structures of inequality between the global North and the global South. In contrast, the discourse of humanitarianism within the global South can be characterised as less an expression of the obligation of the strong to the weak than as an expression of solidarity born of mutual vulnerabilities to, for instance, Natural Disaster. Humanitarianism is often framed in the language of mutual assistance and reciprocity aimed at sharing knowledge and building resilience. India, for instance, does not use the language of donors and beneficiaries in its approach to aid, but of partnership. From this perspective, the privileging of bi-lateral and government to government assistance is commensurate with a



*In 2014, Turkey became the 3rd largest international donor of humanitarian assistance.*

Source: <http://www.timesofummah.com/news/europe/turkey-ranks-3rd-most-generous-donor-country.html>

desire to ensure that humanitarianism does not become a vehicle for political interference in the affairs of other states. Humanitarian action may also be viewed as a legitimate obligation of the state or faith based organizations. This alternative discourse of humanitarianism suggests that approaches to humanitarianism found in the global South have been profoundly influenced by the legacy of colonialism and external control, as well as influenced by local political and social cultures.

Whilst therefore the belief that there is an obligation to relieve the undue suffering of others is widely shared, conceptions of what constitutes

- The emergence of countries like Turkey, China and India on the stage of the international humanitarian system have huge implications for the system.
- But new actors from the global south may operate in a way that might undermine the principles of the international humanitarian system.
- What approaches can be followed to ensure that this diversity in global humanitarian system can be leveraged to provide assistance to those in need in the most effective ways possible.

legitimate humanitarianism can vary widely and may be significantly influenced by cultural perspectives and the legacy of historical experience. There is a danger that tensions between actors, stemming from perceived cultural dissonance in humanitarianism, might bring about a "clash of cultures" discourse that could weaken trust and cooperation across the sector, and thus contribute to fragmentation of the humanitarian system. This heightens the need for enhanced dialogue between diverse actors. Dialogue, however, needs to be structured on a framework that facilitates a comprehensive and mutual understanding of diverse conceptions of humanitarianism; on understanding actors on their own terms rather than necessarily privileging established definitions. Such a dialogue may not necessarily be comfortable, nor will it necessarily lead to consensus, but it is essential to identifying synergies and to finding ways to negotiate and manage differences with the goal of achieving the fundamental objective of humanitarianism: providing assistance to those in need in the most effective ways possible. ■

**- Jacinta O'Hagan,**

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# Transfer of Risk – Case of Coastal Polders in Bangladesh

The coast of Bangladesh is subject to the risk of regular tidal flooding. Since the early sixties, a number of polders (ring embankments) were constructed on the coast to protect agricultural land from such flooding. Now there are 123 polders in the coast of Bangladesh (see figure) giving protection to 1.5 million ha of land. After polderization, agriculture in the coast flourished due to flood and saline free environment. But later on many bio-physical impacts of polderization became evident and gave rise to newer risks.

Since the coastal rivers carry very high sediment load (1-2 g/l), one of the inevitable consequences of polderization was gradual siltation of rivers because of the loss of connectivity between the tidal rivers and their floodplains. The siltation problem became so severe that at many places rivers beds became higher than the adjacent land inside the polders. As a result, water logging became very common within many polders. Thousands of people had to

abandon their farms and homes because of uninhabitable conditions.

Two cyclones in recent time – *Sidr* (November 2007) and *Aila* (May 2009) severely tested the polders in their path over the south-west region. Many polders were either breached or overtopped by resulting storm surge inundating large areas within the polders. These waters are now trapped within the polders because they cannot freely flow out of the polders because of the barriers posed by the embankments themselves and hydro-morphological changes that have been caused over the years because of polderization. Even 6-7 years after the cyclones many polders remain inundated with saline water.

It has become evident that the coast cannot recover from such shocks quickly because its hydro-morphological characteristics have been changed and rivers have lost their capacity to convey storm surge efficiently. The challenge is now to restore the resilience of the coast to mitigate new risks of extended water

logging and salinization. The most important element in building up the resilience of the coast will be to regain the functionalities of the tidal rivers.

