

**Regional Workshop on
Social Inclusion in Disaster Risk
Reduction in the Himalayan
Region — Sharing Knowledge
and Bridging Gaps**

Kathmandu, 9-11 May 2007

Regional Workshop on Social Inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction in the Himalayan Region – Sharing Knowledge and Bridging Gaps

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Day 1, Wednesday 9 May: Planning for Disaster Preparedness in the Region: Are Vulnerable Groups Reflected?

Session 1: Opening Remarks

Madhav Karki, Acting Director General, ICIMOD, delivered the welcome address. The August 2006 ICIMOD regional workshop on disaster preparedness planning called for bridging the gap between local and conventional knowledge through sharing for disaster risk reduction. The rich source of traditional and indigenous knowledge among local communities can contribute to the crucial issue of social inclusion in disaster risk reduction.

Pratap Kumar Pathak, Joint Secretary, Disaster Management Section, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal, highlighted the need for a people-centred government agenda to ensure an inclusive approach to disaster preparedness. This requires capacity-building and involvement of policy-makers in designing disaster management policies. The concern for human security can be addressed through synergetic and coordinated efforts within the national and community frameworks. It will ensure the incorporation of best practices in inclusive intervention, especially in reference to gender and vulnerability.

Mohsena Ferdousi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Bangladesh, described the transition of Bangladesh from a conventional response, relief and rehabilitation approach to a holistic model. In order to strengthen pre-disaster processes, the government is incorporating hazard identification and mitigation with an emphasis on community preparedness. Steps are also being taken to ensure that recovery planning addresses vulnerability issues. Regional cooperation, especially in the area of early warning systems, is of prime interest to Bangladesh.

P.G. Chakrabarti, Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), India, highlighted the challenges to social inclusion in DRR especially regarding social discrimination against women, the aged, children, the disabled, and Dalits. The recent major disasters in the region have accentuated these discriminations which are deeply rooted in the socioeconomic system. It is crucial to distinguish between risks that can be mitigated through preparedness and risks that people have to learn to live with.

Nawazish Ali Khan, Deputy Director, Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority, Pakistan, shared the experiences of Pakistan from the 2005 earthquake, highlighting how the challenges have also led to new opportunities. One such outcome is the establishment of the Natural Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). The issue of vulnerable groups is being addressed through consideration of gender and spatial equity and the promotion of behavioural change. The DRR agenda includes improved urban centres and hazard-sensitive reconstruction. Emphasis is also being given to transparency and decentralised local bodies that deal with the grievances of community members.

Mats Eriksson, Senior Water Specialist, ICIMOD, presented the workshop objectives in line with the conclusions from the previous workshop on ‘Disaster Preparedness Plans for Natural Hazards’ and the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). The workshop is a small step among many steps towards building a more disaster- resilient society. The three objectives were as follows.

- To provide a platform for interaction and sharing knowledge among key practitioners in disaster preparedness (DP) and management; especially between institutions working at the community and central levels
- To explore opportunities to include local knowledge, innovations, and practices in the disaster management process
- To examine how gender, equity, and vulnerability issues can be reflected better and incorporated in the work of disaster management

Book Launch

Pratap Kumar Pathak launched three ICIMOD publications on Knowledge for Disaster Preparedness.

1. ‘Gender Matters – Lessons for Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia’ by Manjari Mehta
2. ‘The Snake and the River Don’t Run Straight – Local Knowledge on Disaster Preparedness in the Eastern Terai of Nepal’ by Julie Dekens
3. ‘Herders of Chitral the Lost Messengers? Local Knowledge on Disaster Preparedness in Chitral District, Pakistan’ by Julie Dekens

The books can be downloaded from the website: www.disasterpreparedness.icimod.org

Keynote speeches

Kenneth Hewitt, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, and Cold Regions Research Centre, Wilfred Laurier University, Canada in his presentation ‘**From Vulnerability to Disaster Prevention**’ presented a case study on landslide hazard risks in the Hopar villages, Karakoram Himalayas, Northern Pakistan. In Hopar, most deaths and damage can and have been prevented through preparedness. Modest improvements in the security of the more vulnerable have dramatically reduced losses and increased community resilience. In fact, the somewhat invisible but ‘real’ disaster is not the landslide hazard itself. It is the over-work, stress, health problems, and premature death of women struggling to compensate the loss of land and other resources following landslide disasters. The Hopar case study illustrates how disaster risk often reveals pre-existing social insecurity and vulnerability. As such, disaster management would gain by applying the lessons learned from the public health and civil justice sectors; for example, emphasis on prevention, recognition of broad professional and official responsibilities, focus on vulnerable groups and situations, rights’ dimension, and precautionary principles. A major concern is the risk of large institutions taking over the role of civil society and thereby diminishing the skills and initiatives of the intended beneficiaries. Hewitt concluded with proposals for greater inclusiveness of (1) gender issues as a precondition for a holistic prevention approach and (2) the linkage between local knowledge and disaster preparedness for livelihood security and resilient communities.

