



Disaster & Emergency Response

A Working Group of LCG on Emergency



Annual Report 2013

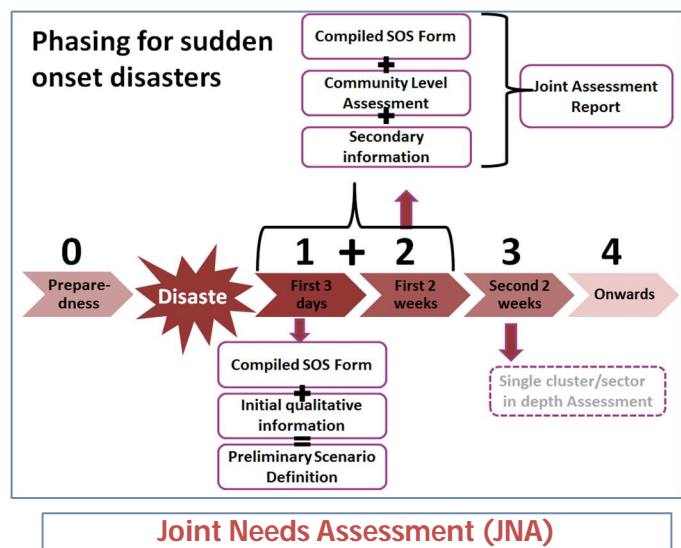
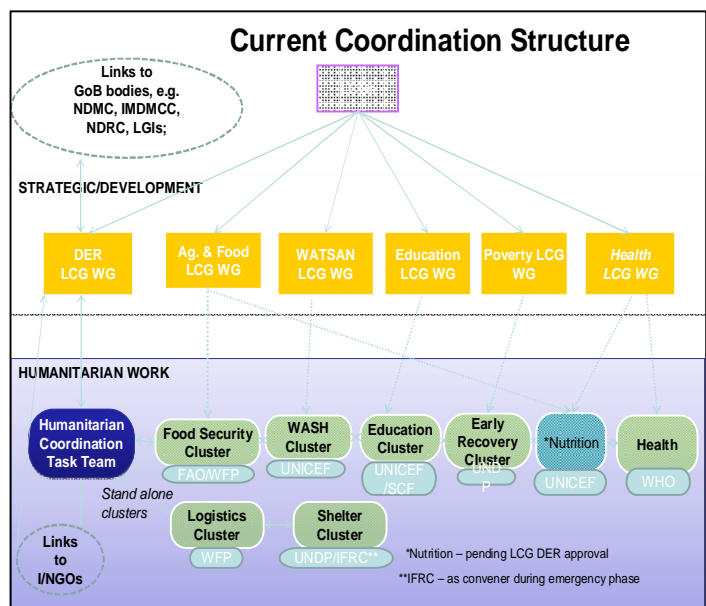
Highlighting the Key Achievement of LCG DER in 2013

INTRODUCTION

The Disaster Emergency Response (DER) Working Group was conceived after the floods in the Southwest in 2000. The DER Working Group emerged as an effective coordination mechanism among the Government, Development Partners, the UN, I/NGOs and civil society organizations, engaged in emergency response management. In 2002, the DER was adopted as one of the working sub-groups of Local Consultative Group. Since its inception, the Local Consultative Group on Disasters and Emergency Response (LCG DER) has provided the platform for the Government, the Development Partners, the UN and I/NGOs for a comprehensive and coordinated policy level dialogue on disasters and emergency relief.

