

Gaps in Existing Plans

The National Action Plan for Disaster Management 1996 gives details of the plan at the national level. The Plan is executed in all 75 districts of the country through DDRC and other government agencies at the centre. The districts, therefore, need long-term natural disaster preparedness plans for implementation. However, plans have been made for five pilot districts only (Chitwan, Makwanpur, Sindhuli, Syangja, and Tanahun) with the support of the United Nations Office for Cooperation in Humanitarian Affairs (UN/OCHA). Of these five plans, only the district plan for Chitwan has been formally launched by the government. The plans for the other four pilot districts are yet to be launched. The remaining seventy districts have yet to prepare their district plans for natural disaster preparedness.

In the absence of proper plans, the DDRCs are presently engaged only in post-disaster activities when disasters occur. The annual budget received from MoHA is expended only on post-disaster activities as and when they occur.

Hazard maps of the most susceptible areas have not yet been prepared for all categories of natural disaster such as floods, landslides, mass wasting areas, and areas vulnerable to frequent earthquakes. In the absence of such maps, plans and programmes cannot be implemented to mitigate natural hazards. As a result, valuable lives and property are being lost every year.

Shortcomings in the implementation of disaster preparedness plans

Lack of human and financial resources are the main reasons for not implementing some of the key activities in the National Action Plan formulated on the occasion of IDNDR. This plan was a complete document on the mitigation of natural disasters and included preparedness, response, and rehabilitation activities. Ambitious plans have not been matched with the resources available.

Political instability and insurgency have meant that researchers have failed to carry out field survey work and construction activities in disaster-prone areas of the country. Community participation and stakeholders' consultations at local level could not be held and people were unable to come forward with their specific demands.

Efficient implementation of preparedness activities has often been hampered by lack of coordination between and within government and non-government organisations. The concentration of disaster preparedness has, in general, been on response and recovery and assistance to communities struck by disasters on an ad hoc basis and, in many cases, to an insufficient degree. Lack of coordination has, in cases, led to duplication of work by different organisations.

The priority is still mainly on post-disaster activities, i.e., rescue and relief work, and this is a common mindset of people and organisations working in this field. Because of this mindset, preparedness activities have not received sufficient priority in disaster management activities.

Inadequate policies and a weak legal environment are the biggest impediment to disaster management. Development of an effective institutional mechanism has always been promoted, but without success. Absence of an organisation at the highest level that could provide intellectual and administrative leadership is a serious gap in Nepal. Improving leadership and creating a National Disaster Risk Management Council or a National Emergency Operations Centre, backed by appropriate legislative instruments, are urgently needed.

Although the government has given a mandate to deal with water-induced disasters to the DWIDP, it is working with limited manpower and only seven divisional and five sub-divisional offices throughout the country. The present institutional capacity at DWIDP is not sufficient to manage water-induced disasters throughout the country.