Response to the 2019 monsoon floods
Draft Synthesis report of the September 2019 meeting with Local NGOs
- This report will be translated in Bangla -

1. Introduction

On 19 September 2019, the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office organized an inter-cluster/working group meeting with the participation of the nine (9) local NGOs performing the role of district focal point of the response to the monsoon floods: Caritas Bangladesh, Grameen Bikas Foundation (GBF), Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK), Adarsha Polly Unnayan Songstha (APUS), Mahideb Jubo Somaj Kallayan Somity (MJSKS), Manab Mukti Sangstha (MMS), Efforts for Rural Advancement (ERA), Society for Sylhet resources advancement (SRAC) and Palli Unnayan Sangstha (PUS). The objectives of the meeting was to benefit from an update on the implementation of the HRP by the local NGOs and to learn about possible gaps, challenges and success stories. The expected outcome of the meeting was to identify ways to strengthen coordination at district level and to overcome identified challenges. All background on the humanitarian response to the monsoon floods is available here.

2. Update on the response by local NGOs district focal points

Each local NGO presented the situation in its respective district. Their presentations are available here. Despite specificities of each concerned district, most districts are facing similar issues. Below is a synthetized list of key issues and/or challenges raised:

- **Infrastructures**: All district focal points highlighted the high level of distress of the affected population due to infrastructure damage. This issue is of particular high importance for the districts of Bandarban, Gaibandha, Kurigram and Jamalpur where the impact of damaged infrastructures on public services delivery is very high. Affected people in Jamalpur and Bandarban are reportedly having tremendous challenges to access education services in current circumstances. Proper maintenance of embankment was reported as a huge concern in the nine districts. It was suggested that an improved coordination of DRR interventions at both national and local levels would reduce the needs for humanitarian assistance;

- **Recovery/livelihoods support**: Recovery/livelihood support is required for all districts (e.g. Cash for Work). Life-saving humanitarian assistance is reportedly no more required in Sunamganj, Sylhet and Tangail districts.

- **Humanitarian Access**: Due to transportation-related infrastructures damages, the access to the remote areas is made even more complicated than in normal time. This is particularly the case for the districts of Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Kurigram, Gaibandha and Bandarban. Land erosion is another factor contributing to limit humanitarian access in some locations. In addition to physical access, communication challenges can even make the response even more challenging e.g. language barrier in Bandarban district. The availability of search and rescue equipment such as boats was limited in Gaibandha;
- **Protection and displacement**: All district focal points insisted on the need to ensure the safety and to respect the dignity of the affected people during evacuations. In Sirajganj, it was reported that GBV cases rose sharply during such operations. There were significant concerns for the safety and dignity of the elderly and of the adolescent girls. In some cases, adolescent girls were shifted to the houses of relatives in order to mitigate protection risks. It was stressed that displacement situations lead to increased pressure on women and, to cases of domestic violence. To reduce this pressure, it was recommended to include firewood when dry food and water are provided in displacement situations. The need for tracking permanent displacement was highlighted in order to facilitate future targeting and planning processes;

- **Accountability to Affected Populations**: It was recommended to set up a beneficiary complaint mechanism to promote accountability to the affected communities. With the view of leaving no one behind, it was recommended that people living on chars receive a higher level of attention due to their very limited resilience capacity;

**3. Briefing from clusters and working groups**

Each cluster and working group had an opportunity to inform local NGOs of its on-going response in each district as per the HRP. While the detailed information will be included in the next HRP report, some highlights are provided here: Health cluster indicated that apart for SRH activities, the health situation is back to pre-disaster level but that surveillance activities are continuing. WASH cluster informed of a gap in WASH assistance in Jamalpur. Logistics cluster is on standby to respond to logistics requests from partners (e.g. storage information). Socioeconomic recovery remains a major concern for the affected population across all concerned districts.

**4. Humanitarian Architecture in Bangladesh**

The RCO presented the humanitarian architecture in Bangladesh and the linkages with the district focal point system. Copy of the presentation is available [here](#).

**5. Learnings and recommendations**

Following the presentations, intense exchanges took place between the participants on several aspects of the on-going response and/or broader issues which are synthetized here below.

