Consultative Workshop on
University Network for Disaster Risk Reduction in India
5-6 April 2019, New Delhi

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context and Rationale

Despite continued efforts in reducing disaster risks global disaster impact continues to rise. India is expected to lose around USD 10 billion annually due to a series of disasters. Recognising this, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development embeds disaster risk reduction in development processes resulting in the new paradigm of risk-informed development. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and regional and national plans on its implementation have highlighted the importance of understanding risk in all its dimensions and emphasize the need for higher education, and theme-based partnership with higher education institutions to facilitate this.

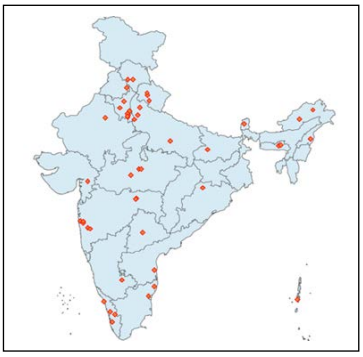
The Disaster Management Act of 2005, the National Disaster Management Policy 2009 and the National Disaster Management Plan 2016 (aligned with the Sendai Framework) of India outline the role of education and DRR integration into curricula. The Prime Minister 10 Points Agenda on DRR (Agenda 6, 2016) stresses the need to "*Develop a network of universities to work on disaster issues in India.*" This is complemented by an emerging needs of professionals and practitioners in related fields, capacity building and professional and higher education.

To this end, the National Institute of Disaster Management and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) convened a consultative workshop on university network for DRR in India. The workshopengaged with selected universities and technical and professional institutions to share experiences, challenges and good practices in higher education on DRR; action-based and policy research; and discuss modalities of the proposed university network.

Key Findings and Observations

1. Diversity of existing courses

A mapping of the current status of DRR across a sample of around 50 courses across universities and institutes formed the substantive basis of the workshop.[1]Two major categories emerged: 1) *Full time courses*, which consists of 80% of the existing courses (master, bachelor, post-graduate diploma and certificate), 2) *Online / part time courses*(master, diploma and certificate, besides elective courses). Graduate courses are divided into three major disciplines: 1) *technical or engineering based*, 2) *social science based*, and 3) *management courses*. Institutions also focus on capacity development and professional education. Except a few states, the distribution of courses is reasonably uniform across zones in the country.Despite the diversity, all these types of courses have inter-disciplinary focus in their curriculum.



2. Interdisciplinary education: Challenges and Opportunities

The interdisciplinary nature of the subject makes it difficult to have a standardized course pattern. The syllabus of the subject is largely defined by the expertise of the parent department, which hosts or initiates the discipline at the first place. In TISS, e.g., since the course arose out of social work discipline, it has more leanings towards social service and the ideals of a participatory community approach. In contrast, the course at IIT Roorkee has a technical origin and thereby offers science-based solutions to DRR. Similarly, management courses ondisaster management addresses the industry demands.It was pointed that having dedicated DRR departments may have limited scope as specialised DRR departments may develop only generalists.

[1]The mapping was further complemented by presentation of sample courses and academic focus represented by selected institutions like Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee, Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) and Indian Institute of Remote Sensing (IIRS).

Nonetheless, interdisciplinary was recognised as an essential component of DRR education, especially with the growing focus on risk-informed development. At the same time, it was asserted that education and research, awareness raising and capacity building in DRR, while individually important, should be kept as separate functions serving the needs of different target beneficiaries.

3. Establishing minimum standard in curriculum

The *absence of a standard curriculum* leads to inefficiency of education standards of students passing out from regional colleges. Further the lack of trained faculty in this subject hinders the curriculum development at many universities. The subject is yet to be recognized for University Grant Commission (UGC) NET examination, which further restricts the growth of the course as a specialized separate discipline. Private universities face a huge challenge in initiating a DRR course. Lack of referral study material and resources remains a challenge, which becomes more acute when it comes to their development or translation in local languages. The state level open universities also face the problem of having curriculum translated and contextualized to their language and region. Further, the absence of this course at under-grad level makes it difficult to bring students at masters' level at par in their education as they come from varied graduation backgrounds. Therefore, a minimum standard in syllabus for all types of courses is an urgent requirement.

Challenges

1) *Faculty capacity* needs further strengthening, both in terms of training and refresher courses for existing faculties and recruitment of regular faculties for DRR education in universities where they are drawn from other departments.
2) *Research, Field experiences and practical training* is a key to DRR higher education. This needs to be enhanced throughinternship, field survey, exposure visits, link to community colleges etc. University level post-masters research needs strengthening through linking with other regular disciplines depending on the focus of the undertaken research.
2) *Employment of students in the DRR related field* is a challenge for all the universities. Further, lack of UGC NET exam not only leads to lack of qualified faculty in this subject but also leads to decrease in employment for those passing out with this course.
3) *High impact research*, leading to policy change and/or business innovation is lacking in the current system, which needs to be addressed. This may also be related to adequate funding opportunity in the subject.

A survey across participants at the workshop substantiated these challenges: *faculty shortage* as the highest challenge, followed by *lack of future prospects of students* and motivation, followed by *funding* and *lack of students*.

Role of the University Network

Given these challenges and remedial measures, the felt need for a university network was unanimously echoed. It was asserted that the university network is not meant to advocate for a specific type of course but to inform and strengthen all forms of DRR courses at all levels. A key contribution of the network is to optimise the interdisciplinary of DRR as an academic discipline, leveraging the expertise drawn from different universities and institutes. Linkages of the national network with UNDRR's regional and global Scientific and Technical Advisory Groups (STAGs)will facilitate a smooth dissemination and translation of global and regional thematic advances into national research and education. Finally, the partner universities and institutes will serve as hubs of technical resources and capacity building, including through technical support to the national, state and local disaster management authorities.

A draft Memorandum of Association for the network was presented on which the participants shared some initial feedback and suggestions. It was agreed that the memorandum will continue to be a work in progress and will be subsequently finalised with comments from the participating universities and institutes.

Way Forward

The following are a few course of actions agreed as immediate priorities:

1. Building on the mapping of DRR curriculum in India, develop a baseline for education and research that outlines the current status of DRR as a discipline in the country
2. Strengthen engagement with key actors in the field, including the University Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Principal Scientific Adviser.
3. Finalise the Memorandum of Association and develop a preliminary work plan. To begin with NIDM will facilitate dissemination of information (updates and events) received from UNDRR and other DRR-focused agencies with the network members. Efforts will be made to map the network activities with the work plans of the regional and global STAGs.
4. The University Network will facilitate a two-way exchange of DRR knowledge from and to global, national and local. It will also provide technical support to institutions in its catchment e.g. state and district disaster management authorities
5. The linking of the University Network with other related networks e.g. private sector and local authorities will further strengthen turning policy into action.