

CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS WITH PROVINCIAL EMERGENCY OPERATION CENTERS



Hon. Minister Tilak Ram Sharma at Consultation with Provincial Emergency Operation Center, Lumbini Province

BACKGROUND

The project 'Promoting Action for Disaster Risk Governance and Working to Achieve Preparedness for Risk Reduction through Technical Assistance in Nepal' – PARIWARTAN aims to contribute to improved federal, provincial, and municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) legislative regulatory framework that facilitates timely and comprehensive disaster risk management with strengthened capacity to build resilient community. Given the pivotal role of the emergency operation centers for effective DRRM, it is important to enhance the capacity of the Provincial Emergency Operation Centers (PEOC), its nodal ministry and other line Ministries in the Provinces. Therefore, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) organized a two-day workshop for all seven provincial Emergency Operation Centers (EOCs) to improve emergency preparedness and response coordination at the provincial, district and local levels. The first day focused on awareness related to federal, provincial, and local policies, and on the following day tabletop exercise (TTX) was conducted based on a major earthquake scenario with violent shaking, power cut off, breakdown in communication, severe damage to physical infrastructures, and buildings severely damaged or collapsed.

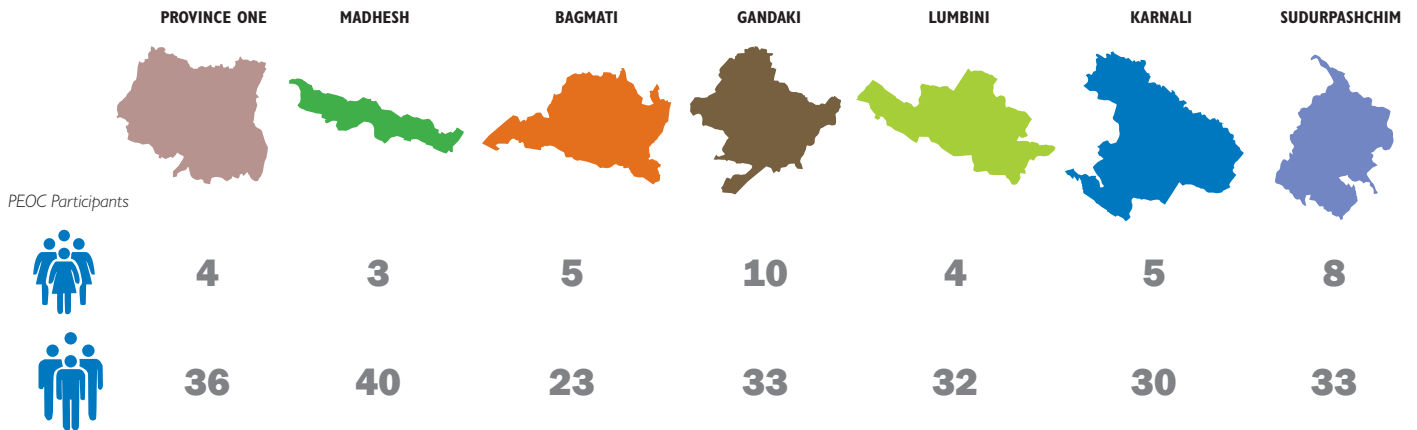
OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the program was to contribute to enhancing the capacity of PEOC and staffs of the provincial ministry overseeing emergency coordination, communication, and data management/dissemination to improve coordination and better functioning of EOCs. The specific objectives of the program were as follows:

- 1 To take stock of 7 PEOCs.
- 2 To analyze current emergency coordination and communication at Provinces.
- 3 To capacitate PEOC, nodal ministry and other line ministries' staff on information update/dissemination and technical components of EOC.
- 4 To test the learned knowledge and skills on emergency communication through tabletop simulation.

PARTICIPANTS

Altogether 266 participants (39 females and 227 males) benefitted from the provincial consultation workshops. Participants included representatives from the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), National Emergency Operation Center (NEOC), National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority (NDRRMA), PEOC, Provincial Health Emergency Operation Center (PHEOC), Office of the Chief Minister and Council of Ministers (OCMCM), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law (MOIAL)/ Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) – Gandaki Province/ Ministry of Internal Affairs, Law and Communication (MoIALC)- Lumbini Province/ Ministry of Home Affairs and Communication (MoHAC)- Madhesh Province, Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Development (MoPID), Ministry of Social Development (MOSD), District Emergency Operation Center (DEOC), Local Emergency Operation Center (LEOC), Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), other humanitarian agencies and UN agencies.



