Bangladesh floods – Community Feedback summary
Issue 2 – 17 September 2017

Introduction and Purpose

Shongjog (the multi-stakeholder platform on Communication with Communities in Bangladesh) is collecting and collating feedback from communities affected by floods in Bangladesh. This report covers the period 3-16 September and includes a summary of community feedback from the following sources:

- Feedback captured by ICCO Cooperation’s mobile-enabled community engagement activity¹, in Gaibandha District
- Comments left on Facebook pages where flood-related information is being disseminated (ActionAid, BBC Media Action’s Amrai Pari page, IFRC and UNICEF)
- Face-to-face engagement with communities as part of ongoing relief efforts from several agencies.
- Case studies from Care Bangladesh

This summary aims to provide a snapshot of feedback received from affected communities, to assist clusters to better plan and implement relief activities with communities’ needs and preferences in mind.

Flood Situation and Needs

Based on the community reports, the physical flood situation in many northern areas is better now and very few areas remain under water. In many areas, the water receded after 10-12 days. People who were staying in shelters have returned to their homes.

In general, the key problems that communities are facing at present are:

- Limited access to cooking (lack of utensils and fuel)
- High transportation costs, due to damage to roads and bridges in many areas
- Lack of work, particularly for day labourers
- Lack of medical support
- Rapidly increasing levels of debt
- Lack of support for people with disabilities
- Setbacks in children’s education where schools were being used as shelters
- Difficulty in replacing belongings and assets that were left behind while sheltering

¹ ICCO Cooperation are piloting a mobile-based application (Akvo RSR) to capture community feedback. The key themes identified are included in this report. More detailed, real-time updates can be viewed at https://rsr.akvo.org/en/project/6416/
Information and Support Requests

Communities raised a range of issues where they require additional information or support in order to meet their current needs. Information related to getting relief/food (in particular, information about how long relief payments will last for and whether they are recurring or one-off), work and livelihoods are prominent – suggesting that more attention needs to be paid to disseminating information to communities on these topics. Embankments, roads, community buildings and electricity supplies remain a problem in many affected areas, further hampering communities from accessing information. Mobile coverage and newspaper availability remains scarce in some areas and thus people continue to trust and rely on community leaders and word-of-mouth as sources of information.

Particular issues that communities have highlighted include:

- Worry about how long relief will last, whether a second or subsequent installment of relief will be given and how many times people are entitled to receive relief.
- Complaints that the actual amount of relief received does not match the promised amount (For example: some beneficiaries complained that in some relief programmes they were promised 10kg of rice but, when measured out, they found their ration contained only 8kg of rice while 2kg was filled with unwanted substances like stones)
- Confusion in some areas about how affected people can register for relief; and questions about how beneficiaries are being selected
- Lack of employment opportunities, due to the inundation of agricultural land, which are triggering harsh competition between potential workers in some areas
- Rates of migration into cities are increasing, since many see this as the only option to sustain their livelihoods
- Farmers belief that they need to wait for a minimum of 2-3 months for their land to be cultivable again. Options / techniques for cultivating land earlier than this are not well understood.

Some communities also highlighted longer-term worries or suggestions about the impact of floods in future:

- Including DRR within the national curriculum, on the basis that if a child is educated they can spread the knowledge to many people in their family
- Absence of early warning systems for flood
- Lack of understanding of existing early warning systems – some report that, even where flag-based systems exist, people fail to identify the risk due to lack of training and understanding. Sometimes, even if the early warning is announced by loudspeakers, the message is not clearly heard. Some feel that local radio channels could play better role in informing people about flood warnings and that they do not currently do so.
Positive stories

Several affected people expressed their thanks for relief that had been received – there was a particular trend of affected people having used their relief to help fund livestock purchases. Additionally, stories of effective DRR or preparedness activity continue to feature:

- Mehedi Hassan (17) learned about the flag warning sign in his school provided by Red Crescent, hence he could inform his family and neighbors about the risk of flood. This helped his family and many other families to be aware and take precautions beforehand.
- Morjina (30) reported that her home was completely submerged under water during a flood three years ago. She learned from that incident and then, with some saved money, she raised her home higher which eventually helped to keep her house safe from flood water this year.

Inputs for future summaries

By its nature, this summary is not comprehensive, as feedback mechanisms are not yet active in all affected areas. To improve the usefulness of future summaries, humanitarian agencies are encouraged to include community engagement and feedback mechanisms within their sectoral responses. All CwC activities can be registered with Shongjog and inputs into the next Community Feedback summary are welcome. Please send inputs to Fuad Ur Rabbi (fuad.ur.rabbi@bd.bbcmediaaction.org)

Shongjog is also available to assist agencies with the design and implementation of CwC and community engagement activities within sectoral responses. Please contact Richard Lace (richard.lace@bd.bbcmediaaction.org)