

building Safer Communities in South Asia

a series of case studies on Community-Based Disaster Management (CBDM) in South Asia (Jan 2008 Vol 1 No. 1)

Enhancing Community Solidarity through Capacity Building and Formation of Community-Based Disaster Management Organizations

BACKGROUND

Bangladesh has more than 700 rivers and tributaries that define the geography of the country and the way of life of its people. The rivers are the main sources of irrigation, the principal arteries for commercial transportation and homes for fisheries and aquatic resources. This makes the communities living along the river banks predominantly dependent on the flood plains for their livelihoods and forces them to be more exposed to natural hazards like floods, cyclones and droughts. The vulnerability is worsened by problems like upstream river erosion and climate change.

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has been very proactive in addressing issues related to disaster management. The draft National Policy on Disaster Management (DM) of Bangladesh is recognition by the Government of the need to shift the approach from disaster response to disaster risk reduction. It also gives much emphasis on involvement of community and local governments in implementing DM programmes.

As an auxiliary to the GoB, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) has been working with vulnerable communities since the early 1970s through its Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP). In 1997, the BDRCS launched a comprehensive Community-Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) programme designed to reduce the vulnerabilities of communities living in high-risk areas of disaster-prone districts. Since its inception, the programme has been implemented in 34 disaster-prone districts and 142 cyclone shelters, benefiting about 450,000 vulnerable people directly.

CBDM Programme in line with the BDRCS DM Strategy for 2005-2008

The experience of BDRCS in implementing Disaster Management programmes in Bangladesh, has revealed the need to work more closely with communities in order to target and reach the most vulnerable, especially women. It is also necessary to integrate multi-hazard DM and long-term development strategy into disaster preparedness and disaster response programmes. Hence, its Strategy for 2005-2008; *"the vulnerability of people in Bangladesh, particularly of women to disasters is reduced"*.

Building on the success of the CDBP programme and the revised BDRCS Disaster Management Strategy (2005-2008), the Community-Based Disaster Management (CBDM) programme was launched in 2005 with support from Hong Kong Red Cross and Department For International Development (DFID) through the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The programme aims to adopt a more holistic approach towards disaster risk management and is being implemented in 80 flood-prone communities under 10 districts of Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Sirajganj, Tangail, Jamalpur, Faridpur, Madaripur, Sariapur, Munshigonj and Chandpur.

Focusing particularly on women, it continues to increase community consciousness about risks and how they can collectively act to reduce their exposure to hazards. It fosters community participation and unity to coordinate with the local government in fulfilling their responsibilities to save lives and property in the event of disasters.

ABSTRACT



This case study highlights how community-based disaster management (CBDM) interventions contributed to enhance community solidarity and capacity to cope with the annual flood in 10 flood-prone communities under four districts of Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Sirajganj and Tangail. The key outcomes and lessons learned show that the formation of CBDM organizations has increased awareness on the need to reduce risk of natural hazards for long-term development and fostered a sense of collective responsibility to recognize and act on various flood risk reduction measures.

PROJECT

To guarantee a community-led approach and to reach the most vulnerable, the CBDM programme is implemented by the communities with support from the BDRCS. The programme assisted the communities to organize themselves in Micro Groups with 30 to 40 members in each. These Micro Groups (MG) act as the target group for household-level disaster risk reduction interventions.

Each MG selects two representatives who become members of the Community Disaster Management Committee (CDMC). The CDMC is a community level body responsible for leading programme activities to reduce long-term community risks from floods and for facilitating the contingency planning process. It consists of 16 members, 50 per cent of whom are women.

The composition incorporates a well-balanced mix of age and gender from and chosen by the community that helps the programme to recognize different perspectives and how existing local strengths and weakness could address household issues and challenges faced by community members to reduce their risks.

The third community structure under the programme is a team of physically and mentally fit community volunteers; Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs), trained to assist vulnerable community members during severe floods. The CDRTs are assisted by the respective Unit office of the BDRCS and the Unit Disaster Response Teams (UDRTs).

The CBDM programme has a long-term development approach and is focused on capacity building and strengthening of community structures. This will ultimately lead to sustain the initiatives even when programme activities



<< UDRT and CDRT community volunteers helping communities during the flood 2007 relief operations

have ended and would result to community empowerment.

It has been recognized that to reduce risks of natural hazards, community awareness must be raised and capacities built through integrating disaster preparedness into development. The programme conducted in-depth vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCA), a *learning by doing* methodology, with communities to understand and establish the linkages between disasters and social, physical and economic vulnerabilities.

Based on the findings of the VCA, the communities prioritized various livelihood interventions to be undertaken by the programme to reduce floods risks leading to poverty of the most vulnerable households.

