



ASIAN CITY JOURNALISTS CONFAB FINDS . . . :

Mobile phones come in handy in disaster prevention

by Anuraadha KODAGODA



The Asian City Journalist Conference was held recently for the sixth consecutive year in Fukuoka, Japan. The confab is held every year with the aim of bringing journalists in Asia together, to exchange opinions and share knowledge about the different experiences in countries.

In this year's conference, journalists discussed how to increase disaster prevention capacities and skills at community levels and thus contribute to strengthening disaster resilience of cities.

This time eight countries participated at the event, India, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, China, Japan and for the first time Sri Lanka also got the opportunity to take part.

The keynote speech delivered by Associate Professor of Kyoto University, Rajib Shaw and in his speech he stressed the importance of public awareness programs which should be conducted by relevant authorities as a disaster prevention tool.

He also mentioned selected key issues faced by the local government such as early warning systems and human loss, housing damage during disaster situation and temporary housing, damages to educational facilities, debris and related environmental issues and recovery planning process issues.

In recent years, natural disasters which are caused partly by climate changes have frequently occurred in Asia.

While many of these disasters are difficult to prevent or predict, but to minimize damages is very important, not only to create disaster resilience in cities but also to strengthen disaster prevention



capacities at community levels, through formal and informal education systems, local community networks and organizations and voluntary organizations for disaster preventions.

At the conference the Director UN Habitat, Toshi Noda expressed the importance of family involvement in the reconstruction process immediately after a disaster which will help to get over the trauma of the disaster.

Also he stressed the recovery strategy principles the UN Habitat follows as an international guideline which is as follows:

- *Respect the primacy of the needs of the families
- *Responsibility for recovery rests with the families and communities
- *Support of the authorities is essential for people to take recovery into their own hands
- *Devolve decision-making to the point of action
- *Recognize people's organizations
- *Ensure security, protection, right to a "place to live"
- *Generate a process that would allow every family in need to build a basic secure home
- *Cultivate a spirit of peace-building and community cohesiveness
- *Design the recovery investment to remain with the community as far as possible



The latest UN Habitat statistics shows that 250,000 people die every year because of natural disasters, 95 percent live in developing countries. Therefore, every developing country has a task to reduce this number by transferring knowledge and by raising awareness.

Most of the journalists who participated in the conference stressed that the best way to transfer the knowledge by raising awareness among the communities is to increase mobile phone usage.

As per statistics shown by the journalist who represented India, Arun Katiyar said that the wireless subscribers among India are 858.37 million which is less than 50 percent of the country.

However, there is 0.64 percent urban mobile phone subscribers' growth shown in the year 2011 which is a significant increase when compared to the population of the country.

Therefore, the best way to improve the awareness is popularising the mobile phone usage among the community.

Similarly in Sri Lanka the mobile phone usage is significantly growing day by day irrespective of urban or rural areas.

Therefore, the authorities must come up with a method to improve the awareness and prevention methods from natural disasters which can occur at any time.

This year's conference was successfully concluded and in the event many Japanese local newspaper journalists and with public participation and involvement for the discussions had with international journalists and with UN Habitat officials.

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