

ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami,
Disaster and Climate Preparedness in
Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian Countries

Strategic Note 2013-2016

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1 Introduction

Background

The ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in Indian Ocean and South East Asian Countries (“the Trust Fund”) was established in 2005 through a US\$ 10 million contribution from the Royal Thai Government. The Trust Fund’s initial, overall objective was to build and enhance tsunami early warning capacities at various levels by responding to the needs of Indian Ocean and South East Asian countries.¹ In addition to Thailand, the governments of Sweden, Turkey, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Nepal have all contributed financially to the Trust Fund.

The Trust Fund was expected to contribute to the development of an integrated regional early warning system comprising a network of collaborative centers connected to sub-regional and regional platforms. To this end, the Trust Fund applied a multi-hazard approach in line with the principles of effective and people centered end-to-end early warning systems. In 2010, the scope of the Trust Fund was expanded to include climate and disaster preparedness within the core areas of support, while retaining a focus on early warning for coastal hazards.

Key achievements to date

The results of the Trust Fund have exceeded expectations. As of April 2013, the Trust Fund had supported 22 projects with a total budget of approximately US\$ 12.3 million, directly benefitting 19 countries. Projects cover a number of aspects of early warning, including but not limited to: monitoring and warning services that provide support to lower capacity countries; risk maps for community preparedness planning; Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); and, education and public awareness activities. The Trust Fund contributed to the establishment of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS), which entered into operation in October 2011, and as such the Trust Fund met its initial objective. It is estimated that the IOTWS, in a conservative estimate, will contribute to the saving of 1,000 lives per year over the next 100 years.

The Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES) was established in 2009 as a result of Trust Fund projects. RIMES, a collective resource for member countries, provides a range of cost-effective early warning and climate application services. These have led to improvements in early warning systems and capacities, especially in low capacity countries. Products include improved typhoon and cyclone tracking and longer-lead, location-specific agro-advisories, which have positively impacted on livelihoods.

¹ The countries covered by the Fund are: Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Lao PDR, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste and Viet Nam.

Way forward

Since its inception, the Trust Fund has proved to be a useful mechanism to strengthen the regional dimension of early warning and climate applications and to provide specific support to countries based on a regional approach. Going forward, building on its achievements, opportunities and comparative advantages, the Trust Fund will focus its efforts on three pillars: (i) regional intergovernmental mechanisms; (ii) specific country needs; and (iii) civil society innovations and business sector initiatives. This framework will facilitate a more coherent portfolio and allow for soft earmarking to specific pillars if desired.

2 Challenges and opportunities

The region continues to face disaster threats

Asia-Pacific is the most disaster-prone region of the world. Between 1970 and 2011, nearly two million people were killed by disasters in this region, an alarming figure that represented 75 per cent of global disaster fatalities during this period.² Whether the hazards are geophysical, hydro-meteorological or climatological, their impact is greater in Asia-Pacific than anywhere else in the world. In this context, the understanding of the different risk factors is improving as better data, research and technologies become available and are circulated more widely.

Disasters undermine development

Disasters exacerbate poverty, vulnerability and economic inequity. The poor in any society are generally more vulnerable to disasters, and bear the brunt of overall damages and losses. Likewise, people in low-income countries are more exposed to natural hazards than those in high-income countries. Disasters can impede and even roll-back progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Meanwhile, rapid economic growth alone does not reduce vulnerabilities sufficiently, but can lead to even greater exposure to a variety of disaster risks. Therefore, building resilience is an integral part of efforts to reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs.

Urbanization brings new vulnerabilities

Rapid urbanization heightens exposure to hazards and increases vulnerabilities, especially among the poor. In 2011, ten of the world's 20 megacities were located in Asia. The share of the total population in Asia living in urban areas increased from 17 per cent in 1950 to 44 per cent in 2010, and will likely reach 64 per cent by 2050. Cities with the highest concentrations of people tend to be the areas with the highest risk related to disasters.

Coastal areas are heavily exposed

Eight of the ten countries in the world with the largest populations residing in low elevation coastal zones are found in Asia. Most have heavily populated delta regions, which are exposed to disaster risks from rising

² Asia Pacific Disaster Report 2012, ISDR and ESCAP, 2012
(<http://www.unescap.org/idd/pubs/Asia-Pacific-Disaster-Report-2012.pdf>)

tides, tropical storms, sea level rise and high river flows. Despite these risks, coastal settlements continue to attract people and are growing more rapidly than those inland, putting additional people at risk to coastal hazards.

