

Chapter 7

Sharing Knowledge on Plans

Communicating and sharing knowledge are vital aspects of disaster preparedness. It is through communicating and sharing knowledge that necessary inputs are provided to policy-makers and implementers for preparing natural disaster preparedness plans. Communication helps to provide a common platform for all those who are involved in natural disaster management activities at the national as well as international levels where issues relating to natural disasters have transboundary ramifications.

At the national level, MoHA has a country-wide network through its 75 district offices of chief district officers (CDOs) who provide information about disasters in their respective areas and about their interaction with the communities affected. It has constant communication link with the districts which facilitates preparation of disaster preparedness plans at all times. Among NGOs, only NRCS has the capability to act in case of natural disasters as it has a country-wide network.

With the introduction of modern communication devices such as mobile telephones and the recently introduced Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) service via satellite, it has become easier for the centre, districts, and communities affected to communicate and share knowledge on disaster preparedness.

Communicating and sharing knowledge at national level

Communicating and sharing knowledge is the basis for coordination. Communication between key actors in Nepal about disaster preparedness is not very effective. The CNDRC at the centre coordinates among organisations when disaster strikes a community. Pre-disaster activities are few and most of the activities are concentrated during disasters and in post-disaster periods. The District Natural Disaster Relief Committee under the chairmanship of the Chief District Officer is the most effective organisation in each district for coordinating activities among various government and non-government organisations during emergencies. Even so, this committee also does

very little preparation for disasters and most of its activities are concentrated on post-disaster.

Communication between other organisations and the community in the field of disaster management in Nepal is poor. The community can hardly keep in contact with other organisations during an emergency, resulting in added loss of lives and property.

National and international workshops and conferences on disasters, mostly held in Kathmandu, Nepal's capital city, have provided forums for communicating and sharing knowledge on planning for preparedness at national level. However, these conferences are mostly held in the capital where the relevant government agencies, NGOs, and INGOs have their headquarters and where logistics are favourable. Some are also held in disaster-prone districts by both government agencies and local NGOs with the support of INGOs. This gives a chance to local stakeholders to participate, since their involvement in the decision-making process is crucial. The outcomes of these meetings are always useful.

Communicating and sharing knowledge at regional level

Nepal, being the upper riparian country vis-à-vis India and Bangladesh, has been cooperating with both India and Bangladesh by providing vital data to them for flood forecasting. Nepal has also extended its cooperation in the development of water resources at bilateral and trilateral levels in the region for irrigation, hydropower, and flood mitigation (ICIMOD 2004, 2006).

Nepal-India cooperation

The area near the southern border between Nepal and India frequently experiences flood-related problems caused by changes in the drainage pattern as a result of human intervention on one or the other side of the border. In order to facilitate cross-boundary dialogue on these and similar issues, a Joint Committee on Water Resources (JCWR) at the secretary level has been put into place. There is also a bilateral committee called the Standing Committee on Inundation Problems (SCIP) to facilitate discussions on problems caused by inundation in the vicinity of the border between Nepal and India.

The SCIP was established in 1985 and is headed by the Director General of DWIDP from Nepal, and by the Chairman, Ganga Flood Control Commission (GFCC), from India. Over time, about 35 problem cases have been raised by Nepal and 20 by India. Contact officers from field offices are nominated by both countries and are assigned tasks such as observation, joint survey, verification, and preparation of joint reports as cases arise. A subcommittee for embankment construction under the SCIP looks after the

technical aspects of ongoing and proposed embankments. The committee meets once a year, discusses these problems, instructs the contact officers or the sub committee, reviews the progress made, and makes the necessary decisions.

There are also other forums where flood-related matters can be discussed by India and Nepal. Worth mentioning is the Joint Committee for the Koshi and Gandak projects (JCKGP) which discusses maintenance of the projects and floods in the area. There is also a Joint Committee on Flood Forecasting for Nepal and India with the DHM leading the committee from Nepal.

Nepal-Bangladesh cooperation

After the devastating floods of 1988, Bangladesh undertook visits to India, Nepal, Bhutan, and China to seek regional cooperation in order to arrive at more-lasting solutions to flood problems. A meeting between Nepal and Bangladesh was held in Kathmandu in October 1988, and both parties agreed to establish a joint study team to examine the problems of floods and their causes in both countries.

The joint study team held several meetings, exchanged data and information, and finalised a 'Report on Flood Mitigation Measures and Multi-Purpose Use of Water Resources' in November 1989. The report contains geoclimatic settings, types and causes of floods, probable measures for flood mitigation, multiple and optimal use of water resources in the region, and so forth. Among its recommendations were the following.

i) Flood mitigation

- Development of a flood forecasting and warning system through wireless communication for transmission of water levels and flow discharges between Nepal and Bangladesh
- Introduction of a catchment management and afforestation programme for soil conservation
- Coordination of development activities to reduce drainage congestion

ii) Harnessing water resources in the region

- Creation of reservoirs in upstream reaches for optimal and multipurpose use of water resources to reduce flood peak discharges

iii) Study, research, and investigation

- Study, research, and investigation programmes on appropriate catchment management to reduce problems such as topsoil erosion, landslides, and consequent influx of sediment into the rivers, and glacial and snowmelt phenomena

The 1989 report was adopted for implementation by the 'Tenth Meeting of the Bangladesh-Nepal Joint Economic Commission (JEC)' held in 1989. The DHM of Nepal was identified as the executing agency and the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) of Bangladesh as the coordinating agency for mitigating floods and flood damage.

In April 2006, at the request of the Government of Bangladesh, the Government of Nepal established a high-level committee, the 'Nepal-Bangladesh Joint Committee on Harnessing Water Resources and Mitigating Floods and Flood Damage'. The committee is headed by the Executive Secretary of WECS. Other members of the committee are from the MoWR, MoEST, DHM, DWIDP, DoI, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). The Executive Director of WECS is the Member Secretary.

The committee members of the Nepal Bangladesh Joint Committee met in June 2006 in Kathmandu. On the same occasion, WECS and JVS organised a talk programme on the topic 'Opportunities of Nepal-Bangladesh Cooperation in Managing Water Resources of the Region for Mutual Benefits' on June 23, 2006. The role and importance of regional cooperation were emphasised at this programme. Cooperation with India was also emphasised as important if regional cooperation is to be meaningful.

The ICIMOD and WMO project for regional cooperation in flood disaster mitigation

ICIMOD and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) introduced a project to promote regional cooperation in flood disaster mitigation. The goal of the project is to reduce flood vulnerability in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region and, in particular, in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Indus River basins.

The project involves the following activities.

- The establishment of a regional flood information system for the HKH region which is accessible at www.southasianfloods.org
- Regional sharing of information in order to provide warning to potentially affected areas and to save lives
- Regional sharing of technologies, resources, and scientific knowledge to provide each country with adequate ways and means of collecting and disseminating data and information
- Capacity building with national collaborating institutions

There are numerous non-government organisations in Nepal working with international agencies in the field of flood management. Most of these organisations are active in relief operations during flood disasters. Some of them are engaged in mobilising local resources for flood protection and in increasing awareness.