

DRR Initiatives in Nepal

Partnering with Communities on the National Implementation Strategy on Implementation of HFA in Nepal



In late 2008 Huairou Commission decided to partner with the Global Civil Society Network on Disaster Reduction on action-research initiative assessing the implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action. From HC's point of view there were two major reasons for this collaboration. Firstly the participation of grassroots women in this global action-research initiative would ensure that grassroots women's voices were heard in the civil society assessment of HFA implementation. Secondly, the action-research would create an opportunity for member organizations to engage local and national governments in a dialogue on disaster resilience.

In Nepal, which is among the top 20 countries most vulnerable to disaster, member organization, Lumanti Support Group for Shelter decided to survey grassroots women leaders, government and municipal officers. In the course of the action-research Lumanti found that there was low awareness of HFA across within and outside the government. When the organization reported this to the Disaster Section of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suman Ghimire - the officer in charge - responded with a decision to jointly organize a training workshop to orient national and municipal officials on the National Implementation Strategy for the Implementation of HFA.

The workshop held in the Himalayan mountain village of Nagarkot on March 20-21, 2009 was jointly organized by Lumanti, Action Aid and Nepal's Ministry of Home Affairs. It was attended by 23 government officials: 9 from national ministries, 8 district officials and 6 municipal officials. Government officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs oriented the participants on the HFA, National Implementation Strategy, Damage and Loss Assessment methodologies and the proposed National Disaster Management Act.



The final section of the workshop provided an opportunity for presentations highlighting community interventions on disaster risk reduction. Sobina Lama from Lumanti described the school safety pilot project initiated in two schools with the support of Action Aid have enabled the parent-teacher school management committees, teachers and children to undertake vulnerability and capacity assessments through which they learned about the risks and vulnerabilities that their schools were exposed to. This school safety pilot reached out to about 650 students, 33 teachers along with parents from across 175 households. Discussing the impact of

the vulnerability and capacity assessment conducted as part of the school safety program, Mithu Pant, principal of Buddhajyoti School located in a poor settlement of Kathmandu said, "when teachers and children learned about the weaknesses in our school building and how these endangered all of us, we were quite alarmed... Soon teachers and children began to observe these kinds of structural problems and risks in all the buildings we were in - in our classrooms, in our school, in our homes...everywhere." The program included first aid training for school teachers and youth resulting in a group of 60-70 volunteers. The school safety program also includes the formation of disaster management committees focused on emergency preparedness. The retrofitting process now underway incorporates earthquake safety features including windows on the outer walls. In the classroom too, benches once attached to

the desks have been separated from them to facilitate rapid evacuation in case of an emergency. This pilot phase has resulted in the development of 23 community trainers who have the capacity to train other women's groups.



The children's clubs formed in the squatter settlements where Lumanti first began working more than ten years ago have now blossomed into youth groups in which members are keen to contribute to the development of their communities. Youth Leader, Smita K.C. presented the work of the Child Development and Youth Network have been doing street plays in squatter settlements to communicate the damage caused by earthquakes and floods; and actions that communities can take to reduce the impact of these disasters. Youth leaders who have been part of these experiences are responsible for selecting schools in poor and

low income settlements to partner with other community leaders to transfer the vulnerability and capacity mapping methodology and use it to mobilize communities, teachers and parents.

Suranjana Gupta, from the Huairou Commission was invited to provide a global perspective on the participation of grassroots women in the local implementation of HFA. She asserted that a major reason for Huairou Commission's participation in the global action-research on the Local Implementation of the HFA was intended to find out what grassroots women are doing to build resilient communities and how these local initiatives can be connected to national programs on the implementation of HFA. She went on to point out some of the benefits of government-grassroots partnerships in the implementation of HFA saying that women's cooperatives and the federations (such as those promoted by Lumanti) are well connected social networks whose resources and relationships can be rapidly mobilized in a disaster. But most importantly, these community based institutions - cooperatives and federations have a history of serving their communities in an equitable and accountable manner.

Partnerships to Advance Community Resilience

In the lively discussions that followed the presentations municipal officials from Kathamandu also spoke out on the lack of clear mandates and resources for local authorities in the context of disaster management. As the ward is the smallest municipal unit at which all development and disaster programs are implemented, ward officials identified the lack of accurate, reliable data as a major obstacle to planning and implementing work.

In response to these discussions Suman Ghimire affirmed that there was an urgent need to "translate the national disaster management strategy into local, concrete actions" which would surface the practical problems and help to identify solutions for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework.

