Keynote Address: Strengthening Disaster and Climate Resilience Capacity in the Asian Context – Through Institutionalization and Collaboration with Academia

Distinguished Guests, Esteemed Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

It is an honor and a privilege to address this gathering today on a topic of paramount importance: "Strengthening Disaster and Climate Resilience Capacity in the Asian Context – Through Institutionalization and Collaboration with Academia." As we come together in pursuit of a resilient future, our focus on institutionalization and the pivotal role of academia provides a beacon of hope and direction.

The Imperative of Resilience

Asia, home to more than half of the world's population, is characterized by its rich diversity and dynamic economies. However, it is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. From typhoons and earthquakes to floods and droughts, the frequency and intensity of these events are increasing, posing significant threats to lives, livelihoods, and sustainable development.

In this context, building resilience is not just an option but an imperative. Resilience ensures communities can withstand, adapt, and recover from disasters and climate shocks. It is the foundation upon which sustainable development and prosperity are built.

Institutionalizing Resilience

To effectively build disaster and climate resilience, it is essential to institutionalize resilience frameworks within our governance structures. Institutionalization ensures that resilience is not a temporary response but a sustained and integrated approach across all levels of government and sectors of society.

1. Policy and Legislation: Governments must develop and implement robust policies and legislative frameworks that prioritize disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate resilience. These policies should mandate the integration of resilience into urban planning, infrastructure development, and economic policies.

2. Coordination Mechanisms: Establishing strong coordination mechanisms among government agencies, private sector entities, and civil society organizations is crucial. This ensures that efforts are not duplicated and that resources are used efficiently.

3. Funding and Resources: Adequate funding and resources must be allocated to resilience-building activities. This includes investing in early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, and community-based disaster risk management programs.

4. Capacity Building: Continuous capacity building for government officials, emergency responders, and community leaders is essential. This ensures that all stakeholders have the knowledge and skills to implement resilience strategies effectively.

Challenges we are facing

From ADPC's extensive experience in working in Asia and the Pacific region to strengthen capacity on disaster and climate resilience, we have observed the following challenges:

1. Resource Constraints: Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region face financial limitations, hindering the implementation and sustainability of capacity development programs. Limited budgets restrict access to advanced technologies, training, and resources essential for building resilience.

2. Institutional Weaknesses: Weak institutional frameworks and governance structures can impede effective coordination and implementation of resilience initiatives. Inconsistent policies and a lack of integration between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation efforts further exacerbate these challenges.

3. Knowledge Gaps and Data Availability: Insufficient access to accurate, timely, and localized data on climate and disaster risks hampers the ability to make informed decisions. Knowledge gaps in understanding the complexities of climate change impacts and disaster risks hinder the development of effective strategies.

4. Human Resource Development: There is often a shortage of skilled personnel with expertise in disaster risk management and climate resilience. Continuous professional development and retention of trained individuals are challenging due to high turnover rates and migration of skilled workers.

5. Community Engagement and Awareness: Ensuring active community participation and raising awareness about disaster and climate resilience are crucial but challenging. Communities may lack understanding of risks and the importance of resilience measures, leading to low levels of engagement and preparedness.

6. Technological Barriers: Rapid technological advancements can make it difficult for countries to keep up, especially those with limited resources. Access to and adoption of innovative technologies for monitoring, early warning, and response are essential but often lacking.

7. Cross-Border Coordination: Many disasters and climate impacts transcend national boundaries, requiring regional cooperation. However, differences in policies, priorities, and capacities among countries pose significant challenges to effective cross-border coordination and information sharing.

8. Sustainability of Initiatives: Ensuring the long-term sustainability of capacity development initiatives is a persistent challenge. Projects often rely on short-term funding, and once funding ends, there is a risk of discontinuing activities and losing gained capacities.

9. Gender and Social Inclusion: Addressing the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, is essential for effective resilience building. However, integrating gender and social inclusion considerations into capacity development programs remains challenging.

10. Political and Economic Instability: Political and economic instability in some countries of the region can disrupt the continuity and effectiveness of resilience-building efforts. Changes in government priorities and economic crises can divert attention and resources away from long-term resilience initiatives.

Collaboration with Academia

While institutionalization provides the framework for resilience, collaboration with academia adds the depth of research, innovation, and education. Academia is critical in advancing our understanding of disasters and climate change and developing evidence-based solutions.

1. Research and Innovation: Academic institutions are at the forefront of research and innovation. Governments and organizations can leverage cutting-edge research to inform policy and practice by partnering with academia. This includes climate modeling, risk assessments, and the development of resilient technologies.

2. Education and Training: Academia is instrumental in educating the next generation of leaders and practitioners. Incorporating DRR and climate resilience into curricula ensures that future professionals are well-prepared to tackle these challenges. Additionally, universities can offer specialized training programs for current practitioners.

3. Community Engagement: Academic institutions often have strong ties to local communities. They can facilitate community engagement and participatory approaches to resilience-building, ensuring that solutions are context-specific and culturally appropriate.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation: Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are crucial for assessing the effectiveness of resilience initiatives. Academia can provide the expertise needed to design and implement robust evaluation frameworks, ensuring that interventions achieve their intended outcomes.

In closing, strengthening disaster and climate resilience capacity in Asia requires a concerted effort to institutionalize resilience frameworks and foster collaboration with academia. Doing so can create a resilient future where communities are empowered to withstand and thrive in the face of disasters and climate change.

Let us commit to working together—governments, academia, the private sector, and civil society—to build a resilient Asia. Our collective efforts will ensure that we are prepared for the challenges ahead and emerge stronger and more united.

Thank you.