Considering that “disasters are inevitable in Bangladesh due to its high vulnerability index”, the Government, specifically the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), recognized the need for strategic options to further reduce the impacts of disaster. The principle of “build back better” is one particular option that the Government wants to promote by seizing the opportunity to correct the limitations and failures of previous practices, policies, and programs during the recovery phase. It further recognized that recovery offers opportunity to make infrastructures, communities, and livelihoods resilient.

Specifically, the consultation was expected to achieve the following: (i) introduced recovery agenda to key stakeholders, (ii) prepared the ground works for establishing a National Recovery Platform, and (iii) discussed and endorsed a Roadmap for Disaster Recovery Planning.

At the opening, IRP delivered the keynote speech which introduced the key principles of disaster recovery, including knowledge products, case studies, tools, and guidance. After the keynote, the following key officials from the Government delivered their respective speeches: Mr. Mohammed Abdul Wazed, Director-General of the Department of Disaster Management; Dr. Mesbah ul Alam, Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief; Hon. Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya Bir Bikram, Minister of Disaster Management and Relief; and Mr. Dhirendra Debnath Shambhuh, Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction. The key message of all the speeches was that recovery is gap in disaster risk reduction (DRR) that Bangladesh needs to address.

In view of this, the MoDMR, in cooperation with the Institute of Strategic Recovery Studies for Disaster Resilience and Research (ISRSDDR) and the International Recovery Platform (IRP), had jointly organized a Stakeholders Consultation Workshop on Disaster Recovery Planning, 9-10 December 2014 at CIRDAP Auditorium in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The workshop was supported by local partners, namely: UNDP, Australian Aid, Islamic Relief, and Christian Aid. Participated by over 50 stakeholder representatives, the consultation was generally aimed at creating the foundation for promoting resilient recovery and paving the way for sustainable development in Bangladesh.

At the end of the workshop, the stakeholders identified the following key recommendations: (i) institutionalization of recovery functions at the national and local governments; (ii) establishment of predictable funding for recovery at the government agencies;
One of the initiatives shared at the “IRP’s International Recovery Forum”, 16th January 2015 at Hotel Okura in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, was the experience of Bangladesh in establishing a National Recovery Platform (NRP). According to Dr. Akram H. Chowdhury, Executive Chairperson of the Institute of Strategic Recovery Studies for Disaster Resilience and Research (ISRSDRR) and former Member of Parliament, the main function of the NRP is to serve as an advisory body to the Government of Bangladesh to ensure efficient and effective recovery processes. Dr Chowdhury highlighted that the Government is advocating for the “build back better” principle of recovery to seize the opportunity to correct the limitations and failures of previous practices, policies, and programs.

The NRP is expected to address the gaps in knowledge, practice, and resources experienced in Bangladesh. Firstly, the concept of recovery is not yet fully integrated in the policies and planning instruments of the Government such that recovery is not clearly articulated in the Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD) and National Plan for Disaster Management of 2010-2015. Secondly, recovery plans and efforts are not yet fully aligned with the long-term development agenda. For instance, the Disaster Management Act of 2012 does not stipulate predictable funding for recovery. Thirdly, stakeholders and other key actors are not yet fully engaged and coordinated to take on recovery functions after a disaster because there is no existing mechanism for cooperation in recovery. Furthermore, Dr. Chowdhury narrated that the recovery initiatives in Bangladesh were inspired from the IRP organized activities, including the side events at the Sixth Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (6AMCDRR) in Bangkok in June 2014 and at the Second World Reconstruction Conference (WRC2) in Washington, D.C. in September 2014, where he was enlightened with the importance of building resilient recovery.

The experience of Bangladesh had remarkable contribution in achieving the objectives of the International Recovery Forum 2015 that commemorated the 20th Year of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake as well as the 10th of IRP. The Forum had effectively sent the message of “Build Back Better” from Hyogo to the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), 14-18 March 2015 in Sendai, Japan.

Recommendations

(i) Organization of a three-day workshop on disaster recovery planning to be participated by inter-ministerial representatives and key stakeholders;
(ii) Half-day orientation on recovery among parliamentarians;
(iii) Activation of the inter-ministerial council, Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Coordination committee, National Disaster Management Committee, Earthquake Preparedness and Awareness Committee etc., which are stipulated in the SOD – to take on recovery functions;
(iv) Propose amendments to the Disaster Management Act of 2012 or propose for a separate “National Recovery Act” to secure recovery financing; and
(v) Advocate for clear articulation of the recovery component in the process of updating the National Plan for Disaster Management.