

Bureaucratic procedures hamper road restoration works

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If the findings of Royal Audit Authority's performance audit on the roads department and its regional offices is any indication, it is the perfect example of bureaucratic tangles hampering service delivery.

The audit on monsoon restoration works pointed out works were delayed due to lengthy bureaucratic process including field assessment and delay in release of budget from finance ministry.

Without proper records maintained at the time of the audit, the RAA picked the Lobesa regional office's record on restoration works of monsoon-damaged roads as a case study to study the efficiency. An audit team visited Tekizam-Chuserbu primary national highway under Nobding sub-division that was damaged and washed away during monsoon.

The study found that road department and its regional offices took 264 days from the date of damage till the date of work awarding to complete monsoon restoration work.

It found out that the sub-division office had reported the damage to the regional office within three days of working (August 2 2018) and then proposed for restoration along with a cost estimation.

The assessment team visited the site only after 81 days of the damage reported only to realise there was a need for a geotechnical engineer. The next visit was made only after 152 days.

The final visit concluded that a gabion wall would be constructed with the estimated amount of Nu 3.65 Million (M), which was approved and released after 64 days of the geotechnical engineer's visit. The work was tendered in April 2019.

"A total of 264 days was taken to complete formalities where majority of delay was because of assessment and geo-tech's visit and finalising the structures. The time taken for restoration works was unreasonable," report stated.

It also stated that such delays in the long run would have huge impact on the cost of restoration and further deteriorate damaged structures. "The road department must study current practice for further enhancement of efficiency and effectiveness in monsoon restoration works."

However, road department reasoned that although it takes about six months to complete the restoration work, the work was delayed because government released the budget for 2018-2019 in two parts.

Non-implementation of planned activities

DoR carried out several unplanned activities from the approved budget due to change in priority activities during implementation, which deviated from the planned activities.

The report pointed out that this has led to ad-hoc activities, non-implementation of approved structures, which indicated poor planning and execution of monsoon restoration works.

As per the report, road department and regional offices carry out various monsoon restoration works that require immediate action and as per the standard practices. The department releases Nu 3M beginning of every fiscal year for monsoon restoration. About Nu 87.24M was approved and distributed for restoration works in the Fiscal Year 2017-2018.

Lobesa regional office had received the highest budget for monsoon restoration works with Nu 23.57M.

During the fiscal year 2017-2018, of the 155 restoration work planned, 104 were completed. Audit found that 71 structures were constructed without approved budget. Trongsa carried out the highest number of unplanned activities.

The RAA recommended instituting a system whereby prior approval must be obtained from the road department before executing unplanned activities.

The review also reported that practice of periodic maintenance is untimely leading to further deterioration of unattended roads.

“The government gives low priority in terms of budget allocation for periodic maintenance and regional offices did not maintain proper records on roads constructed and those maintained were incomplete or inadequate,” the report stated. “Improper handing taking between the outgoing and incoming officials were observed as the main reason for non-maintenance of information.”

For instance, Tshelingkhor-Khothakpa highway was constructed in 1979 and the road department has not carried out resurfacing works for the entire stretch of roads even after four decades due to improper plan.

“There could be other roads in the country that needs immediate resurfacing or reconstruction. However, due to lack of proper records, RAA could not carry the detailed analysis of all roads planned.”

Although road department expressed lack of budget as a reason, RAA recommended ensuring compliance to requirements and prioritisation of periodic maintenance.

Inadequate records maintained by site engineers

The RAA also noted that regional offices lacked adequate records on the inspection carried out by site engineers. “It was found that although the inspection sheet was simple and easy to fill none of site engineers in the five regional offices that RAA visited had made use of it.”

During the review, it was also found that road markings that provide useful directions and warnings to road users were not maintained properly and signs were put up unsatisfactorily.

Other deficiencies RAA found was that after completion of approach roads, remedial measures were not put in place causing inconvenience to commuters nor maintenance work was carried out.

The RAA emphasised on improving efficiency in restoration of monsoon damages and review the current practice to establish standard operating procedure to respond to regional offices.