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Background

Bangladesh’s geographical setting and meteorological characteristics make the country highly vulnerable to natural disasters. Globally, it is the fifth most natural disaster prone country.\(^1\) Between 1980 and 2008 alone, Bangladesh experienced 219 natural disasters, which resulted in damage of over US$16 billion.\(^2\)

Providing people in Bangladeshi with critical information following these disasters can save lives, mitigate risk, enable greater accountability, and shape the humanitarian response\(^3\). The emerging field of communicating with communities (CwC) seeks to provide disaster affected people with the information they need and to create channels for two-way communications between affected communities to share their needs with responding agencies\(^4\). However, with limited knowledge of two-way communication among key disaster response bodies in

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\(^3\) Martin Dawes (2015), Definition and Key Messages to Support Advocacy and Action for Communicating with Communities, CDAC NETWORK Available from: http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20151214145316-xg70r [Accessed 23 November 2016]

\(^4\) http://reliefweb.int/report/world/ocha-message-communications-communities
Bangladesh\textsuperscript{5}, poor communication with affected communities remains a barrier to effective and efficient disaster response\textsuperscript{6}.

In this context, the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) network, through the Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP), aimed to increase the use of predictable, coordinated and resourced two-way communication as a component of the humanitarian response system.

**Project overview**

An overarching aim of the Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP) is to build the capacity of national actors, communities, and government to better prepare for and respond to disasters. To contribute to this aim, a Multi-stakeholder Platform (MSP) named \textit{Shongjog} was created to provide advocacy, support, skills development, common tools and services and coordination of CwC in Bangladesh. The group consists of government, NGOs, UN agencies, CSOs and other organisations. As a member of this MSP, BBC Media Action took the role of leading a series of capacity strengthening activities on behalf of Shongjog\textsuperscript{7}. BBC Media Action worked with representatives from Save the Children, Concern Worldwide, Plan International Bangladesh and Handicap International to design and implement project activities within this work stream.

\textsuperscript{6}‘Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalization’, ELRHA, March 2012

\textsuperscript{7}Work stream is a diverse collection of collaborative initiatives developed by DEPP members.
With support from partner organizations, BBC Media Action delivered the following range of capacity strengthening workshops:

- Awareness-raising workshops: to gain buy-in, high-level influencers and decision makers from the government and other organizations were invited to a session to learn more about CwC and the capacity strengthening project.

- Training of trainers (TOT) Workshops: Staff from partner agencies (Concern Worldwide, Handicap International, Save the Children and Plan International) were invited to attend a ToT workshop, allowing them to contribute to the CwC training programme.

- CwC Workshops: thirteen 3-day workshops designed to increase understanding of CwC among organizations involved in humanitarian preparedness and response in Bangladesh. More than 300 staff from diverse organisations, including state and private media, iNGOs/NGOs/UN agencies, government, armed forces personnel and members of the private sector, participated in the workshops. Ultimately, the workshops sought to increase participants’ capacity to integrate the CwC approach into their disaster response plans. The workshops covered the following topics:
  - How communication with disaster-affected populations can help communities and relief providers
  - Information needs of populations in crisis
  - Designing communications activities and strategies
  - Crafting and targeting messages
  - Two-way communication: allowing people to voice their needs and share their experiences
  - Channels and options for two-way communication
  - Working with the media
  - A full day simulation exercise which allowed participants to apply the skills they learned

Research objectives & methodology
This evaluation study aimed to understand the extent to which the Shongjog CwC workshops contributed to trainees’ knowledge, confidence, and usage of Communicating with Communities (CwC) approaches for humanitarian response. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- What evidence, if any, is there that the training improved participants’ understanding of viable and accessible media and communications for disaster affected people?
- What influence, if any, did the training have on participants’ confidence and skills to carry out CwC for disaster affected communities?
- What evidence, if any, is there that the practitioners apply their learnt skills and resources?

**Research methodology**

The study was qualitative in nature and included interviews with the following stakeholders:

- **Key informant interviews with master trainers** (staff from BBC Media Action and partner agencies). These interviews explored trainers’ impression of the workshop content, challenges during the workshops, and perception of the impact. They were also used to collect anecdotal feedback trainers had received from workshop participants.