Removal of at least some of the polders may be the most technically sound solution in this regard. But that is not practical given the complex socio-political situation. One promising option could be tidal basin management (TBM) which is being practiced at one site. TBM is a solution which is locally developed based on the indigenous knowledge about the behavior of the tidal rivers. Under TBM, a polder is opened and rotated thereafter among other polders, so that link between the river and the basin is restored. The sedimentation will now occur in the basin instead of the rivers. That way, rivers regain their capacity to safely convey tidal floods as well as storm surges. ■

– **Rezaur Rahman,**

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# Disaster Risk Reduction in BRICS Countries



Oheneba Boateng

The BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are known for many things; impressive economic growth, regional leadership, and their emergence as donors of development and humanitarian aid. However, despite their economic growth, or perhaps because of it, these countries remain prone to some of the same natural disasters for which they donate aid to other countries. From earthquakes and floods in China and India, landslides and drought in Brazil, forest fires and flooding in Russia, and cyclones in South Africa, the BRICS are exposed to a variety of disasters which require swift response and preventive measures to reduce the risks of these disasters.

A look at institutions created by these countries reveals that alongside their developing economies, the BRICS have taken measures to reduce disasters at home. For instance, Brazil, since it adopted the 1988 constitution, has created various institutions towards this. The most prominent are the Ministry of National Integration and the Ministry of Cities. The latter, created in 2003 oversees the Action to Support the Prevention and Eradication of Risks in Settlements with a special focus on urban settlements. In 2010, Law 12,340 and Decree 7,257 were also introduced to reform the faltering National Civil Defence System tasked to develop programmes to mitigate and respond to disasters. China's current disaster management programmes are captured under the five-year National Comprehensive Disaster Prevention and Reduction Plan 2011-2015 which defines disaster risk

reduction policies, while India's National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction performs advisory function to the government. Since 1994, Russia's Federal Ministry for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters has been the foremost organisation for disaster risk reduction in the country, and in South Africa the National Disaster Management Center is responsible for similar functions.

There are certain similarities in how BRICS countries implement disaster reduction policies. Some authors suggest that BRICS use their humanitarian aid as a way to share their disaster management experiences with recipients. But one of the common features is that at home, the BRICS have devolved disaster risk management to provincial, metropolitan, and local authorities in order to ensure swift and effective preventive and response measures. Another common feature is that some of the policies above are being implemented in partnership with international organisations. For

- BRICS countries are now emerging as donors of development and humanitarian aid.
- Being ailed by natural disasters themselves the BRIC countries have created institutions to reduce their vulnerability to natural hazards.
- But there are some serious challenges that need to be overcome these countries such as under resourced provincial departments, widespread social inequality, etc.

instance, India and China are working with the UNDP and the World Bank respectively on domestic disaster management. But perhaps, the most important commonality is that the disaster reduction policies of the BRICS countries have been created on the basis of the Hyogo Framework for Action, a global initiative by governments to reduce disaster risks by 2015. Some of these countries are already considering post-2015 policies when the Hyogo framework fizzles out, so the future of disaster reduction looks promising among the BRICS.

However, some challenges remain. In Brazil, South Africa, India, and even China, some state or provincial and municipal authorities, despite being mandated to prevent and fight disasters, are often under-resourced to perform this duty. Also, floods, cyclones, and other disasters often have a disproportionate effect on the poor, women, and children, facts which reveal a link between disasters and social inequality. But going forward, it is expected that BRICS countries will give more resources to state or provincial, municipal, and local authorities to effectively fight disasters. Importantly, as emerging economies and regional leaders, the BRICS must continue to share their experience with other countries. But for now, we can say that the right foundations have been set. ■

- **Oheneba Boateng**, PhD., Research Fellow (International Relations) Berlin Graduate School of Transnational Studies Free University Berlin Research Associate, KFG-The Transformative Power of Europe Berlin, Germany

# Understanding "Post 2015" Process and Make the SDGs a Reality



Dr. Jean-Philippe Thomas

Following ENDA experiences and some proposals and comments (as IDDRI, SDSN members or country, see below Box), the operationalization of post-2015, SDGs and more generally of sustainable development goes through the search of compromise, or social contract, at local, national and international level. The MDGs made the mistake to disregard this prerequisite.

