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Disaster Affected People's Reflections on Humanitarian Assistance in Bangladesh

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Disaster Affected People's Reflections on Humanitarian Assistance in Bangladesh

Report Preparation

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National Development Programme (NDP)



People's Oriented Program Implementation (POPI)



Prodipan



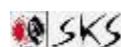
RDRS Bangladesh



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Shariatpur Development Society (SDS)



SKS Foundation



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INTRODUCTION

This report is prepared to contribute to the SCA regional consultation to be held in the last week of July 2015 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. It aims to help map out the key challenges and opportunities for humanitarian action in South and Central Asia through informing the humanitarian challenges in Bangladesh and the key issues for rationalizing and improving humanitarian response. It focuses on natural and man-made hazards but does not include conflicts.

This report is based on research conducted by NIRAPAD and its member organisations. The methodology included individual survey with affected community, literature review and a series of discussion with disaster management personnel. For capturing the voices and perspectives of the affected people, individual surveys were conducted with affected community by the member organisations of NIRAPAD.

75 individual surveys were conducted with disaster affected community in 17 districts by the member organisations of NIRAPAD

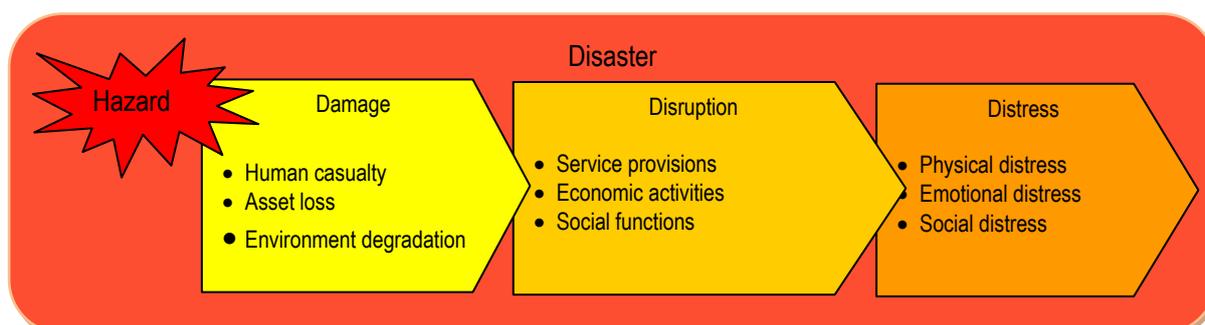
For the purpose of identifying key challenges, national policy documents as well as different research reports developed by NIRAPAD have been reviewed. Policy documents included Disaster Management Act 2012 and Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-13. Research documents included monthly disaster incidence report, Papers of *Disaster Clinic*, January, 2013: Disaster and Vulnerability from People's Perspective, Annual Report 2012: Disaster Response and Recovery, Bangladesh Report 2013: Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery, Education in Emergency: Exploring Options for Continued Education during Disasters in Bangladesh, Handbook on Women Leadership in Disaster Risk Management.

For analysing the primary and secondary data collected from field locations as well as different reports developed by NIRAPAD, a series of discussions among the disaster management personnel have been organised. It helped to map out the key challenges in Bangladesh and the key issues for rationalising and improving the humanitarian response.

OVERVIEW OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH

Trend of Major Disasters

Location of the country between the Himalayan mountain range and the Bay of Bengal, three river systems, and flat and low-lying terrain and proximity to active tectonic fault line make the country vulnerable to disaster. Common natural hazards that occur at regular interval include cyclone, tidal surge, wind storm, flood, water logging, land slide, riverbank erosion, salinity intrusion and drought as well as fire and boat capsizing. Numerous of these incidences at low magnitude affect all parts of the country every year. They create distress for large number of people and cause huge damage to asset and livelihoods. As well, large scale disasters occur at less frequent interval and cause human casualty along with huge damage to asset and livelihoods and disruption of the services.

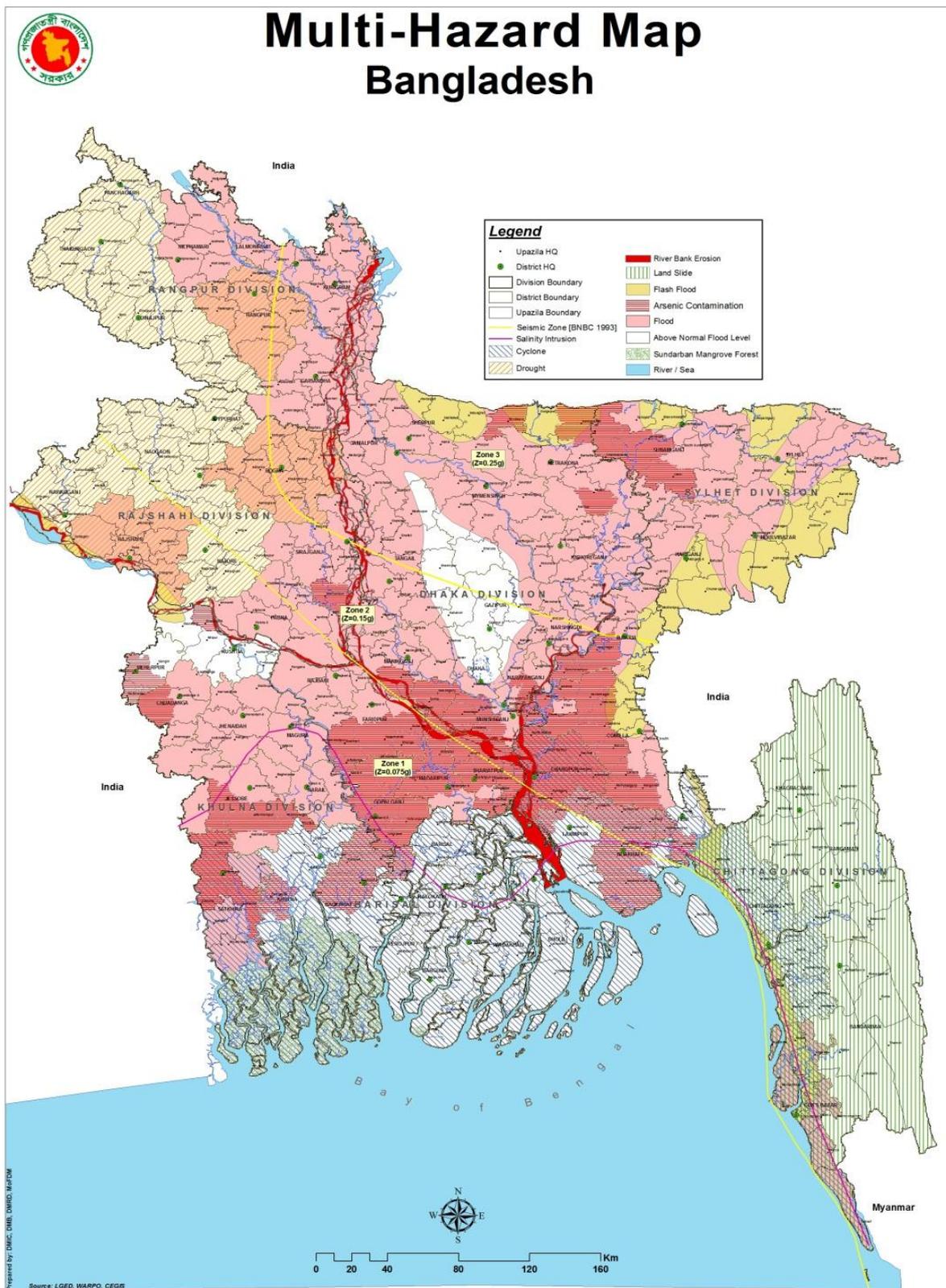


Source: *Paper on Disaster and Vulnerability from people's perspective, Disaster Clinic, NIRAPAD, January, 2013*

Cyclone and tidal surge occur affect the coastal region in the south. They are devastating, and they kill and injure people, destroy animals, crops and assets, damage buildings, embankments, roads, bridges, power lines and other infrastructure and degrade environment. Wind storm or nor'wester occurs in April-May. Nearly all parts of the country are exposed to flood. Flash flood occurs in April-May in the Haor areas. It destroys standing crops, roads and embankments. Severe monsoon flood occurs in the riverine areas at five to ten years interval. It inundates villages and crop lands and sweeps away crops, animals, houses and household assets and cause damage to infrastructure. Monsoon flood occurs during July-October and affects almost all parts of the country. It traps water in low-lying areas and cause water logging. Drought mainly affects the northern part of the country; and it destroys agriculture and severely diminishes water availability for human consumption. Land slide occurs in the hilly areas during monsoon.

Salinity intrusion contaminates both surface and ground water, as well, the soil in the coastal region. Conventional crops (e.g. rice and vegetables) cannot be grown in the fields; and water

becomes unfit for human consumption or agriculture. Also, ground water in large parts of the country is arsenic contaminated; and it is not fit for human consumption.



Source: GIS Mapping Unit, CDMP II

Moreover, incidence of fire in readymade garments factories, slums and densely populated urban areas has become a common phenomenon. Similarly, building collapse has become more frequent in the urban areas, particularly, in or around Dhaka City.

Furthermore, Bangladesh is geographically located on a seismically active region and highly vulnerable to earthquakes. Its northern and eastern regions in particular are known for experiencing earthquakes that surpass 5 on the Richter scale. Cities such as Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet are particularly vulnerable as a result of rapid urbanization, poor planning, high population density, and innumerable high rises and buildings that are yet to meet National Building Codes.

Response

The Government recognises that the country is highly prone to disasters and its efforts to manage disasters are focused on risk reduction. However, it has identified a need to manage residual risks. Accordingly, the Government – through the Department of Disaster Management – plan and implement numerous response interventions during disasters, which aim to protect lives and livelihoods of the disaster affected people using

Response to Tropical Storm Mahasen by the Agencies in 2013	
Agency	Assistance
GoB	Evacuation, Rescue, GR Rice, GR Cash and Medical Support, shelter rehabilitation
UN Agencies	Cash Grant, Skill Building, High Energy Biscuit and Disease Surveillance
NGO	Food Aid, Cash Grant, Cash For Work/ Training, NFI, WaSH Materials, Housing Grant
IFRC and BDRCS	Cash Grant, Tarpaulin, Water Jerrycan, Hygienic Latrine, Cash for Work/ Training, Sapling of Indigenous Tree Species

Source: Bangladesh Report 2013: Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery, Department of Disaster Management, 2014

asset-transfer as the main strategy to deliver humanitarian assistance. Response interventions of the Government are determined following Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-13 that include cash grants and distribution of rice, corrugated iron sheets, housing grants, blankets and warm clothes amongst the disaster affected people.

Also, UN agencies, NGOs and BDRCS and IFRC respond to the disasters. The UN agencies mainly respond to major disasters. They also respond to some of the disasters with unique characteristics, such as communal violence, extreme weather and pest attacks. NGOs respond mainly to the disasters that affected large areas and large number of people. The BDRCS and IFRC respond to both large and small scale disaster. Supports provided by UN agencies,

NGOs and BDRCS and IFRC include distribution of blanket and warm clothes, emergency drugs, medical assistance, food items, household items, drinking water, water purification kits, hygiene kits, latrine and shelter materials.

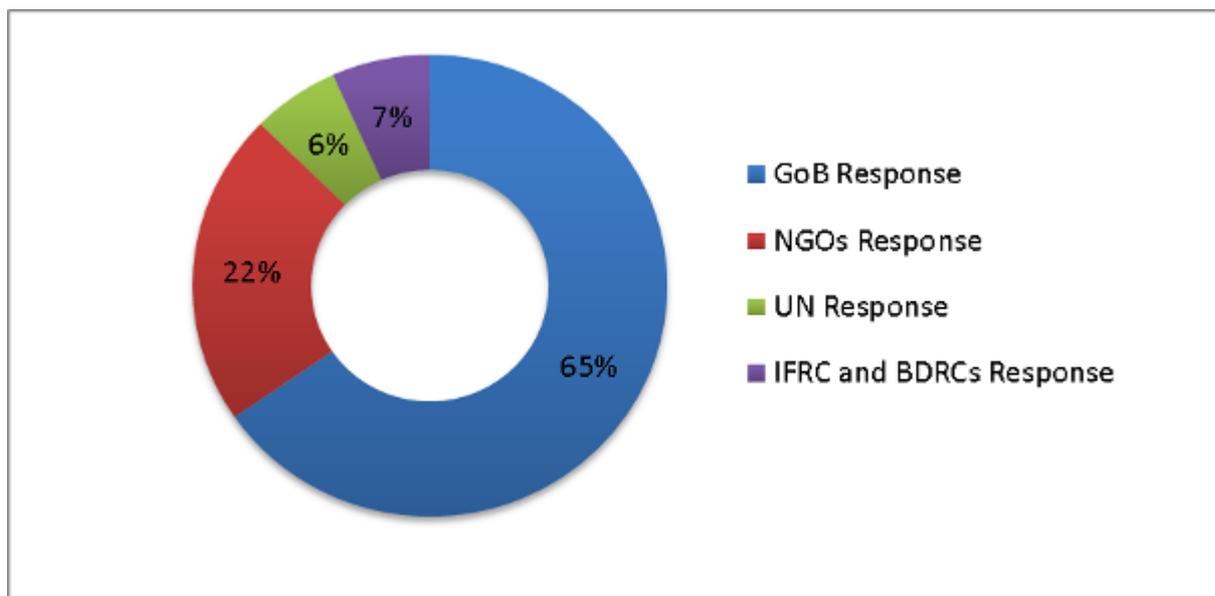
Resource Mobilisation

Mobilising financial, material and human resources timely for response and recovery interventions is imperative for the Government and humanitarian actors such as local and international NGOs, UN agencies, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).

To mobilise resource the Government relies on its safety-net provisions and on the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund. The latter is used in case of large scale or more visible disaster; and it collects fund from people and institutions through appeal.

In 2013, disaster response and early-recovery interventions in Bangladesh received aid amounting to an estimated BDT 3,753.7 million – of which BDT 2,450.9 million came from the Government, BDT 226.3 million from UN agencies, BDT 250.4 million from IFRC and BDRCS, and the remaining BDT 826.1 million came from individual or consortia of humanitarian NGOs (Bangladesh Report, DDM, 2014).

Fig 1: Percentage of resource utilisation for disaster response and early recovery in 2013 by the type of agencies



Source: Bangladesh Report 2013: Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery, DDM, 2014

KEY HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES IN BANGLADESH

a. Responding to Low Magnitude Disaster

Bangladesh is prone to natural hazards such as cyclone, wind storm, flood, riverbank erosion and drought. Large scale disasters recur after several years' interval but disasters of low magnitude occur more frequently. For example, low intensity flood that inundates only about 20 percent of the total area of the country occurs nearly every year. Lightning that injures or kills only one or two people occur several times each year. Riverbank erosion that devours small area of land at a time, continue throughout the monsoon; and every year about 1,000,000 people are affected by river erosion and 9,000 hectare cultivable lands are banished in the river (World Disaster Report 2001 published by IFRC). As the density of the population is very high and these incidences occur recurrently, put together, they adversely affect substantially large numbers of people. Nevertheless, because of their low magnitude and low visibility, these disaster events get little attention and low priority; and the national disaster management system usually respond to it locally, although at national level it does not formally declare the situation as emergency.



Photo 1: Riverbank erosion



In April, Nor'wester occurred 16 times in different parts of Bangladesh; put together it affected 47 out of the 64 districts. These incidents of Nor'wester killed and injured 93 and 391 people, respectively; as well, damaged about 79, 000 houses. The immediate response was from the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and it included cash grant of Tk. 0.62 million to the families of the deceased persons and cash grant of Tk. 0.25 million to the affected families in only five districts.

