

Home Safe Home: Reducing Exposure, Reducing Displacement

Christian Aid and Shifting the Power organised a roundtable titled "Home Safe Home: Reducing Exposure, Reducing Displacement" on October 11, 2017. Here we publish a summary of the discussions.



Shakeb Nabi, Country Director, Christian Aid, Bangladesh
The observation of International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) began in 1989. Its larger mandate is to celebrate risk awareness and risk reduction by various actors. This is also a part of the new commitment which is known as Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework). There are four priorities for action in this framework with recently launched Sendai Seven Campaign. This year, this campaign targets to substantially reduce the number of disaster affected people globally. The theme of this year's IDDR is "Reducing Exposure, Reducing Displacement" which focuses mainly on the lives and livelihoods of people. Ensuring a safe home is crucial in this regard.

In today's roundtable, we will focus on this. We will also talk about how people should be reducing risks and how various agencies can help the community in tackling various disasters.



Reaz Ahmed, Director General, Department of Disaster Management
This year we faced several natural- and human-induced disasters: flood in haor areas, landslides in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Cyclone Mora, two consecutive floods and the ongoing Rohingya influx. The government has successfully tackled these disasters with the support of NGOs, INGOs and global community. We are continuously learning from these calamities. Besides strengthening preparation at the institutional level we need to make people aware about how to cope with these catastrophic events. Public awareness and education can significantly reduce disaster risks.

After the decision of Honorable Prime Minister, the Department of Disaster Management, MoDMR started to support "Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Citizens". The way we have treated the Rohingyas is a global example. So far we have been able to provide shelter and food to all the Rohingya refugees. We are taking further measures to coordinate interventions of various actors. The challenge here is uncertainty: How long will we have to support these people?

Apart from Rohingya, to cater the needs of homeless people, the government has various housing schemes such as Guchha Gram, Adarsha Gram, Ashrayon, Ghore Fera and so on. In addition, Department of Disaster Management, Bangladesh Institute of Building Research, and an international NGO Friendship jointly prepared housing models for the disaster-prone areas. We have prepared these models considering the particular needs of the disaster-prone areas. We talked to the local people and learnt what kind of solutions they prefer. All this manifest a clear provision to give priority to the disaster-affected people in these housing projects.



Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen, Professor & Director, Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies, University of Dhaka
In any disaster, women are the most vulnerable group but at the same time they contribute most to tackle an adverse situation. In South Asia, generally, the second aspect gets overshadowed by too much emphasis on women's vulnerability. However, in recent years, women's contribution is getting more recognition. But here arises a dilemma. There always remains a risk of overlooking vulnerabilities of women in overbalancing women's role as a contributor. Therefore, on the one hand, we have to address vulnerabilities of women in disasters, and on the other hand, an enabling environment needs to be created so that they can contribute to their fullest potential to tackle the crisis.

In any disaster situation it is generally considered that women will take care of their children and by addressing the needs of mothers we can cover both. But children, particularly adolescents, have different vulnerabilities as well as divergent needs that require special attention.

Finally, when we face a protracted disaster like the current Rohingya crisis, we have to address both their immediate and long-term needs. Besides providing food, shelter and medicine to Rohingyas, we have to take responsibility for the education of Rohingya children.

At the institutional level, women are now included in the upazila committees. But there is no such opportunity for children to voice their demands. It is important to ensure their representation in all the decision-making forums regarding disaster risk management.



Gawher Nayeem Wahra, Founder Convener, Disaster Forum and Adjunct Faculty, University of Dhaka
In response to the question regarding how women and children can contribute in a dignified way in a disaster situation, I want to share my experience of working in Shyamnagar, Satkhira after

Cyclone Aila. Generally speaking, after such disasters, people move to high land or embankments. Due to security reasons parents send the adolescent girls to their relatives' house which only exacerbates the protection problem and their safety and security. We tried to bring back these girls to their parents' house and established adolescent friendly space (where they met with each other) to discuss their problems and decide their action plan for recovery. At that time, diarrhea was widespread and many children were dying of the disease. We found out that rice saline was an effective antidote to it. So we taught the girls how to make rice saline and they went house to house teaching people the technique. Within a few weeks, these girls garnered reputation among the local people. They even played football in a conservative society such as theirs.

When we make an intervention we should take care of the needs of the locals. After a severe flood in Jessor, most of the mud houses in the locality were badly affected. NGOs went there and built various kinds of houses. At the end of the housing programme DFID decided to evaluate the success of the housing programme. Evaluation process incorporate a provision to take suggestions from children about building houses. Initially we did not give much importance to it. However, as it was mandatory according to the contract, we talked to children about the houses built. Most of them said, "These are your houses, not ours. There is no veranda where we can read, sleep, play, eat, and enjoy the rain during monsoon." This was a great learning experience for us. We need to learn from the local population, particularly from women and children. We should also learn from our past experiences so that we do not repeat mistakes and can replicate successes in future projects.

Regarding management of Rohingya refugees, the government should take a community-based approach where the local community members will be entrusted with the responsibility to look after the refugees and the government and non-government organisations will provide necessary support and monitor all efforts.



