Swiss Red Cross

Applying the LRRD approach at country programme level, lessons learned from Bangladesh

Swiss NGO DRR Platform Learning Event LRRD, 4 March 2019

1. Country context and country programme, achievements and challenges

Bangladesh in a nutshell:

- Large part of the country is flat, a delta (Ganges and Brahmaputra and Meghna Rivers)
- Highly exposed to the impacts of a multitude of disaster risks and climate change
- One of the highest population density in the world: inhabitants 165 Mio (2017), area of 147'000km^2, 1'100 inhabitants/km^2 (Switzerland: 190)
- Fragile context: poor governance, existence of Islamic groups

SRC country programme:

- In 2018, 10 projects implemented in parallel, 6 of them are complex long-term projects, all 10 in cooperation with Government.
- Annual turnover of 4.8 million CHF in 2018.

Gaibandha Union: Combining Disaster Risk Management & Emergency response with stronger National Society partnership, *July 2018 – June 2021*
Partner: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

District Rajshahi: Public Health Improvement Initiative Rajshahi-PHIIR II, *January 2016 – June 2019*
Partner: DASCOH

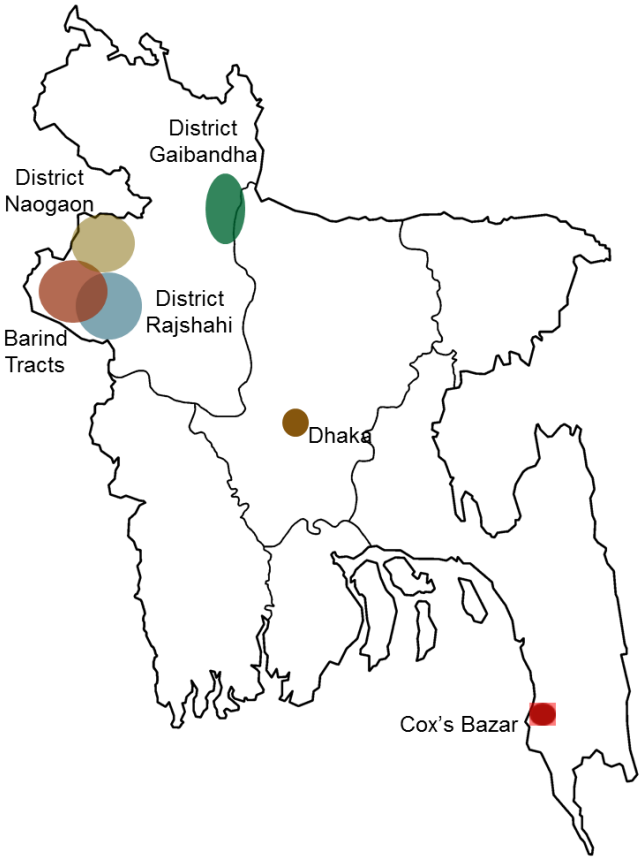
Barind Tracts: Institutionalisation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in the Barind Area of Bangladesh (Phase II) *August 2018- July 2022*
Partner: WARPO, DASCOH

District Naogaon: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Vulnerable Barind Tract Communities in Naogaon
January 2016 – June 2019
Partner: DASCOH

Dhaka City, Gazipur Slum, Urban Empowerment Project *November 2016-March 2019*
Partner: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

Cox's Bazar: Primary Health Care Centers with Extended Services and Host Community Assistance in Cox's Bazar
January 2018-March 2019
Partner: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

Various Locations: Emergency response operations for flood, fire and cyclone victims
4 projects in 2018 in rural and urban areas



Achievements:

- Strengthened governance approach across all projects, following the auxiliary role of Red Cross Movement and the necessity to engage at all levels of governance to materialise good governance that is transparent and accountable, particularly in the domains of public services (health and WASH), disaster management, and humanitarian operations.

- In the camp setting at Cox's Bazar: the SRC along with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society built the first semi-permanent health facility where the Red Cross Movement, the Government and the UN organisations collaborate in a unique partnership model to deliver primary health care and protection services. This is in full compliance with agreed standards defined by the Government, Red Cross Movement and the UN agencies.

Challenges:

- Complexity of projects requires high number of human resources for supporting the project partners who are actually implementing the projects: SRC country office with 19 local employees and 2 expatriates.

