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Advancing Skill Creation to ENhance Transformation

Issue 1 - August 2016

NETWORK NEWS

Photograph: representatives from 14 instititutions involved in the ASCENT project at the project kick-off meeting in Colombo on March 2016

ASCENT Project Kick-Off Meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka

Over 30 experts from across Europe and Asia are meeting on March 13th to 17th this year in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to launch the ASCENT project; a new project funded by the European Union to strengthen research and innovation capacity for the development of societal resilience to disasters. The four-day meeting concluded on Thursday 17th March, and will provide a basis for a three year workplan.

The project, called ASCENT (Advancing Skill Creation to ENhance Transformation) will support training, skills, leadership development, international collaboration and university-industry partnerships. It will strengthen the ability of higher education to respond to research needs in disaster resilience. It will also empower individuals and organisations with the skills, competencies and credentials needed to continue to pursue research, and to lead research at institutions, aimed at reducing the impact of disasters.

ASCENT is co-funded by an EU Erasmus+ programme grant which will run for three years and is led by the University of Huddersfield's Global Disaster Resilience Centre, based in the UK. They are joined by a consortium of 13 European and Asian higher education institutions from the Bangladesh, Estonia, Lithuania, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand and the UK.

Over three years, the ASCENT consortium will identify research and innovative capacity needs across Asian higher education institutions in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand to tackle the development of societal resilience to disasters. It will develop research infrastructure, prepare researchers to undertake advanced, world-class and innovative, multi- and interdisciplinary research, and increase international cooperation among higher education. It will also explore, promote and initiate opportunities for fruitful university / industry partnerships. In doing so, ASCENT will provide the link between the research and the public, helping to reinforce the connection between education and society.

The project was inspired by the Sendai Framework for Action 2015-2030, signed by 187 UN member states in March 2015, as a 15-year, voluntary, non-binding agreement which recognises that the State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk but that responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including local government, the private sector and other stakeholders. The Framework identifies that international, regional, sub-regional and transboundary cooperation remains pivotal in supporting the efforts of States, their national and local authorities, as well as communities and businesses, to reduce disaster risk.

The first phase of ASCENT will involve a detailed analysis of existing capacity for disaster resilience among higher education in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand. This will provide the basis for future capacity development activities.

For further information on the ASCENT project, contact:

Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga (d.amaratunga@hud.ac.uk), or

Professor Richard Haigh (r.haigh@hud.ac.uk)

or visit the website at www.disaster-resilience.net/ascent.

Work Package 1
Research and innovative capacities development framework

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- University of Central Lancashire, UK
- University of Moratuwa, Srilanka

Objective:

The objective of WP1 is to identify research and innovative capacity needs across partner country HEIs to tackle the development of societal resilience to disasters. The WP will result in a detailed capacity development framework for the identified countries (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand) in target region 6 (Asia).

Work Package 2
Project Management

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- University of Huddersfield, UK
- Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Bangladesh

Objective:

The objective of WP2 is to manage partners to deliver outputs and achieve intended outcomes.

Work Package 3
Quality assurance and monitoring

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia
- BRAC University, Bangladesh

Objective:
The objective of WP3 is to ensure systematic monitoring and evaluation of the project's activities to maximize the probability that the project will deliver its planned outputs and achieve its intended outcomes.

Work Package 4
Research infrastructures

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- University of Huddersfield, UK
- University of Dhaka, UK

Objective:

WP4 will develop research infrastructure to support implementation of the capacity development activities that have bene proposed in ASCENT in providing sustainable capacity development within the partner HEIs.

Work Package 5
Research Method Training Programme

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- University of Central Lancashire, UK
- University of Ruhuna, Srilanka

Objective:
The objective of WP5 is to prepare researchers (via capacity development) in the identified Asian countries to undertake advanced, world-class and innovative, multi- and inter-disciplinary research that will contribute to increased societal resilience to disasters. This will be achieved through the development and delivery of an advanced research methods training programme.

