

# 32 Middle East Seismological Forum (MESF): Its Role In Promoting Research And Cooperation

## **BACKGROUND**

The *MESF* (URL: <http://www.meseisforum.net>) is a projected cyber Forum geared to serve in the capacity of an information conduit for locally initiated and conducted research, data acquisition and publications on the Middle Eastern seismicity, earthquake engineering, seismic hazard and related geophysical studies of the Region.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of *MESF* is to provide a one-stop web source for authoritative earthquake information, on the Middle Eastern Region, covering a wide variety of multidisciplinary earthquake subject areas, such as seismology, earthquake databases, earthquake engineering, preparedness, images, agencies and associations, and the publishing of abstracts of recent work on the Region, and related topics.

## **ACTIVITIES**

The idea of having a website dedicated to the service of seismologists in the Middle Eastern Region grew actually more than four years ago. It started as an attempt to launch an internet journal, but evolved due to financial, time and logistic limitation to a website, first for Earth Scientists, then for geophysicists, and finally it was focused to seismology; probably as a transitional step to a comprehensive Middle Eastern Geophysical Forum.

The *MESF* idea was emailed to a number of friends and colleagues; but was formally presented during the August 2001 meeting of the Global Alliance on Disaster Reduction in Reston, Virginia, and within the Mediterranean Group.

The Middle East Seismological Forum (*MESF*) website was launched on March 2002, in an effort to promote seismological research and to create an interaction and integration between seismologists working in the Middle Eastern region, and the international seismological community elsewhere

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

*MESF* is a projected cyber forum geared to serve in the capacity of an information conduit for -locally initiated and conducted- research, data acquisition and publications on the Middle Eastern seismicity, earthquake engineering, seismic hazard and related geophysical parameters. Avenues for further development of *MESF* website would grow through mutual participation of seismologists and geophysicists in an estimated of more than 150 universities and research centers whose academic output is rarely exposed in the international journals and publications. The absence such facility or mechanism at present in the region necessitated this endeavor

*MESF* is run by the Executive Director and Board Chairman Professor Sahil Alsinawi. The *MESF* Advisory Board is composed of 26 strong Seismologists from various institutions and research centers in the region. The Board is supported by a 23 member strong Associate Research Corresponding Members Commission (ARCMC). The names and email address of the 49 *MESF* Scientific Family is published on the website

*MESF* is needed for a better interaction and integration between seismologists working in the region of the Middle East and other International seismological communities. *MESF* will serve as a Research Center without Walls. Researchers and Scientists can work, cooperate and exchange knowledge without regard to their distant geographic locations or logistical limitations. Seismologists and other Geophysicists can interact, access instrumentation (probably in a later stage), share data and, access digital libraries and other pertinent data.

During various geophysical meetings, the Earth scientists always talked about means and ways to communicate and carry cooperative research projects, which may take relatively longer time, but leads to new information, new experience and may open new avenues to some of the participants. This practice is a natural and routine in many developed countries in their research centers and academic departments; but for Middle Eastern Scientists it is rare. It is a known fact those days that most of the research conducted on the geology and geophysics of

the region is carried out outside the region; even if the data was collected, or a resident of the region scientist originally suggested the problem

## ***FUTURE***

Four identified areas, which need future focus are :

■ **Science:** Seismology-Geodynamics-Seismic Hazard - Earthquake Engineering-Remote Sensing and GIS/GPS Applications

■ **Data Bank:** Seismological Bulletins-Geophysical Data Bibliographies and Human Resources of the Region

■ **Cooperation:** Information-Research -Organization and Meetings

■ **The MESF CYBER JOURNAL OF GEOSCIENCE:** The journal tries to bridge the gap between the production of scientific results and the time of international publishing and academic exposure.

MESF in its three years of work, is still in its initial stages and needs the support to carry its objectives cooperative research, fast publishing and scientific communication are the basic tools



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## Capacity Building In Asia Using Information Technology Applications (CASITA)

### BACKGROUND

The outcome of Asia's high rate of urbanization has been the expansion of urban populations into geographic areas, which are frequently affected by disaster events. The result is an increased vulnerability of populations and infrastructure. Reducing urban vulnerability to disaster risks has been a major area of focus of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, since the start of its Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Program (AUDMP) in 1997. Training and education has been adopted as a key strategy to develop the professional capacity of city government officials, staff of NGOs, technical professionals, university faculty and students to promote urban vulnerability reduction. In addition to other training activities on urban disaster risk management, Capacity Building in Asia using Information Technology Applications (CASITA) was a significant initiative in this regard.

### OBJECTIVES

CASITA project was jointly implemented by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), ITC Netherlands, and ENSG France in 2003-2004. The objective of the project was to build knowledge in Asia on modern urban disaster mitigation tools and methods through the inclusion of relevant and up-to-date disaster risk management components in the urban planning curriculum in several Asian universities and training institutions. The strategy of the project was to promote web based teaching and learning technology and use of GIS and remote sensing technologies for urban disaster risk management in the project universities.