- **In-depth interviews with high-level decision-makers.** Decision makers for organizations involved in disaster response in Bangladesh were asked about their perceptions of the relevance of the workshop within their existing disaster response approach, barriers to implementing CwC, and their intent to support or implement initiatives incorporating CwC. It is important to note that the aim of these interviews was not to evaluate the impact of awareness-raising workshop, therefore, respondents for these interviews were not workshop participants.

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8 For this study ‘apply’ means, discussion with colleagues, initiative to conduct training among colleagues, initiative for changing organizational approach, usage of learnt skill.
• **In-depth interviews with CwC workshop participants.** Interviews were conducted to understand workshop participants’ perception of the workshop and its impact on their knowledge, confidence to implement, and application of CwC in their jobs.

**Study participant selection**

Interview respondents were purposively selected to capture diverse views. Seventeen respondents were included in the study. These included staff from NGOs, donors, media, government, UN agencies, and first responders. Respondents were chosen to reflect different levels of seniority and influence within their organizations. Geographically, study participants were selected from three regions: northern districts (e.g. Rangpur, Kurigram and Gaibandha); southeastern districts (Cox’s Bazar, Teknaf); and the capital (Dhaka).

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<tr>
<td>Local donor</td>
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<td>First responder</td>
<td>2</td>
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9 Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique.
### Evaluation Findings

This section presents the findings from the evaluation study. It is important to note that interviews were conducted in two phases between 3-6 April and 16-27 April of 2016 while the thirteen capacity strengthening workshops were delivered between 29 January, 2017 to 22 August, 2017. The findings therefore only include the views of participants from the first eight workshops. All thirteen workshops maintained a similar structure and the participants in the first eight workshops represented in the study workshops share similar characteristics to those in the latter six workshops not represented in the study workshops. We therefore expect that the results from this study present a general assessment of the workshops. There were however, some adaptations to later workshops which might have influenced specific participant feedback. In these rare cases, the study results will be accompanied by commentary indicating how the later workshops were adapted and the hypothesized effect on study results.

### Impact of the workshop on participants’ knowledge
For some participants, the content of the workshop was completely new whereas for others the sessions served as a refresher. This section outlines how the workshops contributed to participants’ understanding of communicating with communities.

“This whole concept of effective communication during disaster was new to me.”

- Project officer, Local NGO

✓ **Participants learned that CwC is as an effective means of two-way communication**

The concept of CwC was new for many workshop participants. They reported learning that the CwC approach was a means of two-way communication in which there is an opportunity to receive feedback from the recipient. For many workshop participants, CwC became synonymous with ‘two-way communication’. Participants explained that community consultations, group discussions, in-depth interviews, face-to-face conversations, and communicating through mobile phones were examples of two-way communication. One participant noted that any channel could be incorporated into a two-way communication strategy, if used appropriately (eg a television output which provided a phone number that viewers could call).

Given the two-way nature of CwC, participants described it as a ‘bottom-up approach’ that engages the community in decision-making. Participants said that CwC is unique to other communication approaches in that it seeks to give community members, including minority groups, a voice.

"The CwC approach means hearing the individual voices from the community so it is different. It [the approach] also talks about minority groups and to reach each and every person in the community so that no one should feel excluded. Moreover, CwC prioritizes the bottom-up approach."
CwC is important for both affected people and humanitarian workers

Workshop participants noted that employing the CwC approach benefits both humanitarian workers and the affected community during an emergency response. For humanitarian workers, using CwC helps them to understand the needs of the community so that they can provide the appropriate support. For affected people, the CwC approach means that they have channels through which they can inform humanitarian workers of their needs, which in turn helps them to get appropriate assistance. By establishing a clear line of communication between the two parties, the CwC approach helps to minimize any misunderstanding that could negatively affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the relief effort.

"CwC is an important factor in the case of disaster response. It is necessary to know about the community needs along with the accurate time for providing support for those needs. Otherwise disaster response could have a negative impact on a community. So in the case of disaster response, CwC is very important."