Work Package 6
Supplementary Research Skills

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- Mid Sweden University, Sweden
- Chiang Mai University

Objective:

The objective of WP6 is to prepare researchers and support staff (via the proposed capacity development activities as detailed below) in the identified Asian countries to undertake advanced, world-class and innovative, multi- and inter-disciplinary research that will contribute to increased societal resilience to disasters. This will be achieved through the development and delivery of a supplementary research skills training programme. WP6 will focus on the development of non-scientific skills, thereby complementing the scientific focus of WP5 (research methods).

Work Package 7
International cooperation

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- Lund University, Sweden
- University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Objective:
The objective of WP7 is to develop capacity to increase international cooperation by partner HEIs to tackle ways to increase societal resilience to disasters, with a focus on strengthening of relationships between HE and the wider economic and social environment

Work Package 8
University and industry partnerships

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania
- Naresuan University, Thailand

Objective:

The objective of WP8 is to develop the capacity of partner HEIs to explore, promote and initiate opportunities for fruitful university / industry partnerships to increase societal resilience to disasters and ensure wider social and economic benefits.

Work Package 9
Dissemination and exploitation

Work Package leader/co-leader:
- Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia
- University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Objective:

The objective of WP9 is to publicise the project progress, successes and outcomes as far as possible, raise awareness across the field of Higher Education about capacity building for disaster resilience research via various, innovative avenues, and extend the impact of

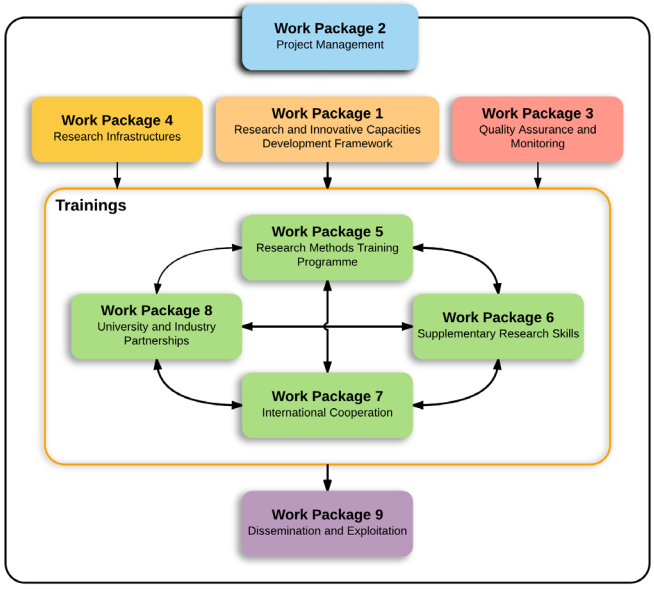

Fig 1. Relationship between work packages

ASCENT project consortium

Programme Countries (Europe)

- University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom (Lead Partner)
- University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom
- Lund University, Sweden
- Mid-Sweden University, Sweden
- Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania
- Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia

Partner Countries (Asia)

- University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka
- University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
- University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka
- Naresuan University, Thailand
- Chiang Mai University, Thailand
- University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
- BRAC University, Bangladesh
- Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Bangladesh

Developing innovation capacity through innovation platforms

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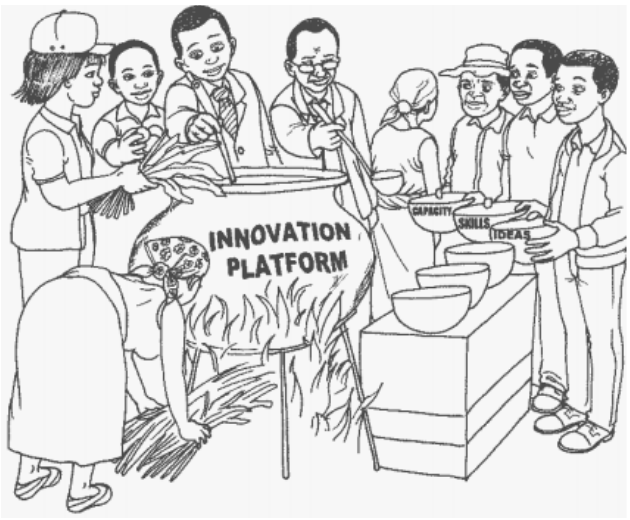

"An innovation platform is like a cooking pot. The pot is the container where innovation capacity can develop, given the right preconditions and ingredients."

