



Fourth South Asia Forum on SDGs

Special High-Level Event on Disaster and Climate Resilience in South Asia

Virtual Meeting

Date: December 4, 2020

Time: 15.00-16.30 (New Delhi), 16.30-18.00 (Bangkok)

Background

The convergence of COVID-19 with natural hazards has created a hitherto unseen complex, compounding, and cascading risk landscape in South Asia. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, South Asian countries are being hit by cyclones, floods, landslides, and locust infestations. These cascading and complex risks are expected to continue to occur at greater rates. The pandemic has highlighted the existing cracks in the interdependent economic and social systems, and there is an increasing realization that disaster preparedness for any hazard, whether natural or biological is a multi-sectoral and a multi-stakeholder issue. The capacity for managing disasters and public health emergencies to respond to these converging risks is key to recover from the COVID-19 and prepare better for the future crises.

The intersection of COVID-19 and extreme climate events reminds us once again the shared vulnerabilities of South Asia and urgency of sub-regional actions to address the crisis. It's in this context that, on 9 July 2020, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) convened a virtual High-Level Policy Dialogue - COVID-19 and South Asia: Socio-Economic Impacts, National Strategies and Subregional Cooperation for Building Back Better. The dialogue was attended by the UN USG and Executive Secretary of ESCAP as well as the Secretary Generals of SAARC, BIMSTEC and the key ministers of all South Asian countries. One of the key recommendations from the dialogue is to scale up the regional cooperation in building back better through building subregional platforms in coordination with SAARC and BIMSTEC secretariats and other development partners.

During the Sixth Session of ESCAP's Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction in August 2019, member States established the Asia Pacific Disaster Resilience Network (APDRN) to address the shared vulnerabilities in multi-hazard risk hotspots including those in South Asia. The core of this network is the regional platform for multi-hazard early warning systems supported by the key partners in the region.

In parallel, during the Third South Asia Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Forum's session on climate and disaster resilience, held in Dhaka in December 2019, member Countries from South Asia requested ESCAP to facilitate the integration of climate and disaster risks into development planning processes. The specific recommendations include a twin track strategy to begin with (1)

ESCAP joining the South Asia Hydromet Forum (SAHF)¹ and (2) linking the SAHF to the South Asia SDG forum.

In specific context of the regional co-operation to address the cascading risks and to bring together multiple stakeholders under one discussion platform, ESCAP with partners has been engaging in a multi-part webinar series to discuss building resilience to cascading disasters in South Asia. The first expert webinar jointly with the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), Ministry of Home/Government of India, held on July 22, 2020² focused on innovative solutions to manage cascading disasters. The second expert webinar jointly with NIDM, SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) and BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate Centre (BCWC) was held on August 26, 2020 and discussed the key pathways to manage cascading risks and protect people.

The key recommendations by disaster risk reduction and public health experts emerged from these webinars include:

- (1) Promoting disaster risk reduction measures viz., multi-hazard early warning systems and resilient infrastructure as a public good.
- (2) Using existing global frameworks that address the disaster-health/pandemic nexus along with investments in green recovery to build back better.
- (3) Using existing regional cooperation mechanisms to scale up the pathways of putting in place people's health at the Centre of disaster resilience in South Asia.

Objectives and content

In the backdrop of the Fourth South Asia Forum on SDGs, this special dialogue on Disaster and Climate Resilience in South Asia aims to take forward these recommendations and discuss the optimal ways to implement these recommendations in an integrated and systemic manner.

The event will have 2 parts.

High-level Panel: This session will have ministers from South Asia will deliberate policy messages and outstanding issues on disaster and climate resilience.

Experts Panel: The expert session with multi-sectoral experts will discuss the way forward, particularly through the linkages between the Climate service forums and the South Asia Forum on SDGs.

Target audience

The two sessions aim to engage ministers and technical experts responsible for disaster risk management, health, and planning to discuss how to take forward the recommendations from the prior webinars and the Fourth South Asia Forum on SDGs.

Discussion points and guiding questions

1. What are the opportunities and imperatives to overcome the challenges in implementing a systemic approach to disaster and public health risk management?

¹ South Asia Hydromet Forum (SAHF), supported by the World Bank, in technical partnership with the World Meteorological Organization, Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning System (RIMES), UK Met Office, is a partnership platform that has brought together weather and climate stakeholders from the South Asia Region, including the Heads of the National Meteorological and Hydrological agencies as well as user-sector representatives from weather-dependent sectors.

² <https://youtu.be/pRdsRoYalc8>

2. What could be the strategies to capitalize on existing regional and sub-regional cooperation mechanisms including the South Asia Forum on SDGs to scale up multi-hazard and multi-sectoral preparedness systems for future cascading disasters?

Background documents

1. Weaving a stronger fabric. Managing cascading risks for climate resilience in South Asia. Draft Summary for Policymakers.
2. Scenario-based risk analytics for managing cascading disasters- A pathway to manage risks and protect people in South Asia.
[\[https://www.unescap.org/resources/scenario-based-risk-analytics-managing-cascading-disasters\]](https://www.unescap.org/resources/scenario-based-risk-analytics-managing-cascading-disasters)
3. Policy brief: When crises converge: Responding to natural disasters in South Asia during Covid-19
[\[https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Policy%20brief_when%20crises%20converge_v1%20%284%29.pdf\]](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Policy%20brief_when%20crises%20converge_v1%20%284%29.pdf)
4. Policy study: Protecting the most vulnerable to cascading risks from climate extremes and the COVID-19 in South Asia
[\[https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Policy%20study-climate%20hazards%20during%20the%20pandemic_final_v6%20%284%29.pdf\]](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Policy%20study-climate%20hazards%20during%20the%20pandemic_final_v6%20%284%29.pdf)
5. Policy study: COVID-19 and South Asia: National Strategies and Subregional Cooperation for Accelerating Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Recovery
<https://www.unescap.org/resources/covid-19-and-south-asia-national-strategies-and-subregional-cooperation-accelerating>
6. Blog: A cascade of COVID-19 and climate extremes call for new algorithms to protect at-risk communities <https://www.unescap.org/blog/cascade-covid-19-and-climate-extremes-call-new-algorithms-protect-risk-communities>