World Meteorological Organization

THE ASSOCIATED PROGRAMME ON FLOOD MANAGEMENT

Report on the National Workshop on Community Approach to Flood Management in Bangladesh

Edited by

TECHNICAL SUPPORT UNIT

Introduction

The National Workshop on Community-based Approaches to Flood Management was held in Dhaka during February 24-25, 2006. The national Workshop was participated by representatives from a host of Government Institutions, NGOs, Professional Organizations, media etc. About 11 people representing the Community-based Flood Management Committees (CFMC) at Nayanagar Union and Palobandha Union and a few beneficiaries of the CAFM activities were also present in the occasion. A total number of 56 participants attended the workshop and took part in deliberations. The National Workshop was inaugurated by the Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, Mr. Mushfiqur Rahman. The Secretary to the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Mr. Abdur Rashid Sarker was the Special Guest of the Concluding Session. Dr. Wolfgang Grabs was present during the course of the workshop and shared his views regarding CAFM in Bangladesh on behalf of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Background of the Pilot Project

Flooding has been a common recurrent phenomenon in Bangladesh. The country being located at the bottom most part of the combined basin area of the three major rivers of the world – the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna (GBM), and most of its landmass being floodplains with very flat topography, the country frequently experience floods along the major rivers. Fortunately, people in Bangladesh have been coping with floods and pursuing economic and developmental activities from time immemorial. They rather reaped the beneficial effects/aspects of flood with advantage in the forms of alluvium deposit, groundwater recharge, spatial flushing and flourishing aquatic flora and fauna. However, the phenomenal population increase has forced the people, especially the poor, to encroach upon severely flood-vulnerable plains increasingly over time. Thus more and more people, livestock and assets created with development have become increasingly flood vulnerable.

Sometimes, the devastation caused by a flood event can assume disastrous proportions. The most tragic part in the whole gamut of extreme floods is that some losses can be measured while some others like loss of lives, human misery and deprivation can hardly be quantified in monetary terms. Floods and their consequences may occur at local level in rural areas, but when summed up and internalized at national scale they appear to be a major impediment to socio-economic development. Furthermore, the threat of recurrent floods puts the real development potential of the country in a low key.

Given that the country has been subject to frequent flood events, it has become a major development impediment on the part of the successive Governments. Management of floods therefore has become a major national agenda, with lots of investments and little success. Only recently, the Government made a shift in approaching the millennia old problem: it has shied away from relief and embarked on preparedness and response with a long term focus on self reliance.

In this backdrop, an action research project was initiated in 2002 in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal on Community Approaches to Flood Management. The pilot phases were completed by mid-2004; and a wider replication of the approach in all the three countries was initially planned. The project was jointly implemented by Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP), Dhaka; Institute for Resource Management and Environmental Development (IRMED), New Delhi; Jalsrot Vikas Sanstha (JVS), Kathmandu, with support from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)/Global Water Partnership (GWP) Associated Programme on Flood Management (APFM). The BUP has been acted as the South Asia regional coordinating institution and its chairman Q. K. Ahmad, the present author, has been the Regional Coordinator of the project. Two locations in Bangladesh and Nepal each and three locations in India have been chosen as the study sites in the participating countries.

The goal of the study project was to reduce flood vulnerability and mitigate flood impacts. The objectives have been to identify ways of raising the capacity of (i.e. empower) the people of flood-prone areas to manage floods as best as possible. It was deemed necessary to develop flood management manuals and strategies in a bid to provide the framework for effective community responses. It was also felt necessary

to implement the community-self help approach with a view to reducing flood vulnerability and flood losses, damages, and sufferings at the lowest tier of local government institutions. Following the pilot phase limited implementation at two locations in Bangladesh, a National Workshop was convened and the lessons learnt from the pilot exercises have been shared with national level stakeholders.

The Concluding National Workshop in Dhaka

In the Inaugural Session, the genesis of the action research project on Community-based Approaches to Flood Management (CAFM) was explained to the audience. Dr. Grabs gave an overview of the three country pilot study and its connection with WMO and Associated Programme on Flood Management (APFM) of Global Water Partnership (GWP). The house was informed that the study had been executed by BUP of Bangladesh as regional coordinator, IRMED of India and JVS of Nepal.