Training on first aid, maternal health and safe delivery, primary health care and reproductive health and DM leadership were also provided to members of CDMC, CDRT, Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) and disaster health volunteers (DHVs), improving local capacities and equipping communities with the necessary skills that helped save lives during the recent floods in 2007.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AND DRR HAVE NO BOUNDARIES

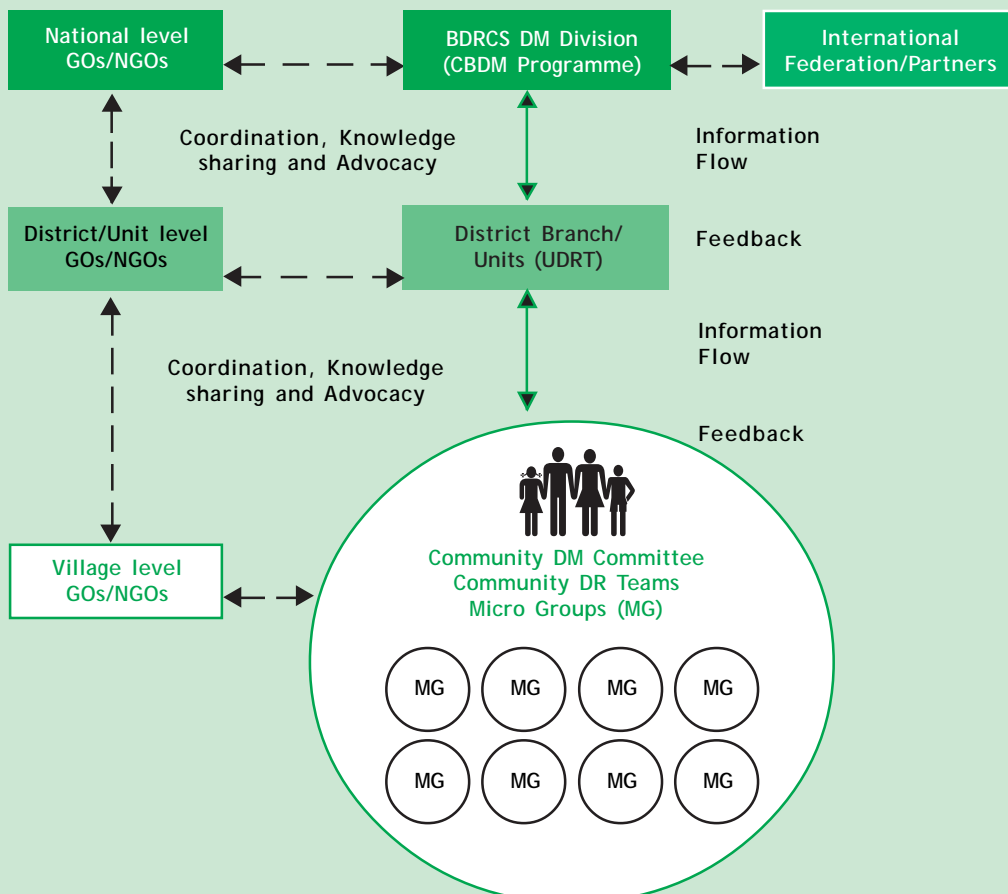
Shobaj and Dipankar, UDRT members from Tangail district took the initiative to travel from Tangail to help the people in the districts most affected by cyclone Sidr. With their strong spirit of volunteerism, they mobilized the support from the community. After three days of a tiresome journey to Bagherghat, they immediately sprang into action by providing cooked food, first-aid services and halogen tablets for safe drinking water. They also helped in repairing roads, cleaning debris and providing psycho-social support.

Establishing contact with Water Development Board proved beneficial in providing flood early warning for communities

The Modhuram and Madhyarajpur communities in Lalmonirhat district live by the Teesta river. Due to their proximity to the Teesta barrage, the communities are frequently threatened by the sudden release of water during the flood season. Through the CBDM programme, the Red Crescent Unit worked with the Deputy Commissioner of Lalmonirhat district to establish contact with the Water Development Board to find ways of reducing the impacts from sudden onset floods. The meeting helped the CBDM programme representatives to include the concerned Units in the contact list of the Water Development Board, to advise them prior to the release of water from the barrage and allowing the concerned Units to inform the CBDM communities.

On 16 June 2007, before the sluice gates of the Teesta barrage were opened to release water, the Red Crescent Unit was invited to the emergency meeting of the District Disaster Management Committee at the Deputy Commissioner's office where the Executive Officers and Chairmen of affected Unions were present to plan necessary actions. The Red Crescent Unit took immediate actions to advise the UDRT to inform the communities. This simple community early warning proved to be of great help for the communities in minimizing the impacts of the 2007 floods.

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE



OUTCOMES

Disaster risk reduction being a long-term process, the most significant outcome of the CBDM programme is the empowerment of the communities, particularly women in understanding their own risks and acting collectively to reduce the impacts of floods.

- Through the involvement of CDMCs in facilitating Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCAs), the communities recognized their own risks and took decisions to act collectively and has most importantly led to the development of a sense of unity within the communities.

The desire for continued unity has helped the communities prioritize the need to have a community space for the CDMCs. With assistance from BDRCS, the CDMC leaders have volunteered to provide the common space, where the communities have built an office for community meetings and training activities.

This office space is also planned to serve as a shelter for the most vulnerable families during the flood season and would continue to stand as a symbol of their strength and solidarity.

- The established CDMCs brought a sense of strength and ownership that has empowered the communities to plan for contingency funds to sustain their current livelihoods provided by the programme.

"We will continue this DRR programme by developing a community contingency fund. We will start collecting BTK 2.00 per family per month once this fund raising scheme is accepted by the CDMC..."

-Joinal Sardar, CDMC member

- The process of formation of CDMC ensuring not less than 50 per cent membership of women has helped the community to view its vulnerabilities and challenges from different perspectives and plan actions accordingly.
- The series of training activities for community volunteers conducted by CDMCs and UDRTs have resulted in better understanding of local capacities and increased knowledge and skills necessary to mobilize community resources and to reduce long-term flood risks in a more systematic manner.

"CDMC has provided a platform for our community to interact and coordinate among ourselves through regular meetings and also encourage the spirit of volunteerism." *-Komala Begum, Community Member from Puran Shailabari, Sirajganj*



"The strong leadership of CDMC/CDRT enhanced capacities of my community to cope or live with the floods in a more systematic and organised way..." *-Mubarak Ali Khan, CDMC Leader from Gunergati, Sirajganj*

- The effective functioning of the CDMC and CDRT particularly in the post 2007 flood situation has helped gain confidence within the community and increased their commitment.

"In the future I am committed to become a member of the CDMC or CDRT in order to better serve and develop my community and village. After few years, with our community effort, my village will be greener and flooding will be less, and the increased vocational training and income generation activities would help to establish small cottage industries in the village", reflected by a *12 year-old Ashima from Khokshabari, Sirajganj.* >>



LESSONS LEARNED

Regular awareness building meetings in MGs, CDMCs and CDRTs have made the communities realise that the flood risks could be reduced by acting collectively as a community along with partnerships of various stakeholders like the local government authorities, local NGOs and the Red Crescent Society.

The CDMC can play a vital role in the future in initiating dialogue with various stakeholders and be the focal point ensuring disaster-resilient development.

Participation in the VCA process has made communities realise that in order to reduce flood risks, it is necessary to address the root causes of development and not only focus on preparedness and response.

THE WAY FORWARD

The programme has taken the first step towards embracing a collective vision of the communities to reduce flood risks. A similar mindset needs to be created for other local relevant hazards like drought and tornado. An integrated approach towards risk reduction needs to be adopted. This would require time, continued engagement of the BDRCS and strengthening linkages between the local government and other stakeholders.

Currently, there are three committees that coordinate and review disaster management activities at a sub-national level. These are the Districts, Upazillas and Union Disaster Management Committees. Since under the CBDM programme, the UDRT and CDMC are formed at levels below the Union, they could be further strengthened and expanded in the future to complete the linkages from the national to the village level.

It is important to continue the current community-based approach to ensure participation of the most vulnerable within the communities towards programme sustainability. The BDRCS would continue to facilitate the communities in developing the flood preparedness and response plans.

The VCAs conducted in the communities under the programme would be revisited to understand the change in priorities and to continue advocacy on disaster-resilient development with the local government and other stakeholders.

Possible options for sustainability of CDMC:

- CDMC could be considered by the local government as the Community-Based Organization
- Local government member included in the CDMC
- CDMC Leader and Deputy leader to take the life membership of the BDRCS
- CDMC office to function more like an operations room for the community with all the required information and records.

