

DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA: A COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION 2006-2015

Recommended by an Expert Group Meeting (Dhaka, 7-9 February 2006) and endorsed by the Seventh Meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers (Dhaka, 24 May 2006)

I. Context

South Asia with its population of about 1.3 billion is highly exposed to a variety of natural as well as human induced hazards. Countries in the SAARC region experienced a number of major disasters in the last one and a half decades, which took lives of about half a million people and caused huge economic losses and massive destruction in the countries' economy. Among others the major reasons in increasing vulnerability of people in the region is largely related to the demographic conditions, rapid technological and socio-economic changes, fast expanding urbanization and development within high-risk environment.

Recurring disasters pose a great development challenge for all SAARC countries. In that context, a SAARC Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management and Disaster Prevention is articulated. The SAARC Centre for Disaster Management and Preparedness (New Delhi) , SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre (Male') and SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (Dhaka) will implement the Framework in context of regional cooperation within the mandate of the respective Regional Centres.

The Framework is also aligned with the implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA) 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

II. Regional Objectives, Expected Outcomes and Strategic Goals

A. Objectives

The Framework provides a platform for South Asian countries to:

1. Establish and strengthen the regional disaster management system to reduce risks and to improve response and recovery management at all levels;
2. Identify and elaborate country and regional priorities for action;
3. Share best practices and lessons learnt from disaster risk reduction efforts at national levels;
4. Establish a regional system to develop and implement regional programmes and projects for early warning;
5. Establish a regional system of exchanging information on prevention, preparedness and management of natural disasters;
6. Create a regional response mechanism dedicated to disaster preparedness, emergency relief and rehabilitation to ensure immediate response; and

7. Create a regional mechanism to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of achievements towards goals and strategies.

B. Expected Outcome

1. An efficient Disaster Management System;
2. Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into the development policies and practices of the government at all levels;
3. Disaster resilient communities that have enhanced coping capacities in relation to all hazards;
4. Development of policies and programmes that recognizes all risks to the communities, and mitigation strategies that are based on a risk management assessment;
5. Greater levels of coordination and cooperation at national, regional and international levels; and
6. Enhanced information, warning and reporting systems within governments at all levels.

C. Strategic Goals

1. Professionalising the disaster management system;
2. Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction;
3. Strengthening of community institutional mechanisms;
4. Empowering community at risk particularly women, the poor and the disadvantaged;
5. Expanding risk reduction programming across a broader range of hazards (all hazards approach);
6. Strengthening emergency response systems; and
7. Developing and strengthening networks of relevant national, regional and international organizations.

Priorities for Action 2006-2015

General considerations

In determining appropriate actions to achieve the expected outcomes and strategic goals, the framework takes into account the following:

1. To proactively pursue national and international agenda for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

2. To align national service delivery with the vision and priorities of national governments.
3. To strongly advocate the adoption of a comprehensive approach to risk reduction and disaster management.
4. To promote the integration of research outputs within development planning and community risk reduction strategies.
5. To engage the governmental system at all levels in risk reduction and disaster management through mainstreaming and advocacy strategies.
6. To develop policy and operational frameworks for sustainable coordination, collaboration and information management across governments, and with key stakeholders.
7. To establish partnerships of government agencies with civil society, private sector and other stakeholders for effective and sustainable service delivery.
8. To have a community focus with a strong emphasis on issues of gender and the disadvantaged embedded in all programmes.
9. To establish and maintain strong regional partnerships and networks, and to actively contribute to national, regional and international agenda.
10. To pursue the standardization of training curriculum and its adaptation to suit local context by aligning with best practice standards, models and competencies and exchange of expertise.
11. To build and maintain high level competencies of the professionals involved in disaster risk management.
12. To learn from traditional and indigenous coping mechanisms of the communities and further improve the same.

Priorities for action

Taking into account the recommendations of the HFA, and directives of SAARC meetings including the Dhaka Declaration 2005 of the 13th SAARC Summit, the framework envisages the following priority areas of action:

- 1. Develop and implement risk reduction strategies which include:**
 - a. development of methodologies and standards for hazard and vulnerability assessments;
 - b. development of strategies to make a right balance across prevention;
 - c. preparedness, response and recovery (PPRR) programming; and

d. development and implementation of risk reductions programmes.

2. Establish Regional and National Response Mechanisms which include:

2.1. Establish, strengthen and improve Regional Early Warning Systems to:

- a. define national and regional needs and priorities;
- b. identify national organizations responsible for early warning;
- c. identify their current procedures during normal working hours and after hours;
- d. identify their linkage with regional centres or other countries;
- e. share real-time data relating to natural hazards; and
- f. find out the best possible options to strengthen the national systems as well as to integrate them regionally.

2.2. Develop systems and procedures to establish an effective Community Alerting System.

2.3. Establish and improve Search and Rescue Mechanism.

2.4. Develop and standardize Damage, Loss and Impact Assessment Methodologies and Relief Management Procedure;

2.5. Establish a post-disaster recovery and reconstruction mechanism.

3. Establish a Regional Information Sharing and Develop Network of Institutions and Organizations including, but not limited to, the followings:

- a. Mainstreaming and advocacy
- b. Community risk assessment
- c. Geo-information technologies
- d. Research information database
- e. Emergency response management
- f. Networking with relevant national, regional and international systems

4. Develop and implement Disaster Management training, education, research and awareness programmes which will include the following:

- a. Conduct training need assessment
- b. Develop strategies for HRD
- c. Develop training modules for various stakeholders
- d. Standardize training curriculum
- e. Mainstream disaster risk reduction in education curriculum at all levels
- f. Exchange trainers and experts
- g. Conduct research, documentation and publication
- h. Compile best practices and indigenous knowledge
- i. Develop indicators for measuring the impact of training

5. Apply the ICT for disaster management.

6. Establish an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

IV. Implementation and Follow-up

A. General considerations

1. The implementation of and follow-up to the strategic goals and priorities for action should be addressed by different stakeholders in a multi-sectoral approach, including the development sector. Member States and regional organizations will integrate disaster risk reduction considerations into their sustainable development policy, planning and programming at all levels. Civil society, including volunteers and community-based organizations, the scientific community and the private sector are vital stakeholders in supporting the implementation of disaster risk reduction at all levels.

2. While each Member State has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development, an enabling regional environment is vital to stimulate and contribute to developing the knowledge, capacities and motivation needed to build disaster resilient nations and communities.

3. All the Member States will be encouraged to apply a holistic approach and maintain consistency in programming and building multi-stakeholder partnerships at all levels, as appropriate, to contribute to the implementation of this Framework for Action.

4. Member States and other actors are encouraged to promote the strengthening or establishment of volunteer corps, which can be made available during disasters.

B. Specific considerations

1. Member countries shall develop their own plan of action for implementation of this framework.

2. The regional cooperation components of this framework shall be implemented by the concerned regional mechanisms.