### ACTIVITIES

Fourteen (14) universities from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam participated in the project. The three implementing partners, ADPC, ITC and ENSG brought complimentary strengths to the table.

Following major activities were implemented under the project.

*Inventory of needs and opportunities:* A consultation was conducted with the participating universities in order to assess their current capability, the needs and opportunities in the areas of GIS and remote sensing and

module development on urban disaster risk management. The universities differed in the level of their expertise and interest.

*Communications strategy:* A project website was created to ensure communication amongst the partners. The website was adapted to reflect the latest status and other highlights during the implementation process. Email list serves were also used to communicate with the project partners.

*Virtual platform for module development:* A virtual platform for the development of modules was the core of the project. This platform was developed using blackboard software. It was divided into two components: one resource area for module developers, and one area for students. The module development area was intended for the staff of the universities and research institutes to obtain information on:

- How to structure a course,
- How to include GIS and Remote sensing exercises;
- How to do quality assurance;
- How to contribute to participatory development of Internet-based platform
- Gathering of study material, research information and other useful data to be put on the E-platform.

*Train-the-trainers workshop:* University staff responsible for designing and implementing courses on urban disaster risk management was trained on the use of virtual platform for module development. Training was provided in the use of GIS and Remote Sensing, and the use of the distance education software, ILWIS. Existing case studies from ITC, ADPC and ENSG were used in this regard. Lecture materials including the power points and training manuals have been made available on the project website for wider use.

*Development of GIS case studies:* Each participating university and training institute developed a GIS case study in order to design modules on urban disaster risk management. Case studies covered topics about earthquake, flood, volcanic, landslide and coastal hazard assessment, vulnerability and hazard assessment, hazard assessment and urban development and database management. The use of local case studies proved very effective in the learning process of students. The students were also able to exchange case studies through the virtual platform established under the project.

*Development of educational modules:* A number of modules about urban disaster risk management were developed on the virtual platform. The university staff can use these

modules to teach about urban disaster risk management. The modules have been made available to the students through the virtual platform. The modules include the following:

- Vulnerability reduction for cities
- Landslide hazard assessment
- Flood hazard assessment
- Seismic hazard assessment
- Coastal hazard assessment
- Technological hazard and risk analysis for cities
- Multimedia and hypermedia information and resources

*Internet based distance education:* Universities and training institutes required support from disaster risk management experts, since such courses were developed and used for the first time in the participating institutions. Assistance was given both as direct inputs from project implementing institutions in some of the courses, and also via the Internet-based platform. Satellite conferencing, email-list-server and electronic forum were used as some of the tools in order to provide support in teaching various disaster risk management courses.

Please see the following for the details: ADPC/UDRM, 2004. Final Report. Capacity Building in Asia using Information Technology Application (CASITA), Bangkok <http://www.adpc.net/CASITA/default.html/>

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

26 faculty from 14 universities in 10 countries have been trained in the use of GIS, Remote Sensing and on module development on urban disaster risk management. A web-based teaching and learning system has been set up. GIS based training materials and case studies on urban disaster risk management are available on the project web site for the use of teachers and students. During the Final workshop of the project, the participating universities indicated that the project acted as a catalyst, instigating them to update their knowledge and learning methods and include new topics in the curricula.

## **LESSONS**

Electronic modes of education have lot of potential and they offer great opportunities for capacity building in the area of disaster risk management. However, the process of change in traditional culture of teaching and learning in Asian universities will require comprehensive and consistent efforts in the areas of training, promotion and accessibility of technology, both to students and teachers.

The training was highly appreciated by the participating university faculty. A lot new

knowledge and information was exchanged between the network of Asian universities and European universities and amongst the Asian universities themselves. The subject of disaster risk management is now more prominently placed in the curriculum of participating universities. An important start has been made with the use of Electronic-Learning tools in the South and Southeast Asian universities. The universities are now equipped with teaching and learning materials to integrate urban disaster risk management in their own academic programs, as well as promote the subject in other universities. Such materials include the power points, training manuals and GIS based case studies on hazard, vulnerability and risk assessment.

## **FUTURE**

The project partners appreciate the need for strengthening the initiatives, undertaken during the first phase of the CASITA project, in order to achieve substantive impact. Therefore, the ADPC, ITC and University of the Bonn are planning to implement the second phase of the CASITA project. The second phase will be implemented in the University of Gadjah Mada (Indonesia), the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, the University of Moratowa (Sri Lanka) and the Chiang Mai University (Thailand). The project will continue capacity building in the three areas of GIS, Remote Sensing and Urban Disaster Risk Management module development.