The speakers explained the goal of the study as well as the specific objectives, which included the following:

- facilitating local level institutions to engage in self-help activities;
- local level capacity building;
- needs assessment;
- co-ordination with external agencies (GO, NGO);
- formulation of practical self-help codes in the form of manuals;
- improvement of forecasting and warning etc.

The audience was informed that the pilot study was carried out in two locations in Bangladesh: Nayanagar Union in Islampur and Palabandha Union in Melandaha Thana, both being located in Jamalpur District.

The Outcome

It was explained that the action research was followed by pilot-scale implementation phases. The conceptual research had been completed by the end of year 2003 and was presented in the World Water Forum in Japan. The pilot implementation at the field level was approached during the flood of 2004 and subsequently in 2005. The BUP deployed its experts in the two locations to interact with communities extensively and intensively to cover the entire cycle or process. The process has been iterative. After every stage of analysis and formulation, discussion was held with local stakeholders and necessary modifications carried out.

The national level stakeholders, selected by the relevant government and non-government agencies, were provided copies of the CAFM manual (in Bangla) to explain the detailed approach and methodology of the activities which had been carried out in the two pilot research areas. It was revealed that the field testing of manual had been successfully applied in both the pilot study sites and accordingly, expected benefits have been accrued by the general people in the two locations. With small investments, damages were minimized to the least compared to earlier severe floods.

The Technical Sessions allowed other national level stakeholders to present their cases, those of whom had been involved in somewhat similar approaches to flood management in Bangladesh. Centre for Environmental Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) showed how the technical flood information and warning could be disseminated in culturally acceptable forms in remote areas by involving local communities. The participants commented that in integration of CAFM approach and the warning dissemination approach of CEGIS would perhaps offer more benefits to flood affected communities.

On behalf of the NGOs, which have been offering various flood management services at the grassroots, Mr. Khaled Masud Ahmed, a representative of Action Aid Bangladesh (AAB) made a presentation on how NGO activities could reduce flood vulnerability involving affected communities. He provided an example on how AAB helped develop Family Preparedness Plan and Family Contingency Plan with a

vision to enhance flood preparedness in selected flood prone areas in Bangladesh. He commented that a number of NGOs such as AAB, OXFAM etc. have been using Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) tools to assess flood management needs of local communities in flood prone areas.

Mr. A.K.M. Mamunur Rashid of Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP) of the Government made a presentation on Community Issues Towards Management of Flood-related Disasters. He commented that in line with the CDM Framework, affected communities could be provided with capacity building training so that they could effectively mobilize themselves and took precautionary measures before the onrush of flood waters. He also commented that people should be involved directly in order to define their risk environment and flood response measures. He further commented that good practices such as CAFM and dissemination of early warning system should be scaled up by relevant government agencies in a bid to properly implement the CDM Framework provided by the Government.

Following the technical presentations, the participants were asked to comment on the lessons provided by the CAFM and other risk reduction activities. Generally, the concept of promoting peoples' self-help towards reducing flood vulnerability was hailed by the participants. It was generally felt that such a practice would promote reliance and reduce dependence on relief. The house reached to a general consensus that there are a host of good elements in the CAFM Framework as well as in the manual which should be replicated elsewhere in the country. Moreover, the house felt that the CDMP processes should take note of the developments in relevant fields and try to integrate the CDM Framework with the good practices.

The participants also placed a number of recommendations with a notion of reducing flood vulnerability of communities living in flood vulnerable areas.

- The Local Government System should be enhanced and should be provided with adequate financial support and authorization to implement CAFM and/or similar good practices.
- CDM framework should concentrate more on preparedness instead of post-disaster relief.
- The dissemination efforts of flood forecasting should be given high priority so that people could prepare early. The use of community radio and cell phone technologies have been considered as next frontier for quick dissemination of early flood warning system.
- Union and Thana level contingency planning for flood response should be given due importance in the CDM Framework.
- Alternative cropping practices should be promoted in order to facilitate agricultural rehabilitation following a big flood.
- An effort should be made to check whether the same CAFM could be equally effective in flash flood conditions.
- The current efforts towards developing new crop varieties should be strengthened and the national Agricultural research System should be provided adequate funding to carry out future research.
- The media should be involved in the promotion of CAFM.
- The CAFM manual should incorporate creation of 'safe havens' for livestock.
- Emphasis should be placed on enhancing drainage capacity of rivers and rivulets. Desilting should be taken up as a priority activity and the planning for such activity should be placed on Local Government Institutions.