

Expert Group Meeting on Capacity Development for Disaster Information Management in South and South-West Asia

New Delhi, India
16-17 April 2014

REPORT

A. Organization of the meeting

1. The Expert Group Meeting on Capacity Development for Disaster Information Management in South and South-West Asia was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at New Delhi, India, from 16 to 17 April 2014.
2. The expert group meeting was organized as part of the implementation of Commission resolution 67/4 of 25 May 2011 on the establishment of the Asian and Pacific centre for the development of disaster information management. The resolution requested the Executive Secretary of ESCAP to support the process for the establishment of the Centre, including, inter alia, the development of the required modalities and arrangements through, among other measures, enhanced engagement under ESCAP subprogramme on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction and engagement under ESCAP subregional offices with the more vulnerable countries and subregions in the areas of disaster risk reduction and disaster information management.
3. The resolution also invited all members and associate members of ESCAP to participate actively in the process of developing the programmes of the Centre and to support its activities, as appropriate, in a comprehensive manner. It encouraged the United Nations and other international and regional organizations to support actively the process for the establishment of the Centre.
4. The key objectives of the expert group meeting were for member States of South and South-West Asia to (i) understand the gaps and barriers in disaster information supply chain in the subregion; (ii) discuss the programme of work of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM) vis-à-vis the needs and aspirations of the member States in the subregion; and (iii) outline the needs for and benefits of APDIM to the respective member States. In this respect, the expert group meeting discussed opportunities for capacity development in disaster information management through regional and South-South cooperation and recommended the way forward.

5. This expert group meeting is part of a series of subregional expert group meetings on capacity development for disaster information management organized by ESCAP, focusing on the more vulnerable subregions in Asia and the Pacific. The agenda of the meeting is attached as Appendix 1.

B. Attendance at the meeting

6. The meeting was attended by senior officials and representatives from the following member States of the South and South-West Asia subregion: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Turkey. Representatives and experts from the Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also attended the meeting. The statement of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) was delivered by the secretariat. The list of participants is attached as Appendix 2.
7. The bureau of the meeting comprised Fathimah Thasneem (Maldives) as Chairperson, Mohammad Daim Kakar (Afghanistan) and Jnanendra N Biswas (Bangladesh) as Vice-Chairpersons and V. Bhanumurthy (India) as Rapporteur.
8. The Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India, and the Deputy Vice-President, Vice Presidency for Strategic Planning and Supervision of the Islamic Republic of Iran delivered keynote and inaugural addresses at the opening of the expert group meeting. The Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India delivered the valedictory address.

C. Major conclusions and recommendations

9. The expert group meeting provided a platform for the member States of South and South-West Asia to share their experience in disaster risk reduction and management, exchange views and assess the existing gaps and critical needs in disaster information management.
10. South and South-West Asia is one of the most disaster-prone subregions in the Asian and Pacific region, with high levels of poverty and low coping capacity. Between 1970 and 2011, among the more than 2.5 million people who died in disasters globally, close to 2 million were from Asia and the Pacific. Of these, the majority to the extent of 1 million was from the South and South-West Asia subregion. The subregion thus has the highest mortality rate from disasters in the region and it also experienced disproportionate economic losses. South and South-West Asian countries are prone to earthquakes, cyclones, floods, droughts,

landslides and mudflows, glacial lake outburst floods, snow avalanches, storm surge, tsunami and water-logging. In addition, sea level rise threatens the Maldives and other low-lying islands of the countries in the region.

