

Regional Support for Southeast Asia Disaster Preparedness

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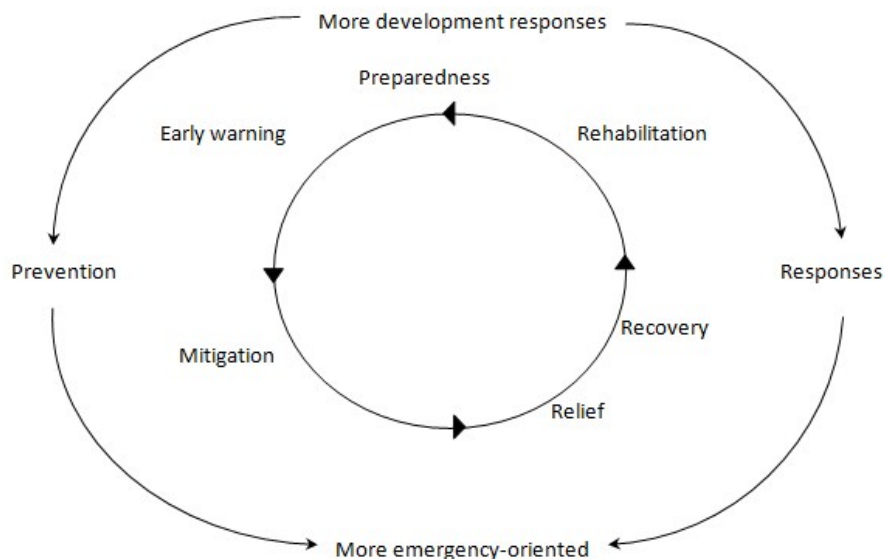
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A comprehensive approach is pertinent to minimise risks of disasters in Southeast Asia. In a book titled *Disaster and Development*, Dr Andrew E. Collins offered a framework for looking at comprehensive disaster management, which he referred to as the ‘disaster management cycle’. It is called a cycle to highlight that lessons learnt from one disaster should be applied to improve future disaster preparedness, thus minimising risks. This cycle incorporates the aspects of preparedness, early warning, mitigation, relief, recovery and rehabilitation. Dr Collins defined these as the following:

- Preparedness - Having an adequate level of development in disaster reduction;
- Early warning - The ability to predict a disaster event and build community awareness about potential disasters;
- Mitigation - The reduction of the impact of potential disasters up until and whilst they occur;
- Relief - The immediate responses that reduce the impact of a disaster after it had happened;
- Recovery - The process of restoring lives, livelihoods and infrastructures to a locally acceptable standard; and
- Rehabilitation - The process in dealing with the longer-term effects of a disaster and a full restoration to development.

Figure 1 Proposed cyclic framework on dealing with natural disasters



Implementing a comprehensive disaster management framework requires strong local and national-based preparedness. A regional framework renders support to strengthening the capacity of national and locally-based disaster preparedness mechanisms. Based in a

The Development of ASEAN Disaster Management Mechanisms

Disaster management is not a new issue for ASEAN; it was one of the first areas of cooperation for the bloc. The ASEAN Expert Group on Disaster Management, as the focal point to enhance cooperation in disaster management, first met in 1971. Disaster management has been one of the eight principles and objectives of regional cooperation since as early as the Declaration of the ASEAN Concord, adopted in February 1976. Initially formed as a regional socio-economic bloc, ASEAN member states believe that vulnerability to disasters would affect economic and social conditions in the region and hinder the development of member states, which in turn could pose a challenge to regional stability.

Further cooperation on this area was marked by the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on Mutual Assistance on Natural Disasters in Manila in 1976. The Declaration called for ASEAN member states to cooperate in the area of disaster-warnings communication, and the exchange of experts, training, information and documents. It also called for states to establish a national agency to coordinate national disaster preparedness and to be the focal point for regional cooperation. These efforts were strengthened only in 2003 by the forming of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM). The ACDM consists of the heads of national disaster management agencies.

