

Implementing the Hyogo Framework Priorities of Action in Bhutan

Background

Bhutan has been very fortunate not to have experienced major disasters resulting in enormous loss of lives and property. However, due to our location in one of the most seismically active regions in the world, impending threats from potentially dangerous glacial lake outburst floods, recurrent hazards and increasing pressure on the environment from population growth, urbanization and economic development coupled with the effects of climate change and global warming, disaster risk reduction concerns is receiving increasing priority and the government is in the process of developing a comprehensive disaster risk reduction and management strategy for the country.

The National Disaster Risk Management Framework (NDRMF), endorsed by the Cabinet in 2006 is based on the principles of the Hyogo Framework of Action and has 8 components (Institutional, legislative, policy frameworks; hazard, vulnerability and risk assessment; Early warning systems; Disaster preparedness plans; Mitigation and integration of DRR in development plans; Public awareness and education, Capacity development and Communication and transportation) contributing to the achievement of the 5 Priorities of Action.

1. Making Disaster Risk Reduction a priority - Ensuring DRR is a national and local priority with strong institutional basis for implementation

Disaster management is a multi-sectoral process and effective mainstreaming can be achieved only if all stakeholders are involved in the process at all levels. Following this principle, the NDRMF recognizes respective roles of different organizations in disaster risk management and the need to establish linkages, decentralized authorities and coordination mechanisms at all levels.

At the national levels, the National Committee for Disaster Management level, the highest executive body, has members from all stakeholders, including the armed forces and the monk body. This ensures coordination of disaster management activities at the highest level.

The NDRMF and the draft National Disaster Management Bill (NDMB) also requires the setting up of disaster management authorities in all the 20 districts and 201 blocks in the country. These committees would have representation from the local government authority, local administration, armed forces, educational and other sectoral institution, from the monk body and from the local NGOs.

To facilitate mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction concerns into the national planning and budgeting process the National Disaster Management Planning Guidelines was developed in collaboration with all stakeholders, following which, almost all sectors have developed their own disaster management plans, which are in the process of being incorporated in the 10th Five year Plan of the country. Also, recognizing the high vulnerability of schools and school children a School Disaster Management Planning

Guide was developed and introduced during the Annual Education Conference in January 2008. Almost all schools in the country have their own disaster management plans.

2. Know the Risks and Take Action – Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks – Enhance early Warning

Focal disaster management agencies need to realize that there is a vast reservoir of information and data in the other sectoral/technical line agencies. At present the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs is in the process of collecting and compiling and collating information on disaster occurrence, impacts, losses and mitigation actions taken for the purpose of informing decision makers. Considering the rugged mountainous terrain and isolated pockets of rural settlements in Bhutan, there is a need to build up and enhance early warning systems. The government is in the process of setting up a disaster communications network through the establishment of the districts National Emergency Operation center and emergency centers in vulnerable districts.

In the Bhutanese context, the development of early warning systems in valleys vulnerable to Glacial Lake Outburst Flows (GLOF) is of outmost importance. Bhutan has 25 potentially dangerous glacial lakes, the overflow of which would cause extensive damage down stream. Here again the key to setting up an effective early warning system is through the development of clear partnership between all stakeholders, especially the community as it is often the “last mile communication” that is crucial to the success of an early warning system.

3. Build Understanding and Awareness – Use knowledge, innovation, and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.

The NDRMF recognizes the need to mainstream education and awareness on disaster risk reduction and awareness in school and college curricula. The development of their school disaster management plans, has to an extent raised awareness among the school management on the need to be aware of disaster risks and their roles and responsibilities in raising awareness, prevention, mitigation and responding to disasters or emergencies.



So far awareness workshops have been conducted in 7 Districts and it has been planned to conduct mock drill and awareness campaign in all districts. The Home Ministry, in coordination with various sectors has drawn up an Awareness and Education Strategy that outlines key messages, key targets and the type of media to be used for raising awareness on different hazards.

4. Reduce Risk - Reduce the underlying risk factors

The National Environment Commission (NEC) is the main custodian of the Environment Assessment Act and ensures that the environment is conserved through the implementation of the act. Along with the Environment Assessment Act, the NEC has formulated the Environment Code of Practices and sectoral guidelines on environment

covering a broad spectrum of developmental activities like roads and highways, hydropower plants and transmission lines and other infrastructure constructions.

The National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) document formulated by the NEC in coordination with all relevant stakeholders identified and prioritized a number of climate change adaptation measures, among which the development of a disaster management strategy was accorded highest priority. Developing a disaster impact assessment guidelines and integrating it with the current Environment Impact Assessment process is a priority for the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs.



The Standards and Quality Control Authority (SQCA) is involved in the development and continuous updating of national standards and building codes. Together with the SQCA, the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs is implementing the Earthquake Risk Reduction and Recovery Preparedness (ERR&RP) project, which would include a series of earthquake education campaign, review of the national standards and building codes, preparedness planning for pilot districts and retrofitting of few model life line buildings.

5. Be Prepared and Ready to Act - Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

There is need to build capacities at all levels – human, material, financial and in terms of legislation/policies and the enabling environment and at implementation level. To further operationalize the NDRMF, a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) mission, conducted a response preparedness assessment of the country from 29 March to 12 April, 2008. The mission has made a total of 39 recommendations for instituting an effective disaster preparedness and response system in the country.



The first responders are the people themselves who are “in the eye of the storm”, therefore it is crucial to build up preparedness and response capability at the community level. Realizing this, the NDRMF recognizes the importance of community based disaster management and planning. As per the national framework, there is need to institute disaster management committees in all the districts and blocks and strengthen focal agencies at the national level, to enable them to develop their own disaster management and response plans.