Lumanti proposed a pilot project that it was prepared to undertake with the collaboration of the government and municipalities in 10 wards across 5 municipalities to mobilize communities to map risks, vulnerabilities and capacities to cope with disaster. The outcomes of these risk mapping exercises are expected to be disaster management plans which will feed into the district level plans which are part of the Government's National HFA Implementation Strategy. The pilot projects will culminate in the formation of local multi-stakeholder platforms for resilience building. The youth groups and other community resource persons who have been involved in vulnerability and capacity assessments are expected to be key stakeholders in the local platforms and their experience can also be drawn upon to lead the community mapping processes. Lumanti also intends that during the mapping processes in each ward, grassroots women leaders and other key actors from other wards be invited to observe the process so that the risk mapping process can be rapidly transferred across communities.

Mainstreaming DRR into Community Development Efforts



While the school safety program was highlighted at the workshop on the National HFA Implementation Strategy, communities affiliated with Lumanti there are several other grassroots initiatives that Lumanti is associated with. These are not explicitly described as ‘disaster risk reduction’ initiatives but are in fact risk reduction and resilience building measures that are embedded in the community development efforts of the Network of Women’s Cooperatives, Mahila Ekta Samaj (Federation of women’s groups) and the Baso Bas Basti Samrochan Samaj (Federation of Squatter Communities)

The settlement committee in Narayantol a small squatter settlement in a hilly part of Kathmandu identified the need to prevent landslides in their settlement and worked together to create paved stairways and build retaining walls along the landslide prone settlement.

Sanitation has long been a priority for the squatter communities. The lack of toilets and proper drainage and sewage in settlements makes communities vulnerable to floods as well as health problems. The Narayantol community has also recently installed a low cost up-flow bio filter unit for sewage treatment which has been drawing a stream of visitors who want to learn from this community. In Kharipakha, a 150 household squatter settlement in Kathmandu, communities decided to create a paved cover a stream which was being used as a sewage disposal area. It’s made a world of difference to families living here. Children are no longer in danger of falling into the stream and water borne diseases in the settlement have reduced drastically. In Bharatpur, one of the fastest growing municipalities in Nepal, women from the squatter communities have been taking the lead in the construction of 750 toilets, starting with a basic hygiene assessment of communities, they go on to mobilize and motivate families to build toilets and then supervise the construction of these toilets.

Women’s Cooperatives as Community Safety Nets



The Pragati Women’s Cooperative is one of several grassroots women’s cooperatives partnering with Lumanti. With 440 individual members from 29 savings groups belonging to 10 communities, this cooperative is completely owned and managed by grassroots women. The cooperative has total savings of Rs. 9 million and has loan outstandings worth Rs. 10.52 million. In addition to the compulsory monthly savings this cooperative boasts of 10 savings products ranging from housing savings, children’s savings to festival savings and fixed deposits. Loan products each with different interest rates and repayment periods include products for paying off

other high interest loans, traveling abroad for jobs and buying land for securing housing. For emergencies most members turn to their local savings and credit groups who ensure that they keep at least Rs. 1500-2000 available at all times in case of emergencies. Larger amounts, however are also available from the cooperative. The cooperative has also provided small grants to different communities to improve community infrastructure and basic services. For example Rs. 8,000 has been given to Chandol community to cover open drains, Rs. 5000 to Hattigauda for paying for a water connection and Rs. 2000 each to- Kadya Bhadrakali to repair their community building and to Tikuri to construct toilets.

The Cooperative essentially handles all the financial needs of its members. The advocacy issues are addressed by the 15,000 strong federation of women’s groups spread across 15 districts called the Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj. If you ask the leaders of the Mahila Ekta Samaj what their relationship with the cooperatives is, they will say, “It is like bricks and mud. You need both to build your house, don’t you? We need the cooperative for money matters. If the government provides land we need money to

build our houses. But we need to advocate with the government to influence them, to get land and to gain support for our work.” This logic reaffirms the one of the core ideas in the resilience framework which is being developed by the Huairou Commission’s Global Campaign for Community Resilience. An insight emerging from grassroots women’s resilience practices across Asia, Africa and Latin America is that grassroots women’s organizations and their ability to engage institutional actors are vital for sustaining grassroots women’s efforts to build resilient communities. ☒

Post cards from Nepal, Suranjana Gupta, GROOTS International

- Disaster Watch, March 2009