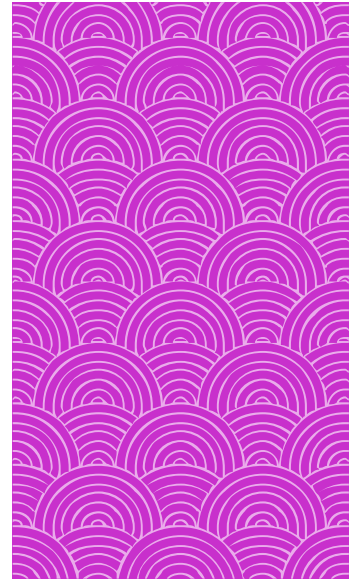


# Role of NGOs in Disaster Management in Bangladesh

## **SATREPS**

Research Project on  
Disaster Prevention/Mitigation Measures  
against Floods and Storm Surges  
in Bangladesh



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## **About this module**

This module is developed using the findings of our research work on **ROLE OF NGOs IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH** under Component 5 of SATREPS's "Research on Disaster Prevention/Mitigation Measures against Floods and Storm Surges in Bangladesh". Central focuses of this training module are revisiting learning and experience of NGOs' disaster management in Bangladesh. It attempts to share best practices of NGOs in disaster management. This module also propels knowledge sharing on strategic approaches of NGOs in changed situation that generated by the influences of government and donors' policy.

## List of abbreviations

<b>BRAC</b>	Building Resources Across Communities (Bangladeshi NGO), formerly Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
<b>CFD</b>	Credit and Development Forum (National Association of Bangladesh Microfinance)
<b>DM</b>	Disaster Management
<b>DMA</b>	Disaster Management Act
<b>DMC</b>	Disaster Management Committees
<b>FAP</b>	Flood Action Plan (1990)
<b>FDRB</b>	Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Bill 2016
<b>GK</b>	Gone Shasthya Kendro (Bangladeshi NGO)
<b>GoB</b>	Government of Bangladesh
<b>HFA</b>	Hyogo Framework of Action
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-governmental Organization
<b>MFI</b>	Microfinance Institution
<b>MoDMR</b>	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>NGOAB</b>	NGO Affairs Bureau (Government of Bangladesh)
<b>PKSF</b>	Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (Government of Bangladesh)
<b>RDRS</b>	Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (Bangladeshi NGO)
<b>SoD</b>	Standing Orders on Disaster

# Table of contents

## List of Abbreviations

### Chapter 1 Background of NGO approaches to disasters in Bangladesh

- 1.1 Values regarded by NGOs
- 1.2. First NGO activities in DM: emergency and relief work
- 1.3 Late 1980s and 1990s: from relief to rehabilitation, disaster preparedness and development
- 1.4. From mid-1990s onwards: the shift towards Microfinance
- 1.5. Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs

### Chapter 2 Constraints, Gaps and Challenges

- 2.1. Regulatory framework of operations
- 2.2. Coordination Failure
  - 2.1.1. Government-NGO coordination failure
  - 2.1.2 Inter- and Intra NGO failure
- 2.3. Limitations and challenges of the microfinance-focused model