Climate change increases risk

Adapting to the added risks brought about by climate change is a major challenge for countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The observed effects of climate extremes and variation suggest that, while the overall number of tropical cyclones (typhoons in Eastern Asia and the Pacific) may not be increasing, the intensity of the cyclones is on the rise, making the region as a whole more susceptible to disaster losses. This situation is becoming more serious due to current migration patterns, with more people settling in coastal areas exposed to the risk of tropical cyclones.

Early warning systems save lives

Improvements in end-to-end early warning systems have contributed to the saving of lives and property. Advances in technologies are also making systems more accurate, and experience has shown that spending on early warning systems and hydro-met applications has high returns. However, many of the countries covered by the Trust Fund have not yet benefited as much as they could have from such improvements in early warning, and unmet gaps still remain. Likewise, despite notable progress towards achieving the MDGs, there are pockets of poverty across the region, where early warning systems need to be extended and further strengthened.

Regional standards and data sharing are vital

As hazards are transboundary, many of the solutions involve cooperation between countries. While SOPs need to be context- and hazard-specific, common standards are becoming the norm across the region. Standardized multi-hazard risk mapping and vulnerability assessments, policies for simulations and drills, and standardized information storage, accessibility and use for disaster risk reduction are other areas in need of further regional cooperation.

Collective systems support low capacity countries

Early warning and climate applications based on pooled resources make sense for low capacity countries that cannot afford their own systems. Such sharing of capacity and tools are being developed in the region based on South-South approaches and systems such as RIMES.

Early warning depends on reaching people

Regardless of the advances in technology and accuracy of forecasts and warnings, if information does not reach people in danger in a timely and understandable manner, the warning system will fail. Recent experiences show mixed results in terms of integrating the media into national early warning systems, and the relevant operational policies and processes still need to be improved in several countries.

Capitalizing on citizen initiatives

Strengthening national systems is a pre-requisite for effective end-to-end early warning. At the same time, an effective response depends upon citizen action. There are examples of effective citizen initiatives utilizing new technology for climate applications and disaster warnings, but these are often not well known, and policies to support them are often lacking. Combining national systems and bottom up approaches is likely to be the most effective approach.

Business sector increasingly active in disaster management

In several countries across the region, the business sector is becoming increasingly active in disaster preparedness and response. During the 2011 floods in Thailand, for example, the business sector was severely affected and also contributed significantly to the response by making donations and sharing technical expertise. Likewise, in Indonesia, the business sector has become an active partner in various aspects of disaster management, as exemplified during the response to recent earthquakes and floods. This emerging role of the business sector provides opportunities to build new partnerships and to mobilize the resources, skills and expertise of the business sector in support of disaster risk reduction efforts.

A regional approach to learning

Experience has proven that peer learning works. When knowledge crosses geographical and subject boundaries, it can become even more valuable. For national stakeholders involved in early warning, one of the best venues for impactful learning is regional.

3 Comparative advantages

The Trust Fund is one of many actors contributing to the strengthening of end-to-end early warning systems for coastal hazards. Advancements are first and foremost driven by the countries and communities themselves. However, a number of international organizations, bilateral agencies, non-governmental organizations, private enterprises and citizen initiatives also contribute to the development of capacities for end-to-end early warning.

The Trust Fund relies on the following comparative advantages and strengths in contributing to more resilient coastal communities:

The Trust Fund's location in ESCAP allows it to build on ESCAP's role as a convenor of regional cooperation. The ESCAP Commission meets annually at the senior officials and Ministerial levels, and has provided an important platform to move the agenda of the Trust Fund and its partners forward. In addition, ESCAP is the co-facilitator with WMO of two intergovernmental regional bodies, the Panel on Tropical Cyclones and the Typhoon Committee. ESCAP also convenes the biennium Disaster Risk Reduction Committee. These platforms are used to share lessons of Trust Fund projects and are also supported as intergovernmental mechanisms for development of joint standards related to end-to-end early warning. The platforms are suited to bridge the local, national and regional levels, demonstrating practices at local level for upstream policy development and identifying gaps and opportunities for regional cooperation.

A strategic approach of the Trust Fund has been to contribute to national level capacity in early warning systems and hydro-meteorological applications based on collective systems and regional approaches. In this way, the Trust Fund has contributed to proven results, especially in least developed countries.

The Trust Fund has been one of the few regional funding sources for the regional aspects of early warning. The niche has allowed it to focus and develop good partnerships with different actors, including UN organizations, regional organizations and national institutions. These partnerships will be a key strength in retaining and further developing the relevance and effectiveness of the Trust Fund.

The decision making and quality assurance processes set up as part of the governance and management of the Trust Fund from 2005 have proven to be efficient and effective, and have contributed to positive results of Trust Fund supported projects.

