Local Innovation to Global Action for Heat, Health, and Livelihoods: Resilience Starts at Home

Roundtable Report

1. Introduction

On October 12, 2026, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) organised a virtual roundtable on **"Local Innovation to Global Action for Heat, Health, and Livelihoods: Resilience Starts at Home"** on the occasion of the 2026 International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDRR).

Moderated by **Joshmi Davis, AIDMI**, the roundtable brought together perspectives from government, the United Nations, regional networks, civil society, and disaster risk reduction practitioners from South Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region.

The discussion explored how resilience that begins in homes and communities can influence wider policy, planning, finance, and disaster risk reduction action. Extreme heat provided the central focus. For many households, particularly those of women workers, small workers, home-based producers, small businesses, older persons, and persons with disabilities, the home is not only a place of shelter but also a place of work, care, learning, and livelihood.

The roundtable also marked the launch of **Issue No. 234 of *southasiadisasters.net*** on the same theme. A central question from the publication framed the discussion: **Did the warning help the most exposed person protect health, livelihood, and dignity in time?**

The roundtable brought together **95 participants from 21 countries and territories**. The participants represented regions across South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, the Pacific, West Asia and the Middle East, West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, Europe, North America, and the Caribbean.

2. Roundtable At a Glance

Date: October 12, 2026
Time: 4:00 PM–5:30 PM IST
Occasion: IDDRR 2026
Format: Virtual Roundtable
Participants: 95 participants from 21 countries and territories
Main Focus: Extreme heat, health and livelihoods; locally led action; women's leadership; early warning and early action; household resilience; and regional learning
Moderator: Joshmi Davis, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI)
Speakers: Dr. Midhila Mallika, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), India; Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, UNESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia; Ms. Remya Sasindran, words. rhythms. images. / ADRRN, India; Ms. Pritha Khanal, Duryog Nivaran, Nepal
Concluding Remarks: Mr. Mihir R. Bhatt, AIDMI

3. Key Insights from Speakers

3.1 Women, Heat, and Local Resilience

Dr. Midhila Mallika, Senior Consultant at the National Disaster Management Authority, highlighted the unequal burden of extreme heat, particularly on women. She described this as the **"gender tax of extreme heat."**

For many women, particularly those involved in home-based and informal work, the home can become a thermal trap. They may experience high indoor temperatures while simultaneously managing unpaid care responsibilities, household work, and livelihood activities.

Dr. Mallika identified three important pillars for stronger heat resilience: **early warning systems, improvements in the built environment, and economic protection**. Affordable cooling, safer

housing, financial support, and appropriate risk-transfer mechanisms need to become part of heat resilience.

She also stressed that local organisations and communities can identify vulnerabilities that larger systems may miss. Local leadership must therefore be connected with state and national institutions.

“Empowering local action is the only sustainable path forward.”

3.2 Rising Heat, Rising Risk in Asia-Pacific

Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head of the UNESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, placed local heat experiences within the wider Asia-Pacific context.

Drawing from the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2025*, she highlighted the growing impact of rising temperatures on health, labour productivity, agriculture, food security, energy systems, infrastructure, and ecosystems.

Her presentation showed that extreme heat can no longer be viewed only as a seasonal health concern. It is becoming a broader economic and development risk. Agriculture and construction are especially exposed to productivity losses, while rising cooling demand is putting growing pressure on energy infrastructure.

A key message was that heat resilience should be integrated into existing development finance, infrastructure, public health, and planning systems rather than treated only as a separate programme.

“Heat adaptation does not require exclusive financing, rather strategic integration into other development funding and policy streams.”

She also stressed stronger impact-based forecasting, standardised heat terminology, urban cooling, and regional cooperation for sharing data, innovation, and good practice and use national experience at regional level.

3.3 Climate Education and Storytelling

Ms. Remya Sasindran, Co-founder of words. rhythms. images. and Communications Manager at ADRRN, shared experiences from Dehradun, where rising temperatures are changing the everyday lives of communities.

The initiative combined **climate education and storytelling** to help women, children, and families understand heat risks and identify practical household-level measures.

Local women teachers played a central role because they were trusted within their communities. Children carried learning from classrooms into homes and neighbourhoods, encouraging others to drink water, avoid peak heat, and take practical protective measures.

Some households explored low-cost actions such as white roof coatings, curtains, and improved ventilation.

“This heat is not normal.”

The Dehradun experience showed that awareness can lead to action when information is locally understood, trusted, and connected to practical choices. Storytelling also created space for communities, officials, journalists, educators, and civil society to discuss heat risk together.

3.4 Women’s Leadership and Regional Learning

Ms. Pritha Khanal, GESI Specialist at Duryog Nivaran, shared lessons from the SIDRRA programme and related experiences across South Asia.

She emphasised that disaster and heat risks are not experienced equally. Women, persons with disabilities, socially excluded communities, and low-income households often face greater exposure while having fewer options for protection.

Examples from Nepal and Pakistan demonstrated the value of women acting as **trainers, leaders, risk communicators, and decision-makers**. Participatory risk mapping also showed that communities possess knowledge that external technical systems may not capture.

A major lesson concerned communication. Forecasting or warning technology does not automatically result in action. People must understand and trust information, and warnings must be accessible and connected with realistic options for response and take it beyond India to region.

"Information that exists but is not understood or acted upon does little to reduce risk."

She also emphasised that livelihood constraints matter. A worker may understand a heat warning but still have to continue working. Heat action must therefore connect risk communication with livelihood protection.