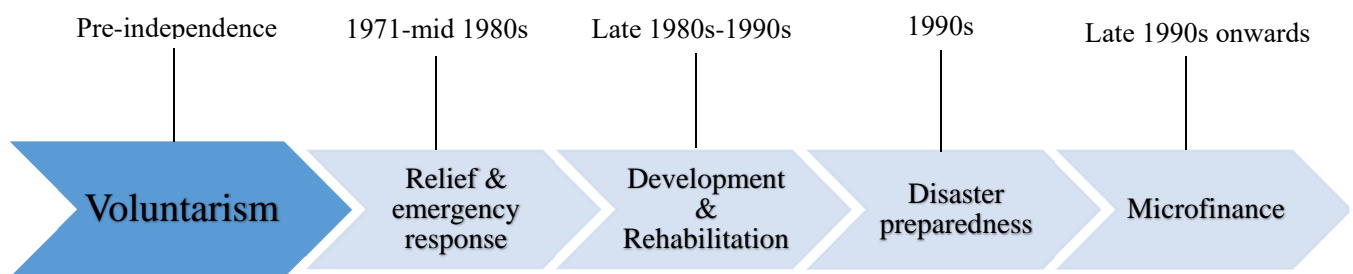
### Chapter 3 Concluding Remarks

## References

# Chapter 1

## Background of NGO approaches to disasters in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a long history of voluntarism and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which will be briefly introduced in this section. The analysis that follows pays special attention to the evolution of values and approaches of NGOs involved in disaster management (DM) activities from the independence period to current day, and sets the stage for the presentation of current challenges and constraints, which is undertaken in Chapter 2. The figure below provides a general overview of this evolution of NGO approaches to DM in Bangladesh.



**Figure 1:** Evolution of DM approaches by NGOs in Bangladesh (made by the authors)

### 1.1 Values regarded by NGOs

Bangladesh has a long history of philanthropy and voluntarism which predates NGOs and is mostly related to religious beliefs as well as social and cultural values. Contemporary NGO practices, however, brought new ideas in terms of professionalism as well as formal specialization and management structures, thus leaving a lasting footprint on the way voluntary and social works are conducted in the country (Huda,

1990 cited in Haider, 2011).

Historically, NGOs have records of voluntarism in response to any disaster in Bangladesh, with the commitment of serving humanity acting as a core value. Since this perspective was shared by both local and foreign NGOs, a close relationship between the two developed and enabled NGOs to raise funds for emergency work in response to floods, cyclones, tornados, flash floods, riverbank erosions, droughts, and manmade disasters (e.g., slum evacuation, fire-victimized slums, communities victimized by violence, etc.) Protecting the interests, rights and existence of disadvantaged, poor and vulnerable people was their main philosophy and their programs and interventions were shaped accordingly.

## **1.2. First NGO activities in DM: emergency and relief work**

NGOs had already emerged during the first years of Bangladesh's independence (December 1971). Humanitarian agencies and media coverage were focused on the apparently overwhelming needs of a mainly rural population living on the edge of subsistence in a 'disaster prone' environment, while the national infrastructure was still being reconstructed from the destruction of the 1971 liberation war (Haider, 2011). For example, Gone Shasthya Kendro (GK) had its roots in a mobile medical unit that provided support to the freedom fighters in 1971. Similarly, the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) started its activities by providing post-war rehabilitation services and supporting infrastructure development in the north-west region; while the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has its origins in the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance to fishing communities in the north-east who were displaced by atrocities during the war of liberation in 1971 (Zohir, 2014). NGOs in Bangladesh got a radical transformation and turned into agents of development in the post-independence era. Since the 1970s, NGOs have become a part of the institutional framework of poverty alleviation in Bangladesh (Haider, 2011).

Despite working in an extended emergency environment, the NGOs involved in relief and rehabilitation soon saw their mission in terms of development. After only one year working with returning refugees in Sulla, Sylhet, BRAC commenced a “program of integrated community development” seeking to develop “agriculture and horticulture, fisheries, adult education, health and family planning, vocational and other training programs” (Chen, 1986). RDRS also describes itself as shifting “from relief-and-rehabilitation to Sectoral Development Programme” (RDRS, 2006). Integrated

Rural Development became the 'dominant methodology' for community development (Hailey, 1999), so it was natural that the NGO sector would adopt this approach, especially in the context of Bangladesh's multi-sectoral needs (Davis, 2006).

Concerning disaster management, NGOs were mainly engaged in emergency-response and relief work during the 1970s and early 1980s. They operated relief agencies which helped the victims of floods, cyclones, tornados and riverbank erosion by providing them with dry food, clothes, medicine, water purification tablets, and temporary shelters. For example, in response to the devastating cyclone of November 1970, NGOs like CARE, CARITAS, and the Christian Organization for Relief and Rehabilitation (CORR) became heavily involved in sheltering vulnerable displaced people (McInley, 1979 cited in Haider, 2011). During these two decades, foreign donations were available for NGOs to operate emergency work and a variety of international donor NGOs (INGOs) such as—OXFAM, Christian Aid, ActionAid, NOVIB, ICCO, EZE, Bread for the World, CONCERN, and OXFAM Quebec—helped raised funds for Bangladeshi NGOs in response to their requests to operate emergency work for the victims of natural disasters.

