

# **Building academic alliances for promoting sustainability paradigm in Higher Education -Resilience building amid COVID-19 Pandemic**

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## **Introduction:**

The COVID-19 pandemic, broke out at a global scale since early 2020, has led to the largest disruption of education systems in history. According to the United Nations (2020), nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents were affected by this global health risk. Only in the early stage of the pandemic, educational institutions were forced to shut down in 186 countries at the end of April 2020, affecting approximately 74 per cent of total enrolled student population (Di Pietro *et al.*, 2020). The disruptions created by the global pandemic have reflected that higher education should have adaptation capabilities to cope with any sort of unpredictable challenges. Once again, it alarmed the need to have resilient higher institutions for education continuity and to maintain the coherence in the societal functions to promote core values of education (Bartusevičienė *et al.*, 2021). It is high time to accelerate the transition in the education system, enhancing digital infrastructure to create an attribution of opportunity. Though this dreadful time has closed physical doors to pursue knowledge, but with the paradigm shift in teaching and learning methods; multiple doors are being opened, providing opportunities for institutions to bounce back better. The joint project supported by ProSPER.Net “Disaster Education for integrating SFDRR and SDG in Asia” helped in building academic alliances for promoting sustainability paradigm in higher education to build resilience building amid COVID-19 Pandemic.

## **Reaching out the Global Communities**

In this chaotic period, the global communities are addressing the issues by exploring multiple possible ways and innovative approaches in teaching and learning practices. But the preexisted digital divide and connectivity issues faced by students in lower-income countries (UNESCO, 2020) have spasmed them and their commitment to look for a long-term holistic approach to establish education as a fundamental right of an individual. Education in the shifted paradigm needs to be established not just as a degree but also as a phenomenon of designing and setting the capabilities in an individual to uplift towards betterment. During the second International Symposium on Disaster Resilience and Sustainable Development held on 24-25, June 2021, hosted by the Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand; a discussion

about understanding of changing dimensions of disaster risk sciences in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic was held, and speakers from diverse sectors urged the need for multidisciplinary participation in science and technology to collaborate for effective education deliveries by indicating education as one of the sustainable means to reduce vulnerability to disasters by increasing knowledge, improving behavior and attitudes that can help to minimize the risk of disasters.



The changing paradigm is shaping a lot of new things in the global education domain. Therefore, by considering today's situation, it can be undoubtedly predicted that the need arises to build a collaborative network for joint education programs between institutions to address students' psychology and changing perceptions in the shifted paradigm. On a positive note, the global health crisis has once again provided Asian institutions and countries opportunities to regain their education standards and hold their students.

### **International event on disaster resilience and sustainability:**

The Education sector especially the Higher Education has been facing an unprecedented challenge due to Covid 19 pandemic. There are various issues need more attention in terms of understanding impacts, mitigation measures by the organizations, local and national governments. The ProSPER.Net consortium has been organized webinar Disaster Risk Reduction Education Series (DRR-Edu Series) on five thematic areas with good number of global audiences. The Sessions of the Webinar shared perspectives from various economy of the region and focus on the impacts, mitigation and adaptation to the Higher Education impacted by the Covid 19. The webinar was open to public and in addition to ProSPER.Net member universities, educators, policy makers, students participated in the webinar with free of charge.

## “DRR-Edu” Webinar Series

Webinar Thematic Areas	Participants Attended
“Disaster Communication for UNESCO sites – Education for DRR Integrating SFDRR and SDGs for in-Service Teacher Training”	105
“Urban rural partnership for resilience and sustainability”	98
“Continuing Eco-DRR Platform in the Era of Pandemics COVID-19”	101
“Natural and Non-Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and Their Implication on Multidisciplinary Higher Education”	97
“COVID-19 and Higher Education- Impacts, Mitigation and Adaptation”	148

The 2<sup>nd</sup> “International Symposium on Disaster Resilience and Sustainable Development” has been organized virtually by Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand, in coordination with Keio University, Japan; Miyagi University of Education, Japan; Andalas University, Indonesia; and Universities Gadjah Mada, Indonesia under ProSPER.net consortium on June 24 – 25, 2021”. The symposium had collaborated with twenty one institutional partners reaching out to 337 participants through 4 keynote sessions and 21 technical session; provided a vibrant platform for policymakers, academia, researchers, development practitioners, private sectors, and relevant stakeholders to discuss various dimensions of higher education systems in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on Disaster Risk Reduction and Sustainable Development. The International Symposium has successfully delivered the multiple dimensions of existing and future risk scenarios and concerted efforts of the scientific communities to find new adaptation methods.

