



CASE STUDY

# Strengthening Local Risk Governance in Nepal

Strengthening community and institutional resilience to floods and other hazards in Nepal through effective municipal laws and policies.<sup>[1]</sup>



## Nepal

Nepal is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. With a population of 28 million people it experiences frequent flooding, landslides, earthquakes and exposure to the impacts of a multitude of other hazards that occur annually, including cold spells and heatwaves.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Nepal has more than 6,000 rivers and rivulets flowing from north to south, with almost 80 per

cent of annual precipitation falling during the summer monsoon season (June-September).<sup>[iii]</sup> Flooding occurs annually with devastating impacts, with the 2017 floods affecting 35 of the 77 districts, more than 190,000 houses destroyed or partially damaged, displacing thousands of people.<sup>[iv]</sup>

Nepal is classified as a least developed country on the Human Development Index, ranked 142 out of 189 countries.<sup>[v]</sup>

## Nepal Red Cross Society

Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) was established in 1963 and is the largest humanitarian network throughout the country, with a total of 117,617 active volunteers and an operational presence in all 77 districts (with 77 district branches).<sup>[vi]</sup> Nepal Red Cross' role is articulated in key government policies and strategies as a critical stakeholder in disaster risk management and response, and in practice acts as an auxiliary or special partner to national and local government

The Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) platform provides an excellent example of this partnership in action. Created in 2011, and co-chaired by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), and Nepal Red Cross, the CBDRM platform provides a multistakeholder and inclusive approach to risk reduction and resilience in Nepal and has created opportunities between the government of Nepal, Red Cross and partners to co-create policies and ensure effective coordination of best practices of disaster and climate risk management.

## IFRC Disaster Law

Disasters cause massive human suffering and loss, but the right laws and policies can help keep communities safe and save lives. IFRC Disaster Law supports National Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies and governments to strengthen disaster risk governance, through the development and implementation of climate, disaster and emergency related legislation, policies and procedures. Since 2008 Nepal Red Cross has been working alongside its government to evaluate and strengthen laws and regulations for disaster risk management at the national level, ranging from work on [legal preparedness for international disaster assistance in Nepal](#), [DRR and Law in Nepal](#); [regulatory barriers in emergency shelter in Nepal](#) and [Gender Equality and prevention of SGBV in disaster law in Nepal](#). Red Cross was also instrumental in supporting the Government of Nepal to review its 34-year-old Natural Calamity Act and to pass the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2017.

Red Cross is now turning its efforts to support government and communities in Nepal to strengthen disaster risk management law, policy and action at the municipal level.



# Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance

The Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (the Alliance) aims to scale up its work in climate action, to help make 2 million people more resilient to flooding by the end of 2024. This change will be achieved through encouraging effective public policy and increasing funding in support of flood resilience, developing sound practices and policy support for flood resilience, and measurably enhancing flood resilience in vulnerable communities across the world.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has been working as part of the Alliance since 2013. In 2018 the Alliance began supporting Nepal Red Cross to further its disaster law and advocacy initiatives in Nepal. This support has focused on working with the central and local government to streamline and strengthen risk governance at the municipal level, through the development and rollout of the Municipal Risk Governance Assessment Tool.

# Constitutional change in Nepal

In 2015, constitutional and governance reforms moved Nepal from a unitary to a federal state resulting in the formation of 753 municipal governments (spread across seven new provinces). Subsequently, the country's climate and disaster risk management legal frameworks and institutional arrangements have had to be adjusted to reflect the new federalized structure. This included the enactment of several key pieces of legislation:

- Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2074 (2017)
- Local Government Operation Act 2074 (2017)
- National Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2075 (2018)
- Disaster Risk Reduction National Strategic Action Plan 2018-2030<sup>[vii]</sup>

# Finding a solution – Red Cross partnering with the Government of Nepal

An identified challenge under these new arrangements was how to devolve responsibility for local disaster risk management to the 753 municipalities systematically and coherently. The majority of these municipalities lacked the resources, knowledge and guidance on how to meet these new responsibilities.

Given its global leadership on disaster law, and its community presence across the country, Red Cross partnered with the Government of Nepal to assess and understand what municipalities needed to design and implement a cohesive disaster management policy, which would be in line with national legislative obligations. Through consultation and dialogue with municipal authorities, CBDRM partners and communities, it became evident that municipalities' capacities, resources and challenges varied widely and needed to be thoughtfully analyzed. Red Cross proposed to MoFAGA that this analysis would need to be consistent across all 753 municipalities, to ensure that each municipality would be able to meet its responsibilities under the new Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act and Constitution of Nepal.

MoFAGA with Red Cross consulted a range of stakeholders to find a solution to this problem, including the Prime Minister's office, provincial government, Alliance partners – Mercy Corps and Practical Action and broader CBDRM platform members. An outcome of this was a decision to adapt and contextualize some of the key IFRC disaster law tools, such as the [Checklist on Law and Disaster Preparedness and Response](#) for use at the municipal level in Nepal. These checklists were originally designed to guide national governments on how to strengthen their relevant disaster law and to ensure that they provide the enabling framework for comprehensive and inclusive disaster risk management. Nepal was one of the first countries to localize' and adapt these checklists to guide municipal authorities and partners in their local law and policymaking efforts. The result has been the development of the Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool.

