

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**  
Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction

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**“Delivering as one” for disaster risk reduction and resilience**

**Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction  
and Resilience of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination  
Mechanism: implemented activities and future direction**

**Note by the secretariat\*\***

*Summary*

The present note - prepared by ESCAP in partnership with the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience – is being presented to the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction for the first time. It is prompted by the new global architecture built on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. It outlines the actions taken and achievements of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, as the expression of the United Nations “delivering as one” approach at the regional level. The future direction of the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience, guided by the Vision of the United Nations Secretary-General on Prevention and the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience is also discussed. The suggestions outlined are aimed at enhancing a cohesive regional policy voice in disaster risk reduction and resilience building with ESCAP serving as a policy think tank, providing data, analytical services and policy advice, within the Regional Coordination Mechanism’s overall role of providing leadership and strategic guidance.

The need for the United Nations to align its work with sub-regional organizations is a key consideration. Notably, the coordination provided through the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the development of the United Nations-ASEAN Joint Strategic Plan on Disaster Management is highlighted as this Plan is to date the only one between the United Nations and subregional organizations and in this respect, ASEAN has emerged as a leader. The support provided by the United Nations to ASEAN’s initiative on a “culture of prevention” is also reviewed.

Given the imperative of translating these mandates into results on the ground, the Committee is invited to take note and consider proposals for furthering cooperation and policy-level coherence amongst United Nations entities and sub-regional organizations.

\* E/ESCAP/CDR(5)/L.1.

\*\* This document is being issued without formal editing.

## I. Introduction

1. Translating the ambitious, integrated and transformative aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into results on the ground demands a strong coordination among United Nations entities on all fronts – policy, programming, implementation, follow-up and review. The United Nations delivering as one approach is particularly relevant for delivering on crosscutting issues, such as resilience- building and disaster risk reduction.
2. Disaster risk reduction and resilience is embedded across all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and explicitly so in at least five of the 17 SDGs, namely ending poverty in all its forms (goal 1), ending hunger (goal 2), resilient infrastructures (goal 9), resilient cities (goal 11), and combating climate change and its impacts (goal 13), aligning with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.
3. In addition to the integration of disaster risk reduction-relevant targets into the SDGs, resilience is a common thread across the five other frameworks which were agreed by United Nations Member States in 2015 and 2016: (i) Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030; (ii) Paris Agreement on Climate Change; (iii) Agenda for Humanity; (iv) New Urban Agenda; and (v) Addis Ababa Action Agenda.<sup>1</sup>
4. The policy basis for stronger coordination among United Nations agencies in delivering disaster risk reduction and resilience is firmly-established. The Sendai Framework recommends a strong engagement of the United Nations system. It is expected to align its policies, programmes and work practices with the Sendai Framework and deliver coherent programmes that support the priorities of States in a balanced, well-coordinated and sustainable manner.
5. In response to the recommendation of the Sendai Framework, at the global level, the *United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience: Towards a Risk-informed and Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development* was formulated and was subsequently endorsed by the United Nations Chief Executive Board for Coordination – the United Nations body which brings together the executive heads of 31 specialized organizations to deliver as one at the global, regional and country levels.
6. This Plan of Action is designed to ensure that the United Nations's implementation of the Sendai Framework contributes to a risk-informed and integrated approach to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. It addresses the need for coherence and it seeks to enhance the integration of the United Nations's operational preparedness and response capacities into national implementation efforts.
7. At the regional level, the recently-concluded 73rd session of the ESCAP Commission added impetus by adopting two resolutions. Resolution 73/9 requests the Executive Secretary, as convener of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, to strengthen and promote communication, cooperation and collaboration among the relevant organizations of the United Nations system in the Asia-Pacific region and other stakeholders, as appropriate, in support of the implementation of the Sustainable Development

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<sup>1</sup> Resilience being the common thread of the global development frameworks adopted in 2015 and 2016 is discussed in the forthcoming Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017.

Goals by member States, with particular focus on countries with special needs<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, Commission Resolution 73/7, in addition to emphasizing United Nations inter-agency cooperation, requests the Executive Secretary to accord priority to synchronizing multi-disciplinary support to member States in their efforts to achieve the SDGs and targets relating to disaster risk reduction.

8. The Regional Coordination Mechanism translates these mandates into actions by strengthening policy and programme coherence of the United Nations. Chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and convened by the Regional Commissions, the Regional Coordination Mechanism fosters and enhances interagency collaboration, as mandated by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC resolution 1998/46).