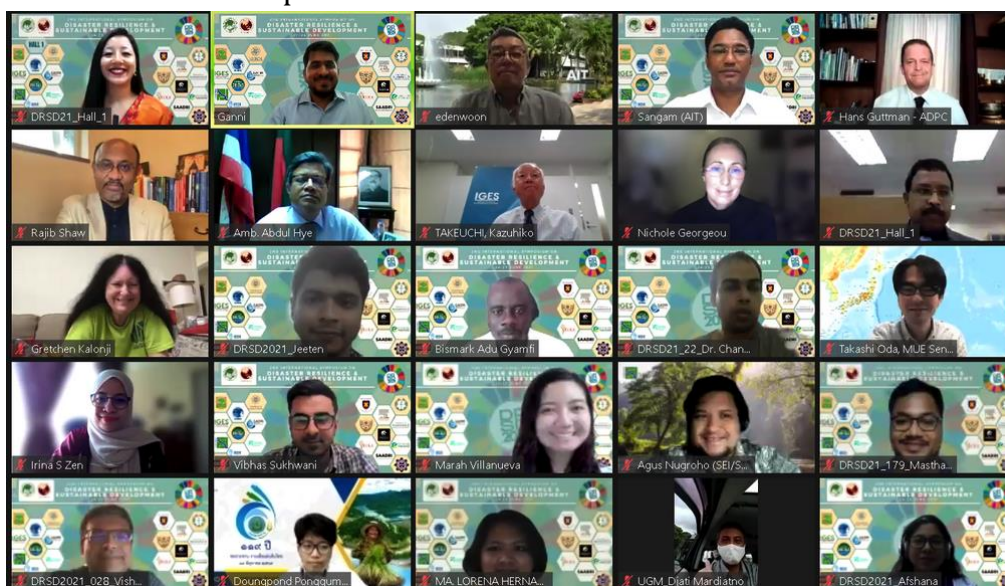


Fig: 2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on Disaster Resilience and Sustainable Development (DRSD-2021)

The second International Symposium on Disaster Resilience and Sustainable Development was officially inaugurated by Dr. Eden Woon, president of the Asian Institute of Technology, on 24 June 2021. In his inaugural remarks, president Dr. Woon highlighted the contribution of AIT in disaster resilience and sustainable development in the region and emphasized the second symposium's role in contributing to the vision of the institution. In his remarks, he said, "AIT is working on disaster resilience for quite a long time in the region and our motto 'Social Impact with Innovation' is well reflected through this multidisciplinary, international event attended by the Academicians, Scientists, Practitioners, Policy makers, Researchers from around the world." As a keynote speaker, the opening session was addressed by Her Excellency Dr. Armida Alisjahbana, the executive secretary of The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. During her address, she highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in building resilience to cascade disaster risk. She said, "To promote regional corporation to implement the health aspect of the Sendai framework, including those reflected in the Bangkok principles, ESCAP is already working with member countries to discuss solutions, to build resilience to cascading risks and we look forward to partnering with AIT to support countries in the region." Delivering a special remark in the opening session H.E Mr. Mohammed Abdul Hye, Ambassador of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the kingdom of Thailand, thanked AIT for its contribution in helping to develop the capacities of many government officers of Bangladesh. He said, "AIT and its programs have supported developing the capacity of large numbers of government officers of Bangladesh. The chair of the organizing committee of the symposium, Dr. Indrajit Pal, said, "The symposium is successful in becoming a virtual melting pot of researchers, development agencies and practitioners to exchange knowledge and innovative ideas as well as a platform to explore collaborative research opportunities". Four Global Challenges Addressed in the symposium (1) The Global Risk Agendas and Uncovering Resilience Strategies, (2) Dwellers and Deltas in Asian- Mega Deltas: their contribution to locally-led adaptation and resilience, (3) Technological and Social Innovation Pathways for Safer and Inclusive Societies, (4) The Pandemic Challenges and Road to Recovery of Education System.



## **Institutional Mitigation and Resilience**

One of Asia's established higher academic institutions, the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand launched a new hybrid mode of instruction in August 2020 to continue the higher education predicting the uncertainty of the global pandemic. The hybrid approach adopted by AIT ensured students in a physical classroom on campus receive live classes, while students in their home countries were able to participate in the class in real-time online. The availability of enough resources (both technical and human) made the transition seamless for AIT. A large number of higher education institutions adopted this hybrid approach to cope with this dynamic situation. But, lack of capacity, connectivity, and other reasons; many academic institutions in Asia are still struggling to adopt the new pedagogy to move on as per the demand of shifted paradigm. Each day, information and communication technologies increasingly play an essential role in the changing paradigm of education pedagogy (Yao et al., 2021). During this critical moment of institutional difficulties, the key challenges are shifting institutional policies and practices, dwindling resources, and dilemmas. Further, the effort to ensure that students, instructors, and staff have equal access to and allocate resources is becoming a rock mountain for institutions (Kruse et al., 2020). Additionally, the issues about accessibility, affordability, and sustainability remain unanswered as per the context, capabilities, and situation of educational institutions. In such a context, there is a need for collaboration and peer support between institutions to uplift each other by sharing and expanding their expertise and possible support to face and defend the situation ensuring the proper transaction of all higher educational institutions toward the journey of this unexpected paradigm shift.

### **Conclusion:**

Every crisis gives opportunity, the education system divided by language and geography has once again got an opportunity to come together in a similar path to bounce back better. Internalizing the essence of collaboration for better and sustainable paradigm change, neglecting economic factors as a pillar to education. It's high time for all to collaborate on a regional and global level to re-design the education system and co-develop a similar approach. The joint collaboration between the higher educational institutions with external collaborators can support retrofitting the educational pillars of the developing countries to profound changes as aimed in the global commitment SDGs and SFDRR.

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