

ASIA-PACIFIC POLICY BRIEF

RECOMMENDATIONS ON MANAGING RISK AND ADDRESSING DISASTER DISPLACEMENT: CHALLENGES, EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND SOLUTIONS



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This brief reflects the interventions, feedback and recommendations from the 19 November 2020 virtual regional exchange under the title Managing Risk and Addressing Disaster Displacement: Challenges, Effective Practices and Solutions in the Asia-Pacific, organized jointly by the Asia-Pacific Disaster Displacement Working Group, the Asia-Pacific Issue-Based Coalition on Building Resilience, the GP20 Initiative on internal displacement, the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and the UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement (HLP-IDP) Secretariat. The virtual exchange included high-level delegates from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka with varying responsibilities on disaster management, resilience and development.

The event was moderated by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs (Cecilia Jimenez-Damary), with introductory remarks by a High-Level Panel member (Dr. Sima Samar), and an introduction by Professor Walter Kaelin, Envoy of the Chair of the PDD and Member of the Expert Advisory Group of the HLP-IDP.

This brief builds on lessons-learned and best-practices from governmental representatives from participating countries and provides recommendations around systems and mechanisms to improve displacement prevention, response and solutions based on the statements made by the country representatives.

OVERVIEW

Forced displacement related to disasters, including the adverse effects of climate change, poses some of the biggest human rights, humanitarian and development challenges facing States and the international community in the 21st century. Each year, millions of people are displaced in the context of disasters caused by natural hazards such as floods, tropical storms, earthquakes, landslides, droughts and flooding, with most of this “disaster displacement” taking place *within* countries. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that in 2019 alone there were 24.9 million new internal displacements associated with disasters across 140 countries, the majority of them linked to weather- and climate-related natural hazards. In her recent report to the UN General Assembly 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons focused on the people displaced by the adverse effects of slow onset climate change and how States and other stakeholders can better protect the human rights of IDPs. Notably, more than 80 percent of documented disaster displacement between 2008 and 2019 occurred in Asia, making it a particularly salient issue for the region.

Driving this phenomenon is the combination of highly densely populated areas and a high level of exposure to a range of hazards, including earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, typhoons and volcanic eruptions. An increasing number of people in the region are also compelled to move or are displaced because of slow-onset events and processes, such as the effects of sea level rise, desertification and environmental degradation linked to the adverse effects of climate change. Countries will increasingly experience the limitations of current climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts, leading to both more severe and a greater number of disasters and in response, more displacement.

Disaster displaced populations face a multitude of protection and assistance needs, which are often linked to the type of natural hazard leading to displacement (e.g. whether sudden-onset vs slow-onset) and the forced nature of the movement. Similar to conflict contexts, people displaced by disasters may not be able to return to their homes

or places of habitual residence for a long period of time, if ever, leading to protracted displacement, relocation or settlement elsewhere and the need for long-term solutions.



Flood survivors in a relief camp in Quetta, Pakistan, on January 25, 2011 (Credit: Thomas Koch / Shutterstock.com)

In recognizing and forecasting the risks related to specific characteristics determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards and the potential for displacement in a given context, prevention and preparedness measures can be taken to minimize their impact and build the groundwork for protection, sustainable responses and solutions. This includes both disaster risk management systems and actions (contingency planning, early warning systems, evacuation shelters) but also should include more robust integration of risk into development planning, including building codes, land use planning, critical infrastructure strengthening, and many other areas. In practice, a range of both direct and indirect factors can complicate these efforts, ranging from existing legal and regulatory barriers to the permanent loss of land or livelihoods as a result of sea level rise or riverbank erosion.

Protecting the displaced, especially the most vulnerable ones, and achieving durable solutions to displacement in the context of disasters and climate change requires robust preparedness and sustained cross-sectoral partnerships and coordinated action long before disaster strikes,

with the primary responsibility resting with national authorities. Engaging only during the immediate disaster response is often too late to establish necessary relationships within and between governments and counterparts, circumventing the potential for an integrated approach to addressing risk, needs and solutions across a range of sectors. Ensuring displaced people or those at risk of displacement actively participate at all stages of planning, assessment and decision making on matters related to reinforcing communities' resilience and adaptive capacity to future shocks, and improving disaster preparedness, mitigation and responses across policy areas are key. Across Asia, while hazards continue to pose a significant challenge to the coping capacity of countries, notable progress has

been made in setting up early warning systems and managing pre-emptive evacuations.⁸ The success of both India and Bangladesh in limiting loss of life through large scale pre-emptive evacuations in the lead up to Cyclone Amphan in May 2020 is one such example.

In light of the breadth, range and innovative experiences of States within Asia in preventing, responding to and resolving displacement from both rapid and slow-onset disasters, it is critical that the perspectives of this region on disaster displacement are presented to the High Level Panel on Internal Displacement to support its recommendations.

LESSONS-LEARNED

While each speaker laid out specific recommendations from his or her context and experience around systems and mechanisms to improve displacement prevention, protection, response and solutions, there were some overarching recommendations that were reiterated from all and suggest a common perspective on the key priorities for internal displacement.