Brief proceeding

The program modality was similar in all seven provinces where the first day was focused on presentation and discussion and the second day on TTX. On the first day, participants were engaged in discussion on the operation and coordination of EOCs following presentations on LEOC, DEOC, PEOC and NEOC. The discussion revolved around theoretical and operation aspect of EOCs at various levels. It was learned that a basic set-up for PEOC exists in all provinces except Gandaki Province where efforts are being made to set up a functional PEOC at MoIAL.

On the second day, TTX was held by forming three breakout groups- (a) PEOC; (b) DEOC/LEOC; (c) provincial humanitarian cluster systems. The breakout groups played their respective roles in responding to a major earthquake and its impact. The exercise focused on decision-making, coordination, and communication related to evacuation, rescue, provision of emergency shelter and sites (management of open spaces), camp management, and life-saving aid. An earthquake ensemble from Sajag Nepal (Humanitarian Country Team scenario) was presented, and five injects were generated involving a situation, a problem, and required outputs. The participants displayed their knowledge and skills in coordinating responses by putting EOCs functions and information management at the center of the exercise.

At the end of the exercise, the local, district, and provincial EOC representatives realized the gap in coordination and communication in an emergency context. They shared that they would work on developing Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), policies, coordination, and communication mechanisms to prepare for future disasters. The seven events were organized in between October first week to November first week 2022.

OUTCOME

Altogether 266 participants benefitted from the workshops which reinforced connections between various levels of EOCs. The TTX tested the coordination and communication interoperability of the EOCs. The participating officials from provincial and local governments realized the gap in communication and coordination between and among EOCs. Additionally, the event reflected the need to ramp up PEOC efforts in information management and bring more clarity on roles and reporting lines and connections with LEOCs and DEOCs.

Discussion with a representative from NEOC was an opportunity for LEOCs and PEOCs to learn about the distinct functions and services of the EOCs. Other stakeholders such as NDRRMA, MoFAGA, DAO, and provincial ministries overseeing DRRM in the province as well as local government officials and humanitarian partners focused on the institutional links and functions in emergency management context.

The TTX demonstrated the importance of strengthening interagency emergency preparedness, response, and communication. Officials from the local, district, and provincial EOCs, fire brigades, and humanitarian partners reflected on the coordination and communication shortfalls at the end of the exercise. Discussions among various levels of government and humanitarian partners helped bring more clarity on the immediate response and coordination requirements in responding to disasters.

PROVINCE ONE

The Chief Minister Emergency Services Centers (CMESCs) have been established in a few districts in the province. The ESCs aim to support the local governments for setting up the EOCs and other disaster preparedness initiatives. However, some officials from the federal government raised concerns as the name sounds like a parallel structure to the EOCs. The ESCs are supporting fire brigades and establishment of EOCs in the local governments. The provincial government also plans to strengthen disaster preparedness at the Ward level of local governments through the establishment of 'emergency response desk/EOC'.

The TTX reflected on the need for stockpiling relief materials in remote and disaster risk vulnerable areas. Data verification and authentication were also strongly realized throughout the

exercise. More focus must be paid to preparedness to bring clarity on the communication and coordination between and among the EOCs at local, district, province, and federal levels.

LEOCs have been established in Dharan, BudhiGanga, Duhabi, Ramdhuni and Itahari local governments in the province. In Dharan, Itahari and Biratnagar, LEOCs are being run by municipal police. Some of the local governments have developed guidelines for disaster preparedness and response, fire brigades, and information centers.

The provincial government has realized the need for the guidelines/SOPs for proper linkages among LEOCs, DEOCs, and PEOCs.

MADHESH PROVINCE

TTX participants shared about practical challenges in coordination for relief distribution, information management, and data collection on damage and needs. Often the data collection is politicized, and the number related to disaster-affected people is inflated. The government offices at local, district, provincial, and federal levels have been distributing relief without clear coordination among each other.