**Some people in need are currently left behind** due to a combination of factors: (1) The complexity of the selection/prioritization of beneficiaries due to the fact that there is no standard guidelines used by the humanitarian community for such process and that there is no single listing of the most vulnerable approved by the communities themselves and used as reference by the humanitarian community. It was noted that the establishment of such a listing would require political will, transparency and community participation as well as the use of ICT communication. It was also noted that such a listing could ideally be the one used by the national social protection system; (2) The insufficient level of funding of the response and; (3) the limitations in abiding by the humanitarian principle of impartiality. The latter would reportedly be explained by the fact that several institutions give priority to their existing programme participants/supporters/beneficiaries/clients which are not always the most affected persons and/or the most in need.
Partnerships b/w local administration and NGOs/CSOs need to be clarified. Indeed, NGOs/CSOs are often requested to respond to local administration’s requests of assistance in terms of emergency preparedness and response while those NGOs/CSOs do not necessarily have the means/dedicated funding/expertise to do so. Therefore, such requests are often transmitted to international partners. Interesting to note is the fact that local administration has usually a budget for such purposes which is reportedly either insufficient or not used properly. It was recommended that local governance should be assessed and strengthened. In addition, it was suggested that CSOs could organize themselves with HCTT’s support to develop a pool funding mechanism to reduce dependencies vis-à-vis international support.

Coordinated engagement with the communities should be improved. Indeed, the means of engagement with the communities are reportedly limited and/or not used fully. Therefore, the local humanitarian community has not necessarily a comprehensive picture of the situation in the field. Continuous engagement with local NGOs HCTT District Focal Points is required in order to get continuous updates on the evolving situation in the field. In addition, information-sharing mechanism at local level in most exposed districts needs to be activated or strengthened as per HCTT’s recommendation made in 2018. An inter-agency common feedback mechanism should be established to ensure that the public can obtain information on humanitarian services and provide feedback through face-to-face meetings, suggestion boxes and mobile technology. Based on this feedback, humanitarian community can provide the HCTT and the Government of Bangladesh with recommendations in responding to community concerns and needs.

Engagement of local NGOs in clusters’ work should be reinforced for strengthening their voices and understanding their concerns. HCTT NGO representatives are ready to support the process of identifying local NGOs which could be interested in becoming active member of clusters. It is expected that this mechanism would also help local NGOs to understand sectors’ selection criteria of beneficiaries. Guidance on clusters’ standard support packages is requested at the local level to improve the efficiency of the response. Multi-Purpose Cash Grant (MPCG) is reportedly appreciated as immediate response intervention but it was stressed that it should be complemented by sectoral interventions.

Partnerships b/w UN Agencies and local NGOs should be reinforced in a way that reduces transaction costs. Several local NGOs have multiple UN partners. However, these partnerships do not translate necessarily into additional local capacities, specifically sectoral capacities. Joint UN support to capacity development of local NGOs could be discussed specifically when it relates to emergency preparedness actions.

Voices of local NGOs at the HCTT: HCTT NGO representatives should be in direct liaison with NGO district focal points in order for their views to be considered during HCTT meeting. Clusters and working groups should systematically copy HCTT NGO representatives when communicating to the NGO district focal points.

Resource mobilization: So far, resource mobilized are mainly from own-agencies’ funds, START funds and CERF funds. IFRC’s appeal did not lead to significant resource mobilization. Overall the HRP is around 35% funded. Based on DFID’s request, CARE and START Fund initiated a GIS based vulnerability analysis in order to help decision-making processes on possible additional high and sustainable impact funding decisions.

Localization baseline assessment: Participants recognized that the localization baseline assessment will provide an opportunity to document many of the above concerns and to support
the development of the HCTT workplan for 2020. The RCO liaised with the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) which confirmed their support in undertaking the localization baseline assessment with the support of a technical team which will comprise NIRAPAD, ICVA, RCO and other representatives of the HCTT.

**Humanitarian-Development Nexus:** Local NGOs requested advocacy from the humanitarian community on the promotion of disaster insurance mechanisms to support the resilience of the vulnerable communities.

**Disaster risk mapping and analysis:** According to local NGOs, local risk mapping and analysis information do not seem to get into national planning processes to feed into decision-making process. Therefore, there is a risk that national planning/budgeting are insufficiently risk-informed.

6. Conclusion/Way-forward

The meeting was considered as a healthy and fruitful exercise which provided a lot of insights to all participants. The humanitarian community will continue the dialogue with local NGOs and will reconvene in order to decide on the moving forward on each learning/recommendation considering on-going processes (i.e. localization baseline assessment, information-management platform at local level, response monitoring) and advocacy needs notably vis-à-vis development partners on issues of common interest (i.e. social-protection, local governance, Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation).

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