From Risk to Resilience: ADB & Japan Creating Pathways Together

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Disaster resilience is a development imperative across Asia and the Pacific. No longer viewed as a specialist concern, disaster risk management (DRM) has been mainstreamed across governments and the private sector. DRM is a strategic area where Japan and the Asian Development Bank (ADB)[1] can deepen their partnership, share know-how, and help economies manage and prevent risks, prepare better, recover faster, and become more resilient. In March 2026, Japan announced the establishment of a new Disaster Management Agency, opening fresh opportunities to translate national lessons into regional impact.

Resilience – a Development Imperative

The Asia-Pacific region is the most disaster-prone region in the world and home to 4.8 billion people. In the past five decades, out of 8.25 billion people directly affected by disasters globally, more than 7 billion were from Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2023).[2] Risk hotspots continue to remain concentrated in Asia. As per World Risk Index 2025, six out of the top 10 highest-risk countries are from Asia, including India and the People's Republic of China, representing over one-third of the world's total population.

In 2025 alone, disasters cost economies across Asia and the Pacific more than $156 million in damage every single day (EM-DAT: The International Disaster Database, 2026).[3] While the region is experiencing more frequent and intense climate-induced hazards, geohazards also remain a major compounding factor behind disaster loss and damage. Between 2001 and 2020, geophysical events made up 12% of disasters in the region yet accounted for 62% of fatalities and 38% of damage.

With around 60% of the global population living and working in Asia and the Pacific, major shocks to its population and economies create global market disruptions. Higher risks, increased costs, implementation delays, and returning volatility caused by frequent disasters often disincentivize investment decisions and constrain Asia's growth potential. External factors, such as pandemic, conflict, trade uncertainty, and fragmented supply chains affecting the region impact the ability of ADB members to invest in risk-informed development and disaster resilience. To help navigate a world with compounding and cascading risks, ADB supports its members in solving complex challenges together through a wide range of policies and instruments covering the full spectrum of DRM and resilience building.

Disaster Resilience: a Shared Development Agenda

Disaster resilience is a shared global agenda for ADB, the government of Japan,[4] and development partners worldwide. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement, and the Sustainable Development Goals collectively reinforce a people-centered resilience building approach. Catering for the world's most disaster-prone region, ADB positions itself as a partner in building regional resilience through collaborative action. Disaster resilience is one of the key priorities of ADB's Strategy 2030 aiming for prosperity, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Disaster resilience is a development necessity. Disasters undermine economic progress, disrupt development, and erode hard-won gains. They destroy infrastructure, displace communities, and weaken institutions and service delivery, hitting the poor hardest, particularly women. Poverty and vulnerability to natural hazards are mutually reinforcing. Recurrent disasters diminish national capacities to eliminate extreme poverty. Fiscal pressures intensify, as revenues decline and reconstruction costs surge, diverting domestic resources and international assistance away from long-term development priorities.

For ADB members with scarce resources and fragile infrastructures, disaster impacts are devastating. As a multilateral development bank, ADB views disaster risk management not as a humanitarian concern but as an issue that impedes core development and fiscal sustainability, which are prerequisites for sustained growth. This pathway to resilience involves acknowledging the relationship between disasters and poverty, helping those in chronic and churning poverty struggling to improve development outcomes against frequent disasters. Embedding disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures into development planning and translating plans to interventions is central to strengthening the disaster resilience of communities, systems, governments and nations.

The impact of major disasters is no less detrimental for advanced economies. Over the past 30 years, Japan has faced major disasters. The 1995 Kobe earthquake had lasting economic impacts, with the port yet to fully regain its global ranking. Drawing on past lessons, Japan's 2025 disaster resilience policy upholds a vision of building a Disaster-Resilient Nation. It highlights low-probability but high-impact risks – such as megathrust earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The policy factors in the aging populations, infrastructure interdependencies, and complex, cascading disasters requiring cross-sector coordination and planning. Notably, even in the most advanced economies, disasters cause significant short and longer-term impacts, and curb growth.

ADB fosters broad-based partnerships with governments, civil society and the private sector, and invests heavily in enhancing regional collaboration. By integrating DRM into development, ADB aims to enable its members to transition from reactive response to proactive risk management. This shared commitment resonates with Japan's ongoing efforts to establish a Disaster Management Agency. While primarily a domestic reform, its vision – centered on prevention, whole-of-government engagement – aligns closely with ADB's core principles. This underscores a common ambition for disaster prevention, advancing resilience as a cornerstone of sustainable development.

ADB's Approach to Resilience Building: a Transformative Journey

ADB follows a holistic approach to DRM that balances risk reduction, preparedness, and resilient recovery, underpinned by robust risk analytics *(Chart 1)*. Over time, ADB's approach has evolved from post-disaster response to systemic risk management. It emphasizes a multi-hazard, inclusive perspective, recognizing resilience as traversing physical, ecological, financial, and social-institutional dimensions. The aim is to build system-wide resilience that accounts for the interdependence of critical infrastructures and services. Transformative investments, such as risk-informed land use planning and pro-poor investments are priorities. Beyond infrastructure, cross-sectoral investments into social, environmental and financial sectors are made to advance resilience comprehensively.

ADB invests in resilience through a combination of standalone and embedded measures. Standalone initiatives hold DRR as the primary objective, whereas embedded measures factor in risk consideration as part of development projects. To make investments risk-informed, DRM is mainstreamed across ADB's portfolio. Through Country Partnership Strategies, an effective blend of standalone and embedded interventions is made. Investments are directed towards a combination of structural measures such as flood protection, seismic retrofitting, or non-structural measures like shaping policies, standards, and regulations. Investments in resilience involve strengthening institutions, capacities, and partnerships essential for long-term sustainability.

ADB is guided by a suite of enabling policies and financing instruments that evolved over time in response to rapidly changing risk landscapes. Among international financial institutions, ADB was the first to adopt a dedicated disaster policy in 1987. A range of successive policies followed alongside the establishment of dedicated financing instruments *(Chart 2)*. ADB's current engagement is guided by the Revised Disaster and Emergency Assistance Policy (DEAP, 2021) and complemented by a comprehensive package of financing instruments and policy options – the Crisis Preparedness and Response Toolkit. Anchored in DEAP, this toolkit is designed to help ADB's members prevent and mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises by ensuring that financing is available at every stage of the crisis cycle. It combines ex-ante (pre-arranged) and ex-post (after crisis) financing tools to ensure speed through rapid disbursement, flexibility through reprogramming funds, scaling through large budget support and

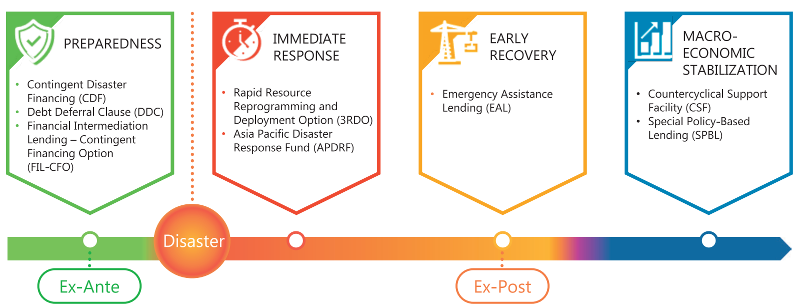
CHART 1

ADB's Disaster Risk Management approach

Source: Asian Development Bank

CHART 2

ADB's financing instruments for Disaster Risk Management



Source: Asian Development Bank

resilience building through policy reforms and enhancing preparedness. ADB's approach to a risk-layered financial strategy is effectively manifested through this toolkit. Collectively, these enable ADB to support its members with instruments covering the full disaster risk management continuum from response to recovery-reconstruction with greatest emphasis on DRR.

In 2024, ADB approved its Disaster Risk Management Action Plan (DRMAP) 2024-2030 (ADB, 2024), operationalizing DEAP. The broader goals of DRMAP are to help member countries to lower risk across sectors, lower impact through enhancing preparedness and disaster risk financing readiness and promote resilient recovery-reconstruction through "build back better" approaches. The four interlinked DRMAP work streams are fully aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and ADB Strategy 2030. DRMAP carefully considers disaster risk in upstream country strategy-programming, midstream pipeline development, and downstream project design and implementation. The first workstream promotes disaster risk screening, upstream risk assessment, and risk-informed decision-making tools. The second workstream assists member countries in increasing DRR investments and transboundary initiatives. The third promotes disaster risk financing to strengthen governance and disaster preparedness. And the fourth enables effective post-disaster recovery through improved programming, planning, and institutional strengthening. ADB's evolving approach reflects a paradigm shift toward proactive system-wide resilience building.

Why Institutions Matter: the Bridge from Policy to Resilience

ADB's DRM agenda shows that better risk analytics, preparedness, financing, and resilient recovery matter – but they do not deliver results automatically. What determines whether they translate into action is how institutions shape risk reduction and preparedness and perform under stress. Two economies can mobilize similar resources and still see very different results because coordination, clear decision-making authority, and accountability shape whether risk reduction and preparedness are prioritized in investments, response is organized and support reaches people quickly, and whether reconstruction moves from plans to delivery. Strong institutions do more than respond once a shock occurs. They also reduce and prevent risk beforehand by setting policy, preparing resilience plans, organizing data and risk information, and clarifying responsibilities before a crisis tests them.

Many of ADB's members face familiar institutional hurdles: fragmented mandates across ministries, unclear leadership during complex emergencies, weak links between national policy and local delivery, and limited arrangements for coordinating information and finance. These gaps deprioritize risk reduction and preparedness, slow down evacuation and logistics decisions, delay damage and needs assessments, complicate recovery financing, and make it harder to move from emergency measures to reconstruction with a clear sense of priority. They also create a recurring trade-off: when a major disaster hits, the same institutions responsible for planning and prevention are often pulled fully into response operations, leaving less capacity for preparedness and long-term risk reduction. The result is not only slower recovery, but also recovery that can be less coherent, less inclusive, and less effective at reducing future losses.

This is also where ADB's operational agenda and Japan's reform agenda most clearly meet. Financing, technical assistance, and resilient infrastructure standards matter – but they work best when institutions can reduce risk, set policy, develop resilience plans, and carry them through via clear roles and shared procedures. Institutions turn lessons from past disasters into policy, align national and local actions, and keep implementation moving before, during, and after disasters. They also connect parts of the resilience agenda that are too often treated separately: risk analytics, early warning, budget preparedness, and recovery governance. In short, institutions are the bridge between knowing what to do and being able to do it at speed and at scale.

Japan's Disaster Management Agency is a useful illustration of how institutional design can support faster, more coherent recovery. By creating a clearer center of coordination under the cabinet and linking preparedness, response, and reconstruction more closely, the reform addresses a problem many members of ADB recognize: recovery is often slowed not by lack of intent, but by fragmented authority and weak coordination. The broader lesson is that risk reduction, policy setting, preparedness planning, and recovery management work best when treated as connected responsibilities rather than separate tasks. That helps explain why Japan's latest reforms matter not only domestically, but also as a regional reference point.

Japan's Renewed Momentum: Launching a Disaster Management Agency

Seen in that light, Japan's renewed momentum on disaster resilience starts with a clear diagnosis—and a broader reform vision. The Basic Policy for Promoting a Disaster-Resilient Nation (Government of Japan, 2025) argues that Japan must prepare for national-crisis-scale disasters by strengthening preparedness in normal times, using scientific evidence and lessons from past events, and mobilizing public, private, academic, and civic capabilities. It places the protection of human life and human rights first, while also safeguarding the functions of the state, society, and the economy. Within that vision, Japan announced in March 2026 the establishment of a Disaster Management Agency under the cabinet as the institutional centerpiece of the reform, with implementation expected to be staged through 2026.

The new agency gives that vision an operational home. It is not just a coordinating body; it is meant to help set policy, shape resilience and preparedness plans, and drive execution across government. By bringing strategic functions such as the Central Disaster Management Council into one institution under the cabinet, it can translate risk assessments and lessons from past disasters into concrete measures, align ministries around shared priorities, and sustain implementation over time. The reform also reaches beyond the center: regional disaster management bureaus are intended to strengthen local support, while a proposed Disaster Management Academy points to longer-term investment in training, shared practice, and institutional learning.

The reform is also substantive, not merely organizational. The basic policy calls for rigorous, evidence-based preparedness – backed by better risk assessment, smarter use of digital tools, and rapid nationwide damage assessment during crises. These are institutional tasks as much as technical ones: reducing risk, setting priorities, preparing resilience plans, and executing them consistently across levels of government. The policy also elevates a victim-centered approach by shifting from supporting places (evacuation centers) to supporting people (evacuees), improving living conditions and welfare support, and offering "one-stop" coordination so local governments can move faster from response to recovery and better reconstruction. It emphasizes whole-of-society collaboration – across national and local government, private companies, non-profit organizations/non-government organizations, universities, and communities – and Japan's continued role in international disaster risk reduction through sharing experience, technologies, and lessons learned. For ADB's disaster-prone members, the relevance lies not only in the agency itself, but in the broader policy direction: stronger preparedness, clearer recovery governance, and closer links between national coordination and local delivery. Two-way learning also matters: many members have advanced community-based preparedness, shock-responsive social protection, and innovative risk financing approaches that can inform how any system builds resilience.

That broader relevance points naturally to partnership: when Japan's reform agenda, regional role, and technical know-how are linked to ADB's regional reach, they can be translated into practical support for disaster-prone economies across Asia and the Pacific.

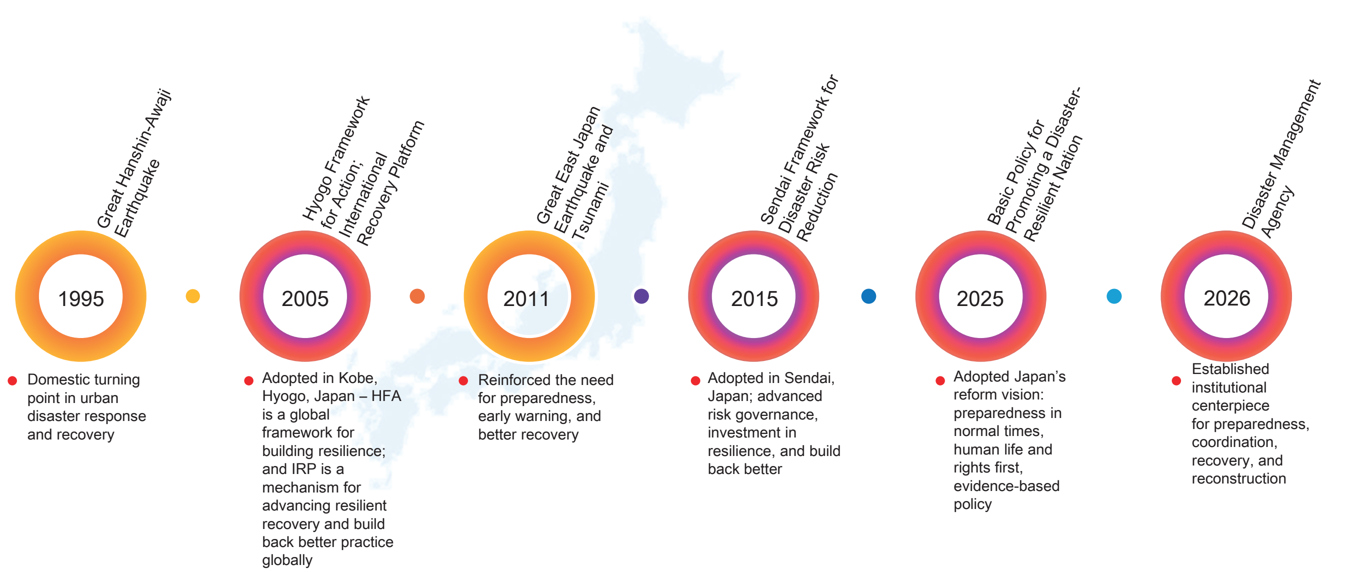
Deepening ADB-Japan Partnership for Resilience

Japan already plays a leading role in disaster risk management across Asia and the Pacific *(Chart 3)*, but its contribution is not only financial. It also lies in technical expertise on resilient infrastructure, multi-hazard early warning, post-disaster recovery, and disaster risk financing, as well as in shaping regional and global disaster risk management agendas. Japan helped advance international frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework for Action and the Sendai

CHART 3

Japan's domestic experience & global leadership in Disaster Risk Management

Turning points in disaster response and recovery



Source: Government of Japan, and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Japan hosts the International Recovery Platform (IRP) Secretariat since its creation after the 2005 Kobe conference. The IRP serves as a key global mechanism for promoting resilient recovery through knowledge sharing and peer learning among disaster-prone countries. It also continues to support regional cooperation through platforms led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, early warning initiatives, wider multilateral coordination, and regional disaster risk finance mechanisms such as the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company (PCRIC). In that landscape, ADB plays a complementary role by helping translate regional experience and policy innovation into operational support through country programs, technical assistance, and financing platforms, including for members beyond the Pacific. Together, these engagements help translate global commitments into practical cooperation, strengthen institutional capacity, and promote shared standards across disaster-prone economies.

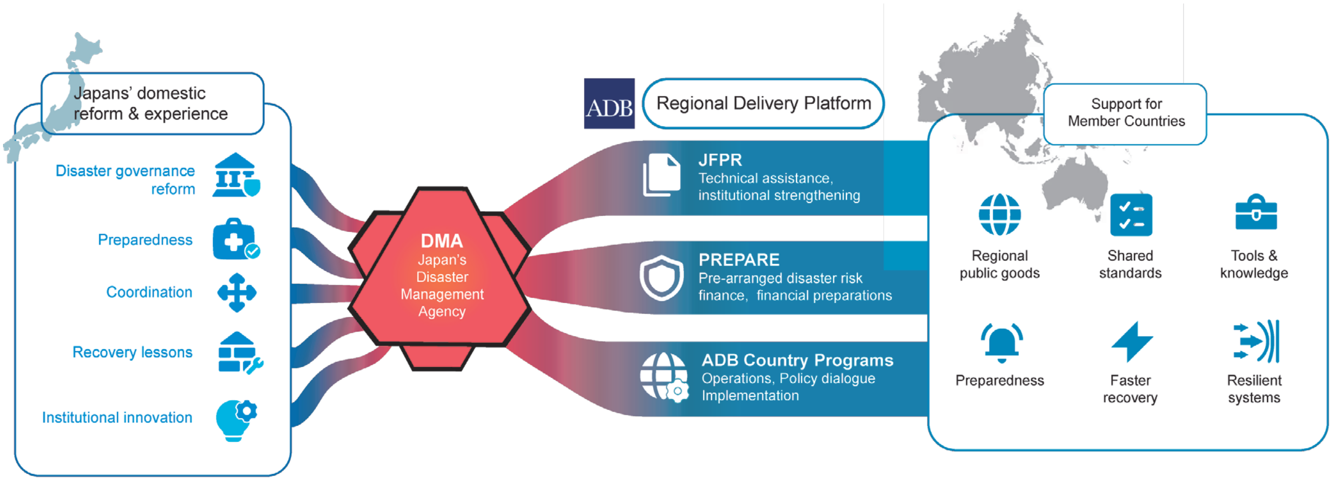
That is where partnership with ADB becomes especially important. ADB offers a regional delivery platform – through country programs, technical assistance, and financing tools – that can turn Japan's policy experience and technical know-how into practical support for its members. As Japan's Disaster Management Agency moves from establishment into implementation, it adds a new dimension to that partnership: emerging lessons on preparedness, coordination, and recovery governance that ADB can help adapt and apply across different country contexts *(Chart 4)*.

Two instruments make that partnership practical. The Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific (JFPR) supports the "software" of resilience – risk analytics, institutional strengthening, and recovery readiness that complement sovereign lending. A newly announced ADB–Japan platform adds a second pillar: the Pre-Arranged Resources for Enhancing Preparedness and Resilience (PREPARE) financing partnership facility, launched in May 2026 with Japan as its initial financing partner. As ADB's first financing partnership facility focused entirely on disaster risk finance, PREPARE reinforces the shift from reacting after disasters to building financial preparedness before they strike. That is especially relevant for Pacific economies, where disaster shocks are frequent, fiscal buffers are limited, and rapid liquidity can make a decisive difference.

From that foundation, ADB and Japan can deepen cooperation in four practical areas that directly support members. First, they can co-develop regional standards and knowledge products for resilient development and recovery, including guidance on risk-informed land use, infrastructure choices, and reconstruction governance. Second, they can help member countries strengthen end-to-end recovery management through rapid assessment workflows, recovery planning templates, and digital tools that improve coordination and transparency from the earliest stages. Third, they can scale sector-specific early warning systems by combining Japan's technologies and operational experience with ADB's country engagement, helping governments and communities anticipate shocks, protect critical assets, and reduce losses across sectors such as transport, energy, water, agriculture, and urban services. Fourth, they can connect financing to institutional readiness by aligning contingent finance, rapid-disbursement protocols, and fiduciary arrangements with agreed preparedness and recovery systems. A regional knowledge-sharing platform could cut across these areas by spreading standards, tools, and practical lessons more widely. Taken together, these strands show how national experience can be turned into shared regional capability – a theme that points directly to the way forward.

CHART 4

From domestic reform to regional public goods



Source: Asian Development Bank

Looking Ahead: Bridging National Experience into Regional Resilience

Resilience is not a choice, it's a necessity – enabled by institutions, investment, and sustained partnership. Across this agenda, ADB's Disaster Risk Management Action Plan, Japan's Disaster Management Agency, and the ADB–Japan partnership point in the same direction: stronger preparedness, prevention and mitigation in normal times, clearer coordination under stress, and faster, higher-quality recovery when disaster strikes. Together, they create an opportunity to turn national experience into regional tools, standards, and practical support for disaster-prone economies across Asia and the Pacific.

The task now is to carry that momentum into implementation and shared learning. As Japan's new agency moves through staged implementation, practical lessons on coordination, preparedness, and recovery governance can be distilled and linked to ADB's country operations and regional platforms. These lessons can help shape guidance, technical assistance, and financing approaches that respond to the needs of disaster-prone member economies. At the same time, Japan can benefit from ADB's broad-based experience across diverse country contexts, sectors, and financing instruments, drawing on what works in institutional strengthening, community-based preparedness, shock-responsive systems, and recovery planning at scale. This must also be done in the age of artificial intelligence and machine learning, where better data, forecasting, and decision support can strengthen disaster risk reduction and recovery – and where the ideas, skills, and civic energy of young people can help drive innovation and resilience from the local level upward.

For Asia and the Pacific, the prize is large – and so is the opportunity. If Japan and ADB can turn hard-earned experience into regional public goods, economies across the region will be better prepared and resilient, and equipped to reduce damage and losses and recover more quickly as hazards intensify. These public goods could include shared methods for risk assessment and recovery management, stronger standards for resilient infrastructure and essential services, multi-hazard early warning systems, and preparedness-based financing linked to institutional readiness. The priority now is to deepen collaboration where it matters most: embedding risk analytics in planning and investment; strengthening the institutions that lead response, support affected people, and manage recovery; and aligning rapid financing with systems that ensure speed, effectiveness and accountability.

Disasters cannot be eliminated altogether. But with the right systems, partnerships and preparedness, they need not reverse development – and recovery can be faster, safer, and more resilient.

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