The Madhesh EOC has been facing shortages in human resources, equipment, and budget. In addition, there is a lack of clarity in policy supporting the institutionalization of emergency response governance. Frequent transfer of government staff causes serious shortfalls in human resources.

In Tilathikoili Rural Municipality of Saptari District, LEOC was set up in 2017. It has four components- preparedness, equipment, awareness raising, and communication (early warning system, communicating with communities). The security forces present

at the local level are part of LEOC. The LEOC has cross-border communication through WhatsApp.

The Madhesh government has prepared a new bill to institutionalize the cluster approach, roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, and procurement during a disaster, among others. DM Fund guidelines have been drafted.

Ministry of Home Affairs and Communication (MoHAC) plans to conduct regular simulation exercises and knowledge sharing workshops. It also aims to procure Search and Rescue (SAR) equipment.

The TTX exercise reflected a gap in the SAR team coordination in handling the grievances of the disaster-affected people. There is not enough knowledge on dead body management. Ambulance services and fire brigade need to be linked with the EOCs.

BAGMATI PROVINCE



Pre-positioning of Stocks in Local Emergency Operation Center, Raksirang Rural Municipality

The location of the PEOC is an issue in the province. The distance between the provincial secretariat, including the Chief Minister and other ministries, and the PEOC is around two kilometers. The PEOC is across the Rapti River, which will be inaccessible in case of big flooding and bridge collapse.

Bagmati Province has its DRRM Act, an annual budget for DRR activities, and Bagmati BIPAD Mobile Application (disaster information app).

However, during the TTX, participants realized the need to empower the EOCs network. Due to several reasons, including administrative ones, Bagmati Province EOC is currently not linked with EOCs in Kathmandu Valley.

The local governments and districts which have EOCs do not use very high frequency (VHF) or high frequency (HF) communication systems. In addition, there is a need to empower ward-level disaster management structures.

Currently, Raksirang Rural Municipality in Makwanpur District is working on EOC Guidelines and SOPs. A landslide geological survey is also ongoing. The local government has established a Volunteer Group and trained ten people. Simulation exercises are conducted regularly.

In Makwanpurgadhi Rural Municipality, LEOC is not established. The local government has prioritized disaster preparedness and readiness. It has set aside dedicated budget, and risk transfer/insurance schemes and is maintaining open space areas.

Road safety is a major issue in the province as traffic-related fatalities are increasing alarmingly every year. The representatives from the local government, district and province suggested including road accident-related issues in the BIPAD portal (Disaster Information Management system of Government of Nepal).

Some of the provincial stakeholders pointed out that regular evaluations/audits of the EOCs, such as through the introduction of minimum performance indicators/system, is important for quality control. The Bagmati provincial government is working on the EOC SOPs, which will be endorsed soon.

GANDAKI PROVINCE



Group photo after the Event, Gandaki Province

The TTX identified knowledge and understanding of EOCs from different breakout group exercises. In Gandaki, most of the EOCs are not equipped. EOCs need assessment experts and support with information management to strengthen the provincial disaster database and information management.

EOCs in Gandaki need to be strengthened institutionally through training, equipment and technological support, formation of SAR team and systematization of information and database management. More focus is needed on activating EOCs, deploying SAR team, and coordinating with ambulance and firefighting team for EOCs to work as per the proposed structure and mandates.

Specific initiatives are needed to strengthen humanitarian civil-military coordination. Authorities are used to dealing with

localized disasters, but preparedness for responding to major disasters requires specific policy provisions and operating procedure. Clarity is needed on how to activate the emergency response mechanism.

EOCs need to work on coordination with other stakeholders, particularly during initial hours of an emergency when networks are down, and roads are damaged. Strong connections are required among LEOCs, DEOCs, PEOCs, and NEOC. Stakeholders' information should be readily available through periodic meetings and consultations. Other issues to work is inclusion of cluster coordination mechanism, accessibility of EOCs and information management related to local governments and districts. Major hazards are fire, landslides, and lightning. PEOC is yet to work on the landslide flood risk and earthquake risk. Challenges include inadequate information and awareness as well as poor planning and budgeting.