Source: Monthly Disaster Incidence Report, NIRAPAD, April, 2015

Helping the people affected by low magnitude disaster in Bangladesh requires establishing decentralized humanitarian response system. It is essentially strengthening the disaster management committees at the local level which includes defining their jurisdiction, responsibilities and functions through protocols, guideline and directives. It also requires allocating resources through annual budgets or other means to help these committees plan and implement humanitarian responses.

b. Responding to Urban Disaster

Urbanization in Bangladesh is growing rapidly and, along with that, incidences of disaster in urban area increasing. Nature of the disaster in the urban areas is different from that of the rural areas. In majority cases, urban hazards are *manmade*, and even the hazard is natural, its impact multiply due to human action. Common hazards in urban areas include fire and building collapse and rain induced flood or water logging. Bangladesh has substantial experience and sound expertise in managing disasters in rural context. However, capacity of the humanitarian system to manage urban disaster is very weak. For example, it faced significant challenges to deal with Rana Plaza incidence.



Photo 2: Building collapse (Rana Plaza) in Savar

An eight-story commercial building (Rana Plaza) in Savar, Dhaka, housing garment factories and shops, collapsed on 24 April in 2013. 3,553 people were trapped inside the collapsed building. The Government mounted rescue operations immediately mobilising Bangladesh Army, Navy, Fire Service and Civil Defence, BGB, Police and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and more than 1,200 volunteers. They continued the operation for three weeks and rescued 2,438 people alive and 1,115 dead bodies.

Source: Bangladesh Report 2013: Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery, Department of Disaster Management, 2014

Considering the increasing risk of urban disaster, it is crucial for the humanitarian system in Bangladesh to enhance its capacities to respond to urban disasters. The key issues for capacity enhancement is to gain better understanding and practical skill, to have s as well, to have standard operating procedures and protocol to support planning and implementation of humanitarian response for urban disaster. Also, it is important for the humanitarian system to invest in acquiring hardware and technologies that responding to urban disaster might require.

c. Determining the Scope of Humanitarian Response

The humanitarian assistance concentrates only on preventing human casualty and ensuring access to food, water, sanitation and medical care. It does not look at broad spectrum of distresses that the affected people suffer from. Disaster affected people may experience death or injuries of their family members, relatives or neighbors, and they may suffer from fear or trauma. Cyclone, flood or riverbank erosion often displaces many of the affected people. These affected people may suffer from emotional distress due to the loss of their shelters and their dignity. Generally, humanitarian responses in Bangladesh rarely include support provisions to help affected people overcome their emotional distress. Also, displaced people, women and children in particular, become more exposed to abuse, violence and exploitation. However, these affected people get very little assistance to meet their protection needs.

Among the 75 respondents, around 44% and 35% of the respondents preferred shelter and food, respectively, as the most necessary items in a time of emergency. However, 12% respondents mentioned safety and security as their first choice.

Source: Field Survey with Community People, 2015



Photo 3: People Rescued from Rana Plaza after building collapse

To assess the situation and plan for response, the Government collects information through 'D Form'. Information received through the 'D Form' include numbers of affected people and families, human casualties (death, injuries, missing), asset loss (house, domestic animals, poultry, standing crops, fish farms, boats and fishing gears), damage to utilities (power, sewerage, gas and water lines), damage to infrastructure (industries, service centres, mobile tower, public buildings, road, embankment, bridge and culverts) and water sources (tube well, pond and reservoir).

Source: DDM Website- <http://www.ddm.gov.bd>

Support from Government Agencies and NGOs for the people affected by various disasters in 2013 included blanket and warm clothes, emergency drugs, medical assistance, food items, household items, drinking water, water purification kits, hygiene kits, latrine and shelter materials.

Source: Bangladesh Report 2013: Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery, Department of Disaster Management, 2014

Traditionally, damage and need assessments in Bangladesh apply tools and processes that measure only *physical damages* (e.g. loss of infrastructure or material assets) and *physical distresses* (e.g. malnutrition or illness). Largely, due weak understanding and absence of suitable tools and analytical framework, damage and need assessments rarely indicate magnitude of affected people's emotional distresses (e.g. fear, anxiety or trauma) or social distresses (e.g. women's or children exposure abuse, violence and exploitation).

d. Determining Standards of the Support Provision

Humanitarian assistance under the national disaster management system relies largely on safety net provisions. Disaster affected people are simply added into the list of the people qualified for receiving safety net supports. Although disasters occur recurrently every year, annual budget does not include allocations for humanitarian assistance.

The Government has operationalised the Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-13. The guidelines listed six types of assistances for disaster affected people that include Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), cash grant, rice, warm clothes, CI sheet and housing grants.

Source: Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-13, MoDMR 2012



Photo 4: Affected People Waiting for Assistance

Accountability Issues	Satisfactory	Average and Below Average
Access of the community people to their necessary information during emergency	29%	69%
Access of the community people to the aid groups for giving their feedback, opinions or complaints	24%	76%
Community people's opinions were taken into account	29%	69%
Aid group's care about local strengths, politics, culture, or community tensions while delivering humanitarian assistance	35%	65%

Source: Field Survey with Community People, 2015

It is essential to define entitlements of the affected people, and based on that determine the compositions and quality standards of different support provisions in reference to various needs. Also, it is important to make provision for resource allocation humanitarian supplies.

e. Addressing Women's Perspective in Humanitarian Response

Traditionally, women are responsible for reproductive function – e.g. ensuring food, water, sanitation and child care. Although disasters disrupt this function, humanitarian assistance includes very little to help women perform their reproductive duties during emergency. Humanitarian assistance delivery arrangements seeks to promote gender equity, however, in practice, it increases work burden on women such as collecting relief items from the distribution centers or participate in cash for work.

Among the 75 respondents, 44% feel that they were fully safe and protected from violence during the crisis. However 56% feel that they were not safe and protected from violence during the crisis.

Source: Field Survey with Community People, 2015

“Maintaining their personal hygiene was difficult for the women who moved into the temporary shelters during Sidr, Aila or the flood in 2007. Also, because they did not have safe and secured shelters, their exposure to sexual abuse and harassment increased significantly. Furthermore, many women became emotionally distressed because of the uncertainties in their life or loss of their dear and near ones.”

Source: Handbook: Women Leadership in Disaster Risk Management, Oxfam GB, 2011



Photo 5: Flood affected family migrating temporarily

vital that the humanitarian system in the country, through consultation with children and other, determine the provisions to recover children's educational losses, pursue continued education and ensure children's protection and include that in the list of the support package.

g. Minimizing Exclusion Error in Targeting

Generally, distresses of the disaster affected people are perceived as amplification of the manifestation poverty; therefore, humanitarian assistance focuses on delivery of material resources and targeting concentrates on disaster affected people amongst the poor. Then, by extension, targeting exercises become allocating resources proportionately to the rates of poverty in the respective communities.

Among 75 respondents, 58% indicated that the aid groups were efficient to reach the people who needed help most during the crisis. However, 39% mentioned that they could not reach the people who needed help most during the crisis.

Source: Field Survey with Community People, 2015

GoB Criteria for qualifying for receiving humanitarian assistance

- a) Persons or households that are destitute and extreme poor in normal time
- b) Persons, households or institutions that becomes destitute or poor during or immediately after disaster
- c) Poor occupational group in temporary food crisis
- d) Primary school children who are at risk of malnutrition
- e) Poor and disadvantaged groups unable to procure special food items necessary for their religious practice

Source: Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-13, MoDMR, 2012

Criteria for beneficiary selection should refer to disaster induced distresses. Also, these criteria should be measureable and visible; and it should be applied them to determine exclusion who does not require assistance.

h. Building Partnership between Local and International Agencies

The local humanitarian agencies must have understanding and skills for planning and implementing humanitarian intervention. It requires investment through partnership between the local and international agencies. The current practice is that, both donors and international humanitarian agencies enter into subcontracting service delivery to the local agencies. It is not satisfactory, at least, for two reasons. Firstly, it requires an additional quality control system which is expensive; secondly, quality control costs reduce direct share of the affected people's benefits.

Among 75 respondents, 44% mentioned that community people were engaged/ employed by aid groups to help them in the crisis. Among them 44%, 26% and 24% were selected by the community, aid groups and existing leaders, respectively.

Source: Field Survey with Community People, 2015

Among the 75 respondents, around 41% and 37% of the respondents identified own community and NNGOs, respectively, as the most effective aid groups for meeting the needs of their community during the crisis. However, 19% respondents mentioned Local Government as their first choice.

Source: Field Survey with Community People, 2015

It is important for humanitarian system to find resources and invest to develop knowledge and skills at local level through partnership and engage in humanitarian assistance through the local partners.

i. Addressing Risk Elements in Humanitarian Response

Generally, disaster risk reduction approach focuses solely on development intervention. Provisions for humanitarian assistance do not include risk reduction element. For example, shelter supports comprise few pieces of corrugated iron sheets and bamboos. It does not help the households cope better with the future hazards.

Among the 75 respondents, only 31% think that aid groups have helped their community prepare for future crises.

Source: Field Survey with Community People, 2015

Among the 75 respondents, around 45% and 26% of the respondents think that own community and local aid groups, are mainly responsible for helping them to prepare for and prevent future crises. However, 12% respondents mentioned Government and international aid group as their first choice.

Source: Field Survey with Community People, 2015

Provisions for humanitarian assistance should also include risk reduction element. Humanitarian system must have tools and framework to determine and apply standards to integrate risk reduction elements in the support packages.

KEY HUMANITARIAN ISSUES NEED TO ADDRESS

At national level, the key issues for rationalizing and improving humanitarian response include i) accessing financial resources for responding to low magnitude disaster, ii) finding tools and guidelines for integrating risk reduction elements in humanitarian response, and iii) obtaining technologies and hardware for responding to urban disaster.

It is crucial that the global humanitarian system support to improve the country level capacity and effectiveness of the humanitarian response; **therefore, the key issues for global humanitarian system will be:**

Mechanism for Ensuring Financial Resource for Responding to Low Magnitude Disaster

Currently the global humanitarian system has mandate to engage at country level to respond to high magnitude disaster. However, the low magnitude and recurring disasters have become serious concern for densely populated countries. To improve effectiveness of humanitarian response it is important for the global system to look into the structure and processes of the current funding mechanism to explore how to support humanitarian response the country particularly in the area of responding to low magnitude disaster.

Provision for Improving Local Capacity to Integrate Risk Reduction Elements in Humanitarian Response

National humanitarian system need to have better understanding, as well, tools and guidelines to integrate risk reduction elements in the humanitarian support provisions. To support the national systems, the global humanitarian system may have to engage in technical network with its national counterparts.

Arrangements for Providing Technology and Hardware for National Humanitarian System to Deal with Urban Disaster

Application of appropriate technologies and hardware immensely help improving effectiveness of humanitarian response. It is particularly so for managing urban disasters such as fire or building collapse.

Approach towards Shifting the Power in Partnership for Institutionalizing Local Capacity Building

It is important that the global humanitarian system operate together with the local actors. Therefore, the global system has to engage with the local actors applying partnership principles to enhance local capacities to plan and implement humanitarian response.

Humanitarian Assistance Framework for Promoting Humanitarian Principles

Interventions to help the national humanitarian system more effective may have implications on the global humanitarian system, particularly, the mechanisms for allocating financial resource allocation, providing technical support and developing strategies and technologies. More importantly, these implications may reflect on the international humanitarian architecture and, in particular, on certain elements of the regulatory actions. To engage in providing these supports to the national system, it will require a *response framework* (similar to disaster risk reduction framework such as, earlier HFA or the current Sendai Framework). This *response framework* does not exist currently, but it is necessary to define the scope, outline strategies and explain whether, how and to what extent the global humanitarian system should be involved in supporting the national humanitarian systems in residual risk management.

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