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# 34 Recovery And Rehabilitation In Shomali Valley, Afghanistan: Miseries Of Ali Ahmad

## **BACKGROUND**

Bagram was established as a district in 1966. The district has 96 villages and 168 sub-villages and is green with abundant agricultural activities. The ethnic composition of the district comprises of 60 percent Tajiks, 25 percent Pushtun, and 5 percent Hazaras. The people of Bagram had experienced the worst situation during the Soviet Union and Taliban time. The large number of displaced people fled to Panjshir, Takhar, Kabul and out of the country (most of them to Pakistan).

The 'House Reconstruction Program in Shomali Valley - Recovery and Rehabilitation, ASAF-31' is developed by Church World Service-Pakistan/Afghanistan (CWS-P/A) in partnership with Norwegian Project Office/ Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan (NPO/RRAA) to address the basic shelter needs of 1,000 IDPs, returnees and most affected families in the Bagram district. The implementation of this project is made possible through funding from Action by Churches Together (ACT), Geneva.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The main goal of this project is to assist the most vulnerable families, including displaced and returnees, with house reconstruction materials in order to help them resettle in selected areas.

The objectives are:

- To assist resettlement of 1,000 most vulnerable families in Bagram district of Parwan province, Shomali Valley, with house construction materials to build safe and secure homes

- To provide livelihood kits to 2,500 families for income opportunities.

- To promote the rehabilitation of the centuries old institution of collective decision making i.e Shura

## **ACTIVITIES**

For smooth and organized implementation, the following initiatives were taken

- A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between CWS-P/A and NPO/RRAA.

- Preparation and signing of different documents and agreements at provincial, district and village levels, regarding formation of Shuras, level of contribution and cooperation by

stakeholders etc

- Strengthened 4 local Shuras in four different villages namely Qala-e-Nasro, Qala-e-Uzbashi, Qala-e-Golay and Qalandar Khil in Bagram district.

- Preparation and signing of contracts of houses ownerships etc with the selected beneficiaries

- Construction of 500 houses of most affected families.

- Provision of livelihood kits and digging of well in the selected communities.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

In the first and second phases of the project, 500 houses have been reconstructed/repared. The essential shelter material has been provided to each family to reconstruct/repair two rooms, one corridor and one latrine. Wells were drilled and 1,000 livelihood kits have also been distributed to beneficiaries. Along with this, trainings on Sphere and quality shelter were also organized with the members of the community who are directly involved in construction.

## **LESSONS**

Whilst it would not be true to say that the rebuilding of people's homes solves all the social and economic problems faced by these different villages but the implementation of this project is indicative of the fact that provision of houses and reestablishment of the agricultural industry would motivate people to rehabilitate their places of origin with dignity. This would help in reducing out migration as the people had done previously.

## **FUTURE**

At present in Bagram, about 30 percent of the land cultivates as rest is damaged by prevailing drought. A considerable number of villages have no access to potable water and livelihood opportunities. At some places people drink even contaminated water. According to UNHCR, 150,000 refugees and IDPs have returned in Bagram district, while the rest, most of them in Pakistan, are continually coming. Majority of these families have to stay with their relatives or under the tents, distributed by UNHCR and some INGOs. In this scenario, rebuilding of their

homes and provision of livelihood opportunities are the key areas to work upon

### **ALI AHMAD NARRATES HIS MYSTERIES OF WAR**

*During the initial period, NPO/RRAA identified 500 beneficiaries by using following criteria:*

■ *War and drought affected families who lost their houses and either migrated to neighboring/other countries or became internally displaced.*

■ *Families originating from the project areas who have lost their homes.*

■ *Willingness to beneficiaries to contribute labor.*

*War affected female-headed families. War and drought affected families with disabled male heads.*

*"This was very good humanitarian assistance, a good contribution," notes Ali Ahmed, one of the project beneficiaries. "But also it mobilized people to come together and come back to their villages, to be repatriated. This was one of the most important parts of this project*

*Eventually he takes us to his shelter in a different part of the village. He has spruced it up by painting the window frames bright blue. He is married with three children, all of whom attend the local school. He has always worked here as a farmer. He too had to spend time in Pakistan. When asked him what was the situation when he returned to the village, and he responds bluntly*

*"You can see the situation we came back to. Everything was destroyed."*

*Before his shelter was built last year, he had to share a house with relatives. Having his own living space for him and his family has made a big difference. Although he initially worked as a laborer, he is now back working full time as a farmer.*

*"It is enough as I'm using my land, but I'm also working for a local landowner. Also, we are using the land of some people who are not here." Even so, he admits it will take a good seven years for the output to return to pre-war levels*

*"Nowadays, everything is electric," ponders Ali Ahmed. "It means that slowly working methods will become easier. One day we will be able to have a quicker production and income from agriculture. Right now we have problems of pests, especially with the grapes. We need some pesticide to control that. We are busy with trying and testing growing apples, apricots and almonds. Already we are busy trying to establish new orchards. If there is enough water, we could grow watermelons or other vegetables. It would be possible to plant and cultivate these things."*