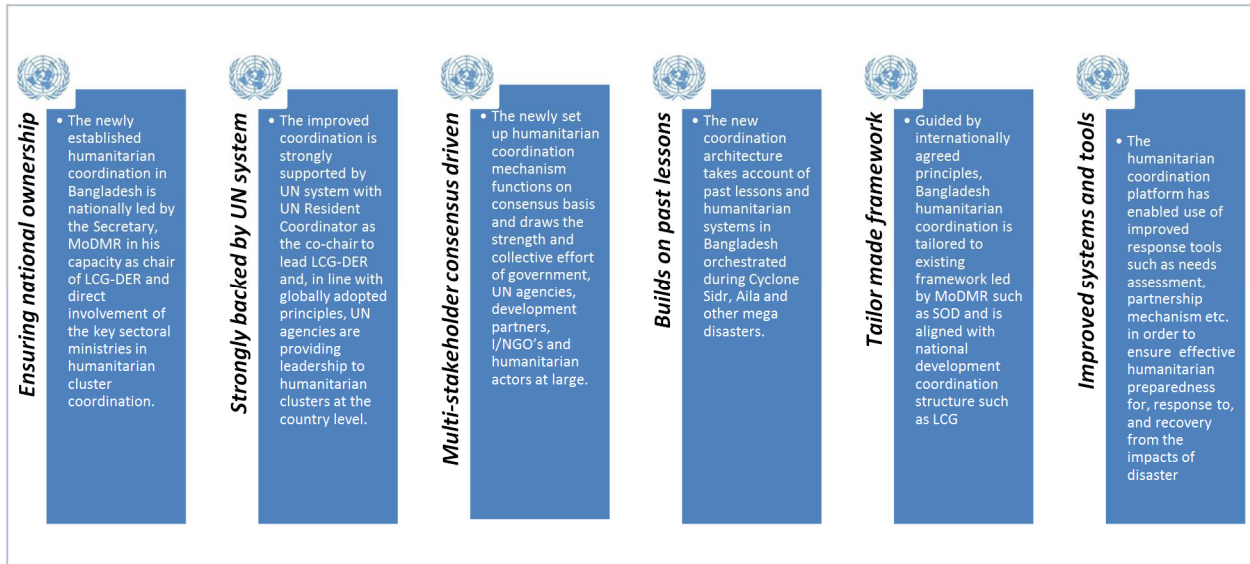
In recent years, there have been noteworthy developments in the disaster coordination, preparedness and response in Bangladesh. These developments have long term implications on the planning and management of emergencies and disasters. Prominent among these is the Disaster Management (DM) Act, endorsed in 2012. The DM Act authorizes the state to assume responsibility for all the stages, and provides the legitimacy for using available resources to minimize damage to lives and livelihoods.

The DER led reform of the Humanitarian Coordination Architecture in 2012 represents a major step forward with the potential to transform the way disaster coordination, preparedness and response is practiced in Bangladesh. Drawing on key functions of the global humanitarian coordination framework and building on the existing disaster management systems and structures, the reformed architecture includes a Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT) and eight humanitarian clusters. Six of these clusters are directly linked with the relevant LCG working groups and the rest are cross cutting clusters. The adoption and use of Joint Needs Assessment (JNA)



methodology is another significant achievement under the reformed architecture which is tailored to fit into the country context and local practices.

The DM Act and the reform in the Coordination Architecture mapped out the legal and institutional arrangements to support effective and efficient preparation and response to disaster, Progress in the coming period would pivot around these developments, providing shape to streamlined coordination at local and national levels. The LCG DER led consultative processes to understand the implications on implementation of these developments.



DISASTER CONTEXT IN 2013

2013 marks a year in which the DM Act 2012 and reformed humanitarian coordination architecture with its tailored cluster system was put into a test and paid off. The disaster management community was exposed number of critical events ranging from small scale localized disasters like the tornado in Brahman Baria to national tragedy- the Rana Plaza collapse. The national capacity for efficient management of cyclone (Storm *Mahasen*) response was reconfirmed with innovations of cell based early warning system in 2013. On the contrary, the sufferings of waterlogged people in the southwest of Bangladesh continued despite some noble effort to address it.

The year 2013 was an eventful year on all counts. Along with the political agitation that pervaded all sectors, a number of emergencies and disasters tested the capacity of the newly formed Department of Disaster Management. On a positive note, the year 2013 also saw major developments in the Early Warning Systems which transformed the way information on disasters is communicated in the country and contributed to improved

coordination efforts. Enhanced institutional capacity and successful partnerships with cell phone companies expanded the early warning system to cover 112 million people in the country. Both, general warnings and specific information related to occupations groups are available through the Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) system. Furthermore, the lead time for floods increased by two days- providing 88 million vulnerable people in the three flood plains- with a total of five days of warning to protect lives and livelihoods from impending floods.

