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From Relief To Community Based Disaster Preparedness: Training-Action-Reflection Approach To Capacity Building

BACKGROUND

After the 1992 devastating cyclone, in the year 1995, German Red Cross (GRC) supported Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) to Community Based Disaster Preparedness Program (CBDP) in the Disaster Prone (particularly Cyclone) area of Bangladesh. BDRCS as traditional organization for providing relief and rehabilitation services and which is top-down, had difficulties to conceptualized and apply this approach. I and my colleagues of DASCOH (Swiss Red Cross (SRC) mandated technical support organization) were given the task to build capacity of BDRCS to apply this approach. This case study is developed based on my experience gained through continuous involvement as main facilitator for a period of 1995 to 2000.

OBJECTIVE

The main objectives of this initiative was to build capacity of BDRCS's staff to implement CBDP by shifting their approach from a relief orientation to a community based participatory approach to risk and vulnerability reduction.

ACTIVITIES

There were several mini steps but following were main activities that included in the process.

- Forming a team taking staff from BDRCS head quarters, Field Offices, Unit Representative (periodically the delegates of GRC, SRC, JRC)
- Conducting a participatory assessment (using PRA) to understand the multidimensional character and local conception (both male and female) on the dimensions of disaster, vulnerability and risks management.
- Simultaneous consultation with other relevant stakeholders
- Approach setting workshop for CBDP (participated by community leaders, donors, BDRCS, and other invited stakeholders)
- Capacity needs assessment for enabling BDRCS staff to implement the approach

- Conducting Participatory- Action -Reflection Training on steps (decided for the approach) and other supporting training determined by the capacity needs assessment.
- Piloting the approach, document learning through periodic lessons learnt workshop
- Refine the approach and scaling up operation

ACHIEVEMENTS

Though this process BDRCS -CBDP program was able to development a complete set of facilitating tools drawn from the field experiences. Local communities' participation and resource mobilization was enhanced. Appropriate local technologies were identified and utilized for family level preparedness. Many Community Disaster Preparedness Committees were formed and participatory planning monitoring evaluation system was introduced. In the year 1999, this program got Guggenheim Award as one of the best programs in disaster preparedness.

LESSONS

- **Risk, vulnerability management as a relevant people's perception:** When we bring forward the perspective of managing risk and vulnerability we talk in line with the heart of poor people the way they view development at the first instance. For conceptualizing development, perception of poor people often refers to the struggle of sustaining with the present position. The challenge is to integrate this perception in development interventions.
- **Fostering human and cooperative values is the central to generate collective action to the preparedness and fighting crisis:** Fostering social capital and traditional social cooperation mechanism allows us to use different stakeholders at community level. In Asia most country has got reach structure of traditional social organization founded on the clan ties or fictive relationship. This structure needs to be instrumental as organization the local level planning and action. The challenge is to link human value orientation in the DP planning and management.

■ **Integration of interdependent dimensions by decentralized systems is crucial for preparedness:** Community based organization, learning and action through organization is essential. There is no alternative to participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation approach but community organization is vital for running the process. The challenge is to tackle diversified local needs by centralized standard of organization facilities CBDP.

■ **Minimizing contradiction between present life struggle and future need:** Poor people's day-to-day relentless struggle to satisfy present survival needs seldom allow them to think about the security for future. Consideration of this reality is crucial to ensure people's participation in disaster preparedness program. The challenge is to link both present and future needs in the CBDP framework.

■ **Learning local conception and dimension involved:** Before developing a program strategy it is crucial to learn from the local community about vulnerability and risk involved caused by disaster to understand its multidimensional character that often varies by type of disaster and local conception on it.

■ **Involvement of key players from the beginning:** Involving key players/ staff rightly from the assessment stage through the strategy development is crucial to build the capacity of the available institutions engaged in Disaster management programs in countries.

■ **Participatory program approach setting:** For developing a road map or program framework and to have a shared understanding on it, it is very effective to organize an approach setting workshop in participation with community representatives, implementing agencies and support providing agencies. For ensuring the program's responsiveness to the wellbeing of primary stakeholders it is crucial that in his approach setting workshop the facilitators channel the learning generated from the participatory consultation process.

■ **Program approach Training-Action-Reflection system of training learning is vital for capacity building:** For building capacity of organizations and its staff accentuated with the past relief-rehabilitation mind-set, it is important to develop training program that absolutely falls under program approach and framework developed jointly and through Participatory Capacity Needs assessment. Further, it is important that the staff of the organization complete a cycle of Training-Action-Reflection on any single stage of the approach/framework.

FUTURE

As an effective capacity building approach, instead of one short isolated training organization should employ a systematic training-action-reflection approaches to capacity building.



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36 Empowerment Of The Coastal Fishing Communities for Livelihood Security: Bangladesh Experience

BACKGROUND

Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country. The geographic location of the country contributes greatly to its proneness to disasters. Being situated on the tropic of cancer, Bangladesh bears a tropical nature with monsoon type of climate. It is particularly affected by cyclonic storms that come from the Bay of Bengal. The average annual frequency of tropical disturbances in the Bay of Bengal ranges between 12 and 13 of which at least 5 attain the cyclonic strength with the wind speed of more than 65 kph. Although they contribute only 5-6% of the global total, some of them turn out to be the deadliest of the world, accounting for about 75% of the global loss in terms of lives and properties.