Manjari Mehta, ICIMOD, in a keynote presentation entitled ‘**Reaching out to Vulnerable Populations – Issues and Considerations in Disaster Risk Reduction**’, demonstrated how cultural norms and the invisibility of women often contribute to gender inequities that increase their vulnerability to natural hazards and disasters. Cultural norms refer to rules or values that prevent or limit women’s access to food, education, health services, and any other resources that are vital before, during, and after a disaster. Women, as care givers in the household, have many responsibilities that have often been overlooked – and this is despite the fact that their responsibilities are intensified during and after the occurrence of natural hazards. Both factors hamper women’s access to relief and early warning systems and ultimately contribute to higher morbidity rates. Women’s vulnerability to violence following natural disasters is another key issue. For a socially inclusive and gender sensitive perspective on disaster management, vulnerability assessments need to take into account local knowledge and risk-reducing activities and disaggregate what is often conceived as a homogenous ‘community’. This will help to identify the most vulnerable and provide entry points to tap into communities’ strengths, knowledge, and local coping strategies – that is, reveal people’s capabilities rather than focusing on vulnerabilities only. A great need still exists to bridge the social-technical divide across disciplines, for promoting local-level initiatives, and for learning from experiences in disaster preparedness and management policy and action.

Discussion

Chakrabarti highlighted Ladakh as a case where the rapid changes induced by modernisation of the economy are making what used to be a relatively balanced social-ecological system more vulnerable to stresses, including to natural hazards.

The need to identify and discuss social practices in the context of disaster risk mitigation was emphasised. Some examples of how cultural reasons make women more vulnerable to natural disasters than men include how saris impede the mobility of women and how young girls are deprived of opportunities to learn key survival skills as they are not allowed to climb trees or swim.

Session 2: Planning for DP in the Region

Mats Eriksson, ICIMOD, provided an ‘**Overview of the Status of DP plans in the Region**’ based on the findings from the August 2006 workshop. Preparedness planning is mainly disaster driven by country and donor priorities. A paradigm shift is occurring in DM from a relief-driven approach to a preparedness-driven approach. Recent disasters in the region as well as a general awakening process on the importance of the issue have contributed to putting DP/M tools, instruments, and institutions in place. Most countries are well on the way to endorsing policies, strategies, plans, and acts at the national level.

Pratap Kumar Pathak, Joint Secretary, Disaster Management Section, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal, in his presentation, ‘**New Tools for Disaster Preparedness in Nepal: Strategy, Policy, and Act – How is Social Inclusion Reflected?**’ presented the current situation of disaster planning in Nepal. The government has adopted a policy of disaster risk reduction and has included preparedness activities for DM at national and community levels. A National Water Resource Strategy, National Water Plan, and Water Induced Disaster Management Policy are already in place. A national policy on internally displaced persons has been approved by the government and is being put into operation. Social inclusion constitutes a key aspect of this policy. Overall, the major challenge at the policy level is the need for sensitisation about issues of social inclusion. Nepal is moving towards a rights’ based approach but remains rooted in a service providing or welfare approach. Societal restrictions based on gender, caste, class, and ethnicity also need to be overcome. Nepal is in the process of making several national-level decisions about DM. Among them are incorporating disaster management in the poverty reduction agenda, mainstreaming issues of disaster into the national policy framework and sectoral policies, and affirmative provisions for special needs’ populations during disasters (women, children, the marginalised and socially excluded, the disabled, and senior citizens). Legislative reforms and institutional strengthening are also on the agenda.