9. The Regional Coordination Mechanism provides a platform for exchanging views on major strategic developments and challenges facing the region. Through this forum, consensus is forged and policy coherence is developed on regional priorities and responses to global priorities. It also serves as a tool to implement the United Nations Secretary-General's global priorities.

10. As part of its efforts of making the United Nations system fit-for-purpose in implementing the 2030 Agenda, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism was reformed in 2016. It now comprises seven Thematic Working Groups which offer holistic, cross-sectoral policy and analytical advice on the SDGs.<sup>3</sup> As the most disaster affected region of the world, and in recognition of the rising risk that disasters may reverse development gains made during implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, a dedicated Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience was carved out of what was then the Thematic Working Group on Environment and Disaster Risk Management.

11. Co-chaired by ESCAP, UNDP and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the dedicated Thematic Working Group aims to support the regional implementation of those disaster-related elements of the 2030 Agenda through:

(a) Coherent and coordinated United Nations support to implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

(b) Coherent and coordinated United Nations engagement with regional and sub-regional organizations on disaster risk reduction and resilience, with a specific focus on ASEAN, SAARC and Pacific sub-regions.

(c) United Nations support to the development of more coherent and optimized regional approaches and strategies related to disaster management, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation for resilience.

(d) The implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction: Towards a Risk-Informed and Integrated Approach

<sup>2</sup> The aim of the regional road map is to facilitate cooperation at the regional level, supported by the ESCAP secretariat and other United Nations entities through the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism as appropriate

<sup>3</sup> ESCAP Executive Secretary's statement delivered during the Opening of the Senior Officials Segment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission in Bangkok, Thailand. Available from <http://www.unescap.org/speeches/statement-during-opening-senior-officials-segment-or-73rd-session-commission>

to Sustainable Development with a focus on ensuring coherent and coordinated support to United Nations Country Teams.

## **II. Achievements (2016-2017)**

12. The Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience has made significant progress in three key areas: (i) advancing coherence in the implementation of disaster risk reduction and resilience across the 2030 Agenda and other internationally-agreed frameworks, an important guiding principle of the Sendai Framework; (ii) aligning the work of the United Nations with sub-regional organizations; and (iii) coherent regional response to the 2015/2016 El Niño.

13. In the first area, coherence was advanced when at the Asian Ministerial on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) in New Delhi in November 2016, the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience organized a technical session on enabling governance for coherence across disaster risk reduction, climate change and sustainable development. The session contributed to the AMCDRR's outcome - the New Delhi Declaration on disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific 2016 and the Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 - which calls on governments and stakeholders to "*Enhance regional cooperation including strengthening the role of Intergovernmental Organizations for coherent implementation of the Sendai Framework and the 2030 sustainable development agenda, fostering innovative partnerships, and North-South, South-South and Triangular Cooperation in all areas related to disaster risk.*"

14. A key joint knowledge product that helped shape this outcome was the ESCAP, UNDP and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) guidance note on how to operationalize coherence at the national level with respect to translating global agreements into national-level strategies. The guidance note was developed with support from the ninth tranche of the ESCAP-implemented United Nations Development Account. Following AMCDRR, it was further refined, finalized and presented to ESCAP member States at a side event in the context of the Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD). It was enriched by the perspectives shared by senior officials from the APFSD delegations who exchanged experiences on their national efforts aimed at ensuring coherence across policy-making organs. The members of the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience will continue to advance coherence as called for by the Sendai Framework, including in future AMCDRRs.

15. In the second area, the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience has advanced partnership with subregional organizations, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) having emerged as the leader. Led by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience forged a coherent approach towards engaging the ASEAN Secretariat and the AHA Centre to align the work and activities of the United Nations with jointly agreed priorities that support the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme for 2016-2020. The ASEAN- United Nations Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management 2016-2020 is the result of this engagement.

16. The ASEAN-United Nations Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management constituted an important step towards greater coherence in United Nations engagement with ASEAN on disaster risk reduction and management. Instead of each United Nations agency pursuing separate initiatives with ASEAN, it serves as an overall framework and promotes consistency in engagement, covering areas such as preparedness and response; risk assessment, early warning and monitoring; and prevention, mitigation, outreach and mainstreaming. The Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience's experience in bringing about greater coherence in engagement with subregional organizations offers a potential blueprint for a more strategic United Nations engagement in other subregions and thematic areas.<sup>4</sup> Notably, and more recently the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience has provided support to ASEAN's new initiative on a "culture of prevention" where under the chairmanship of the Philippines the thirty-first ASEAN Summit is expected to adopt a Ministerial Declaration.