With such a background of disasters, the coastal fishing communities were identified as being mostly at risk to cyclonic disaster endangering their livelihood security. To address this grave situation, the empowerment of fishing communities project, with disasters preparedness as one of the components has been initiated to promote their livelihood security. Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC) as the implementing partner of this component has been working with the poor fishing communities for the last two years at enhancing their capacity to cope with cyclonic and other disasters.

OBJECTIVES

While the goal of the project is to empower the coastal fishing communities to cope with natural and human induced disaster more effectively with confidence, courage and in an organized way, the objectives of the project are as follows.

- To develop a corps of Community Volunteers, and Change Agents professionally expert in disaster preparedness, risk reduction and response operations.

- To improve understanding of the communities about cyclone disasters, warning dissemination and other appropriate actions before, during and after disasters, at family and community levels.

- To develop and enhance the overall capacity of the communities in managing natural disasters effectively which will contribute to their sustainable livelihood development

- To link the target communities with public, private and local government institutions for improved disaster preparedness

ACTIVITIES

The BDPC, as the service provider promoted the concept of disaster preparedness at family and community level in enhancing the capacity of the coastal fishing communities to cope with disasters effectively. Specific activities undertaken during the program were:

- Organizing the community and activating the members of Village Disaster Preparedness Committee (VDPC) particularly Volunteers and Change Agents (CAs) like the trusted Imams of the Mosque, School Teachers, and Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) through enhancement of their capacity;

- Raising awareness on Disaster Preparedness and Management (DPM) at the family and community level.

- Promoting use of local resources and technologies for DPM.

- Ensuring linkage with GoB and NGOs cyclone preparedness programs.

BDPC's approach in empowering the fishing community was primarily non-structural which included extensive awareness raising, organizing the fishing communities, initiating use of local resources and integrating the fishing communities with government and non-government cyclone preparedness programs.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The initiatives undertaken and interventions made under the project over the past two years have contributed to the achievement of the following results:

- Formation of 64 Village Disaster Preparedness Committees

- Selection and training of 387 Change Agents of whom about 50% were women.

- Selection and training of 403 Volunteers of whom about 50% were women.

- Plantation of 35,798 samplings of which 11,882 were fruit bearing, 16,711 timber and 7,205 herbal.

- Establishment of 12 cyclone resistant model houses.

- Sensitization of about 20,000 people through conduction of 21 mock exercises on cyclone preparedness

- Sensitization of 407 and 1472 persons in cyclone preparedness and risk reduction through conduction of 6 and 16 sensitization meetings at upazila (sub-district) and union parishad (block) levels respectively.

- Sensitization of 3,549 persons of whom 50% were women by holding 129 informal group

discussions at the community level. The role played by the trained Change Agents and Volunteers as well as the extent of preparedness for coping with cyclonic disaster at the community level were tested with specific reference to an impending cyclone, which formed near Andaman-Nicobar Island on 16 May 2004 and crossed the coastal area of Bay of Bengal between Teknaf, Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh) and Akyab (Myanmar) on 19 May 2004. This was an instant observation during the emergency period focusing on behavioral and community mobilization in response to cyclone preparedness. The observation and assessment revealed that the project initiatives e.g adherence to emergency work-plan by the VDPC, creating of linkage between the local GO and NGO initiatives pertaining to cyclone preparedness, use of local technologies and resources during the cyclone preparedness, behavioral change amongst the key actors such as Change Agents and Volunteers were quite positive and perceptible.

LESSONS

The assessment and validation of the program activities suggest that although an internal mechanism for disaster preparedness at the community level could be established through enhancement of capacity of the Change Agents and Volunteers, the sustainability of the mechanism remains to be the biggest challenge. This is mainly because of the fact that the formal disaster management committees existing at the local levels were not found active to the desired extent. In fact, these committees are supposed to provide leadership and guidance to the volunteers and change agents to make the program sustainable.

FUTURE

The Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, which is responsible for initiating and implementing the fishing communities livelihood programs should ensure that the existing Disaster Management Committees at the union parishad level play their due role and provide necessary guidance and support to the trained volunteers and change agents at the community levels for the sake of sustainability of the programs

My name is Nasima Khatun. I am 75 years old now. I can not see and hear properly. On 18 May last, I became extremely worried hearing the sound of whistles and drum beating. I went to the house of the president, voluntary organization to know about the actual situation. As I came near her house, I found that a group of men and women were discussing something very seriously I came to know from them that a cyclone, our worst enemy, is likely to strike at any moment. I also learnt that they were discussing about disseminating the danger signal through the microphone of the local mosque. I have experienced the cyclones of 1960, 1970, 1991 and 1997. The 1991 cyclone took away my dwelling house and other assets. Re-collecting the losses that I suffered the past cyclones, I hurried back home and advised the members of my family to put all our belongings together, particularly the chicken and ducks in a cage so that we could carry them along if emergency arose. We also decided to move to the nearby cyclone shelter if the signal changed into great danger signal. We arranged ropes to secure the roof, windows and doors of our house before leaving for the cyclone shelter. The male members decided to shift the children and women, including myself first. I played the role of an old person in the mock exercise organized in our village by the Change Agents and Volunteers. I learnt about all these cyclone preparedness activities from Razia, Anowara, Bilquis and Kanak the Change Agents and Volunteers during family level discussions held in our village. By the grace of GOD, the cyclone did not finally strike in our area. I am grateful to all those who took initiative in undertaking cyclone preparedness activities at the community and household level in our coastal fishing communities.

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