



A Brief Report of the Pilot Implementation of Community-based Flood Management Strategy (CFMS) in Bangladesh

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

A pilot implementation of the recently developed Community-based Flood Management Strategy (CFMS), under the aegis of Community Approaches to Flood Management Programme of BUP with assistance from the WMO, was attempted in two flood vulnerable Unions of Jamalpur district: (a) Nayanagar Union of Melandaha Thana and (b) Palbandha Union of Islampur Thana. Two facilitators from BUP were placed in the field office, starting on 5 June 2004, at a mid-point between the two command areas.

1.2 Experience of Flood in 2004

The year 2004 experienced an early monsoon flood of severe intensity in Bangladesh, particularly in Jamalpur district. An overwhelming majority of the agricultural and homestead lands in the flood vulnerable zones of the two command areas were completely inundated for several weeks during late-June till mid-August. Two flood peaks were observed, one in late-June and the other in mid-July that persisted for over two weeks. As anticipated, the early monsoon severe flood caused significant damages to assets and properties of majority of the households and physical infrastructure in Jamalpur district. However, agricultural damage was not so alarming due to the fact that the farmers could transplant high yielding Aman (paddy) seedlings, given the rapid recession of water before the threshold transplantation date of 15 August.

2. FORMATION AND FUNCTIONING OF A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION TO MANAGE FLOOD

In each of the command areas, a Community Flood Management Committee (CFMC) was established. In both the cases, with active facilitation from the BUP field personnel, the local elected leader took the initiative to form the proposed CFMC and invited volunteers to establish various sub-committees. A number of sensitization meetings were held involving BUP facilitators, leaders (elected), and local people which led to the formation of various sub-Committees (SC). Separate meetings were held with each of the sub-Committees where the respective Chairperson of the CFMC, in association with the BUP facilitators, explained the roles and responsibilities of the members of the sub-Committees. Each sub-Committee was asked to develop a work plan in order to streamline various activities in a coordinated fashion.

2.1 Awareness Raising Among the Local Beneficiaries

With support from the sub-Committees, the BUP personnel carried out a number of 'courtyard training sessions' on various self-help measures to reduce flood vulnerability. Separate courtyard meetings were held with women, often in their leisure time, in view of respecting gender sensitivity prevailing in the country. The people were made aware of various flood-management services on offer from the respective sub-Committees and explained how the local community can be benefited from such services.

2.2 Early Responses of the Local People on Preparedness



While sharing experience of having any damage-preventing measures, it was revealed that flood proofing of dwellings had been a common measure considered by the local people. From field experience it was found that the well-to-do households had already taken steps to flood-proof their households above or near to flood danger levels, while the poor could not do so despite being aware about the benefits of such precautionary measure. People felt the necessity to flood proof existing tubewells by sinking additional pipes (tubes). However, due to financial constraints, the poor opined that such a measure could not be taken before the commencement of the flood, unless the measure was facilitated by the government institutions.

2.3 Activities Rendered by the CFMC sub-Committees

Weather-bulletin Dissemination: Although the SCs on Weather-bulletin Dissemination (SC-WBD) had very little time to start operating due to late commencement, they collected information using cellular phone from nearest water information collection centres and disseminated the information on rise and recession of water on a regular basis. Dissemination of such real-time information, especially during the peak-flood season, was somewhat new in the area and people found it extremely useful.

Relocating Marooned People: The Sub-Committee for bringing marooned people in shelters could not function properly due to lack of transportation. When a boat was handed over to such a SC, they took effective measures to relocate families not only in shelters, but also in other places across the neighborhood.

Flood Shelter Management: The Sub-Committees on Flood Shelter Management in the two command areas identified two flood shelters for each of the command areas. Usually schools have been chosen as potential flood shelters. The School Management Committees of the respective schools allowed the CFMC-SC to use their school premises as flood shelters. Adequate preparations were taken to accommodate flood vulnerable people within the premises. However, such a collective activity paid little dividend due to the fact that the school premises were completely inundated during the early days of flood. But, unfortunately, as the premises went under water, people who had come to stay in the flood-shelters had to leave, in search of alternative shelters, mostly in the immediate neighbourhood, as the flood waters rose fast and high. The selected schools were not, according to local people, inundated during 'normal floods'.

Health Care: The SCs on Health Care were reportedly highly effective in both areas. They prepared water purifying sachets with low-cost material, according to methods shown by the BUP personnel. They also distributed these sachets to marooned households. The BUP also distributed some oral rehydration saline (ORS) mix in order to control epidemic of diarrhoeal diseases. The SC on Health Care also offered other forms of medical services to the flood vulnerable people. Recognizing the usefulness of water treating chemicals, the CFMC raised money and asked the SC on Health Care to prepare and distribute additional number of sachets. Compared to other flood vulnerable areas of Jamalpur, prevalence of diarrhea was much less in the two areas, mostly due to effective outreach of the Sub-Committee on Health Care.

Distribution of Potable Water: The SC for distribution of potable water (SC-DPW) helped raise a number of tubewells above flood danger level. Many people collected water from these refurbished tubewells. Those living relatively far away from any tubewell were provided potable water by the SC-DPW.

Livestock Management: Although households were encouraged to relocate their marooned livestock on elevated lands, only a few households took the advantage and made efforts to safeguard their livestock. Most of the people were reluctant to leave the livestock in unprotected areas and kept their cattle within the household.

2.4 Post-flood Rehabilitation



The post-flood rehabilitation received a moral boost when the government decided to distribute food aid in the form of issuance of VGF cards. The involvement of the Armed Forces in identifying poor and hardcore poor as recipients of VGF cards was hailed by the local communities.

The agricultural service providers tried their best to facilitate government-led agricultural rehabilitation programme. They collected seeds from the government and distributed them amongst the poor farmers. However, there was allegation that the seeds provided were of poor grade.

An SC was established in each flood vulnerable area to take active part in local governance and decision making. The relevant SC maintained liaison with the government hierarchy and placed written demand for relief and rehabilitation assistance to the Thana level officials. Moreover, the community-level volunteers collected flood-damage information, which gave a basis for identifying the worst victims of the flood.

3. PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING AND EXPECTATIONS

People expressed their satisfaction on the formation and functioning of the CFMCs in the areas established under the leadership of the chairmen of the two Union Parishads, respectively. People believed that, if such a programme may be linked with official service delivery systems in place, under the leadership of officials of local government and administration, the effectiveness of such a programme could be enhanced significantly. People also expressed that such programmes should be continued for at least a few years so that community-led interventions become a part of their flood management culture.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The community-based and CFMC-led flood management effort in the two unions has been the first of its kind in Bangladesh. As a first attempt, it naturally suffered from certain deficiencies; more so as the flood was so sudden and so devastating. But many lessons have been learnt, which can be put to good use in future. It needs to be replicated widely to help people minimize losses and damages caused by floods. In the process, the methods and ways of organizing activities can be further improved.