One of the most important things that innovation platforms do is to build the capacity of their members to innovate. This is a crucial function. Innovation capacity is vital if the innovation platform is to achieve its aims. It is the invisible glue that ties successful innovation platforms together—the 'capacity to get things done' (see the Definitions box).

This brief uses the analogy of a traditional African cooking pot to explain how innovation capacity is developed within an innovation platform. It draws on three examples of innovation platforms: in Babure, Uganda; Gwanda, Zimbabwe; and three regions in Ethiopia.

Like a cooking pot

An innovation platform is like a cooking pot. The pot is the container where innovation capacity can develop, given the right preconditions and ingredients. It is a collective cooking pot: innovation platforms are about collective action to solve complex problems

Various people gather around the pot: farmers, government officials, community leaders, researchers, private investors, and civil society. These are the members of the innovation platform. They all help to cook: feeding the fire, adding ingredients, stirring the contents, and serving the broth.

Each contributes specific skills, knowledge and capacities—the ingredients that go into the pot.

There is no one recipe, but a few key ingredients can make success more likely: scientific knowledge, local knowledge, facilitation techniques, training, mixed with social learning.

Mixing ingredients together is no good without a catalyst: the fire.

The catalyst may be an external organization that initiates the platform and triggers innovation. Or it may be internal factors and market conditions. In Babure, for example, the market could not absorb the amounts of sorghum that platform members produced. That was a catalyst for developing a new product, a sorghum-based drink.

What comes out of the pot? After bringing ingredients and helping with the cooking, the chefs naturally want to enjoy the bowls of soup they have prepared. Innovation platforms can serve up various benefits for their members: more profits from product diversification in Babure (Case 1), or cheaper feed prices in Gwanda (Case 2).

Innovation capacity

What is innovation capacity? It is like the cooking process in the pot. It is where individual platform members, and the platform as a whole, develop the abilities to find solutions to problems and to respond to opportunities.

There is no single way to develop this capacity. It may seem effortless to an outsider: outcomes (tasty, nutritious soup) suddenly emerge from an unruly mess of ingredients.

But there are a few essentials: the participants have to interact well; the facilitation has to be suitable, and all those involved must have the patience to let the process unfold.

Paying attention to the process and to learning by the group is central to developing a sustained capacity to innovate, as is appropriate training to develop relevant capacities locally.

There is a seven-step process which innovation platforms generally follow, from initiation to analysis and learning. Innovation capacity can (and indeed does) occur in all these stages.

For example, many straightforward methodologies exist to help innovation platform members identify problems and come up with innovations to address them. But it is during the later stages—testing and refining solutions, analysis and learning—that most of this 'magic' takes place.

Innovation capacity can go beyond the members of the platform. They can share their new experiences and insights with people and organizations outside the platform: they share their soup with others.

The cases here illustrate innovation capacity at the local level, it can also be developed at higher levels, such as in policymaking. These processes can be sustained and replicated if they are monitored and documented.

The tangible results of an innovation platform (better incomes, lower costs etc.) are a result of an intangible product: innovation capacity. Perhaps because it is intangible, innovation capacity is rarely explicitly included in a project design. It is often seen as an implicit side-product.

Even in RiPPLE (Case 3), which made special efforts on this front, process documentation eventually fell through the cracks and was abandoned two years into the program as management and donors emphasized formal monitoring instead.

Definitions

An innovation platform is a space for learning and change. It is a group of individuals (who often represent organizations) with different backgrounds and interests: farmers, traders, food processors, researchers, government officials etc. The members come together to diagnose problems, identify opportunities and find ways to achieve their goals. They may design and implement activities as a platform, or coordinate activities by individual members.

Innovation capacity enables groups of people to shape their own future by taking advantage of opportunities and dealing with changing situations. Some key elements of innovation capacity include: self-organization, learning new skills, changing mindsets, valuing others' roles in innovation, having a holistic view, being able to adapt to changing situations, creating new ideas, recognizing opportunities, being proactive, using indigenous ideas, and looking to the future.

Text and illustration are extracted from:
Boogaard, B., Dror, I., Adekunle, A., Le Borgne, E., Rooyen, A. van and Lundy, M. 2013. Developing innovation capacity through innovation platforms. Innovation Platforms Practice Brief 8. Nairobi, Kenya: ILRI.

Full article can be accessed on:
https://cgspace.cgiar.org/handle/10568/34162

Swiss International Cooperation in Research and Innovation

By their very nature, education, research and science have an international dimension. In all its variety, quality and constant need to develop further, knowledge thrives on global exchange.

This natural tendency has become stronger in the age of globalisation. In Switzerland this can be seen by the constant increase in the mobility of students, the internationalisation of university teaching staff and the interest of researchers in cooperation in European or global networks. So it should come as no surprise that today around 20% of all federal resources for the promotion of education, research and innovation go to international cooperation activities.

Swiss efforts to involve its research community in international cooperation programmes began in 1953 with the considerable support the country gave to the founding of the European Organization for Nuclear Research, CERN, in Geneva. Since then this involvement has constantly increased. Switzerland has also focussed its step-by-step involvement in international organisations and programmes on education and research priorities in which it has developed either a leading position internationally or which it has identified as important fields of development and tasks.

Current activities of the Swiss research and innovation sector in international cooperation include the following:

- Participation in the development of the European Research and Innovation Area through Swiss cooperation in European programmes and organisations in the field of research and technological development;
- Support for global scientific and technological cooperation of Swiss universities and institutions working in research and innovation with their foreign counterparts particularly through the development and promotion of bilateral partnerships with selected countries and regions.

Texts and ilustration are extracted from:
https://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/en/home/topics/swiss-international-cooperation-in-research-and-innovation.html

Further reading:
SERI, 2013. Switzerland's International Strategy for education, research and innovation

Promoting University-Industry Collaboration in Developing Countries

Collaboration between universities and industries is critical for skills development (education and training), the generation, acquisition, and adoption of knowledge (innovation and technology transfer), and the promotion of entrepreneurship (start-ups and spin-offs). The benefits of university-industry linkages are wide-reaching: they can help coordinate R&D agendas and avoid duplications, stimulate additional private R&D investment (additionality effect), and exploit synergies and complementarities of scientific and technological capabilities. University-industry collaboration can also expand the relevance of research carried out in public institutions, foster the commercialization of public R&D outcomes, and increase the mobility of labor between public and private sectors. The benefits of university-industry collaboration are also evident in developing countries. For example, a study in Chile and Colombia shows that collaboration with universities substantially increased the propensity of firms to introduce new products and to patent (Marotta, Blom, and Thorn 2007).

The many types of university-industry links have different objectives, scopes, and institutional arrangements (see Table 1).

Table 1. A typology of university-industry links, from higher to lower intensity

High (relationship)	Research partnerships	Inter-organizational arrangements for pursuing collaborative R&D, including research consortia and joint projects.
	Research services	Research-related activities commissioned to universities by industrial clients, including contract research, consulting, quality control, testing, certification, and prototype development.
	Shared infrastructure	Use of university labs and equipment by firms, business incubators, and technology parks located within universities.
Medium (Mobility)	Academic entrepreneurship	Development and commercial exploitation of technologies pursued by academic inventors through a company they (partly) own (spin-off companies).
	Human resource training and transfer	Training of industry employees, internship programs, postgraduate training in industry, secondments to industry of university faculty and research staff, adjunct faculty of industry participants.
Low (Transfer)	Commercialization of intellectual property	Transfer of university-generated IP (such as patents) to firms (e.g., via licensing).
	Scientific publications	Use of codified scientific knowledge within industry.
	Informal interaction	Formation of social relationships (e.g., conferences, meetings, social networks).

Collaboration may be more or less intense and may focus on training or research activities. Collaboration may be formal or informal, from formal equity partnerships, contracts, research projects, patent licensing, and so on, to human capital mobility, publications, and interactions in conferences and expert groups, among others (Hagedoorn, Link, and Vonortas 2000). Also it is useful to differentiate between short-term and long-term collaboration.

Short-term collaborations generally consist of on-demand problem solving with predefined results and tend to be articulated through contract research, consulting, and licensing. Long-term collaborations are associated with joint projects and public-private partnerships (including private-funded university institutes or chairs, joint university-industry research centers, and research consortia), often allowing firms to contract for a core set of services and to periodically re-contract for specific deliverables in a flexible manner. Longer term collaborations are more strategic and open-ended, providing a multifaceted platform where firms can develop a stronger innovative capacity in the long run, building upon the capabilities, methods, and tools of universities (Koschatzky and Stahlecker 2010).

Extracted from:

Guimón, J., 2013. Promoting University-Industry Collaboration in Developing Countries. Policy Brief. The Innovation Policy Platform, 1(3), pp.1-12.

Photograph: COP 21/CMP 11 - Paris Climate Change Conference. Source: UNClimateChange

Paris Agreement on Climate Change Adaptation

At the Conference of the Parties (COP) 21 in Paris on November 30th to December 12th 2015, Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reached a landmark agreement to combat climate change and to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future. The Paris Agreement builds upon the Convention and – for the first time – brings all nations into a common cause to undertake take ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so. As such, it charts a new course in the global climate effort.

The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Additionally, the agreement aims to strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change.

"The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change"

To reach these ambitious goals, appropriate financial flows, a new technology framework and an enhanced capacity building framework will be put in place, thus supporting action by developing countries and the most vulnerable countries, in line with their own national objectives. The Agreement also provides for enhanced transparency of action and support through a more robust transparency framework.

The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead. This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts.

There will also be a global stocktake every 5 years to assess the collective progress towards achieving the purpose of the agreement and to inform further individual actions by Parties.

Decision 1/CP.21 also sets out a number of measures to enhance action prior to 2020, including strengthening the technical examination process, enhancement of provision of urgent finance, technology and support and measures to strengthen high-level engagement.

Essential Elements

The Paris Agreement, adopted through Decision 1/CP.21, addresses crucial areas necessary to combat climate change. Some of the key aspects of the agreement are set out below:

- Pursing efforts to limit the long-term temperature goal of well below 2 degrees (Art. 2)
- Reaching greenhouse gas emission global peaking (Art. 4).
- Enhancing efforts and preparing measures for contribution in mitigation (Art. 4)
- Conserving and enhancing sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases (Art.5)
- Defining a framework and mechanism for Market and non-markets approaches to sustainable development Market and non-markets (Art. 6)
- Establishing a global goal to significantly strengthen national adaptation efforts through support and international cooperation (Art. 7) .
- Enhancing the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (Art. 8).
- Supporting developing country Parties to build clean, climate-resilient futures (Art. 9, 10 and 11)
- Reliance on robust Transparency and accounting system to provide clarity on action and support by Parties, with flexibility for their differing capabilities (Art. 13)
- Assessing collective progress toward meeting the purpose of the Agreement in a comprehensive and facilitative manner through 5 yearly Global Stocktake meeting (Art. 14)

Extracted from:
http://bigpicture.unfccc.int/#content-the-paris-agreemen

Science and technology has a vital role in new Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

In March 2015, representatives from 187 UN member States adopted the first major agreement of the Post-2015 development agenda, a far reaching new framework for disaster risk reduction with seven targets and four priorities for action.

Conference President, Ms. Eriko Yamatani, Minister of State for Disaster Management, announced agreement on the text, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 – the new international framework for disaster risk reduction, following a marathon final round of negotiations which went on for over 30 hours.

Margareta Wahlström, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, said: "The adoption of this new framework for disaster risk reduction opens a major new chapter in sustainable development as it outlines clear targets and priorities for action which will lead to a substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health".

"Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction over the next 15 years will require strong commitment and political leadership and will be vital to the achievement of future agreements on sustainable development goals and climate later this year. As the UN Secretary- General said here on the opening day, sustainability starts in Sendai.

The framework outlines seven global targets to be achieved over the next 15 years: a substantial reduction in global disaster mortality; a substantial reduction in numbers of affected people; a reduction in economic losses in relation to global GDP; substantial reduction in disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, including health and education facilities; an increase in the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020; enhanced international cooperation; and increased access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments.

The World Conference was attended by over 6,500 participants including 2,800 government representatives from 187 governments. The Public Forum had 143,000 visitors over the five days of the conference making it one of the largest UN gatherings ever held in Japan.