Saudia Anwer, Capacity Building Specialist, Early Recovery Facility, UNDP

To make a safe home, it's not the roof, concrete, doors or windows but the dignity, sense of security and togetherness of a family. Remembering that, the risk landscape is changing both at rural and urban level.

As best practices, UNDP shelter provides an effective response in the aftermath of disaster. In 2016, UNDP has introduced a shelter design with the people living in the affected area, Bogra. The shelter is a low-cost, light-weight structure which can quickly be disassembled by unscrewing the components from each other. A family can easily hoard and then transport the shelter components to a safe location. Once the flooding recedes, the shelter can be taken back and reassembled in the original location in a matter of hours. When an important, basic need like shelter is secure, people are better equipped – mentally and financially – to return to their everyday lives and livelihoods.

Regarding safe home at urban, implementation of building code is crucial. Poor construction quality, use of substandard materials, and ad-hoc changes in design significantly increase the physical vulnerability of buildings. Relevant authorities should review the current mechanism of enforcing building codes and providing building permits to ensure that gaps in implementation and regulation that allow substandard construction are addressed effectively.

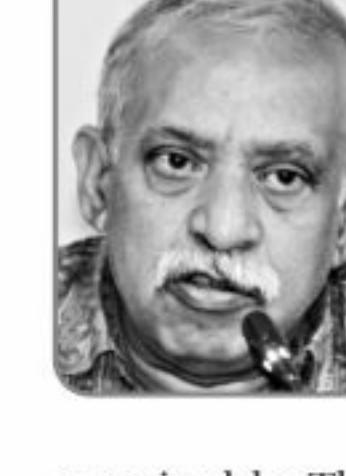
Another thematic area of today's discussion is displacement; we need to consider both preventive and adaptive measures to minimize internal displacement caused by different disasters; for example: promoting livelihood opportunities and access to entitlements. In addition, specific legal mandate and dedicated institutional arrangements are required to deal with the displacement issue. In the humanitarian context, understanding mobility in situation of disaster is a major priority and there is a fundamental need of better displacement data. We can introduce displacement tracking tool which can be useful to monitor the displacement flows. It will also help us prepare a detailed plan of action regarding displacement.



Rahima Sultana Kazal, Executive Director, AVAS

Generally, we do not keep count of the long-term life hazards of disaster-affected people, particularly women and children. We have seen that in the post-disaster situation pregnant women suffer highly vulnerable situation. The mortality rate of newborn children is high after the disaster and we see that the disable children born rate is higher than the normal situation.

Another important issue is to increase awareness amongst the women and elderly about disaster-prone areas. They do not want to leave their houses. When we choose a model for building a house in the disaster-struck areas, we should consider whether the building materials are suitable for the environment. For example, in the high salinity areas, reinforcement columns are badly affected by corrosion. Therefore, we have to use corrosion-resistant building materials in those areas.



Abdul Latif Khan, Disaster Management Specialist

The disaster resilient structure is important but it is not enough to make a house safe. In the post-disaster phase, along with providing a safe living place, we have to ensure livelihood opportunities for the affected people. Otherwise, our interventions will not be sustainable. The process is not only in the after disaster but it should be taken during the development project time.

In our education curriculum, particularly in engineering education, we need to include disaster-resilient housing technologies.

Bangladesh House Building Research Institute has done important researches on building disaster-resilient homes. We can use their models and replicate those in the disaster-prone areas. There exist several good examples. Under the CDMP project two villages which had been washed out after the cyclone SIDR were developed as a climate/disaster resilient habitat. However it was bit expensive. We need to do more research on how we can make it cost effective.



Bijoy Krishna Nath, Head of Risk Reductions & Response, Concern Worldwide

In Lalmonirhat Concern Worldwide established an emergency response committee to cope with the flood. They created a fund for times of emergency through savings. This type of local initiatives should be promoted throughout the country.



Atwar Rahman, Interim Humanitarian Programme Manager, Oxfam Bangladesh

The main aspect of disaster management is to increase capacity of the affected people. Private organisations, particularly financial organisations, should find innovative and affordable solutions to meet the financial needs of the disaster-affected people.

In any disaster a large number of people are forced to move from their traditional living areas. These people have to face severe hardship in finding shelter and livelihoods in the new place they move to. But these issues do not get proper attention in our disaster management plans. I would urge all those involved in disaster management activities in government and non-government organisations to include this issue in disaster contingency plans.



Dr. Dibalok Singha, Executive Director, Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK)

In the urban areas, particularly in the capital city, many disaster-induced displaced people move for shelter and livelihood. But we do not have any policy for supporting these people. We prepared a policy in this regard and submitted it to the government. It is yet to be approved.