# Development of the Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool



## Co-creating the key to scaling up

The first draft of the Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool was presented to members of the CBDRM platform in 2019. It was agreed that to make the Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool accessible and user-friendly for municipal staff of varying capacities and suited to different contexts (urban, peri-urban and rural) the checklist would be simplified into six thematic areas: 1. Policy, Legal and Regulatory Framework, 2. Institution and Organizational Structure, 3. Planning, Budgeting and Monitoring, 4. Coordination, Partnership and Collaboration,

5. Resources and Capacities and 6. Cross-cutting Issues. Through the CBDRM platform, Red Cross and MoFAGA have facilitated feedback from cross-sectoral government ministries UN agencies, international and local NGOs to into the development of the tool. This engagement is critical, as these agencies will play key roles in supporting the municipalities to work through and implement changes identified by the Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool across the entire country and its 753 municipalities over the coming years.

After these alterations were incorporated, the draft Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool was ready in late 2019. Ten municipalities were identified to pilot the tool in early 2020, with the support of Alliance partners. However, these plans were interrupted by Covid-19, where Nepal experienced huge challenges with insufficient medical facilities, major cross-board management issues, and the country placed in repeated lengthy lockdowns. The pilots, with most other government work, was put on hold.

The government, however, reflected that Covid-19 demonstrated to everyone the important role that municipal governments must play in preparing for all types of disasters, whatever their origin.

“Before Village Development Committees [before the federal structure] had a poor performance, but decentralisation of power has resulted in municipalities managing small disaster situation themselves.”

**GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL REPRESENTATIVE.**

In 2021, the pilots were again attempted to be rolled out but were stopped by the second wave of Covid-19. The CBDRM platform then adapted the rollout to an online format. In early 2021, Red Cross began training key Provincial and Municipal Government, Red Cross and non-government partners on how to use the tool virtually. These lead trainers will in turn guide key municipal staff and DRR focal persons on how to use the tool to inform their new disaster management and climate change policies. These experiences and reflections will also inform a new initiative of IFRC Disaster Law globally to research and provide guidance on urban and subnational climate-smart disaster risk management laws which will be getting underway in 2022 and enable other countries and local leaders to learn from the experiences and practice in Nepal.

## The future is resilient

This training is in time for the annual local planning and budgeting process that municipalities must undertake. As a result, MoFAGA expects to see an increase in disaster risk management measures in municipal budgets and plans over the coming years, as spending and action is further localized. To date, three municipalities (with total populations of approximately 500,000 people) have piloted the Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool, and plan to use the tool to strengthen their local laws and plans for risk management.

It is anticipated that by the end of 2023, all municipalities involved in the piloting phase will have been supported to develop their municipal DRM Plans and have DRR better integrated into relevant municipal development plans using the tool. Furthermore, they will be supported to have the necessary skillset and capacity to effectively oversee the plan and its implementation.

After one of the training sessions, a senior staff member shared:

“Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool is very useful to understand the current resources and need of resources, gaps and challenges in disaster risk reduction/management in the municipality. These indicators [in the tool] will be considered during planning, budgeting, policymaking in coming days.”<sup>[viii]</sup>

**SENIOR MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT STAFF  
FROM BARBARDIYA MUNICIPALITY**

After the feedback from the piloting, MoFAGA is confident that with the Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool and the support of agencies like Red Cross, that all 753 municipalities across Nepal will have disaster risk management integrated into their local plans by 2025. MoFAGA and the CBDRM platform are certain that the Municipal Disaster Risk Governance Assessment Tool will be a catalyst for stronger governance at the local level and result in improvements to disaster and climate resilience policy and most importantly action across the country.

“One single programme cannot work alone. There needs to be integration of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation across all programmes and sectors [in municipalities]. We need to go together in one direction. If we have a commitment by the municipality and partners - there could be big change across Nepal.”

**GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL REPRESENTATIVE**



[i] This case study was developed by an independent consultant, Ms Becky- Jay Harrington and was produced with the intention of carrying out a more in-depth study at the of the current project, at the end of 2023.

[ii] Government of Nepal Ministry of Home Affairs. (2019). Nepal Disaster Report.

[iii] Government of Nepal Ministry of Home Affairs. (2019). Nepal Disaster Report.

[iv] Government of Nepal, Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. (2019). Standard Operating Procedure for Flood Early Warning System in Nepal.

[v] UNDP. (2019). Human Development Report 2019: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century: Mozambique.

[vi] Nepal Red Cross Society. (2017). Annual Report.

[vii] Oxford Policy Management. (2020). Disaster risk reduction and management in Nepal: Delineation of Roles and Responsibilities.

[viii] Senior municipal government staff from Barbardiya Municipality, NRCS MDRGA Tool Testing Report, September 2021.