

Fourth Monthly Forum

REBUILDING SAFER URBAN SPACES

EVENT REPORT

Kathmandu, 20 September 2017: South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) organized a discussion program titled *'Rebuilding Safer Urban Spaces'*.

This is fourth such discussion forum organized by SAWTEE under the project *'Initiating dialogue on Post Disaster Reconstruction Experience'* undertaken with support from The Asia Foundation (TAF). Themes such as "Nepal Post Disaster Reconstruction Experience: Current Status and Lessons learnt", "Migration and Labour Dynamics in Post Disaster Nepal", and "Expenditure Analysis and Tracking of Post-Earthquake reconstruction programmes" have already been covered in similar previous events.

Making a presentation on *'Rebuilding Safer Urban Spaces'*, Mr Kishore Thapa, former secretary at the Ministry of Urban Development and expert member of the steering committee at the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), pointed out the need of strictly enforcing "Settlement Development, Urban Development and Building Construction Basic Byelaws 2072", which was one of the major changes imposed as one of the first rebuilding exercises. However, its success will depend on conviction of citizens that these rules are for their own benefit and capacity of the local governments for strictly implementing these regulations, he added.

In addition, he called attention towards reviewing existing housing policies, operational guidelines and responsible agencies to ensure safer living spaces. Mr Thapa further added that integral part of reconstruction in the urban spaces, especially in the valley, pertains to reviving cultural heritage and traditional settlements with minimum aesthetic and structural intervention. Similarly, he called attention to lack of open space that affected the initial relief and recovery works in the immediate aftermath.

My Surya Bhakta Sangachchen, technical advisor to the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) and former Director General, Department of Urban Planning and Building Reconstruction, stressed on the stakeholder engagement —between central government, community and local level, in order to achieve harmonious and acceptable rebuilding. He cited example of Boudhanath Stupa that involved local participation from the support of government entities. In addition, he also pointed out the possibility of house pooling to be undertaken at the core city areas in Kathmandu and Lalitpur such as Kilagal and Pilachhen, respectively, could provide blueprint for the reconstruction.

Mr Bhesh Narayan Dahal, Director General, Department of Archaeology, pointed out the government efforts towards preservation and reconstruction of the cultural heritages and emphasised government's priority towards preserving national heritage as far as possible in the reconstruction process.

Chairing the discussion forum, Prof Dr Sudarshan Raj Tiwari, former Dean of Institute of Engineering, said that in adopting modern technology, traditional and indigenous knowledge should not be discarded. He said that traditional and indigenous knowledge has been proved time and again after withstanding various disasters and thus emphasised on footprint conservation.

Adding to that, vice chairperson of SAWTEE, Ms Urmila Joshi, said that best possible way forward is to integrate new technology with the traditional knowledge so that we can have best of both worlds in building safer spaces. The experts present at the programme also emphasised on the need to review housing policies at operational level in order to create a safer living space in the densely populated urban areas.

Some 30 participants from various organizations, including research institutions, experts, activists and development partners, participated in the event.