SUMMARY OF GAP ANALYSIS STUDY ON COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES (CWC) IN BANGLADESH
RESEARCH & CONTENT
Study on Communication with Communities (CwC) Gap Analysis in Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS)

April 2016

SUMMARISED BY
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PHOTOGRAPHY
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CONCEPT & DESIGN
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SUMMARY PUBLICATION
April 2017

Disclaimer: This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.
BACKGROUND

Communication with Communities (CwC) during disaster is itself aid. Globally there is a growing acknowledgment of the critical importance of effective two-way communication with communities in disaster management. At global level, humanitarian aid and communication agencies have formed the Communication with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network to focus on information and communication aspects of aid. The vision has been to create a system for effective and consistent communication as an integral part of humanitarian response in Bangladesh.

Having no such network present in Bangladesh, a country exposed to natural disasters every year, INGOs and UN agencies who are already part of the global CDAC Network came together to create a working group for Communication with Communities in Emergencies (CwCiE) in Bangladesh in 2013 to focus and contribute in building effective two way communication mechanisms. Based on the experience of CwCiE working group, a formal multi-stakeholder platform called SHONGJOG was formed in 2015 with representation of key stakeholders from government, UN agencies, national and international NGOs, the Department of Disaster Management (DDM) as its chair to improve effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to disaster affected communities in Bangladesh, through predictable, coordinated and resourced two-way communication.

To set the strategic priorities of Shongjog, a gap analysis study was launched on the same year in 2015. The gap analysis study on Communication with Communities (CwC) was conducted by Bangladesh Centre of Advanced Studies. This publication presents the summary of the study findings.

OBJECTIVES

Communication with Communities (CwC) is imperative to reduce risks associated with various disasters, deliver better response during and post disaster periods, and build resilience of the communities in Bangladesh. Communication with Communities assists affected communities to make informed choices, take appropriate decisions to save lives and livelihoods, and take effective actions to recover from disasters, help each other in the community before relief and rescue operations are in place.

The qualitative study looked into gathering an understanding on the gaps of two-way communication with communities in Bangladesh, the best practices that have helped save lives, the lessons learned to make response and actions more effective, and associated policies addressing disaster communication, information sharing and knowledge dissemination. Key objectives:

- Undertake an analysis of national policy and policy drivers related to Communication with Communities (CwC), including, pre, during and post disaster;
- Conduct case studies illustrating best practices, lessons learned and community perceptions of CwC;
- Identify the gaps and challenges of CwC in Bangladesh from previous disasters in different hazard zones.
METHODOLOGY

The process of the study consists of conducting literature and policy reviews, consultation workshop with some of the experts and the members of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP), key informant interviews of some of the experts on disaster management, communications and humanitarian response from diverse organizations and institutions, field study involving focus group discussions with the communities, key informant interviews of informed individuals from local level, and conducting the case studies. During the selection of the study areas, few basic criteria were kept in primary consideration which are: Vulnerability of the targeted population in terms of exposure and sensitivity to different hazards and disasters, poverty situation and social deprivation status of the districts1.

KEY FINDINGS

REFLECTION OF CWC AT POLICY LEVEL ASSOCIATED WITH DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSE:

- Communication with disaster affected communities is given key importance since the deadly cyclone in 1991 and much of it has focused on ensuring the mass population, particularly the vulnerable communities, are aware of various actions during disasters to save lives, build preparedness, evacuation process, and also provide guidance to relief operations in post-disaster period. However, in none of the policies, communication with disaster affected communities is identified as an aid,

- Providing appropriate and correct information is vital to save lives and livelihoods.

- In the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) 2010-2015, it is mentioned that in the emergency response phase,
communications with media is expected to be delivered for information dissemination for the welfare of disaster victims, information on the missing people and the ones who are found, as well as sharing information on the results of damage assessment surveys in disaster zones. The plan also aims to facilitate media coverage by media agencies on reporting earthquake and other disaster event through designated individual’s offices of various key stakeholders to share the information to wider audience, including emergency declaration.

- The establishment of a two-way communication with the disaster affected communities appeared to be not the top priority since minimizing loss of lives and damages is set to be the primary priority and thus, planning and resources mobilization focuses from this context.

THE STATE OF EFFECTIVENESS COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES IN BANGLADESH

Is information dissemination timely and two way?

- People receive information and messages about disasters in varied levels as often it is the male group that receives the information earliest while the female and elderly, physically challenged people receive the information much later when their lives are already in extreme risks. The minority group also receives information much later.

- Many women in the urban disaster zone are forcefully evicted during a disaster time, leaving them homeless and helpless as they do not know where to go to seek help, find shelter locations, and thus, this situation leaves them highly distressed.
Information and messages sharing process also lacks two-way actions as the warnings are sometimes transmitted without clear guidance to the vulnerable people.

How early warning should reach communities?

The early warning should be disseminated depending on the variation of disaster and respondent. Although in reality, while the disaster information is delivered to the community, most of the time vulnerable groups left excluded. Early warning should be disseminated 2-10 days before depending on disaster and types of community receiver group.

Awareness about focal personnel and organizations to communicate disaster information

Union Parishad and UDMC are the lowest cell of information dissemination during disaster for the community. Male community members identified UP chairman, Upazilla executive officer, local MP, and NGOs as the responsible person for information dissemination, whereas female, persons with disability mentioned volunteers, Imam, UP chairman and reputed individuals.

Who are the most reliable information providers?

People from flash flood prone area rely on information received through TV, imams, government officials, UDMC members, NGO workers, community radio, local newspaper, school teachers, children attending school.

“The pond water becomes dirty after floods and then my family and I, also my neighbors face tremendous crisis of fresh water. In my area, majority of the people are dependent on the pond water, and for this reason, it is very important that someone experienced visits our households to teach us how to purify water during disasters.”

- Momtaj Begum, Barguna
Males from coastal area mentioned about TNO, union council chairman, NGOs, educational institutes, mosque committee as information providers. Including persons with disability, most of the community people relay on the information disseminated by BDRCS volunteers.

BEST CHANNELS FOR INFORMATION DESSIMINATION DURING DISASTER IN BANGLADESH

A number of communication channels have been identified as best way to communicate in disaster. For example:

- **Radio**
  - Door to door information sharing by volunteers and NGOs
- **Mega phone**
  - Words from local influential and village market
- **Television**
  - 10941 HOTLINE
- **Mobile phone**

The chart shows the information flow during disasters, according to the representatives of the local government in flood prone study locations.
GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES IN BANGLADESH

• Widespread understanding of the importance of communication with communities among the key individuals and institutions needed to be involved efficiently in disaster response. However, gaps in knowledge and understanding exist when it comes to two-way communication.

• Ambiguity on the subject and how it can be designed, implemented and maintained; influence of established power relations and power structures on vulnerable communities; a perception exists that the decision-making is a top-resources and capacity is a major barrier towards two way communication.

• Clear directives are not present in the policies regarding engaging with the communities in a two-way manner. The respondents particularly praised the Standing Order on Disaster (SOD) but at the same time, highlighted that there is a need to bring clarity in communication issues to strengthen communicating with the affected communities.

• The early warning messages and information may not be enough if the

“\textit{I never saw anyone official coming to inform me about a disaster. Sometimes I heard from younger people in my neighborhood that a flood is coming. I do not know how to manage my life at this old age. I wish someone heard about my sufferings and helped me.”}\textit{- SAKINA, Kurigram}
continuation is not maintained during and after the disaster strikes and thus the community people feel that there are needs for humanitarian responding entities to communicate with the local and affected communities with guiding instructions and information to save lives and livelihoods.

- Community people suffer most of the time from lack of specified and accurate information in disaster, such as how and when the rescue operations will take place during disaster time, what are the ways to reach raised grounds when disaster strikes, on which the villagers can move their cattle and poultry for their safety, what are the measures farmers can take for crop protection during disaster and what facilities are available for safe drinking water and sanitation.
- Persons with disability and elderly people require early warning and door to door information service, which could be possible through Disaster Management Committee at village level.
- People in Bangladesh suffer mostly from lack of proper information on communicable diseases during and post disasters as they don’t get right information about waterborne diseases and information on preventive measures through the right channel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study presented with the following recommendations:

1. Enhanced awareness building and empowering communities in disaster responses is needed:

   Awareness building and empowering communities can be further enhanced and made adequately efficient to save and protect more lives and livelihoods through various awareness building and community empowerment programs. Also, to change the behaviour and practice pattern following activities can be done, for example:
   - Formal inclusion of local actors and service providers in the process of communicating with the affected communities for disaster response may deliver effective results.
   - Capacity building activities can be arranged for local level leaderships, government officials, volunteer networks and relevant other stakeholders for better communication with communities practices in the before, during and post-disaster intervals.
   - Rapid responses by the trained and properly equipped volunteers need to be ensured during disaster responses, as the volunteers play vital roles in assisting communities towards engaging in two-way communication.
Training for local and national journalists to ensure better, efficient, respectful, supportive engagement of journalists with the affected communities.

2. Emphasising policy advocacy and raise awareness among policymakers:

Policy advocacy with the policymakers is recommended to open avenues that address disaster management and response to consider prioritising Communication with Communities (CwC) at field implementation level, in which the communities can actively participate in protecting their lives and livelihoods.

3. Development of Communication with Communities strategy for Bangladesh:

Development of a CwC plan of action is recommended which will foster the policymaking process as well as inspire to design communication with communities at the national level humanitarian interventions.

4. Emphasise on better understanding and consistency about CwC and trust building:

Uniformity in early warning ensures inclusivity of information dissemination that requires more attention to safeguarding level of stresses among communities.
the concerned people so as to have equal opportunity to protect their lives and livelihoods. To reduce risks of being misinformed, during and post-disaster time, it is important that the communities gradually learn to trust all available channels of communication.

5. Develop and nurture a common platform for CwC through better information channel and efficient technologies:

It is important to bring together specialists who understand, have required skills and experiences in disaster response and communication, to develop a CwC cluster at national level for better coordination.

6. Emphasizing better coordination, cooperation, experience sharing and resource mobilisation:

Donors, government, development partners engagement is key to maximum utilisation of the limited resource, thus better coordination between NGOs and donors are required.

7. Particular attention required for urban disaster risks reduction and intervention:

As Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries, with rising number of people migrating to urban areas rapidly. Particular attention is required to address urban disaster risks.

The findings will significantly benefit the work on CwC, as well as initiatives aimed to reduce disaster related risks and guide to fill the existing gaps for better response during and post disaster.

For full report, please visit:
www.shongjog.com