P.G. Dhar Chakrabarti, National Institute for Disaster Management, New Delhi, presented ‘**Social Inclusion in the Central Planning Process in India**’. The provision for affirmative discrimination of ‘socially excluded’ groups by the Constitution of India has triggered a series of initiatives from community to central levels. The Ministries of Women and Child Development and Social Justice and Empowerment are mandated to lead the process of social inclusion. Accordingly, the Planning Commission has developed innovative tools such as Gender Budgeting to ensure that funds are clearly set aside for gender issues. Self-help groups at the grass roots are facilitating mobilisation and empowerment of the excluded as ‘social inclusion’ has now become the principal political agenda cutting across party affiliations. Despite these efforts, recent major disasters revealed that more women than men die from natural disasters and women face issues of violence following natural disasters. Children have to compete with adults to get their share of relief and their lives are being seriously disrupted at a critical stage of development. They are also vulnerable to exploitation such as trafficking. Early warning systems are not disability friendly and disabled people are sometimes left out during evacuation operations. Some steps have been taken to bridge the gaps such as drafting relevant manuals, procedures, and templates to incorporate the critical needs of the marginalised. Training modules have been developed to sensitise functionaries within and outside government about the needs of women and other marginalised people. NGOs working for marginalised groups are associated with disaster management committees at district and village levels. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is expected to incorporate further actions for social inclusion when developing minimum standards of relief for disaster victims.

Mohsena Ferdousi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, presented ‘**Strategic Priorities of Disaster Management in Bangladesh**’ focusing on professionalism in the disaster management system. The Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD) outline the roles and responsibilities of every relevant agency and responsible person for preparedness and response. A draft

Disaster Management Act, which will provide the legal basis for the SOD and communities to mitigate disaster risk, response, and recovery, is in the process of being finalised. However, communities are not included in the orders to an adequate degree. Another strategic provision is the National Disaster Management Plan, which serves as the umbrella for the plans to be designed at all local levels. This provision still needs to be approved by the Cabinet. The Gender and Social Exclusion Analysis Framework Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP) has developed a draft gender and social exclusion analysis framework. It is a screening tool to help disaster managers to take design, implementation, and monitoring issues into account in their programme activities in a systematic way.

Discussion

Pathak reiterated that lack of awareness and sensitivity at policy level was the bottleneck to social inclusion in DRR in Nepal. More pressure from civil society to account for social inclusion is needed to overcome this problem.

Chakrabarti observed that the Indian states which faced recent incidences of disaster have learned to be better prepared than other states that did not encounter major disasters. Community-based disaster risk management programmes are being implemented in 169 districts targeting 300 million people. Village disaster management plans are being prepared by villagers through village disaster management committees.

A major lesson learned is that community involvement is crucial for the success of disaster preparedness activities. Sustainable solutions have to account for multiple factors (ecological, socioeconomic, and political) and how these factors cascade through all levels and influence them. For example, top-down legal provisions banning human settlements in hazard-prone areas have often failed to prevent people from living in risky places.

Session 3: Outreach, Networking, and Communication

Kunda Dixit, Nepali Times, in his presentation ‘**Reporting on Disaster Preparedness and Management – The Role of Media**’ highlighted the reasons behind the failure of the media to play a proactive role in DP/DM. Media owners have emphasised ‘saleable news’, consequently reporting on post disasters; and especially those with a large number of deaths. The Media is oriented towards sensationalism, mainly entertainment driven, and preoccupied with western and the developed world’s concerns. These limitations can be addressed by changing the market perspective. Organisations such as ICIMOD can play a proactive role by inviting media personnel out to field sites to report on the complex processes leading to increasing vulnerability to natural hazards in the region.

Vijay Khadgi, ICIMOD, in his presentation on ‘**Knowledge Networking – Are There Gaps to be Filled?**’ focused on what was needed to build a knowledge sharing culture. The benefits of networking include strengthening capacity, resource pooling, and developing synergies and catalysts for establishing partnerships. Despite these benefits, a huge gap still exists between the amount of information being generated and the extent of sharing to make the information useful for disaster-risk reduction practitioners. ICIMOD’s DRR initiatives on knowledge sharing reveal that, despite the existing members, infrastructure, and the availability of useful information, the sharing of information has been lacking so far. One major reason behind this is that the Knowledge Network is still relatively young and users may not be familiar with it yet. Some of the key questions that disaster management practitioners, as a community and as individuals, need to address to bridge the gap in information sharing include the following – how can we build a knowledge sharing culture? what kind of knowledge are you looking for? And what kind of knowledge are you able to share with others?

