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Paradigm shift in disaster management and the need for transformational management

Introduction

Increasing awareness about the rising trend in the incidences of disastrous natural hazards and the costs of recoveries from disasters prompted the humanitarian system to modify its approaches and strategies for managing disaster (ISDR 2005). "The traditional view of disasters held that they were temporary interruptions of a linear development process that was leading to ever-improving standards of living". "The task of humanitarian aid, therefore, was to patch things up so that the process of development could start up again. Emergency relief would be followed by rehabilitation, leading in turn to renewed development work (Twigg, J. 2004)." Although, the humanitarian system conventionally has been concerned solely with responding crisis and providing assistance to reduce distresses of the affected people and bringing back social functioning on the development trajectory, to ensure that the responses are effective, efficient and timely, it always included some preparedness activities. However, human and economic costs of disasters continue to rise. Compared to 1970s, the number of people affected in the 1990s was nearly three times greater and the economic losses were nearly five times higher in real terms (Twigg, J. 2004). Eventually, there has been "international acknowledgement that efforts to reduce disaster risks must be systematically integrated into policies, plans and programmes for sustainable development and poverty reduction, and supported through bilateral, regional and international cooperation, including partnerships" (ISDR, 2005).

Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, adopted in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005, clearly articulated the paradigm shift. It redefined the strategic goals of the humanitarian system as:

- (a) The more effective integration of disaster risk considerations into sustainable development policies, planning and programming at all levels, with a special emphasis on disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness and vulnerability reduction;
- (b) The development and strengthening of institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels, in particular at the community level, that can systematically contribute to building resilience to hazards;

(c) The systematic incorporation of risk reduction approaches into the design and implementation of emergency preparedness, response and recovery programmes in the reconstruction of affected communities.

Then, to pursue the strategic goals, the Conference has adopted the following five priorities for action:

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

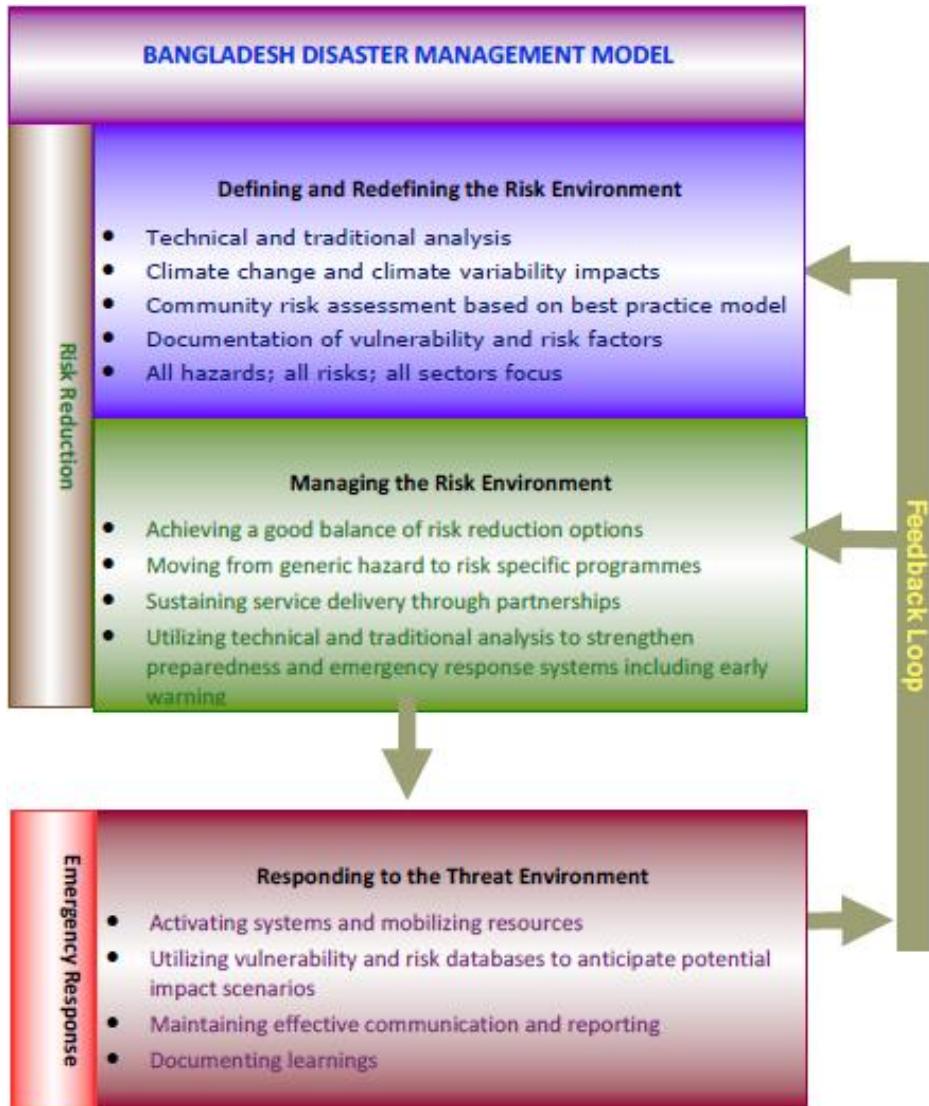
Bangladesh Disaster Management Model

Bangladesh has adopted the HFA 2005-2015 and developed a simple but effective model to guide its disaster risk reduction and emergency response management efforts. It focuses on risk reduction and has two major components. Firstly, risk reduction through defining risk environment and managing risk environment and secondly, emergency response which essentially is managing the residual risks. Defining risk requires hazard analysis - process of identification of events that lead to harm or loss, vulnerability assessment - understanding the interaction of hazards on communities and risk treatment - ranking risk in priority and determining actions that reduce risk.

Managing risk environment aims at enabling "communities to better understand their changing risk environment and thus become more resilient through proactive risk reduction efforts." Emergency response involves responding to an actual threat situation. It includes early warning dissemination, organising evacuation and rescue operations and providing humanitarian assistance as well, undertaking preparedness action during pre-disaster period. An important element in the strategy is mainstreaming disaster risk reduction. Essentially, it means that the development interventions

- Never induce any additional risk to the people;
- Sustain and protect the accumulated gains despite the occurrence of disaster;
- Contribute to reducing disaster risks of the communities.

Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction requires every department and agency of the government to have understanding, capacities and motivation to build-in risk reduction elements in their respective programmes. The Department of Disaster Management has the responsibility to mount emergency response and promote disaster risk reduction. Clearly, establishing disaster risk reduction elements in all parts of the government system is beyond the scope and authority of a single government agency. It necessitates institutional arrangements for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction the sector based development interventions.



Transformational management

The paradigm shift in the disaster management, to be effective, would require changes in the management system and style. The old procedures should be replaced by the new set of procedures; and the old behaviours should be extinguished. Changing structure and policy by simply writing new rules and procedures is relatively easy but it is challenging to change the organisational and culture and the old ways of functioning. Generally, it would require institutional arrangement, procedures and supports that all departments and agencies under all sectors have:

- Understanding of the need disaster risk reduction and how mainstreaming applies in their respective agencies' work;
- Knowledge, skills and tools to undertake risk analysis, risk management and preparedness for responding to threat environment in their respective area of operation;
- Process and procedures to promote and support introducing disaster risk reduction element in their respective programmes;
- Access and involvement in the inter-sector coordination of the disaster risk reduction intervention.

Bibliography:

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