A standard school earthquake safety guidebook and posters have been prepared and distributed to the schools. It is planned to extend this drill in a more effective manner to 65 schools in the earthquake risk-prone cities of the country in CDMP-II. In order to make safety and evacuation drills sustainable, equipments to conduct the drills will be provided to the schools and they will be organised with the administrative framework of the primary and secondary school directorate.

Training for religious leaders (imams) for awareness about earthquake dangers : Natural disasters have usually had some religious meaning for people in ancient times. But, this kind of religious interpretation of natural disasters has declined gradually because of the influence of education in society. Religious leaders have the access to motivate and educate the people in reducing the vulnerability of different disasters. Keeping this in mind, religious leaders were educated through this activity on the earthquake dangers and what to do to reduce the non-structural vulnerability at the household level. The religious leaders were given preliminary knowledge on the earthquake hazard and training on the vulnerability of the non-structural elements and asked to disseminate this during 'khutba' of Friday prayers.

Training for masons and bar-binders for safe construction practices: Construction of residential buildings in a developing country like Bangladesh is primarily carried out by the informal sector, mostly the owners/builders. The workforce (masons, bar-binders and plumbers) employed in this sector do not have any formal training. Most of them acquire skill either through trial and error or through practical experience. While there have been initiatives by the respective government organisations, such asRAJUK, towards improving seismic performance of new constructions by incorporation of seismic designs in the building construction process, it can still be anticipated that local masons and small contractors will continue to play a significant role in the building construction process. So, any enhancement in their skills in seismic-resistant constructions can significantly help in improving the earthquake resistance of informal, non-engineered buildings and hence considerable reduction in the loss of human lives and properties due to earthquake. To improve the construction qualities, training programmes are necessary for small contractors, masons and bar binders, equipping them with basic knowledge of earthquake resistant building construction technology and providing them with a clear and concise framework of earthquake-resistant construction technology. A standard training manual has been developed to produce new masons and bar binders as well as upgrade the skill level of those practising.

Poster and leaflet on earthquake vulnerability reduction measures: Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) has been working on upgrading the awareness and preparedness level of the city dwellers by producing booklets and other relevant documents. CDMP has also produced posters and leaflets on earthquake awareness while some academic institutions (BUET) and NGOs (Islamic Relief, Concern Worldwide, etc.) are also working to educate the people about what to do before, during and after earthquake.

The way forward

While there have been significant developments in the area of earthquake preparedness in the country, much remains to be done. This includes: formation of a well-equipped Earthquake Emergency Operation Centre (EOC), strong laws and building codes, proper monitoring mechanisms during construction of buildings, adequate measures to reduce structural and non-structural vulnerability of hospitals, schools and other critical infrastructure. Earthquake education from the household to institutions is crucial. The most important is institutionalising the preparedness and risk reduction activities within the relevant organisations. In the updated version of Standing Order on Disaster (SOD) approved in April, 2010, the responsibilities for earthquake preparedness and risk reduction of all the concerned ministries and departments have been clearly delineated.

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. We have a well-structured disaster management strategy in hand, but we need much more intervention to reduce earthquake hazard to address the long-term vision of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on disaster management: "to reduce the vulnerability of people to a manageable and acceptable level". We have made some encouraging progress, but there remains a long way to go. Disaster management is everybody's business. The present status of earthquake preparedness is not yet at the level of flood and cyclone hazard management. The work done so far by all parties has established a backbone for earthquake risk management; now we need to escalate these activities across all sectors.

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