

Problems of Coordination between GoB and NGOs in Disaster Relief Operations in Bangladesh: A Case of Flood 2000 in the South-Western Districts.

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Introduction

Bangladesh is widely known in the world not only for its level of poverty, but also for its' proneness to the natural disasters. The major disasters that affect the country almost every year are floods and cyclones. The geographic location is the most contributing factor for the disaster proneness of the country.

Bangladesh is the largest delta of the great rivers- the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. It is criss-crossed by over 230 rivers and rivulets. These river systems drain the run-offs from a catchment area of about 1.7 million km, 92.5 percent of which is located outside the country (Banglapedia: 2003). The estimated volume of water flowing through these rivers is about 1500 billion cubic meter, which can form a pool of a depth of about 10.25 meters stagnant water, if accumulated over an area equal to that of Bangladesh.

The average annual frequency of tropical disturbances in the Bay of Bengal ranges between twelve and thirteen of which five attain the cyclonic strength (with wind speed of more than 64 kph). Although they contribute only 5 per cent to 6 per cent of the global total, they are deadliest in the world accounting for about 75 per cent of the global losses in terms of lives and properties. Most of the damages done by cyclones are caused by the storm-surges associated with cyclones, and not by the wind speed as is usually believed (Saidur: 1999). Records show that the world's most severe storm surge disasters are observed in

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case of cyclones forming in the Bay of Bengal, especially when they make landfall at Bangladesh coast near the Meghna estuary. The worst cyclone in the recorded history of the world was the one, which killed over 300000 people of Bangladesh on the night of 12th of November 1970. Over 138000 peoples died in another cyclone that hit the coastal-belt and the offshore islands on 28th of April 1991(The Daily Ittefaq: 2001).

The damages done by the catastrophes in form of floods, flash floods, cyclones, storms, river erosion is quite a recurrent phenomenon in Bangladesh. All the key actors in Bangladesh; the government, NGOs, businessmen, civil society and individuals promptly respond with relief support, particularly in the emergency survival phase. In most cases these interventions are on ad-hoc basis, and extremely lack in coordination and cooperation needed for optimization of the effectiveness of disaster response operations. The unique example of lack of coordination was observed during the relief phase of the floods that hit the south-western districts in 2000 (DFID: 2001).

Background of the Study

An unprecedented flood inundated the south-western district of Jessore, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Meherpur and Shatkhira. It was the first of it kind after a gap of 65 years. As expected, the people were unaware of the damages and unprepared to mitigate the losses. A brief statistics of the colossal damages happened at that time is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Damage Statistics of Floods of September 2002

District	Affected Villages	Affected Population	Affected Houses	Affected crops Land (hec.)
Chuadanga	155	426178	55870	67785
Meherpur	160	532675	64614	49540
Jhenidah	180	392432	138233	44724
Jessore	434	580508	260166	46723

Source: ADAB in Jessore, WAVE, Chuadanga

In proportion to the magnitude and severity of the floods, the response from the private and public institutions was massive. The government, NGOs, Local Government Institutions, business organizations, educational institutions, youth clubs and the public in general sprung into action in the shortest possible time. Massive scale of emergency survival relief operations was mounted.

Since these interventions were made in an unplanned way on an ad-hoc basis, serious lack of coordination and cooperation among and between the key actors (GoB departments, donors, NGOs, Local Government Institutions, etc.) have been observed during the operations, particularly in the emergency relief phase. As a result there were substantial duplication of efforts and wastage of resources and whilst some of victims of the remote areas were left out from the package.

Methodology of the Study

The study, employing a set of tools and techniques, intended to understand the broader issues of coordination between various actors who were engaged during the relief and rehabilitation phases of the operations. Given the objectives of the study, multiple methods of data and information collection were employed. Several social science methods, including the following, were used to explore the qualitative information.

- Collection and review of literatures
- Conduction of Focus Group Discussions
- Interview with the key informants
- Conduction of case studies

Jessore and Sathkhira are the districts where the data collection methods were applied. Various local NGOs of this region were visited and interviews were conducted with the key persons. The information from the affected people and the elected local representatives was also collected.