INGO, Senior Advocacy Officer

Not every channel of communication is appropriate for every community

Choosing suitable channels for CwC is an important consideration for effective communication. Participants mentioned that the workshops highlighted how the pattern of every disaster is different which means that not every channel of communication is appropriate for a disaster response. Participants explained that a needs
assessment, secondary media consumption data, and situation analyses were effective ways to identify suitable channels for CwC.

"It depends on the pattern of the disaster and the existing communication channels. For example, if there is an earthquake or cyclone, then the mobile network will be damaged. If the mobile network is still working, then text messaging can be an option. In that case, the local community can give ideas on the best communication channels for their area."

INGO, Senior Advocacy Officer

✓ **Workshop participants felt that mass-media could play a vital role in an emergency**

Participants noted that mass media could be one of the most effective ways to promptly deliver important information to large numbers of affected people in the event of an emergency. Given its ability to reach people, participants mentioned that mass media communications can play a vital role in disaster response.

"Media is very important for emergency responses. We can communicate through radio or TV from the headquarters to field level workers and a large number of affected people. If we want to deliver the message very quickly, media is the only way."

- Government employee

✓ **Prevent rumors by informing the community of the relief plans beforehand**

Workshop participants mentioned that rumors often spread because affected people have high expectations for what they will receive or misconceptions about an organization's mandate (e.g. people may think that an organization will build houses for them as shelter whereas the organization only distributes food). Participants
said the workshop highlighted that, once a rumor begins to spread it is very hard to manage it, so precautions should be taken beforehand. To avert rumors related to relief distribution, participants reported that affected people should be provided with the correct information (i.e. the amount and type of relief, the number of people among whom it will be distributed, and the reason why some people don’t qualify) before the distribution starts.

"The correct information should be provided to the community. What I want to do, how I want to do it, where I want to do it; I will have to provide all this information to the community beforehand, so that they don’t get misguided…so that people can’t spread rumors about it."

• Local NGO, Project Officer

To manage rumors once they have already begun, participants said they would communicate the right information repeatedly to the beneficiaries using the most suitable channels. They also mentioned the importance of linking the information to a source that the community finds credible and using multiple channels to reach as many people as possible.

To avoid the chaos that can ensue when relief distribution does not meet people’s expectations, participants talked about the importance of conducting a needs assessment to understand the number of affected people who require support and identify those that should be prioritized during the distribution of relief. Participants also mentioned that working with community leaders and local authority to determine the best plan for relief distribution could help to manage the community’s expectations.

“In such cases, it would be better if the humanitarian workers talk to the community leaders and tell them that they don’t have enough relief for everyone. That way they [humanitarian workers] can discuss with the community leaders about the best way to distribute it.”

Station Manager, Community Radio
Participants had difficulty recalling the characteristics of effective communication and humanitarian principles

Certain elements of the workshop did not appear to stick with participants. Specifically, participants struggled to recall that the characteristics of effective communication and humanitarian principles that were discussed during the workshop. It is perhaps unsurprising that the humanitarian principles content was not fully absorbed by participants – many found the session difficult to follow as it was a new concept and the content was too theoretical. A master trainer also mentioned that the session on humanitarian principles was difficult to facilitate and could be better contextualized.

Impact of workshop on respondents’ confidence to apply CwC
Respondents generally reported feeling more confident to apply CwC approaches following the workshop. For participants without formal communications training, the sessions provided reassurance that their approach to communicating with communities was aligned with best practices.

"I got confidence that the work I have done so far was done in correct way."

First responder, NGO

Most respondents highlighted the simulation exercise as the component that helped to improve their confidence. The simulation provided a safe environment for participants to experiment and practice responding to a real emergency. This was an invaluable experience for those who had never been involved in a disaster response before, as illustrated by the quote below from a UN staff member. Working in a supportive team environment
for the exercise also helped respondents to feel confident that they could successfully tackle any issue and their teammates’ support helped them to feel valued.

"The simulation was very helpful as I have never gone to respond to an earthquake. We have come to know how to work in an organized way based on a situation. We also got to know about the effective ways of communication too."

Program Associate, UN organization

Application of Workshop Learning

Fortunately, Bangladesh has not experienced a large-scale disaster since the workshops. Participants, therefore, have not had an opportunity to apply the skills they learned from the workshops to a large-scale disaster response. However, there are indications that participants are applying the skills they learned from the workshop to their work.

