Regional Conversation Series: Ministerial Panel on Disaster, Climate and Health Resilience

25 August 2021 (12:15-13:45 UTC+7)

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has made our world a much riskier place and the pandemic’s impacts are being compounded by extreme climate events. The Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021 shows that adding biological hazards to the existing disaster riskscape changes our understanding of risk in the region. The cascading and compounding impacts of COVID-19 along with unprecedented cyclones, floods, landslides, heatwaves and volcanic eruptions have taxed the capacity of disaster management and public health systems to respond to the disaster-climate-health nexus. While the pandemic is surely leading to an economic slowdown that will have significant negative impacts on sustainable development goals across the region, it has also provided the potential and, perhaps, a new resolve to abandon business as usual and change direction.

There are multiple opportunities and imperatives to overcome the challenges in implementing systemic approaches to disaster and public health risk management. The region needs to capitalize on existing global, regional and sub-regional cooperation mechanisms including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, to scale up multi-hazard and multisectoral preparedness systems for better preparedness to future cascading disaster risks. The regional conversation on disaster, climate and health resilience that comprises policy insights and experiences shared by ministers from Indonesia, India, Japan, Maldives and Thailand led to the following policy recommendations:

Key take-away

(1) A paradigm shift in disaster risk management is needed to focus on investments in prevention, resilience, and an all-hazard approach integrating disaster and health emergencies with universal social protection.

(2) Economic and governmental mechanisms need to place climate and nature at the centre of development. This can support the move away from the growth-led development models to solutions that enable net-zero-carbon development, maintain the integrity of ecosystems, and promote investments in disaster and climate resilient infrastructure.

(3) Delivering on the untapped potential of digital technologies is fundamental for accelerating inclusive, resilient and sustainable development. The current digital dividends are still mostly bypassing the region’s poorest people and universal access to affordable and reliable broadband Internet by 2030 is an essential condition for a more equitable sharing of digital dividends that include our most vulnerable populations.

(4) Building resilience in regional supply chains and promoting trade in health services could ensure that the region is better prepared for future pandemics, disasters and shocks.

(5) Investments in these components have to be backed by fiscal resources complemented by innovative sources of funding. With the advent of green, sustainable, and innovative financing mechanisms, there is scope to achieve resilient growth and nature-centred development.
Policy recommendations

National level: Many countries have achieved success in dealing with individual disasters. Most are still ill-prepared for complex overlapping crises. In particular, the intersection of biological and natural hazards remains poorly understood. The interplay of disease, disaster and climate change, is reshaping and expanding the region’s riskscape. To manage the perils of systemic risk arising from the cascading disasters, 4 policy action areas are suggested: i) embed cascading risk scenarios in traditional disaster risk management; ii) prioritize risk-informed investments in health infrastructure and shock-prepared social protection; iii) capitalize on frontier technologies; and iv) boost resilience through targeted COVID-19 fiscal stimulus spending.

Regional/sub-regional level: Building back better in the era of COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to scale up regional cooperation with sub-regional approaches that capture the shared vulnerabilities and disaster risks to manage the cascading risks associated with natural and biological hazards, including by taking note of the Bangkok Principles and considering other relevant regional and subregional frameworks and initiatives. In this regard, it is recommended to organize consultations with member States and expert meetings to shape appropriate policy tools/guidance that will support the implementation of the Sendai framework.