Aslam Perwaiz, Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), Bangkok, presented ‘**Regional Approach and Networking - Recent Examples of DRR from South and South East Asia**’. Composed of institutional members from 26 Asian countries, ADPC’s main roles are to identify disaster-related needs and priorities of the Asia-Pacific countries, to promote regional and sub-regional co-operative programmes, and to develop regional action strategies for disaster reduction. ADPC’s overall strategy in DRR in the region aims to strengthen institutional mechanisms and capacities, facilitate exchange of information and resources regionally, promote and provide demonstrations of innovative practices, promote and support good governance policies, and encourage participation and coordination among the public and private sectors.

Dissanaike Tharuka, Duryog Nivaran, Sri Lanka presented information on ‘**Duryog Nivaran – A Network for Disaster Mitigation in South Asia**’. Duryog Nivaran (DN) promotes disaster preparedness and risk reduction initiatives based on vulnerability analysis and community participation. It has around 50 registered, institutional and individual members and covers five thematic areas: understanding vulnerability and social linkages; promoting accountability; promoting regional cooperation; and traditional knowledge and capacities. Activities include publications, training, research, policy advocacy, and providing and participating in various forums. Vulnerability, gender, and marginalisation are major foci of the network’s research and publications.

Discussion – The need for networking and regional cooperation

ICIMOD’s knowledge-sharing initiative in DRR through a website (www.disasterpreparedness.icimod.org) might gain in linking up with the Hindu Kush- Himalayan – Flow Regimes from International Experimental Network Data (HKH-Friend) website which already has a maximum outreach to institutions dealing with natural disasters in the region. Due to the diversity of already existing initiatives, a network of networks could contribute to improving the networking of institutions, essentially by mapping institutions at all levels working on DRR. The Internet network is mostly used on a needs’ basis, especially during crises rather than on a routine basis. The low period is meant for preparation to ensure that all information is accessible and ready when the need arises. One key issue is the degree of accessibility and usefulness of such hi-tech medium to marginalised and vulnerable groups. One example is the case of women from fishing communities in South India who have been trained by M.S. Swaminathan Foundation to download images of cyclone tracking to assess whether fishing is feasible or not. The women’s participation is considered very effective. The combination of internet, fax, and news boards used by disaster management units of the Vietnamese Government provides another example. Early warning messages sent from Hanoi to community leaders through this system arrive at the community targeted within one day.

Day 2: Gender, Equity, Vulnerable Groups in DRR

Session 4: Gender, Equity and Vulnerable People

Mats Eriksson, ICIMOD, presented a ‘**Summary from Day 1**’. Keynote speeches emphasised that understanding and addressing the social insecurity and vulnerability pre-existing any natural hazards are crucial for improved disaster management activities. As such the needs of the marginalised and vulnerable groups need to be addressed to enhance the preparedness process. The issue of gender-related vulnerability is an integral part of disaster preparedness and should not be treated as an add-on. An overview of the planning processes in the region reveals that much is happening in DRR with new ideas, institutions, and a paradigm shift from post- to pre-disaster activities and the integration of social inclusion issues. Increased sensitisation about the issues of social inclusion among politicians and governments is needed. Within the area of networking and communication, changes in the media’s perception and way of reporting natural hazards and disasters are greatly required. At present the media are still geared towards post-disaster reporting as the result of an outdated perception of what is saleable news. Networking is crucial for disaster preparedness and the internet network is accessed and used on a needs’ basis rather than in a routine manner. This nature of internet networking needs to be recognised and accepted and further facilitated.

P.G. Dhar Chakrabarti, Director, SAARC Disaster Management Centre, India, presented ‘**The Emerging Framework of Regional Cooperation in Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia**’. The nature of every major disaster in the region is interconnected and therefore requires regional cooperation for viable solutions. Some of the milestones of regional cooperation include the establishment of the SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (Dhaka, Bangladesh) and the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre (Male, Maldives). The 2005 Male Declaration of SAARC environment ministers called for a Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management which led to the adoption of the Framework on DM during the 14th SAARC Summit, Delhi, India, in April 2007. The 2006 Delhi Declaration included setting up a Regional Platform on DRR. Following the Indian Ocean tsunami and Kashmir earthquake, every country has firmly committed to setting up legal institutional mechanisms for DRR although they are facing constraints in terms of capacities, technologies, and resources. Regional cooperation remains more challenging than bilateral cooperation and needs to be improved and pushed forward by the SAARC regional forum. Innovative and proactive commitment is required to raise the level of regional cooperation in South Asia.

