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**Achieving the vision through existing
regional initiatives: disaster-related statistics**

Progress towards the development of a statistical framework and guidance for a basic range of disaster- related statistics

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

The present document provides an update on the progress made by the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific to develop a basic range of disaster-related statistics.

It contains information on the approach and steps taken to develop a draft statistical framework for disaster-related statistics in order to conceptualize and structure in-depth technical studies on data availability and opportunities for statistics compilation. Particular emphasis is placed on the extensive partnership approach adopted as a main modality of work. This approach has ensured the relevance of the efforts to existing and emerging demands for disaster-related statistics and enabled the work to benefit from global expertise.

The document outlines the decisions taken by the Expert Group for the finalization of its work, including the development of statistical guidelines and contributions to efforts to strengthen statistics for monitoring the internationally agreed development goals contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

The Committee on Statistics is invited to take note of the information provided and provide advice and support for the continued work of the Expert Group, in particular as it relates to strengthening statistics for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

* E/ESCAP/CST(5)/L.1.

** The present note was submitted late in order to capture the results of the 4th meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics, which took place on 5 and 6 October 2016 in Manila.

I. Introduction

1. The Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was established in 2014 pursuant to resolution 70/2 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Its establishment followed a series of policy discussions on the importance of disaster risk reduction in preventing disasters and in alleviating human and economic losses when disasters strike. The discussions had highlighted the need for better data and statistics to strengthen the evidence base for all phases of disaster management. The Expert Group was entrusted with assisting member States in that task through the development of a basic range of disaster-related statistics.

2. The Commission required the Expert Group to comprise statisticians as well as disaster management experts in order to ensure that the required multidisciplinary expertise was present in its membership. Further, in recognition of the need for close engagement with both the statistics and disaster management communities, the Expert Group was requested to report on its progress to the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction as well as to the Committee on Statistics.

3. In 2016, the Commission renewed the mandate of the Expert Group in Commission resolution 72/11 on advancing disaster-related statistics in Asia and the Pacific for implementation of internationally agreed development goals, in which it highlighted a series of recent international developments that had shown the importance of the work of the Expert Group and the necessity of close collaboration and alignment with related international efforts. Bearing in mind the fast evolving context, in resolution 72/11, the Commission stipulated that the task of the Expert Group would continue to be to develop a basic range of disaster-related statistics and requested it to report on progress in implementing the resolution at the seventy-fourth session of the Commission, which will be held in 2018.

4. The present document presents an overview of the progress made by the Expert Group since the fourth session of the Committee on Statistics. With reference to the recent extension of its mandate, particular emphasis is placed on developments in its collaboration and complementarity efforts with other international bodies in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.² Given the focus of the current session of the Committee, the Expert Group's experiences with multidisciplinary work are also reflected on, with a view to providing useful lessons for regional cooperation efforts to strengthen integrated statistics, including in the context of the proposed collective vision and framework for action.³

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1.

² Assembly resolution 69/283, annex II.

³ E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1.

II. Progress in the work of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

A. Activities of the Expert Group

5. Since its establishment, the Expert Group has met four times to review intermediary results, discuss progress and decide on the direction of its work. In between these physical meetings, technical work has progressed continuously through electronic communication among the members of the Expert Group as well as with the wider international community of disaster information management stakeholders. The regional technical work has been complemented by efforts at the national level, not least by the four pilot countries, namely Bangladesh, Fiji, Indonesia and the Philippines.

6. The period during which the Expert Group has been operating has been a time of landmark international agreements on development goals related to disaster risk reduction, in particular the Sendai Framework and the 2030 Agenda. The Expert Group has benefited from these developments, which have provided added impetus for its work and a growing international community of partners.

7. An overview of the activities of the Expert Group and relevant international developments are provided in table 1.

Table 1

Overview of activities of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and relevant international developments, May 2014 to October 2016

<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>
May 2014	Commission resolution 70/2, establishing the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific
October 2014	1st meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics, Sendai, Japan Agreement on the scope of work
February 2015	Establishment of the Economic Commission for Europe Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters
March 2015	Establishment of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators
March 2015	First progress report to the Committee on Statistics
March 2015	2nd meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics, Sendai, Japan Discussion on definitions of disaster occurrence and direct and immediate impacts of disasters; agreement to survey current country practices
March 2015	Establishment of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030
June 2015	Establishment of the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group on indicators and terminology relating to disaster risk reduction (General Assembly resolution 69/284)
September 2015	Progress report to the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction

<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>
September 2015	Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
October 2015	3rd meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics, Bangkok Discussion on the draft statistical framework for disaster-related statistics; agreement to pilot the framework
November 2015	Briefing on the work of the Expert Group to the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission
December 2015	Technical meeting among volunteer pilot countries (Bangladesh, Fiji, Indonesia and the Philippines)
January 2016	Launch of the community webpage of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics (http://communities.unescap.org/asia-pacific-expert-group-disaster-related-statistics/)
February 2016	Issuance of Stats Brief, Issue No. 13: Developing Guidance for a Harmonized Basic Range of Disaster-related Statistics (www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Stats_Brief_Feb2016_Issue_13.pdf)
May 2016	Report to the Commission on the implementation of Commission resolution 70/2
May 2016	Resolution 72/11 adopted by the Commission
October 2016	4th meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics, Manila Review of the results of the pilot studies; agreement on plan for finalizing the statistical framework for disaster-related statistics and the development of supplementary compilation guidelines

B. Substantive progress

8. As described in detail in earlier progress reports,⁴ at its first two meetings, the Expert Group defined the scope and modalities of its work, taking into account current country practices and challenges as well as existing and evolving national and international demands for statistics on disasters.

9. The Expert Group agreed on the scope of a basic range of disaster-related statistics and discussed principles and criteria for defining and classifying disaster events as well as human and socioeconomic impacts. It was decided that a basic range of disaster-related statistics must include time series for the statistics that underpin indicators for informing disaster risk reduction policy, starting with the fundamentals:

- (a) Occurrences of disasters (including their basic characteristics, such as date, hazard type and location);
- (b) Direct impacts of disasters;
- (c) Disaster risk reduction intervention activities (such as related expenditures).

⁴ E/ESCAP/CST(4)/7; E/ESCAP/CDR(4)/4; and E/ESCAP/72/6.

10. It was further decided that, in order to ensure that the resulting work of the Expert Group would reflect the realities of the region, current availability of disaster information and practices for collecting and managing such information would be further investigated through a survey.

11. At its third meeting, which was held in Bangkok in October 2015, the Expert Group⁵ reviewed the results of the survey of current practices, which had been conducted among its members. The discussion revealed a need for further in-depth studies on data availability for the production of core statistics on disasters.

12. In order to structure the studies, the Expert Group developed a conceptual draft disaster-related statistics framework.⁶ The framework was used to generate a series of tables, representing the basic range of disaster-related statistics agreed by the experts and as called for by the Commission.

13. The set of tables was drafted in accordance with the defined scope of the pilot studies and was complemented by a detailed description of the framework for the pilot studies; the description and collection of the tables were reviewed extensively by Expert Group members and a broad range of other international experts and stakeholders.

14. Four countries volunteered to pilot the framework: Bangladesh, Fiji, Indonesia and the Philippines. Following a technical meeting in December 2015 to discuss content and approach, the pilot studies were initiated, each pilot country taking a slightly different approach according to national priorities, data availability and other capacities.

15. At its 4th meeting, which was held in Manila and hosted by the Philippine Statistics Authority in October 2016, the Expert Group⁷ reviewed progress and the provisional draft findings and recommendations from the pilot studies, which were captured in the draft pilot study report prepared by the secretariat.⁸ The review focused on identifying areas where the quality of statistics could be improved through the cooperative development of technical guidance on measurements. The meeting was held in conjunction with the thirteenth National Convention on Statistics, which featured sessions on disaster-related statistics at which Expert Group members presented their work. The decisions from that meeting are contained in section II.F of the present document.

C. Advancing the work through partnerships

16. The Expert Group, throughout its operation, has engaged with stakeholders and groups of stakeholders involved in disaster risk information and monitoring.

⁵ The outcomes of the discussions at the third meeting of the Expert Group are captured in the draft disaster-related statistics framework, rather than in the standard meeting report. Available from http://communities.unescap.org/system/files/drsf_draft_7jan_0.pdf.

⁶ Available from http://communities.unescap.org/system/files/drsf_draft_7jan_0.pdf.

⁷ Notes of the meeting are available from http://communities.unescap.org/system/files/4thegm_minutes.pdf.

⁸ See http://communities.unescap.org/system/files/report_of_the_first_round_of_study_of_pilot_implementation_sept_1.pdf.

17. At its fourth and most recent meeting, the Expert Group received information from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction about the global process for monitoring implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the 2030 Agenda. A representative of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the top global bilateral donor of international assistance for disaster risk reduction, presented information on major developments in disaster risk reduction policy and indicator assessment studies being conducted by Japan.

