

# The ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness

## Building disaster and climate resilience in Asia and the Pacific through multi-country early warning

### Challenge

Today, a person living in Asia-Pacific is still five times more likely to be affected by natural disasters than a person living outside the region.<sup>1</sup> This was seen during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which resulted in more than 225,000 deaths and widespread economic losses across the Ocean Rim countries. The Indian Ocean had no multi-country tsunami early warning system in place prior to the occurrence of this destructive event. Despite progress in building resilience to natural hazards, risks are outpacing resilience across the region. A key finding from the 2017 edition of the Asia-Pacific Disaster Report is that of the 2 million lives lost over the past half century; the largest share is attributable to the lack of timely and location-specific early warning ahead of disasters. Faced with this continuing challenge, timely and collective efforts are required to safeguard development gains.

### Towards a Solution

To help avoid the further loss of lives, Thailand contributed USD 10 million to establish the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness under the aegis of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2005. Since then, other donor countries contributed, for a total of USD 15.5 million. The Trust Fund serves as an example of how, through the modality of South-South cooperation, developing countries have emerged as donors and providers of technical cooperation. With the subsequent contributions of Germany, India, Japan, Sweden and Turkey, the Trust Fund evidenced how South-South cooperation can be a catalyst for triangular cooperation. By pooling resources through the ESCAP platform, the impact for vulnerable populations was effectively maximized.

The ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness (Trust Fund) provides financial and technical support to address unmet needs and gaps in early warning systems in the Asia-Pacific region. It has promoted innovative pilot initiatives, scaled up successful early warning systems and facilitated multi-country cooperation. Under ESCAP, the Trust Fund synergizes intergovernmental processes and operational multi-stakeholder implementation for a multi-hazard and people-centred approach to early warning systems focused on coastal hazards.

**Since its establishment in 2005, the Trust Fund has supported 26 projects with a total budget of approximately USD 15.5 million and directly benefitted 19 countries.** At the regional level, it provided sustained financial support that contributed to the establishment of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS) as well as the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES), an intergovernmental institution that provides cost-effective warning products and services, particularly for tsunamis and extreme weather systems. Operating in a regionally coordinated way, the Trust Fund helped reduce the total cost

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<sup>1</sup> Asia Pacific Disaster Report 2017, [www.unescap.org/publications/asia-pacific-disaster-report-2017-leave-no-one-behind](http://www.unescap.org/publications/asia-pacific-disaster-report-2017-leave-no-one-behind).

of establishing and maintaining early warning systems substantially, as compared to the sum of costs if every country maintained its own system. These are especially useful for countries that are at a high risk of disasters but possess limited domestic capacity in hazard monitoring and early warning. To this end, the Trust Fund has been a most effective vehicle for accessing and sharing data, tools and expertise to support disaster resilience in Asia-Pacific.

More recently, the role of the Trust Fund in responding to slow-onset disasters has been of particular note. These are phenomena that lend themselves to early warning. However, often they do not spur early action because of a lack of understanding of the action required by the warning at the ground level and of institutional mechanisms for considering such information on a regular basis. To help overcome these challenges, through the Trust Fund, ESCAP has supported activities aimed at building capacities for climate preparedness in highly vulnerable countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. As a result, national climate outlook forums (or “monsoon forums” as they are popularly known due to their convening around the onset of the monsoon season), have supported dissemination of seasonal forecast information to understand potential impacts. The main users of risk information meet to identify lessons learned from previous monsoon seasons, take stock of available tools and services, share forecasts for the upcoming season, and develop required preparedness activities.

The Trust Fund has helped to develop and promote innovation, science and technology across Asia-Pacific

so as to address the gaps and unmet needs of early warning through the application of frontier technologies and advances in modelling. Second-generation early warning products (i.e. impact-based forecasting and risk-informed early warning for slow onset disasters) as well as downscaled and customized climate projections are regularly disseminated through the monsoon forums for use by multiple local stakeholders, including line ministries (e.g. agriculture and health), local authorities and non-governmental organizations. Today, climate outlook forums are held regularly in 14 Asia-Pacific countries and have created networks of technical experts from various sectors, nurturing a culture of anticipatory management. These successful experiences and the knowledge gained through the implementation of monsoon forums in the region are now being scaled up and introduced in additional target countries while also being extended to the Pacific. The monsoon forum is a good practice that can be further replicated in the region and beyond.

Harnessing regional cooperation for disaster prevention and building resilience is crucial to achieving the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Trust Fund is evolving to face these challenges and build on the opportunities offered by the new global and regional commitments.

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**Project name:** The ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness

**Countries/Regions:** Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam

**Nominated by:** UNESCO

**Sustainable Development Goal target(s):** 1.5, 2.4, 11.5, 11.b, 13.1, 13.3

**Supported by:** Bangladesh, Germany, India, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey

**Implementing entities:** Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC), Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), ESCAP/WMO Typhoon Committee, IOC-UNESCO, Oxfam GB, Raks Thai Foundation, RIMES, UNDP, WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC), et al.

**Project status:** Ongoing

**Project period:** 2005 – Present

**URL of the practice:** <http://www.unescap.org/disaster-preparedness-fund>