

Foreword

The Asia-Pacific region continues to be hit by a relentless sequence of disasters: cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, droughts, dust storms and heatwaves. These disasters can strike anyone, anywhere, but they do their greatest damage in the poorest communities — often those of minority groups, or of people living in remote areas, or in the fragile marginal zones of the region's rapidly expanding cities.



Countries across the region have committed themselves to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 — to ensure that 'no one is left behind'. But they cannot achieve many of the SDG targets if their people are not protected from disasters that threaten to reverse hard-won development gains. This means not just building resilience in the priority zones but doing so across the entire 'riskscape' — reaching the most marginal and vulnerable communities.

This *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report* shows that more of today's events are linked to environmental degradation and climate change. This is generating disasters of increasing complexity and uncertainty. Taking slow onset disasters into account, economic losses due to disasters quadruple as compared to estimates in previous editions. The report shows key hotspots emerging where fragile environments converge with critical socioeconomic vulnerabilities — thus making it much more likely that disasters will transmit poverty, marginalization and disempowerment across generations. In these hotspots, disasters are closely linked to poverty and inequality of income and opportunity.

The report gives empirical evidence of how disasters impact health, employment, and education of the most vulnerable populations leading to a vicious downward cycle. However, this is not inevitable. Governments can break this vicious cycle by investing to outpace disaster risk and the report shows that investments will inevitably be large, though far smaller than the damage and losses from unmitigated disasters. Moreover, these same investments will deliver co-benefits — in the form of better education, health, social and infrastructure services, and higher agricultural production and incomes.

Disaster resilience can also benefit from rapid advances in technology. Even the poorest countries can be empowered by smart digital technologies. Artificial intelligence and big data techniques, for example, can build a live picture of rapidly developing events by merging satellite imagery with data from mobile phones. At the same time, digital identity systems can offer more ways to deliver essential social protection services, before, during and after disasters.

This report also points out that many of the region's disaster hotspots extend across national boundaries. Dust storms can easily sweep on to neighbouring countries, and floods in one country can soon rush on to others downstream. This underlines the importance of regional cooperation both to monitor the evolution of disasters and to work together across the riskscape to mitigate the impacts and build cross-border resilience. For example, partnership between ESCAP and ASEAN is mobilizing Member States towards the development of an ASEAN strategy on drought resilience to reduce the impacts of drought, protect the poorest communities and foster harmonious societies.

We hope that this *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report* will illuminate and inform this critical effort — demonstrating the scale of this important task, but also identifying the wide range of potential solutions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. S. Alisjahbana'.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP