

## **Sikkim Earthquake:**

### **National Workshop on Housing, Rehabilitation & Resilience**

**Organized by the Sikkim Studies Programme of the Centre for North East Studies**

**Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi, Nov. 11-12, 2011**

### **Background Note**

The Sikkim Earthquake of September 18, 2011, is another reminder of the vulnerability of India's North-east. Although, the fatality count has remained rather low in relation to the quake's magnitude (6.8 on the Richter scale), thanks to its low population density, its destructive potential is evident from the trail of damage. What is also evident is the vulnerability of the region on account of its remoteness and mountainous terrain, which underscores the acute need of reduction in building vulnerability.

At this point, while the relief phase is still under way, it is important to start talking about the next phases that will focus at bringing safety and stability, a form of 'normalcy', among other things, to housing for the affected people. Since, housing will be the largest component of the rehabilitation expenditure, and since it will involve the common man and major stakeholders, this specific issue warrants deliberation: what will it entail, how can the need for disaster-resilient housing as well as that of the disaster risk reduction be addressed? The issues have to be addressed through a process which involves people and institutions so that responses are not just quick and effective but also sustainable.

One cannot forget that, while the earthquake brought much destruction in the northern part of the state, in other less affected regions there are thousands of buildings that are not disaster resilient. Hence, they are just as vulnerable, and could succumb easily in a future quake in those regions. Extending this argument further, while much of Sikkim is in Seismic Zone IV, most of the North-east is in Seismic Zone V, which implies bigger and more frequent earthquakes.

States like Assam are also faced with flood disasters every year. Hence, disaster risk reduction is the need of the hour for the whole of the North-east. In the aftermath of recent events, this is the best possible time to begin a deliberation that could guide

local people, stakeholders and institutions in bringing long term disaster resilience to the region.

### **Past Disasters and Lessons Learnt**

Disasters have been known to strike the subcontinent for hundreds of years. But it is only in the past two decades or so that systematic efforts have been undertaken by the governments and non-governmental organizations for the post disaster rehabilitation as well as disaster risk reduction. Experience gained from disasters like Latur Earthquake of 1993, the Orissa super-cyclone, the 2001 Kutch Earthquake, the Kashmir Earthquake of 2005, Indonesia's 2007 Tsunami etc. have helped identify the critical areas of rehabilitation and have taught many valuable lessons in ensuring effective rehabilitation. These critical areas could be listed as follows:

- Damage assessment including technical analysis
- Mid-term shelters
- Technology packages for reconstruction including improved vernacular systems
- Technology packages for vulnerability risk reduction in existing structures
- Capacity Buildings – Engineers, artisans
- Evolving of assistance packages and disbursement modalities
- Community awareness building
- Owner Driven Reconstruction
- Compilation of reference documents
- Any other issues which participants may wish to raise

### **Kick starting Process**

What is critical is to ensure through a process of discussions that the public, research organizations, NGOs, researchers, scholars, media and others are empowered and able to take part in a response procedure that is built into policy and law and which is imparted in regular training to students, government officers, NGOs etc. The policy has to be specific for each state, which has different physical characteristics (e.g. soil conditions and structural issues) as well as urban growth challenges.

This process has to go beyond just the responses of the National Disaster Management Authority and the courage and resilience of the Rapid Deployment Force personnel.

In order to kickstart this process, a series of workshops is proposed by the Centre for North East Studies at Jamia\_Millia\_Islamia, New Delhi, which, appropriately has a Sikkim Studies Programme, which could provide the umbrella and some funds for this effort. Discussions will facilitate the sharing of valuable past experiences and could throw some light on the way ahead.

Another area which needs extensive research and documentation, leading to policy prescriptions, is counseling for victims of trauma and survivors of the earthquakes, an issue that has not been given the priority that it deserves.

Proposed participants will include those with first-hand experience relevant to the critical areas of intervention areas mentioned above including senior government officials and those outside the government (Central and State) including MPs, NGOs, educational institutions, and private individuals, having extensively worked in different regions of the country on such issues. They will also include significant representation from the North-east especially Sikkim and the workshop is the first initiative of the Sikkim Studies programme which the Centre has launched, in partnership with the Sikkim Government.

It is envisaged that deliberations should lead to forming of recommendations for housing rehabilitation, changes in institutional responses, involvement of civil society including media and long-term vulnerability risk reduction for Sikkim as well as for possible future disasters in the region.

We therefore propose a one-and half day National Workshop in New Delhi to focus on these issues on November 11-12, 2011 at Jamia\_Millia\_Islamia, New Delhi, which would begin at 10 am on the 11th and close with lunch the following day.

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