

**NEAT Working Group on
Regional Cooperation on Disaster Management in East Asia
- Resilient Nations and Communities against Super Disasters -**

Final Report

Tokyo

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Introduction

In the past three decades, catastrophic and fatal disasters have been increasing. Most of them took place in Asia, e.g. China 2008, Indonesia 2004, Myanmar 2008, Bangladesh 1991, Pakistan 2005, Iran 1990 and 2003. Most of them were induced by earthquakes.

On March 11, 2011, a super earthquake of magnitude 9.0 also struck off the coast of Eastern Japan. The earthquake and the tsunami that followed it devastated Eastern Japan, leaving a total of 19,000 people dead or missing, and a total of 250,000 houses were lost or severely damaged.

Asia, particularly East Asia, is an eminent disaster-prone area, and is continuing to suffer damage and losses due to super disasters. People's survival, dignity, livelihood, and profits from local development have been gravely affected and are facing serious consequences.

The United Nations designated the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) to decrease the loss of life, property destruction and social and economic disruption caused by natural disasters. In 1994, the UN World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction was held in Yokohama, Japan, and adopted the "Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World." The second UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held in Kobe in 2005, and adopted the present Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. The "Hyogo Framework for Action 2005 – 2015" resolves to pursue the substantial reduction in disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries.

The first NEAT Working Group (WG) on "Regional Cooperation on Disaster Management" was held in Tokyo, Japan on 7 July 2011 to promote mutual understanding on the current situation and the future challenges of regional cooperation in disaster management, thereby developing concrete and feasible policy recommendations to be submitted to the ASEAN Plus Three Summit. Twenty experts from ASEAN+3 member countries, the ASEAN Secretariat and the sponsoring organization, the Japan Forum on International Relations (JFIR), took part in the WG meeting.

Based on the discussions at the meeting, the NEAT WG on "Regional Cooperation on Disaster Management in East Asia" summarized the following recommendations;

1. Improve and strengthen existing schemes and initiatives for regional cooperation such as AADMER and bilateral international cooperation for disaster reduction and climate change.
2. Explore possibilities for more integrated and comprehensive approaches to disaster management at the regional level.
3. Encourage information sharing on early warning and appropriate technologies, technology

transfer, and financial and technical assistance for disaster reduction in the region.

4. Strengthen and extend cooperation and coordination in search and rescue, disaster relief, and reconstruction at the regional level. Particularly, strengthen capacity for coordination between international assistance and domestic response activities in the disaster-stricken areas.

5. Promote joint research, training, and emergency response exercises and encourage capacity building and development of human resources in the region.

6. Implement a regional pilot project to build the capacity of local governments and communities in several pilot cities in the region through developing disaster scenarios and action plans through community based disaster activities.

7. It is expected that the Japanese Government should lead the regional cooperation as stated above, and suggested by the ASEAN Plus Three Summit in 2010.

After one year has passed since the 2011 East Japan Earthquake Disaster, Japan has been facing various problems on recovery and reconstruction such as how to recover from the catastrophic disaster and how to reconstruct resilient nation and communities against the super disasters, which will occur at very low frequency but with great impact. Such lessons should be shared among the member countries, and it will be important to discuss how the regional cooperation can be promoted to build up resilient nations and communities against super disasters.

With the above background, the NEAT Working Group (WG) on Regional Cooperation on “Disaster Management in East Asia - Resilient Nations and Communities against Super Disasters -” was held in Tokyo, Japan on 27 July 2012. The objective of the meeting was to discuss how to build up resilient nations and communities against the super disasters in the region and how the member countries can cooperate to reduce the impact of such super disasters, thereby developing concrete and feasible policy recommendations to be submitted to the ASEAN plus Three Summit.

Discussions on Resilient Nations and Communities against Super Disasters

Nineteen experts from ASEAN+3 member countries, the ASEAN Secretariat and the sponsoring organization, the Japan Forum on International Relations (JFIR), took part in the WG meeting. The WG meeting began with opening introductory remarks by Amb. HIRABAYASHI Hiroshi, Vice President of JFIR, and Dr. OKAZAKI Kenji, Professor of National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), followed by three topical sessions.

1. Session 1 on “Early warning and safe evacuation”

In order to reduce the number of tsunami victims by, it is most important to issue the warning as soon and as precisely as possible so that people can evacuate to safer evacuation shelters or parks. In Japan, early warning systems for earthquakes and tsunamis have been developed and operated. The monitoring and warning system for flood and typhoon disasters have been also well developed. These systems could be also used in developing countries with some modification. The critical issue is that many people who received the early warnings would not evacuate promptly and eventually be killed by natural disasters, particularly by tsunamis.

2. Session 2 on “Motivation of the local communities to invest to build resilient societies against disasters”

To reduce the damages caused by earthquakes, retrofitting is most effective. However, people are not easily motivated for retrofitting due to various reasons. Similarly, people are not easily motivated to invest in safety, thinking that severe disasters may not occur in the near future, and that they will be safe. In principle, the local governments take the responsibility to promote disaster reduction. However, as they have various other high priorities in their administration, they are not motivated for disaster reduction. Therefore, motivation of the local communities to invest for safety is the most critical issue to build resilient societies against disasters.

3. Session 3 on “Commitment of international societies and the national and local governments”

In order to reduce the damages, particularly casualties, caused by super disasters, policies for disaster risk management should be changed from response oriented to mitigation oriented (from post-disaster activities to pre-disaster activities). For this purpose, the international societies and the national and local governments in the region should commit themselves to promote disaster reduction so that there are strong incentives for people and organizations to take proactive actions for safety before super disasters take place, causing serious human and economic damages.

Policy Recommendations for Regional Cooperation

Based on the discussions above, the NEAT WG on “Regional Cooperation on Disaster Management in East Asia - Resilient Nations and Communities against Super Disasters -” summarized the following policy recommendations;

1. Transfer and develop appropriate technologies and knowledge to tackle super disasters through international technical cooperation such as the activities of Japan International Cooperation Agency. Information sharing and close coordination among the international organizations, national governments, and local communities should be also promoted in the region.
2. Introduce the early warning systems in the region and improve its operation and accuracy. Mass media should be more involved in risk communication as efficient and effective risk message is essential for safe and prompt evacuation. Disaster education and awareness raising are essential so that people can take prompt and appropriate actions for evacuation and protection of their lives after receiving the warnings.
3. Promote community based disaster risk management (CBDRM) activities.
 - Broader stakeholders should be invited in CBDRM.
 - Applicable and affordable techniques should be developed for CBDRM.
 - Financial capability of the communities should be enhanced for disaster risk management
 - Socially cohesive and cooperative communities should be built up to address disasters
 - Communal property rights should be secured to encourage common investment in disaster risk management
4. National and local policies for disaster risk management should be developed, reflecting local conditions. Particularly, economic and social incentives should be developed to motivate the local communities to invest in disaster risk management.
5. Establish the focal point in every country for regional cooperation and coordination. Strengthen the network of the focal points through various activities such as the international workshops and seminars.
6. Military forces are the asset for regional assistance in case of super disasters. The protocols to dispatch and accept the military forces should be established from the view point of humanitarian activities.

[END]

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