Building resilient nations and safer communities: Disaster management in South Asia

South Asia comprising eight member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, is home to 1.626 billion people and is vulnerable to natural disasters and has faced 900 disasters in last 42 years. During 1990 and 2008, over 750 million were affected with 230,000 deaths and US$45 billion in losses (World Bank 2009).

Heavy monsoon rains and floods played havoc in recent years as 29 million people were affected in Pakistan in 2010-11 floods, unprecedented losses of life and property were also reported. Intensity of disasters in South Asia is affecting multiple countries across the region and undoing the development gains against poverty and hunger. To reduce risk of hazards turning into disaster, SAARC leadership needs to make their nations resilient for safer future communities.

Besides boundaries, South Asian countries share water resources, glaciers, rivers, and cultural heritage and are directly or indirectly affected by disasters may they occur anywhere in the region. Tsunami 2004, earthquake 2005, droughts, cyclones and floods have worsened the lives and livelihood of the population residing in the region, making them more vulnerable to future disasters. The affected and the vulnerable are likely to remain more vulnerable to disasters and poverty unless disaster management policies in the said countries focus on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction (DRR) into the overall development framework. Based on this it could be argued that as things progress, South Asia may be off track the Millennium Development Goals if its hard fought development gains are not protected from the risks and impacts of disasters.

This panel would provide an opportunity to speakers from across South Asia to present their research findings as how in their respective countries, the policies are focusing on supporting the vulnerable people, increasing their resilience to disasters. The speakers are encouraged to present specific models and learning on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) that can help governments build resilience of the people against disasters in the future. Plans for evidence based advocacy and policy messages on mainstreaming DRR into development framework in the respective national governments could also provide much needed insight into the issue. Incorporation of community based DRR models may benefit those who are not aware of such models.

The panelists may also take into consideration the impacts of disasters and climate change on agriculture and food security, especially in the future. The session intends to focus on protecting the lives and livelihood of the people in the communities who are at the risk of disasters.

Reference:
World Bank 2009, Why South Asia is vulnerable to Climate Change?, World Bank

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