6th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

Bangkok, Thailand | 22-26 June, 2014

Promoting and Institutionalizing Safer Settlements in Myanmar

UN-Habitat, In partnership with Ministry of Construction (MOC) and Myanmar Engineering Society (MES) with support from USAID-OFDA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Norway and ECHO.

MYANMAR ENGINEERING SOCIETY

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Abstract

Physical vulnerability stemming from settlements along hazard prone area, poor building materials and construction practices are among key factors along with weak institutional and preparedness mechanisms in Myanmar.

UN-Habitat has been actively engaged in shelter recovery and reconstruction since Cyclone Nargis. Since then, it has been promoting safer construction practices through developing various guidelines and training of artisans with partners such as Ministry of Construction (MOC), Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR), Myanmar Engineering Society (MES), UN, INGOs and LNGOs.

Capitalizing the opportunity to address safer settlements as part of development interventions under the broader reform process initiated by the New Government in 2011, it is currently working on formulation of Myanmar National Building Code (MNBC) through MES under the guidance of MOC.

Context

With the recent changes in the constitution and governance system, and changing geo-political context, Myanmar is at its crossroads for modernization and development. While the country is characterized as an agrarian economy with 66.1 % of the population currently residing in rural areas, Myanmar is on a fast track mode to urbanization (33.9% as of 2010). Past disaster events in Myanmar is characterized by frequent small- and medium-scale disasters, there were at least 14 major storms, 7 earthquakes and 12 major floods between 1910 and 2000. Of all the hazards, fire has been ranked one of the most prevalent hazards in Myanmar .The country was also badly affected by 2004 tsunami, 2005 landslides in the mountainous regions cyclone Nargis in 2008. However, cyclone Nargis has been by far the most devastating natural disaster in the history of the country; it has brought into focus the extremely high vulnerability of coastal communities to natural hazards.

Physical vulnerability stemming from settlements along hazard prone area, poor building materials and construction practices are among key factors along with weak institutional and preparedness mechanisms in Myanmar.

Post Nargis recovery, placed Building Back Better (BBB) as an overarching goal for sustainable recovery and development. UN-Habitat and its partners Ministry of Construction, Myanmar Engineering Society, UN, INGOs and LNGOs have been promoting safer construction practices through developing various guidelines and training of artisans such as carpenters and masons. In 2011, UN-Habitat study on Post Nargis Shelter Intervention " Lessons learned and way forward for resilient shelter interventions in Rural Myanmar" revealed that 62% of the surveyed households live in shelter which are not disaster resilient and they need retrofitting. Assessed shelters cannot withstand winds exceeding 80 MPH and will be completely destroyed in the event of near Nargis event. Subsequent large scale disaster events Cyclone Giri (2010), Tarlay Earthquake (2011) and Shewbo Earth-

quake (2012) and small scale localized events highlighted the vulnerability of rural and urban households.

Institutionalizing Safer Construction Practices:

Capitalizing on the ongoing reform process and engagement with development partners, UN-Habitat strengthened its partnership with MOC, MES and its partners to address disaster risk reduction and to address safer settlements as part of development interventions. In 2012, UN-Habitat and MES under the guidance of Ministry of Construction embarked on formulation of Myanmar National Building Code (MNBC) which incorporates disaster risk reduction and environment sustainability. While also noting that predominantly that most construction are built without inputs or supervision of professionals such as Engineers, there is a need to enhance the skills of artisans involved in construction in both rural and urban areas. With the support from USAID /OFDA and Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Norway, UN-Habitat, MOC and MES to explore and institutionalize the safer construction practices.

Based on stakeholder consultations, it identified the potential opportunity to work under the National unified system for skills recognition- National Skills Standard Authority (NSSA) which was established in October 2007 by the Government. The NSSA's functions include:-

- Establishing Occupational Competency Standards for occupations on a priority basis.
- Accrediting training providers & competency assessors including those in the private sector.
- Overseeing assessment and certification of skilled workers at the National level.

Since its formation the NSSA has identified 173 priority occupations in the various Economic sectors of which 55 priority occupations have been approved by the Cabinet (of which 15 are related to construction trades). Further, NSSA has identified 4 Levels under National Skills Qualification Framework (NQF) and competency standards for each level .

Levels under National Skills Qualification Framework

1. Level(1) / (Semi-Skilled/Helper/Learner)
2. Level(2) / (Skilled Worker)
3. Level(3) / (Advanced skilled worker)
4. Level(4) / (Supervisor/Technician)

Review of NSSA endorsed construction trade course revealed that DRR measures are not addressed in the syllabus. While the NSSA system is evolving with the recent enactment of Employment and Skills Development Law, 2013 the partners are currently working under the framework of National Skills Standards Authority (NSSA) to mainstream, DRR, Fire and Environmental Considerations in the skills course in Construction Sector.

Over the last one year, it has developed course curriculum for Carpentry (with elements of DRR, Fire and Environmental Considerations) and organized National and local level trainings with competency based certification through ECHO (DIPECHO VIII – Myanmar Consortium for Community Resilience).

Challenges:

- While the NSSA system is evolving, early engagement on this endeavor had its own institutional and coordination challenges.
- Training and ongoing certification has been acknowledged by NSSA, and it is working on establishment of institutional mechanism for Skill Certification(Training the Trainer and Assessor, Implementing the training Programs, Skill Testing Programs and Certifications)
- Currently there is no dedicated training facility for construction sector in Myanmar and the Ministry of Construction Training School (primarily to train its staff) offered its training facility and its lacks necessary infrastructure for training delivery.

Success:

- Recognizing the importance of skills training and no training centers and related infrastructure for construction trade, Ministry of Construction Training School, took the initiative of offering its training center for training community members for the first time.
- National training for community members through DIPECHO VIII at Ministry of Construction Training School generated interest among women (further enabled by Oxfam's Women Empowerment Trainings) at the community level. This has led to active participation of women in the trainings to enhance their skills and contribute to community level mitigation measures and to repair their houses in partners pilot communities. In addition, partners recognize the role of women in promoting safer construction and have committed to engage women in training.

By linking safer construction practices into construction trade of NSSA system, provides an window of opportunity to institutionalize and scale up under the leadership of Government and provide decent and skilled labor further facilitating Myanmar's integration into single market and production base within the ASEAN by December 2015 that allows free flow of skilled labor within all member states.

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