3.5 From Local Innovation to Heat Action Planning for All

Mr. Mihir R. Bhatt, Director of AIDMI, brought the four presentations together around the idea that **resilience is the continuity of everyday life**.

He argued that a disaster is not only what happens outside the home; it is also what happens inside when ordinary life becomes impossible. Can a woman cook safely? Can a child sleep? Can an older person breathe comfortably? Can a home-based worker continue earning under a hot roof? And India has a lot to learn and share to set the agenda (Annex-1).

He highlighted four priorities: resilience should be measured through everyday life; women must help design heat resilience; warnings must be accompanied by the means to act; and local innovation needs institutional support.

AIDMI describes this broader approach as **Heat Action Planning for All**.

"Resilience starts at home, but protecting that home is everybody's responsibility." All homes in all Asia Pacific. And UN ESCAP has the needed leadership to not leave anyone behind (Annex-2).

His remarks called for a shift from measuring completed activities to measuring whether people can remain safe, healthy, and economically secure during extreme heat.

4. Key Way Ahead

The roundtable identified a practical agenda for moving forward:

- **Turn heat warnings into action** by connecting forecasts with water, cooling, health preparedness, safer working conditions, and financial protection, take from India to Asia.
- **Put women at the centre of heat planning** as leaders, knowledge holders, trainers, and decision-makers.
- **Protect health and livelihoods together**, recognising that reducing heat exposure should not force vulnerable workers to lose income.
- **Make homes part of heat resilience planning** through cool roofs, ventilation, shade, water access, and affordable cooling measures.
- **Strengthen trusted local communication** through women's groups, schools, community organisations, and accessible two-way risk communication.
- **Document and scale local innovations** by connecting community experience with policy, finance, government systems, and regional learning.
- **Mainstream heat resilience** into health, housing, labour, agriculture, infrastructure, social protection, urban planning, and development finance.
- **Strengthen regional cooperation** so that locally tested solutions and evidence can inform wider Asia-Pacific action.

5. Conclusion

The roundtable showed that **"Resilience Starts at Home" is more than an IDDRR theme. It is a practical test of disaster risk reduction.**

Extreme heat affects homes, workplaces, schools, markets, health, income, and local economies. Effective heat action must therefore move beyond forecasting alone and ensure that people have the means to respond.

The discussions pointed towards a common direction: connect **local knowledge with science, early warning with practical protection, women's leadership with decision-making, and community innovation with institutional support**.

The challenge now is to move **from forecasts to protection, from plans to action, and from local innovation to wider change**.

The ultimate test remains simple:

Can the most exposed person protect health, livelihood, and dignity in time?

Annex-1.

Call for Action in India

India now needs to move from heat preparedness to **heat protection that works in daily life of all Indians**. The priority is not only to issue warnings, but to ensure that people can act on them and have matching public resources. Heat Action Plans should therefore link forecasts with drinking water, shaded and cooled spaces, safer working hours, health preparedness, and financial protection for those who cannot afford to stop working.

Women, home-based workers, informal workers, older persons, persons with disabilities, and low-income households must be treated as central actors in heat planning. Their knowledge of household temperatures, water needs, care responsibilities, work patterns, and livelihood constraints should shape local plans and budgets on an ongoing basis.

Cities and states should scale practical low-cost measures such as cool roofs, ventilation, shade, reliable water access, and neighbourhood cooling options. Local organisations, schools, women's groups, health workers, and community networks should be used as trusted channels for two-way risk communication and allocate suitable resources to match local actions from India to the region.

Heat resilience must also be integrated into housing, labour, health, social protection, agriculture, urban planning, infrastructure, and development finance. India should measure progress not by the number of plans produced, but by whether exposed people can remain safe, healthy, and economically secure during extreme heat each summer and between summers.

Annex-2.

Call for Action in Asia-Pacific

To take the message “In every crisis there lies an opportunity”, said Madam Anmida, Executive Secretary, ESCAP, April 2026, Bangkok, which we can rephrase to “In every extreme heat event theme lies an opportunity for cooling the most affected” for Asia-Pacific.

Asia-Pacific needs a **regional shift from heat awareness to coordinated heat resilience on the ground, taking everyone along**. Rising heat is already affecting health, labour productivity, agriculture, food security, energy systems, infrastructure, and ecosystems. Heat should therefore be treated as a cross-sector development risk, not only as a seasonal emergency, summer to summer

Governments and regional institutions should integrate heat resilience into existing development finance, infrastructure investment, public health, urban planning, social protection, and climate adaptation. Dedicated finance is useful, but much faster progress can come from making existing investments heat-responsive, with more work to align with Baku-Bangkok Declaration.

Countries should strengthen impact-based forecasting and connect warnings with practical protection: cooling spaces, water, safer work arrangements, accessible communication, health services, and livelihood support. Warning systems must reach women, informal workers, persons with disabilities, and other high-risk groups in forms they can understand and act upon by national authorities by sharing at regional level.

Regional cooperation should focus on **shared data, common heat terminology, tested urban cooling solutions, locally led innovation, and exchange of evidence across countries** and lead to transformative, equitable, innovative and cooperative actions towards Agenda 2030.

Asia-Pacific institutions should also document and scale community solutions that are already working. The regional goal should be simple: ensure that every warning leads to protection, every local innovation has a pathway to scale, and every heat policy protects both health and livelihoods.