2. Aspects, elements of LRRD/Nexus applied

From emergency relief to longer-term programs

- Beneficiary selection in emergency relief: seek collaboration with other NGOs, but above all with the Government. Be sure you understand the Government system. They have beneficiary lists that serve as basis for social schemes, but they are usually not updated. By helping to update those beneficiary lists, it is quite likely that you restore correct targeting of social schemes and on demand side make people aware, that they are entitled to receive other services from the Government. The annual updating of the poverty profile of all villages continued to inform the adaptation of formal UP (i.e. Union Parishad, communal level) beneficiary databases. This has a very significant impact in targeting correctly the development and welfare programmes run by UPs. Very often, the lack of credible data is an equal obstacle for reaching the people in need, as are political considerations that guide UP transactions.
- Area of tension between the wish to have simple, clear projects, based on in-house expertise and the wish to have a resilience orientation, which is a multi-facetted problem that should ideally be tackled from various angles.
  - One possible solution: seek partnerships with other specialized NGOs. This will leverage competencies and diversify the risk to several organizations.
  - Another solution: negotiate with the Government, demand contribution of Government agencies and work with them from the very beginning.
  - Example: in the Rohingya Crisis Response, the SRC conducted emergency relief as part of the Red Cross multilateral system: financial contribution and deployment of specialists for IFRC-led operations, mainly surgeons and logisticians. The early recovery however shifted to a collaboration mode with the Government through the establishment of three Primary Health Clinics run by Government staff.
- One of the biggest challenge is the funding gap: once the immediate emergency relief is over and public attention is gone, continuous fund flow is at risk, although the crisis might be protracted. SRC does have own funding and a relatively flexible budgeting and financing system but particularly in protracted crises strongly feels limitations.

Development cooperation

- The community must be in the driving seat for the definition of its needs to deal with risks from natural hazards, climate change and (health) emergencies: E.g. in the Urban Empowerment project, the project team was initially open about the issues to tackle, oriented on accessing services and improving the lives of the communities. To their surprise, the most pressing need – apart from access to water and latrines – for the communities were to clean and re-functionalise the drainage channels. An important DRR

component was in that sense integrated into the project, and communities speared no efforts to remove the garbage in order to prevent the area from being flooded in the rainy season.

- The Char area in the district of Gaibandha has its own set of challenges with regard to remoteness. Initially, health was not part of the project design, only DRR and WASH. Subsequently, in community focus group discussions, people clearly expressed their need to have closer health care facilities that they can also reach during extreme weather events (high and low river water). For the project team and the communities, it turned out to be crucial to link to the PHIIR project. The already established relationship with the Ministry of Health facilitated the establishment of three community clinics in the project area. For the SRC, this was a good example to use synergies across projects within its programme.
- A dedicated budget for disaster preparedness, prevention and response at the level of Local Government Institutions is a sound indicator of DRR mainstreaming. Through policy dialogue and community empowerment, local authorities invested from their own (meagre) budgets in road construction/repair, tree plantation (prevention) and emergency response funds. The budgets of Local Government Institutions dedicated to DRR measures increased significantly.
- The PHIIR project integrates DRR mainstreaming above all with regard to being able to maintain the functionality of the community clinics during hazardous events (e.g. floods), important elements are ensuring physical access to the clinics during emergencies and the availability of health staff with sufficient expertise to treat typical health issues during these emergencies.
- The IWRM project integrates LRRD elements in form of drought prevention through water governance, promotion of agricultural measures, climate adapted crops (consuming less water) and the 4Rs.

Institutional level

- Field level: Delegation preparedness: in general, every SRC country coordinator has in his job description the task to be able to respond to disasters in his or her function and according to the specific country context. In Bangladesh, the high number of delegation staff allows for additional resources for specific tasks in emergencies. E.g. capacity building of specific employees to be able to function in Emergency Response Teams for the Red Cross Movement, even at regional level. Adding new tasks also means a job enrichment for the employees. E.g. logistician, who earlier only had an office job, is now regularly in the field in emergency response operations, the same goes for the finance assistant, also to prevent fraud and corruption.
- Headquarter level: Close cooperation and regular informal exchange between the development and humanitarian divisions allows for a very easy and open cooperation, based on mutual trust and openness. The institutional policy to have only one person responsible per country provides the basis for clear management and communication lines. E.g., the respective programme coordinator is in charge for emergency operations in SRC focus countries and the specialists from the disaster management division have an advisory and supporting role. The same disaster management specialists are in charge of emergencies in other countries. Furthermore, the SRC can make use of dedicated SDC emergency funds that do not require a long administrative procedure. This proves to be very valuable for such operations.

3. Three key messages as conclusions

Development programming

- ***DRR pays off***: if DRR is consistently mainstreamed in long-term projects, communities and authorities are better protected against and prepared for risks resulting from natural hazard and climate change. The impact of hazardous events is reduced due to mitigation measures, and response can be channelled through the structures that had been strengthened before through disaster preparedness. Emergency committees at community level and the responsible emergency bodies at the local government can put into practice their increased capacities and work with their improved instruments, substitutive action by the project is reduced which smoothens the transition to normality.

Emergency relief

- ***Work with existing structures also in disaster response***: collaborate as much as possible with the communities AND the Government, and this from the very beginning of disaster response, including needs assessment, beneficiary selection, relief distribution, monitoring etc. In trying to maintain a rather facilitating role and abstaining from (too much) service provision, the project will support authorities and communities in keeping / regaining their agency. This is context specific and depends to a certain extend also on collaboration arrangements in previous phases.

Institutional

- ***Maintain clear management and communication lines***: there should be only person in charge for all operations of the organisation, in country and at headquarters. Even though the SRC has geographic divisions for longer-term and a disaster management division for emergency operations, the responsibility for all projects in SRC programme countries, remains with the in-country coordinator and the programme coordinator at headquarters. Additional staff sent for emergency operations report to the country coordinator and not directly to the disaster management division. Non-adherence to this set up can lead to confusion, duplication of efforts and frictions among staff members, hence to reduced efficiency and effectiveness.