M. A. Halim, Director, BDRCS

People become displaced mostly due to cyclone, flood and river erosion. People also move to big cities for seeking livelihoods. Currently Bangladesh is hosting thousands of Rohingyas who have been forcibly displaced from their home. Due to displacements people lose their homes and can't have access to basic needs e.g. food, water, sanitation, health and livelihoods. It is the obligation of humanitarian organizations to ensure right of the displaced by providing safe home and associated needs. Local volunteers have a big role to play in disaster situation. With regard to displacement they can make people aware about disaster risks and help them in taking necessary preparation to cope with disasters. They can also help in creating livelihood opportunities for the disaster-affected people. BDRCS is providing supports on this issue through its countrywide network of volunteers.



Md Majibur Rahman, Director, POPI

It is mandatory for all micro-credit organisations to spend certain percentage of their yearly profit for social development. In our yearly budget, we have a certain allocation for disaster risk reduction. This year we provided support in haor areas with this fund. Besides providing financial support we also make them aware about building flood-resilient houses.



Fazlul Hoque, Director, Sajida Foundation

When we talk about internally displaced people we often ignore the large number of pavement dwellers in the city areas. They are not being counted in the national demographic survey. They are more marginalised than the slum-dwellers. We should include them in the safe home scheme. During a disaster, resource coordination is a big problem.

Different NGOs have different capabilities and resources. If they work in a coordinated way the output will be much higher.

In the shelters and safe homes we should keep accommodation for livestock because that is an important source of income for the village people.

We have become over-dependent on donors. Now the country is financially more solvent than ever. We should focus on internal resource mobilisation.



Md Rafiqul Alam Mollah, Executive Director, Unnayan Sangha

We can't totally stop displacement. Therefore we should focus on safe displacement. Another important thing is to let people design their homes. Our role would be to only support their efforts.



Shamina Akhtar, Programme Manager, Shifting the Power, Christian Aid

Bangladesh has made good progress in disaster management. We are proud of it but that should not push us back in taking further steps for disaster management in Bangladesh.

Everyday many people are migrating from rural areas to the mega cities, especially in Dhaka. A larger portion of this displacement happens due to regular occurrence of disasters in Bangladesh. This non-stop flow of internally displaced population proves that we could not make homes safe in rural areas as well as we are not being able to keep homes safe in urban areas. As a solution of this challenge, my recommendation would be to prepare an urban-and-rural-combined comprehensive strategy and plan to address the displacement issue and making homes safe in both rural and urban areas. In many cases, we involve experts to come up with solutions. But we often forget that community people are the most important sources of knowledge. 'Mujib Killah' is a very good solution for keeping livestock safe during disasters. This arrangement will make their home safe. We need to consult with farmers and female members of the family who take care of those livestock and are familiar with the nature of cyclone wind as well as with the behavior of livestock. Based on their experience they will be able to tell whether soil plinth or concrete plinth will be perfect for livestock. Thus, we should link our indigenous knowledge with academic knowledge to make a sustainable impact.

We have acquired efficiency in flood and cyclone management. The Rohingya crisis is also a learning opportunity for us as to how to deal with mass displacement. The government should involve civil society actors in a coordinated way in the management of the crisis.



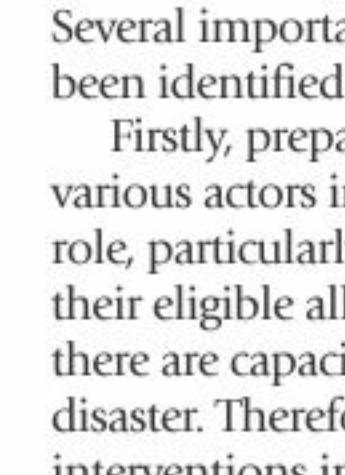
Patrick Palma, Capacity Building Adviser, Tearfund

We should celebrate IDDR not just as a day but also as an occasion for creating accountability of what we do to reduce disaster risks in the country. On this day, we will revisit what we have done in the last year and plan what we should do in the next years. It will also help in creating coordination among different stakeholders.



Kajal Ahmed Leon, Programme Officer, Knowledge Management, Christian Aid

Media has a big role to play in educating general people about disaster management. They can act as a bridge between the community and disaster management actors through circulating information about the experience of the community to the stakeholders and expert knowledge of stakeholders to the community. It is the nature of the media to shift focus constantly. Therefore, there is a lack of follow-up reports on what happens to the disaster-affected people in the post-disaster period. We should involve media with the research on disaster management so that they can disseminate credible information. It will also help them to get government-aggregated data and make a credible forecast based on it. It will also help to create accountability of the actors engaged in disaster management activities.



Concluding Remarks: Several important takeaway points from the discussion have been identified as follows:

Firstly, preparing accountability tools/paper on the role of various actors in disaster management efforts can play a big role, particularly how microfinance organisations can spend their eligible allocation for disaster management. Secondly, there are capacity gaps in dealing with various types of disaster. Therefore, we should coordinate among different interventions in this regard. Also, we shouldn't limit ourselves on the observation of International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDR) only. Rather we should prepare a roadmap on how we can continue the disaster management efforts throughout the year. Finally, development directions and physical planning are very closely related to disaster management in the long run. Therefore, this aspect should be given proper consideration in preparing our development plans.