✓ Workshop participants have applied their new skills in their jobs and describe intent to incorporate learning in upcoming projects

Participants reported applying the learning from the workshop to better understand the communities they work with. For example, a member of staff from a local NGO reported applying the workshop training to conduct a situation analysis in a community affected by a local storm, while another participant used the learning during a needs assessment following a fire incident in Dhaka.

There was also an array of cases that illustrated how the workshop encouraged participants and improved their ability to communicate more with the people they were serving. For example, a first responder reported applying the learning from the workshop to conduct focus group discussions (FGD) in Cox’s Bazar. In another case, an
INGO staff member whose campaign team delivers information to communities through songs mentioned that the workshop changed their practices to incorporate more discussion with the community, as described below:

“Earlier, the campaign team rarely asked questions to community people. Now I have made it mandatory for them to, after completing a session and at the end of a song, take feedback from the community about whether they need to know anything else or not. If they [community members] have queries, they [campaign team members] note them down and we will include those messages in the next song.”

Awareness officer, INGO

Participants also discussed plans to apply learning to specific upcoming projects. For example, a participant from a community radio station noted plans to establish better two-way communication with their listener clubs and to get feedback from listeners. In another case, a staff member from an INGO who was responsible for developing materials on CwC reported plans to adopt content from the training for the materials.

"In case of material development, we can use the skills. We are planning to add some content to advocacy materials and developing tools. This tool is about how CwC can be used in a project, from the design stage to implementation."

Senior Advocacy Officer, INGO

✔ Participants shared their learning with colleagues

All workshop participants said they discussed the CwC workshop with colleagues, however, few said they had spoken with their organization’s leadership about the event. Most respondents said they discussed their experience and learning from the workshop during their monthly staff meeting where most of their colleagues and, sometimes, higher authorities were present.
In addition to discussing with colleagues on their own team, some participants shared their learning with other staff in their organization. For example, a first responder mentioned discussing the workshop content with volunteers and field staff as they are the ones who directly communicate with the affected people following a crisis.

With the exception of one participant from a UN organization who reported leading a formal presentation on the workshop content, most participants mentioned that they had been unable to arrange formal training sessions for their organization due to time constraints. Participants also said they shared workshop materials on shared drives or online storage for all staff to access – a key benefit of providing electronic copies of course material.

While all participants said they talked to their direct supervisor about the CwC workshop, only a few said they spoke to their organization’s leadership. Among the high level decision makers interviewed for this study, there was generally an interest in more effectively incorporating CwC into the organization’s work. However, few had taken action based on their discussions.

**Participants’ workshop experience**

This section outlines participants’ perceptions of what worked well in the workshops and areas for improvement.
Participant feedback: workshop strengths

Workshop participants generally found the sessions engaging and valuable – with the one-day simulation exercise being the highlight for many.

✓ Participants considered the workshop relevant and valuable

Given that most workshop participants were directly or indirectly involved in disaster response, they found the content relevant and valuable to their everyday work.

"It was very relevant to my job. My job is related to coordination, communication and networking with the disaster response team. So I got a relatively clear idea about effective communication through using different channels or media.”

- District representative, INGO

Some participants highlighted the message drafting session as new, valuable learning. They found the training on effective text messaging with fewer than 160 characters especially useful.

"When I am delivering messages through a poster I can cover a lot by using images or writing. But when I deliver messages through mobile, then no one will read it if I send a lengthy one. It will have to be short and concise containing all the important info they need."

Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Officer, First responder

✓ Participants appreciated that the workshop was interactive

Many participants reported that they enjoyed the group activities and found them very interesting.

“I really enjoyed the workshop; I never experienced such an interactive workshop before.”

Officer Communications, Local donor
Some participants said they liked that the sessions concentrated on the practical application of skills rather than on theory. They felt it was easier to learn by being involved in something practically than by learning theory.

“Overall I liked the workshop. I liked it that there were less theoretical parts and they tried to teach most of the content through group work. And I think people can learn more through working (by being involved). It’s more useful than the theoretical way.”

