

Role of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Disaster Risk Management

Ravinder¹ & Dr. Sonika²

¹Research Scholar, ²Assistant Professor, ^{1,2}Political Science & Public Administration, BMU Asthal Bohar (Rohtak), India.

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ABSTRACT

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) plays a pivotal role in disaster risk management within the South Asian region, which is highly vulnerable to a range of natural disasters. This abstract provides an overview of SAARC's engagement in disaster risk management, highlighting its key functions and impact.

SAARC's active involvement in disaster risk management is of utmost importance in a region susceptible to a variety of disasters, including earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and landslides. By fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge, and building capacity, SAARC helps member countries reduce the impact of disasters, save lives, and protect the well-being of the region's population, underlining the organization's critical role in disaster resilience and management in South Asia.

Keywords: Disaster risk management; Rehabilitation efforts; Advocacy and Policy development.

Introduction

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) plays a crucial and multifaceted role in disaster risk management within the South Asian region. The South Asian region is exceptionally susceptible to a wide array of natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods, cyclones, landslides, and droughts. These disasters not only pose a significant threat to the lives and livelihoods of the region's population but also hinder its socio-economic development. Recognizing the pressing need for collective efforts to mitigate and manage these risks, SAARC, comprised of eight member countries, has taken on the responsibility of coordinating disaster risk management activities in the region. This introduction provides an overview of the role of SAARC in disaster risk management, outlining the organization's objectives, key functions, and the importance of its efforts in enhancing the disaster resilience of South Asian nations.

SAARC, established in 1985, is an intergovernmental organization that strives to promote regional cooperation and integration among its member states, which include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. While SAARC addresses various aspects of regional cooperation, one of its most critical and impactful domains is disaster risk management.

The South Asian region's unique geographic location and topography expose it to a multitude of natural hazards. The impact of these disasters can be devastating, causing loss of life, property damage, and disruptions to critical infrastructure, agriculture, and the overall socio-economic fabric of the affected countries. Recognizing the need to address these challenges collectively, SAARC has formulated a comprehensive approach to disaster risk management.

SAARC's role in disaster risk management encompasses several key functions, including facilitating the exchange of vital information related to disaster preparedness, early warning systems, and response strategies among member

countries. It conducts capacity-building programs to enhance the disaster management skills and readiness of member nations, focusing on training first responders, strengthening disaster response agencies, and bolstering community resilience.

Moreover, SAARC promotes standardization of disaster management procedures and protocols to ensure uniformity and efficiency in disaster response efforts across the region. It encourages regional coordination in disaster response, enabling member countries to provide support and resources to one another during times of crisis. This cooperation ensures efficient resource allocation and swift response to disasters.

SAARC also advocates for policies and initiatives that emphasize disaster risk reduction and resilience building. It encourages member states to incorporate disaster risk reduction into their national policies and development plans. Furthermore, SAARC plays a role in resource mobilization, assisting member countries in securing the financial and technical support required for disaster risk management initiatives.

The importance of SAARC's involvement in disaster risk management cannot be overstated. It has significantly contributed to enhancing the region's ability to respond to and recover from disasters effectively, thereby saving lives and protecting the well-being of South Asia's population. As the South Asian region continues to grapple with the ever-present threat of natural disasters, the role of SAARC in disaster risk management remains a vital and indispensable component of the region's efforts to build resilience and safeguard the future of its people.

❖ **Role of SAARC in Disaster Risk Management**

Although the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) created a comprehensive framework for disaster management and disaster prevention in 2005 and established a number of SAARC centres, most notably the SAARC Centre for Disaster Management and Attention (SDMC), progress in enhancing the DRM capabilities of South Asian states through regional cooperation has been sluggish.

Nations in the area confront a scope of various common risks, including surges, tidal waves, seismic tremors, violent winds, avalanches, dry spells and ocean rise. In late decades, ecological debasement, statistic changes, urbanization, and environmental change have expanded introduction to these perils, bringing about more continuous and more exceptional catastrophic events. Avalanches, surges, and earthquakes are the main threats for Nepal and Bhutan, the two landlocked countries in the area. Violent winds and tidal surges also pose real risks to life and employment for countries with extensive beach frontage, such India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. The current region includes the five "uber urban areas" of Mumbai, New Delhi, Dhaka, Kolkata, and Karachi, which are increasingly likely to experience catastrophic catastrophes due to their extreme character.

The underlying SAARC sanction did not say the danger of fiasco chance administration DMR. It was simply after the Indian Sea wave in 2004 the South Asian nations obviously clarified the issue of cataclysmic events through the SAARC thorough system of Debacle Administration.

❖ **The Structure was lined up with the Hyogo System for Activity 2005-2015 and proclaimed as needs:**

1. Improvement and usage of hazard lessening systems;
2. Foundation of territorial and national reaction systems;

3. Foundation of territorial data sharing stages;
4. Improvement and usage of fiasco administration preparing, training, research, and mindfulness programs;
5. Use of data and interchanges innovation (ICT) for catastrophe administration;
6. Foundation of viable observing and assessment components.

So as to encourage correspondence between the inside and the party states, national consideration focuses are set up in each South Asian nation. These are normally national catastrophe administration authorities (NMAs) or other government offices accused of DRM where a NDMA does not exist. SAARC plays a significant role in disaster risk management in the South Asian region. South Asia is prone to various natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods, cyclones, droughts, and landslides. SAARC member countries recognize the importance of regional cooperation in addressing these challenges.

SAARC Contributions to Disaster Risk Management

1) Sharing Information and Data

SAARC facilitates the sharing of information and data related to weather patterns, early warning systems, and disaster preparedness. Member countries exchange meteorological and hydrological information to improve forecasting and preparedness.

2) Capacity Building and Training

SAARC conducts capacity-building programs, workshops, and training sessions to enhance the skills of disaster management professionals and first responders.

These programs focus on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

3) Standardization of Disaster Response

SAARC promotes the standardization of disaster response procedures and protocols among member countries.

This ensures a coordinated and efficient response in the event of a disaster.

4) Joint Exercises and Drills

Member countries participate in joint disaster response exercises and drills organized by SAARC.

These exercises help improve coordination, communication, and the effectiveness of disaster response efforts.

5) Regional Early Warning Systems

SAARC supports the development and maintenance of regional early warning systems for various types of disasters, including cyclones and tsunamis.

Early warning systems help in evacuating vulnerable populations and minimizing casualties.

6) Resource Mobilization

SAARC member countries collaborate on resource mobilization efforts for disaster response and recovery.

Regional solidarity ensures timely assistance and support to affected areas.

7) Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies

SAARC promotes disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies that include risk assessments, vulnerability reduction, and resilience-building measures.

Member countries work together to identify and address disaster-prone areas and communities.

8) Post-Disaster Recovery and Rehabilitation

SAARC facilitates the sharing of best practices and lessons learned in post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation efforts.

Collaboration ensures a more effective and coordinated approach to rebuilding communities.

9) Research and Knowledge Sharing

SAARC encourages research and knowledge sharing on disaster risk management and resilience-building.

This helps member countries make informed decisions and policies.

10) Advocacy and Policy Development

SAARC member countries jointly advocate for disaster risk reduction and resilience-building at regional and international forums.

They collaborate on the development of regional policies and frameworks for disaster management.

11) Disaster Risk Reduction Framework

SAARC has adopted the SAARC Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, which provides a regional strategy for reducing disaster risks and enhancing resilience.

12) Cooperation with International Organizations

SAARC collaborates with international organizations, including the United Nations and its agencies, in efforts to strengthen disaster risk management.

This collaboration ensures access to global expertise and resources.

13) Promoting a Culture of Safety

SAARC endeavors to promote a culture of safety and resilience among communities, schools, and institutions in the region.

By fostering regional cooperation and sharing best practices, SAARC member countries work together to mitigate the impact of disasters, save lives, and promote sustainable development in the face of ongoing natural hazards in the South Asian region.

SAARC Disaster Management Center (SDMC) National Focal Points

Afghanistan	Afghan National Disaster Management Authority
Bangladesh	Disaster Management Bureau
Bhutan	Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs
India	National Institute of Disaster Management
Maldives	National Disaster Management Center
Nepal	Ministry of Home Affairs
Pakistan	National Disaster Management Authority
Sri-Lanka	Disaster Management Center

The SDMC launched numerous initiatives to assist the member states in the development of DRM capabilities after its inception in 2006. Although SAARC receives a lot of credit for its efforts, what is striking about many of these proceedings is that, at least on the surface, they appear to reflect positive and thoughtful focus on DRM issues. Through a participatory process including representatives from member states and local experts in pertinent DRM sectors, the SDMC established many directions or "road maps" concerning various elements of disaster management during a five-year period from 2008 to 2012. For this endeavour, the SDMC received support from a small number of donors; it appears that ISDR, USAI, and JICA provided some cash to construct the road maps.