The cold wave in the northern districts, followed by the Rana Plaza collapse and the tropical storm “Mahasen”, tested existing capacities and shaped the national agenda on disaster preparedness and response. Advance preparation, early in the year, was critical to the timely assistance, in the form of blankets and rice, to the communities affected by the cold wave in the northern districts.

The combination of expanded communication system and the newly defined rules of the DM Act, was critical in the response to the tropical storm *Mahasen*. The evacuation of 1.1 million people, within 24 hours, to safe shelters dramatically reduced the loss of life. Pre-positioning of supplies and relief items ensured timely assistance to several thousands of families affected by the storm. Coordination of efforts, especially during the preparatory stage was noted by the LCG DER members. The *Mahasen* experience highlighted the need for further improvements in the coordination of efforts following the storm. The Early Recovery efforts, launched after *Mahasen*, demonstrated the effectiveness of the GO-NGO partnerships in strengthening local disaster management practices. Importantly, these initiatives underscored the need to build sustainability of interventions in the strategies employed for recovery.

The Rana Plaza tragedy highlighted the urgent need to ensure better preparedness for urban disasters, especially earthquakes, and to engage with other stakeholders, especially the Armed Civil Forces Division. The disaster, one of the most challenging faced by Bangladesh in recent years, forced the topic to be high on the list of priorities.

2013 PRIORITY AREAS

The accomplishments in 2012 invigorated the disaster management actors and provided renewed energy for action in 2013. The DM Act and the major reforms at the structural level created the necessary foundation for a systematic and broad based preparation for response to disasters. The 2013 priorities were developed within the overall framework of the LCG DER 2011-2013 action plan and the DM Act 2012. In determining priority areas of action, the lessons learned and challenges emerging from the previous year, and the coverage of the full DM cycle were key considerations. With the necessary legal and institutional structures in place, the focus in 2013 shifted to operationalization. Hence, the establishment of the humanitarian coordination architecture at the local level and the operationalization of the DM Act were considered of prime importance for 2013. The LCG DER considered other areas where urgent attention was needed for inclusion on the

agenda for 2013. High on this list was Bangladesh's susceptibility to earthquakes. Minor jolts are commonly recorded and an event of greater magnitude is expected to cause massive devastation in a densely populated country with inadequate infrastructure, and poorly planned urban centers. Updated plans and capacity to respond to earthquakes needs to be at the forefront of the disaster preparedness efforts. The LCG DER's decision to include planning against urban risks as a priority direction for 2013, reflects the urgency of this need.

In Bangladesh, the emerging phenomenon of slow onset and persistent natural disasters is receiving increasing attention. Because of their insidious onset, complex underlying causes and long term impact on livelihoods and ecology, slow onset disasters need individual thresholds and contextualized response mechanisms and strategies. In 2012, a Taskforce comprising of Government Departments, Development Partners, the UN and I/NGOs, prepared a series of recommendations. The Task Force proposed broad based collaboration with the LCG on Climate Change and Environment (LCG CCE) and the LCG Water Management (LCG WM). The LCG DER placed this recommendation of establishing a multi-dimensional dialogue with the LCG CCE and the LCG WM on the list of priorities for 2013.

In setting the priorities for 2013, the LCG DER placed an emphasis on collaborative efforts with other stakeholders directly engaged in the DER field. The priority actions were presented and circulated among the LCG DER and finalized after a consultative process.

In addition to its mandate of ensuring coordinated response and recovery efforts, the LCG DER identified the following priority areas:

- *Improved Humanitarian Coordination at national and local levels*
- *Continued collaboration and coordination within and beyond the LCG DER group*
- *Earthquake preparedness*
- *Disaster Management Act, priority actions for its urgent implementation*
- *Disaster Risk Reduction – Climate Change Adaptation linkages*
- *Strengthening the National Volunteer Network*

The impetus provided by the accomplishments of the previous year, contributed to a great extent, to the ambitious agenda for 2013. It was also acknowledged that the set agenda could be accomplished through collaborative efforts of different partners. The need to retain an element of flexibility to accommodate emerging needs was understood.

