

Report on Webinar

Disaster Risk Management of Cultural Heritage in Himachal Pradesh

November 12, 2020



Organized by:

Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (HPSDMA)

Government of Himachal Pradesh

Department of Revenue

Disaster Management Cell

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1. Introductory Remarks and Context Setting

- **Speaker: Dr. Garima Sharma, Capacity Building & Documentation Coordinator, Disaster Management Cell, HPSDMA**

This webinar on 'Disaster Risk Management of Cultural Heritage in Himachal Pradesh' was organized as part of the 'Samarth-2020' campaign, which is a novel initiative spearheaded by the Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (HPSDMA) for raising awareness on various Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) issues and for building disaster resilience of our State. This campaign was started as a symbol of solidarity with the global efforts to observe the celebrations related to International Day of Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDR). This Department is committed towards preserving the cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh, which goes a long way in ensuring disaster resilience.

Cultural Heritage is an expression of the way of living developed by a community and is passed on from generation to generation including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions, values, and includes both tangible and intangible components. The Indian Constitution and various legislations provide the essential backdrop for valuing and conserving our cultural heritage. In addition, we have the guidelines of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India on Cultural Heritage Sites & Precincts (September 2017) and Museums (May 2017).

Tracing back to the Vedic times, the rich heritage of Himachal Pradesh has been the invaluable wealth and pride of our State. Disasters pose an imminent threat to this wealth. For instance, in the 1905 Kangra Earthquake, the Brajeshwari Mata temple was destroyed, which was subsequently rebuilt by the government. There are examples from other State too, like the Bhuj earthquake of 2001 that caused damages to the Bhuj City Palace, and the earthquake of 2011 in Sikkim which destroyed many temples and monasteries. Floods too have caused grave damages to various temples, monuments and cultural artefacts.

Another critical facet of Disaster Management of Cultural Heritage site is to do with emergency and medical preparedness. The need for this is demonstrated well by the horrific incident of August 3, 2008 at Naina Devi temple where 146 devotees

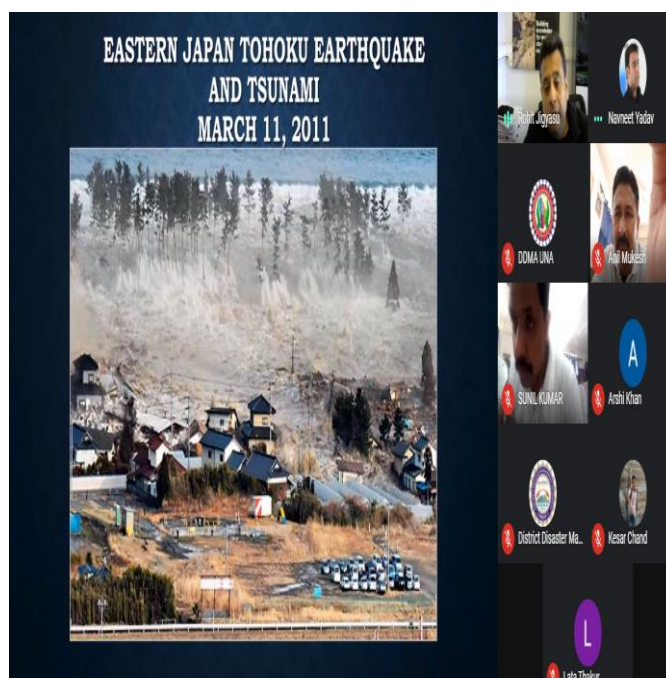
including 30 children and 38 women lost their lives in a major stampede. Such accidents can be avoided with proper crowd management and medical preparedness during emergency situations. Every temple, heritage site should have its disaster management plan which is tested and updated periodically.

2. Technical Session I: Need and Scope of Disaster Risk Management Planning for Cultural Heritage

- **Speaker: Dr. Rohit Jigyasu, Project Manager, Urban Heritage, Climate Change & Disaster Risk Management, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)**

Dr. Jigyasu commenced his presentation, by giving a brief introduction about ICCROM, which is an intergovernmental organization working in service to its 137 Member States to promote the conservation of all forms of cultural heritage, in every region of the world. It was established in 1956 during the ninth Session of UNESCO in New Delhi, India. Working on the front lines of heritage preservation, including scientists, conservators, museum curators, site managers, archivists, researchers and archaeologists rely on ICCROM for its world-class initiatives in conservation training, information, research, cooperation and advocacy.

Thereafter through a set of photographs, Dr. Jigyasu shared examples from across the globe where cultural heritage sites suffered severed damages due to disasters of various kinds, like earthquakes, fires, floods and so on. He showed images of damages cultural heritage sites from Central Mexico earthquake of 18th September, 2017; Eastern Japan Earthquake of 11th March 2011, Nepal Earthquake of 25th April 2015 and 12th May, 2015, Notredame Cathedral (Paris) fire of 14th April, 2019; Kedarnath floods of 2013, Balkans floods of 2014.



Thereafter he discussed the impact of climate change, where due to sea level rise and other associated hydro-meteorological phenomenon the incidences of cyclones, flooding and other extreme weather events are becoming evident. The Leh floods of 2011 were a glaring example of the same. Environmental and climate change are removing and altering animals' habitat, changing how they live, where they live and who eats whom. He quoted the research of Benton, (2020) which states, that with increased urbanization, humans are more susceptible to pathogens carried by wild animals, as has been the case of current COVID 19 pandemic.

