

Discussion Note for the Global Thematic Consultation on
Disaster Risk Reduction and
the Post-2015 Development Agenda:
Agenda for the Asia-Pacific
February 19-20, 2013, Jakarta, Indonesia



This short discussion note was written in early February for the Global Thematic Consultation on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, to be held by the Government of Indonesia in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (ISDR) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) from February 19-20, 2013 in Jakarta, Indonesia. Its purpose was to draw attention to the local and grassroots issues faced by poor and vulnerable communities across the Asia-Pacific region which may not otherwise reach the post-2015 development agenda consultations. Rather than repeating the issues already in discussion from the GAR process in Geneva and the fifth Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, this note adds and augments the other valuable contributions to the post 2015 development process. It was prepared by the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) based upon its work with local partners at the ground level in India and in the Asia-Pacific region.

1. **Right to Human Rights:** Disaster-prone and disaster-affected individuals are, just like any other human being, vested with basic rights by international human rights instruments and in some countries, domestic constitutional laws.¹ In addition to the usual 'survival' rights such as the right to food, shelter, clean water, sanitation facilities and livelihood, they also have the rights to safety, disaster risk reduction, relief, recovery, preparedness and mitigation for these go towards protecting their lives and wellbeing.

Although the relationship between human rights and disasters is being increasingly discussed and debated by stakeholders involved in disaster management (for example government departments, disaster management authorities and NGOs), the actual implementation and institutionalisation of human rights-centred disaster management practices at the local, national, regional and international levels still lags far behind. For instance, upholding the disaster victim's and vulnerable person's right to work is extremely important for recovery, preparedness, and developing his or her overall resilience to disasters, but this is not being addressed in DRR agendas. For a number of years AIDMI has worked with poor communities, in particular women, affected by the 2010 cloudburst in Leh/Ladakh (Jammu and Kashmir), the 2008 Kosi floods (Bihar), the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Odisha, Tamil Nadu), and frequent cyclones (Odisha, Tamil Nadu) to provide them with stable, disaster-resilient livelihoods. Not only has this provided recipients with a source of income, it has also given them a sense of confidence and independence. The organisation's ongoing work with the National Human Rights Commission in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has also often highlighted the poor levels of understanding on disaster-prone and disaster-affected persons' rights to safety and disaster risk reduction.

2. **Natural Resources as Mitigation Assets:** The majority of disaster-affected and vulnerable persons are poor and depend heavily on the land for their everyday needs. Having access and ownership over natural resources such as land, water, and forests is thus essential for mitigating the impacts of and preparing for disasters. However, as these persons typically do not have formal ownership rights (and even if they did these rights may not be properly documented), it is often extremely difficult for them to gain assert any sort of ownership claim over natural resources. Disasters can exacerbate such difficulties due to the depletion and / or deterioration of natural resources, delayed administrative processes, and general confusion especially in the aftermath of disasters.

Ownership of natural resources is an issue often overlooked in disaster risk reduction efforts and the other stages of disaster management, especially disaster relief and recovery. Who owns the natural resources? How should limited / depleted resources be allocated following disasters? How should the poor be assisted with formalising and strengthening their rights over natural resources? Who decides the use of natural resources? What is the impact of non-local ownership of natural resources on disaster risk? Who will monitor the ownership and use of natural resources? In its projects across India, AIDMI has observed how disaster victims have no say over the use of natural resources following floods in forests and droughts affecting arable land in high altitude regions. Its work with the National Institute of Disaster Management, the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) and the Climate Change and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) has also drawn attention to the need to study in greater detail how natural resources such as lakes, swamps, and wetlands can be used as disaster mitigation assets.

3. **Increased Support for Small and Micro-Businesses:** Small and micro-businesses, especially those run or owned by *dalits*, tribals, minorities, youth farmers and women are a major source of employment and income to people recovering from a disaster. Small and micro-businesses can also help with ensuring their resilience to disasters, reduce their dependence on external support, and improve their own and their communities' living conditions. In India however, these businesses are almost always the first to be affected by disasters and yet are typically the last to be addressed in recovery projects. A very small proportion of

¹ For instance, in India Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees all its citizens the right to survival.

resources for recovery reaches them. AIDMI is presently working with the UNDP (India) to show the nature and extent of this issue.