Possible options for sustainability of UDRTs and CDRTs:

To divide them in five Core Disaster Reduction/Disaster Response Teams (five members in each Team with specific roles and responsibilities) such as:

- **Disaster preparedness and response:** to address community preparedness, DM training, structural mitigation, search and rescue;
- **First Aid and Primary Health:** to provide basic health care services, first aid, Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs), HIV/AIDS awareness and community health awareness;
- **Communication/Coordination and reporting:** to address community awareness and advocacy;
- **Shelter/water and sanitation:** to address both emergency shelter/permanent housing
- **Grain and cash collection/distribution and account keeping:** to facilitate and monitor emergency funds and livelihood-income generation programmes



BANGLADESH RED CRESCENT SOCIETY (BDRCS)

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) offers a range of services to deal with both national and international emergencies. As a National Society within the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the BDRCS has access to the largest voluntary network in the world and is also among the oldest humanitarian organisations in the world. Throughout its history, the BDRCS has enjoyed tremendous public support and has played a pioneering role in many areas of health care, social work and education. The society has steadily grown stronger and is now the premier humanitarian agency in the country. For more information, please visit: www.bdracs.org.



DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (DFID)

The Department for International Development (DFID) is the part of the UK Government that manages Britain's aid to poor countries and works to alleviate extreme poverty. It is headed by a Cabinet minister, one of the senior ministers in the Government. This reflects how important the Government sees reducing poverty around the world. It has two headquarters (in London and East Kilbride, near Glasgow) and 64 offices overseas.

DFID's values define the way in which they intend to live up to their strategic aim of halving world poverty by the year 2015 and also provide a framework for improved performance. The core values are: ambition and determination to eliminate poverty, diversity and the need to balance work and private life, ability to work effectively with others, desire to listen, learn and be creative, and professionalism and knowledge. Their policies and processes support and underpin these values.

Disaster Risk Reduction Programme Phase II is a three-year programme (May 2005 to April 2008) in seven countries and in particular three countries in South Asia; Bangladesh, India and Nepal and is implemented together in collaboration with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, DFID and British Red Cross. The programme aims to develop community resilience, to strengthen national society and community preparedness for response and to establish networks and develop knowledge sharing. For more information, please visit: www.dfid.gov.uk.



EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S HUMANITARIAN AID DEPARTMENT (ECHO)

The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) is one of the biggest sources of humanitarian aid in the world that has funded relief to millions of victims of natural and man-made disasters outside the European Union. Aid is channelled impartially to the affected populations, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality and political affiliation. Part of the department's mission is to raise public awareness of the issues at stake.

For humanitarian aid, the Commission works with about 200 operational partners, including specialised United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

The Commission under the DIPECHO programmes also funds disaster preparedness and mitigation projects in regions prone to natural catastrophes. It has recognized the vital importance of community preparedness to respond to disasters in the period before aid agencies arrive at the disaster site. Currently, DIPECHO programme is supporting the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, South Asia Regional Delegation to implement Building Safer Communities in South Asia region programme.



ASIAN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS CENTRE (ADPC)

Established in 1986, ADPC is a leading regional, non-profit organization based in Thailand, mandated to promote safer communities and sustainable development through disaster risk reduction. ADPC's programs and projects demonstrate a wide diversity in applications, address all types of disasters, and covers all aspects of the disaster management spectrum from prevention and mitigation through preparedness and response, to damage and needs assessment, rehabilitation and reconstruction endeavors. ADPC thematic focus areas are Climate Risk Management (CRM), Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM), Disaster Management Systems (DMS), Early Warning Systems (EWS), Public Health in Emergencies (PHE) and Urban Disaster Risk Management (UDRM). For more information, please visit www.adpc.net.

BDRCS COMMUNITY-BASED DISASTER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME IN FLOOD-PRONE AREAS

The purpose of the programme is to prepare high-risk communities, particularly women at household level in flood-prone areas, to manage impacts of severe floods. It is working with 80 communities in 10 selected districts which are most prone to severe riverine flooding due to their location across the large rivers of the country namely Jamuna, Brahmaputra, Ganges/Padma, Teesta and Meghna. Based from the flood-prone area map prepared by the Government of Bangladesh in collaboration with World Food Programme in 2004, the target beneficiaries are the communities at riverbanks in the districts of Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Tangail, Faridpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Munshiganj and Chandpur.

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Building Safer Communities in South Asia

is a series of case studies on Community-Based Disaster Management (CBDM) in South Asia, as part of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - South Asia Regional Delegation's (SARD) programme. The programme is guided by the International Federation's Disaster Management strategy and standards in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). It aims to draw together regional experiences and knowledge to harmonize and standardize Red Cross Red Crescent risk reduction trainings, approaches, systems and tools.

The case studies illustrate processes adapted and lessons learned during the CBDM programme implementation to promote and facilitate a more coherent cooperation among partner national societies, volunteers, international NGOs and local community groups. This is essential to increase the quality and reach of risk reduction measures that create better prepared, more resilient and self-reliant communities. These are written and developed in partnership with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) based in Thailand.



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