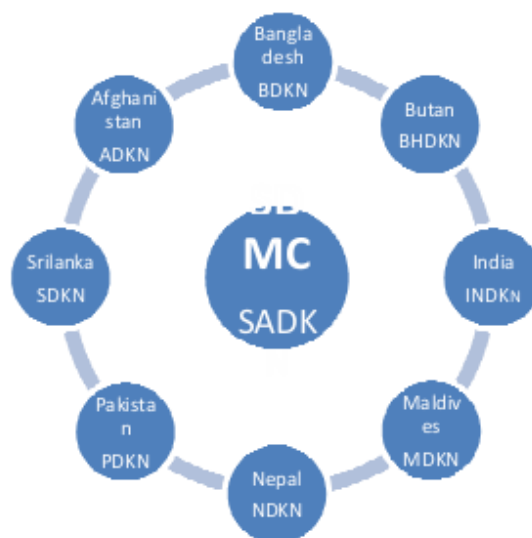
The 10 road maps that SDMC created are all accessible online

These comprise:

- a. Community-based risk management for disasters in South Asia (2008);
- b. Application of Science and Technology for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (2008);
- c. Coastal and Marine Risk Mitigation Plan (2008);
- d. Integration of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in South Asia (2008);
- e. Mainstreaming Disaster Reduction in Development in South Asia (2008);
- f. Earthquake Risk Management in South Asia (2009);
- g. Landslide Risk Management in South Asia (2010);
- h. Urban Risk Management in South Asia (2010);
- i. Drought Risk Management in South Asia (2010);
- j. Flood Risk Management in South Asia (2012).

The Centre has collaborated with UN-HABITAT and UNISDR to develop methods for assessing school and hospital safety for multi-risk in South Asia in addition to the SDMC road maps. The 2012 release of a set of four standard toolkits was intended to assist national level officials in estimating the safety of schools and hospitals against potential dangers.

The key element of SDMC programming is training. The most pressing requirements of the states are addressed by trained members. In order to assist work in this area, SDMC contracts out specialist technical and academic institutions from throughout the region. Every year, there are typically four to six training sessions, covering themes such as teaching GIS and remote sensing, incident command system (ICS), seismic retrofitting, water resources management, river erosion, etc. The member states, particularly the smaller South Asian nations, are stated to value trainings considerably, according to SDMC. Along with the aforementioned initiatives, the SDMC created the South Asia Disaster Knowledge Network, or SADKN, to collect the numerous DRM knowledge streams in the South Asian area. While the eight National Portals are managed by the various National Focal Points within member state countries, SDMC designs and maintains the regional site. UNISDR made funding from the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) available to support the creation of the SADKN.



SOURCE: SDMC, SADKN Brochure, as found on the SDMC website in April 2015,

<http://www.saarc-sadkn.org/downloads/Brochure%20SADKN%20SAARC.pdf>

Summary

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) plays a crucial role in disaster risk management within the South Asian region. SAARC, consisting of eight member countries, recognizes the vulnerability of South Asia to a wide range of natural disasters and the need for collective efforts to mitigate and manage these risks.

SAARC's role in disaster risk management involves:

- 1) **Information Sharing:** SAARC facilitates the exchange of information related to disaster preparedness, early warning systems, and response mechanisms. Member countries share data and best practices to enhance their collective understanding of regional disaster risks.
- 2) **Capacity Building:** SAARC conducts training programs and workshops to build the capacity of member countries in disaster management. This includes improving the skills of first responders, enhancing the capabilities of disaster response agencies, and developing community resilience.

- 3) **Standardization:** SAARC works on standardizing disaster management procedures and protocols to ensure uniformity and efficiency in disaster response efforts across member states.
- 4) **Regional Coordination:** SAARC promotes regional coordination in disaster response, enabling member countries to support each other during times of crisis. This collaboration helps in efficient resource allocation and swift response to disasters.
- 5) **Research and Innovation:** SAARC encourages research and innovation in disaster risk management, focusing on improving early warning systems, hazard mapping, and the development of innovative solutions to mitigate the impact of disasters.
- 6) **Advocacy and Policy Development:** SAARC advocates for policies and initiatives that address disaster risk reduction and resilience building. It encourages member states to integrate disaster risk reduction into their national policies and development plans.
- 7) **Resource Mobilization:** SAARC facilitates resource mobilization and assists member countries in securing financial and technical support for disaster risk management initiatives. This ensures that adequate resources are available for preparedness and response.

SAARC's role in disaster risk management is vital in a region prone to various disasters, including earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and landslides. By promoting collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity building, SAARC helps member countries reduce the impact of disasters, save lives, and protect the well-being of the region's population.

Declarations

Source of Funding

This study has not received any funds from any organization.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Consent for Publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' Contribution

Both the authors took part in literature review, research, and manuscript writing equally.

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