18. During earlier meetings, the work of the Expert Group benefited from the participation and contributions of a large number of other stakeholders, including Asian Disaster Preparedness Center; Asian Disaster Reduction Center; German Agency for International Cooperation; European Environment Agency; Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters; Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre; Integrated Research on Disaster Risk; Japan Water Agency; European Commission Joint Research Centre; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; Tohoku University, Japan; Trisakti and Panca Sila University, Indonesia; United Nations Development Programme; Economic Commission for Europe (ECE); Statistics Division of the United Nations; University of Dhaka, Bangladesh; and World Bank.

19. Experts from the majority of the above-mentioned bodies, as well as other international experts, are following the electronic communications of the Expert Group. Moreover, a number of Expert Group members are also members of the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group on indicators and terminology relating to disaster risk reduction.

20. Close interaction and continuous information exchange has allowed the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics to ensure that its work draws upon, is relevant to and adds value to the combined efforts of the international disaster information community to strengthen the evidence base for related policy action.

D. The Economic Commission for Europe Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters

21. The Expert Group's focus on disaster-related statistics (rather than data or indicators) is shared with the ECE Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters, which, since its establishment in January 2015, has paid particular attention to the role of national statistical offices in the production and dissemination of disaster-related statistics. The shared focus on statistics makes it particularly important for these two bodies to collaborate and coordinate; that both are serviced by United Nations secretariats, that is the secretariats of two United Nations regional commissions, creates opportunities for joint approaches to seeking formal recognition and endorsement of the results by the international statistical community.

22. The two bodies work closely together and the Task Force incorporated collaboration with the Expert Group into its terms of reference.⁹ The two participate in each other's physical and electronic meetings and consultations. Recent discussions resulted in an agreement between the secretariats to further align the work so that the respective efforts of the two contribute to common results. The emerging guidance materials (section II.F)

⁹ ECE, document ECE/CES/BUR/2015/FEB/5.

are a prime candidate for a joint deliverable, where the two could take responsibility for different sections or elements. Alignment will be further discussed upon the issuance of the recommendations by the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group on indicators and terminology relating to disaster risk reduction, to which the Task Force has agreed to calibrate its efforts.

E. Advancing disaster-related statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals

23. In parallel to the discussions of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics on the scope of a basic range of disaster-related statistics, the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators were established. The two bodies have discussed indicators for global monitoring of the targets embedded in the Sendai Framework and the 2030 Agenda. With the Inter-Agency and Expert Group's agreement to accept the recommendations of the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group with regards to monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, full alignment was ensured between the two monitoring frameworks as it pertains to disaster-related indicators.

24. Through early outreach to these two global groups and their secretariats (the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Statistics Division of the United Nations, respectively), the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics has benefited from their expertise and outputs, which have been a main source of guidance for its understanding of the emerging demand among policymakers for indicators. It has enabled the Expert Group to infer some key attributes for a basic range of statistics that can be used to calculate the indicators.

25. A core challenge for producing the indicators that are under discussion by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group is the need to integrate data from multiple sources and different domains of statistics (for example, demographic, social, economic and environmental). Thus, a major emerging emphasis in the discussions and outputs of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics is on guidance on (a) how existing data can be better integrated and (b) how to create stronger coherence between existing disaster information and international standards for official statistics, such as the classifications used for economic and social statistics.

26. In this manner, the above-mentioned collaboration has been leveraged productively to ensure that the outputs and guidance produced by the Expert Group are consistently designed so that they can directly contribute to capacity-building for the production and dissemination of disaster-related indicators for monitoring progress on the Sendai Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals.

27. The recommendations of the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group are expected to be submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration in December 2016. The work has thus entered its final phase, which has prompted intensified exchange between the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group, the Task Force and the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics to ensure that the latter continues to develop the necessary statistical guidance for monitoring in accordance with

the recommendations of the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group.

28. Through the active participation of and interventions by members of the ECE and ESCAP bodies during informal and formal sessions, the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group is pursuing this further at its fourth formal session in Geneva from 14 to 18 November 2016. At the session, the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group will deliberate on the continued need for the international statistical community, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations and the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics, with the support of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, to undertake further technical work in respect of existing statistical standards, including the development of guidelines and minimum standards for disaster-related data and statistics, with the goal of ensuring that target measurement of the Sendai Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals adhere to the same quality standards and benefit from official statistics.

F. Next steps: decisions taken by the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics at its 4th meeting

29. The key deliverable of the Expert Group will be statistical guidance for a basic range of disaster-related statistics. The guidance materials will be developed on the basis of the Expert Group's pilot studies, which examine the current availability, quality and use of disaster-related statistics by national statistical offices and national disaster management agencies.

30. Bearing this in mind, at its 4th meeting the Expert Group decided to further investigate existing practices in order to create a list of outstanding issues identified through the pilot studies. The investigation would have the purpose of soliciting additional information considered necessary for the development of guidance materials on the production and dissemination of disaster-related statistics. Countries expressing interest in contributing are indicated in parentheses in the following list of identified issues:

- (a) Disaster risk reduction expenditure (Bangladesh; Fiji; Myanmar; Philippines);
- (b) Direct material impacts in physical terms (Bangladesh; Bhutan);
- (c) Direct material impacts to infrastructure and/or economic loss valuation (Armenia; Bangladesh; Myanmar);
- (d) Social impacts (Bangladesh; Sri Lanka);
- (e) Impacts on the environment (Fiji; Myanmar);
- (f) Hazard exposure (Indonesia);
- (g) Small disasters and slow onset hazards (Azerbaijan; Bhutan; Mongolia);
- (h) Data discrepancies, disaggregation (Philippines);
- (i) Big data (Philippines);
- (j) Understanding risk (Indonesia; Myanmar; Philippines);
- (k) Frequencies of hazards, climate change (Mongolia).

31. The Expert Group also decided to continue the well-established collaboration with the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group. Collaboration will be facilitated by close interaction among the involved secretariats and will aim to identify and implement complementary streams of work common to the implementation of the disaster-related statistics framework and the monitoring process for the Sendai Framework indicators (and, by extension the disaster-related indicators of the global monitoring framework for the Sustainable Development Goals). The close coordination with other groups and processes, not least the ECE Task Force, will also continue.

32. As one of the action points for its future work, the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics will calibrate its studies of current practices and the development of guidance materials with the final recommendations of the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group, which are expected by the end of 2016.

33. The Expert Group determined a set of milestones (table 2) in anticipation of reporting on the results of its work to the Commission in May 2018.

Table 2

Milestones of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Milestones</i>
October to December 2015	Finalization of the pilot study report Report to the Committee on Statistics at its fifth session
January to September 2017	Investigation of outstanding issues for the development of statistical guidance materials Complementing the disaster-related statistics framework with basic methodological principles and examples of good practices Calibrating the work as necessary to the recommendations of the open-ended intergovernmental and expert working group
September 2017 to May 2018	Finalization, including international consultation, of statistical guidelines on the production and dissemination of disaster-related statistics Report to the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction at its fifth session Report to the Commission at its seventy-fourth session

34. The Expert Group also decided at its 4th meeting that its work will be directed by a newly elected leadership, comprising the Philippines (Chair), Bangladesh (Vice-Chair) and Mongolia (Vice-Chair), now that the Republic of Korea (Chair) and Indonesia and Japan (Vice-Chairs) have reached the end of their two-year terms.

G. Conclusion

35. High-quality and readily available disaster-related statistics are important for Governments and other stakeholders in their efforts to take informed decisions, especially as exposure to natural hazards rises in Asia and the Pacific.

36. The efforts of the Expert Group to date suggest that once a coordinated and integrated system of disaster-related statistics is established, the compilation of such statistics can improve significantly in quality and efficiency. Improvements towards added coordination and the integration of the underlying statistical system will be vital to building national capacities to meet demands for disaster-related statistics for disaster risk reduction policy action at the national level and to meet the emerging demands for monitoring progress towards the international development goals of the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework. This insight has been possible due to the active involvement of national statistical offices and disaster management agencies in the Expert Group's work, which is a relevant lesson for strengthening statistics on other cross-cutting topics.

37. The tentative outputs of the work of the Expert Group, which have been produced through discussions and technical work at the regional and national levels, demonstrate successful cross-sector and multidisciplinary collaboration in support of the development of statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals. The extensive discussions during the Expert Group's first year of operation to establish a common understanding and agreement on the scope and modality of the work are now paying off in terms of the relevance and usefulness of the outputs and the increased engagement of stakeholders in the work. This is another lesson that may be of use for other initiatives that require the involvement of different professional communities and collaboration across line ministries.

38. In view of the information provided in the present document, the Committee on Statistics is invited to:

(a) Provide advice and guidance on how the Expert Group can best ensure the continued progression of its work towards the development of a statistical framework and on guidance on a basic range of disaster-related statistics;

(b) Provide advice and guidance on how lessons from the work of the Expert Group may be applied in order to advance other areas of statistics for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In that regard, the Committee may wish to provide specific recommendations on collaboration to address thematic cross-cutting issues, particularly pertinent to action areas B and C contained in the proposed collective vision and framework for action.