The ACDM launched an ASEAN Regional Programme on Disaster Management (ARPD) in May 2004 to foster more tangible regional cooperation from 2004 to 2010. Moreover, this programme also aimed to expand the scope of cooperation to engage ASEAN dialogue partners and relevant international organisations. The ARPD has outlined 29 activities under five major components which were the result of an assessment of member states' needs and capacities. The five major components with their objectives are as follows:

- The establishment of an ASEAN Regional Disaster Framework. This component aims to promote regional cooperation through a number of joint projects;
- Capacity building to support member countries on disaster management priority areas;
- Sharing of information and resources through networks and research;
- Promoting, collaboration and strengthening partnerships among various stakeholders on sub-state, state and international levels; and
- Promoting public education, awareness and advocacy.

The ARPD basically establishes two types of activities, namely multi-stakeholders cooperation on sub-national, national and international levels, as well as supporting national capacity.

The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Responses (AADMER) is a product of the priority areas implemented through the ARPD. The AADMER will enter into force by the end of 2009 after being ratified by the Philippines, the last of the 10 ASEAN states to do so. Signed by all ASEAN Foreign Ministers in July 2005, AADMER is a legally-binding agreement for ASEAN member states to foster regional cooperation in disaster management. It is a framework to develop operational procedures for a concerted effort to respond swiftly to disasters. These include arrangements for relief assistance, custom and immigration exemptions, a coordinating centre, funding, standby emergency response, and civil-military cooperation. It is also a form of regional commitment to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) on disaster reduction.

Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

HFA was adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction that was held from 18 to 22 January 2005 in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan. The Conference's expected outcome was to pursue substantial reduction of disaster losses in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries. Hence, three strategic goals were set as follows:

- The integration of disaster risk reduction into sustainable development policies at all levels.
- The development and strengthening of institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels.
- The systemic incorporation of risk reduction approaches into the design and implementation of emergency preparedness, response and recovery programmes.

There are five areas of priority for practices to be implemented from 2005 to 2015. They are to:

- Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with strong institutional basis for implementation.
- Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
- Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
- Reduce the underlying risk factors.
- Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

Source: UNISDR, 'Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters', extracted from the final report of the World Conference on disaster Reduction (A/CONF.206/6). Available at <http://www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa/docs/Hyogo-framework-for-action-english.pdf>.

The first ASEAN Regional Forum - Volunteer Display of Response (ARF-VDR) on Disaster Relief Exercise, the Philippines



Source: The Singapore Civil Defence Blog, 2 December 2009.

Available at

<http://myscdf.wordpress.com/2009/12/02/gearing-up-for-international-disaster-relief-collaborations/>.

simulations and joint exercises on disaster preparedness have taken place. An example is the ASEAN Regional Disaster Emergency Response Simulation Exercise, or ARDEX, held annually to test joint regional emergency response and humanitarian assistance capacity. The first exercise, ARDEX-05, was held in 2005 using a scenario of an earthquake in Selangor, Malaysia. Subsequent ones were held in Cambodia, Singapore and Thailand. Ironically, the Philippines was expected to host ARDEX-09 by the end of October 2009, which was during the height of the series of typhoons such as Ketsana and Parma that struck the country.

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A shift of focus to disaster risk reduction

The AADMER accommodates various stages of the disaster management cycle in its provisions, namely the element of preparedness, early warning, mitigation, relief, recovery and rehabilitation. Incorporating a comprehensive approach to disaster preparedness is a valuable lesson learned from the tsunami in 2004, as indicated in the ASEAN Declaration on Action to Strengthen Emergency Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Prevention on the Aftermath of Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster adopted in December 2004. ASEAN is trying to evolve from mainly focusing on information exchange and strengthening regional relief efforts to building capacity, so as to conduct appropriate rehabilitation and reconstruction. This will contribute to the prevention and mitigation of future calamities caused by disasters. In March 2005, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong as then-ASEAN Secretary General noted the importance of a people-centred approach in disaster management in order to reduce vulnerabilities. He also acknowledged the need for ASEAN states to shift their paradigms to disaster risk reduction, where investments should be made in the area of pre-disaster preparedness.