Shyam Jnavaly, ActionAid Nepal, presented his experience on **‘Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA): Social Inclusion Process in Disaster Risk Reduction’**. PVA is based on the principle that communities know their own situations best; and therefore any analysis should be built on their knowledge of local conditions. This method incorporates a rights’ based approach. Simple PRA tools and matrices are used to involve the community in the NGO process of acquiring information, understanding, and analyses of DRR-related information and participating actively in DP/DM activities. PVA can provide a clear analysis to practitioners to identify and/or understand target groups, their vulnerabilities, and their coping capacities in regards to natural hazards. The method also gives a perspective on communities’ ability to think in a broader framework by taking into account their perceptions on the influence of regional, global, and market economy issues. PVA is used as a baseline during the preliminary phase of project activities.

Faizul Kabir, Handicap International, Bangladesh, presented **‘Mainstreaming Disability Issues and Inclusion of Marginalised Groups in Disaster Preparedness and Risk Reduction’**. In mainstreaming the issues of disability in DRR, Handicap International Bangladesh uses the ‘twin track approach’ focusing primarily on creating sustainable change and inclusion of persons with disability (PWDs) in the society and establishing their rights in every sphere of life. The programme focuses on strengthening programme collaboration, advocacy, awareness raising, capacity building, better networking, and sharing information to build safer communities through a multi-hazard, disaster preparedness approach mainstreaming disability, women’s, and children’s issues. The participation of target groups in society and DP meetings is facilitated through various means. Door-to-door therapy is supported by providing the individuals with locally available and adapted devices for assistance such as crutches and wheel chairs. Houses and the community environment are designed to facilitate people’s mobility. Simulation exercises and appropriate means of communication are developed to ensure disabled people’s preparedness to cope with natural hazards. Government agencies and district administration are involved in the DP mechanism to ensure the inclusion of people’s specific needs at policy and implementation levels. Linking DP with poverty alleviation and taking an inclusive approach during the preparedness phase have proved to be effective. Making early warning systems accessible to all is a major challenge as varied disabilities need to have different communication and outreach means. Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programmes are crucial for the DP approach and require the proactive participation of all community members. The organisation is open to all types of support available in the community. It does not accept or reject on the basis of whether the support offered is of a service-oriented nature or a rights-based one. The ultimate decision is left up to the individual beneficiary.

Deepesh Sinha, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), India presented AIDMI’s experience of **‘[A] Gender Perspective in Disaster Risk Reduction’**. AIDMI works towards DRR in vulnerable communities through livelihood security activities; for example, women are given support to start small businesses and are also involved in cash for work projects. AIDMI has developed a disaster insurance package to help women during the recovery process. The package has been designed to include shelter, household and livelihood items, life, and accidental death. Premiums are initially paid by AIDMI and later by the women themselves. The insurance system currently covers approximately 784 men and women in the project areas. The Safer School Campaign promotes the role of mothers and female staff for DP in schools. These activities empower women victims to gain bargaining power in the household and increase their role in decision making. The activities also expand the women’s scope to explore social, economic, and educational areas.

Jakia Akter, Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS), presented her experience in **‘Bangladesh Erosion Prediction: A Tool for Poverty Reduction’**. Land erosion on the river sides is a major cause of poverty in Bangladesh. Between 1973 and 2006, Bangladesh lost 200,000 ha of land and 64,000 people have been displaced annually, affecting a total of 1,600,000 people. CEGIS has carried out erosion forecasting over a period of three years (2004-2006) on the bank line in Shailabari using remote sensing-based erosion prediction technology. The case study demonstrates that this technology is useful in planning and prioritising DP, including issues of resettlement and rehabilitation. Such technology can facilitate proper distribution of relief and relocation of schools, community buildings, and other infrastructure including hat bazaars, roads, and transmission lines to less hazard-prone areas. According to CEGIS’s experience, this locally developed technology is quick, easily understood, and less expensive than other methods.

Panel discussion and comments

Panellists: Faizal Kabir, P.G. Dhar Chakrabarti, Shyam Jnavaly, Deepesh Sinha, and Jakia Akter

Moderator: Manjari Mehta

Practitioners and communities working with DRR are facing a diversity of issues including gaps between national policy and ground reality (e.g., diversity of people's needs), political agenda, and their implementation and the highly technical/scientific perspective and the basic issues of livelihood survival and social rights. The complex dynamics associated with the multicultural setting within and across nations further complicates and makes the social inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups more difficult for DRR practitioners.

