# NATIONAL STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN ON SEARCH AND RESCUE 2013



The Government of Nepal Ministry of Home Affairs August 2013

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# 1. Background

Nepal is a hotspot for natural disasters such as floods, landslides, fire, cyclonic winds, hailstorms, drought, famine and epidemics. Located on an active seismic belt, Nepal is also highly vulnerable to seismic activities. Based on the historical earthquake records and geological evidence of active faults that have produced earthquakes in the past, the possibility of one or more magnitude 6 or larger earthquakes anytime in near future is fairly high.

The historical record shows that the Kathmandu Valley witnessed at least three large scale earthquakes in 19<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. 1810, 1833 and 1866 AD). One of the most devastating earthquakes in the recent past (1934: magnitude 8.4) caused serious damages to around 60% of the buildings and killed about 8519 people, out of which 4269 people were from Kathmandu Valley alone (*SAARC Workshop Report on Earthquake Risk Management in South Asia, 8-9 October 2009, Pakistan, page 11*).

It is difficult to predict an earthquake, but it is inevitable and when it occurs, it destroys lives and property and devastates all economic, development and infrastructure gains of several years. It is evident that the 1934 magnitude earthquake (experts claim is already overdue for Kathmandu valley) would be catastrophic given the geological and demographic condition of the Valley. Although, every situation is unique and the extent of damage and casualties vary from one situation to another, it is likely that major hospitals, schools and buildings would collapse, leaving large numbers of live victims buried in the debris in the event of a major earthquake in Nepal. The immediate needs for search and rescue capacity would be overwhelming.

Over the past several years, dedicated officials at security forces and in partnership with some NGOs, Government of Nepal has developed minimal Search and Rescue capacity in the country. In line with the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Management (NSDRM), Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC) Flagship 2 and the recommendations from different scoping missions, including the INSARAG emergency response capacity scoping mission conducted in May 2011, the Government of Nepal has formulated this National Strategic Action Plan on Search and Rescue Capacity as part of strengthening overall disaster preparedness and response system in Nepal. In local context, the term SAR has been used instead of USAR. The SAR capacity formed hereby is the local adaptation of USAR capacity as set forth by the INSARAG Guidelines and it will be seamlessly operational/ applicable in the urban as well as rural setting in a scalable manner.

# 2. Concept of Strategic Action Plan:

Trained personnel from the Security forces namely Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force are working as search and rescue team as Nepal does not have specialized unified SAR force till the date. The government of Nepal, Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), with support from national and international organizations, has developed a minimum level of SAR capacity within the security forces. Based on the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (NSDRM)-2066, priority-two of the Nepal Risk Reduction

Consortium (NRRC), suggestions received from International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) in 2011, National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF) and Disaster Preparedness and Response Planning documents, the government of Nepal has prioritized the formation of integrated search and rescue capacity in the country.

The development of Strategic Action Plan on Search and Rescue Capacity is based on the USAR Response Framework of the INSARAG Guidelines Chapter G on "Building an Urban Search and Rescue Capacity" and the national scenarios:



Figure 2: USAR Response Framework

The INSARAG Response Framework is a diagrammatic representation of all levels of response, starting with spontaneous community actions immediately following the disaster, which is supplemented initially by the local emergency services and then by national rescue teams. Finally, there is a response of international USAR teams, supporting national rescue efforts.

Each new level of response increases the rescue capability and overall capacity but has to integrate with and support the response already working at the national and field level. In order to ensure inter-operability between the levels of response, it is vital that working practices, technical language and information is common and shared across the whole response framework.

Adoption of the INSARAG Guidelines (more specifically Chapter G of the Guidelines) would support ensuring this common and shared framework at all levels of response. Therefore, the SAR Response Framework can be used as a basis to establish principles and working practices that relate to all levels of operational preparedness, capacity building, training and capability assessment. All structured SAR teams, irrespective of their capacity and operational involvement, should comprise the following components:

- a) Management
- b) Logistics
- c) Search
- d) Rescue
- e) Medical
- f) Fire services

These common components will ensure that several teams have similar structures, are able to integrate effectively and have standardized the primary aspects of a rescue response (Adopted from the INSARAG Guidelines Chapter G, April 2012 Version).

# 3. Strategic Vision

A strategic vision is to develop a professionally and technically sound Urban Search and Rescue capacity in Nepal as per the INSARAG Guidelines and National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF).

# 4. Purpose of the Strategic Action Plan:

The purpose of National Strategic Action Plan on Search and Rescue Capacity is to elucidate the exact scope wherein search and rescue capacity is organized and thereby guiding its development and operational functioning. The Action Plan intends to provide a single framework and enabling environment for the Government and other stakeholders to address the challenges inherent in the field of search and rescue after disaster incidents.

#### 5. Goal

The overall goal is to develop consolidated teams of especially trained persons on search and rescue operation drawing from the experience of the United Nations International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) in Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Capacity Building and adapt these standards to the context of Nepal. The overall goal has been determined with the following considerations:

To adopt a three pronged concurrent approach to build capacity:

a) Targeting the equipping of community level first responders;

b) Strengthening the response capacities of emergency services; and

c) Developing dedicated SAR teams that are deployable to augment daily response as needed;

To tap on the existing able manpower that can immediately be trained and deployed to disasters on a regular basis

The guiding principles of this Action Plan reference the recommendations from the INSARAG Assessment Mission of 2011 and the INSARAG Side Donor Meeting chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator in 2012. During the small and medium scale disaster, the national SAR teams will be managed and deployed by the respective DDRCs in coordination with the concerned security forces. Whereas, incoming USAR capacity during the mega disaster becomes an inherent element of the response coordination tripod as stipulated in the National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF) and naturally fall under MNMCC limb.

# 6. Strategy

- i. Develop a specialized and professional SAR team,
- ii. Develop a specific TOR of the SAR Team
- iii. Based on the local and national context, establish the SAR teams in national and local level;
- iv. With collaboration of various ministries, donors and partners work for institutional development of the SAR team in the country
- v. Strengthen the preparatory work on SAR capacity development.

# 7. Guiding Principles for SAR Capacity Enhancement

- i. National SAR teams will be developed as per the recommendation of INSARAG
- ii. National SAR Teams will be developed as per the national context and necessity,
- iii. Suggestions of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and donors will be the guidance for the SAR teams
- iv. CNDRC, RDRC and DDRC can mobilize the SAR teams within their jurisdiction
- v. During the mega disaster, the SAR teams will be mobilized as per the modality mentioned in the National Disaster Response Framework,

# 8. Issues and Challenges

Technically speaking, there is no consolidated professional team specialized for SAR operation in Nepal. Presently, the limited numbers of first responders are made up of specially selected personnel from the Nepalese Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force. Currently hundreds of members of NA, NP and APF are graduated from different Medical First Responder (MFR) and collapsed Structure Search and Rescue (CSSR) training programs offered by various Institutions. These are scattered throughout the country. These trained personnel have been then dispatched to different local units of these security forces around the country. More specifically, agency specific SAR capacity is presented in ANNEX -A.

Most existing training programs focus on basic skill trainings. There is no systematic training package designed for smooth search and rescue team operations. Without being trained together and operating together, the team can never have the opportunity to form the rapport needed for efficient communication and swift response when disasters occur. No systematic training package is in use, with each organization using varying methods and differing training periods. Different training programs with the same names are offered to trainees by different organizations with very little commonalities in standards and quality

Furthermore, efficient search and rescue operations necessitate certain types and numbers of search equipment, rescue equipment, lighting equipment, personal equipment, communication and command equipment, medical equipment, logistics equipment, and on site office equipment. These equipments are inadequate with the responding agencies. Although all security forces have made special efforts to secure equipment and construct infrastructure specifically for SAR operations, the quantity and types of existing equipment and infrastructure are barely enough even for training purpose. The current equipment used for search and rescue is very basic and inappropriate for multi-storey building collapse.

