



# Building Professionalism in Disaster Management: Standardizing and Certifying Disaster Management Expertise in ASEAN

## SUMMARY

This flagship case of the ASCEND initiative is a government-led initiative on a regional standardization/certification process for WASH in Emergencies (WiE) related trainings amongst member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with support from the Development Partners including UNICEF. The initiative is an effort to ensure a universally accepted competency standards, certification and a mechanism to facilitate the movement and mobilization of qualified WiE experts across ASEAN countries. It also builds on established good practice in certification and ensures processes that strengthen high-level regional capacity on disaster preparedness and response. The ultimate aim of the initiative is to expand and improve its application for WASH and other sectors across all ASEAN member states.

## Introduction

### Indonesia's emergency context

Indonesia is very prone to natural hazards, being located on the volatile seismic strip, the Pacific Ring of Fire, an area with high levels of volcanic activity. Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis and consequent floods are therefore constant threats to the country in addition to extreme wet or dry seasons resulting from El Niño and La Niña climate cycles, which lead to floods and landslides. When these strike areas of high population density (Indonesia has a large population of 266.79 million and average

population density of 140.08/km<sup>2</sup>)<sup>1</sup>, disaster prevails. Indonesia also faces a heavy burden of man-made disasters, namely forest fires from traditional slash and burn culture, pressure on land from palm oil and other cash crop cultivation and ongoing conflict resulting from historical transmigration policies and between the many ethnic groups scattered across the country's numerous and widespread islands.

Each year, earthquakes measuring greater than magnitude 6 occur in Indonesia. In 2018, there have been nine significant earthquakes. The Lombok and Sulawesi earthquakes and resulting tsunamis of August and September 2018 respectively gained significant, global attention,

<sup>1</sup> Source:  
<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/indonesia-population>

with over 1,763 people dead and more than 5,000 reported missing. Figure 1 shows the epicentre of the Sulawesi earthquake and the location of the Indonesian archipelago within Southeast Asia.

**Figure 1: Epicentre of the Sulawesi earthquake<sup>2</sup>**



Importantly, the response to these emergencies from the Government of Indonesia (GoI) was considered inadequate, with a failure to learn lessons from previous experience, inadequate budgets, lack of preparedness and disaster mitigation plans, lack of know-how and delayed rescue efforts due to the dependence on military support.

## Description of Intervention

The ASEAN Standardization and Certification of Expertise in Disaster Management (ASCEND) initiative started in 2017, led by Indonesia as agreed among the member states of ASEAN. It is a collaborative effort with direct support from the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC), UN OCHA, and UNICEF (as task force chairs), as well as other humanitarian agencies based in Indonesia.

The initiative aims to build expertise in the Disaster Management Sector within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The GoI, and specifically the Indonesian Professional Certification Agency on Disaster

<sup>2</sup> Source : <https://phys.org/news/2018-09-earthquake-jolts-central-sulawesi-indonesia.html>

Management (PCA DM) has been mandated by the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) to develop professional competency standards and certification mechanism in disaster management. Four UN agencies (UN OCHA, UNICEF, UNDP and IOM) collaborated with the IFRC and the GoI, as all these agencies have a presence in each of the 10 ASEAN member states. In addition, other ASEAN member states are leading aligned processes such as establishing 'associations of experience' (Singapore) and building capacity of training institutes (Viet Nam).

ASCEND has been designed in order to promote employment and enable the mobility of skilled human resources of disaster management professionals within each member state and to recognize the skills and qualifications of professionals within different ASEAN countries. Thus, qualified disaster management (DM) professionals, certified under this initiative can be recruited by all ASEAN countries. Under the ASEAN Ministers Regulation, personnel must be certified to be deployed to work outside their own country, thus, capacity gaps can be quickly filled.

