



**Community Based
Disaster Risk Management
In South Asia**

Road Map

**SAARC Disaster Management Centre
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1. Introduction

1.1 Hazards of nature and vulnerabilities of socio-economic conditions have made South Asia extremely prone to disasters. It is not possible to prevent disasters altogether nor will it be cost effective to mitigate every disaster and therefore every country of the region has to live with substantial amount of risks and be prepared for the same.

1.2 While national, provincial and local authorities have important role to play in disaster risk management, it is the active participation and involvement of communities at the grassroots that would make the real difference. Inadequate community preparedness has turned even a relatively minor hazard into major disaster while enhanced community awareness and preparedness have been able to prevent major hazards becoming mega disasters.

1.3 One of the three strategic goals of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-15 (HFA) adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005 is “development and strengthening of institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels, in particular at the community level, that can systematically contribute to building resilience to hazards”; one of the eleven principles of the HFA is that “both communities and local authorities should be empowered to manage and reduce disaster risk by having access to the necessary information, resources and authority to implement actions for disaster risk reduction”; and one of the priorities of action is to “promote community participation in disaster risk reduction through the adoption of specific policies, the promotion of networking, the strategic management of volunteer resources, the attribution of roles and responsibilities, and the delegation and provision of the necessary authority and resources”.

1.4 The SAARC Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management (SCFDM) adopted at the Fourteenth SAARC Summit held in New Delhi in April 2007 aims to develop ‘disaster resilient communities that have enhanced coping capacities in relation to all hazards’ through strengthening of community institutional mechanisms and empowering communities at risk, particularly women, the poor and the disadvantaged.

1.5 Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) finds a prominent place in the national disaster management frameworks of all the eight countries of South Asia. Every country has committed to empower the communities, enhance their capacities, involve them in every phase of disaster management including assessment of risks and preparation of plans for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery and integrate community structures and processes with local self governing institutions. However there are lots of works which remain to be done in translating these commitments into action.

2. Lessons Learnt

2.1 The current status of implementation of CBDRM strategies and initiatives in South Asia region was reviewed in two-day SAARC Workshop on Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 19-20 November 2007. Countries of the region have varied experiences according to the national policies and programmes, governance system, local initiative, community structures and exposure to risks and disasters. The main lessons learnt from these experiences are the following:

- a) CBDRM in South Asia is relatively new. Bangladesh was the first to start the process through the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) in the coastal districts in 1972. India started its Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in 169 multi-hazard districts in 2002. Other countries have started the process only recently.
- b) Wherever the CBDRM has been under implementation for some time positive gains have been made in reducing the risks of disaster. In Bangladesh the CPP created massive awareness among the communities about the risks and enhanced their capacities to be prepared and respond to disasters, which is reflected in the drastic reduction in casualties in subsequent disasters. In India the communities covered under the programme have performed better than those which were not.
- c) CBDRM has done better in countries where the national and local governments have been proactively involved with the implementation of the programmes.
- d) CBDRM has done better in countries where this is institutionalized with local self governing institutions and integrated with local and national level planning mechanisms.
- e) In almost all the countries CBDRM has been taken up largely through the initiative of international/ national NGOs, UNDP etc, and in some countries in collaboration with the national

governments. CPP in Bangladesh was started by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society and DRM was started in India by the UNDP which is also the driving force of the programmes in Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh. In Sri Lanka and Pakistan the programme was taken up under tsunami and earthquake recovery programmes funded by the donor agencies.

- f) In none of the countries CBDRM extends to all the communities living in risks and therefore there is a need to upscale the programme to all such communities.
- g) The special needs of communities at risk in island, mountains and in thickly congested urban areas and vulnerable groups like children, physically and mentally challenged and senior citizens have not been adequately addressed.
- h) The gender and equity concerns have also not been adequately addressed in the CBDRM.
- i) Training and capacity development of the communities have remained one of the weak areas of CBDRM which need to be addressed through the creation of specialized institutions for training, development of need based innovative training modules according to the local cultural and socio-economic practices and improvement in the quality of trainings.
- j) The communities are the reservoir of time tested knowledge of coping with risks and disasters which need to be documented and linked with scientific knowledge in a two way process in which scientists learn from the indigenous coping mechanism and communities are benefited from scientific knowledge.
- k) CBDRM has mostly been taken up on a project mode and has not been integrated within the existing governance and development programmes for their long term sustainability.
- l) The lessons learnt and experiences gained in the programmes within and among the countries have not been documented, shared and evaluated for further improving the quality of the programmes.