1. Enhance Legal and Regulatory Frameworks to integrate Displacement

Policy and regulatory frameworks must be strengthened at national and sub national levels to ensure strategic and effective approaches to disaster displacement. Many countries brought these frameworks and strategies as best practices, and all speakers agreed on the importance of integrated, multi-sector and local level capacity to address displacement issues. While a focus on IDPs for the event was clear, the frameworks discussed went further into looking at local planning and contingency mechanisms, local risk-aware investment and construction, adaptation planning, resilience building, and risk

sensitive settlement planning, in the context of disasters and climate change.



Rohingya, who crossed over recently from Myanmar into Bangladesh, carry their belongings and leave their flooded camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh on September 20, 2017 (Credit: Sk Hasan Ali / Shutterstock.com)

2. Data and evidence for policy on displacement

Speakers agreed that data and evidence, including on different forms of human mobility, but also on hazard and risks profiles and scenarios for disasters continued to play a major role in national capacity to address displacement. Mongolia is

focused on tracking mobility and including displacement into national statistics for development to ensure no one is left behind.

Bangladesh is working with its disaster management committees to ensure decentralized mechanisms to track and feed data to the national level. Similarly, the Philippines is attempting to link displacement data in camps and evacuation centres to protection focused information systems that will integrate and monitor protection and solutions for the IDPs. Afghanistan is working on IDP policy revision to better disaggregate conflict and disaster induced displacement for analysis, and Sri Lanka is focusing on climate scenarios and monitoring technology, along with above mentioned hazard mapping, to strengthen risk awareness and their capacity to ensure that development projects can reduce displacement risks and/or prevent future disaster displacements.

3. Partnership building

All speakers spoke to the importance of partnerships at the local, national and international levels. Often this came out in key preparedness and solutions-oriented projects, as well as in support for disaster responses. Mongolia pointed out the value of engagement with stakeholders including the 'Community Encounter Team' co-chaired by the UN that provides a forum for an integrated and holistic approach to disaster management. Bangladesh and Indonesia focused on local partnerships and programmes.

In particular, Bangladesh noted that the Cyclone Preparedness Program (CPP) – a joint program of the Government and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) – was a globally recognized best practice on community preparedness. Indonesia discussed the Sister Village Programme which supports villages to work together and allow for safe haven and pre-existing relationships between villagers. Further elaboration was made on the partnerships required in the recent Palu and Aceh disaster responses. The Philippines also pointed to a whole of government and partnership approach it has institutionalized to engage multi-level stakeholders – including IDPs, local governments, CSOs, NGOs, UN and development partners – to address risk and find solutions.

4. Localization, Contextualization, and Innovation

While international frameworks and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) play a role in providing guidance, many of the states presented examples of how they had contextualized and localized systems and guidance, including novel development projects to address prevention and solutions issues around displacement. The Philippines retains a CCCM cluster but has localized the framework into national frameworks for disaster management to better fit the context and coordination systems with stakeholders. A focus on simulations and capacity building has ensued to ensure decentralized systems. Bangladesh has recently institutionalized a Displacement Management Cluster under the leadership of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR). A similar arrangement exists in Indonesia where Displacement is integrated with the Protection cluster.



Mongolia faces extreme winters, which impact thousands of Mongolian herders in remote regions (Shutterstock.com)

The case of Mongolia is differentiated by a large percentage of displacement and human mobility in the context of slow-onset process and with rural-urban movements; this has led the Government to focus on forecast-based financing mechanisms to anticipate and mitigate displacement impact with early action protocols. Based on its 2017 Disaster Protection Law, Mongolia has mandated government institutions to invest 1% of their budgets on disaster preparedness for improved risk identification for communities leading to a surge in training and capacity on preparedness and emergency response.

Bangladesh further elaborated on specific initiatives to address risk beyond the CPP. In particular, they are embarking on a Disaster Resilient Housing program to prevent displacement and climate induced disasters as well as a Cluster Village Project that addresses displacement by building villages in clusters, rehabilitation and support for landless families to prevent protracted scenarios.

5. Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Displacement

Countries also highlighted the burden of the adverse effects of climate change on their disaster risk. While the Philippines is a low CO2 emission country, it receives the brunt of climate change related disaster impacts, specifically an increasing scale and intensity of tropical cyclones. In Mongolia, the slow-onset dzud (dzuit) has increased in frequency, while Bangladesh is dealing with a large proportion (78%) of its population living in multi-hazard risk areas and an expectation that up to 26 million people could be displaced by climate change related hazards in the coming decades. Sri Lanka was particularly concerned by the uncertainties and the need to invest further in modeling to ensure risk identification and proper land use planning to ensure people's safety and security. Many also



Typhoon Haiyan left more than 4 million people displaced in the Philippines in 2013 (Credit: Ymphotos / Shutterstock.com)

pointed to the human impact locally that needs to be addressed including desertification from overgrazing (Mongolia), and uncontrolled rural-urban flows (Sri Lanka, Mongolia), illegal deforestation and high-risk settlements (Sri Lanka), and coastal erosion (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka).