11. Compounded by the high risk and the limited capacity to prepare for and mitigate the devastating recurrent disasters, the subregion calls for a more efficient information management strategy to address the disaster risk reduction and post-disaster management issues more effectively. Further, the disaster risks in South and South-West Asian subregion often have transboundary effects. In this respect, there is a felt need for strengthening regional and South-South cooperation in information and knowledge management in order to mitigate the shared risks among member States. Also, there is greater potential for cross country learning and collaborative projects to reduce disaster risks.
12. The expert group meeting shared information on the status and development of disaster information in the countries of the subregion. The meeting pointed out that data availability for effective disaster risk management is a critical gap and remains one of the biggest challenges facing policymakers and practitioners. The lack of systematic, reliable and comparable data constrains the understanding of various components of disaster risk such as hazard, vulnerability and exposure. Most countries do not have a commonly agreed system of data collection with definitions and standards. As such, many countries follow various practices of data collection, and as a result, the collected data is not comprehensive and often lack disaggregation.
13. The meeting also pointed out a lack of consensus and consistency of disaster-related data, including the number of lives lost, number of people affected and economic damage, among various disaster databases, regionally and globally. The meeting noted that there is only a limited number of institutions available to provide capacity development training on multi-hazard risk assessment as well as damage, loss and needs assessment.
14. The experts noted that it is important to address disaster risk reduction holistically by addressing risk and resilience with a multi-sectoral approach. The experts also noted that it is essential to consider the internal capabilities and resources of countries, and contextualize the capacity building activities to ensure that the end-users are reached with customized information that they can later put to good use.
15. The expert group meeting provided an opportunity for the member States to review the work programme of the APDIM. The meeting recognized that APDIM can play an important role in addressing the above identified major gaps in the subregion, including establishing a dynamic portal for information sharing.
16. The representative of the APDIM presented the vision, mission, strategy and modalities of delivery. The vision of APDIM is to build resilience to disasters in ESCAP member countries by meeting the gaps in information, and enhancing

knowledge and capacities through various ways and means including strengthening South-South and regional cooperation for disaster risk reduction. The mission of APDIM is to reduce losses and damages resulting from natural hazards by developing the capacities and capabilities of the region and strengthening regional cooperation on information sharing and management for disaster risk reduction. APDIM will also address the economics of disaster, assessing the impact of disaster at macro levels in countries in the region. APDIM will commence its functions and programme with a focus on the more vulnerable subregions of Asia and the Pacific region.

17. The strategy of APDIM links all the three pillars of disaster information management, namely information, knowledge and capacity development, and promotes regional and South-South cooperation. Multi-tier partnerships with specialized institutes in the region will be put in place to realize two flagship projects: (i) the information and knowledge hub and (ii) the capacity development hub. The development of these two hubs is to be carried out in a phased manner. Phase one will be carried out with specialized institutes within the country such as the Building and Housing Research Centre (BHRC), the National Cartographic Centre (NCC) and the National Disaster Management Organization (NDMO) of Iran; phase two with other intergovernmental and regional organizations; and phase three with relevant UN organizations.
18. The experts from participating member States took note with appreciation and expressed strong support for the vision, mission and programme of work of APDIM, which had been developed in line with the programme of work of the ESCAP subprogramme on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction. They supported the road map for APDIM to undertake short-, medium- and long-term activities by engaging member States and developments partners. They also supported the modalities of APDIM in promoting South-South cooperation and regional cooperation on disaster information management and the use of various cooperation options, alternatives and platforms for delivering its programme of work, such as capacity building, collaborative projects, information sharing and knowledge networking through the documentation of good practices and development of resource materials.
19. UNDP, UNISDR and intergovernmental organizations in the subregion, namely BIMSTEC, ECO and SAARC, noted the importance of data and information for effective disaster risk reduction and management at the national level, as well as at the subregional and regional levels for disasters with transboundary origin and effects and welcomed the initiative of APDIM in building capacities of member States in disaster information management. In addition, the SAARC consultations on the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA-2) have recommended establishing a regional system of information exchange on various phases of disaster management. Several countries of the subregion, including Turkey, have also carried out comprehensive consultations on HFA-2.