The Findings of the Study

The study conducted in the severely affected UPazilas and Unions identified by the donor agencies with unacceptable level of gap of coordination in several areas of operation. This resulted in duplication of efforts, wastage of resources and lack of transparency (Concern: 2001). The areas of problems of coordination are presented below:

1. Damage and Need Assessment (DANA)

The key success to any disaster relief and rehabilitation operations is to start with a report of damage and need assessment, conducted in a professional manner. This is essential for targeting the areas and the beneficiaries with limited resources. In case of sudden on-set disasters, first DANA should be conducted by the arial survey. In the initial days of the disaster, several helicopters flights were made to the areas with

political personalities, but not even one for conducting DANA. Regrettably to note that no global damage and need assessment was conducted within the first five weeks by any of the major stakeholders. In absence of a ‘Big Picture’, some of the NGOs and the civil administration in the field area conducted DANA independently, neither in a structured way, nor using any uniform format. They lacked the professional expertise that is required for the job.

Record shows that the ADAB compiled the DANA and published on 29th of October, 33 days after the areas were first affected by the floods. So the starting of the relief and rehabilitation operations in the areas was not based on sound footing.

2. Selection of Areas

In absence of the global picture based on DANA, specific geographic and programme areas were not allotted to specific NGOs based on their capacity and resources. The Bureau of NGO Affairs was very efficient in approving the applications from the NGOs for operations, but no effort was made to ensure that resources were allotted based on the need of the particular area. As a result, there was heavy concentration on operation by the NGOs in areas which were focused in the newspapers properly and where they had their existing development programmes.

The following table will show the affected areas that got the maximum concentration of the NGOs in Jessore District.

NGOs	Areas Covered		
	District	Upazila	Union
RRC, Bachte Shekha, Jagoroni Chakra, Disari Samaj Kallan Sangstha (DSS), BRAC, AD-DIN, Proshika, CARE, BDRCS	Jessore	Sharsha	Sharsha, Nijampur, ulashi, Dihi, Laskanpur, Bahadurpur, Putkhali, Benapol, Kaiba
RRC, Bachte Shekha, Jagoroni Chakra, BRAC, AD-DIN, Proshika, CARE, BDRCS		Jhikargacha	Jhikargacha, Gadakhali

Source: ADAB, 2001

The table clearly shows that the operating organizations were concentrating almost in the same areas. In the absence of coordination among the operators in respect of allocation of geographic areas of operation, some of the areas received intense attention and some were left out in their program. Specific complaints against UNO for influencing the NGOs to operate in specific areas under the pressure of political leaders

were made. The most disturbing finding was the selection of areas by NGOs based on the existing programme run by them.

3. Beneficiary Selection

The selection of beneficiaries is very important to target limited resources available for both emergency survival relief and rehabilitation operations. The study reviewed that no initiative was taken in standardizing the criteria and the process for selection of the beneficiaries, nor for coordination in sharing of the list of beneficiaries among different operating agencies. The root cause for these could be attributed to the fact that disproportionate weightage and importance were given on the members of the groups, formed by the operating NGOs under their normal development programme, in the selection of the beneficiaries.

There are several other examples revealed that undue weightage was given by the NGOs on the members of their development programme groups. This resulted in discrimination of the selection of beneficiaries leaving a number of the needy uncovered. Although not very common, another area affected the process of selection of beneficiaries was undue pressure from the powerfuls in the areas, both from the local government and central government authorities. Local NGOs alleged that sometime chairmen and members of Union Parishads tried to pressurize them to select beneficiaries of their own choice. They presented list of beneficiaries and insisted that they should be covered. Influenced by the leaders of political parties and local government institutions, in few cases the UNO had no other option but to try to put pressure on the NGOs for prioritization of the beneficiaries as per their choice.

The study found that the absence of set criteria and procedure for selection of beneficiaries and sharing of information between the operational NGOs resulted in the huge duplication of efforts and wastage of resources, particularly at the emergency phase. The problems of selection of beneficiaries, particularly the high priority that was given by the NGOs on their group members and the poor level of coordination among the operating NGOs, as explained above, is not very uncommon in Bangladesh.

4. Relief Package

In the floods of 2000 in the south-western districts, different NGOs had different packages of relief and rehabilitation supports for the beneficiaries. These differences were not only in the commodities or the

types of assistance, but also in their quantities and qualities. There was no set menu for distribution either at the emergency phase or during the rehabilitation operations. Nor the issue of requirement of minimum calorie, for different categories of beneficiaries, was considered. Neither standing order of GoB, nor the Sphere Standard, pr even the Disaster Management Handbook for Bangladesh were consulted.

Duplication of efforts was observed in the packages given by different NGOs, even by the NGOs in the same area operating with funding from same donor agencies, for the same purpose. The following table is a presentation of that fact.