### **1.3. Late 1980s and 1990s: from relief to rehabilitation, disaster preparedness and development**

NGOs' accumulated experience with emergency work and the ensuing lessons learned brought a shift of DM approach from strict relief activities towards a "relief and rehabilitation" approach. The change into a more expanded reach to cover rehabilitation efforts was catalyzed by the emergency works for the massive floods of 1987 and 1988 and the aftermath of a devastating cyclone (Super Cyclonic Storm BoB 1) in 1991. For the former, NGO assistance went on to include farm and housing rehabilitation as well as support for income generation activities for flood victims. For the latter onwards, the programs expanded going beyond emergency relief operations and encompassing short-, medium- and long-term rehabilitation programs. Examples of interventions developed in this period included dewatering polluted pond water, cleaning household damages, water and sanitation, housing, agriculture rehabilitation, school reconstruction (following a new approach that construction of school building cum cyclone shelter), and the provision of books and other necessary materials for schoolchildren. NGOs continued this approach up to the 1998 flood.

NGOs also demonstrated remarkable initiative and mobilizing power by organizing



with academics and concerned civil society groups against the Flood Action Plan (FAP) of 1990: a list of measures drafted by donor communities and adopted by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) in response to the massive casualties and alarming damage caused by the 1987 and 1988 floods. The FAP envisioned extensive embankments across major rivers throughout the country and was heavily criticized for its potential environmental and social impact as well as an overreliance on structural approaches to DM over people-oriented methods and interventions (Custers, 1993). NGOs cooperation with academics and the media was widely regarded for having raised awareness of the limitations and risks of the FAP approach, thus helping to shape public opinion and influencing succeeding water policies (Mallick et al., 2005).

Over the period, mainly in 1990s, larger NGOs and some local NGOs initiated “disaster preparedness programs” with the support of their international donors and INGOs. These programs contained different types of activities such as awareness training, raising homesteads in char areas, raising tube well platforms, cyclone early warning systems, savings for emergency time, flood shelters, tree plantations, and so on. Throughout these efforts, NGOs also expanded principles of community-based “integrated rural development” to DM and introduced innovative approaches such as “community based disaster management,” “savings for emergency time,” “evacuation during emergency,” “multipurpose cyclone shelters,” “flood shelter in river chars”, etc. NGOs’ ‘disaster preparedness programs’ would, however, disappear silently around the year 2000.

Funding flow from foreign donors proved to be adequate during this period. As the number of NGOs increased rapidly, the amount of international aid funds coming to NGOs “ballooned from roughly USD 150 million in 1990 to nearly USD 450 million in 1995, the peak year of the decade” to 2000 (Stiles, 2002 cited in Davis, 2006). In the funding processes, the Northern NGOs institutionalized sustainability objectives and requirements for all their partnerships, which focused on the financial sustainability of NGOs rather than creating sustainable livelihoods for the poor (Fernando and Devine, 2003 cited in Davis, 2006 ). This is one of the reasons why micro-credit operations have come to play a key role in NGO strategy from the late 1990s onwards (see below).

#### **1.4. From mid-1990s onwards: the shift towards Microfinance**

Starting in the mid-1990s, most of the NGOs became engaged in microcredit programs, which are rooted in a different “philosophy” and view on “development

models”. The central motivation for NGOs to become Microfinance Institutions (MFI) was to survive a potential funding crisis. NGOs surmised from the policy debate that foreign donations would not remain available for longer periods and, therefore, for the sake of their own survival saw emerging microcredit programs as the only viable alternative. As noted in the previous section, “if NGOs wished to continue to be attractive to donors at a large scale of activity, then they had to show that they were sustainable as institutions in the longer term, securing cost recovery through micro-credit lending and other financial services” (Wood and Sharif, 1997 cited in Huq, 2001).

Many NGOs, especially larger ones, were coopted with this strategic motivation. For instance, PROSHIKA, a large NGO historically committed to human development, human rights, education, awareness raising, environmental development, water and sanitation programs, adopted the narrower function of micro-credit, and eventually became a microfinance institution (Huq, 2001). Like PROSHIKA, almost all the leading national and local NGOs transitioned into microfinance institutions during this period and established their control over people’s savings.

Data from the Credit and Development Forum (CDF), the national association of Bangladesh Microfinance, shows that as of 2015, 506 MFIs mobilized BDT 270,689.68 million from their members/clients/customers; these 506 MFIs received BDT 606,543.24 million in loan funds from different sources; and disbursed loans to their clients amounting to BDT 827,768.40 million (CDF webpage)

### **1.5. Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs**

The international standard for DM was established in 2005 with the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) by the 165 members of the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. Among its provisions, it called for “the full commitment and involvement of all actors concerned including governments, regional, and international organizations, civil society including volunteers, the private sector, and the scientific community” (UNISDR, 2005:3). This approach was further emphasized (and updated) with the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, which placed DM at the center of the international development agenda by calling for coordination and integration of the DM agenda with the efforts towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It also called for consistent multi-stakeholder communication and

coordination for comprehensive assessment of disaster risk, consistent preparedness and timely disaster response, rehabilitation and reconstruction (UNISDR, 2015).

Despite problems relating to coordination between government and NGOs, the latter are already a well-established, if not leading, actor in DM in Bangladesh. The same, however, cannot be said of the private sector, whose involvement in DM and disaster reduction efforts remains extremely limited (Ferdous, 2006 cited in Izumi & Shaw, 2014). The occurrence of natural and man-made disasters—such as the Rana Plaza incident where the collapse of a building took the lives of over 1,100 textile factory workers—emphasized private sector limitations in DM through the evident financial, reputational, and, most importantly, human losses. These events also made the private sector more susceptible to the influence of advocacy networks, of which NGOs are a key player (Izumi & Shaw, 2014).

While still incipient, Izumi and Shaw (2014) analyzed potential cooperation arrangements under which NGOs and other actors can strengthen preparedness and response capabilities of the private sector while also actively integrating them in the DM process. Such innovative approaches include a pilot project in which Concerns International shares installation costs of polymer tanks in coastal regions as means to provide households with potential income from vegetable harvesting and for storage of safe water and seeds. Installation costs were repaid within three years, thus indicating a potential business model for tanks and other structures. Other relevant examples include the collaboration and educational initiatives targeting employees and subcontractors, such as the case of a garment factory that engaged a local NGO for employee training on disaster preparedness. According to the authors, these initiatives increase the potential to link disaster preparedness and disaster response efforts by the private sector with Corporate Social Responsibility principles, thus consisting a potential entry point for further involvement in the DM process. While it is still early to assess the fruits of collaboration between NGOs and the private sector, these examples seem to suggest promising new venues for cooperation and integration of DM efforts.

## **1.6. NGO Approaches to Disaster Management**

NGO Approaches to disaster management in Bangladesh was constructed in the philosophy of humanity in the initial phase during 1970s and continued practices of these approaches till mid 1990s. During these periods, NGOs innovated, developed and practices Participatory Approach (Chambers, 1998, Huq, 2001). Drawing upon our

study, it can be attempted here to describe below the approaches of NGOs to disaster management.

#### **1.6.1. Approach to emergency work:**

NGOs keep watching and monitoring weather forecast. If floods/cyclone happen, NGOs visit their working locations to know the loss and damages of the affected people. NGOs attempted to assess peoples emergency needs by interviewing local people, especially NGOs project or program beneficiaries. Based on need assessment, NGOs identify the “beneficiaries” of emergency services following some set of indicators. Then a list of beneficiaries gets prepared. NGOs then procure materials and organized materials in packages for smooth distribution. They then st up particular date, time and venue for materials distribution. NGOs distribute cards among the listed beneficiaries visiting house to house and mentioned about venue, date and time of “Relief Materials” distribution. NGOs engage village high school and college students, members of youth clubs as volunteers in these processes of emergency work.

#### **1.6.2. Approach to rehabilitation work:**

After emergency work is over, NGOs start processes of short-term and long-term rehabilitation work. In this phase of work, NGOs follow some steps:

**Step I:** Rehabilitation needs assessment – NGOs organize consultations meetings with their program/project beneficiaries in village levels to know about the needs of both short-term and long-term rehabilitation. Conducting Focus Group discussions they come to know about specific needs of rehabilitation of respective occupational groups, e.g., farmers, fishermen, landless, other occupational groups. Then they prioritize the needs following analysis at their level.

**Step II:** Fund raising- NGOs develop post disaster rehabilitation program on the basis of assessed needs and submit proposals to NGO donors for funding proposed rehabilitation program. For small scale project, NGOs request one or two donors among from their existing ones and for large project, they go through “Consortium Funding Approach”.

**Step III:** Beneficiary selection - After fund is raised, NGOs enter into selection process of beneficiaries of rehabilitation program. They select beneficiaries among from beneficiaries of their regular project/program. It is important to note here that NGOs give priority to their program/projects beneficiaries for emergency and post disaster rehabilitation program, because they work for and with the disadvantaged, poorest, poor and lower middle income groups., who , are most vulnerable to any disaster. NGO

workers visit door to door to observe and understand the vulnerabilities and potentialities of supporting them for rehabilitation. Following some set criteria, NGOs identify beneficiaries and prepare a list for providing them with supports – cash capital, materials, orientation and training for short-term and long term rehabilitation.

**Step IV:** Program implementation – NGOs invite the listed beneficiaries for orientation and training on post disaster rehabilitation batch by batch and by occupation. This training is of one day/two days duration. Soon after training NGOs do supply rehabilitation packages, which may include cash capital, seeds, housing materials, sanitation materials, education materials for children, and so on. NGOs also engage the disaster victims in rehabilitation programs of the government through coordinated efforts.

**Step V:** Monitoring – NGOs do close monitoring of implementation of rehabilitation program by frequent visits to beneficiaries' households, organizing weekly follow-up meetings with the beneficiaries in village levels, and monthly follow-up meetings with the group leaders in field office. NGOs also share monitoring reports in monthly development coordination meeting at Upazila and district headquarters level.

**Step VI:** Evaluation – NGOs get have ongoing evaluation, mid-term evaluation and project end evaluation of post disaster rehabilitation program. First two are done by respective NGOs themselves with active participation of beneficiaries. They use some tools which are innovated and developed by NGOs. The project end evaluation is conducted by the donors engaging external experts. Sometimes donors also conduct both mid-term and project end evaluation.

### **1.7. NGO Approach to Disaster Preparedness**

Drawing upon the learning, experience, innovations & development and lessons learned, NGOs got engaged in 'Disaster Preparedness Programs' with their beneficiaries beginning from late 1980s. Approaches to disaster preparedness programs of NGOs are embedded in dominantly participatory framework and bottom up approach. Disaster preparedness program contains training, savings, assets building, network, weather forecasting, social forestation, water & sanitation, food stock for emergency period, flood shelter, cyclone shelter, killa, raising homestead, tube wells' platform, fodder for cattle, crop and vegetables seeds preservation, and emergency fund of NGOs.

NGOs conduct training on different issues and activities related to disaster and disaster preparedness for their project/program beneficiaries. Processes of conducting training are of different folds such as trainers training for NGO staffs and group leaders.

# Chapter 2

## Constraints, Gaps and Challenges

This chapter briefly introduces the institutional framework in which NGOs operate in Bangladesh as well as their regulatory standing and nature of relations with the government and between themselves. The final section also provides a concise non-exhaustive list of challenges faced by NGOs who made the transition towards more microfinance-focused interventions.

