E-Governance: A powerful tool to combat, mitigate and sustainably manage disaster risks

E-governance plays a critical role in building inclusive, resilient societies both before and in response to disasters, according to a United Nations report issued this week.

The 2018 E-Government Survey highlights the complex challenges and varied opportunities of deploying e-government services.

Contributing to the global report, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) highlights that the use of information and communications technology during all phases of disaster risk management presents "substantial opportunities to reduce disaster risks, enhance coping capabilities, and provide inclusive preparedness and response."

Several regional case studies illustrate that it is critical to integrate emerging innovations in digital technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI), social media, space applications and geospatial information for e-resilience efforts.

To ensure undisrupted services and information to citizens before, during and after disasters, the report also reiterates the urgency of embracing e-resilience in e-government initiatives.

The findings and recommendations come against the backdrop of several recent disasters, such as landslides in Japan, an unpresented heatwave in Pakistan and monsoon flash floods in Bangladesh and India, all of which serve to remind us how disaster risk is outpacing disaster resilience in Asia-Pacific.

As the Asia-Pacific region is among the world's most disaster-impacted, governments have stepped-up disaster risk reduction efforts through digital connectivity and innovations.

"Digitally-driven emerging frontier technologies, such as AI, are expected to offer unparalleled levels of data availability, insights and coping capabilities to support countries address this formidable challenge and advance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), said ESCAP.

Broadband connectivity for all remains critical to the success of e-governance.

Towards this end, ESCAP continues to support the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative to seamlessly increase the regional availability, affordability and resilience of broadband networks as a platform for e-resilience.

Its implementation will be reviewed and discussed by countries and partners in Bangkok, from 27-28 August, followed by an ESCAP intergovernmental meeting of the Second Session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation on 29 to 31 August 2018.