NGOs	Relief Packages	Same Area
DSS	Rice, Dal, Salt, Sugar, Biscuits, Oil, Soap, ORS, Candle, Match, Blanket, water purification tablets, instruments of tubewell, clothes	Sarsha
Banchte Shekha	Rice, Dal, Salt, Oil, soap, potato, hygiene kits, baby food, medicine and water purification tables	
RRC	Rice, dal, salt, sugar, biscuits, oil, soap, ORS, candle, match, blanket hygiene kits, water purification tables, baby food, clothes	
Jagorani Chakra	ORS, candle, match, hygiene kits, bleaching powder, vegetable, seeds, housing materials, sanitary latrine.	

Source: RRC, Jessore, 2001

5. Coordination among and between the key actors.

The flood of 2000 in the south-western districts was the first of its kind in the area in 65 years time. In proportion to the damage and destruction cause by the floods, the response from the people of all walks of life was very praiseworthy. The amateur groups e.g. business communities, students groups, youth clubs, women organizations, etc. conducted, as usual, in a very unplanned and uncoordinated way (rushed to the spot, off loaded the goods to easily accessible areas, took some photographs and returned). The major players in the operations were the government of Bangladesh, the NGOs and the donors. It was painfully observed that hardly any operational coordination existed among the players and between them.

6. Coordination among the NGOs:

ADAB opened a coordination cell in the office but the members of this chapter neither cooperated, nor responded to our queries. No organization filled in and returned the formats that we provided to them for compilation of information. We have seen that more than one NGO were

operating in the same areas with the same programme but did not coordinate among them. We, as coordinating body, had no authority to force the NGOs to coordinate directly with other NGOs or through us. Nor did we have sufficient staff to ensure coordination among the NGOs.

RRC: There was very little coordination and communication among the NGOs which received fund from the same donor. Virtually no coordination existed between NGOs funded by different donors. The NGOs had been operating almost in isolation from one and other. The leaders were always busy for mobilization of funds from the donors. In fact there was an unhealthy competition among them. The very little coordination that existed in few cases was because of personal relationship between the leaders of local NGOs.

Concern: had very little coordination with parallel agencies, either at Dhaka or at the field level. We had always been under pressure to distribute emergency relief to the affected people through our local partner NGOs. Although we had guidelines for the NGOs, those were not followed properly. We must take the responsibility for not giving specific formats/ system for the partner organizations to coordinate among themselves.

7. Coordination between the donors and the NGOs

During the floods of 2000, the coordination among the donors was very weak, and insignificant among themselves and between them and NGOs. Absence of sharing of information about funding to local NGOs informed the donors about their other funding partners. In some cases we found that the NGOs we funded directly also received fu from Oxfam and European Union. Some of the NGOs were over funded (three times than their normal annual budget) compared to their capacity to deliver. These problems stemmed from the lack of coordination and cooperation among the donors.

Similar Problems were surfaced during several interviews with the representatives from the multilateral and bilateral aid agencies and INGOs finding confirmed that a member of NGOs received funding from multiple donors. It was observed that in several cases the same donors funded different NGOs to do the same job in the same area. Also different donors funded one particular NGO to do the same job in the same area. The following table will present the cases:

Funding Agencies	Recipient	Purpose
WFP, DFID, OXFAM-GB, ACTION AID, EU, CONCERN, CARE	Uttaran	Emergency relief e.g. food, clothings, utensils, etc.
OXFAM-GB, ADAB, NGO FORUM, CIDA	Banchete Shekha	Emergency relief e.g. food, clothings, utensils, etc.
DRID, ECHO, CONCERN, SDC, NORAD, SKIP, OXFAM	Jagarani Chakra	Emergency relief e.g. food, clothings, utensils, etc.
OXFAM, CONCERN, COBSCP, HKI, SDC, CCI, CARE, PROSHIKA	SODAP	Emergency relief e.g. food, clothings, utensils, etc.
OXFAM, SDC, CCTS, CCI, CARE, PROSHIKA	RRC	Emergency relief e.g. food, clothings, utensils, etc.

Coordination between GoB and NGO:

The fact that the Prime Minister's Office took over the control of the Relief and Rehabilitation operation of the flood disaster of south-western districts reflected the level of priority given by the government for this particular disaster. The INGOs and NGOs did not have any direct contact with the control room set up at the PM's office excepting through ADAB in Dhaka which had occasional interaction with the people stationed at that control room. At the field level (district and Upazila), the initiatives taken by the responsible central government authorities did not bring about desired fruit.

