The government is also keen to identify effective equipment and procure them through the guidance of recently formed Earthquake Preparedness and Awareness Committee, headed by the minister, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management (MoFDM).

Development of urban community volunteers, a unique initiative of CDMP for community involvement in search and rescue operations to support regular forces of the government: Global scenarios reflect that during any disaster, community people are the first responders. Considering the model of Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) of the Government of Bangladesh and Red Crescent Society, CDMP-I has taken initiatives to develop urban community volunteers through FSCD. CDMP initiatives had been followed by some NGOs such as, Islamic Relief and Action Aid, extending their support to FSCD for developing volunteers. So far, more than 1,000 volunteers have been developed in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet, who have been trained on search, rescue and first aid to support the regular forces of the government during the period of emergency. Two hundred volunteers in each ward of the city corporations will be trained and, by the next five years, around 62,000 urban volunteers will be developed throughout the country.

Capacities to conduct scientific research are not yet adequate in the country. CDMP has procured scientific equipment for GoB organisations as well as academic institutions to promote application-oriented earthquake research activities in the country. Through the procurement of these equipments, the country is now equipped to some degree for engineering and scientific solutions related to strong ground motions.

The country is already equipped with 16 seismometers, 12 controlled by the geology department of Dhaka University and four by the Bangladesh Department of Meteorology (BMD). Collaborative research programmes with foreign universities are also available in Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET) and Dhaka University.

Professionalizing Disaster Management: CDMP has been working with National Curriculum and Text Board (NCTB) to incorporate earthquake preparedness and evacuation drill into elementary to secondary level text books as well as supplementary learning materials. Disaster management courses have been introduced in public training institutes and a number of public and private universities (University of Dhaka, BRAC) of the country to a level through CDMP initiatives. Earthquake risk management is also taught in these courses and degree programmes. Moreover, CDMP has been supporting the development of earthquake engineering curriculum at CUET and Sylhet Shahajalal University of Science and Technology (SUST).

Awareness-raising initiatives

Safety and evacuation drill in schools: Due to irregular shape and poor constructions, schools are most vulnerable to earthquakes. The Pakistan Earthquake of 2005 killed around 17,000 school children and teachers in a total death toll of 75,000. The Sichuan earthquake in China with a total death toll of 85,000 killed around 10,000 children and teachers. In all earthquake-prone countries, school safety and evacuation drills are conducted regularly and have saved thousands of lives.

It has been observed that even in the most severe earthquakes, buildings rarely collapse completely. Injury and even death is most often caused by the shattering and falling of non-structural elements, such as window glass, ceiling plaster, lighting fixtures, chimneys, roof tiles and signs. There will be no time to think about what to do; therefore, of all earthquake-preparedness measures, earthquake drills are the most important. There is a need to educate the school children and teachers on safety and evacuation measures/drills to make the schools safer, and to know what to do before and after an earthquake occurs in their area. The earthquake safety lessons they learn will stay with them and be useful in adulthood, both for themselves and their children. In CDMP-I, school safety and evacuations drill has been conducted in 28 schools in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet on a pilot basis, along with some NGOs which have done so.

Bangladesh is now considered the world leader in responding to cyclone and flood. However, we have no recent experience of responding to a major earthquake.