It has been recognised that the success of this post-2015 framework hinges on creating and implementing policies that are built on the best available knowledge. Higher education has a vital role in supporting this move to a more disaster resilient society by 2030.

In January 2016, the UNISR Science and Technology Conference on the Implementation of the Sendai Framework was held in Geneva, Switzerland. The conference successfully launched the Science and Technology Partnership, and crystallized an agenda for the science and policy community to support the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

A number of concrete recommendations came out of the conference that included:

1) Need for formal "national DRR science-policy councils/platforms" or a form of national focal points for science to support disaster risk reduction and management plans identified. Focal points could include platforms or chief scientific advisors function.

2) Focusing more attention on understanding the root causes and underlying risk factors of disaster risk including inter-linkages between DRR, sustainable development, and climate change mitigation and adaptation, and ensuring DRR is mainstreamed into other sectors, policies, and strategies. A call for an evidence-based review of risk assessment and its implementation was made.

3) Conducting a periodic review of knowledge needs, new science (including implementation science), and research gaps. More effort is needed to work out how to achieve this and ensure avoiding duplication of effort.

4) Using the expanding S&T evidence base to support capacity building and ensure that capacity development for disaster risk management is interdisciplinary, shared across international boundaries, and demand-driven.

5) Leveraging science for DRR through innovative schemes that are long-term and provide opportunities to enhance the dialogue between decision makers and researchers through interdisciplinary and participatory networks to ensure integrated disaster risk governance.

6) Supporting integrated and holistic approaches to the use of S&T for DRR that reflect the wide scope of the Sendai Framework, which applies to disasters caused by natural or human-made hazards, as well as environmental, technological, and biological hazards.

7) Enhancing the role of social science in the multidisciplinary effort to understand behavior and decision making in DRR and the role of the wider societal context in disaster risk creation and reduction, and incorporating key markers of socioeconomic vulnerability.

8) Supporting open access, multi-hazard data platforms and standardized approaches and tools to map and use of data and scenarios that make science sensible to decision makers and the general public.

9) Using participatory approaches for communities to work together to co-produce risk knowledge, define options, and support evidence-based decision making. Users must be included in the earliest stages of developing research and technology, including through improved dialogues with citizen groups, involvement of local and national universities and institutions, young scientists, and the use of indigenous knowledge.

10) Documenting and analyzing the effects of disasters and DRR interventions, including ethical implications of scientific research.

11) Strengthening DRR science-policy and cross-sectoral dialogues to facilitate risk assessments, post disaster reviews, data sharing, and decision making.

12) Producing guidelines for evidence-based risk assessments and their implementation to support the practical application of risk assessment.

Photograph: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon delivers a speech during an opening ceremony of the 3rd UNWCDRR in Sendai, March 14, 2015. Source: Reuters/Kyodo

Write for ASCENT Newsletter

The ASCENT project provides an opportunity for people to share knowledge and experience. This newsletter is written by the ASCENT membership for the ASCENT membership, and also for other readers working with national and international NGOs, UN agencies, government and donor institutions, academics, and independent consultants.

We, the Editors of ASCENT newsletter, welcome contributions from ASCENT partners and associate partners. We are also pleased to consider articles submitted by anyone involved in researcy capacity building within the context of disaster resilience. If you have knowledge and experience to share, please consider making a contribution.

The scope of contributions should be consistent with the aims of ASCENT. Typically, we welcome contributions in the following categories (word counts are advisory):

- News and reports from activities and events linked to the project (100 - 500 words)
- Reports on developments in the field / projects that are being investigated by partners – these do not have to be activities directly linked to the project, but should be relevant to project partner institutions (100 - 500 words)
- Useful Resources – relevant publications, websites (up to 20 - 40 words)
- Upcoming events (20 words)

We welcome suggestions for alternative types / styles of contribution. If you have an idea for an article that you would like to develop, the Editors would be pleased to discuss it with you - send an email to Dr Ezri Hayat (e.e.hayat@hud.ac.uk)

The Editors reserve the right to edit any contribution.

This edition of ASCENT newsletter was edited by Dr. Ezri Hayat

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