Social inclusion can be defined as the lifting up of (sociocultural, economic, political, etc.) barriers that prevent excluded groups from having access to and benefiting from various assets (natural resources for example). Finding ways for the socially excluded and socially included groups to interact and ensure a win-win situation is a key challenge. This issue needs to be addressed at the root — that is starting with changing people's attitudes. Christian Aid uses the social equity audit tool to promote an inclusive approach through a transformation process by analysing personal values and attitudes.

Implementation of DRR at community level is often perceived to be the role of NGOs and INGOs. Community outreach involves dealing with complex social issues that need time, sensitivity, and particular skills. Governments should commit resources and ensure that local best practices and initiatives can be scaled up and included in policy, legal, and institutional frameworks and in strategy and action plans whenever relevant.

At the regional level, SAARC might be the most suitable institution to deal with DRR within a regional framework. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre (DMC), which is expected to be fully operational within a few months from May 2007, aims at developing a network of networking institutions to facilitate rapid acquisition, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information. Data and knowledge on disaster management will be made available — including linkages with approved real-time data providers. Its major challenge is the implementation of the huge mandate given to it by the member countries with limited resources and a complex decision-making process. The vision is to make the DMC a vibrant centre of excellence for knowledge, research, and capacity development in disaster management.

Session 5: Group work

Manjari Mehta and **Dechenla Sherpa**, ICIMOD, initiated a group work exercise on '**Mainstreaming Social Inclusion in Disaster Preparedness**'. The purpose of the group work was to identify the key challenges, key responsible stakeholders, and possible solutions for mainstreaming social inclusion in DP. Participants were divided into four groups: gender, age and disabled, poverty, and caste/ethnicity/indigenous people. The questions posed were a) why do disasters affect more women, children, the elderly, and the poor, and disabled people? b) how can we address these problems? and c) who is responsible for the different roles (who does what)?

The main reasons for social exclusion as perceived by the participants include lack of education, negative cultural beliefs, lack of policy implementation, and lack of understanding about vulnerable groups and/or insensitivity towards the issues of these groups. In response to these key challenges, the participants suggested empowerment of vulnerable groups through sensitisation of socially included groups, training, education, and strengthening implementation of legal provisions through proper and regular monitoring. The emphasis on the participatory approach also highlighted the need to focus on people's capabilities rather than focusing on their vulnerabilities to make a difference in their lives. All stakeholders (vulnerable groups, government and non government organisations, and the media and private sector) were identified as having a key responsibility to mainstream social inclusion in DP.

Brigitte Leduc and **Manjari Mehta**, ICIMOD, summarised the group work. The root causes for social exclusion coming from the group work revolve around socio-cultural beliefs and locations (places where people are forced to be or in some cases where they are not given access). It is important for all stakeholders to understand the needs and situation of vulnerable groups and take collective responsibility for improving their conditions. Although political provisions and mechanisms may exist to account for issues of social inclusion, their effectiveness on the ground is the real issue.

The group-work solutions prioritised sensitisation of stakeholders at every level through awareness-raising.

Listening to socially excluded groups is considered a precondition for meaningful participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups. The multidimensional nature of the problems calls for learning to work in multi-disciplinary teams, exchange of experiences, and respect and acknowledgement of others' culture and knowledge.

The session was concluded with a self-reflective question: what do we have to change in our own organisations and our way of working to reduce the vulnerability of marginalised groups?

Day 3: Friday 11 May: Understanding Local Knowledge and Practices for Disaster Preparedness

Manjari Mehta, ICIMOD, shared the '**Summary of Day 2**'. The gap between what exists in constitutional and legal provisions and the everyday realities of millions of people is a persistent issue. The main causes attributed to the lack of implementation of the provisions are sociocultural norms and traditional barriers that influence the attitude of those responsible. They are unaware of the value of accounting for and working with marginalised and vulnerable groups. They consider these issues to be burdens rather than a means of solving a common societal problem; and hence challenges still remain to the processes and mechanisms for ensuring social inclusion. A great need still exists for sensitising policy and decision-makers regarding how disasters have differential impacts on varied groups of society. Marginalised groups need to be empowered to participate in policy and decision-making processes. Information must be tailor made to ensure it reaches all groups in society. Capacity building of relevant institutions to implement and enforce disaster management policies and plans is crucial for ensuring inclusion of socially excluded groups.

