



INTERNATIONAL



FEDERATION

Community Feedback Bulletin

Camp Community Perceptions on Cyclone Preparedness

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh
Population Movement Operation
May 2019

BACKGROUND

The coastal areas of Bangladesh remain highly susceptible to disasters and cyclones putting millions of people's lives at risk every year. This includes Cox's Bazar district which is already considered one of the most disaster-prone areas of the country. Cox's Bazar is specifically at risk to natural hazards such as high winds, cyclones, torrential rain, land slides, flash floods and storm surges.

Those living in the camp communities in Cox's Bazar are especially vulnerable to extreme weather due to a variety of factors. Most people in the camps live under tarpaulins and bamboo structures on steep slopes of hills or in low areas – at high risk to the impacts of hazardous weather such as heavy rains or cyclones. There continue to be restrictions on the specific materials used for construction, impacting the durability of shelters to withstand extreme weather. For example, most families received their bamboo and shelter materials in late 2017, much of which is now rotting and in need of repair.¹ Furthermore, the dependence on firewood and accompanying deforestation in the settlement has exacerbated the potential for landslides and flash flooding. The vulnerabilities are further compounded by the high level of congestion and the limited evacuation options available.

While the displaced population comes from a disaster-prone area within Myanmar, their trauma due to their forced displacement, their current confinement to a camp settlement and their dependency on humanitarian assistance creates an entirely different cyclone risk and vulnerability scenario.² It is important to remember that enhancing disaster preparedness and response in this camp context is complex and different from the regular preparedness activities in the coastal areas of Bangladesh. With this in mind it is critical that efforts to enhance preparedness continue.

The following bulletin provides highlights from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) carried out among 135 displaced people in six different camps in Teknaf and Ukhiya, in January 2019. The BDRCS and IFRC Community Engagement & Accountability (CEA) team organized the FGDs together with the American Red Cross. FGDs were focused on gathering the perspectives, questions and suggestions from communities on their preparedness for cyclones. The FGDs specifically explored ways to enhance preparedness for vulnerable groups in the camps.

It is important to note that camp communities in Cox's Bazar are diverse and face varying degrees of risks for disasters. This bulletin is a snapshot of community perspectives from a sub-section of camp residents. The document does not claim to be a representation of the feedback from the entire community. A comprehensive Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey around disaster preparedness is planned to be rolled out in the summer of 2019, as an inter-agency effort implemented by REACH. This data will provide more in-depth insights into the existing coping mechanisms for extreme weather events, the effectiveness of the disaster preparedness messaging and the remaining information gaps.

Cyclone Preparedness Programme

Established in 1972, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP), a joint program between the Government of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) aims to minimize the loss of life in cyclones and storm surges by enhancing the capacity of coastal communities of Bangladesh to deal with disasters. CPP covers over 11 million people at risk across 13 coastal districts in Bangladesh including Cox's Bazar. In February 2018, the CPP system was expanded to include people from Rakhine living in the camp settlements in Cox's Bazar, recognizing the camp residents as temporary CPP Camp Volunteers. CPP is in all 34 camps and has trained over 1800 volunteers with a target of training 3400 by June 2019, equivalent to 100 volunteers per camp.

MAIN FINDINGS

Shelter upgrades are a key need

When an extreme weather event happens, most FGD respondents report that they would stay in their own shelters since there is limited space to move elsewhere in the camps, for example to higher ground. However, shelter conditions in the camp are challenging. Almost all participants in the FGDs asked for shelter upgrades to make their existing dwellings more durable or the construction of new shelters that are more disaster/weather proof. This corresponds with other perception surveys, where members of the displaced community state that one of their top concerns is the quality and supply of shelter materials. For example, there is a lack of protection against high wind speeds with community members describing that wind gusts can rip through and break their structures.³ Most of the current shelters are predicted to only resist wind speeds up to 40km/hour, while Cox's Bazar district has witnessed wind gust speeds of 148, 130 and 65 km/hour in 2015, 2016 and 2017.⁴



“Our houses have become very weak. We have not yet received any bamboo and plastic sheet. The four sides of the house are broken down. At night, a lot of wind enters the house.”



“Please repair the roads and put handles there for us to use hilly roads. Also give a torch to every household.”