ADAB at Jessore: some NGOs participated at the coordination meeting convened by the DC or UNO but they did not comply with the decisions of the meeting for sharing of information on programmes e.g. areas of operation, allocation of resources, etc. Large NGOs like CARE and BRAC did not bother even to attend such meeting of several occasions.

Some of the NGOs opined that to avoid direct control by the government over their programmes and pressures from LGIs and politicians, they kept distance from the public authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bangladesh is affected by disasters e.g. cyclones and floods almost every year. The geographical location of the country is the contributing factor for its' proneness to disaster. Since we don't have resources to prevent disasters we have to be prepared to live with it. Very high emphasis should be put on measures to alleviate the sufferings of the people affected by disasters. Today there is no place for any amateurship in the field of disaster management. Professional expertises are needed to design and implement both pre-disaster plans and post disaster response operations. Coordination among the key actors at all stages, particularly at the emergency survival relief phase, is a must to avoid duplication of efforts and wastage of resources. Since it is the responsibility of the government of Bangladesh to protect the life and property of people of

the country, they should take the leading role in any aspect of disaster management. As mandated, the NGOs should supplement the efforts of the government. Some of the techniques which have to be applied are presented as recommendations

a) Damage and Need Assessment (DANA):

Time is the essence for all disaster response operation, more so in the emergency relief phase. Sooner the intervention, better the evacuation, because it is a question of life and death. Prerequisite for any effective response operation is the report of the damage and need assessment done. In case of sudden on-set and high impact disasters e.g. cyclone, tornadoes, earthquake, flash floods, etc. the first DANA must be conducted within 24 hours after the disaster has hit. This should be done even accepting an error margin of as high as 50 per cent, as the report will form the basis to plan and start the response operation immediately. In case of slow on-set disaster e.g. monsoon floods, DANA must be conducted within 72 hours and successive DANA should be made to get much clear picture at regular interval later. Helicopter/ Seaplane/ BAF aircrafts should be used to make the first arial survey by DANA experts.

The contents of the report of DANA should include the following

- i) What has happened: the extent of damage with brief statistics to be presented
- ii) When: The time and duration of the disasters
- iii) Where: the areas affected should be categorized in to A, B and C according to the extent of damage done identifying the most severely affected areas as A and the less ones as C. this categorization should be done preferably Upazila wise in the report of the DANA conducted by national level experts and union wise at district/ Upazila levels.
- iv) How many are affected: Estimation of figure of number of people affected in different categories of areas should be indicated.
- v) What are needed: the package needed for emergency survival relief has to be specified (indication for the same for long term relief and rehabilitation supports should be given.
 - It must be conducted by professional experts on the subject (regrettably not many are available in Bangladesh)
 - Ideally, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MDMR) or a team from NGOs under the authority of MDMR should perform the task.
 - Disaster Emergency Response (DER) group, initiated and coordinated by WFP, has taken good initiatives during the last part

of the last century. The members should have professionally been trained as DANA conductor with intense knowledge about the socio-economic and demographic situation of high risk areas and have ready access to statistics of those areas.

- MDMR should make and keep as inventory of professional experts out side the DER group. Contract arrangement should be made in advance so that their services could be mobilized avoiding bureaucratic formalities.

b) Information Sharing

- The report of DANA conducted must be shared within 24 hours after the assessment is done, i.e. maximum 48 hours fro the time disaster hit the area.
- MDMR must hold a meeting with the key actors to share the report of the DANA.
- MDMR to present DANA report i.e. the global big picture of the damage done and the needs created by the disaster.
- MDMR to specify what GoB is planning or doing and what supports are expected from the NGOs.
- NGO representatives must have the authorities to commit resources (financial, material and human) on behalf of the respective organization t supplement a part of the big picture drawn by MDMR.
- At district and Upazila levels, DC and UNO respectively would convene and conduct business within maximum 48 hours.

c) Selection of Beneficiaries

- The selection of beneficiaries should be made as pre-determined set criteria and guidelines. This will help avoid undue pressures from social and political elites in the field.
- Selection should be based on level of distress caused to family by the disaster and their capacity to meet the emergency needs (even the well-offs might need emergency survival supports e.g. water, survival food, first aid and medical assistance, etc.)
- The list of distressed people and the beneficiaries of VGF programme maintained at the UP office may be considered as the basis to tart the process of selection fo the beneficiaries.
- Female-headed households, pregnant and lactating mothers, children, aged and disabled should get the priority. Membership of groups organized by the implementing NGOs must not be a criterion for selection of beneficiaries.

