



PAVING RESILIENCE THROUGH CITY GOVERNANCE

The Daily Star in association with Plan International Bangladesh, Population Services and Training Centre and Save the Children Bangladesh organised an online discussion titled "Paving Resilience through City Governance" on August 17, 2021. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

Session 1: "Setting up effective urban governance mechanisms to manage urban hazards"

Shuvashish Roy, Head of Business, The Daily Star

The purpose of this session is to discuss the different ways in which we can improve our preparedness for disasters, rather than addressing disasters after they take place. I hope that we will be able to gain a lot of interesting insight from the participants of the session on building a resilient city.

Yasna Rahman, Project Manager, Strengthening Urban Resilience Project (SURP-2), Plan International Bangladesh
The purpose of our SURP-2 project is to help Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), and Narayanganj City Corporation (NCC) improve their disaster resilience capacity. We want to strengthen their organisational structure in terms of their ability to address and prevent disasters. We have designed our contingency plans using our learning from previous disasters and with the technical support of the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Manik Kumar Saha, Acting Dhaka and Country Portfolio Manager, Plan International Bangladesh
We have made significant progress by preparing a risk reduction action plan and contingency plan. An important step will be to incorporate our risk reduction action plan and contingency plan into the annual plan of the city corporations.

There is a gap in our coordination with the government agencies, and this should be reduced.

We must also develop a framework for the private sectors under which their work on disaster management can be more impactful.

Our lifeline service providers must be able to continue working even amidst a large-scale disaster and this should be a primary focus. Civil-military coordination can play a significant role in this regard.

City corporation lacks the ability to mobilise resources in the case of a large-scale disaster due to an absence of funds. We need to ensure that they have ways of generating funds to mobilise their resources during such disasters.

Dr Md Mahbulul Alam, Head of Programme, Population Services and Training Centre (PSTC)

We tried to raise awareness on disasters at the individual level. We also formed local committees to prepare plans to mitigate the damage in the case of a disaster (taking into consideration local realities). We presented these plans to the concerned city corporations. These plans have come from the grassroots people and are practical measures to reduce the damage caused by a disaster. This model should be replicated to strengthen our long-term disaster resilience.

Dr Nazmun Nahar, Deputy Director - Humanitarian, Save the Children Bangladesh

I would like to highlight the importance of preparedness at an institutional level. A disaster contingency plan for all hospitals needs to be prepared in line with our national policy.

We must also prepare our backup resources to support our contingency plans. Mock drills should be conducted at regular intervals to ensure that all staff are informed about the actions to take in the event of a disaster. We should also establish an action plan for emergency services for different types of disasters.

All workplaces, particularly factories, should ensure that their workers can evacuate a building safely during a disaster. We should take a holistic approach toward disaster management, and establish a coordinated action plan involving all the relevant stakeholders.

Mostafizur Rahman, Humanitarian & Resilience Manager, Plan International Bangladesh

We have made plans for institutions such as schools from the disaster risk reduction (DRR) perspective to ensure that during a disaster the infrastructure remains safe and educational activities are not hampered. This aspect should be considered seriously in our education policies.

Schools can look to form internal committees that can assess the risks associated with disasters. Once they have a better understanding of the risks involved, a plan can be formulated to mitigate the risks.

Md Sirajul Islam, Chief Town Planner, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC)
Under the leadership of the honourable mayor, the city corporation has taken the initiative to create an integrated master plan which will be in place till 2050, and will be implemented on a short-, medium- and long-term basis.

This plan will accommodate the RAJUK's Detailed Area Plan (DAP), STP, Department of Disaster Management's disaster contingency plan, WASA's drainage

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master plan and other relevant plans. We are establishing an emergency operations centre under the Nagar Bhaban which will be fully prepared by December 2021. We must ensure that the human resources involved in this operation centre are well trained. Hopefully, their training will be completed by February 2022.

Lt Col Siddique Mohammad Zulfikar Rahman, Director, Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence

During a major earthquake in Dhaka, we would need support from volunteers based outside the city. City corporations should keep some equipment in their reserve for these volunteers. We should develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) that allows the fire services to take companies that produce necessary equipment under their command during emergencies.

We do not require extra equipment for our hazard response. Most of these equipment become redundant or stop working after a period of time, so our focus should not be on procuring more equipment. Instead, we need to ensure there is sufficient human resource which can be mobilised during a disaster.

Session 2: "Emergency preparedness of health, education, utility services and private sector authorities"

Yasna Rahman, Project Manager, Strengthening Urban Resilience Project (SURP-2), Plan International Bangladesh
We are putting special efforts to increase the skills of government and non-government organisations at the policy and structural levels to create a disaster resilient city. We will focus on the issues that the food, health, and education sector need to be prepared for, during a disaster.

Rezaul Karim, Disaster Risk Management Specialist

The Standing Order on Disasters (SOD) has been merged with the Disaster Management Act. While the role of different government departments is mentioned in the document, there is no specification for how the private sector will respond during a disaster. It is necessary to incorporate the private sector in the disaster management framework. This will make them legally liable to contribute to disaster resilience.