3. Purpose of Road Map

3.1 Taking into considerations the lessons learnt from the various CBDRM initiatives in South Asia, the present status of these initiatives, their strengths and shortcomings and the goals of the Hyogo Framework of Action and SAARC Comprehensive Framework of Action, it has been felt that a Road Map should be developed to provide guidance to the SAARC member countries to:

- a) Promote and strengthen the community lead disaster management systems to reduce vulnerabilities, build resilience to reduce risks, enhance response and recovery management;
- b) Facilitate effective partnership between communities at risk and local government
- c) Integrate CBDRM into local and national level planning process
- d) Create institutional arrangements for knowledge sharing and capacity enhancement on CBDRM good practices and lessons learnt;
- e) Define roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders - SDMC, National, Provincial, Local Governments, Civil Society Organizations, NGOs, CBOs and Communities.

4. Expected Outcome

4.1 The expected outcome of the road map would be to:

- a) Develop disaster resilient communities that have enhanced coping capacities in relation to all hazards;
- b) Mainstream community disaster risk reduction into the development policies and practices at all levels;
- c) Create enabling environment that would facilitate community based disaster risk management practices; and
- d) Provide a framework in which GOs, NGOs, Civil Society and Private Sector shall contribute to the development of the capacities of the communities in coping with disasters.

5. Key Action Areas

5.1 National governments of all the countries of South Asia have committed themselves to Community Based Disaster Risk Management Programme as an essential and important component of the National Disaster Management Framework. In order that such commitments are translated into practices each country must develop its strategies and work plan in accordance with its priorities, needs and requirement in consultation with all the stakeholders. The following issues must be addressed in the strategies and action plan:

a) Scope and expanse

The CBDRM should extend to the whole of the country. Initially it can start in multi-hazard areas; subsequently it can be up scaled to other areas.

b) Phasing

CBDRM may be implemented in three phases – preparation, implementation and consolidation. The preparatory phase may continue for 3 to 6 months, actual implementation phase may continue for 2 to 4 years, while consolidation phase may run for 6 months to 1 year. However actual duration of the programme may vary according to contexts and situations.

c) Implementation mechanism

Community Based Disaster Risk Management must always be driven by the community, but it is usually not auto-driven unless community has a champion who can take the leadership role without external assistance. Even when a champion is available from the beginning, they require counseling and guidance to start the process. This requires initial hand holding by an outside agency or a social animator who can take initial preparatory steps required to kick start the process. These are usually a local government agency or Non Government Organization (NGO) or a Community Based Organization (CBO). Where no such agency is available a designated government functionary can be inducted.

d) Organizational structure

At the national, provincial and local levels the programme should be integrated with the institutional mechanisms created by the countries under the National Disaster Management Frameworks. At the community level the programme should ideally be implemented by the three tiers of community structures (a) General Assemblies of Community which would be open to all adult male and female members of the community which may meet once in a year; (b) Community Disaster Management Committee which may consist of local elected representatives, grassroots level local government functionaries, local NGOs/CBOs, opinion leaders and other local resource persons, social and occupational groups, at least one third of them being women, and (c) Community Disaster Management Teams to attend to specific tasks at the onset or after the disaster such as early warning, evacuation, search and rescue, shelter management, water and sanitation, medical and first aid, relief and coordination, carcasses disposal, trauma counseling and damage assessment etc.

e) **Functions and processes**

The Community Based Disaster Management Programme may attend to the following functions in its different phases.

Preparation phase:

The following tasks may be attended in the preparatory phase:

- i. Establishing rapport or contacts in the community which can be done through local opinion leaders or field functionaries of government or other agencies who have good local knowledge of the area.
- ii. Collection of data regarding the physical condition of the area, its natural resources, socio-economic and demographic profile, conditions of hazards and vulnerabilities, history of disasters, local coping mechanisms etc. Earlier considerable time was required to collect such data, which are now easily available from various sources.
- iii. Deciding, in consultation with local leaders, the initial strategy to be adopted for starting the programme.

Implementation phase:

Once the preparatory steps have been taken the actual implementation phase begins. The essential steps that are required to be taken during this phase are the following:

- i. **Community Risk Assessment:**
The community shall assess their own hazards, risk and vulnerabilities. Various tools and methodologies are available for participatory risk assessment which needs to be adapted according to the local conditions.
- ii. **Community Risk Reduction Plan:**
Communities shall prepare their own plans for risk reduction which shall include plans for disaster risk mitigation and preparedness. These plans shall be integrated with local development plan. Various tools and methodologies are available for preparation of Community Risk Reduction Plan which needs to be adapted according to the local conditions.

iii. Community Contingency Plan:

Communities shall prepare their own contingency plans for managing the disasters. These plans should be based on the seasonality calendar of disasters, inventory of local resources, lessons learnt from the past disasters, safe and alternate route of evacuation, community shelters, management of relief camps etc. The plan shall also define the responsibilities of community disaster management teams.

iv. Community Mock Drills:

Communities shall hold mock drill to run the Community Contingency Plan to remain in a state of preparedness. Such drills may be conducted at least once in a year, typically before the monsoon/ cyclone seasons.

v. Community Response:

In the post-disaster phase, the community level Disaster Management Teams shall respond to the disaster situations as per the Community Contingency Plan till external responding agencies are pressed into service.

vi. Community Awareness:

Electronic, print and folk media shall be used for creating awareness among the communities about the do's and don'ts for reducing the risks of disasters and responding to such disasters as and when they may occur.

Consolidation Phase:

In the consolidation phase the community disaster management plans are stabilized, risk mitigation programmes identified by the community are integrated with the development plans, community disaster management teams become functional, general level of awareness of the community is raised and a culture of preparedness replaces the culture of fatalism in the community. When the programme consolidates the confidence of the community is enhanced and no further external support is required to run the programme. The external agencies exit from the scene and communities fully take over and the programme is integrated with the system and becomes sustainable in the long run.

In actual practice, however, the route towards integration and sustainability may not always be very smooth and this may vary according to the strength of the local communities and quality of implementation of the programme. There are instances when communities are in the driver's seat from the initial stage; there are also instances the community structure collapses when external supports are no longer available. Each situation requires varied approaches according to the needs of the situation, but even in the worst of the cases the programme is able to enhance the level of community preparedness and make a difference in reducing the risks of disasters.

f) Institutionalization

The programme shall be sustainable if it is integrated with the local self governing institutions at the rural and urban areas. Such integration shall take place if responsibilities and resources for local level disaster management are devolved to these institutions. These would ensure that community disaster management plans are adopted by the Municipalities/ Union Committees/ Panchayats.

g) Integration with local level planning

National strategies may lay down guidelines on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and management in development planning including local resource management, environment management and poverty alleviation. Such guidelines shall facilitate integration of community based disaster risk management with local level planning.

h) Capacity Development

Training and capacity development of the key community leaders and local level disaster management teams on the basics of search and rescue techniques, emergency first aid to victims, operation of equipments like ham radio etc shall be useful for the success of the CBDRM. Such training programmes may be organized by the local self governing institutions with assistance from the Government and Non Government Organizations, Civil Defence etc. Innovative short duration training modules for trainers and community leaders have been developed in some countries which are useful for conducting locally driven training programmes for the communities.

i) Indigenous Knowledge on disaster risk reduction

Communities are the repositories of indigenous knowledge on disaster risk reduction. Most of such knowledge is still relevant for coping with disasters. Communities should be encouraged to revive, adapt and use such knowledge, to the extent it is possible, in the community based disaster risk management programmes.

j) Role of stakeholders.

International Organizations

UN agencies and multi-lateral funding institutions have been promoting community based disaster risk management programmes in different countries. Such organizations have the knowledge, experiences wherewithal to support such programmes on a pilot basis and further support scaling up good practices developed through pilot projects.

SAARC Disaster Management Centre

SAARC Disaster Management Centre shall circulate the Road Map to all the member countries and other stakeholders including NGOs, local self governing institutions etc for their guidance. The Centre shall further assist the member countries for the development of locally relevant tools, methodologies, templates, training modules etc for the introduction and scaling up of the CBDRM in the member countries. The Centre shall document the good practices developed in the region for their possible replication in other countries.

National Governments

The national governments of all the member countries are already committed to promote Community Based Disaster Risk Management practices. They shall take appropriate proactive measures including investment of resources for translating these commitments into action. These measures may include policies, programmes, strategies, guidelines, schemes etc which would promote CBDRM initiatives. The national governments shall also allocate resources for promoting such initiatives by the provincial and local governments.

Local Governments

Community Based Disaster Risk Management Programmes have performed better in areas where the programme has been owned by the local rural and urban self governing institutions. Such ownerships have taken place in countries where the legal systems have devolved powers and responsibilities to such institutions.

NGOs/ CBOs

Non Government Organizations and Community Based Organizations have been playing very important role in actually running CBDRM in many countries. NGOs were in fact the prime movers of the programme in most of the countries. They have developed many innovative tools and methodologies relevant to the needs of the local communities and successfully integrated CBDRM with poverty alleviation and other programmes. Continued support of the NGOs to the local communities to manage their own risks shall be crucial to the introduction and scaling of CBDRM in places where these have not been done so far.