Moving on, he deliberated upon the key considerations for Disaster Risk Management of Cultural Heritage sites. There is a need for considering multiple events, especially those that can happen in parallel or follow each other. Very often the site characteristics of heritage sites creates vulnerability, the Old City (Delhi) is a pertinent example of this. Besides, Dr. Jigyasu explained that vulnerability has socio-economic dimensions, which makes children, women, elderly, disabled and the poor more vulnerable.

Furthermore, he shared examples of post-earthquake recovery from Kashtamandap, Nepal where traditional building knowledge for disaster mitigation was utilized. The indigenous water system for emergency supplies were utilized and traditional open sites were used for emergency refuge. He highlighted that a fine balance should be maintained between human safety and heritage values. He discussed that disaster risk management is not only concerned with passive protection of cultural and natural heritage from disasters, but also with a more proactive role that the heritage can play for disaster mitigation, as the source of resilience, livelihood regeneration, and an asset for disaster risk reduction.

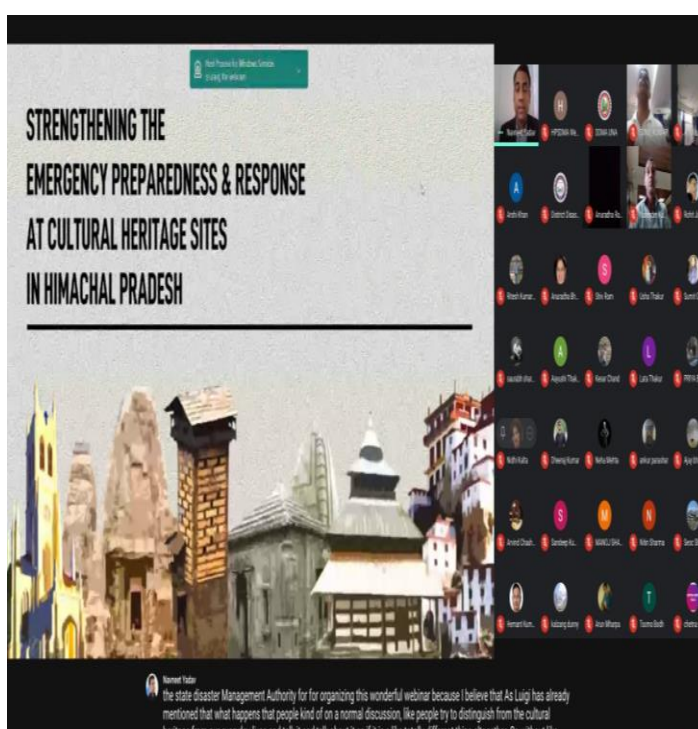


Dr. Jigyasu touched on the aspects of formulating Disaster Risk Management Plans for various cultural heritage sites. He concluded his presentation by highlighting the need for engaging multiple stakeholders and mainstreaming the issues of Disaster Management.

Technical Session 2: Strengthening the emergency preparedness and response at Cultural Heritage sites in Himachal Pradesh

➤ Speaker: Mr. Navneet Yadav, Associate Director, DOERS

Mr. Navneet Yadav commenced his presentation by discussing the paradigm shift in disaster management, to risk informed development and planning which requires systems thinking. There is an urgent need to build on risk communication and enhance the risk perception of the community at large. Thereafter he described the cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh, which comprises of



British era buildings and infrastructure, notified temples, ancient Buddhist Monasteries, Kath-kuni architecture, forts, palaces and rock-cut temples. He stressed that the rich cultural heritage of our State is at considerable due to high seismicity of the Indian Himalayan region. Other than that, fires pose great risk to this invaluable wealth of our State.

There are multifaceted challenges in in management of cultural heritage sites, such as there limited focus on aspects of reducing overall risks , low political will, lack of financial resources, low stakeholder engagement, lack of community awareness and participation, among others.

Mr. Yadav shared some positive examples from the field, where even corporate sectors like Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN), which has signed an MoU with the State Government for developing four heritage sites in HP, namely temple complexes in Nirmand and Kullu, Kalka-Shimla Railway World Heritage Site and Chitkul village, Kinnaur. He also mentioned that Price Claud Fund for Culture and Development, which is supporting the NGO DOERS for the preparation of emergency preparedness and response plan of Gaiety Theatre Complex, Shimla.

He concluded his presentation by sharing the equation for Disaster Risk Reduction, where disaster risk is a product of hazard, vulnerability and exposure which can be mitigated by building capacities. Capacities refer to the strength, moral imperative to work, knowledge, skills and resources, which includes financial, human and technical resources. He stressed the need for taking up various capacity building measures for the concerned stakeholders and the entire community.

Recommendations and Way Forward

1. The Guidelines of NDMA on Cultural Heritage Sites & Precincts (September 2017) and Museums (May 2017) needs effective implementation by the State in letter and spirit.
2. Emergency and Preparedness plans need to be developed for various heritage site and temple complexes in HP.
3. The issues of DRR need to be mainstreamed.
4. Capacity building and training programmes need to be organized for relevant stakeholders and the community at large.