The importance of sustainable development in disaster risk reduction has also been mentioned in the ARPD 2004-2010. In line with this aspiration, ASEAN announced in May 2009 a joint effort geared at disaster risk reduction and disaster management in Southeast Asia with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and the World Bank. Moreover, the ACDM is currently developing a platform similar to that of ARPD, to be implemented from 2010 to 2015. The main objective of this new platform would be to implement disaster risk reduction initiatives in order to build disaster-resilient nations in Southeast Asia.

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Role of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Regional Disaster Management

Complementing disaster management efforts in ASEAN, the ARF has been looking at disaster management as one of the security concerns in the region. Hence, it has developed a number of initiatives among its members. The ARF, established in 1994, is the principal forum for security dialogue in the Asia-Pacific. It provides a setting in which members can discuss current regional security issues and develop cooperative measures to enhance peace and security in the region. The forum draws together 27 countries which have a bearing on the security of the Asia-Pacific region, including the 10 ASEAN member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam), the 10

The 6th Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief, Qingdao, China, 18-20 September 2006.



Source: ASEAN Regional Forum, 2005. Available at

<http://www.aseanregionalforum.org/PhotoGallery/ARFISMonDisasterRelief/tabid/312/Default.aspx>.
ASEAN dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States), one ASEAN observer (Papua New Guinea), as well as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Timor-Leste, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The objectives of the ASEAN Regional Forum are outlined in the First ARF Chairman's Statement (1994), namely:

- To foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern; and
- To make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

Disaster relief is an important aspect of comprehensive security, and a valuable confidence building measure for the ARF. Disasters cause serious damage to local economies and social stability, and hence affect the security of states. Moreover, major disasters do not respect political boundaries, but are a common problem for all states in the region. As indicated in Table 1, Southeast Asia is prone to natural disasters. Scientific findings have also indicated that the region will see an increasing intensity and frequency of these disasters in the coming year. Regional cooperation among states is thus essential in dealing with natural disasters. Cooperation of this nature could enhance mutual confidence and hence regional security, as well as reinforce the sense of good neighbourliness among ARF participants. This point was reiterated at the 16th ASEAN Regional Forum held in Phuket, Thailand on 23 July 2009. Participants recognised that natural disasters pose an increasing threat to the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region, and emphasised the urgency of developing effective prevention, relief, mitigation and rehabilitation measures and arrangements in the region, so as to complement and reinforce existing mechanisms, including those of the United Nations.

Table 1 Relative intensity of natural hazards faced by countries in Southeast Asia

Country	Typhoon	Flood	Drought	Landslide	Tsunami	Earthquake	Volcano	Fire
Cambodia	L	S	L					L
Indonesia	L	M	M	L	L	S	M	M
Lao PDR	L	S	M					M

Malaysia	M	S*	S	L	M		L
Myanmar	M	M	M	M		S	S
Philippines	S	S	L	S	S	S	M
Thailand	L	S*	S	L		L	L
Vietnam	M	M	L	S	S	L	L

Source: Lolita Bildan, *Disaster Management in Southeast Asia: An Overview*, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), 2003. Legend: S- severe; M- moderate; L- low * coastal flooding

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ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief

The ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief (ARF-ISMDR) is the framework which facilitates discussions on natural disasters. The aim of the ISMDR is to enhance confidence and mutual trust among ARF participants through practical cooperation in disaster relief. Nine meetings have been held so far. The first meeting was held in Wellington, New Zealand in February 1997 and the ninth meeting was held in Hawaii in September 2009. These meetings brought together ARF members, represented by their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, as well as additional agencies like the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The Meetings took up a wide range of issues which mainly focus on the following:

Mechanisms for Regional Cooperation in disaster management in Southeast Asia

- **ASEAN Experts Group on Disaster Management**

First called in 1971. The 11th meeting in August 2000 adopted the guidelines for disaster relief assistance and the development of the ASEAN Region Program on Disaster Management. The *ADMIN Newsletter* promotes awareness and information exchange.

