Nepal Red Cross Society

Disaster Management Department

Nepal Flood: Simplified Early Action Protocol

Report of sEAP Activation Lesson Learning Meeting: 19 December 2024

Background:

The Nepal Red Cross Society, with technical support from the Danish Red Cross, Finnish Red Cross, and Red Cross Climate Center, is implementing the Simplified Early Action Protocol (SEAP) for floods in western Nepal. Funded by IFRC's DREF, this program began in June 2024 and will continue for two years, covering 12 municipalities in Banke, Bardiya, and Kailali districts across the West Rapti, Babai, and Karnali river basins respectively. The SEAP aim to support vulnerable populations through early actions triggered by flood forecasts, enhancing their capacity to mitigate disaster impacts. As Nepal Red Cross's first approved early action protocol, sEAP serve as an interim solution before a full Early Action Protocol will be established. Early actios focused on safeguarding lives, household essentials, and livestock, while ensuring access to safe water and hygiene. Activities included early warning dissemination, evacuation to shelters, and resource preparation, in collaboration with local governments.

On September 26, 2024, based on the weather forecast issued by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM), the Simplified Early Action Protocol (SEAP) was officially activated for the Babai and West Rapti River Basins. DHM had issued special flood forecast advisories on the evening of September 26, highlighting the West Rapti and Babai rivers with red color, indicating a high possibility of flooding on September 28. This activation was triggered after the forecast aligned with the pre-determined thresholds and criteria established in the SEAP's trigger statement for these rivers. Following the activation decision, a series of early action measures were promptly implemented at the local level in the affected areas within these basins. In Banke district, early actions were carried out in Raptisonari Rural Municipality, Duduwa Rural Municipality, and Narainapur Rural Municipality. Similarly, in Bardiya district, early actions were executed in Gulariya Municipality, Thakurbaba Municipality, and Barbardiya Municipality following the activation of the protocol.

Capturing the lessons learned, challenges faced, and gaps identified during the activation of the SEAP in these basins is essential for enhancing future processes and formulating an Early Action Protocol (EAP) for floods. To collect insights and exchange experiences related to the sEAP activation, a lesson-learning meeting was held on December 19, 2024, involving representatives from the relevant district chapters, the SEAP advisory team, partner national societies (PNS), and the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS). The Lessons Learned Workshop was designed to be highly interactive and participatory, accommodating both virtual and in-person attendees. The meeting aimed to create an engaging environment where participants has shared their thoughts candidly and depart with a deeper understanding and sense of ownership of the Early Action Protocol.

Objectives of Lesson Learning:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the activation and analyze the implementation of the early action
- Provide an opportunity for stakeholders to meet and to share experiences implementing the early actions and learn from their different perspectives and identify the challenges, best practices and strength with the recommendations for improving future activation along with the recommendation to develop full phase EAP.
- Identify key recommendations which can be used as the basis for the revision and revalidation of the Early Action Protocol.

Date and Time

19 December 2024 from 11 AM to 1:00 PM

Participants

1. Sagar Shrestha - Director, Disaster Management (DM), NRCS
2. Harimohan Shrestha - Deputy Director, DM, NRCS
3. Amarmani Poudel - Deputy Director, DM, NRCS
4. Dolakh Dangi - Deputy Director, NRCS, Banke
5. Rajanish Raj Ojha - Professional Consultant, NRCS
6. Niru Pradhan - Program Coordinator, Danish Red Cross
7. Ghanashyam Sapkota - Swiss Red Cross
8. Arya Regmi - Senior Officer, NRCS
9. Santosh Neupane- Operation COordinator, NRCS
10. Neelam Dhungana- Program Coordinator, NRCS
11. Pallavi Singh - Program Coordinator, NRCS
12. Pramod Adhikari - Anticipatory Action Coordinator, NRCS
13. Sharmila Karmacharya, PMER Coordinator, NRCS

14. Ajanta Dhakal, IM Officer, NRCS
15. Mukesh Chandra Gautam - SEAP Focal Point, Kailali
16. Hari KC - SEAP Focal Point, Bardiya
17. Tapendra Timilsena- Municipal Assistant, NRCS Kailali
18. Biwas Kunwar - District Chapter Staff, Bardiya
19. Hem Raj Joshi, Senior Accountant, Kailali DC

Methodology:

- Presentation by each districts and HQs
- Interaction
- Brainstorming and recommendations

Program Agenda:

Estimate Timing	Session	Description
15 Min	Introduction and Welcome Remarks	Participants had introduced themselves, followed by welcome remarks from the NRCS, Director of Disaster Management, Buddhi Sagar Shrestha.
1 hour	Presentation with overview of Activation	Individual presentations was delivered by the respective district chapters and NRCS headquarters, focusing on their activation experiences, including lessons learned, challenges faced.
30 min	Brainstroming and Recommendations for future activations	Participants had expressed their recommendations for future initiatives.
5 min	Reflections and Wrap Up	Meeting was concluded by Deputy Director Harimohan Shrestha with his remarks.

Major Lessons Learned

No Flood Impact:

Exceeding Thresholds Without Impact: There was not any notable impacts in community by the flood occurred in Babai river. This situation can lead to decreased community trust in the forecast and the trigger statement. It highlights the necessity of continuously refining forecast models and trigger thresholds to minimize false alarms and maintain community confidence in the system.

No Regret Approach:

Designing Early Actions to Avoid Harm: Early actions should be designed to ensure that they do not cause harm to communities, even in the absence of flood impacts. This approach emphasizes the importance of planning interventions that are beneficial regardless of the outcome.

Contributing to Community Resilience: Early action assistance should be structured to enhance community resilience, even when no flood occurs. This ensures that resources allocated for early actions provide value and support to communities, fostering a sense of preparedness and security.

Timely and Reliable Forecasts:

The use of Integrated Flood Forecasting (IBF) is critical for effective early actions. Accurate and timely forecasts enable stakeholders to make informed decisions and implement necessary measures promptly.

Prompt Decision-Making for Activation:

Quick and decisive activation of the SEAP facilitates the effective execution of early actions. Timeliness in decision-making is essential to mobilize resources and support when needed.

Pre-Positioned Stock:

Ensuring that stock and resources are pre-positioned in strategic locations is vital for a swift action. This preparedness allows for rapid deployment of assistance to potential affected areas.

Consistent Tracking of Forecasts:

Continuous monitoring and tracking of weather forecasts are essential to ensure that potential flood events are not overlooked. This vigilance helps in making timely decisions and adjustment to early action plans.

Clearly Defined Roles:

Clearly defining roles and responsibilities among volunteers and team members can minimize delays in executing early actions. A well-structured team with assigned tasks enhances coordination and efficiency during early action period.

Readiness for Effective Execution:

Overall readiness is crucial for the effective execution of early actions. This includes training, resource availability, and established protocols to ensure that all stakeholders are prepared to perform the actions when necessary.

Readiness Must Be Completed Before Monsoon:

Ensuring that all readiness measures are completed before the onset of the monsoon season is critical. This proactive approach allows for effective planning and execution of early actions, minimizing risks to vulnerable communities.

Challenges:

Limited Time for Readiness:

The SEAP was approved only after the onset of the monsoon, which left insufficient time for proper preparation and mobilization of resources. This lack of adequate lead time can significantly undermine the effectiveness of early actions, as thorough readiness is essential for ensuring that all necessary resources, personnel, and logistics are in place to act the early action.

Inadequate engagement from Local Authorities:

The engagement of local authorities in the SEAP activation process was not fully realized. Their involvement is critical for effective coordination and implementation of early actions at the community level. Strengthening partnerships with local government entities and ensuring their active participation in planning and execution phases will enhance the overall effectiveness of the SEAP.