The LCG DER met three times in 2013 to discuss the progress, identify concerns and to provide guidance to the HCTT and the clusters. The last meeting of the LCG DER, scheduled for the end of the year, had to be cancelled due to political unrest.

Continued unrest disrupted normal activities, throughout the year, but especially towards the last part of the year. Normal routine was disturbed for almost one third working days in 2013, causing delays in planned activities and contributing to the dissipation of energy for

action that had been carried forward from the previous year.¹ As a result many of the activities planned for 2013, has been carried forward to the following year.

The following sections reports on the process and the progress made under each of the priority areas.

Improved Humanitarian Coordination at national and local level

The Humanitarian Coordination Architecture articulates the coordination mechanism with clearly defined leadership, roles and accountabilities and linkages between the different teams. The roll out of the Humanitarian Coordination Mechanism at the local level envisaged the following activities:

- Strengthening capacities for implementation of the new architecture
- Assessing progress towards the implementation, and
- Institutionalization of the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) approach

❖ Strengthening capacities for implementation of the new architecture:

There was significant progress in establishing local level coordination structures. In half of the disaster prone districts, focal persons for six of the eight clusters have been identified. The Logistics and Shelter cluster are expected to appoint district focal persons soon. The coordination roles of the focal persons have been defined based upon the guidelines provided by the HCTT.

For further progress on the roll out of the coordination structures to take place, a Standing Order on integrating the revised coordination structures into the government systems, is needed. The Standing Order has to be organized through the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR). The need for this Standing Order has been communicated to MoDMR, and a response is awaited. Following the issuance of the Standing Order, the structures for coordination and efforts to strengthen local level capacities will be intensified. In the coming period, attention will be on the training of the focal persons at the district level- including a simulation exercise to assess individual and collective capabilities to plan and respond, and determine the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms.

❖ Assessing progress on the implementation of the Humanitarian Coordination Structure.

The LCG DER has commissioned a review to determine the progress in implementation of the humanitarian coordination architecture. Under ECHO's guidance, a matrix to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current coordination structure was developed. The responses of the HCTT

¹ UNDSS-88 workings days of unrest in 2013

members, including clusters leads are being compiled, and will be presented to the LCG DER early 2014. The review will assist in determining the factors that promote/inhibit progress, and the determine the institutional responses to address these.

Another exercise to assess disaster preparedness and humanitarian coordination capacity in the country is being led by OCHA. With inputs from the HCTT members, OCHA finalized a questionnaire on the Minimum Preparedness Package (MNP). The MNP is a globally accepted conceptual framework for disaster preparation and coordination. The survey will begin after endorsement from the LCG DER Co chairs, and is expected to be completed within the first quarter of the 2014.

❖ ***Institutionalization of the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) in DDM and policies:***

The Joint Needs Assessment was successfully contextualized during the water logging in Satkhira in 2011. Since its initiation in 2011, the JNA approach has steadily gained interest in the government, the development partners and NGOs. Both DFID and ECHO have confirmed their expectation on continuing the current JNA in the Southwest beyond the current funding time frame.

Significant progress was made in 2013 to expand the capacity on JNA in the country. A JNA task force, with UNDP as the convener, was established. A special initiative to build local capacity was started by CARE Bangladesh under which five district level workshops were held to introduce JNA among the Government and Cluster members. As a result of these efforts, ten organizations are capable of leading JNA in the country. A list of these agencies/organizations is available in the appendix. Local level officials in 20 disaster prone districts are now capable of engaging in the JNA process, and provide the relevant information to decision makers. As the interest and commitment towards JNA grows and local capacity on JNA increases, it is expected that the quality of the data being collected will improve further.

Although JNA relies heavily on the data collected through the government system, the current JNA efforts are not embedded in the policies and strategies of the Department of Disaster Management. The process of institutionalizing the JNA into the government system is yet to begin. An analysis of government laws and policies will assist in understanding how JNA can be integrated into the government procedures. The procedural implications of bringing the JNA methodology into the government's systems need to be better understood, and the institutional space created for the JNA approach.

Enhance Collaboration and Coordination beyond the LCG DER group

The activities under this theme were designed to facilitate the availability of information for decision making to promote collaboration, remove barriers to response and recovery operations, and identify and create strong functional relationships with prominent stakeholders outside the LCG DER group.