## The added value of the SDGs will be materialized only if the SDGs are actually implemented

A set of agreements, conventions, approvals, etc. already exists on an international level. What do the SDGs bring better? We know that historically, previous agreements, especially Rio 92, are distinguished by their non-completion. That is why the text of Rio+20 resumes the previous commitments to make subsequent new restraint commitments. This means that the SDGs (on the new commitment) would have a major

part only if they are actually implemented. This is the first challenge.

## To start from the Existing and the Realities

The SDGs, "Universal" by definition in the text of Rio+20 are to be applied in countries that have national circumstances and different concerns. These differences have to be grown to set up approaches and processes that will build, step by step, what we use to call an "Economy". So we need to develop, all the same, experimentation and training. The way we will have to implement the SDGs is here more important than the SDGs contents in itself.

## Building Compromise

Apparently, every transformation is not favorable for every stakeholder. The existing antagonism, barriers and blockings to the transformation are the patent demonstration and systematically believing in short-term "win-win" is illusionary. If Rio 92 can be considered as "The Policy" of sustainable development, then the

"Economy" of the SDGs and their governance are generating losses (especially regarding the uncertainty of profit that can be higher than costs).

The protagonism transition involves, in sustainable development implementation, internal compromises for countries or regions: the innovative solutions for SD are not only technical but more social and institutional and SDSN members can, at each level, contribute to build the compromise. The above-mentioned "Social Contract" will question the "Compensations", a long-term "Win-Win" condition, that is to say the future we want.

## The new Governance of Sustainable Development has to target the Coherence of Internal Compromises in the Countries and at International Level

The national compromises are prerequisite for the existence of an international compromise. Indeed,

### An example In Finland: "A social compact for sustainable development implementation", related by "Beyond 2015" December 2014

In Finland there is a social compact for sustainable development implementation, organised so that all central operators and implementers in our society can participate and make operational commitments, including concrete measures, changes in operating procedures. This includes municipalities, companies, NGOs and so on. The Government asks these stakeholders to make a practical commitment concerning their own sphere and how they will contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. Finland is ready to share this with others, and it's an approach that is securing participation at local and individual levels, engaging everyone in concrete actions.

This process is run by the Ministry of Environment in Finland, but also includes social and economic dimensions of development. It is still at initial stage, but there are 80 types of commitments by very different organisations. The Government wants to have the public sector strongly involved, but also civil society and companies. They will also organise monitoring systems for the implementation to follow up what happens in practice.

- Due to differing national contexts, the implementation process of SDGs will be more important than the contents of the SDGs themselves.
- The greatest challenge to the success of the SDGs is the mentality of exceptionalism as displayed by developed countries in not adhering to those guidelines that have been set for developing nations.
- To ensure the success of the SDGs the universality and coherence of these goals across national and international levels needs to be stressed.



one of the reasons of the failure of Rio 92 and SDGs application is that the international community has ordered what is "Good" for the others (the developing countries) without applying these same rules for themselves.

This is one of the opportunities of the SDGs' universality. Their implementation should be universal too, which implies the coherence of

processes at international and national levels. This is the challenge for new Sustainable Development Institutions (Commitment of Rio+20) to ensure the coherence of the application.

In that mindset, we should develop and implement a targeted program of capacity reinforcing aimed to support national and local plans that integrate the SDGs and which is

based on SDSN's members approaches and experiences. In addition, this program should be focused on the application of an independent mechanism of monitoring and evaluation.