There are also many issues with the bamboo that is currently being used for shelter construction. This includes the use of bamboo which is of poor quality and durability, as well as the use of untreated or immature bamboo which is more prone to the infestation of pests such as beetles, which results in deterioration and rot. Community members have suggested that they need a new set of bamboo and tarpaulins to replace any damaged materials to reinforce their structures.⁵ A survey carried out by the shelter sector July/August 2018 also found that “the shelter materials [...] provided to the refugees in 2018 are insufficient for protection against adverse weather conditions.”⁶

For 2019, the Shelter/NFI sector in Cox's Bazar is targeting to improve the shelter conditions of a majority of the camp population, mainly by distributing sustainable treated bamboo, introducing mid-term shelters which meet minimum standards, and providing transitional shelter assistance to households who previously received basic shelter kits.⁷



“We expect support to strengthen our shelters before the next cyclone season.”

In addition, FGD participants suggested the distribution of specific goods (flashlights, raincoats and lifejackets) for preparedness.

Knowledge and experience with preparing for cyclones



“We usually stay in our shelter during that time. We bury our valuables and stay inside.”

In Rakhine state, the population experienced relatively similar weather patterns as in the Cox's Bazar area. As a result, most of the FGD participants are aware of when the cyclone seasons takes place in Bangladesh. Some also note indigenous coping mechanisms for storms and cyclones, such as relocating to hills and finding local cyclone shelters such as temples and schools. In the current camp context, FGD respondents identify Camp-in-Charge (CiC) offices, mosques and madrasas as the safest shelters in their vicinity.

Most people in the FGDs had discussed cyclone preparedness over the past year in their communities through different channels including with CPP volunteers, with BDRCS volunteers, with mahjis and imams, with CiC's and with NGOs such as Oxfam, BRAC and World Vision.



“In Myanmar we used to relocate in high places but here we do not have any experience like that. Usually we do not have any place to move here.”



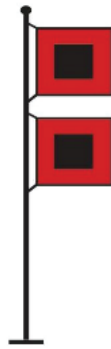
ঘূর্ণিঝড় প্রস্তুতি কর্মসূচি (সিপিপি)
CYCLONE PREPAREDNESS PROGRAMME (CPP)
 A Joint Programme of Government of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society



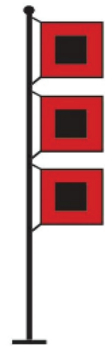
Signals 1- 3
 No flag hoisted.
 Verbal discussion on possibility of depression/ cyclone formation.



Signals 4
 One flag hoisted.
 Raise awareness on formation of cyclone and possibility of impact. Public address through megaphones and loudspeakers.



Signals 5-7
 Two flags hoisted. Public address through megaphones and loudspeakers.



Signals 8-10
 Three flags hoisted. Public address through megaphones and loudspeakers and use of static and hand sirens.

* adjusted specifically for camp settlements

Significant knowledge and information gaps remain

Under the Standing Orders of Disaster (SOD) of Bangladesh, CPP is responsible for disseminating cyclone early warning messages after receiving the signal from the Bangladesh Meteorological Department. A radio communications system helps CPP to provide messages at the local level and if required, the CPP volunteers hoist the flag in accordance with the CPP Early Warning system:⁹



“We understand very little about the flagging system. We share the information on our own with the vulnerable people in our home.”

Unfortunately, most of the FGD participants stated that they do not fully understand the flag system that has been replicated in the camp context.



“We discussed about cyclone preparedness with CPP volunteers and community volunteers. We learnt where we can go during cyclone, when we should move out.”

Some FGD participants also noted that the CPP flag poles in the camps were not visible from their specific sub-block. Instead, most people rely on information shared by their neighbours and friends in their own block.

The most prominent gap in knowledge that camp communities noted is where people are supposed to go during a cyclone or heavy storm. This demonstrates the need for more messaging to camp communities on specific actions to be taken to enhance their own preparedness for cyclones. While there is an understanding to look for strong, concrete structures, much more



“We got message but that was not enough. We did not know where to go during cyclone specifically. Though they advise to take shelter in strong structure but it was not clear.”

actionable information is needed. People ask for information that is adapted to their specific geographical area, for instance for communities located on the bottom of a hill or people who live directly next to the ocean, as in Shamlapur (Camp 23). Finally, there is a lack of awareness of what type of support camp communities can expect from humanitarian agencies before, during and after a disaster.