▪ ***Establishing the 4W database:***

Along with the Government, the Development Partners, the UN and the private sector, an estimated 2000 NGOs are operational in Bangladesh. Effective coordination among the different entities is possible when the information on their roles and scope of work is readily available and accessible to decision makers. Identifying the different actors, their location and expertise was a priority area for LCG DER. In 2013, an Information Working Group (IWG) of 27 members, was formed to consult on the design of a 4 W data base that would provide information on location, areas of expertise, coverage and the capacity to respond.

The 4 W database structure has been prepared and is available within the Disaster Management Information Center of the Department of Disaster Management. This Web-based application will store information on DRR initiatives across the country. The database will have online reporting and query functions to allow analysis. The IWG is managing the data collection from the different organizations under the HCTT Clusters.

The database will be populated in the coming months. Once established and functioning, the mechanism to regularly update the database will be needed. Existing systems within the government would need to be explored to ensure up to date information is available on a regular basis.

- ***Explore areas of further cooperation and improved coordination with military and private sector:***

Bangladesh's location on three major fault lines, makes it extremely vulnerable to earthquakes. This vulnerability was further exposed during the collapse of the Rana Plaza. To prepare for an unpredictable event of a greater magnitude, the LCG DER foresaw greater collaboration with the Military and the private sector. The Director General Fire Services and Civil Defense (FSCD) was invited to present key lessons from the response to the Rana Plaza collapse to the LCG DER. In one of the first steps to promote collaboration, the humanitarian cluster participated in the four day exercise on Disaster Response Exercise and Exchange (DREE) carried out by the Bangladesh Armed Forces Division (AFD) in collaboration with the US Army Pacific. The goal of DREE was to operationalize a Multi-National Coordination Centre Plan that integrates military and civil institutions. The findings and recommendations emerging from the DREE 4 exercise have been presented to the Ministry of Disaster Management. The Armed Forced Division DM focal person will be invited to present the findings at the next LCG DER meeting.

The experience emerging from 2013 reiterates the need for joint planning towards DREE. DFID in particular, has expressed interest in the civil-military collaboration for better preparedness. The LCG DER is expected to form a task force to develop the ToR for the implementation of the DREE recommendations. The LCG DER has also requested the Earthquake Preparedness and Awareness Committee to meet regularly to ensure efforts are up to date.

- ***Facilitate the approval process for disaster response and recovery activities (FD6) and prospects of fast track procedures:***

The approval from the NGO Bureau for projects on disaster response and recovery is a critical legal requirement for programmes. Cognizant of the delays posed by the time taken for approval of

recovery and rehabilitation projects, the LCG DER initiated a dialogue with the NGO Bureau to speed up the approval process. Under the guidance of the LCG DER, a committee undertook several dialogues with the NGO Bureau. A fast track mechanism which tracks the time taken for the review and approval of projects on recovery and rehabilitation has been proposed. Further follow ups are needed to ensure timely approval of programmes to promote recovery and rehabilitation.

Disaster Management Act- Priority Actions for its urgent implementation

The Disaster Management Act, passed in 2012, was a significant step in establishing the state's leadership role in emergency and disaster preparedness in Bangladesh. The implementation of the Act requires specific instruments for implementation. In 2013 the following activities contributed towards the implementation of the Act:

- ***Rules accompanying the DM Act:***

As part of this process, nine rules were drafted and submitted to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. These rules specify the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities considered vital to the implementation of the DM Act. The Standing Order on Disasters (SoD) has been translated into Bangla. The rules for the Disaster Management Committees (NDMC,IMDMC, NDRCG) have been incorporated in the DM Act. CDMP II and DDM prepared an abridged version of the SoD, on the roles and responsibilities of the Disaster Management Committees (DMC). To promote awareness on the DM Act and associated rules, consultation workshops were held in six divisional towns. .

The DM Act is a far reaching legal instrument that envisages the inclusion of 30 key Ministries at the time of a disaster. The drafting of the specific of responsibilities of these ministries at the time of a disaster has begun. When complete, these roles will be incorporated into the DM Act.