17. Specifically, work is underway to implement the commitments made by United Nations agencies, as follows:

(a) on risk assessment and awareness, the Government of the Philippines and ESCAP will organize a series of regional activities to complement the ongoing technical efforts being undertaken by the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Assessment and Awareness Working Group;

(b) a special event to showcase fifty years of cooperation in ASEAN on disaster risk reduction and management. Among the achievements, those of the Multi-donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness, will be highlighted. It will provide ASEAN with a wider platform for sharing ASEAN experience with sub-regional groupings and other centres of excellence on disaster risk reduction as integral part of building a culture of prevention. It will also be a part of the commemoration of the International Day on Disaster Risk Reduction and the ASEAN Day on Disaster Management;

(c) on prevention and mitigation, through active engagement of ASEAN at the 7<sup>th</sup> Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMC-DRR) in 2016 and in preparation for the 8<sup>th</sup> AMCDRR in 2018, as well as at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction that took place in Mexico in May 2017, and on urban resilience through the ASEAN Resilient Urban Forum and Habitat III;

(d) on preparedness and response, by adopting a common methodology and aligning regional and international efforts on response preparedness and contingency planning in high-risk countries; developing and testing standard operating procedures (SOPs) to support the interoperability of emergency response teams and coordination platforms when deployed; and working together to strengthen emergency logistics management and civil-military coordination in the region. In September 2017, ASEAN and the United Nations will formally launch a new agreement on complementarity in the work of their senior leadership, represented by the ASEAN Secretary-General and the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, in emergency responses.

(e) on recovery, through collaborative efforts to roll-out and familiarize national disaster management officials on the jointly-developed ASEAN Disaster Recovery Reference Guide; and

<sup>4</sup> Regional mechanisms for disaster risk reduction in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. Note by the secretariat. E/ESCAP/CDR(4)/1. Available from [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/E\\_CDR4\\_1.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/E_CDR4_1.pdf)

(f) on knowledge and innovation management, through capacity building and training programmes for ASEAN national disaster management officials on disaster management and humanitarian action; a pilot project on creation of a regional standardization and certification regime for disaster management, and coordinated engagement with private sector networks to support disaster risk reduction and disaster management.

18. In the third area, the United Nations system's response to the 2015/2016 El Niño event - one of the strongest El Niño phenomena on record – demonstrated the potential of a multi-disciplinary and coordinated approach amongst United Nations agencies and technical organizations to enable a shift towards proactive risk management by countries. While countries in the region are no stranger to the potential of El Niño to amplify the risks of extreme weather and climate events during El Niño years, many need support to understand the specific risks to sectors and to develop risk mitigation measures.

19. Responding to the needs of countries, ESCAP and UNDP, with technical support from the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia, (RIMES) jointly developed a guide “Assessment of El Niño-Associated Risks: The Step-Wise Process.”<sup>5</sup> The guide was presented at a regional consultation on El Niño jointly organized by ESCAP, UNDP and OCHA in June 2016 in Bangkok. Representatives from 14 countries that are historically hit hard by El Niño attended the consultation and used the guide in developing their countries' responses to the 2015/2016 event.

20. Cognizant that the El Niño is a naturally-recurring event and has historically increased the probability of extreme weather and climate events in many countries in the region, the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience also decided to take stock of the lessons learned during the 2015/2016 event and to identify steps to improve the institutional readiness of United Nations agencies to support countries more effectively in the future. UNDP, ESCAP, and OCHA, conducted a study “Enhancing Resilience to Extreme Climate Events: Lessons from the 2015-2016 El Niño Event in Asia and the Pacific”, in collaboration with RIMES and the APEC Climate Center.<sup>6</sup>

21. In the study, the agencies jointly propose a multi-agency offer of service for countries at risk that describes what support they can collectively provide to address these risks. This will ensure that the lessons learned from previous experience can guide strategic preparedness and future response plans at both the regional and the national level.<sup>7</sup>

### **III. Future direction: strengthening United Nations System coherence and effectiveness in disaster risk reduction in response to new mandates**

22. The future work of the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience will be guided by the regional road map. Recognizing that there is a scope for strengthened regional cooperation in

<sup>5</sup> The guide is available as an online resource. See <http://www.unescap.org/resources/assessment-el-ni%C3%B1o-associated-risks-step-wise-process>.