As all speakers pointed out, the impact of climate change is not yet fully known, but the mechanisms for addressing disaster displacement and slow-onset and climate change related displacement – particularly as a development problem focusing on prevention and solutions – are closely interlinked and need responses to be integrated at the country level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While each speaker laid out specific recommendations from his or her context and experience around systems and mechanisms to improve displacement prevention, protection, response and solutions, there were some overarching recommendations that were reiterated from all and suggest a common perspective on the key priorities for internal displacement.

1. Enhance Legal and Regulatory Frameworks to Integrate Displacement

Policy and regulatory frameworks must be strengthened at national and sub national levels to

ensure strategic and effective approaches to disaster displacement. Many countries brought these frameworks and strategies as best practices, and all speakers agreed on the importance of integrated, multi-sector and local level capacity to address displacement issues. While a focus on IDPs for the event was clear, the frameworks discussed went further into looking a local planning and contingency mechanisms, local risk-aware investment and construction, adaptation planning, resilience building, and risk-sensitive settlement planning, in the context of disasters and climate change.

2. Data and evidence for policy on displacement

Every country had specific and contextually relevant needs for more data, including real-time monitoring and tracking, historical analysis and modelling, and mechanisms to turn that evidence into useful tools for planning and development decision-makers. Specific examples ranged from river bank erosion modelling and population impacts, to labour force modelling to provide better services and livelihoods, to IDP models themselves to provide predictive simulations to better develop disaster management plans. In all cases, the focus was on centralizing the data – including sex, age and disability disaggregated data to help support specific needs of vulnerable groups – with accurate tracking and information about IDPs in real-time, and subsequent risk analysis to better use the displacement data and evidence to ensure that development in the country took this into account and reduces the risk of further displacement.



Real-time monitoring and tracking of hazards can support the development of disaster management plans.

3. Forecast-based financing and early action on displacement

Building on the data and evidence base, several of the country representatives focused on the importance of piloting forecast-based financing models for displacement, similar to the work that Mongolia has begun. While data and evidence is still required, and thus was pushed consistently, countries desire to turn that evidence into mechanisms to create early action to mitigate or prevent displacement in the future. Examples

included early action for cash transfers to affected populations before displacement, targeting of host communities to ensure proper social protection of those affected by displacement, and forecasting of likely displacement impacts from incoming natural hazards based on census, risk and vulnerability mapping to better prepare adequate services. By identifying displacement risk early, with financial capability to deploy needed support, countries plan to enable early action that will diminish overall resource requirements and avert the crisis, where possible.

4. Risk-aware development from national to sub national levels

Closely linked to the policy frameworks, data and evidence required, countries were focused on the end result, which would be resilient and risk-aware development. This included explicit references to taking the evidence and sharing it through both legal policies and sub national capacity building programs to ensure risk is integrated into planning approaches. Almost all focused not only on the national systems, but the lower administrative levels, and the desire to promote resilient people, infrastructure and government bodies and services. While some hazard awareness may already be integrated into development and infrastructure, the focus here was on displacement and human mobility of people from hazards, and the resultant strains and effects this can have on systems and resources. Planning with displacement as an integral part of the risk analysis would provide improved decisions and financing for reducing risk of future disasters.

5. Continued preparedness and response simulations at all levels

While mitigation, prevention, and solutions to current displacement were the focus of many speakers, the need to continue preparedness efforts was also highlighted. Resilience was a key word used by all, with a focus on sub national capacity, through simulations, drills, contingency planning and capacity building for response measures. Contingency plans, in particular, need to be mandatory requirements for governments at

all administrative levels, and simulations are required to test the plans and ensure their applicability and effectiveness before disasters strike. Community based disaster risk and response management was further highlighted, to upgrade skills of local units and ensure protection and services for displaced people were adequately addressed in crises.

6. Cross-sectoral coordination at the national level to address complex issues

While each Government represented has a different national structure, speakers agreed on the importance of inter-ministerial or cross-sector coordination structures. Whether via a single Ministry in the lead, a Disaster Management Agency, or otherwise, coordination on key issues came up throughout discussions. Frameworks and policies were important in facilitating that coordination, but many pointed out that implementation in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach supported unified efforts and lowered overall resource costs to prevent, respond, and find solutions for displaced populations. Coordination at the national level on management, finance, technical expertise, and

integration with development and services of the Government, under an established structure, was seen as a minimum requirement to enable response and recovery, to operationalize the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, protect the human rights of IDPs, and ensure gains against the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework.



The people of Tulangan village, in East Java province Indonesia, work together to rebuild the houses of residents that were damaged by the tornado in 2018 (Credit: Dedi_Roesyadi09 / Shutterstock.com)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Enhance Legal and Regulatory Frameworks to integrate Displacement.
2. Data and evidence for policy on displacement.
3. Forecast-based financing and early action on displacement.
4. Risk-aware development from national to sub national levels.
5. Continued preparedness and response simulations at all levels.
6. Cross-sectoral coordination at the national level to address complex issues.