It is clearly observed that firefighting capability in Kathmandu is not very strong. This situation is exacerbated by unplanned urban settlement and narrow roads. It was not uncommon that fire engines were not able to reach the location of fire breakouts due to narrow roads. Furthermore, the Kathmandu valley has very limited water supply system and some of the households rely on water delivery trucks for daily water use. Because of lack of hydrants, the fire engines have to go very far from the incident site to fetch water to fight fire.

SN	Activities	Responsible Agency	Support Agencies	Expected Achievements			
Stra	Strategy 1: Establish the specialized and professional USAR Team						
i.	Amend the existing laws to ensure legal basis for establishing the USAR Team	Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)	Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs	Establishment of proper legal basis			
ii.	Identify the existing trained human resources within the three security forces to establish the USAR team	MoHA, Ministry of Defence	Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force	Existing trained human resources within the three security forces will be identified			
iii.	Divide the existing trained human resources into three categories based on their skill and capacity namely highly skilled, medium skilled and skilled	Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force	Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and Ministry of Defence (MoD)	Trained human resources will be classified.			
iv.	Identify the existing equipment and resources for establishing the National Medium USAR Team and list out the necessary equipment and Resources	Nepal Army and Armed Police Force	Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and Ministry of Defence (MoD)	A detailed list of equipment and accessories for MUSAR will be identified.			
v.	Identify the existing equipment and resources for establishing the National Light USAR Team and list out the necessary equipment and resources	Nepal Police	Ministry of Home Affairs	A detailed list of equipment and accessories for LUSAR will be identified.			
vi.	Identify the existing equipment and human resources for establishing the community level search and rescue team who have received MFR/CSSR training from NRCS and other non- governmental institutions.	Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)	Nepal Red Cross Society, Nepal Police	Necessary human resources and other resources will be identified to establish the community level search and rescue team.			

# 9. Formation of Search and Rescue Team and their Plan of Action

2. ld	lentify the Terms of Reference	e of the USAR Te	am	
i.	Develop a Road Map to establish national level medium USAR teams with necessary equipment within Nepal Army and Armed Police Force and manage necessary equipment and human resources.	Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Defence	Nepal Army, Armed Police Force, UN Agencies, National and International Non- government agencies	Road map will be developed and responsibility identified.
ii.	Develop a road map to establish light search and rescue teams with necessary equipment in Nepal Police in its regional, zonal and district level units.	Nepal Police	Ministry of Home Affairs, UN Agencies and National and International Non- governmental organization	The search and rescue teams within various organizations will continuously have trained human resources.
iii.	Develop a road map to establish the local level community based search and rescue teams	District Disaster Relief Committee and respective VDCs	Nepal Police, District Development Committee, Nepal Red Cross Society and national and international NGOs	
iv.	Replace the positions of the USAR team members only with the trained human resources	Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force	Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Defence	
	stablish National and Local onal context	level SAR teams	based on the internat	ional standard and
i.	Establish the community level first responders at ward level based on the human resource and other material resources and mobilize during the time of disaster	District Disaster Relief Committee, respective DDC and VDC	MoHA, MoFALD, Nepal Police and Red Cross Society	There will be community level search and rescue teams in disaster prone VDCs of all 75 districts
ii.	In the first phase, establish seven light search and rescue teams with Nepal Polices at regional, zonal and district units.	Nepal Police	MoHA, NRCS, UN Agencies, National and International NGOs	There will be regional, zonal and district level search and rescue teams with Nepal Police
iii.	Establish one medium level search and rescue team in each Nepal Army and Armed Police Force	Nepal Army and Armed Police Force	MoHA, MoD, NRCS, UN Agencies, National and International NGOs	There will be one national level medium search and rescue team in each NA and APF
	evelop the institutional capa inistries, donor agencies and	-	s in coordination with v	various government
i.	Trained human resources from Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force will conduct the SAR Training to the community based SAR teams	DDRC and local level disaster response committee	MoHA, MoD, DDC, NRCS, UN Agencies and national and international agencies	There will be trained search and rescue teams in local level.
ii.	Trained human resources from Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force will train the light search and rescue teams	Nepal Police	MoHA, MoD, NRCS, National and International NGOs	Light SAR teams will be developed in Nepal Police and the SAR activities will be