20. The meeting recommended that APDIM work closely with BIMSTEC, ECO and SAARC in a collaborative framework, build upon their works on disaster information management and provide an umbrella platform that gives access to these existing initiatives and mechanisms. In this respect, it was suggested to include the South Asia Disaster Knowledge Network (SADKN) of the SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) as a mechanism for regional disaster information generation and exchange in the programme of work of APDIM, with a view to further enhancing its capacities and enabling it to provide tangible benefits to the member States and achieving greater regional cooperation for disaster information sharing. APDIM may also develop mechanisms for engaging partners in the process of development of information management system and also design mechanisms for sustainability of this system.
21. ECO expressed its readiness to cooperate with ESCAP for the establishment of APDIM, within its mandate and regulations. Turkey is also ready to cooperate with ESCAP for the establishment of APDIM, within its mandate and regulations, as being the only country which is a member of both ESCAP and the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR). Other member States also expressed keen interest to share their capacity building services with APDIM, such as through the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific (CSSTEAP) affiliated to the United Nations, in India, and collaborate in the medium to longer term capacity building activities in disaster risk management with APDIM. They also offered sharing good practices, including through specialized institutes of India, Pakistan and Turkey, through South-South cooperation projects and be delivered through APDIM.
22. Given the substantive capacity building needs in disaster information management at all levels the meeting strongly recommended that APDIM address these needs as outlined below:
23. The experts from participating member States recommended that APDIM attach the highest priority to earthquakes, floods, droughts, landslides, and coastal hazards. With regards to earthquakes, experts prioritized assistance in seismic microzonation, building codes, and spatial land use planning. With regards to hydro-meteorological disasters, experts recognized multi-hazard risk assessment as one of the most important needs.
24. The experts also recommended that APDIM, with the engagement of member States and development partners, provide capacity building on national spatial data infrastructure and risk information platform, standardization of disaster-related data, disaster databases, including disaster loss database, damage and loss assessment. Furthermore, they called for assistance in the development of subregional and regional databases for cross-border hazards of common concern to most countries of South and South-West Asia. It was recognized that end-to-end early warning systems for addressing multi-hazards are of high priority.

25. In response to the expressed interest of participating member States at the meeting, APDIM agreed to take forward the recommendations from the expert group meeting to further develop its partnership strategy and organize the following short-term training activities for member States: seismic micro-zonation map, and rapid assembly and low-cost housing under APDIM's capacity development hub; and the development of geo-spatial data for disaster risk management using international standards, under APDIM's information and knowledge hub.
26. The meeting expressed appreciation for the support provided by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to APDIM. The active participation of experts from member States and development partners was also appreciated. The meeting thanked ESCAP for bringing all relevant stakeholders together to identify the gaps in disaster information management and charter a course of action for the subregion.

Appendix 1

AGENDA OF THE MEETING

- Agenda item 1: Opening session**
- Welcoming Remarks:
- Mr. Nagesh Kumar, Director, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, New Delhi
- Opening Remarks:
- Ms Shamika Sirimanne, Director, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, ESCAP
- Keynote Address:
- H.E. Dr Shailesh Nayak, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India
- Inaugural Address:
- H.E. Mr. Seyed Hamid Pourmohammadi, Deputy Vice-President, Vice Presidency for Strategic Planning and Supervision, Islamic Republic of Iran
- Agenda item 2: Election of officers**
- Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda**
- Agenda item 4: Issues and challenges**
- Disaster Information Management in South and South-West Asia: Issues and challenges
- ESCAP Secretariat
- Agenda item 5: Introducing APDIM**
- Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM) – Vision, Mission, Plans and Strategic Framework
- Mr. Mojitaba Khalesi, Officer-in-charge, APDIM
- Agenda item 6: Development Partners**
- Discussions – remarks by development partners on the issues related to disaster information management in SSWA subregion
- UNDP, BIMSTEC, ECO, SAARC

Agenda item 7: Country experiences

Sharing national experiences and identifying the critical gaps in disaster information management

- Representatives of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Turkey

Agenda item 8: APDIM's Programme of Work

A. Disaster information management hub in SSWA subregion

- APDIM Partnership Groups (National Cartographic Centre/National Disaster Management Organization of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

B. Knowledge management hub for seismic risk reduction in SSWA subregion

- APDIM Partnership Group (Building and Housing Research Centre of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Agenda item 9: Conclusion and adoption

Conclusions and adoption of the recommendations based on the comments and feedbacks from representatives from member States

Valedictory Address

- H.E. Ms. Snehlata Kumar, Secretary (BM), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Vote of thanks

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