- **ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief**

The 4th meeting in May 2000 agreed on information sharing on disaster data and early warning, mutual assistance for disaster preparedness and relief, training in disaster management, and promotion of greater awareness in disaster preparedness and relief.

- **ASEAN Regional Cooperation on Trans-boundary Haze Pollution**

Started in 1995. The Regional Haze Action Plan sets out cooperative measures among member countries. Inter-governmental negotiation meetings in September 2001 agreed on monitoring, assessment and prevention, and the immediate deployment of people and goods across borders in case of environmental disaster. Set up an ASEAN Fire Danger Rating System for quantitative measurements of level of risk of fire and haze.

- **Mekong River Commission (or MRC)**

Established in 1995, replacing the Mekong Committee that was set up in 1957. The MRC Flood Management and Mitigation Strategy provides technical products and services on flood preparedness measures, addresses differences and facilitation involving structural measures, and capacity building and technology transfer in emergency response measures.

- **Asian Disaster Preparedness Center Regional Consultative Committee on Regional Cooperation in Disaster Management (or ADPC-RCC)**

Established in 2000. The November 2001 meeting identified priorities for capacity building for national disaster management systems, regional initiatives for disaster management and new action areas for ADPC-RCC members.

- **UNESCAP Typhoon Committee**

Established in 1967. The July 2001 meeting reviewed the Regional Cooperation Program Implementation Plan and identified five priority activities:

Forecasting technology, public information and education, institutional development, network development and communication network.

- **Asian Disaster Reduction Center**

Established in 1998. Areas of concern include exchange of disaster reduction experts from each country, gathering and provision of disaster reduction information, and research for multinational disaster reduction cooperation.

Source: Lolita Bildan, *Disaster Management in Southeast Asia: An Overview*, ADPC, 2003.

- Enhancement of early warning capabilities on emergencies such as earthquakes, floods and severe storms;
- Mutual assistance;
- Creation of a regional database;
- Information exchange and experience-sharing;
- Networking among agencies directly involved in disaster management should be further enhanced. For this purpose, a List of Contact Points for disaster management among the ARF participants was updated and circulated;

- Disaster relief training; and
- Promoting awareness.

One important culmination of these meetings was the inaugural joint humanitarian exercise called the ARF Voluntary Demonstration of Response (VDR) on Disaster Relief which was conducted in the Philippines from 4 to 8 May 2009. The ARF-VDR is a robust civilian-led, military supported exercise designed to demonstrate ARF national capabilities in response to an affected country's request for assistance, and build regional assistance capacity for major, multinational relief operations. Following a hypothetical super-typhoon, participating countries offered assistance in response to a Philippine government request for international humanitarian relief. Areas covered in the demonstration include land, air and maritime search and rescue operations, medical assistance/evacuation and engineering reconstruction. Civil-military projects include reconstruction of a school building, construction of a bridge, installation of a water supply system and the medical treatment of approximately 8,000 Filipinos in the Central Luzon area. The effort was commended by a senior US diplomat and was judged successful enough to warrant renewal in 2010.

These exercises constitute the first major effort on the part of the ARF to develop an operational arm. A focus on responses to natural disasters - the most politically neutral of crises - is commendable, and reflects the inclination of ASEAN member states to view non-traditional security threats, rather than more conventional military conflicts, as better prospects for regional cooperation.

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Conclusion

Disaster management provides an opportunity to strengthen cooperation among member states of ASEAN and the ARF, where disaster management initiatives have been evolving. Regional institutions have begun to realise the importance of mainstreaming comprehensive disaster management initiatives in the region. Documents and statements within both regional arrangements show promising progress towards building a region more resilient to natural disasters. Yet, it remains to be seen whether actual improvements can be realised in the region, beyond the published declarations and agreements.

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