### 2.1. Regulatory framework of operations

After an early phase of relaxed regulation, NGOs were made more accountable for the funds they brought into the country. In 1978, the military government promulgated the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Ordinance to exercise some control over the burgeoning NGO sector by actively monitoring the use of foreign donations for voluntary activities. The most significant increase in government regulation of NGOs commenced in 1990 when the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) was created as the contact point between the state and all NGOs receiving foreign donations (Ahmad, 2001).

The updated “Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Bill 2016” (FDRB), determines that engagement in anti-state activities (such as financing extremism and terror activities), human trafficking, and making derogatory remarks against the Constitution or against a constitutional body by any foreign-funded NGO would be considered as criminal offences under the provision, leaving both the NGO and its officials to be tried under the country's existing laws. The new provision empowers the NGOAB to cancel or withhold the registration of a foreign-funded NGO or ban its activities for committing the offence. The law was met with intense opposition by both local and international NGOs, who argued that the lack of criteria around the concept of “derogatory remarks” could be misused to curb freedom of expression (Durjoy, 2016). UN and EU experts also warned that these provisions and the bureaucratic requirements also risk disrupting NGOs’ ability to secure resources and to implement their projects in a timely fashion (EEAS, 2016; OHCHR, 2016). Given the FDRB’s recent implementation,

it is still unclear how the bill will actually affect Bangladesh-based NGO operations in the near future.

While NGOs that use foreign funds are obliged to register with the NGOAB, this is not the only NGO registration authority in Bangladesh. Other organizations and governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Association of Development Agencies also have similar mandates within their jurisdictions (World Bank, 2006; Haider, 2011). In such a context, with no single registration authority and the possibility that NGOs may have registrations with more than one government agency or body, obtaining a comprehensive overview of NGO activities in Bangladesh is particularly challenging (Moroto et al., 2017).

## **2.2. Coordination Failure**

### **2.2.1. Government-NGO coordination failure**

The Standing Orders on Disaster (SoD), which is updated periodically and whose last version was issued in 2010, determines the governance structure of disaster management in Bangladesh. It broadly divides disaster management into two levels: national and local. This section focuses solely on communication and coordination interfaces between government and NGOs. As such, a comprehensive overview of all actors and their respective duties and responsibilities in the Bangladeshi disaster management system is beyond our scope of study.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) is the main organization in the national sphere and has a mandate to (1) provide information to decision-making process as well as to the inter-ministerial and inter-agency disaster management units<sup>1</sup>, and (2) to implement the objectives of the Disaster Management Act (DMA). Still at the national level, disaster management committees (DMCs) are responsible for reviewing and evaluating disaster management policies and preparedness efforts as well as issuing guidelines for risk reduction activities and ensuring coordination of both disaster management and relief work between governmental organizations and NGOs (DMB, 2010).

At the local level, there are DMCs for each unit of the five local administrative

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<sup>1</sup>- Those are: the National Disaster Management Council, the Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Coordination Committee and the National Disaster Response Coordination Group.

levels in Bangladesh: (a) city corporation, (b) district, (c) upazila (sub-district), (d) paurashava (municipality) and (e) union. City Corporation, Paurashava and Union DMCs are directly in charge of disaster management implementation while District and Upazila DMCs are mostly in charge of monitoring and supervision (Ahmed et al., 2017).

The SoD requires that government and NGOs coordinate their disaster management and relief activities nationally through the Coordination Committee of NGOs Relating to Disaster Management and locally by requiring all local-level DMCs to have an NGO representative (SoD, 2010).

