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Summary

The geological, hydro-meteorological, climatic or anthropogenic factors that cause natural disasters transcend the political boundaries of the countries and affect several countries simultaneously. Indian Ocean Tsunami for example, affected as many as eight countries in South and South East Asia. The South Asian earthquake of October 2005 damaged life and property over large areas of Pakistan and India. The typhoons of Pacific Island affect a number of island countries at the same time. Koshi river floods devastate parts of Nepal and India every monsoon, while Ganges floods maroon hundreds of villages in India Bangladesh. Similarly, Indus river floods affect Afghanistan and Pakistan and Brahmaputra floods affect China and India. Therefore, Prevention, mitigation and resilience to these trans-boundary catastrophes require strong bi-lateral, regional vision, maturity and cooperation.

Context

The frequency and intensity of disasters is on the rise all over the world. There is an increased recognition that the rapid pace of climate change is also exacerbating the frequency and intensity of disasters. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that the frequency and severity of hot and cold extremes and heavy precipitation events is increasing and this trend will continue. It is important to recognize that these disasters are taking place across the societies and nations that are divided by political boundaries. Most recently, a landslide induced flood in the Sun Koshi river in Nepal, triggered high alert not only in the downstream communities in Nepal, but also several hundred kilo meters away in the Bihar state of India. The Governments of Nepal and India worked in tandem to exchange regular information, communication and cooperation to reduce the impact the disaster.

However, it's not always the case that, countries are on the same page when it comes to trans-boundary and regional cooperation in disaster prevention and risk reduction. For instance, extensive monsoon rains in the year 2013, in northwest India and Nepal, caused devastating flash floods. The river Mahakail, that flows through India and Nepal bursts its banks causing extreme flooding, claiming 30 lives in Nepal and 1000 lives in India, displaced thousands of families and swept away fertile lands, houses, hydro power stations, roads and many varieties of livelihoods resources. Officials on the Nepal side reported that, they received no warning from their Indian counter parts, who are supposed to monitor the flows of Mahakali River in the upstream side in Uttarakhand state. Similarly, some authorities in Pakistan claim that, lack of communication from Afghanistan on the flood levels in the Kabul River contributed massive loss of lives in Pakistan in 2010. The authorities In Pakistan also feel that, the data sharing by India on Indus River is inadequate form them to develop effective flood forecast products. Such a gap in communication between the

official of two different countries raises concerns over the effectiveness of trans-boundary cooperation arrangements in managing rivers and reducing flood risk for communities.

It is clear that, the hydrological data sharing, which is crucial for flood disaster risk reduction in Asia remains a prisoner of bi-lateral and regional political dynamics. It is primarily because water is seen as a resource to own for self and deprive others than an opportunity to unite and prosper together. The serious national effort and a plethora of bi-lateral agreements between the countries, notwithstanding, flood risk management in many regions of the world remains largely inadequate due to the hesitation of some countries to take part in the stronger collective action in the realms of disaster information, data sharing, early warning and forecasting. This largely due to lack of mutual trust leading to gaps in communication and ultimately diluting the spirit of much needed multi-lateral action. The lack of collective effort and communication results in delayed evacuation procedures that can potentially saves lives especially where quick reaction is needed. In this context, it is imperative that, better management of trans-boundary water and flood risk management should go hand in hand with improved regional diplomatic environment and leadership.

Past bilateral approaches show that the absence of international and multilateral integrated management poses difficulties for efficient and effective international and regional cooperation in disaster risk reduction. In this context and background, International, regional and bilateral cooperation is very crucial for disaster risk reduction. Equally important is the need for embedding risk management in to national development plans and bi-lateral agreements. Bi-lateral and regional cooperation processes for development should not miss the risk perspective that is a common challenge for all governments in the disaster prone regions. The national governments in all regions of the world need to transcend the political divide agree on common risk-management and resilience objectives, and to achieve them through joint analysis, planning, programming and funding.

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) has also emphasized the importance of regional cooperation for disaster risk reduction. Paragraph 31 of the HFA which deals with regional organizations calls up on regional organizations with a role related to disaster risk reduction to promote regional programs, including the ones for technical cooperation, capacity development, the development of methodologies and standards for hazard and vulnerability monitoring and assessment, the sharing of information and effective mobilization of resources, Establish or strengthen existing specialized regional collaborative centers, as appropriate, to undertake research, training, education and capacity building in the field of disaster risk reduction.

In this backdrop, this forum invites discussion on the role of regional and international relations, policies, institutions and frameworks in disaster risk reduction.