

Delhi-Dhaka Cooperation in Risk Reduction

The implementation of Asia Regional Plan (ARP) for disaster risk reduction is dependent on regional cooperation in Asia. In the region of South Asia, Delhi and Dhaka are most likely to move ahead on this risk reduction path.

During the recent visit of India's Finance Minister to Bangladesh, both the countries signed a credit line agreement worth US\$4.5 billion to fund infrastructure, health, and education sectors in Bangladesh.

At the November 2016 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Delhi both the countries stood out in their positive efforts to reduce risks that their citizens face. The exhaustive breadth of Delhi and Dhaka's initiatives are not amenable easy summation.

Over 17 development projects have been identified for implementation under the credit line. And this development investment offers an opportunity to reduce disaster risk and build regional resilience.

According to Finance Minister of Bangladesh, his team has identified roads, railways and bridges as the most important sectors for utilizing the credit line. Such investment is exposed to disaster risk of floods and cyclones. However, ongoing work on climate change uncertainty and transformation by Indian and Norwegian researchers under the Institute of Development Studies of UK and IIT Mumbai shows that such investments offer an opportunity for transformation.

Of the US\$4.5 billion credit deal, US\$1b will be spent on the infrastructure development of facilities of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant. The plant will offer energy security to Bangladesh's economic growth plans and will need protection from flood and cyclone damage.

India will be providing credit for upgrading 245km highways – Benapole-Jessore-Narail-Bhanga (135km); Ramgarh-Baruerhat (35km); and Mainamati-Brahmanbaria-Sarail (75km) – considering transit and transshipment facilities and the operation of key Chittagong and Mongla ports. Transportation is becoming a key disaster risk reduction areas. The investment will generate rapid economic activities and would need protection from repeated floods and cyclones.

At least three of the projects involve the development of economic zones, a priority for the Bangladesh government, as it aims to ramp up private sector investment in its plans for rapid economic growth.

Of the total credit, about US\$500 million will be used for setting up new economic zones for Indian and other investors, according to the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority. Spreading risk awareness among the investors is a standard practice suggested by Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction signed by both, India and Bangladesh. Several of these zones are exposed to cyclones and floods and mitigation measures will help reduce the risks and build the resilience of the economic activities in these zones.

Over US\$100 million will be provided for building a dedicated economic zone spanning 1,005 acres in Mirsarai area of Chittagong.

The health sector is critical to Bangladesh's rapid economic growth. Public health and hygiene are far better covered with risk protection. High end specialty hospitals are yet to be available to many in Bangladesh. Heat action plans, hospital safety audits, will protect this investment. Some of the faith based organisations and

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent movements have developed workable models to make health facilities safe from disaster risk.

Another US\$100 million may be used for developing a special economic zone at Payra or Moheshkhali area, and US\$300 million may be allocated for developing infrastructure in the key economic zones. A large number of workers will be exposed to flood and cyclone risks in these zones and disaster risk awareness training and capacity of the workers will save lives and protect livelihoods in these areas.

Basic education and safer schools are relatively well covered in rural and urban areas in Bangladesh. What is needed is integration of Child Centered Disaster Risk Reduction, Child Protection, Education, and School Environment into one actionable School Safety Plan in each of the schools in Bangladesh. On September 28, 2017 National Disaster Management Authority of India at its formation day celebration has pin pointed safer schools as a key to local disaster risk reduction.

Since 2010, this is the third big credit line which Delhi has committed to Dhaka for regional cooperation.

International Strategy for Disaster Reduction chief Robert Glasser in Cancun, Mexico Global Platform has called for far more deliberate measures to protect development investments from disaster and climate risks. The efforts of Delhi and Dhaka traverse themes, leap effortlessly from mock drill scenario to spontaneous response by most if not all, as envisaged the Asia Regional Plan. ■

- AIDMI Team