<sup>6</sup> Available from <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/El%20Nino%20report-%20finalized%20ESCAP07082017.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

managing specific hazards, the regional road map embraces disaster risk reduction as one of the priority areas of regional action. Six of the seven areas for regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction fall within the remit of the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience:

- (a) Promote effective regional and subregional efforts to strengthen disaster risk modelling, assessment, mapping, monitoring and multi-hazard early warning systems of common and transboundary disasters;
- (b) Facilitate regional dialogue and cooperation in integrating disaster risk reduction into related development activities;
- (c) Improve analysis to enhance regional knowledge on disaster risk and resilience, promote the wide dissemination of such knowledge, identify challenges and opportunities for data-sharing and provide the analytical basis for regional cooperation;
- (d) Promote capacity-building regarding climate resilience, including climate-related disaster risk reduction, through policy dialogues and the sharing of experiences and information;
- (e) Develop and implement holistic and participatory disaster risk management at all levels, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2016 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- (f) Promote a “Build Back Better” approach in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction, as well as implementation of the health aspects of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, including the Bangkok Principles, with a view to ensuring more systematic cooperation, coherence and integration between disaster and health risk management.

23. Recognizing that “climate-related natural disasters are becoming more frequent and their destructive powers more intense,” disaster risk reduction forms a cornerstone of the Vision of the United Nations Secretary-General on Prevention. With the Regional Coordination Mechanism being the primary means of coordinating implementation in support of the priorities of the United Nations Secretary-General in the region, the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience will be guided by this vision, and in particular the United Nations Secretary-General’s view that “doing everything we can to help countries to avert the outbreak of crises that take a high toll on humanity, undermining institutions and capacities to achieve peace and development” should cut across all pillars of the United Nations’s work as a unifying factor for more effective delivery.

24. The realization of this vision will be through four areas of action, as outlined by the Secretary-General: a surge in preventive diplomacy; Agenda 2030 and sustaining peace as essential to long-term prevention; strengthening partnerships; and reforms to consolidate capacities to meet the prevention challenge.

25. With climate change and extreme weather effects expected to intensify, there is a body of evidence emerging on a correlation between such phenomena and a heightened risk for conflict, and while disaster risk reduction efforts cannot prevent conflict on their own, they can be part of a larger, more holistic approach to conflict prevention and peace building.<sup>8</sup> The Vision of the Secretary-General on Prevention provides a critical opportunity to further

<sup>8</sup> This discussion is elaborated in the forthcoming Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017.

strengthen the humanitarian-development-resilience nexus in the region through a cohesive United Nations approach that synergizes the wide gamut of expertise, niche areas of intervention and diversify modalities of service delivery across the system. The Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience provides a ready-made mechanism, which with the due attention paid by the respective Heads of Agencies can be made fit for purpose.

26. Finally, the future focus and ways of working by the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience will be increasingly driven by the broader reform to reposition the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly Resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations System.<sup>9</sup> The report identifies stepping up the United Nations policy voice at the regional level as a critical component of meeting the demands of the new agenda. It also calls for coherent policy advice and knowledge generation and the Regional Commissions, backed by Regional Coordination Mechanism and its Thematic Working Groups could play an important part in delivering that coherence.

#### **IV. Issues for consideration by the Committee**

27. Intensifying climate change impacts, increasing disaster-related human and economic losses, have heightened the need for a more holistic view of disaster risk reduction in Asia-Pacific. Risk management strategies should address both natural hazards and human-induced disasters and should be examined from the integrated and multi-disciplinary lens of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

28. Better supporting countries achieve their priority development goals requires working in a coordinated manner. As the United Nations Secretary-General said in his Vision on Prevention, “people do not experience problems and crises in silos.”

29. The Committee may wish to:

(a) Reflect on the past and future work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group as a means of promoting integrated and coordinated United Nations wide action in support of member states;

(b) Provide further guidance on areas of work in disaster risk reduction that that would benefit from regional, subregional and cross United Nations collaboration; and

(c) Identify opportunities for alignment of United Nations’s work on disaster risk reduction with those of the subregional organizations, comparable with the ASEAN-United Nations Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management.

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<sup>9</sup> Advance, unedited version June 2017