In most local governments, DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) is not a priority, and there are no dedicated staff to work on DRRM. Most people are focused on response, not on preparedness and risk reduction. Gandaki Province is working on the formation and mobilization of a network of local volunteers, disaster budget coding, risk financing capacity building, early warning system, and space-based technology. "We have resources but are not able to use them," said an official at the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

LUMBINI PROVINCE

The TTX exercise reflected data collection gaps and participants discussed on ways to expedite the assessment process. The data preparedness part was overlooked. The local government and district EOC officials need training on camp management and disaster assessments. Officials of LEOC, DEOC, and PEOC have limited understanding of camp management.

Some local governments, such as Maharani Rural Municipality in Pyuthan have established the Local Disaster Management Committee and Local Emergency Service Center and are currently focusing on ramping up operational readiness at the Ward level. Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City has a Disaster Management Section, three dedicated people, and two firefighting engines. Similarly, Butwal Municipality in Rupandehi District has its own LEOC and regularly reports to the DEOC.

The TTX exercise provided an opportunity to reflect on the need to establish LEOC in Susta Rural Municipality, one of the most flood-prone areas in Nawalparasi District.

Participants from the provincial ministries, PEOC, and humanitarian partners demonstrated the provincial humanitarian cluster activation mechanism, mapping of resources, and regular cluster meetings throughout the exercises. PEOC- Lumbini needs tools and techniques in SAR team mobilization, media engagement, and dead body management. There is no mechanism related to the handling of grievances during disaster response. Thus, PEOC- Lumbini needs to work on setting up the grievances handling mechanism.

As of now, Lumbini Province does not have its DRRM Act, but the bill on DRRM has been drafted and presented in the provincial assembly. Nine humanitarian clusters are formed which meet often and are part of the cluster mechanism. The PEOC gathers information on hazards and disasters from all 12 districts in the province, produces daily reports and share with the Chief Minister and the federal government.

KARNALI PROVINCE

Recent landslides and flooding in the province have exposed a gap in the information management system. In Jumla District, more than 441 houses were damaged during a recent landslide.

The haphazard use of heavy equipment (bulldozers) in road construction has worsened the vulnerability. Therefore, it is important to mainstream DRR in development work. A local disaster management fund (with NPR 500,000) has been established for the disaster response work in Tila Rural Municipality. The newly elected local officials are changing the policies.

Bheri Municipality in Jajarkot District has local disaster management committee, but local politicians do not prioritize DRRM. Lightning and windstorms are reoccurring hazards.

Khada Chakra Municipality of Kalikot District experienced a coordination gap during the flooding and landslide in October 2022. There is no coordination with the DEOC, and blanket approach of relief distribution is common.

In a relief operation, most of the funds are spent on transporting of relief materials. The provincial government spent more than

NPR 20 million in helicopter flight during the 2022 October flooding. Prepositioning of the relief items in remote and far-flung area could be good solution in ensuring the timely response to any disaster.

Sharada Municipality in Salyan has NPR 500,000 in its disaster management fund. Due to administrative bottleneck, mobilization of the fund has been challenging.

Narayan Municipality in Dailekh has no EOC but has fire fighting machine, and ambulance. The local government has NPR 1,500,000 in its disaster management fund.

LEOC in Bheri Ganaga Municipality, Surkhet has been functioning for the last five years but needs support in information management.

The EOCs in Surkhet need to work on guidelines, by-laws, disaster management fund, framework on disaster insurance, and early warning system for water induced disasters. The PEOC guideline is at the final stage.

SUDURPASHCHIM PROVINCE

Five humanitarian clusters are active in the province. The province has enacted its Act and by-laws related to DRRM. During the TTX, it was shared that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law (MoIAL) has developed Simulation Guidelines.

Early warning systems have been provisioned in ten river systems in Sudurpashchim by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM). It has facilitated the transfer of flood early warning messages to the communities at risk of monsoon flooding. Budget has been earmarked to procure SAR equipment.

The local and provincial governments have been mobilizing an indigenous governance system (Bhalmansa among the Tharu community) for awareness-raising program and disaster risk communication. “This two-day workshop and TTX is the first initiative to facilitate connections between LEOC, DEOC, and PEOC,” said Nirmala Chaudhary, DRR focal person of Tikapur Municipality. **Tikapur Municipality is considered as pioneer local government in DRR. It has a dedicated office for DRRM and firefighters. A KOBO toolbox is used to collect information related to disaster need assessments.**

Tikapur Municipality has its own DRR law, framework, climate change policy, and division of responsibilities among different units, and LEOC. The local government organizes simulations, cleans drainage channels, and trains firefighters on a regular basis.