So, SDSN has a key role to make understood "Post 2015" process and make the SDGs a reality. ■

- **Dr. Jean-Philippe Thomas**, ENDA  
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## RESILIENCE AND EDUCATION

# What do Social Work Students Want to know about Disaster Risk Reduction?

Social Work Education, both generalist and specialists practice, aims to equip students with social work knowledge, methods, skills and techniques to promote individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities well being at the macro, meso and micro level. From Social work perspective, disasters consist of impact of extreme stress situation, social and personal disruption, resulting from natural/manmade/technological hazards, ranging from individual to collective situations. Social work professions contribute their services in physical, developmental, social, emotional, cultural and spiritual needs of the victims of disasters. In addressing to the situation, social workers look into the government policies, plans for strategies and practices that minimize hazards and thus aim for sustainable development. Social work's input in planning for disaster response at national, state, and local levels has usually been negligible; social work research on disaster is only now emerging (Ager & Zakour, 1995; Cherry & Cherry, 1995; Dodds & Nuehring, in press; Gillespie et al., 1986; Rogge, 1995).

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is the concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyze and reduce the causal factors of disasters. Reducing exposure to hazards, lessening vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improving preparedness and early warning for adverse events are all examples of disaster risk reduction.<sup>1</sup>

Department of Social Work has been engaged in imparting knowledge, training and conducting research in the field of disaster management, since 2001:

During the 2001, Bhuj earthquake disaster, students along with staff members, actively participated in response stage, where they were engaged in working along with government official and were



*Creating village disaster map through community participation.*

1 <http://www.unisdr.org/eng/library/lib-terminology-eng%20home.htm>



involved in planning, managing and distribution of food grains, clothes, blankets, tents, loading and unloading of trucks, controlling petrol service, right from 28<sup>th</sup> January 2001 from the camp site of Bhuj where after every three minutes the jolts continued. The students also engaged themselves in assisting the injured to medial camps, disposing the dead bodies in pyre. This practical experience actually helped the students to understand role in the planning, management, and delivery of human services within communities vulnerable to natural and manmade disasters.

In 2009, rural camp was arranged in collaboration of All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) at Radhanpur block of Patan, due to its susceptibility to multiple hazards, with an objective of building understanding of risk and risk reduction in a rural context through social work approach.<sup>2</sup>

- Social work students can help in effectively mitigating the adverse impacts of disaster on communities.
- In Gujarat social work students contributed significantly by helping out in 2001 Bhuj Earthquake.
- The scope of the responsibilities of social work students ought to increase for making society's response to disasters more robust.

In 2011-2012 students were engaged with GSDMA, Anand, in 'Building resilience in disaster in Anand', through various activities for creating awareness and building capacity of the people through programmes by using knowledge of DRR. Few activities are given below.

- Radial painting on camel cart
- Creating village disaster map through community participation
- Awareness through signatory campaign

From the above experience it is felt that, student social workers need to know the variables of DRR, understand the components, The Hyogo Framework For Action 2005-2015 (HFA), International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), disaster risk assessment, disaster mapping, development tools, methods to assess human vulnerability, suitable approaches for well being of community, the actors involved in monitoring disaster risk reduction, use of benchmarks for disaster risk and disaster risk reduction, DRR process along with indicators. Knowledge, training and practice of the above said, will not only help students to work systematically, but will also help them to remain focused in their work. Further they develop vision which may lead to effective disaster leadership in planning, training, directing and rehearsing. ■

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Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar,  
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2 Southasiadisasters.net. Issue No. 71, October 2010, Building Youth Leadership in DRR.

## PLANNING FOR RESILIENCE

# Disaster Management Plans in India

The development of a nation is about the economic and social wellbeing of its people, through the increasing of not only quantitative variables, but also of the qualitative ones. Although some strategies to increase these variables are well known and count on successful examples all over the world, it's also important to take into consideration the elements that may put a nation in the opposite direction of the development trajectory.

In this sense, natural phenomena with hazardous potential are a reality

and our societies must look at it through the development perspective, otherwise the damages and losses that result from these events will increasingly hurt human rights and decrease the standard of living. Furthermore, the reconstruction process after a disaster is very expensive and represents huge economic losses. Some characteristics of the contemporary world intensify a region's vulnerability to such phenomenon, like population growth, urbanization and climate changes. In Brazil, for example, the occurrence

of natural disasters increased 268% in the 2000's, in comparison to the ten previous years<sup>1</sup>.

