

“People, Policy and Partnerships for Disaster Resilient Development”

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India Habitat Center, New Delhi

Introduction

Asian countries have been one of the worst hit in recent times experiencing high impact disasters that include Asian Tsunami, South Asian earthquake, this year's Asian floods etc. According to 2001 World Disaster Report, over a decade out of the total number of people reported killed by disasters, 80% are in Asia. Disasters are a major factor in destroying and undermining the impact of development in many of the countries. A major proportion of disasters and development investments are made with little or no attention to safeguarding these against the effects of future disasters.

Among the critical questions that the workshop seeks to address are: Do development investments result in reduced vulnerabilities, especially for the poor and the marginalized? And whether or How development can be made disaster resilient ?

Purpose

This workshop aims at promoting Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) as a development and governance issue to reduce vulnerability of the poor and marginalized. We draw attention to stories and analysis from the ground by NGOs and community experts. Included are testimonies of survivors from the epi-centre and analysis of what works and what doesn't from tsunami and earthquake recovery zones. Critical gaps and actions will be outlined from those facing floods and cyclones .

The critical debate will analyse current priorities, policies and strategies in disaster risk reduction and development so that the relevant agencies and institutions are able to engage proactively in suggesting measures for disaster mitigation and mainstreaming DRR at national and local levels .

The structured dialogue that follows, taps into the synergy between practitioners and policy makers to make recommendations that ensure effective integration of DRR into poverty reduction and development policy & practice .

Towards this end, a multi-stakeholder National Alliance on DRR has been initiated.

Themes

Session 1 REDUCING VULNERABILITIES

Shrinking livelihoods, social inequities, gender discrimination and environmental degradation are some of the factors that increase the vulnerability of the poor .

Poor communities, almost always prioritize daily survival concerns, and do not necessarily take into account the risks of serious hazards. They are more concerned about earning two-square meals than preparing for a disaster.

NGOs, CBOs (Community Based Organizations) and self help groups have taken steps towards reducing social inequities and improving access of the poor to economic resources, livelihoods and basic services: housing, water, sanitation, health services and education. These measures seek to reduce vulnerabilities, enhance protective measures and strengthen safety nets. Not recognized as resilience, these strategies in fact, build the capacities of poor and vulnerable to withstand disasters .

Disaster risk reduction efforts have not adequately addressed effective poverty reduction practices. Instead, we need to recognize, scale up and strengthen these grassroots initiatives to protect the gains of development .

Session 2: TURNING THE TIDE: After Tsunamis & Earthquakes

The unprecedented response by people around the world to the tsunami was marked by its focus on a disaster event and not on the nature of disasters and its prevention. Aid mobilized by public appeal places importance on contribution by “outsiders”. In the case of tsunami and other large scale disasters, it resulted in mainstream response that was largely divorced from the social equity concerns, local culture and development .

In the case of tsunami, immediate suffering and relief needs were the focus with much less emphasis despite the rhetoric on the longer-term needs for recovery of damaged and destroyed livelihoods. It is now acknowledged, that it may take years for the people to recover .

Testimonies from survivors will answer How safe and prepared are these communities? Have early warning systems been put in place ?

Similarly, post-earthquake response and recovery work in Latur (1993) and Bhuj (2001) by civil society groups in partnership with government showed us how to move away from treating people as beneficiaries. Education of house owners, training of artisans, active participation of women and community groups in reconstruction of houses and support from government all led to ‘development’ that was resistant to future hazards .

Insights from practice will centre stage the value of active participation of women and community groups in building resilience while dealing with long term issues. There is a need of transmitting understanding of the risks from tsunamis and earthquakes over a long return period of such hazards. The sessions will debate on: How can this be accomplished ?

Session 3

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY: Climate Change Adaptation and Asian floods

Despite our best efforts the change in climate will affect developing countries like India and its cost will be borne mostly by the poor. Critically, they will also lack resources to adapt to change and insure the consequences. The recent Asian floods that affected more than eighteen million people is evidence enough that we have already entered the period of consequences. The impacts like significant fall in crop yield, extreme scarcity of fresh water supplies, extended periods of drought, more damaging cyclones and floods and displacement of millions across the country have already started surfacing.

Climate change is a development issue. Poverty and climate change are inextricably linked. Development agencies need to ensure that both their work is suitably resilient to climate change impacts. Programme goals may be directly at risk from climate change impacts like increased flooding and cyclonic intensity. Equally, programme activities might inadvertently increase the climate vulnerability, like developing critical infrastructure in climate sensitive areas.

Developing agencies are already playing a significant role in advocating for cuts in green house gas emissions but some changes are now inevitable. Its equally important to understand how communities and natural systems can prepare and respond to changes in climate - known in climate change terminology as adaptation.

Community strength, traditional practices and coping capacity needs to be redefined or seen through climate lens. The views of partners and communities will be vital in developing adaptation strategies. The focus should be on empowering communities to take action on vulnerability to climate change, based on their own decision making process. The challenges and opportunities for the development community yet need to define but the starting point in this dilemma is certainly the poor and vulnerable.

Final Session: Way Forward

The final session would begin with a discussion on partnerships and would serve as the the first step towards implementing the recommendations of the earlier sessions.

Ensuring mutually enriching partnerships between communities at risk, the developmental agencies and public institutions is critical to the success of any programme. The partnerships need to enable

- Knowledge transfer
- Adaptation of national community systems
- Shared platform for various developmental initiatives and the disaster management interventions
- Propose Inclusive approaches

The partnership session would open the way forward for outlining strategies in future for disaster resilient development.

The expected outcome of the workshop should form the basis for a policy deliberation at a larger forum. The subsequent Asian Ministerial Conference taking place on the 7th & 8th of November in New Delhi, would be one such opportunity.

Further, to take up the outcomes and oversee their implementation on a longer run, a National Alliance on Disaster Risk Reduction is being launched at the end of the workshop.

The experiences and expertise shared in the workshop would form a baseline for future monitoring of progress in DRR.

The NADRR (National Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction) would carry forward the recommendations as well as monitor progress and thereby providing a greater push for Disaster Risk Reduction into the mainstream development process in the country.

Organising Partners



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Workshop Secretariat

SEEDS: D-11, Panchsheel Enclave, New Delhi-110017
Tel: 91-11-26498371, 41748008, Fax: 91-11-26498372
email: nadrr@gmail.com, www.disasterwatch.net/nadrr
Contact Persons: P.Chandran (SSP), Tel.: +91-9341229702
Amit Tuteja (SEEDS), Tel.: +91-9899001468