

REFLECTION: APP-DRR FORUM

1-2 December 2020

Resilient Systems, Services and Infrastructure

The WHO South-East Asia Region under the leadership of the Regional Director, Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh has accelerated risk reduction since 2014 through identification of ‘emergency risk management’ as one of the eight Regional Flagship Priority programmes.¹ The setting up of a ‘Preparedness Stream’² under the South East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund has been an important milestone in 2016. Since then, the Regional Office through its Regional Committee for the South-East Asia has passed the most-needed resolutions with ministerial-level high political commitments for increased investment in risk mapping, risk prevention, mitigation and building resilient health systems and service delivery.³⁻⁶ This strategic guidance drive has been aptly aligned with the International Health Regulations, 2005 and the Bangkok Principles on implementation of health-aspects of Sendai Framework (2016).

In countries of the Region; National Disaster Management Authorities have supported in preparation of Contingency plans and Protocols for COVID-19 response- warehousing and distribution of relief supplies for stranded and vulnerable people during restrictions on movements, crowd management, supporting contact tracing, maintenance of containment zones and assisting in implementing the Incident Management Systems through the Health Emergency Operation Centre (e.g.; Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand)

In context of ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic; the following are most-needed for accelerating risk governance:

1. Increased investments into emergency risk management cycle for:

- a. regular analysis of risks, hazards, vulnerabilities, capacities and exposure; and
- b. risk-informed national preparedness and response plan.

2. Leveraging disaster management mechanisms in supporting country-level COVID-19 response:

- a. enhancing operational readiness for multi-hazards disasters, including for possible concurrent disasters of various hazards; and
- b. managing risks associated with mass gathering, facilitating contact tracing and implementation of other public health and social measures.

3. Multi-sectoral collaboration through operational partnerships⁷ for

- a. ensuring continuity of essential health services;
- b. building surge capacity through various mechanisms of operational partnerships:
 - i. Global Health Clusters, Global Outbreaks Alert and Response Network, Emergency Medical Teams, national Rapid Response Teams, Standby Partnership, WHO Collaborating Centres, International NGOs and Civil Society Organizations; and

- c. nurturing 'Community of Practice' through the South-East Asia Regional Knowledge Network of national IHR Focal Points and national DRR Focal Points.

The Regional Office is further advocating, promoting and providing global guidance to countries on adapting to 'New Normal' and putting in place the capacities and functions within and across health and related sectors to reduce health emergency risk and impacts under the WHO Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management (H EDRM) Framework.⁸ For evidence-based H EDRM practices, Health EDRM Research Network and a Knowledge Hub is also being nurtured and made accessible to all stakeholders for strengthening disaster risk literacy, community-level resilience building through operational research and enabling multi-disciplinary workforce-development.⁹

References

1. World Health Organization. South-East Asia. Flagships (<https://www.who.int/southeastasia/about/flagships>).
2. WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia resolution SEA/RC69/R6 on expanding the scope of the South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund (SEARHEF). New Delhi: World Health Organization Regional Office for South-East Asia; 2016 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250288/sea-rc69-r6.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>).
3. Framework for action in building health systems resilience to climate change in South-East Asia Region, 2017–2022. New Delhi: World Health Organization Regional Office for South-East Asia; 2017 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/258953/9789290226109eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>).
4. WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia. Resolution of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, SEA/RC72/R1 on 'Delhi Declaration on Emergency Preparedness in the South-East Asia Regions'; 6 September 2019. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/327921/sea-rc72-r1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
5. Five-year regional strategic plan to strengthen public health preparedness and response – 2019–2023. New Delhi: World Health Organization Regional Office for South-East Asia; 2019 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/326856/9789290227236-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>).
6. WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia. Resolution of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, SEA/RC73/R1 on 'WHO South-East Asia Region Member States' Declaration on Collective Response to COVID-19'; 10 September 2020. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/334243/sea-rc73-r1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
7. Regional framework on operational partnerships for emergency response (South-East Asia Region). New Delhi: World Health Organization Regional Office for South-East Asia; 2018 (http://origin.searo.who.int/about/administration_structure/hse/regional_framework_operational_partnerships.pdf)
8. Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management framework, Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.
9. World Health Organization (2020). WHO Guidance on Research Methods for Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management. https://extranet.who.int/kobe_centre/en/project-details/GUIDANCE_ResearchMethods_HealthEDRM