

Gaps in Existing Plans

Gaps

Many of the plans at national and local level mentioned earlier are still in draft stage and some have been developed as a part of larger international and regional initiatives such as the SAARC Framework of Action and the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA).

There are currently four important gaps in the disaster management plans and Act.

- They do not legally guarantee relief entitlements to the people after a disaster.
- The accountability mechanism in case of failure to respond to a disaster is not specified.
- In some cases there is not even a sanction mechanism if a disaster should occur and no clear instructions concerning who will declare the disaster.
- There are no clear directions about coordinating disaster and development stakeholders to meet a common national goal, and there is no focus on community empowerment.

These gaps could be the result of the process through which the plans were developed at national level. Almost all the national plans have been developed through technobureaucratic exercises from which multi-stakeholder participation was absent. As a result, disasters at local level receive no attention. For example, there is no specific plan for landslides nor do existing plans address them. Many sectoral policies and plans, such as for education, health, land, and water, are yet to include disaster preparedness as an important element in achieving sectoral objectives as well as national priorities.

Although a disaster-prone country, Bangladesh did not have a formal disaster preparedness plan (National Plan for Disaster Management) for a long time because of the government's lack of involvement in the pre-disaster phase. Many key government officials share the perception that DP is the responsibility of the MoFD. The real breakthrough for government intervention in the pre-disaster stages came through the introduction of a Disaster Preparedness Study (FAP-11) under the FAP in the early 1990s. Subsequently, the standing orders of 1985 were revised and updated in 1997 to cover cyclones and floods. To date, there is no national plan for earthquake preparedness; although recently (end of 2006) the GoB enacted a revised building

code. There has been limited work on urban disasters. Because of the recurrence of floods and cyclones, an earthquake plan is yet to be formulated. The lack of disaster preparedness plans at national and district to community level can be seen at a glance in the following table (Table 3).

Table 3: Gaps in national-level preparedness plans

National plan	Gaps
National Disaster Management Plan	Waiting for cabinet approval
Tsunami Risk Reduction Plan of Action	Waiting for cabinet approval
Earthquake Response Plan	Draft for consultation and not yet endorsed by IMDMCC
Flood Action Plan	Exists, but not implemented
Recommendations on Options for Flood Risk and Damage Reduction	Exists, and implementation has started
National Water Management Plan	Exists and is yet to be implemented
Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan	Exists and is yet to be implemented

Shortcomings in implementation of plans for disaster preparedness

The Government of Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in terms of preparedness for cyclones by putting in place an early warning system, carrying out a programme on preparedness, and by constructing cyclone shelters throughout the coastal belt. It has also put in place a flood forecasting and early warning system. It has developed good systems and invested in the efficiency of distribution of relief goods. But because of many shortcomings in the implementation of the plan (unfulfilled political commitments) the country is yet to be made as safe as it could be.

Key factors that account for the limited performance in the implementation of plans are given below.

- Limited participation of vulnerable people and non-state actors in the planning exercise, resulting in limited ownership
- Lack of information about the plans at local level
- Lack of initiative in scaling-up good approaches
- Limited decentralisation and devolution of power and resources to the local government level to implement local plans
- Poor perspective (response led), leadership, and commitment of government officials and politicians about disaster reduction
- A blanket approach to disaster mitigation and faulty criteria for fund distribution leading to insufficiency of resources when and where it matters
- Lack of capacity, lack of skills, and limited resources at various levels (arguably

resources are there but not allocated to disaster reduction as a priority). There is no broad-based ownership of the plans, resulting in different stakeholders implementing them in too many different directions. Many good disaster reduction approaches tried by local organisations have not been merged into a common national approach (e.g., school safety and community-based preparedness by NGOs). Many of them are spread too thinly and have not been scaled-up in all vulnerable areas. For example, the CDMP is implementing national- and local-level plans in seven, selected districts but these are yet to be scaled up to national level.

The limited access of vulnerable people to information about policies is also a factor that hinders implementation of the plan at national level. Two previous studies by this author (Alam 2006 and 2006a) confirmed that people do not have information about many of the plans developed at national level. There is no effective communication strategy to disseminate the plans at various levels⁴ (see Box 5 also).