Awareness officer, INGO

The day long simulation exercise was a particular highlight for many participants. They found it engaging and helpful for practicing the skills they had learned. They also liked the fact that they got to learn about responding to a crisis through a practical demonstration.

**Participant feedback: areas for improvement**
While participants generally had a positive experience in the workshop, they also provided feedback on how the workshops could be improved. This feedback can be broadly categorized into recommendations around the workshop content and structure, the facilitators, and the participants.

✔ **Participant recommendations: workshop content and structure**
With regards to the workshop content and structure, some participants felt that there was **not enough time** in the three-day session to internalize and discuss all the content covered in the workshop. Master trainers also shared this sentiment.

"We were provided huge amounts of handouts at the workshop…but due to a lack of time they were not discussed properly in any session."

Project officer, Local NGO
Participants also recommended that all course material should be in Bangla and that technical terms be replaced by **simple language** (particularly in the humanitarian principles sessions). It is important to note that, by the third workshop, all English materials were translated to Bangla and sessions were fully conducted in Bangla.

A few participants felt **certain sessions were not personally relevant**. For example, UN agency staff mentioned that segments of message drafting for radio shows or facilitating a press conference were not relevant for them because they were not authorized to speak with the press and their organizations had dedicated staff for these tasks.

Given the popularity of the simulation exercise, it is not surprising that people were keen for the workshop to have **more practical** elements. Participants suggested that the workshop could include more videos and two participants even proposed a field trip to enrich the training.

**Participant recommendations: facilitators**

Participants, especially those from INGOs and UN organization, felt that the facilitators should have **more practical experience** in the field and in-depth subject knowledge. In some cases, participants felt that trainers were less experienced than participants. This sentiment was shared among master trainers - one reported feeling uneasy, as he was less experienced than the participants.

"I thought participants knew more than they (most of the facilitators) knew. When participants know more than the facilitators then a gap is created and it gets difficult to receive (from the facilitators)."

*Program Associate, UN organization*

In some cases, participants felt the facilitators were unprepared to lead the sessions and unable to engage participants. One participant from an INGO reported that the facilitators did not effectively manage the sessions so the groups did not have time to discuss the most important content.
Participant recommendations: workshop participants

Participants felt that the dynamics between workshop participants should be more carefully considered. For example, participants mentioned that supervisors and subordinates should not be included in the same workshop as subordinates may feel hesitant to discuss in the presence of higher-ranked colleagues. Similarly, another participant mentioned that people’s educational and professional background should be considered when selecting participants for a workshop.

“I saw that both assistant director and field staff of an organization were participants in the workshop. It would be better if that gap was minimized. If an assistant director is coming, then staff closer to his level, like a program co-coordinator or program officer, should be included. When both higher and lower level staff are present at the same time then there will be a gap in the discussion. They [lower level staff] feel nervous to talk in front his higher authority.”

Program Associate, UN organization
Summary and recommendations

The findings indicate that participants generally found the workshop interesting and relevant. The workshops also appear to have had a positive contribution to participants’ knowledge and confidence in their ability to implement the CwC approach in their work. Despite the fact that there hasn’t been a large-scale disaster since the workshops, there is evidence that participants are already applying some of their learning. Overall, the results suggest that the workshops can contribute to building humanitarian actors’ capacity to integrate CwC into their disaster response operation.

Within the context of these largely positive results, the findings also highlight some recommendations for any future CwC capacity strengthening workshops:

- Conduct a demo-session to gather feedback from participants and adapt accordingly before deploying the actual workshops. This can help to address any possible issues with the structure and content of the workshop (e.g., not enough time to cover all the content, unclear information) and help facilitators to practice leading sessions prior to the official launch.

- Given that the workshops bring together people from different sectors to build understanding of different approaches to communications, participants may feel that sessions that address specific skills are not personally relevant. To address participants’ tendency to disengage from sessions they find irrelevant to their specific role, consider explicitly outlining why each session is important for participants and what they should expect to take away.

- While participants have applied workshop learning to their daily work it is unclear whether the workshops will have a larger, lasting impact as few respondents have led formal training sessions to disseminate their learning or held discussions with leadership. Further research to understand the impact of the workshops on long-term, organizational change, and to identify the drivers and barriers to this change.