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Title of the Session: Earthquake Education and Outreach in Central Asia – The role of visiting scientists

Date: 19/01/2015 to 25/01/2015

Summary

Earthquakes have been recognized as the most damaging hazard in Central Asia. However, in many areas the indigenous population is not aware of the steps it can take to mitigate hazards. Schools are particularly vulnerable to earthquake disasters in this region. Analysis of survey data from schools in Tajikistan and Afghanistan reveals that almost all surveyed participants cannot explain the cause of earthquakes, and that the concept of earthquake preparation is an unfamiliar topic. The theme of this discussion focuses on the role of visiting scientists in addressing this information vulnerability which is ultimately rooted in lack of access to earthquake information and ineffective dissemination methods.

Context

Central Asia is characterized by a lack of public access to science-based earthquake hazard information. This informational vulnerability is often reinforced in situations where experts are unable to share information with the general public. For example, many Central Asian countries have both institutes dedicated to earthquake research and public school systems, yet neither has the necessary resources to promote earthquake education. Without material resources, there are very few interested, qualified individuals within the region who can help ensure that people are aware of their options when facing earthquake hazards. Visiting scientists, however, are in a unique position to raise the level of citizen scientific comprehension about earthquake hazards. Each year, many visiting scientists, scholars, and students arrive in Central Asia and work collaboratively with local scientists to conduct field investigations and research related to earthquakes. During fieldwork, visiting scientists are often interacting with the local population. This informal interaction can be formalized and enhanced through regional initiatives such as the ParsQuake Project. For example, ParsQuake members can create opportunities for visiting scientists, allowing them to become more involved in earthquake education and community outreach activities. ParsQuake members can help with identifying schools and teachers that are interested in learning about current earthquake research relevant to their region. Scientists are then invited and given appropriate resources (e.g., translators and teaching materials) to speak with school communities about their work and research results.

Some topics/questions this discussion would like to draw the attention to are:

1. Do scientists (particularly visiting scientists) in Central Asia have a role in raising earthquake awareness in schools?
2. How can visiting and local scientists encourage and support each other in raising earthquake awareness in schools in Central Asia?
3. What are some examples of effective (and ineffective) ways of communicating earthquake information with schools in Central Asia?