Our honourable prime minister has directed the health ministry to make an emergency hospital management plan to cope with the effects of the pandemic. This new emergency hospital management plan will be made following the previous hospital continuity planning. As part of this planning, we must also assess the preparedness of tertiary healthcare services, medical college hospitals, and district-level hospitals to fight a disaster.

Morium Nesa, Manager- Women Rights & Gender Equity, ActionAid Bangladesh
We must incorporate local-level plans with

national and international plans to ensure sustainability of our disaster resilience plans. Alongside this, we should focus on the proper implementation of our existing plans and policies.

Private sectors should take responsibility and be held accountable for their actions. If we spend on safety while establishing a new factory or building, it would save us from both physical and monetary loss.

Dr Shuchita Sharmin, Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka

While we look at international frameworks for disaster management, we should also ensure participatory planning involving our local communities.

We already have some good policies for disaster management, and we should ensure these policies are implemented properly.

Additionally, we must ensure that our first responders and service providers are adequately prepared during a disaster. If they are vulnerable to disasters, how will they manage to provide support to others?

Dr Mahbulul Alam, Head of Programme, Population Services and Training Centre (PSTC)

In human history, no disease has ever spread as fast as Covid-19. In Bangladesh, it has spread even faster because of our high population density and rapid urbanisation. We cannot fight Covid-19 by only constructing more hospitals.

City corporation is primarily responsible for providing health care facilities in city areas. To do that it needs proper infrastructure, sufficient human resources, and technical support which it seriously lacks at present.

Lt Col Siddique Mohammad Zulfikar Rahman, Director, Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence

We planned to have 62,000 volunteers. So far, we have trained around 47,000 volunteers in different areas. We need to undertake this training programme on a massive scale to build a strong pool of volunteers who can play a key role during a disaster. In line with the directives of the Ministry of Home Affairs, we have developed a project proposal to address this gap. NGOs and INGOs are also welcome to support this initiative.

Session 3: "Accessing knowledge management and institutional coordination to facilitate urban DRR"

Yasna Rahman, Project Manager, Strengthening Urban Resilience Project (SURP-2), Plan International Bangladesh
In this session, we will be discussing how to build the capacity of local-level organisations such as city corporations to ensure disaster risk reduction (DRR) in urban areas and how we can improve disaster management efforts for people living in areas most at risk of disaster.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Incorporate risk reduction action plan and contingency plan into the annual plan of the city corporations.
- » Develop a framework for ensuring private sector's effective engagement in disaster management efforts.
- » Ensure city corporations have adequate means of generating revenue to mobilise resources for disaster management.
- » Encourage public participation in establishing area-specific disaster management plans.
- » Create a separate disaster management plan for hospitals.
- » Include disaster management related topics in our education syllabus.
- » Increase the number of volunteers and ensure they are provided with necessary training.
- » A central repository of all existing knowledge, plans and necessary documents related to disaster management should be created.
- » Include disaster management information in training manuals for government workers.
- » A centralised forum for disaster management should be established involving all the relevant stakeholders.

We have made massive improvements in rural DRR. However, we should focus more on urban areas because 50 percent of the population will be living in urban areas in the near future.

We used to think the variety of hazards such as floods and cyclones only existed in rural areas. However, floods, fires, building collapses, earthquakes, etc., all occur in the metropolitan areas.

There is a National Resilience Programme (NRP) which now includes a separate urban resilience programme. The young generation is our strength because they work in shelter management, first aid, etc., in urban areas. Therefore, volunteerism should be led by young members in all organisations.

The Disaster Management Act should be utilised to hold those responsible for fires and building collapses accountable.

Manik Kumar Saha, Acting Dhaka and Country Portfolio Manager, Plan International Bangladesh

One potential area of inclusion of young people in disaster preparedness is volunteering. We have seen that urban community volunteers have been doing exceptional work.

In the event of any disaster, persons with disabilities are even more vulnerable. So, the community volunteers must be comprised of people who are less vulnerable.

This will enable them to respond to disasters quickly and assist the most vulnerable people without having to be at risk themselves.

We have also been trying to create a central repository for data on urban community volunteers. This repository is hosted on the website of the Department of Disaster Management.

Risk reduction action plans and contingency plans need to be operational on a regular basis rather than on a project basis.

Mostafizur Rahman, Humanitarian & Resilience Manager, Plan International Bangladesh

Knowledge management is a weak point in Bangladesh. Sometimes, organisations that are owners of knowledge forget to follow up on whether others can access this knowledge.

One way to resolve this is to include disaster management information in training manuals for government workers. Having knowledge of disaster management should be a basic life skill. There should be a knowledge base on understanding disasters that are evolving and multi-dimensional such as climate change.

Md Sirajul Islam, Chief Town Planner, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC)
The disaster risk map is being prepared by the Geographical Information System. Once established, this map can be used for preparing action plans to address disasters based on location.