

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

Sixth session

Bangkok, 28-30 August 2019

Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

Regional action: operationalizing the Asia-Pacific

Disaster Resilience Network: United Nations “Delivering as one” for disaster risk reduction and resilience

**Report of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination
Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk
Reduction and Resilience**

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

The present note - prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in partnership with United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the United Nations Development Programme, as Co-chairs of the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience is presented to inform the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction of its work.

The Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience has been meeting on a quarterly basis with a focus largely on regional issues, including coordinated the United Nations engagement with regional and sub-regional organizations such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as well as country-specific activities; sharing of information on Disaster Risk Reduction-related activities; the development of regional knowledge products, as well as common positioning on key issues related to disaster risk reduction.

The Thematic Working Group enhanced cohesiveness by presenting the United Nations regional policy voice at events such as the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in July 2018 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Further, the Thematic Working Group brings together the United Nations’ regional assets, and these were deployed to support the members and associate members on at least two occasions. Working in close coordination with the respective United Nations Regional Coordinators, one was in the aftermath of the wide-spread April/May 2019 flooding in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the Thematic Working Group is responding to the request made by the United Nations Resident Coordinator for comprehensive damage and loss assessment in support of post-flood recovery and reconstruction measures following the region’s best practices of building back better modalities. A second one relates to the United

* ESCAP/CDR/2019/L.1.

** This document is being issued without formal editing.

Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction-led needs assessment mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in which ESCAP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment also participated. The Thematic Working Group is therefore evolving with the United Nations reforms that empower the United Nations Resident Coordinator to capitalize on regional assets while responding to the needs of members and associate members. Towards this end, the Thematic Working Group has also been reviewing its terms of reference with a view to enhancing joint implementation actions within the ongoing United Nations reform process.

National capacity development is being strengthened through using global assets like the multi-agency Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's Global Education and Training Institute.

Given the accomplishments of the Thematic Working Group, the Committee is invited to take note and consider proposals for furthering cooperation and policy-level coherence amongst the United Nations entities and sub-regional organizations.

I. Introduction

1. The overall objective of the Thematic Working Group is to bring the United Nations agencies together to support the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and disaster risk reduction-related Sustainable Development Goals in a collaborative manner. It promotes synergies between agencies to promote the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience¹. The Group supports an integrated approach for the implementation of international and regional agreements on disaster risk reduction and resilience through joint programming, support to regional sectoral coordination mechanisms and knowledge exchange. Notably, the group also serves as an entry point for the United Nations system at the country level to access joint technical support on disaster risk reduction from the region.

2. In 2017-2018, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working group on Disaster Risk Reduction strengthened its role as the main coordinating body for implementing the disaster risk reduction and resilience goals and targets by:

(a) Putting forth a comprehensive, regional voice on policy coherence at the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia in 2018², contributing to the ministerial declaration as well as at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development;

(b) Working with sub-regional organizations such as ASEAN to implement coordinated disaster risk reduction and resilience initiatives through the Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management for 2016-2020;

(c) Producing policy notes to advocate jointly for resilient infrastructure in the region;

¹ <https://www.unisdr.org/partners/united-nations>.

² www.unisdr.org/amcdrr2018.

(d) Jointly responding to the request for technical support from the Islamic Republic of Iran following the widespread April/May 2019 flooding as well as a needs assessment in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; and

(e) Strengthening coordination with the United Nations Resident Coordinators at country level in implementation of ongoing United Nations reforms.

II. Achievements (2017-2018)

3. First, on policy coherence, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group's work is guided by the mandate of ensuring coherent and coordinated United Nations support from global to regional to sub-regional and national levels across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sendai Framework, and other key global development frameworks and international human rights instruments.

4. The Thematic Working Group organized a technical session on coherence of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the 2018 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. Building on recommendations and solutions proposed during the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction 2016, this session provided an assessment on the progress made by countries in translating coherence from a guiding principle into policy and practice, including at the sectoral and local level.