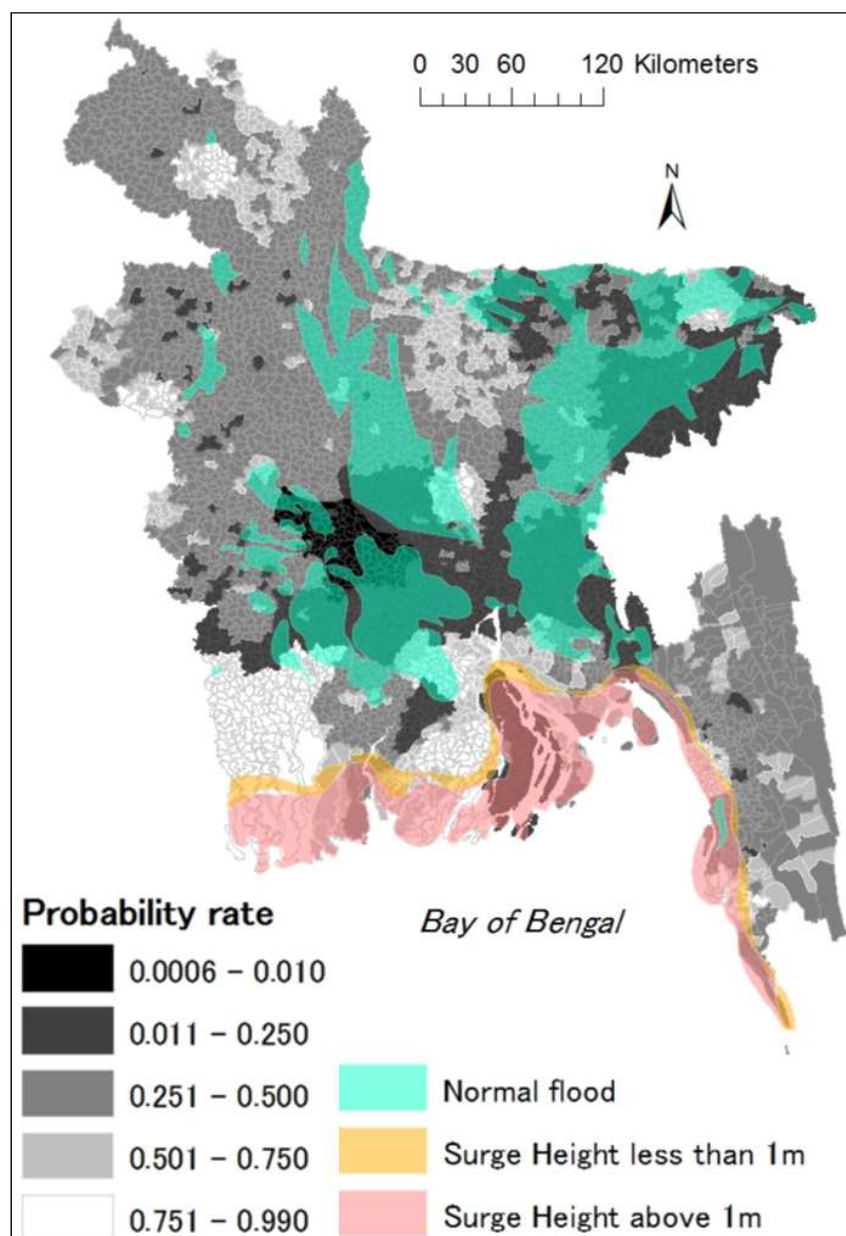
Because disaster damage is directly linked to the people living in a given location, the role of DM arrangements and interventions at the smallest administrative level are of particular importance (Moroto et al., 2017). Ahmed et al. (2017) combined document screenings with a series of interviews with members of local DMCs and NGO personnel active in Bangladesh to identify implementation gaps in disaster management. Their research suggests that local-level DMCs lack the capability and resources to execute DM activities, adopt annual DM plans and even hold regular meetings, thus being largely unable to fulfill their intended role coordinating between DM players and avoiding the duplication of efforts. According to their respondents, DM budget collection remains uncertain despite clear provisions in the SoD. Some DMCs have resorted to relying on NGO project budgets (which is neither regular nor certain) and even collections from disaster-affected communities. Similarly, notwithstanding national regulations, local DMC meetings were found to take place either with sporadic frequency and/or with inadequate attendance by all categories of participants (especially NGO representatives).

INGO personnel expressed views that while Bangladeshi policies and guidelines are appropriate, their implementation is deemed largely deficient and marked by a lack of coordination both between government agencies and between agencies and NGOs. Dysfunctional implementation, such as delayed declarations of state of emergency, as well as political interference by local elites were deemed to be important obstacles for implementing effective disaster responses and avoiding the overlapping and duplication of efforts (Ahmed et al., 2017).



