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POLICY BRIEF
AUGUST 2022

Increase local government budget allocation for effective disaster management in Bangladesh



Rising water level in the community during monsoon flood.
Photo: Practical Action

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to sea-level rise, powerful cyclones, frequent flooding, and many more such events. Communities are on the front line of the negative impact of climate change; they are the people most affected by and most vulnerable to the climate change crisis.

The local government in Bangladesh plays a crucial role in disaster management. The Union Parishad is the lowest tier of government institutions that provides services to local people. It is the only institution which ensures good governance, local development, transparency, and accountability for rural areas of Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, 2019) has developed *Standing Orders on Disaster* (SOD) with the aim that all concerned disaster management stakeholders understand their duties, roles, and responsibilities regarding disaster management. According to the Local Government

(Union Parishad) Act 2009, each Union Parishad is supposed to have a Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC). Under the SOD, the UDMC has been given the mandate to act as the rural disaster management entity and it is supposed to play a role in disaster preparedness, mitigation, and emergency response and post-disaster rehabilitation. Unfortunately UDMCs are often not fully functional because of lack of budget.

This policy brief has been developed based on the findings of *Post Event Review Capability Study: Learning from the 2020 Floods in Faridpur District* (Begum et al., 2021), interviews, and a number of small-scale studies carried out by the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance ('the Alliance'). This brief is also informed by the experiences of the Alliance's partners of working with 15 flood-prone Unions in the districts of Faridpur, Lalmonirhat, and Gaibandha of Bangladesh.

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Building temporary shelter amidst flood.
Photo: Ashikul Islam, Practical Action, 2021

Current context

The Government of Bangladesh has taken a number of significant steps to develop effective and systematic disaster management and response capacity from national to local level. In accordance with the SOD, the UDMC consists of 36 members and is headed by the Chair of the Union Parishad. The UDMC is responsible for ensuring communities are informed and capable of reducing the risk of disasters. UDMCs are expected to conduct community vulnerability and risk analysis, prepare a risk reduction action plan and contingency plan, keep an updated volunteer list, conduct regular meetings, mobilize local resources, share early warning messages, and coordinate communities during and after a disaster. However, often UDMCs are not able to fulfil many of these responsibilities, which is contributing to increased community vulnerability and risk of loss and damage. While the SOD mandates the UDMC to coordinate and manage a total of 64 distinct disaster management responsibilities, in many cases UDMC members and other key stakeholders are not fully aware of their responsibilities. It was observed that the majority of UDMCs in the 15 Union Parishads of the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance's intervention areas are not fully active or functional mainly because of the lack of financial resources, gaps in capacity, and limited knowledge and awareness on climate change

and adaptation. There is also a lack of knowledge of the SOD mandate and therefore the roles and responsibilities of the Union Parishad and UDMC before, during, and after a disaster. It was evident that across the 15 unions, UDMC members do work very closely with the Union Parishad during disasters, including relief distribution and coordination; however, there is significant scope to improve preparedness and coordination.

Local-level funding in practice

To understand the financing gap, a study was conducted to analyse the current allocated budget for flood resilience of 10 Union Parishads in the Alliance study areas in the three flood-prone districts of Bangladesh: Faridpur, Gaibandha, and Lalmonirhat.

Analysis of the 10 Union Parishad budgets showed that the flood resilience funding gap ranged from around US\$107,000 to \$1.6 m; the average financing gap per Union was \$689,000 (Khan, 2020). Current flood resilience-related allocations ranged from 0.2 to 34 per cent of the total budget in the Unions. It is also important to note that the Unions did not have a standard procedure for monitoring budget allocation and expenditure (Khan, 2020; Okura and Dutta, 2020). Insufficient funding for local-level flood resilience efforts has several significant implications for flood preparedness, response, and recovery.

Implications of local-level financing gaps:

- Without community-level risk and vulnerability analysis and risk reduction action plans, communities are increasingly vulnerable to flooding and are adapting too slowly.
- The systems and coordination mechanisms for ensuring that timely and accurate early warning information reaches the grassroots level are not in place. Early warning messages often do not go further than Union Parishad level.
- Without strong local-level institutions like the UDMCs, opportunities for locally led adaptation and scale-up of proven technologies or best practice are being missed.
- The wider scope of the UDMCs for pre-disaster actions is not being realized and they are limited to response and recovery actions.
- Local-level focus has not yet shifted from disaster response to disaster preparedness and risk reduction.



Children are most at risk during flood.
Photo: Ashikul Islam, Practical Action, 2021



Hampered mobility during flood.
Photo: Ashikul Islam, Practical Action, 2021

Policy and practice recommendations

Findings to date indicate that there are some underlying barriers to the amount of budget the Union Parishad can allocate for disaster preparedness and the UDMCs. The total available annual development budget for Union Parishads is not sufficient to support disaster preparedness initiatives at local level. Along with this, the Union Parishad office often has a limited understanding of what budget is needed to fulfil the SOD aims at the Union level.

Based on the study findings, separate discussion with local representatives, and review of available legal instruments and policies to overcome these challenges, four policy recommendations have been identified to enhance the UDMCs' effective functioning along with Union Parishads.

- **Relevant government ministries need to allocate a dedicated budget for Union Parishads** to enable them to fund locally led disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation that can be carried out by the UDMCs.
- **Linkages between the Union Parishads and UDMCs should be strengthened** by increasing the annual development budget allocation to UDMC-led disaster preparedness activities, in accordance with the SOD.
- **Relevant government institutions and development partners should work together** to identify the specific local capacity gaps and then deliver training on, for example: the SOD; conducting community risk assessment and preparing action plans; preparing disaster preparedness budgets; and establishing a monitoring and accountability mechanism to track progress of UDMCs.
- **UDMC staff should include more community members** who have a stronger incentive to conduct disaster risk reduction activities. An inclusive environment where female members are represented and able to engage is also critically important to reflect diverse needs and perspectives.

Communities on the front lines of climate disasters need more funding. Much more could be done to prepare communities in advance of extreme events. Union Parishads have the potential to play an even greater role in reducing the impact of disasters on the local communities; however, they need funding and training. Central to this process are the Union Disaster Management Committees, which need to be trained in how they can work together to support risk reduction and preparedness activities and post-disaster recovery, catalysing learning about what works and what doesn't. By better supporting and integrating local-level institutions, like the Union Parishad offices and the UDMCs, into the overall disaster management governance system, the impact of any small- to large-scale disasters will be considerably reduced. Fully functioning local institutions are vital to face the challenges of climate-induced risks and vulnerability.

References

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The Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance is a multi-sectoral partnership which brings together community programmes, new research, shared knowledge, and evidence-based influencing to build community flood resilience in developed and developing countries.

We help people measure their resilience to floods and identify appropriate solutions before disaster strikes.

Our vision is that floods should have no negative impact on people's ability to thrive. To achieve this we are working to increase funding for flood resilience; strengthen global, national, and subnational policies; and improve flood resilience practice.

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The Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance is made up of the following organizations:

