Foreword

Natural disasters of various kinds are an ever-present risk in most countries in Asia. It is usually the poor who are at highest risk, particularly in developing countries, because the places where the poor live and work tend to be especially vulnerable when disasters strike.

In recent years, a number of megadisasters have struck the Asian region that have incurred very heavy costs in terms of human lives: the 2004 Asian tsunami (causing a loss of nearly 230,000 lives); cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008 (over 130,000 lives); the earthquake in Sichuan in the People’s Republic of China in 2008 (over 80,000 lives); and the earthquake in the Kashmir region of India and Pakistan in 2005 (over 70,000 lives). In addition, there are numerous other natural disasters which are less serious in terms of human lives lost but which have high localized economic costs and disrupt the lives of millions of people: regular widespread flooding in major cities such as Jakarta and Manila and across Bangladesh, typhoons in the People’s Republic of China and Viet Nam, and severe droughts in India and Pakistan are but some examples.

One of the consequences of the 2004 Asian tsunami was a sharply heightened awareness across developing countries in Asia of the need to give higher priority to disaster risk reduction programs across the region. Multilateral action has supported measures to give greater attention to disaster risk reduction issues at the national and local level. The Hyogo Framework for Action adopted in Kobe in early 2005 urged all countries to make major efforts to reduce the risk of disasters by 2015. There was increased awareness of the need to pay attention to pre-disaster programs as well as strengthen capacity to respond in the post-disaster period. More recently, in 2009, the United Nations issued Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate, the first biennial assessment of global disaster risk.

This book is a study in the response to the largest natural disaster in Asia in recent history. The assistance provided by communities, governments, multilateral agencies, and non-government organizations following the Asian tsunami was an extraordinary humanitarian effort. It was also a very large aid program which involved thousands of different organizations. Indeed, as a collective effort, it was one of the largest single aid efforts that the international community has ever joined in for a natural disaster affecting developing countries. In looking to improve disaster risk
reduction programs across Asia in the future, therefore, there are valuable lessons to be learnt from the experience of the regional reconstruction following the 2004 Asian tsunami.

Through the production of studies of this kind, ADBI is committed to a program of research and capacity building that supports the Asian Development Bank’s overarching goal of promoting poverty reduction in the Asia-Pacific region.

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