5. In particular, the session enhanced awareness on the need to accelerate implementation of target (e) of the Sendai Framework which aims to increase the number of countries with local and national disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.

6. The session also provided examples on how coherence can be achieved in practice to address the needs of vulnerable populations and communities, with a number of enablers identified as well as implementation opportunities and challenges across the Sendai Framework, the Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Change Agreement. The need for coherent policy actions in the agriculture sector were prioritized. The outcomes of this session contributed to the Ulaanbaatar Declaration which called on all government and stakeholder to commit to translating coherence of global frameworks into policy and practice to achieve resilience at national and local levels across all sectors.

7. At the Fifth Session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group led the roundtable on Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Similarly, at the Sixth Session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group led the roundtable on Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Action) and contributed to several recommendations that sought to strengthen policy coherence across government institutions for accelerated progress. In both cases, the outcomes contributed to the discussions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

8. Secondly, at the sub-regional level, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism - Thematic Working Group continued to strengthen its engagement with ASEAN, demonstrating a joint United Nations action to support the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on

Disaster Management and Emergency Response, which is now widely recognized as a success story. The Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism is now on the third iteration of the Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management for 2016-2020. A Mid-Term Review of Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management was conducted in 2018 that highlighted the need to accelerate action on Prevention and Mitigation and identified priority areas of action for 2019-2020. The Joint Plan represents a good practice for both institutions, as does the related implementation and monitoring mechanisms put in place through the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management, its Working Groups, and the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group. This work, will be further scaled up in response to the Declaration on the Culture of Prevention by ASEAN in 2017 particularly in areas of resilience for sustainable development, aligning poverty reduction and disaster risk management, together with principled humanitarian action.

9. Third, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group has produced knowledge products to help support the region's decisionmakers on implementation of multiple global and regional agendas promoting disaster risk reduction in the context of sustainable development. The second edition of the Thematic Working Group publication on Disaster Response in Asia and the Pacific: A Guide to International Tools and Services, was launched at the 2018 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

10. In 2019, recognizing that the damage and loss to infrastructure can reach up to two-thirds of economic losses, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group is developing a joint policy note on building resilient infrastructure, including health systems, water sanitation and education facilities. The policy note will highlight risk assessment methodologies for infrastructure, financing mechanisms, innovative technologies and design methods, together with infrastructure management systems. The policy note will be launched on International Disaster Awareness Day held annually 13 October 2019, in line with this year's theme on resilient infrastructure.

11. Fourth, as set out by the United Nations Development System Reform Agenda, the Thematic Working Group has worked on fostering closer linkages with the resident coordinators of the United Nations Country Teams. A key example is the coordinated regional response by the members of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism - Thematic Working Group to the recent floods in the Islamic Republic of Iran and a needs assessment in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

12. On the request of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management in partnership with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and UNDP supported the organization of Training Workshop on Disaster Loss Databases and Sendai Framework Monitoring in Tehran in April 2019. The workshop was attended by key stakeholders, such as the Plan and Budget Organization, National Disaster Management Organization, Housing and Urban Development Research Centre, and others.

13. Upon the request from the Government of the Islamic Republic Iran on 25 April 2019, the coordinated response included (1) joint support to the Plan and Budget Organization from various agencies including ESCAP, UNDP, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to prepare the Post Disaster Needs Assessment; and (2) an offer on flood preparedness

from the medium- and long-term perspective in partnership with Tehran University and other relevant stakeholders.

14. ESCAP, through the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management further offered to organize a regional dialogue on building back better in Tehran to be held in September 2019 focusing on the lessons learnt from floods in Thailand (2011) and in Pakistan (2010). The Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group response to the floods have presented a unique opportunity to integrate seamlessly the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework Mid-term Review. These joint response initiatives will enable smooth transition from emergency response to resilience recovery and sustainable development.