	in Nepal Police and capacitate them.				more effective.	
iii.	Trained human resources from Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force will train the medium search and rescue teams in Nepal Army and Armed Police Force and capacitate them.	Nepal Army and Armed Police Force		MoHA, MoD, NRCS, National and International NGOs	Nepal Army and Armed Police Force will have the trained human resources.	
iv.	Make the provision of necessary equipment, machines and other resources with Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force and institutional development of those institutions	Ministry of Finance		NoHA, UN Agencies, National and International NGOs	There will be enough provision of resources with equipment for search and rescue service.	
5. F	5. For effective response, strengthen the preparedness of search and rescue activity					
i.	Keep the search and rescue team in ready to move condition with support from line ministries, related government departments, donor agencies and other related entities.	Ministry of Home Affairs	Government Line ministries, Nepal Red Cross Society and National and International NGOs		There will be search and rescue teams at all levels for disaster response.	
	6. Regular Monitoring and evaluation of the Urban Search and Rescue team establishment, mobilization etc.					
i.	There will be a national monitoring and evaluation committee comprising the members from MoHA, MoD, NA, NP, APF, and UN Agencies which is coordinated by MOHA.	Ministry of Home Affairs	Po Fo	pal Army, Nepal lice, Armed Police rce, UN Agencies and her partners	There will be effective search and rescue teams in the country.	

# 10. Roll Out of the Strategic Plan of Action

The INSARAG USAR Response Framework is referenced, adopted in national context and clearly spelled out in this Strategic Action Plan. It is expected that support from the donor community, INSARAG and relevant experts and most importantly, all potential stakeholders will be available for smooth implementation of the activities laid in this plan. All the stakeholders mentioned in this document will bear their responsibility as per work plan mentioned in this document. With regard to disaster risk management in Nepal and implementation of this strategic plan, role and commitment from Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force is quite important.

After implementation of this strategy, there will be an increased effectiveness in disaster risk management and response capacity of the government as well as the quality of the response will be enhanced. This action plan should be read and interpreted in conjunction with all other policies, frameworks and guidelines of the Government of Nepal, as it is a commitment to comprehensive disaster management initiative in Nepal.

MoHA in partnership with other ministries and departments will work together with the search and rescue partners in Nepal to create an enabling environment for effective and responsive SAR services with the principle of saving more and more life from the collapsed structures after disasters.

# 11. Legal Provision

Natural Calamity Relief Act 1982 has given the responsibility of disaster management to the Government of Nepal which is the basis for formation of SAR team in the country. Establishment and mobilization of SAR Team has been further backed up by the following existing legal provisions:

- National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management 2066
- District Disaster Preparedness and Response Plans
- Five Flagship Program
- National Disaster Response Framework 2070
- Guiding Notes on Disaster Preparedness and Response Planning 2067
- Disaster Rescue and Relief Standard 2064
- Nepal Police Act 2052 and bylaws
- Local Administration Act 2028
- Armed Police Force Act 2058 and bylaws
- Military Act 2063
- To make the disaster relief and rescue activity more effective, there is a need for amendment and upgrading of existing Disaster Response Act 2039. Also, there is a need to amend the existing Military Act 2063, Nepal Police Act 2052 and Armed Police Force Act 2058 to make the disaster response activity more professional.

#### **12. Institutional Arrangement:**

#### 12.1 Central Natural Disaster Relief Committee/Ministry of Home Affairs (CNDRC)

Ministry of Home Affairs is playing a coordinating role in disaster risk management and response activities in Nepal. With coordination of MoHA, other line ministries, commissions, departments, national and international organization are working on disaster response. CNDRC is the apex body in disaster risk management which is chaired by the Minister of Home Affairs.

National Emergency Operation Center (NEOC) is playing a coordinating role of collecting information and disseminating it during the time of disaster. Also, NEOC has the role of evaluating the institutional capacity of various organizations and coordinate with various ministries and other organizations for emergency operation.

#### 12.2 Nepalese Army (NA)

As a major responder to emergencies, Nepalese Army has been actively participating in disaster management and leading some emergency operations. The government of Nepal considers NA as one of the key first responders during any disaster due to its inbuilt capability to mobilize troops quickly for basic search and rescue. As of now, NA does not have a dedicated unit as such for disaster management/response. But since the

NA is mandated to assist the government in responding to any disaster, NA has been developing specific skills in the field of search and rescue (SAR) through participation in specific SAR training programs. NA has also been acquiring equipments and stores to enhance SAR capability in its units/subunits. Currently each unit/subunit has some trained personnel and limited equipment to carry out basic search and rescue operations. Based on the defense policy and military norms NA is in a position to conduct immediate SAR activities. Also, since NA has its own aviation service, structured and disciplined human resources as well as communication, transportation, medical services and other specialized services, it has been taken as the first responder of disaster. NA has now rubber boats, life jackets, rubber tube, emergency fire fighters with accessories. However, NA does not have a dedicated logistical support system for SAR; there will be a dedicated SAR team for effective disaster response.

# 12.3 Nepal Police (NP)

Nepal Police is traditional first responders to emergencies in Nepal. They always mobilize as soon as an emergency situation arises, be it a fire or a riot. Nepal Police has recently established a Disaster Management Section in its headquarters and it has around 2133 units and posts in various location of the country who collect information, participate in rescue and coordination as well as rehabilitation. NP has recently established a disaster management squad but there is a lack of necessary equipment for disaster management. Most of the trainings are held at National Police Training Academy where there are basic CSSR and MFR equipment for training purpose only. Apart from the recently established disaster management squad, there will seven light search and rescue teams within NP.

# 12.4 Armed Police Force (APF)

APF has been established as per the Armed Police Force Act 2058. Currently APF has about 31000 members distributed in units across all 5 regions and 75 districts nationwide. The role originally designed for APF was Paramilitary Force/Back up Force/Force Multiplier of Nepal Police. Its top priority is to control domestic violence and maintain peace and in the meantime, its role is to provide its service in SAR activities in case of disasters.

APF has established a dedicated Disaster Management Training Center in Kurintar in 2011. The goal of the Disaster Management Training Center (DMTC) is to produce trained professionals on search and rescue activities and strengthen APF's effort to enhance capability. However, APF does not have a designated logistical support system for disaster management operations. A medium level SAR team will be developed within the APF after consolidating all the trained human resources.

#### 12.5 Fire Brigades

Currently in Kathmandu Valley, there are 5 fire-fighting teams. While Kathmandu Municipality, Bhaktpur, and Lalitpur fire brigades are first responders to the public when fires break out, Police and Army also have their own firefighting teams. The firefighting teams organized by NA and NP are mainly for internal use. They do not normally respond to public calls for help unless the scale of fire exceeds capabilities of the three

civil fire-fighting teams. Once there will be SAR teams in place, they their capability will be utilized in the fire service.

# 12.6 Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS)

Currently there is no government certified disaster management training programs for the general public. However training programs and public awareness/education offered by NRCS have provided opportunities for more than 27000 people to get skills in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and 18000 in disaster response. Together with other partners, NRCS is trying to reach around 3900 VDCs for providing basic search and rescue skills, training curricula on community based risk reduction and enhancing the public's awareness of potential risk and knowledge to cope with future disasters.

When it comes to equipment availability at the community level, Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) is probably the most well equipped organization that can support community emergency response as well as training. They also have a national communication system that could quickly collect and communicate information among all local chapters of NRCS.

#### 12.7 International and Non-governmental Organizations

Various international and non-governmental organizations in Nepal have also been providing highly valuable support for development of SAR capacities at the field level. In future, development of SAR capacity in Nepal with collaboration of I/NGOs would be an important milestone.