## Inspiration for developing the ASCEND initiative

The recruitment of skilled people to respond to disasters is currently a significant challenge among ASEAN countries due to the high demand for skilled and knowledgeable people during emergencies. A database of competent people and resources has been compiled in each member state. Once certified, each new trainee is added to the database, to speed up mobilisation when international assistance is required. During domestic emergencies, such as the Lombok earthquake, Indonesia was able to draw on the database to locate national experts. Various

commitments and frameworks adhered to by

#### BOX 1.

### OPPORTUNITIES...for what? For whom?

- Development of a regional roster/database of experts.
- Easier deployment of disaster management professionals within ASEAN member states.
- Faster identification and recruitment process of competent disaster management professionals, especially during large-scale emergencies.
- Systematically improving capacity building mechanisms and contents of all 10 ASEAN Member states (AMS) through common standards and certification system.
- Foster sharing of knowledge on standardization, certification, and capacity building methods across AMS.

ASEAN member states contribute to providing rationale for the ASCEND initiative.

These are:

- ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM)
- ASEAN Community Vision 2025
- ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025
- ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER)
- One ASEAN One Response Declaration
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

The ASEAN declaration, 'One ASEAN One Response: Faster and collective response to disasters in and outside the region,' was signed in September 2016. This agreement between member states, sets out the mutual commitment to help neighboring countries during emergencies, in order to enhance the speed and scale of response and to demonstrate solidarity. The declaration demonstrates ASEAN resolve for

strengthening capacity to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

In addition, ASEAN members have committed to delivering the ASEAN Leadership for Excellence and Innovation in Disaster Management, through the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2016-2020. The development of 'professional competency standards and certification mechanism in disaster management sector' by the Government of Indonesia is detailed as part of this commitment.

Table 1 shows the key organizations involved in the initiative and the respective roles and responsibilities.

#### Challenges and their solutions

##### • **Frequent turnover of government staff:**

The rapid and collaborative processes that have taken place at country level between governments and nongovernment organizations have been positive. However, the frequent turnover of government staff has caused problems for keeping the initiative moving. One example was the impact of the potential shift in priorities resulting from the change of Indonesian government leadership, on the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) and its counterpart, the Professional Certification Agency for Disaster Management (PCA DM).

This has been addressed through assigning the country focal points who will actively promote and advocate for ASCEND principles and standards at country-wide level. These focal points also champion the ASCEND initiative, raising awareness to encourage widespread adoption. The GoI aims to promote ASCEND to other member states, UNICEF and Lembaga Sertifikasi Profesi Penanggulangan Bencana (LSP-PB)/ Professional Certification Agency for Disaster Management are conducting pilot

trainings to develop the capacity of these ASCEND focal points.

- **Lack of funding:**

The initial setup of the secretariat, conducting pilot courses and establishment of the toolbox was limited by access to funding. In principle, people are not willing to pay for their own training since most emergency response and humanitarian work is currently done on a voluntary basis. Task forces have the responsibility to fund themselves; however, LSP-PB has not yet received any funding even though requests have been made to donor countries and the EU.

This has meant that post and pre-standards have not yet been developed. LSP-PB has been collaborating with other organizations to get funding and encourage funding from member states.

**Table 1: Key organizations and their role in the ASCEND initiative**

Organization	Role
ASEAN Secretariat	This is the secretariat for all ASEAN member states. They are the coordinating centre for humanitarian assistance on disaster management. They have had a critical role in making sure all documents are properly endorsed by all member states.
AHA Centre	The AHA Centre (the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Centre on Disaster Management) is an ASEAN organization funded by the member states and established in 2011. Their primary role is to coordinate responses to disasters. They are based in Jakarta and are acting as the ASCEND secretariat. They share information from the government with other member states and manage the database.
LSP-PB	Lembaga Sertifikasi Profesi Penanggulangan Bencana (LSP-PB) is the Indonesian Professional Certification Agency on Disaster Management Agency who are responsible for developing the competency standards. They initiated its developing process and got them endorsed, and then requested GoI to further develop them.
UNICEF Indonesia	They are the chair of the WASH task force team and have been working with LSP-PB to help develop the ASCEND framework for WASH and competency standards.

## Outcomes

A key achievement has been the speed at which the ASCEND initiative has progressed. A similar certification process for the ASEAN tourism industry took ten years. The ASCEND initiative has been able to learn from their experience. Figure 2 shows ASCEND's 2016-2019 roadmap. Activities from 2016, 2017 and 2018 have been achieved.

