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Regional Earthquake Recovery Dialogue for Building Back Better

The Dialogue

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) along with SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) and the National Planning Commission (NPC), Government of Nepal, organised a regional recovery dialogue for building back better after the devastating earthquake that struck Nepal on 25 April 2015. The dialogue aimed to provide a road map for the recovery process after the earthquake. Disaster management experts from various organisations across the region participated in the dialogue to share their experience and the best practices followed in the region after major earthquakes. Their valuable contributions, in terms of the practices followed for disaster recovery, were eye-opening and will provide valuable support in the reconstruction process of Nepal.

This summary presents the lessons learnt during the dialogue, and a number of specific steps to be taken in the near future as a way forward.

Seven Lessons Learnt

The main lessons from the discussions are as follows:

1. Recovery is a time-consuming process, and needs thoroughness more than speed.
2. Sustainability is a fundamental principle for building back better.
3. Institutional arrangements need to be collaborative and incrementally evolve.
4. It is important to keep people at the centre, and to focus on processes.
5. Technical approaches need to be detailed and context-specific.
6. Capacity building is a must for long term self-reliance.
7. Quality and accountability are the keys to a successful reconstruction programme.

Way Forward

The steps agreed to be taken as a way forward from the recovery dialogue are:

1. A detailed risk profile study of the affected areas needs to be carried out. Technical support through the Asia Pacific Centre for Disaster Information Management (APDIM) and the technical assistance of the Islamic Republic of Iran will be very useful. A team of international experts may be formed who, with counterparts in the national research and technical institutions, can use the latest technology for preparation of this risk profile.
2. Retrofitting of cultural monuments and heritage settlements is a critical need in Nepal, which requires highly sensitive technical approaches. The Islamic Republic of Iran's experience of Bam and its technical expertise will be very valuable for this, and appropriate knowledge transfer mechanisms can be established towards this purpose.
3. The need for trained engineers and masons is huge in Nepal, in view of the large number of houses and other buildings to be constructed. The technical content evolved by Sikkim, including mason training material in Nepali language, will be a very useful starting point for Nepal in its recovery. The Sikkim Government's offer of cross visits and knowledge exchange is very valuable and will be of great use to Nepal. Sikkim also has a similar terrain, culture, language and a set of issues to Nepal, making such an exchange very valuable.
4. Accountability and transparency are very important in large scale reconstruction programmes, and Nepal is very serious about establishing state-of-the-art systems for this purpose. Sikkim's experience of online real-time monitoring of housing reconstruction is very relevant towards this, and a technology transfer process may be initiated.
5. It was also seen from various cases that process documentation is extremely important in a reconstruction programme. The input of the Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS), right from the early stages of needs assessment in Nepal, has been very valuable. Documentation may not seem important to many right now, but will be a very useful asset in the future when details of the experience may be forgotten. Process documentation needs to be taken up in earnest.
6. Regional networking emerges as a very important step to be taken, and MoUs can be signed among various institutions for this to be effective. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre may help in putting together such an institutional arrangement for networking to emerge as a means for Nepal to learn and have an effective reconstruction programme.
7. First-hand experience of a number of relevant cases will be of great use to the Nepali agencies responsible for reconstruction. Exchange visits to affected areas of the Islamic Republic of Iran, India, Pakistan and other countries that have carried out reconstruction programmes will be useful. A clear and objective oriented programme may be evolved for this purpose, based on Nepal's specific needs.
8. Sectoral policy dialogues will be needed in Nepal; particularly on housing, education and health. Bihar's school safety campaign, as described in the workshop, emerged as a specific experience that could be valuable in the Nepal context. In coming months, an engagement may be worked out for learning to take place from this and other such experiences.
9. ESCAP's position as a key knowledge hub in the region has been very valuable and instrumental in the organization of this workshop. Such dialogues need to continue to support the very complex reconstruction programme being taken up by Nepal.

Organized by:

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