- Recovery of credit given by the NGOs should not be the aim to provide credit or grant support.
- Selection of beneficiaries should be done in a transparent way.
- For high value relief and rehabilitation supports e.g. house construction or capital support for income generation, selection of beneficiaries should be done in a meeting organized in the village.
- The list must be displayed on the notice board of the NGO and the UP office and shared among the NGOs and with the relevant coordinating authorities.

d) Coordination among the Key Actors.

Effective coordination is very important factor for achievement of success in any disaster operation, particularly in the emergency relief phase.

i) Coordination between GoB and NGO:

- NGOs as supplementary to the efforts of the government must coordinate with the designated authority of GoB at appropriate level as follows.

Level	Authority
National	MDMR
District	DC
Upazila	UNO
Union	UP Chairman

- At the coordination meeting organized by MDMR, all reports from the field, resources, plan of actions, operation guidelines of participating NGOs, etc. will be shared.
- Decision taken at the coordination meeting must be complied with by the participating NGOs.
- In line with the coordination proposed at the national level, all the coordination required in the field will be led / facilitated by the respective public authorities i.e. DC, UNO, UP Chairmen.

ii) Coordination among NGOs

In order to optimize the resources available to NGOs in time of disaster relief operations, they must coordinate, not only with the designated authorities of GoB, but also among themselves at all levels. The responsibilities of such coordination should at different level as follows:

At the National level: GoB authorized NGO coordination body e.g. Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) or an NGO having recognized and proven professional expertise in the field of disaster management and capacity to coordinate.

At District Level: Local chapter of NGO coordination body or an NGO having recognized and proven professional expertise in the field of disaster management and capacity to coordinate.

At Upazila Level: A NGO capable of coordinating other NGOs and authorized by the NGO coordination body (example of 1991 cyclone is unique. ADAB coordinated all NGOs at Dhaka and District level and designated NGOs did the same at the Upazila level.

e) Coordination with Donors

- The first situation report to the donor should contain preliminary DANA conducted by the NGOs
- The application for project funding to the donor organization must reveal the names and contact details of other donors to which same or separate applications have been submitted. In case of projects submitted which is different from the original one, a copy of the project proposal must be endorsed to the prospective donor.
- The donor should be kept informed in case of any change in the programme (area, types and support, major variation in the number of project beneficiaries)
- Report on the progress of the project should be submitted to the donors regularly as per agreed schedule.

f) Responsibilities of the Donors

- Effective coordination among all the donors must be ensured (there is a need to select lead donor on the basis of capacity and interest).
- Applications/ requests received from intermediary and /or implementing NGOs must be shared among all the prospective donors (as per pre-designed format to pre-fixed mailing list- a software programme may be developed).
- The capacity of the implementing NGOs in terms of staff strength, professional expertise, etc. should be considered before taking decision for funding.
- The amount of funding must be based of the consideration of the absorption capacity of the implementing organization i.e. annual turnover, budget of previous disaster programme, etc.
- Donor must ensure that arrangement of coordination at appropriate levels is in-built into the projects requested for funding.
- Once the decision is taken to fund a project, the particulars of the NGO, brief outline of the project activities to be funded, amount of

grant, etc. must be shared with all other funding agencies (as per pre-designed format/ software programme)/

- Donors must arrange for on-going monitoring and evaluation arrangements to ensure financial transparency and effectiveness of the project.
- If required, organizations with professional expertise should be contracted well in advance so that they can be commissioned with short notice to conduct on-going monitoring and evaluation exercises.
- Donor should share among themselves the lessons learnt during their field visits and the reports of monitoring and evaluation conducted.

Concluding Remarks

Effective coordination in time of relief and rehabilitation operations, particularly in the emergency phase, requires expertise and professionalism among the operating organizations. The pre-requisites for such coordination are a set of tools and guidelines. These include different SOPs, formats, checklists, rosters of concerned persons with names and all contact details, etc. The need for orientation and training of responsible people of the key organizations in the field of disaster management can hardly be over emphasized. They would include high-ups in GoB e.g. Secretary and Joint Secretaries of MDMR, DCs, DRRO, UNOs, PIO from the GoB side, and senior members of NGOs responsible for planning and coordination of disaster relief and rehabilitation operations.

It is strongly recommended that a handbook titled 'Handbook for Coordination in Disaster Relief Operations' should be produced incorporating all the tools required for effective coordination in time of disaster relief and rehabilitation operations. The handbook should be pre-tested in one district and one Upazila in each of flood and cyclone areas, through simulation exercise under the auspices of MDMR.

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