The LSP-PB in Indonesia presented their certificate for competencies for disaster management to ASEAN member states at a meeting held in April 2016, which drew heavily on Indonesia's own pre-existing standards that can be upscaled to the wider ASEAN region. LSP-PB has since been created to oversee this, and Indonesia declared the leading role for disaster management in member states.

The ASCEND framework was endorsed at the ACDM meeting in October 2017, followed by the endorsement of competency standards four months later, comprising both core and technical competencies in the five key sectors: rapid assessment, Emergency Operations Centres, shelter, logistics and WASH. Currently, a training manual, handbook and assessment manual are

completed as standard documents to inform about minimum standards for training and the certification process.

WASH standards define key four positions: manager, coordinator, public health in emergencies officer and public hygiene promotion officer.

**Figure 2: Roadmap of ASCEND 2016-2019**



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## Lessons Learned

There has been substantial buy-in and support for the ASCEND initiative from a variety of stakeholders due to the various benefits it is providing (see Box 2). The ASCEND initiative has been completed and uploaded on LSP-PB website [here](#) which includes the following five areas.

- Rapid assessment
- Humanitarian logistics
- Shelter management
- Emergency operations centres
- Water, sanitation and hygiene

Each will have agreed training and competency standards that will be recognized by all member states. The idea is that these are adaptable and can be adjusted or added to as required. For example, incorporating standards around menstrual hygiene management (MHM) into the WASH competency framework and for setting up transitional shelter into the shelter competency framework. In this way, the competency standards in frameworks are built-up to ensure they are relevant and appropriate for different agencies and changing contexts. The process standardizes the roles and competencies of each profession and occupation, for example, specifying the requirements for different levels such as WASH Manager, WASH Coordinator, and WASH Officer.

Figure 3 is an extract from the ASCEND competencies.

Three levels of certification have been identified: basic disaster management training, specialized skills (such as logistics and rapid assessment) and team leader/coordinator. Certification is currently voluntary.

### BOX 2.

## BENEFITS OF THE ASCEND INITIATIVE

For **disaster management professionals**, ASCEND has:

- facilitated movement of personnel across ASEAN nations;
- improved the quality of human resources;
- promoted the recognition of essential skills needed for disaster preparedness;
- encouraged conformity of competency-based training and education;
- enhanced overall the quality of services in the disaster management sector.

For **education and training providers**, ASCEND has:

- provided a clear set of standards for development of training programs;
- Developed a competency-based training and assessment system for preparing trainees to work in the sector;
- Provided a range of job-based disaster management qualifications;
- Offered the opportunity to become a preferred education and training provider.

For **country governments and ASEAN**, ASCEND provides:

- stronger coordination;
- greater resources;
- faster response;
- access to competent and skilled personnel.

