

Roundtable Meeting on International Day for Disaster Reduction 2015



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

“জানই জীবন”
“Knowledge for Life”

Md. Shah Kamal, Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

We are working in cooperation with donors and NGOs. Our work has been recognized by the global community. That's why our honorable Prime Minister has been awarded Champions of the Earth. That means we are on the track. Now we need to fine tune our works and enhance quality of our programmes. To provide quality service we need knowledge. We have to make best use of our indigenous knowledge and make an effective combination of local and acquired knowledge.

We have a strong legal framework for disaster risk reduction. We have Disaster Act and rules of procedure. Recently the government has passed the management policy. It has already been gazetted. We have three particular works: preparation, timely response and rescue operation. We need to improve in all three areas. Media should also come forward in this effort.

Now, earthquake is the major disaster risk for Bangladesh. We have experience of cyclones, floods and other natural disasters except earthquake. So it will be a great challenge for us. When I took the initiative to identify the risky buildings in Dhaka city I got notice from the court and could not proceed further. We should not be oblivious of this great risk which is lurking around the corner.

We have established honors and masters courses at the university level. We have already established a research institute. We will make it a role model for disaster research.

Md. Reaz Ahmed, Director General, Department of Disaster Management

We have been working for creating mass awareness about disaster risks and their prevention. We have distributed more than 1 lakh posters on the theme of 'knowledge for life' all over the country. We have also published special supplement on this theme in seven national dailies. Disaster risk reduction is an important sustainable goal. In our SDG programmes we have given due weight to this issue.

It is now globally recognized that disaster is a consequence of climate change. There is no doubt that people can reduce the impact of disasters in a significant way by having proper knowledge about it. We can learn about disaster risk reduction from both indigenous and acquired sources. Recently, I attended a seminar in Nepal where a participant shared a good example of how indigenous knowledge can save people's life from disaster. During a thunderstorm some people, who were working in a field, started running towards a large tree to get shelter there. A girl requested them not to go there as she knew that large trees are vulnerable to thunderstorm. Those people who stayed under the tree were killed by lightning strike. Those who stayed back in the field remained unharmed. Thus the indigenous knowledge of the girl saved people's life.

Mohammad Abdul Qayyum, Additional Secretary & National Project Director, CDMP

We need knowledge for saving our lives. First we have to collect our local knowledge. Documentation is a big problem here. We have to increase our capacity to document our local practices. Our indigenous insightful knowledge should be stored and replicated in other areas.

We need to assess emerging risks. People have to be made aware about these risks. With their traditional knowledge people might belittle the risk of these new disasters. That's why the awareness campaign is so important particularly in the case of earth quake.

We should give top priority to protect our environment. We are taking various development projects without considering their impacts on environment. We also need to make the government aware about the risks of damaging environment.

Disaster management needs multidisciplinary knowledge. We need support from students of various disciplines. That's why we need more coordination and knowledge exchange.

Shakeb Nabi, Country Director, Christian Aid Bangladesh and the Chair of the National Steering Committee, Shifting the Power, Bangladesh

First and foremost our special thanks to the Government of Bangladesh which is doing commendable work on disaster risk reduction and protecting the community from the impact of climate change. The commitment of the government could be gauged from the fact that the importance of IDDR has shifted from level 2 to level 3 thereby meaning engagement of the senior most government functionaries. Bangladesh has lots to share with the international community in terms of disaster preparedness, response and resilience.

The theme for IDDR for this year is "Knowledge for Life" which focuses on the importance of traditional knowledge for disaster risk reduction and response. Traditional knowledge are the knowledge which exists with the community since time immemorial and helps community overcome various challenges related with day to day life. These are mostly unwritten and passed on from one generation to other through words of mouth in the form of anecdotes, plays, songs and practice etc.

Since ages, the traditional knowledge has been undermined and value is given to the modern knowledge. I feel that in order to overcome disaster, it should be a combination of both the indigenous knowledge which is being practiced by the community over thousands of years and modern knowledge generated after the advent of technology.

Whenever we talk about indigenous knowledge we try to relate it with traditional knowledge and give less importance to this. Whenever we talk about modern knowledge we call it scientific knowledge. I think it is a big myth. Even indigenous knowledge can be scientific and can have great relevance in the current context. In the case of earthquake related early warning systems, example could be given of how community interprets various unusual behaviors by the animals. For example, in earthquake's -humans do not have the capacity to feel the ultrasound waves. But some animals can feel it. Local communities make use of this knowledge and take necessary preparations. Example could be cited from my personal experience in Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India which was impacted by the Tsunami in 2004.



Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDM&R) in cooperation with Oxfam and Christian Aid organized a roundtable on International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) 2015 on October 13, 2015. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

Participants

Md. Shah Kamal	Md. Reaz Ahmed	Mohammad Abdul Qayyum	Shakeb Nabi
Hasina Inam	Murshida Akhter	Shamina Akhtar	M Abdus Salam
Sirajul Islam	Md Jahangir Alam	Okhil Chandra Bairagi	Dilruba Haider
	There are several examples of using the knowledge available with them since ages. In the current context, the traditional knowledge might have romanticized us. Due to the uncertainty of impacts of climate change, the local knowledge is overwhelmed. It is suggested that a proper documentation should be done of the existing knowledge with the community and their relevance is looked into judiciously before promoting or propagating it. Christian Aid Bangladesh is leading a project called "Shifting the Power, which is being jointly implemented by six INGOs in Bangladesh. The main objective of the project is to ensure that the local NGOs have the skills and capacities to take the leadership role in the event of a disaster.		
Ms. Saida Begum			

It is an innovative project which focuses on capacity building, enhancing leadership capacity and facilitating a process wherein they are recognized as key player on issues related with humanitarian advocacy in Bangladesh. The essence of the project lies in it being "bottom up" where in the NGOs do the designing of the interventions based on its existing skills and identify gaps to take their capacity to the next level. I feel that this kind of a project could play a very crucial role in empowering the community through appreciating their knowledge and skills for humanitarian interventions.

Hasina Inam, Country Manager, Dan Church Aid

When we talk about shifting power we should also emphasise on ensuring every one's equal rights to save their lives. Recently, I visited Nepal where I found that during the recent earthquake most of the women stayed back in their home or came out as last person which increased their vulnerability to earthquake. It also happens in Bangladesh particularly during cyclone. So we should look into this aspect of gender equality in addressing disaster risks at family level and make awareness of the family members. At the same time disaster shelter centers also need to be gender friendly with adequate toilet facilities etc.

Murshida Akhter, Humanitarian Programme Manager, Oxfam Bangladesh

Murshida Akhter, Humanitarian Programme Manager, OXFAM in Bangladesh starts the session with importance of IDDR. She said, the International Day for Disaster Reduction is a day to celebrate how people and communities are reducing their risk to disasters and raising awareness about the importance of DRR.

It's also a day to encourage every citizen and government to take part in building more disaster resilient communities and nations. The 2015 theme for the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction is part of a Step Up initiative which was started in 2011. She added that development research tells us that the success and the sustainability of interventions at the community level depend, among a number of factors,

on the availability of relevant local culture, knowledge and indigenous practices that can combine with new ideas to generate innovation and lessen damages and losses. The importance of indigenous knowledge contributes not only to the success of intervention, but more importantly to its sustainability in the longer term. Bearing in mind the participation and integration of these communities in all disaster-related practice as a necessary means for pursuing the Hyogo Framework for Action highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge in assisting to mainstream disaster risk reduction policies and practice.

The theme of this year's International Day for Disaster Reduction is "Knowledge for Life". We are observing this day all over the country with various kind of awareness building programmes. Today's roundtable is a part of this endeavour.

There are various document and plans where we incorporate local practices of disaster risk reduction but we hardly follow them. We also need to share our knowledge and research findings with grassroots people. Often we see disaster risk reduction projects are taken without consulting with the local people.

We have improved a lot in coordinating various risk reduction initiatives. But we need to do more. If we all join hands we can build a disaster risk free Bangladesh.

Shamina Akhtar, National Manager, Shifting the Power, Bangladesh

Shifting the Power project is giving emphasis on the importance of national and local organizations for humanitarian response and in line with the theme this year, it is rather clearer that while these organizations are well familiar with the community indigenous knowledge and has scope to gain and disseminate scientific knowledge. In this regard their capacity building & their voices in humanitarian decision making system in Bangladesh is important which is the objective of the Shifting the Power project.

After Cyclone Sidr in November 2007, I had visited some Rakhaine families in Barguna who stayed at their houses during the cyclone. They built houses on highland with strong wood structure and they were among the least affected people in the disaster. This indigenous knowledge of housing structure with some addition of scientific knowledge can be used to protect people from small to medium scale cyclones.

Water logging is a major problem in some south west part of Bangladesh. During my visit there in 2011, I found all the home gardens, domestic poultrys had been damaged, which is the main sources of nutrition, especially for poor children and a lengthy nutritional lacking has a severe impact on children, but nobody cared about it, even with a huge presence of local, National and INGOs. But, for example mushroom is a very nutritious food, grows very quickly in a small space. It can be cultivated during even flood/waterlogging.

Another important issue is reproductive health of the girls and women living in disaster prone areas. In water logging they had to wash sanitary cloths in polluted water which poses serious risk to their reproductive health. In all these cases local organizations can play a very vital role in disseminating knowledge to the community and in this regard the capacity of the local organizations should be increased and they should have voices in humanitarian system in Bangladesh.

Abdus Salam, Chief Executive, Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK)

I work in the northern part of Bangladesh especially river basin areas of Rangpur division where people suffer from flood, river erosion, cold spell, drought and tornado. They have developed some effective coping strategies but these indigenous practices do not get proper importance in the mainstream disaster risk reduction programmes. In CRA (Community Risk Assessment) reports we have incorporated indigenous practices. But when we plan a programme we do not follow the CRA recommendations. So participation of the community in disaster risk reduction remains elusive. We need to combine scientific knowledge with indigenous knowledge to address disaster risks effectively. I think local organizations like GUK could be able to contribute much through transferring local knowledge, experience and practices to humanitarian system of Bangladesh connecting the theme of Knowledge for Life and Shifting the Power.

SM Sirajul Islam, Program Coordinator, Association for Voluntary Actions for Society (AVAS)

People in Barisal badly suffer from water logging. This is a manmade disaster. The natural drainage system of the city has been destroyed by indiscriminate use of agricultural land for housing purpose and encroachment of canal and water bodies. The government should recover the water channels from grabbers to resolve the problem.

It is a matter of great concern that most of our children do not know how to swim. We, parents, emphasize more on textbooks than teaching our kids this life saving lesson. So this can be taken into consideration to train the children of Bangladesh, specially the children of the disaster prone areas by using the local & national organizations, this is why we are here to talk about Shifting the Power project which is trying to build humanitarian capacity of the local and national organizations.

Md Jahangir Alam, Assistant Director and Team Leader, DRR Programs, Disaster Management Unit, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM)

Different organizations are doing different types of activities to address disaster risks reduction here in Bangladesh, but there is a lack of coordination among these initiatives. Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) has innovated seven types of rice for different disaster prone areas, but most of us are unaware about this development. So we need coordination among the authorities and within different other stakeholders who will connect the dots and make an united effort to address the challenges of natural disasters.

We have introduced climate change related content in our textbooks from class III to class XII, but we have not been able to promote it further.

Shifting the Power project is giving emphasis on capacity building of national and local organizations and shifting their position in practicing power in humanitarian system of Bangladesh, so this is also a scope for the national & local organizations to take a step forward by using their local knowledge. And we request Govt to take initiative to ensure local/national organizations representation in HCTT (Humanitarian Coordination Task Team) the decision making body of humanitarian system in Bangladesh.

Okhil Chandra Bairagi, Fund Raising Manager, Amra Kaj Kory (AKK)

In Faridpur, certain areas often get affected by disasters but we do not receive adequate response due to limited spread of the disaster. In this case we should make special arrangements for this type of disaster victims.

At the local level, different organisations have different capacities. If we have proper information about these capabilities we can coordinate among them effectively during emergency period.

Dilruba Haider, Coordinator (Gender & Climate Change), UN Women

We need to work more on the gender aspect of the disaster risk reduction tools. In the inter-ministerial committee for disaster risk reduction we do not see representatives from women and child affairs ministry.

In many cases our indigenous knowledge is not adequate to address the new realities of climate change. For example, our local people do not know how to fight against salinity. That's why we need new knowledge and research. We can adopt indigenous knowledge in so far as they are relevant.

We need to emphasise on knowledge management of disaster risk reduction initiatives. We are doing many researches but we are not disseminating the results to the common people to whom it actually matter.

CDMP has done many CRA. We need to update those reports regularly. If we take any programme with backdated CRA it will not work. We could not do CRA for all the areas. We should cover those areas.

Ms. Saida Begum, NGO Forum

We are only focusing on rural areas. But our urban areas are also at risk. We should also focus on urban disasters.