# 13. Details of three tier structure of SAR teams in Nepal:

#### a) Community Level Response

Local level of SAR activities will be based on the community based and the SAR teams will be the primary responders. Those trained on MFR and CSSR by NRCS and other organizations will act as the community level responders.

The community based organizations and programmes will target to gradually scale up the development of community level SAR first responders and strengthen local emergency services. Those trained manpower will be able to assess the nature and scale of the incident and start providing the basic casualty care before the light and/or medium SAR teams arrives in the community.

# b) Light SAR Teams

The **Light SAR teams** within the Nepal Police will be located in region, zone and district headquarters / municipalities. In the initial phase the Light SAR teams will be stationed at the five regional offices of Nepal Police and one each in Valley Police and metropolitan police cell. They will cover the area under their coverage. One light SAR team will be formed in the Fire Brigade of Kathmandu Metropolitan City and also strengthened capacity with equipment of the fire brigade offices in other municipalities.

The Government of Nepal ensures that the SAR members will be available 24 hours every day and will be based with the respective security force within the defined SAR team. The members will be unarmed whilst on SAR duty. SAR teams of the respective Security Force will be retained as a consolidated USAR capacity in the country, redeployment of those SAR trained persons will have to be replaced by the trained personnel. The Government will also initiate completing bilateral agreement with countries on sending and receiving USAR capacity in case of mega disaster. In addition, the in-country SAR teams will be required to complete a range of training modules, in a sequential process, commencing with core and primary skills and progressing onto specialist secondary skills.

#### c) National Medium SAR Teams

Of the two medium SAR teams, one each will be hosted and managed by Nepalese Army and Armed Police Force respectively. For NA, they will be located at the airport barrack, TIA or at an appropriate location in one of the NA locations in Kathmandu Valley. The APF SAR team will be located at APF Disaster Management Unit at Khumaltar, Kathmandu.

The **M-SAR teams** will be deployed in case of a mega disaster; however, in the non disaster situation selected members will function as the training cadre in the training institute and continue the training programmes to produce annual requirements of graduates for the gradual roll out and replacement of the team members and to ensure more trained personnel will be made available and be deployed to other strategic locations Country wide. This national capability will augment existing local and specialist capability based on nationally assessed risk and wider planning assumptions across the country.

The M-SAR under NA leadership will also serve as the INSARAG Operational Focal Point to coordinate with the USAR teams that come to the county following a mega disaster.

#### 14. Financing Mechanism

The most common sources of financing the formulation, operationalization, sustaining and rolling out this initiative are donors and Government grants from the national budgets. These sources provide funds for capital and operational expenditures. The SAR team hosting organization such as NA, APF and NP will also allocate budget for the implementation of medium and light SAR teams. Support in money and/or technical capacity of the International and National organizations would also count. Some of the regular offices of security forces will transform as SAR Offices where necessary office setup and the personnel salary will be the extra burden for government. The donor support will be dedicated to organize trainings and procure SAR equipments for the teams.

# **15. Monitoring and Evaluation:**

The Natural Relief Calamity Act 1982 provides MoHA with the mandate of ultimate responsibility for coordinating, facilitating, monitoring and evaluation of the overall SAR teams' performance and to ensure effective implementation.

At central level, there will be a monitoring committee comprising the following members and the committee will report to CNDRC.

- Secretary, Home Ministry Coordinator
- Major General, Nepal Army
  AIGP, Nepal Police
  Member
- AIGP, APF
  - Joint Secretary, MoHA
  - Joint Secretary, MoD
- Member Member Member

The central monitoring committee can seek the support of the United Nations agencies and other stakeholders if there is a need of specialized support. At the national level, CNDRC/MoHA serves as a lead to overall SAR capacity in the country, while individual SAR teams are self-managed within their respective security forces (NA, NP & APF). DDRC/CDOs will ensure the monitoring and evaluation of SAR performance and implementation at the district level. MoHA will develop indicators to monitor the success of this Action Plan and these will be linked with the NSRDM 2009 and NRRC activity implementation.