**Figure 3: Example of ASCEND competencies for assessment<sup>3</sup>**

NO	UNIT NUMBER	UNIT TITLE			
1	ADM.COR.001.1	Identify core humanitarian standards, principles and values	24	ADM.TEC.020.1	Manage data and information during humanitarian response
2	ADM.COR.002.1	Identify ASEAN humanitarian procedures and mechanisms	25	ADM.TEC.021.1	Conduct in-depth analysis on WASH in humanitarian settings
3	ADM.COR.003.1	Manage projects in humanitarian response	26	ADM.TEC.022.1	Deliver strategic direction on WASH
4	ADM.COR.004.1	Supervise projects in a pressured and changing environment	27	ADM.TEC.023.1	Develop strategy to link relief, recovery, and development
5	ADM.TEC.001.1	Lead coordinated assessment	28	ADM.TEC.024.1	Analyse the developing humanitarian situation related to WASH
6	ADM.TEC.002.1	Lead coordinated assessment preparedness	29	ADM.TEC.025.1	Supervise the implementation of WASH program
7	ADM.TEC.003.1	Conduct comprehensive analysis	30	ADM.TEC.026.1	Provide technical guidance to partners and stakeholders
8	ADM.TEC.004.1	Identify various types of assessment	31	ADM.TEC.027.1	Provide technical guidance on core public health promotion and behavior change concepts
9	ADM.TEC.005.1	Conduct rapid assessment	32	ADM.TEC.028.1	Provide technical guidance on core public health engineering concepts
10	ADM.TEC.006.1	Design strategic logistics plan	33	ADM.TEC.029.1	Capable to work with the community, especially with the most at-risk groups
11	ADM.TEC.007.1	Design humanitarian supply chain	34	ADM.TEC.030.1	Monitor an ongoing WASH program
12	ADM.TEC.008.1	Manage logistics operations	35	ADM.TEC.031.1	Analyse shelter and settlement needs
13	ADM.TEC.009.1	Implement humanitarian supply chain management	36	ADM.TEC.032.1	Monitor shelter programme to ensure technical quality, timeliness and appropriateness
14	ADM.TEC.010.1	Operationalize strategic logistics plan	37	ADM.TEC.033.1	Integrate shelter plans and activities with all relevant stakeholders
15	ADM.TEC.011.1	Implement logistics operations	38	ADM.TEC.034.1	Coordinate shelter team and shelter programme activities
16	ADM.TEC.012.1	Apply knowledge on humanitarian logistics operations	39	ADM.TEC.035.1	Provide technical guidance to the shelter programme team
17	ADM.TEC.013.1	Carry out field logistics operation	40	ADM.TEC.036.1	Coordinate shelter programme activities and planning with all relevant stakeholders
18	ADM.TEC.014.1	Carry out logistics capacity assessment	41	ADM.TEC.037.1	Implement shelter and settlement assistance programmes
19	ADM.TEC.015.1	Develop information management strategy	42	ADM.TEC.038.1	Undertake monitoring to ensure the shelter programme continues to best address needs
20	ADM.TEC.016.1	Analyze information management	43	ADM.TEC.039.1	Communicate effectively with others to ensure the timely provision of shelter assistance
21	ADM.TEC.017.1	Operationalize information management strategy for emergency field operation			
22	ADM.TEC.018.1	Identify information management tools and services			
23	ADM.TEC.019.1	classifying credible and accurate source of information			

## Next Steps

ASCEND has been considered ‘a steep learning process for all’ which has captured the attention of key audiences including donors. The LSP-PB are also now preparing a WASH toolbox and training curricula, the draft of which is completed and is now looking to certify participants who have been trained. Around 600 people have been certified in Indonesia across 5 sectors already but using the Indonesian standards. They will also look at a process of assessing the assessors. They are now trying to involve others for example UNICEF country offices or UN agencies to engage their own countries on how to improve ASCEND. Other activities to be conducted are as follows:

- Piloting the application of the ASCEND toolbox in the five sectors that have already been developed. This includes working with training institutes to align the training curriculum with ASCEND standards and provide certification.

- Promoting and embedding the ASCEND initiative. This includes finalizing the ASCEND toolbox, secretariat, and the mechanisms for key stakeholders at the country level in the ten ASEAN member states.
- Strengthening the ASCEND Secretariat, which will be hosted by the AHA Centre, through provision of facilities as well as training for human resources in the unit.
- Expanding to other sectors considered a priority in the ASEAN region. For example, at a recent regional workshop, the AHA Centre described plans to improve the ASEAN Emergency Response & Assessment Team (ERAT) with specialized skills, such as civil military coordination and early recovery. The current focus is still on emergency response and should also extend to include pre- and post-disaster operations and resilience mainstreaming.

<sup>3</sup> Source: ASEAN (2017) ASEAN Standardization and certification for experts in disaster management (ASCEND). Competency Standards.

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## About the Authors

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## About the Series

UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) country teams work inclusively with governments, civil society partners and donors, to improve WASH services for children and adolescents, and the families and caregivers who support them. UNICEF works in over 100 countries worldwide to improve water and sanitation services, as well as basic hygiene practices. This publication is part of the UNICEF WASH Learning Series, designed to contribute to knowledge of good practice across UNICEF's WASH programming. In this series:

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