- ***Reorganization of the DDM:***

Efforts focused on aligning the structure of the Department of Disaster Management (DDM) with its mandate. The DDM organizational structure was revised to ensure availability of appropriate staff for the implementation of expected functions. The revised organogram has been submitted to the MoDMR for approval. In a notable development, the structure of National DM Training & Research Institute was drafted, and the Government confirmed allocation of resources and the space for the institute within DDM.

- ***Ensuring early recovery and enhancing resilience:***

A successful disaster management initiative is expected to intervene on all points on the resilience – disaster-recovery continuum. The DM Act visualizes clear linkages with the existing programmes on building capacity to cope with disasters and ongoing relief programmes. Discussions on integrating disaster management within the main programmes have started. A framework for engagement will be drawn up in the coming period.

- **Enhancing Capacity on Disaster Management:**

The LCG DER oversaw the development of a new curriculum on DM, incorporating the DM Act and its linkages. Over 320 DDM officials participated in the orientation to their new roles and responsibilities. A nationwide campaign was organized on the DM Act, the Standing Order and the NPDM.

- **Draw experience, lessons and technical inputs from Local Disaster Risk Reduction Fund (LDRRF) mechanism in setting up the DM fund (envisaged in DM Act):**

The DM has a provision of establishing a Disaster Management Fund for Emergency Response at the local level. This fund is expected to contribute towards enhancing resilience towards disasters at the community level. The MoDMR has accepted the proposal of establishing local level funds. A committee had been formed to develop the guidelines, drawing upon the experience from CDMP II.



Rozina Begum, a 25 year old woman lives in Nishanbaria village of Barguna Sadar. Rozina was in advanced stages of pregnancy when signal # 7 on the approaching storm “Mahasen” was hoisted. As the family got ready to move to the cyclone shelter, Rozina went into labour. Her family brought her to the cyclone shelter on a rickshaw van. A separate delivery room was created for Rozina. With the help of a trained birth attendant, Rozina gave birth to a healthy baby. The child was named “Mahasen”, by the UDMC Chairman, who visited the shelter late that night. The brick paved cyclone shelter approach road made it possible for the rickshaw to bring Rozina to the center. Improving access to cyclone shelters is an important part of local risk reduction strategies. These local solutions have multiple benefits of providing livelihoods, improving communication and providing shelter at the time of disasters.

Disaster Risk Reduction – Climate Change Adaptation linkages

Bangladesh’s susceptibility to the effects of climate change is becoming increasingly visible. Frequent flooding, changing weather patterns and continued water logging are some of the more common manifestations of climate change- hence the inclusion of Disaster Risk Reduction –Climate Change Adaptation (DRR CCA) linkages as a priority action for 2013. As one of the first steps to lead the process of consultations, a Disaster Risk Reduction Task Team (DRRTT) was formed. The DRRTT team is expected to support knowledge management and strengthen local level coordination and awareness on DRR. Importantly, the DRR team, is the lead on facilitating linkages with the CCA stakeholders.

In a step forward, a DRR-CCA workshop was organized involving practitioners and senior officials of various ministries including MDMR and MoEF. The theme of convergence of efforts between DRR and CCA at various levels has received political commitment from the senior most leaders in the field. Due to transition in senior positions, the discussions did

not progress as expected. Dialogue is expected to resume as soon as the new leadership is in place.

Strengthen the National Volunteer Network



The rescue operations that followed the collapse of the Rana Plaza were the most challenging ever conducted in Bangladesh. A team of fire fighters, the Armed Forces Civil Defense, the police, RAB and health professionals worked tirelessly over a 20 day period to identify and rescue survivors from the debris of the eight storied building. Overwhelming support from volunteers was critical in providing timely assistance to the rescue teams, and boosting their morale amidst the tragedy. A total of 920 volunteers worked eight hour shifts around the clock, to assist the various teams involved in the operations. Majority of the volunteers were students and a significant number of these were women. Half the volunteers were engaged for ten or more days of the operations, administering first aid, assisting with search and rescue, and providing food and water. The Rana Plaza tragedy exemplified the need for better coordination of volunteers and reiterated the need for the expansion of the trained volunteer network to assist at the time of a disaster.

