Organized on the theme “Sending the Message of Build Back Better”, the “IRP’s International Recovery Forum 2015” was held on January 16, 2015 at Hotel Okura in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan with 179 participants from 36 countries. The IRP Forum was an occasion to commemorate the 20th Year of the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake as well as the 10th Year of Establishment of the International Recovery Platform (IRP). In this regard, the IRP Forum highlighted lessons from the 1995 earthquake which remain relevant to nations and communities today as well as the role of IRP as a mechanism for disseminating knowledge and capacity building on recovery.

**Background**

The message of “Build Back Better” was very much emphasized at the Forum. Mr. Jo Scheuer, Chair of IRP Steering Committee and Director of UNDP/BPPS, noted that recovery has been a key component in the discussion in Geneva deliberating on the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. He acknowledged the efforts of various sectors, especially the members and partners of IRP for supporting the recovery advocacy. Mr. Ryosei Akazawa, State Minister of the Cabinet Office Government of Japan, said that “Without incorporating disaster risk reduction and build back better in the national development, we will never put an end to the vicious cycle of poverty and disaster”. Additionally, Mr. Toshizo Ido, Governor of Hyogo Prefectural Government, stated that “There are many lessons on build back better from the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake. These include, strengthening disaster-resilient infrastructures, reinforcing local capacity, adopting a people-centered approach to resilience, and having strong public-private partnerships because these facilitate accurate and actionable risk information”.

**Opening**

One notable effort in advocating “Build Back Better” is the development of recovery plans and frameworks to facilitate efficient and effective organization of recovery. In view of this, the first session of the Forum was aimed at sharing initiatives...
The sharing highlighted the crucial steps in national and regional engagements in recovery planning and frameworks. Ms. Elizabeth A. Zimmerman of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA of USA) discussed the process of forming the National Recovery Framework of the United States of America, and how the framework played an important role in organizing recovery after major disasters, including Hurricane Sandy.

Dr. Akram H. Chowdhury of the Institute of Strategic Recovery Studies for Disaster Resilience and Research (ISRSDRR) of Bangladesh presented the critical steps and challenges in establishing a National Recovery Platform to create the foundation for resilient recovery and paving the way for sustainable development.

On behalf of an IGO, Ms. Mayra Valle Torres of the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC) outlined the steps in facilitating and assisting member countries in developing their respective National Recovery Frameworks.

**Economic Impact of Recovery**

Among many considerations, recovery of livelihoods which is incorporated in pre-disaster recovery plan and immediately tackled from day one of disaster can effectively contribute in restoring economic activities impacted by disaster. Against this backdrop, the second session discussed how a ‘balanced allocation’ of resources in a recovery programs can help improve the overall impact of recovery, and promote social inclusion (including informal sector and persons with disabilities) and gender equity. Dr. Yoshiaki Kawata, Director and Professor at Research Center for Safety Science at Kansai University and Executive Director of Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institute in Japan discussed the macro perspective of economic impact of recovery highlighting the economic restoration after disasters in developing countries. Professor Kawata argued that “the role of micro and small scale enterprises (MSMEs) is very important because its operation does not need much fund. Additionally, MSMEs have cooperative shipments and storehouses that are very convenient”. Dr. Naresh Singh, who is former principal adviser at UNDP on Poverty and Sustainable Livelihoods, tackled the community and household perspective of economic impact of recovery.

**Greater Actions for Recovery**

Recognizing the need for greater action on the recovery component of the global frameworks such as the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the panel discussion explored various strategies and actions to plan, implement, and monitor activities on recovery by sharing their respective initiatives. Mr. Robin D. Willison, an independent technical expert on DRR, shared the practitioner’s perspective on what strategies are culturally appropriate for recovery programs. Mr. Mihir R. Bhatt, Managing Trustee of All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) outlined the efforts that can likely result in “closer to zero poverty, closer to prosperity, and closer to zero risk”. Dr. Mayumi Kako of the World Health Organization Kobe Center (WK) shared the actions in implementing the recovery of health systems after disaster. She highlighted the importance of “continuation of health care” that can be effectively facilitated through collaboration. Finally, Mr. Orliber R. Paule of the Bonifacio Estate Services Corporation (BESC) in the Philippines presented how the Bonifacio Global City (BGC) came up with the idea to initiate a pre-disaster recovery plan. He discussed the steps undertaken during the planning process that engaged various stakeholders.

**Messages from Tohoku**

In view of the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), 14-18 March 2015 in Sendai, partners from Tohoku region, oriented the participants of the recovery developments, the application of lessons learned from Hyogo, and the overview of activities – specifically those that promote the recovery agenda. Ms. Kumi Onuma spoke on behalf of the Tohoku Revival Reinforcement Office of the Development Bank of Japan, Inc. (DBJ) Tohoku Branch. Mr. Daisuke Otsuka spoke on behalf of the Earthquake Disaster Restoration Policy Planning Department of the Miyagi Prefectural Government. Finally, Prof. Yuichi Ono spoke on behalf of the International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS) of Tohoku University.

**Closing**

At the closing, Mr. Kaoru Saito, Co-chair of IRP and Director of Disaster Preparedness and International Cooperation Division of the Cabinet Office Government of Japan, mentioned he participated in the intergovernmental negotiation for Post-2015 Framework on DRR. He assured the audience that the Government of Japan has been pushing for the concept of “Build Back Better” to be the center of the negotiation. The good news was that the government’s effort has been recognized and the build back better concept will be one of the key discussions at the WCDRR. For more information, please contact with Mr. Potutan at gerald@recoveryplatform.org.