4. **Over Monetised Risk Reduction?** : Cash transfers and employment guarantees are possible poverty and disaster reduction solutions insofar as citizens are included in financial services. AIDMI's ongoing work with Concern Worldwide India in Odisha and West Bengal shows that cash transfers can be an effective means of reducing disaster risks. In a Bay of Bengal consultation with local partners from India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, participants observed that the focus on money in Asia's local economies is growing, and that it is being seen more as a buffer to absorb the shocks of disasters and other crises. It was also pointed out that humanitarian actions in Asia are in general becoming more and more monetised. Whether or not there is now an over-reliance on cash, and what the limits of its effectiveness are, are questions which require further analysis. How to expand the poor's access to financial services is another issue that urgently needs consideration.
5. **Democracy and Disasters:** The post-2015 development agenda needs to incorporate strategies for making humanitarian institutions and government authorities more democratic in their administrative processes, work practices, and community development projects. Although consultations with local communities are slowly becoming standard practice in project management, on the whole organisational structures still remain rather rigid and utilise top-down methods of working. This is especially the case in disasters. In India for instance, disaster management authorities have been set up at the national, state and district levels through parliamentary processes but their activities and modes of engagement are administrative and are not citizenry-based. AIDMI is working with the National Disaster Management Authority of India's taskforce on CBDM to address this issue.
6. **Coordination for Results:** Inter-agency coordination is critical for improving the effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian aid and disaster response efforts. While the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's development of the Transformative Agenda to improve coordination structures amongst humanitarian responders has been an important step forward, the agenda can be further enhanced by ensuring that results, not just procedures, are coordinated, and that a proper multilateral coordination system is in place. The development of such a system should be made part of the post-2015 development agenda.
7. **Data Transparency in Risk Reduction:** Data transparency, monitoring mechanisms, and accurate reporting of activities and finances by all parties working with disaster-prone and disaster-affected communities are essential for keeping disaster risk reduction, recovery, and all community development efforts on track and ensuring that they result in tangible, positive, and effective outcomes for the intended beneficiaries. This principle was vividly demonstrated by the recovery efforts in Haiti, where studies have shown that the poor tracking of aid money and documentation of how the money was spent had considerably lengthened the nation's road to recovery.² AIDMI's efforts with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to develop a Disaster Risk Reduction Portal (essentially a database of disaster risk reduction projects across the world) also drew attention to the need for open data on disasters.



² See Vijaya Ramachandran and Julie Walz, 'Haiti's Earthquake Generated a \$9 bn response – Where did the money go?', 14 January 2013, Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/jan/14/haiti-earthquake-where-did-money-go>

While there are data transparency tools such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative, Publish What You Fund and the Humanitarian Aid Partnership, their uptake has been rather limited and much more work on promoting their use is required. The ISDR is also encouraging greater information flows on disaster risk reduction, but while reports are being shared and circulated within across countries, data from their disaster risk reduction projects on critical issues such as the amount of money spent and the number of beneficiaries, are not always included. Moreover, most disaster risk reduction data is scattered across authorities, agencies, NGOs, and other bodies working with local communities. How can open data on disaster risk reduction make lives safer? How can data management practices be made more transparent? How can project monitoring methods be improved and made much more robust? Monitoring is an issue which is all too often ignored and indeed, has been identified as one of the reasons for why many of the Millennium Development Goals have not been fulfilled.

8. **National Budgets and Risk Reduction:** Although governments across the Asia-Pacific region are becoming extremely conscious of disaster risks and are increasing the spending of public finances on disaster risk reduction measures, a multitude of questions remain, these being: what proportion of national budgets should be allocated to disaster risk reduction and disaster management generally? Are, and how should, the budgets of statutory disaster management authorities, be made more open to public scrutiny? How can these budgets be made accessible to other government departments, local authorities, civil society, and most importantly, disaster victims? In its work with the Planning Commission of India on the Twelfth Plan, AIDMI identified the need to monitor the spending of national budgets on disaster risk reduction in a systematic manner.
9. **Urban Sanitation, Water Security, and DRR:** AIDMI's scoping work with SNV and IRC in Bangladesh pointed to the need to make past and upcoming investments in sanitation (especially urban sanitation) and rural drinking water supplies safe from disaster risks and climate risks. These risks are especially great in coastal cities and areas across Asia. Further studies on the impacts of disasters on water supplies and urban sanitation are needed, as are discussions on what are appropriate risk reduction measures.



10. **Children, Youth and Risk:** The International Convention on the Rights of the Child provides children with the right to participate in the life of the community and in decisions which affect them. It also guarantees them with fundamental human rights like their adult counterparts. At present however, the practical fulfilment of child / youth rights and child / youth participation, especially within the context of disasters, remains quite limited. The role of youth and children in Disaster Risk Reduction thus needs more focus and attention in the post-2015 development agenda. Who are these youth? What can they do to reduce risk? What role can the corporate sector play in encouraging children to be involved in disaster risk reduction? Steps have already been taken to address these questions, for instance, UNICEF has started to work with adolescents in India, a national platform for child-centered disaster risk reduction was launched in Delhi with NGOs in 2011, and similar platforms are set to be launched in many of India's states such as Bihar. Much more though needs to be done to involve children and youth in disaster risk reduction.



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