Information dissemination is most effective in the Rohingya language

It is vital that preparedness and early warning messages are delivered in Rohingya, the local language spoken by the people from Rakhine. A large part of the success of the expansion of the CPP program to the camp context can be attributed to the fact that CPP works with volunteers who come from the displaced community who are well understood by their own community members. Community members cited difficulties understanding information when receiving messages from others (i.e. the Bangladesh Army) in different languages. Some terms related to weather and health are very unique to the Rohingya language, making it challenging for Bengali and Chittagonian speakers to disseminate relevant information to camp communities and to understand their concerns. For example, the Bengali term for the pre-monsoon storms is “Kalboishakhi” and the Chittagonian term is “Kalboishekhi”, while the Rohingya term is “Dhuille Jhatka”.¹⁰



“We got the early warning message via an announcement from our mosque which was helpful.”

Camp communities prefer face-to-face communication in their own sub-block

The high illiteracy rate of the displaced population as well as the limited access to technology makes it difficult to reach all camp communities at scale. Nevertheless, most community members in the FGDs feel that they have received early warning messages on time in 2018, mostly through the radio or at the mosque.



“We do not know the proper authority to inform in case of a lost child issue. We do announce it from the mosque. If that does not work, we go to the CiC office.”

FGD participants expressed a clear preference for door to door communication, especially by trained volunteers from their own community. Door to door information exchanges are also important to ensure that vulnerable members of households (i.e. the elderly, the disabled, minors, those who are ill) receive timely and accurate information.

There is continued reliance on mahjis and the imams for assistance in gathering information before and during an extreme weather event, such as instructions on where to go and investigations for missing children. One group suggested better coordination between the mahji and CPP volunteers as a way to improve preparedness efforts.

Efforts targeting vulnerable community members need to be scaled up

Earlier feedback surveys found a wide degree of variability in the knowledge of displaced people about cyclones in general, with some people lacking even the most basic information. This may indicate that there are still gaps in awareness of cyclones in specific areas, and in particular among specific vulnerable groups in the camps.¹¹ For example, people noted that natural disaster situations will be much more difficult for women especially in female-headed households who are unsure where to go. Earlier surveys also showed concerns from camp communities about how women and children will be kept safe during an emergency.¹² With potential evacuations, it was also noted that there are increased difficulties for certain vulnerable groups, such as elderly people, to



“It was tough for woman-headed households to go to safe places with their children. We also did not know the available facility for women.”

move or go to higher ground. Specific interventions and information for such vulnerable groups was highlighted as a critical need in the FGDs.

Moving forward

It is critical that preparedness efforts for the cyclone season continue, taking into consideration the feedback from the displaced community. In particular, it is essential to scale up community engagement activities to better understand the needs and priorities of displaced communities, to identify existing information gaps and to utilize the most effective methods for raising awareness around preparedness and response. Under the leadership of the Government of Bangladesh and BDRCS, an inter-agency Cyclone Preparedness communication campaign is taking place in April and May 2019. This includes activities such as mock drills, imam orientations, radio listening groups and information sessions for vulnerable groups. CPP is also increasing the number of flag poles to 20 per camp and spreading banners that explain the early warning system, especially for illiterate people.

At the same time, it is important to focus on working towards better conditions for those living in the camps by improving shelter conditions, as well as increasing the number of evacuation shelters.

As one of the strategic areas of the RCRC response is building resilience including to disasters, it is vital that we continue listening to communities and meaningfully involving them so that they can strengthen their own capacity to withstand extreme weather events. This includes working towards longer term solutions in regards to shelter construction that provides dignity as well as safety for displaced people.

END NOTES

- 1** NPM R13 Report (December 2018).
- 2** American Red Cross, BDRCS, IFRC, UNDP (2019) Extreme Weather and Preparedness in the Rohingya Refugee Response – 2018 Cyclone Preparedness Lessons Learned.
- 3** BBC Media Action, Internews and Translators without Borders (March 20, 2019) What Matters? Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin.
- 4** 2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis: January – December 2019.
- 5** BBC Media Action, Internews and Translators without Borders (March 20, 2019) What Matters? Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin.
- 6** Shelter/NFI Sector Bangladesh, Shelter Survey, August 2018.
- 7** 2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis: January – December 2019.
- 8** BBC Media Action, Internews and Translators without Borders (March 20, 2019) What Matters? Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin.
- 9** Cyclone Preparedness Program (CPP) and Translators without Borders (2019) Field Discussion Guide – Cyclone Early Warning Procedures.
- 10** BBC Media Action, Internews and Translators without Borders (February 2018) What Matters? Humanitarian Feedback Bulletin.
- 11** Snapshot: Rohingya Community Feedback on Extreme Weather (April 2018) BRAC & Save the Children.
- 12** Snapshot: Rohingya Community Feedback on Extreme Weather (April 2018) BRAC & Save the Children.