

Summary paper to

Participatory Processes in Disaster Management: A close look at Bangladesh

James Roman, University of Birmingham

Context

Climate change continues to encroach on every aspect of human life. As such, there is a need to create institutions and collaboration among various disciplines and sectors. The increasing effects of natural hazards and the heightened possibility of various hazards turning into a disaster has been met with comprehensive risk reduction strategies that underpins the wider discourse of development. Managing risks and vulnerabilities to disasters are realized to be vital to poverty reduction and sustainable development programmes. Bangladesh being a lower middle income country with a population of 163 million people, is one of the most disaster-prone countries in South Asia. Its topography and location exposes it to a wide variety of natural and man-made disasters such as cyclones, floods, storm surges, droughts, tornadoes, riverbank erosion, earthquakes, and arsenic contamination of groundwater are among the common disasters in Bangladesh and of these, floods (river & flash) and cyclones are of utmost concern (Shah Alam Khan, 2008). These cause large-scale loss of lives and properties, consequently jeopardising the developmental activities and livelihood of a large number of people (Abdus Sabur, 2012). This study realises whilst natural disasters are inevitable, the effect it has on the communities and lives can be reduced with clear organised response frameworks, participatory planning and as such, creating a preparedness culture can reduce the mortality rates during a disaster.

Aims

This study seeks to engage with the following inquiries:

- What can participatory processes offer to disaster management (DM)?
- What role can communities take on in disaster management (DM) ?
- How can participation in disaster management (DM) be enabled by formal institutions?

Findings

- The 2015 GAR report on disaster risk reduction highlights how a disaster-prone country such as Bangladesh has institutionalised DM programmes that arguably is responsible for notable improvements. Cyclone Bhola in 1970 caused about 300,000 deaths whereas Cyclone Sidr in 2007 caused almost 4,300 lives.
- This participation allowed by the Community Based Disaster Preparedness and Standing Orders on Disaster resonates with the idea of efficient management of indigenous knowledge by formal institutions complemented by processes that continuously engage communities.

- Community Based Disaster Preparedness ensures a balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches in Disaster Management and the collected data indicates how community members are well-aware of their responsibilities in formulating their Community Risk Assessments, Risk Reduction Action Plans, and engaging their Disaster Management Committees and other disaster 'actors' such as the NGOs. However, what is notable is that community members, such as those in Gabura Union, have long had an RRAP for the improvements they need for their embankment but resources have not been mobilised. They continue to wait on government and other humanitarian agencies.
- Plans and community-generated documents such as the Risk Reduction Action Plans and Community Risk Assessment can easily be formulated but governments and institutions need to ensure that plans are enforced and implemented. They should also be monitored and held accountable as the formal institutes need to be kept in check by participants.
- Community Based Disaster Preparedness and Standing Orders on Disaster also makes it easier for NGOs and other relevant agencies to intervene. IR Bangladesh has built the capacities of Disaster Management Committees, Community Based Organizations, and partners to effectively respond to disasters and implement community-based DM programmes. Enhanced livelihood strategies in disaster-prone areas in Bangladesh show how the Government of Bangladesh and NGOs have complemented each other in pursuit of impactful DM and building a disaster resilient culture.
- There is a call for the devolution of resources since the community can be empowered but resources still need to be mobilized and procured. Findings suggest how crucial culture and ownership are in establishing sustainable DM systems.
- This study shows the importance of context and culture in which by participatory processes are implemented. Thus systems that allow participation should be sought after as it ensures context specific vulnerabilities are met with context specific initiatives.

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