Lack of Availability of Full-Time Staff:

The absence of dedicated full-time staff for the SEAP implementation posed a significant challenge. Ensuring that there are sufficient full-time personnel assigned to the SEAP can improve accountability, enhance operational efficiency, and facilitate better training and capacity building.

False Alarms:

Trigger decision for both river: Babai and West Rapti could be considered as false alarm, where flood forecasts indicated a high likelihood of flooding that did not materialize, can undermine community trust in the SEAP and its activation process. This challenge highlights the need for improved forecasting models and clearer communication strategies to manage community expectations. Developing a more accurate and reliable forecasting system, along with transparent communication about the risks and uncertainties involved, is essential to maintain public confidence in the early action protocol.

Strategic Recommendations

Active Municipality Engagement:

Foster active participation and engagement of municipalities in the sEAP process. This includes involving local government officials in planning, decision-making, and implementation of early actions. Establishing clear roles and responsibilities for municipalities can enhance coordination and ensure that local needs are addressed effectively.

Early Action for Flash Floods:

if Possible, develop and implement specific early action protocols tailored for flash floods, which can occur with little warning. This includes creating rapid response plans that outline immediate actions to be taken in the event of flash flood warnings, ensuring that communities are prepared to respond quickly and effectively.

Retention of Trained Volunteers:

Implement strategies to retain trained early action volunteers who are essential for executing early actions.

Collaboration with Scientific Institutions and DHM

Strengthen partnerships with DHM, scientific institutions and research organizations to improve forecasting accuracy and enhance the understanding of flood risks. Collaborative efforts can lead to the development of better forecast models and provide valuable data that can inform decision-making processes.

Capacity Enhancement of District Chapters:

Invest in capacity-building initiatives for district chapters of the Nepal Red Cross Society. This includes training programs, resource allocation to ensure that district chapters are well-equipped to implement the sEAP effectively and support for Early Actions.

Development of a Full-Phase Protocol:

Work towards the establishment of a comprehensive full-phase Early Action Protocol (EAP) that encompasses all aspects of readiness, prepositioning and early actions. This protocol should integrate lessons learned from the SEAP activation and address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of communities at risk along with the strengthening of the forecast collaborating with DHM and other scientific institutions.

Early Warning Systems (EWS) in Subsidiary Rivers:

Expand early warning systems to include subsidiary rivers that may not currently be covered. This will enhance the overall flood monitoring and response capabilities, ensuring that communities near these rivers receive timely alerts and can take appropriate actions to mitigate risks.

Harmonization of trigger statement and Early Actions:

Currently, the trigger conditions established for the sEAP and those outlined in the Municipal Early Action Framework exhibit few discrepancies. It is imperative to harmonize these differences to ensure that both frameworks and protocol operate in coherence and support one another effectively.

In addition to the trigger conditions, the early actions specified in the sEAP and the Municipal Early Action Framework also differ regarding some early actions. This variation can lead to confusion and inefficiencies during early actions, as stakeholders may not have a clear understanding of the actions required under each framework.

Given that the sEAP is intended to complement and enhance the execution of municipal plans, it is crucial to revisit and potentially revise the early actions defined within the sEAP. By doing so, we can ensure that these actions are not only aligned with the objectives of the Municipal Early Action Framework but also tailored to meet the specific needs and priorities of the municipality.

Conclusion:

The activation of the Simplified Early Action Protocol (SEAP) by the Nepal Red Cross Society has yielded critical insights into flood AA and response. The lessons learned from this activation underscore the necessity of timely decision-making, robust community engagement, and effective collaboration with local authorities and scientific institutions. Addressing the challenges through strategic recommendations will significantly strengthen the NRCS's disaster management framework. Importantly, the implementation of "no regret" policies and the principle of "do no harm" have further bolstered community resilience for future disasters.

Thanks!