

Mr. Pema Thinley from Bhutan



I work for the Department of Disaster Management (DDM), Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs of Bhutan as an Information and Communication Technology/ Geographic Information System (ICT/GIS) Officer. I am an ICT professional by training, but also have experience working with GIS technologies because of their broad applications in the field of disaster management. I work in the Response and Relief Division, which is responsible for ensuring the institution of effective disaster response measures and early warning systems in Bhutan and for building local capacity, especially for search and rescue operations.

Inspired by Japan's use of GIS technologies, remote sensing, and ICT for disaster risk reduction, I applied to participate in ADRC's 2014 Visiting Researcher Program. I am excited to work with the other three Visiting Researchers from Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Iran. During my stay, I would like to focus on studying the functioning of Japan's systems for managing disaster management information, emergency communications, emergency operation centers, and emergency response, and would like to take information on best practices in these areas back to my country.

Bhutan, like the rest of the world, has not been spared by the fury of natural hazards and is susceptible to many disasters. Geo-physically, Bhutan is located in one of the most seismically active zones in the world. Given its location, and as proven by past seismic activities, earthquakes are the most imminent hazard in Bhutan, followed by glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF). In fact, the GLOF threat is more imminent today than ever before due to the rapid increase in the earth's temperature caused by global warming, and the rapid retreat of its glaciers. Other hazards such as landslides, flash floods, windstorms, and fires also frequently occur, causing significant losses of life and property. These seasonal hazards particularly affect people in rural Bhutan, where subsistence farming is prominent. This is why the government is working on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction strategies in all its development activities and in all aspects of socioeconomic life in Bhutan.

Touching on the institutional setup of disaster management in Bhutan, the Disaster Management Division was a division under the Department of Local Government, in the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, until the beginning of the 10th Five Year Plan (2008). Until then, all activities related to disaster management were implemented on a reactive basis. Recognizing the importance of an effective disaster management system, the government of Bhutan upgraded the division to its current status as the Department of Disaster Management (DDM) in 2008. Until early 2013, the department had been following the National Disaster Risk Management Framework

(NDRMF) as one of its main guiding principles in policy making and the planning of its disaster management programs and activities. The roles and responsibilities of the department became even clearer with the enactment of the Disaster Management Act of Bhutan on 18 March 2013.