15. In line with the response to Iran's floods, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group provided a comprehensive, 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.⁷

16. A joint United Nations mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was conducted from 17 to 20 June 2019. Drawn from the members of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience and led by UNDRR, the mission was organized at the request of the United Nations Resident Coordinator of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The mission conducted a workshop to deliver across United Nations agencies, a common understanding on disaster reduction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and an agreement on a joint course of action in support of the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the United Nations and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2017-2021). The Strategic Framework's Priority 3 calls for an integrated approach to disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and mitigation and ecosystem management. During the mission the Democratic People's Republic of Korea National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction was presented to the mission team, and needs related to data gaps, enhanced early warning systems for floods and droughts, vulnerability assessments, environmental degradation, and climate change impacts in the country's food production areas were discussed.

III. Future direction: strengthening United Nations System coherence and effectiveness in disaster risk reduction

17. 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 Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism - Thematic Working Group 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' work as a unifying factor for more effective delivery.

18. Further recognizing that there is much scope to strengthen regional cooperation in managing specific hazards, and guided by the Regional Roadmap on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals which embraces Disaster Risk Reduction as one of the priority areas of regional action, the future direction and activities of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism - Thematic Working Group include the following:

(a) Bridging data gaps to promote coherence through innovative data sources such as geospatial information: The Sendai Framework Data Readiness Review³ reports that data are typically available for physical damage and human impacts but less so for sector-specific economic losses. Such data-related challenges are hindering the capacity of countries to meaningfully monitor, measure and manage disaster risk and losses. There is scope therefore to capitalize on new sources of disaster data, including from earth observation satellites, social media, crowdsourcing, big data, drone surveys and in this regard, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group will work with the United Nations Member States to find coherence in a more diverse and comprehensive information environment.

(b) Addressing data capacity needs: building on ESCAP's Framework on Disaster Statistics capacity will be built on the collection and use of sex, age, and disability disaggregated data, by creating common methodologies and standards, and statistical and geospatial data sharing platforms. This includes new cloud-based metadata platforms to enhance data accessibility and applicability currently under development.

(c) Global Centre for Disaster Statistics: Given the enormous capacity gaps for disaster statistics in low capacity and disaster-prone countries, UNDP is currently piloting activities in seven countries in Asia in partnership with Tohoku University and Fujitsu. It is planned to work collaboratively with the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction under the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism - Thematic Working Group to provide more comprehensive support to low capacity countries in the region to support the monitoring and reporting of the indicators of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Enhanced capacities for data will significantly contribute to building resilience by risk-informing development.

(d) The Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group will enhance its focus on building national Disaster Risk Reduction capacities through regional support. This includes support to the United Nations Resident Coordinators and Country Teams with coherent and timely programming, policy and normative guidance and technical support, including on common country programming. Good practices and case studies on Disaster Risk Reduction and resilience will be shared at the regional and national levels, including through joint knowledge products and tools.

(e) The Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group will regionalize global multi-agency initiatives like the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative as a key tool for capacity development in response to country requests. Other resources, like the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Global Education and Training Institute will also be harnessed.

(f) Jointly promote people-centered approaches to Disaster Risk Reduction, embedded in the principle of leaving no one behind, in line with 2030 Agenda through a strengthened emphasis on understanding the geo-location and

³ <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/53080>.

specific characteristics of the poorest most vulnerable to disaster risk – which is critical to reducing disaster risks, reducing poverty, strengthening health systems and promoting gender and social equality and community empowerment.

(g) Beginning with the response to the floods in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group will 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.

19. Finally, the future focus and ways of working by Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group will be guided 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.⁹ As outlined in this note, the Thematic Working Group has already made efforts to deepen its collaboration and work with the resident coordinators of the United Nations Country Teams. Towards this end, the terms of reference of the Thematic Working Group are being revised with a view to making them more focused on coordinated implementation actions.

IV. Issues for consideration by the Committee

20. 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.

21. The Committee may wish to:

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

(b) Provide further guidance on areas of work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism - Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction for delivering on knowledge for policy as a part of the Asia-Pacific Disaster Resilience Network that that would benefit from regional, sub regional and cross the United Nations collaboration; and

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