For these reasons, it's essential to approach Disaster Management from a holistic view: not only addressing the need for calamity relief and rehabilitation, but also focusing on disaster prevention and mitigation. In other words, the development agenda of a nation must be comprised of a Disaster Management Plan in order to strategically and efficiently deal with disaster occurrences and lessen their

1 <http://viajeaqui.abril.com.br/materias/a-ocorrencia-de-desastres-naturais-no-brasil-aumentou-268-na-decada-de-2000-noticias>  
2 Sanjaya Bhatia: Long-Term Recovery Issues in Disaster Management Planning: Emerging Global Trends. Issue No. 93, June 2013

impacts. Thus, for all practical purposes disaster risk reduction is an investment, not a cost<sup>2</sup>.

Developing countries face greater challenges to overcome a disaster's impacts than the developed countries. It happens mainly because developing countries have poor infrastructure and much less investment directed to this area – so they're more vulnerable. Nevertheless, it's not a problem of lack of know-how, once that along with the globalization era there's the possibility to learn from examples beyond the borders. Also, the country itself can learn from past experiences and formulate valuable measures to get over the devastation with insights from its own reality and, more importantly, find ways to mitigate it.

India, specifically, is 'one of the most hazard-prone areas in the world'<sup>3</sup>. Because of that, natural disaster management is a key issue in this country. In 2005, the Disaster Management Act created a framework and standards to this matter and stated that the districts would have to develop and

- Disasters can undo decades of development progress and can trap communities in a cycle of poverty and deprivation.
- Disaster Risk Reduction, especially in developing countries is a moral and pragmatic imperative.
- An effective tool for DRR in India is the district disaster management plan (DDMP).
- Mandated by law, the DDMPs in India need to be community and ecosystem based in order to lead to holistic development.

implement a District Disaster Management Plan (DDMP).

It's an important policy, but attention shall be given to the fact that communities must be involved in this planning process. The engagement of local actors ensures a more efficient process in any policy/program designing and implementation, as they understand better the local conditions and are able to provide important feedbacks. Besides that, the empowerment of the community is by itself synonymous with development, as discussed by Amartya Sen. Another reason for the engagement at local level is that the community is 'the first responder in any critical situation'<sup>4</sup>,

therefore it's useless to have a well-structured plan if, by the time to execute it, the main character isn't prepared to act. Finally, when it comes to the community, DDMP must also comprise strategies to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups – human rights have to be respected in all circumstances.

Besides being community-based, it's important for the disaster management plan to be ecosystem-based. Nature isn't an enemy and many solutions lie in the ecosystem that surrounds a region. By understanding the characteristics of the environment and the potential disasters, it's possible to use the nature in favor of the risk reduction.

Two instances of community and ecosystems based district disaster management planning shine out in the Indian context. They are the DDMPs of West Champaran and Madhubani district of Bihar. Both these DDMPs have adequately addressed the need of integrating the concerns of the community and those of the ecosystem with broader district level and development planning. ■

– Ana Carolina Richter, AIDMI

3 <http://www.saarc-sadkn.org/PDF/Modules/DDMP.pdf>

4 [http://www.saarc-sadkn.org/countries/india/major\\_safe.aspx](http://www.saarc-sadkn.org/countries/india/major_safe.aspx)



Photo: AIDMI.



# Education for Disaster Risk Reduction at Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)



Dr. Indrajit Pal

Disaster Risk Reduction is a cross-cutting issue in the context of effective governance of Disasters and therefore an important element for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. The Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World in 1994 provided landmark guidance on reducing disaster risk and the impacts of disasters. One of major gaps and challenges identified was knowledge management and education apart from Disaster Governance, Risk Identification, Preparedness etc. The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 also emphasized the importance of capacity building and Disaster Risk Reduction for the effective governance and resource management.