Dodara Chadani Municipality in Kanchanpur District has set up a ‘Resilient Youth Network’ to implement disaster risk reduction activities at the community level.

Parshuram Municipality in Dadeldhura is in the process of setting up LEOC. The municipality representative informed that the TTX exercise and the two-day workshop has been helpful. Other local governments present in the TTX were: Laljhadi, Kanchanpur, Joraya, Doti, and Bhajani, Kailali.

The participant from District Administration Office (DAO) shared that unlike in the past, the number of participants in the district disaster management committee meeting has declined. There is no cluster coordination at the district level.

PEOC-Sudurpashchim needs to work on information management and communication. All the functions of the EOC and the disaster management committees should be shared with a wide range of actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Province One

1

Build capacity of PEOC such as through support in training human resources and deployment of dedicated personnel for communication and information management.

2

Reinforce the communication and information sharing between DEOCs, PEOCs and LEOCs.

3

Organize regular simulation exercises including PEOCs, DEOCs and LEOCs (at least two TTX or functional exercise a year).

Madhesh Province

1

Engage humanitarian partners and other stakeholders in revision/ drafting of DRRM bill and ensure it includes ample provisions to strengthen the EOC mechanism at the provincial level.

2

Reinforce the connections between PEOC and PHEOC.

3

Organize at least one functional exercise including PEOCs, DEOCs and LEOCs.

4

Support the EOC system with technology, equipment, data management and communication protocols.

Bagmati Province

1

Advocate with MoIAL and the Chief Minister Office to transfer PEOC within MoIAL premises.

2

Introduce the minimum performance indicators/system for the EOCs (local, district and provincial)

3

Review the provincial coordination mechanism regarding the EOCs in the districts of Kathmandu Valley (Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur). Currently, the district authorities in Kathmandu Valley receive resources from and report to the federal government directly during the time of crisis.

4

Synchronize the communication channels of EOCs at local, district and provincial levels.

5

Provide technical support for the standardization of SAR system, list of standard SAR equipment and protocols

Gandaki Province

1

Delineate roles and responsibilities of EOCs (local, district and provincial) to enhance coordination between different EOCs.

2

Identify the open spaces in the province and link that information with EOCs.

3

Stockpile relief materials in far-flung areas.

4

Include gender and disability issues in the humanitarian action and in the emergency response mechanism.

5

Clearly define the role of media and civil society organization in crisis response and how they are linked with EOCs.

Lumbini Province

1

Focus on the implementation of the law, by-laws, guidelines that are already developed for the disaster preparedness and response.

2

Organize periodic simulation exercise including all LEOCs in the province.

3

Prepare earthquake contingency plan for the province. Provincial and local authorities pointed out the need to seek technical support for developing and disseminating earthquake scenarios at the local level.

4

Reinforce linkages and communication between EOCs at different levels.

5

Link PHEOC with PEOC.

Karnali Province

1

Support to set up alternative emergency communication system and high frequency radio communication system since communication is a major challenge during disasters in mountainous districts.

2

Stockpile relief materials at the district and local government level considering the logistical challenges in remote districts of Jumla, Kalikot, Mugu, Dolpa and Humla where travel is constricted frequently due to adverse weather situation and road damage due to small scale disasters (landslide, flooding).

3

Organize training of trainers on simulation to the disaster focal persons of provincial, district and local government offices to facilitate regular simulation exercises at the local level.

Sudurpashchim Province

1

Provide equipment and technical support as required by the EOCs in the province.

2

Organize frequent simulations or interaction program to help local governments assimilate the technicalities and administrative issues of the EOCs. EOC workshops also provide an opportunity for cross-learning.

3

Support in preparing Provincial Earthquake Contingency Plan.

4

Support in implementing the provincial 'Grievances Handling Guidelines'.

5

Focus on interoperability of communication system of the EOCs, fire brigades, blood bank, SAR workers and other relevant authorities.

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