Session 6: Local Knowledge for Disaster Risk Reduction

Julie Dekens, ICIMOD, presented the keynote speech on '**Identifying Local Knowledge for Disaster Preparedness**'. Local knowledge is understood in its broadest sense and includes indigenous knowledge. It refers to the knowledge of the people-at-risk and their related beliefs and practices. Understanding and accounting for local knowledge and practices can contribute to improving the formulation and implementation of disaster preparedness activities. The four pillars of local knowledge on DP provide a simple framework designed to help implementing organisations to identify local knowledge about and practices in DP. According to this framework, local knowledge about DP is based on people's abilities to observe their local environment, anticipate early signals of natural hazards, and adapt to natural hazard risks based on their assets and ability to learn, re-organise, and communicate about natural hazards among community members and between generations. People are facing rapid changes and multiple stresses and these make the use of local knowledge for DP a key challenge. Although not all local knowledge and practices are relevant or sustainable, they always need to be understood and accounted for in order to ensure a DP project's acceptance and sustainability.

Nazmul Chowdhury, Practical Action, Bangladesh, presented '**Alternative Strategies for Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction: A Case about Communities Displaced by River Erosion in Bangladesh**'. The aim of Practical Action's DRR work is to shift the emphasis from short-term relief and rehabilitation to long-term mitigation measures and to mainstream DRR into development practices. This can only be achieved by strengthening community capabilities to cope with disasters. One such process has been undertaken since 1997 in one district benefiting 40,000 people. The project is implemented on a model basis and can be used for scaling up and replication by the government. Developing livelihood activities that take into account gender and vulnerability issues and enable communities to cope with disasters better is the main focus. The promotion of various livelihood activities that take advantage of the specificities of the flood-prone environment enables people to become contributors rather than just beneficiaries of the project. Livelihood activities include various agricultural activities such as cropping on flood protection embankments and on barren and unfertile sand bars, fisheries, and livestock resource management.

Deepesh Sinha, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), India, presented his experience on the '**Use of Local Knowledge in Disaster Recovery**'. AIDMI is working in close consultation and cooperation with local communities and authorities (government, army, and panchayat) to initiate a community-driven approach to relief and rehabilitation. The Institute identified key community representatives and volunteers to play vital roles in working effectively with communities affected. The sociocultural traditions of the communities were taken

into consideration in developing appropriate activities. Some of the AIDMI activities included establishment of partnerships with schools, school safety training for teachers and staff, cash for work schemes, and a disaster insurance scheme. Communities were consulted about using eco friendly local materials.

Naheeda Khan, Focus Humanitarian Assistance, Pakistan, presented a case study on **‘Disaster Risk Management: Indigenous Solutions’**. Due to the interventions of government and relief agencies, communities have become increasingly dependent on external services. In response, Focus revived the tradition of doing voluntary work in the community and built upon it to improve the communities’ preparedness to respond to disasters. At present more than 30,000 community volunteers have been trained in responding to emergencies throughout Pakistan, and almost 50% are female volunteers. One hundred and forty-six Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and more than 300 Village Emergency Response Teams have been established. Trained community volunteers have responded to more than 75 major and minor disasters. Where the disaster is beyond the capacity of the community, a 40-member trained and equipped Search and Rescue Team is now available for response. Focus has learned from this experience that (1) combining modern concepts with traditional approaches is necessary to make programmes acceptable to the communities; (2) involving religious leaders to help communities make the right choices is a must; (3) gaining community trust and establishing linkages between the local community and institutions and external agencies are necessary for developing sustainable coordination mechanisms; and (4) supporting local coping and survival strategies is important because it enables the community to respond to the situation long before outside help arrives (especially in the context of remote communities).

Session 7: Group Work

Julie Dekens and **Prof. Xu Jianchu**, ICIMOD, introduced role play on **‘Action Planning: Integrating Local Knowledge in Disaster Preparedness’**. The groups were divided according to their countries and were asked to contribute to the design of a working plan at the local community level in order to integrate local knowledge and practices into DP activities. The outcome expected was concrete recommendations on how to integrate local knowledge into DP activities.