4 Strategic focus: three pillars

In 2013-2016, the Trust Fund will seek to strengthen end-to-end early warning for coastal hazards such as tsunamis, tropical cyclones, flooding and storm surges, while applying a multi-hazard approach. It will contribute to building more resilient coastal communities, and thus ultimately, help save lives and reduce loss and damage from disasters.

To this end, the Trust Fund will focus its support on three pillars: (i) regional intergovernmental mechanisms, (ii) specific country needs, and (iii) civil society innovations and business sector initiatives.

Pillar	I Regional intergovernmental mechanisms
Focus	Regional products and processes: joint tools and standards.
Partners	Mechanisms facilitated by ESCAP will be utilized, including the Panel on Tropical Cyclones, Typhoon Committee, Disaster Risk Reduction Committee, Regional Cooperative Mechanism on Disaster Monitoring and Early Warning, Particularly Drought, and the ESCAP Commission. The Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System, Intergovernmental Coordination Group (facilitated by IOC-UNESCO) will continue to be an important partner. The RIMES Council is another regional decision making body that has emerged, and whose work programme will be supported by the Trust Fund. Efforts will also be made to strengthen linkages to sub-regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
Pillar	II Specific country needs
Focus	Country specific needs related to institutional strengthening and applications, met with regional collective resources. South-South approaches to enhance cooperation between countries covered by the Trust Fund, tapping into the capacities that have been developed in the region, will be emphasized. Priority will be given to low capacity countries, but support may also be provided to projects targeting poor communities in countries with more domestic capacity. Special consideration will be given to projects that build on the achievements made by previous projects supported by the Trust Fund.
Partners	The Trust Fund will support partners with a track record of addressing specific country needs, such as UNDP and RIMES

(based on the needs and priorities reflected in the RIMES Master Plan).

Pillar	III Civil society innovations and business sector initiatives
Focus	<p>Civil society innovations related to early warning, use of hazardous weather information and empowerment at the local level. The Trust Fund will support demonstration projects for the purpose of bringing innovative ideas and lessons to the national and regional levels. A component of the pillar can also be documentation of successful local practices for policy development.</p> <p>Business sector initiatives may include efforts to scale up the role of the business sector in disaster preparedness, and to document and share best practices, in this regard. This pillar may also include projects that seek to strengthen the role of the business sector in the early warning chain.</p>
Partners	The Trust Fund will work with local organizations and businesses through a regional partner such as RIMES, the Asia Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) and the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU).

In practice, the three pillars will overlap. Specific country needs (Pillar II) will be met by regional resources, and will as such depend on the development of such resources under Pillar I. Experiences and lessons from Pillars II (country needs) and III (civil society innovations) will also be linked to the intergovernmental mechanisms in Pillar I.

5 Operationalization

The Trust Fund operates according to the following **principles**:

Partnerships. UNISDR, UNDP and IOC-UNESCO remain close partners of the Trust Fund and technical advisors. The Trust Fund will also maintain close coordination with WMO, OCHA and UNEP. It will continue to work with regional and sub-regional organizations, NGOs and government agencies in the region, and will strengthen such partnerships as appropriate. On a case-by-case basis, the Trust Fund may explore the possibility of entering into strategic partnerships with organizations receiving financial support from the Trust Fund.

Quality assurance. All project proposals are reviewed by a technical committee and the governing body of the Trust Fund, the Advisory Council. The project proposals should respond favorably to an ex-ante evaluation of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact.

Results-based-management. The Trust Fund is guided by a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. The Secretariat monitors projects and conducts progress reviews every six months. All projects are externally evaluated at the end. Lessons feed into programming.

Flexibility. The Trust Fund focuses on filling gaps, as well as supporting innovative, potentially high impact initiatives. Resource sharing arrangements are encouraged.

Coordination and harmonization. Implementing organizations are required to take the total picture of related initiatives and support into account when designing and implementing activities to avoid duplication and build synergies. Projects in pillars I and II are based on priorities agreed by inter-governmental entities, and as such reflect country priority and ownership.

Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In line with the overall international effort to support the achievement of the MDGs, the Trust Fund will give priority to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and low capacity / high-risk countries, and as such the most vulnerable coastal communities, which in turn will contribute positively to the attainment of the MDGs. The Trust Fund will pay particular attention to improving resilience of vulnerable groups such as the poor, women and children as appropriate within the projects supported by the Trust Fund.

Resource mobilization. By demonstrating results, the Trust Fund will seek continued support from existing donors and also make efforts to further broaden its donor base. Countries covered by the Trust Fund will be targeted. The new strategy of the Trust Fund will allow for soft earmarking by pillars, if desired.