



ASIA'S CHALLENGE OF RESILIENCE

Disasters have become a regular feature in modern life that its opposite, resilience, has become a buzzword. Many understand resilience as the ability of people to 'bounce back' from disaster or to 'build back better'. For Oxfam, resilience goes beyond that. Resilience means poor and marginalised people – the people who are most at risk of disaster – are able to enjoy their rights (to work, to shelter, to healthcare, to education, among others), to pursue their well-being and to eventually thrive despite a range of shocks, stresses, and uncertainty. In Asia, Oxfam works with allies and poor communities themselves to promote resilience as an overarching theme that explains and provides solutions to the region's systemic problems. Risk covers a wide range of shocks, stresses and uncertainty, such as food price volatility, economic recession, and extreme weather events. For the purposes of this brief, risk is confined to disasters brought on by weather- and climate-induced events.

ASIA'S HERITAGE OF RISK

Asia is the most disaster-prone region of the world, according to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). Over the past 20 years, Asia has borne almost half the estimated global economic cost of disasters triggered by natural phenomena, amounting to around US\$53 Billion annually, according to the ADB.

In 2012, Asia accounted for 41 per cent of recorded disasters and 64.5 per cent of people affected by disasters globally, according to UN OCHA.

Disasters are a function of vulnerability and poverty. Asia is vulnerable because of its location: it is the birthplace of typhoons, it is surrounded by water, and it is hostage to months-long monsoon rains. But its vulnerability is compounded by its poverty.

One in four people in Asia is poor, despite the region's impressive levels of economic growth. Poverty is a predictor of risk. Poor people not only live in danger zones for lack of other options, they also have little to no ability to recover from disasters, let alone to prepare for them. Most of the poor populations in Asia come from farming and fishing communities.

Asia also faces devastating impacts from climate change in the form of destructive cyclones, rising sea levels, and severe droughts.

Together these elements combine to create a perfect storm of risk that threatens to reverse the economic strides the region has made in the last few years and to trap its poorest people in a destiny of destitution.

About the photo: Oxfam helped a community in Aceh, Indonesia replant mangroves, which are natural barriers against tsunamis and storm surges, after being struck by a destructive tsunami in 2004. The tsunami killed thousands of people. According to a 2016 report from the UNISDR, disasters have killed 1.35 million people across the world over a twenty-year period; 90% of the deaths occurred in middle- and low-income countries. Credit: Jim Holmes/Oxfam

OXFAM'S PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Against this background, Oxfam has identified four main strands of work which will help promote a more resilient Asia: smallholder agriculture; urban resilience; water; and natural resource management.

Smallholder Agriculture



A farmer harvests her family's paddy field in Sri Lanka.
Credit: Abir Abdullah/Oxfam

Oxfam works to promote the resilience of smallholder agriculture and enterprises to climate shocks and climate change. We use our voice and influence to push for inclusive and sustainable development and for a more broadly shared prosperity, and to transform power relations between men and women, and between people and governments. We advocate for the land rights of poor people, for safety nets and public and private risk transfer mechanisms, and for robust local risk reduction and adaptation work.

Urban Resilience

A rapidly growing number of poor people in many Asian cities live and work in places that are exposed to a range of major (or minor but frequent) hazards. Oxfam works in innovative alliances and partnerships to find demand and supply-side solutions in policy and in practice. Examples might include using mobile phones for citizen hazard mapping, or lobbying municipal government to provide the infrastructure and incentives so that local food supply chains make nutritious food accessible to the urban poor whilst benefiting farmers in the city's hinterland.

Water

Variable rainfall, drought and floods as well as access to water for human consumption and productive use are all drivers of vulnerability in Asia. Oxfam builds on its WASH expertise in emergencies, to encourage more sustainable management and equitable supply of water, including community-based management, social enterprise, and influencing governments and the private sector. Oxfam supports the trans-boundary governance, management and political leadership of water in Asia.



A man washes at the Oxfam tap stand at an IDP camp in Nepal.
Credit: Pablo Tosco/ Oxfam

Resilience and natural resource management

Healthy forests, soils, mangroves and other natural resources can reduce risk, support coping, and are the basis for adapting to change. Ensuring that vulnerable people have access to natural resources, and that they are restored and managed sustainably, is therefore a critical aspect of resilience.

OXFAM'S ADVOCACY AND POLICY PRIORITIES

The Sendai Framework for Action

Far from a perfect document, the Sendai Framework for Action nevertheless provides Asian governments with a blueprint for combating disasters. In light of ever growing threats to the safety and resilience of millions of poor and vulnerable people across Asia, Oxfam calls on governments to urgently scale up and accelerate the implementation of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction. It is vital that governments take substantive steps to reduce exposure and vulnerability, prevent the creation of new disaster risk and tackle underlying disaster risk drivers including poverty and inequality, climate change, unplanned and rapid urbanization, and poor land management. Asian governments and dialogue partners must make and provide funding for specific and time-bound commitments to help local governments and communities who deal with disasters first hand.

Inequality

While Asia's economy grew at an average of six percent a year between 1990 and 2015, the share of income of the bottom 70 percent of the population has decreased while the top 10 percent has seen large gains between 1990 and 2010. This is part of a scandalous global pattern of extreme economic inequality. To root out poverty, one of the primary drivers of risk, governments and institutions in Asia must address inequality by instituting policy reforms that increase access to basic services, promote fiscal justice, impose a progressive tax regime on huge corporations, and pay workers a decent living wage, among others.



OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organisations networked together in more than 94 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty.

For more information about Oxfam's resilience work in Asia, visit www.oxfamblogs.org/asia.