Each group highlighted different aspects: the role of outsiders (academicians, government officials, NGOs, and private companies), the nature of the process (who has local knowledge, what type of knowledge, how to find this knowledge, how to document or map the knowledge, how is it transmitted and disseminated, why should this knowledge be or not be incorporated, how to support local knowledge and practices) and the integrated approach (situation analysis, analysis of information, community response, community training, vulnerable areas, and interventions). The overall group work outcomes emphasised that the participatory approach using PRA tools was the most common approach chosen for getting input from the communities. The ICIMOD framework ‘four pillars of local knowledge on DP’ was also used. NGOs were seen to be the most appropriate bodies to gather local knowledge. One group stressed that the private sector has a role to play and has done so in many cases of disaster. NGOs can also facilitate the collaboration between communities and private companies (e.g., cooperation with insurance companies).

Prof. Xu Jianchu stated that indigenous and local knowledge is a very difficult topic and to understand this topic requires a change in one’s attitude and values. Working with the community is a commitment. One has to approach the local communities from the heart, see their situation and environment with one’s own eyes, listen to them, walk through the hazard areas, ask them what kind of knowledge they have, where and whom they got the knowledge from, and why and how they use the knowledge.

Session 8: Closing Session

Conclusions

The conclusions from the workshop are based on observations and remarks made during the workshop. The main outcome from the working groups has also been included in the conclusions. The conclusions were discussed during the closing session and agreed upon as an outcome of the workshop.

General Observations

1. The transboundary nature of many disasters in the Himalayan region calls for the **development of regional mechanisms** as well as national mechanisms to ensure effective disaster risk reduction (DRR).
2. Policy and decision-makers, mid-level practitioners, the media, and the general public should be sensitised through **advocacy and by raising awareness** about how disasters have different impacts on different groups of society.

Local Knowledge

3. **Recognising and respecting** local knowledge and practices empowers local communities. While not all local knowledge and practices are relevant, they should always be accounted for to ensure projects are acceptable and sustainable.
4. By **integrating local and scientific knowledge**, interventions in the field of DRR can be improved.
5. **Sociocultural norms and traditional customs** that promote or inhibit social inclusion in DRR must be understood and addressed.

Equity and Vulnerable Groups

6. **Secure sustainable livelihoods** are necessary to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen resilience against natural hazards, particularly among marginalised and vulnerable groups.
7. Political and socioeconomic **empowerment of marginalised groups** enables their participation in policy and decision-making and reduces their vulnerability.
8. **Capacity-building** of relevant institutions is essential for implementing and enforcing disaster management policies and plans that give specific attention to socially excluded groups.

Communication, Cooperation, and Collaboration

9. **Building partnerships** between government agencies, civil society institutions, and the private sector is compulsory for improving DRR and understanding and including socially excluded groups.
10. **Improved dialogue** is a must for bridging the current gap between central-planning and community-implementation levels. This applies to issues related to social inclusion as well as DRR at large.
11. **Information about disaster preparedness must be tailor-made** to reach all groups in society and give high priority to the most vulnerable.
12. **Sensitisation of the media** on the importance of covering disaster preparedness activities as well as post-disaster events is essential.

Concluding Remarks

Kenneth Hewitt, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, and Cold Regions Research Centre, Wilfred Laurier University, Canada, concluded the session stressing that, unless issues of social inclusion are adequately integrated into DRR, efforts will continue to fail. Disasters are special in that they are evidence of failure, clearly reflecting pre-existing vulnerabilities. The focus on social inclusion is often difficult to discuss and tackle because we all tend to promote our own agenda. Working with the community is challenging: it requires dialectical thinking, a flexible agenda, and reflexivity among other things. Three important aspects need further consideration: (1) local knowledge in urban contexts, (2) language barriers (in many cases external organisations do not speak the local languages), and (3) violence (communities are facing multiple stresses which undermine their livelihoods. Often natural hazards are not the most important stresses (as illustrated by the terrible legacies of violence in Nepal and in many other countries). The issues of rights, ethics, and social justice call for obligations at a higher level.

Madhav Karki, Acting Director General, ICIMOD, reaffirmed that DP is a core element within ICIMOD's work and the organisation has a responsibility to integrate its elements into different programmes and institutionalise it. The wide and rich range of best practices in the region is a strong basis for regional sharing. The challenges of living in multiple hazard zones require the use of all existing knowledge and a holistic approach to DM.