Many of the plans have not been fully implemented because of the limited capacity, equipment, and resources available for officials. Ironically, local-level leadership, such as union disaster management committees, are not supported with the requisite authority and resources. The widespread corruption is given as an excuse not to fund

Box 5: Implementation of the risk reduction programme

“The Ministry of Food and Disaster Management developed a programme entitled the ‘Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Programme’ after the 2004 flood. The programme targets people at high risk who have experienced loss of income sources in past hazards and who are at risk of losing their income generating sources in future hazards. The programme helps by providing them assistance of from Taka 5,000 (ca US\$76) to Taka 20,000 (ca US\$303) based on their income-generating enterprise. Twenty to 25% of it is given as a risk mitigation grant and the remaining 75 to 80% is a loan to be paid back at an interest rate of two per cent over two years. The people are given six months to reactivate their income sources. This programme was funded by the GoB’s national revenue budget of 125 million Taka (ca US\$ 1.89 million) in 2003-2004, 350 million Taka (ca US\$5.30 million) in 2004-2005, 700 million in 2005-2006, (ca US\$10.6million), and 100 million in 2006-2007 (expenditure decreased due to conflict preventing disbursement). The ‘Risk Reduction Programme’ is a very practical idea, but the study team doubts whether the implementing agencies at lower level are clear about the purpose of this programme.

The programme could not offer people guidelines about how they could use their money most appropriately. For example, the fund distributed was used for purchasing cows in Kurigram district, and this resulted in the exclusion of the most vulnerable people according to Union Parishad (UP) officials. The guidelines are perceived as ‘general loan guidelines’. Although such a practice may reduce long-term vulnerabilities, the study concludes that it may not reduce the immediate causes of vulnerability to the flood of 2006. Collecting evidence from 425 men, women, and children in Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Gaibandha, and Kurigram districts the study confirmed that people were not aware about these funds, nor were local government officials properly briefed about the purpose of the fund.”

Source: Alam 2006

⁴ For example, people do not know where to get a copy of the recent building code.

the UP. Therefore, much of the leadership potential at local level remains inactive.

Decision-making about disaster response follows a top-down approach (James 1998); therefore many localised disasters receive no response at all. Political considerations sometimes overshadow the vulnerability criteria for resource allocation in the implementation of plans. The allocation of risk reduction funds is one example that used the criterion of flat allocation by electoral constituency.

The DP plan is essentially a list of activities, many of which used to be carried out by households in a vulnerable community previously and, in some cases, along with NGO and CBO personnel. With the recent decision of the government to become involved in disaster management right from the preparatory stages, additional activities have been added to the list and most of these are to be carried out by government departments and agencies. These jobs are not altogether new either, they are mostly routine activities to be accomplished within a financial year; but now they are being included in the DP plan these activities have to be completed ahead of routine schedule and within the disaster preparedness phase. Examples are the repairs to infrastructure such as dykes, roads, bridges, power transmission lines, tubewells, sanitary latrines, and so forth.

Thus, some readjustment in the list of activities can be seen with clear directions on who does what and when as determined by the DMC; and no confusion is foreseen. There is no dearth of human resources and expertise for such activities in DP as they have been known to vulnerable communities for centuries. The only constraint to be encountered, as foreseen now, is lack of unhindered cash flow to agencies to enable them to accomplish their tasks on time.

Strategies are not mainstreamed among the disaster management committees to integrate preparedness measures into the core business of relevant ministries. Linkages between the preparedness plans developed at local level and projects undertaken by the Food for Work, Cash for Work, Vulnerable Group Development Programme, Test Relief, Seasonal Unemployment Reduction Programme, Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Programme, Disaster Shelter Programme, and other programmes of the Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation and the ministry are very poor. Gaps in local-

Table 4: Gaps in local-level preparedness plans

District to community- level plans	Total unit	Status (existence of plans)	Status (gaps in existence of plans)	Remarks
District disaster management plans	64	29	35	7 plans are ongoing under the CDMP
City corporation disaster management plans	6	0	6	
'Upazilla' disaster management plans	501	74	427	57 plans are ongoing under the CDMP
'Pourashava' disaster management plans	308	24	284	19 plans are ongoing under the CDMP
Union disaster management plans	4,489	744	3745	525 plans are ongoing under the CDMP