"Anticipating, Educating and Informing are the keys to reducing the deadly effect of such natural disasters. Unfortunately such activities have not been given priority" - UNESCO Director, General Koïchiro Matsuura, (2005).

One of the major components in Disaster Risk Reduction is capacity building through the creation of skilled and trained professional manpower. Disaster Risk Reduction also caters to the need of reduction of impacts of climate change through holistic developmental adaptation.

Institutionalization of Disaster Risk Reduction in the disaster governance through sensitized cadre of officers and personnel, needs more attention in education. Trained manpower is the first requirement for mitigation, monitoring and management of disasters. Personnel with the formal knowledge of disaster risk management helps in quick rehabilitation of the disaster affected

people, understands their psychological conditions and helps in their post disaster settlement. In the planning and policy-making, trained and experienced personnel are highly required to give better suggestions and optimization of resources.

Capacity building is integral to disaster management. The programmes in disaster mitigation and recovery cannot be successful without building adequate capacities. Though the focus on capacity building has resurfaced with the new vision on disaster management, the efforts towards building capacities have not been very systemic. Need for building capacities of the grassroots level stakeholders in disaster management is one of the paramount important aspects.

Asian countries are more prone to natural disaster by virtue of its geographic locations and the impacts of the disasters get exaggerated with the socio-economic vulnerability and population density. About 85% of all the people affected by disaster in the world are residing in Asia-Pacific region, the center stage of all disasters. The highest amount of displacement in the World in 2011 owing to disaster also happened in this region. Due to rapid rate of population growth, urbanization, poverty, climate change and geographical location, most of the Asian countries have become highly

susceptible to natural disasters; some of them, per se: flood, cyclone, drought, earthquake, landslide, extreme temperature, heavy rain, epidemics, etc. It has been felt that there is limited capacity at global, regional and national levels in terms of knowledge base, skills training, long-term planning, emergency preparedness and policy development to respond to such severe disaster events. Therefore, there is a huge demand of trained manpower that can assist at the time of disaster as well as in planning of schemes, monitoring and management of disasters. In the present context of changing technological scenario, there is also urgent need of trained manpower for the industry as well as government/private organizations.

Consequently, to address these issues in innovative ways Disaster Preparedness, Mitigation and Management (DPMM) program was introduced at Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand in 2008. AIT being located at the center of this region provides a strategic insight into the happenings in the world of disasters and development. DPMM program uses interdisciplinary capacities (engineering, medicine, natural and social science, as well as management) to manage and minimize the effects of disasters in

- DRR is an indispensable element in the achievement of internationally agreed development goals.
- Capacity building through creation of skilled professionals is a major component of DRR.
- To address this need, the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) launched the Disaster Preparedness Mitigation and Management (DPMM) Programme.
- These courses have helped in reducing the vulnerability of Asian countries to various disasters by churning out skilled professionals in the field of disaster management.

people on the front lines of disaster response and preparedness. It provides professional education and short-term training for the capacity building of the Asia-Pacific as well as neighboring regions apart from advocacy, research, and consultancy on Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation domain. The DPMM programmes have been running successfully with students from Bangladesh, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Sudan, Thailand, Tibet and Vietnam.



School Safety Training, Nov. 2014. Photo: AIDMI.

AIT works closely with its partners for sharing knowledge and expertise like, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM), Thailand, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF), The Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES), UN Regional Agencies based in Thailand such as, UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction for Asia & the Pacific (UNISDR-AP); UN World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Economic and Social

Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) etc.

AIT offers number of degree and professional programs to cater to the need of Disaster Risk Management community. The courses are ranged from Master's Degree, Professional Master's Degree, Doctoral Program, Post-Graduate Certificate, Certificate & Diploma Programs and Customized short-term programs and Seminar series. The students are diversified from bureaucrats to regular masters student across the World.

AIT ([www.ait.asia](http://www.ait.asia)) is an international organization and one of the Asia's leading higher learning institutes focusing on critical global issues through research, outreach, and capacity development. AIT through its diversified regular, short term and professional courses also contributed significantly in education and capacity building for Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asian Countries and as well as for other countries of the World. ■

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