The role of trained volunteers during a disaster has become prominent in communicating early warnings and in relief operations. The network of trained volunteers enhances internal capacity to plan and respond to disasters. The critical role played by the volunteers in the collapse of Rana Plaza, highlighted the need for expansion of this network in rural and urban areas. In 2013, there was an exponential growth in the numbers of volunteers, mainly due to the agreement with Bangladesh Scouts, which led to an additional one million volunteers on call and ready to assist in times of emergency. A number of organizations engage volunteers to assist in time of disaster. Each organization maintains its own data set.

An integrated Volunteer Database that will bring the two main data sets from CDPM and NARRI under one central database to be housed under the Department of Disaster Management is being planned. In addition, the Red Crescent society also maintains a database of volunteers in the cyclone prone areas. The integrated volunteer database will have an urban section and another on volunteers in the cyclone prone districts.

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The year 2013 was an eventful year dotted with significant achievements in the fields of Early Warning Systems, a comprehensive response to the tropical storm “Mahasen”, and successful early recovery initiatives. The Rana Plaza tragedy was a sobering experience as it magnified the ever looming risk of earthquakes, and the need for vast improvements in the capacity to respond to urban disasters. The major structural and legal changes that took place in the preceding year, provided new directions, and the ambitious agenda set at the start of 2013 was a reflection of the momentum provided by these developments. Continued political unrest led to disruption of normal routine and breakdown in communication over protracted periods, especially towards the end of 2013. In spite of these disruptions, progress was made on almost all the priority areas. Local level implementation, combined with capacity building and institutional reform within the DDM continued. Ensuring institutional arrangements and establishment of inter-sectoral linkages requires time, and it is expected these foundational activities will continue into 2014.

The following are some of the activities that need immediate attention in the coming period:

- Standing Order on integrating the humanitarian architecture in the local level: This is a critical activity on which the roll out of the coordination mechanism at the local level, capacity building is predicated. The Standing Order will provide the framework for action and provide the impetus for the roll out of the coordination mechanism at the local level.
- Inter Cluster Coordination and leadership: As compared to the previous years, there have been major improvements in inter cluster coordination. The role of the HCTT during Mahasen was noted as being particularly effective in ensuring a coordinated process was followed. Further efforts are needed to facilitate timely flow of information between clusters, especially during times of preparation for emergencies. The HCTT role can be enhanced by a proactive sharing of information on cluster related work, especially through the use of the HCTT web platform. Involvement of the government in different clusters is considered essential to ensure sustainability of efforts.
- Institutionalization of JNA: The JNA carried out during Mahasen was ranked as first in terms of information provided and the time taken to complete, and the use of union help lines to collect further information was noteworthy (ACAPS). The process of institutionalization of JNA into the government system needs to begin soon to ensure continued commitment and sustainability.
- Follow up of JNAs with action: Contrary to the expectations, the JNA in Satkhira did not result in increased funding commitment, from the Government or the Development Partners. The absence of commitment to action risks the credibility of JNAs. Further

analysis to understand the barriers to funding, and exploration of other global funds is needed on a priority basis. Follow up of the JNAs with commitment to action will demonstrate the value of investing in the JNA exercises at the local and national levels.

- The response and recovery experiences in 2013 underscored the need for a mechanism to account for the support provided by the private sector and individuals. This accounting mechanism will assist in better targeting and resource allocation at the local level.
- Recovery operations dealing with cash are hindered by the bank system at the grass roots level. The modernization of the banking system and payments through smart cards might provide an answer. These developments will have to be observed for their effectiveness in reaching the people at the right time.
- Developing linkages with CCA and DRR: Long term and sustainable approaches to deal with slow onset disasters, need sustained engagement with the relevant ministries. Identifying the appropriate forum and mechanisms will take time and should be high on the list of actions in the coming year.
- Strengthening Earthquake preparedness: The engagement with the Armed Forces and other relevant ministries should be of prime importance in the coming period. The LCG DER should identify a permanent mechanism for involvement in activities related to earthquake preparedness.

Reference

LCG DER Action Plan 2011-2013

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LCG DER Minutes of Meeting, September 2013.

Consultations:

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