

SUMMARY

A Guide for Reducing the Risk of Water-Related Disasters during the COVID-19 Crisis



Infographic by Rodel Valenzuela/ADB.

Experts endorse 10 principles for risk mitigation, which include evacuation plans for medical and quarantine facilities and areas under lockdown.

Overview

Tropical cyclone season has begun, raising concerns over natural disasters complicating the already critical pandemic situation. Intense storms with wind speeds of over 220 kilometers per hour ravage coastal areas in tropical regions several times a year. This could derail efforts to stem the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as cyclones fill evacuation centers and hospitals with more people, not to mention the effects on overburdened public systems and the economy.

The High-level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP) created 10 principles to guide countries, cities, and communities in water-related disaster risk reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The principles were prepared by the secretariat chaired by former Prime Minister Han Seung Soo of the Republic of Korea in consultation with stakeholders and were finalized and approved by HELP members, including the Asian Development Bank, on 29 May 2020.

Water-related disasters include heavy rain, storm, flood, drought, landslide, debris flow, tsunami, high tide, liquefaction (usually from an earthquake), glacier lake outburst flood, and water pollution accidents. They account for majority of natural disasters across the world.

Lessons from recent disasters during the pandemic were used in developing these principles.

The [Principles to Address Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction under the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) can help decision makers and stakeholders prepare and strengthen their disaster risk response and management systems in areas at risk of water-related disasters during the pandemic.

This article provides a summary of the principles.

The 10 Principles

Principle 1: Enhance leaders' awareness on disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the pandemic

Prepare for disasters that may occur during the pandemic by consulting and bringing together both DRR and COVID-19 experts to plan and provide for all possible contingencies. For example, be ready with strategies and measures to ensure the delivery of basic services, such as water, power, and health care, which are critical in preventing the spread of the disease.

Plans should take into consideration the specific needs of all sectors of society: men, women, young people and children, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and displaced groups, day workers, informal settlers, and the homeless.

Take these principles into consideration in national and community contingency planning as well as in business continuity planning.

Principle 2: Integrate risk management of disasters and pandemics

An integrated risk management system that includes the health care sector will avoid confusion and ensure a coordinated and effective response. The [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) and other international guidelines provide basic DRR approaches, such as inclusive, risk-based, and multidisciplinary approaches.

Include areas affected by COVID-19 and related medical facilities in hazard maps to identify high-risk and priority areas.

Principle 3: Provide clean water, sanitation, and hygiene sustainably before, during, and after disasters

Protect the water supply as a top priority. Handwashing with soap and water is the most effective method in preventing the spread of the virus.

Work with water and sanitation service providers in including the pandemic in their DRR plans and COVID-19 safety protocols in operations, such as social distancing and using personal protection equipment (PPEs) when necessary.

Explore wastewater-based epidemiology to track the spread of the virus in communities.

Principle 4: Protect disaster management stakeholders from threat of COVID-19

Educate and train disaster management teams, including volunteers, on how to respond to emergency situations and avoid infection at the same time. Provide adequate supply of protective equipment for them and monitor their health.

Principle 5: Protect scarce medical resources from disaster impact

Prioritize emergency response and communication to health care facilities, ensure that they have water and power supply, and plan for possible evacuation of patients (including COVID-19 cases) and medical staff. Avoid using hospital and medical facilities as evacuation centers.

Principle 6: Protect disaster evacuees from threat of COVID-19

Modify evacuation centers to allow social distancing, provide water and sanitation facilities to prevent cluster infection among evacuees, and monitor their health. Provide for the specific needs of the sick (including COVID-19 patients), older persons, persons with disabilities, and pregnant women. Keep evacuees updated with the latest information on the disaster and the pandemic.

Promote vertical evacuation (moving evacuees to upper floors of their or neighborhood buildings) to avoid overcrowding in evacuation centers.

Ask people to pack masks, wipes, soaps, towels, and thermometers in their emergency “go bags.”

Principle 7: Protect COVID-19 patients from threat of disasters

Develop DRR plans for those undergoing self-quarantine or in quarantine facilities, including a means of communication, evacuation plans, and medical support.

Principle 8: Develop Specialized Evacuation Guidance for Cities and Areas under COVID-19 Lockdown

Develop and coordinate evacuation plans with local authorities, which may include the lifting of some restrictions on quarantined communities.

Principle 9: Finance DRR actions under COVID-19 effectively to avoid economic catastrophe

Tap contingency financing and quick-disbursing facilities beforehand to ensure funds are available to carry out risk mitigation and emergency response. Use digital technology to set up data-driven procurement and cashless payment systems for essential goods and services as well as for extending aid to victims.

Principle 10: Strengthen global solidarity and international cooperation to cope with these co-occurring challenges toward building our world back better

Areas for cooperation include sharing of information on disaster risks and the pandemic, international DRR and humanitarian assistance, and transboundary risk mitigation.

Include designs and measures to enhance the resilience of public and private systems in disaster recovery planning.

Resources

High-Level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP). 2020. [Principles to Address Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction \(DRR\) under the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).



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Last updated: June 2020