### 2.2.2. Intra- and Inter-NGO failure

Moroto et al. (2017) combined a geographic information system (GIS) with a quantitative analysis of possible factors influencing NGO project allocations in Bangladesh from 2009 to 2015 and found negative coefficients for NGO project allocation in disaster-affected and hazard-prone areas (see below).



**Figure 2:** Socially and physically vulnerable areas in Bangladesh. Reproduced from Moroto et al., 2017:16.

The map above superimposes the government hazard map with their estimations for NGO intervention in 4,776 unions (smallest administrative level in Bangladesh). Moroto et al. (2017) analysis suggests that accessibility (proximity to airports and built-in areas), more densely populated areas and low literacy rates were indicators that made unions more likely to be chosen as project locations, with the opposite being true for areas affected by water-related disasters such as floods and riverbank erosion. This result goes against NGO alleged prioritization of disaster-areas, with some locations such as the Dhaka metropolitan region (the white spot in the center of the map) being a cluster for NGO activities while some high-risk areas have low probability of NGO intervention. Given the supplementary role that these actors play along the resource-strained Bangladeshi government in DM and beyond, it is not unrealistic to say that this neglect adds a layer of social vulnerability to areas that are already physically vulnerable to natural disasters (Moroto et al., 2017).

While there is no clear answer for the aforementioned location bias in NGO intervention in Bangladesh, their dependence on foreign donors may limit their project design and ranking of priorities, targets and, most importantly, locations. The previously referred failure of local DMCs as platforms for coordination and information sharing in disaster management also likely contributes to this scenario.

### **2.3. Limitations and challenges of the microfinance-focused model**

With few exceptions, excitement over the success of the leading MFIs (most of which were previously NGOs) spread rapidly and inspired the majority of NGOs in Bangladesh to become microcredit NGOs/MFIs. This transition narrowed down the traditional multi-sectoral and social development-oriented approach of most NGOs into the strict boundaries of microcredit provision and management.

Prioritizing micro-credit, however, demanded “a type and quality of relationship that actually limits poor people's room to maneuver” and NGOs’ own range of interventions (Fernando & Devine, 2003 cited in Davis, 2006). Even though the NGOs’ growth in terms of their microcredit fund and catchment area has been remarkable, the boundaries of microcredit constrains their programs, as NGOs are not entitled to use any amount of funding from the interest they earn against lending for any other activity than microcredit. These constraints are further exacerbated by decisions and policies adopted by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) during natural disasters such as publicly asking MFIs to not recover their loans in the disaster-affected areas and/or to exempt their clients from

loan repayment for an undetermined period of time. These decisions created an impasse for many NGOs as they were still required to honor regular repayments from loans borrowed from banks and from the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation<sup>2</sup> (PKSF). NGOs are convinced that the microcredit services contribute to creating people's resilience to disaster and that the government is the main actor for disaster management; however, under the current circumstances, some MFIs may opt to not disburse any loans to their clients in the aftermath of a disaster despite it being the moment in which victims would arguably be in the most urgent need of investment capital.

NGOs also have very limited sources of foreign donations to operate social development activities and DM, arguing that unless the government declares any disaster an 'emergency', most foreign donors do not respond to NGOs' requests for resources.

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<sup>2</sup> Financial institution created by the GoB in 1990 with a mandate to alleviate poverty, facilitate job creation and support rural development.

# Chapter 3

## Concluding remarks

This module attempted to provide an introductory overview on the state of NGO activities in DM in Bangladesh, a country highly vulnerable to natural calamities and with a considerably resilient population.

Chapter One aimed to provide the scope and the importance of NGO's role and contribution to DM through a brief historical analysis of the evolution of DM approaches. It was demonstrated how values became different from the independence period to the current context, with voluntarism and socio-cultural traditions giving way to professionalism and formal management structures. The transitions between emergency response to rehabilitation and disaster preparedness from the mid-1980s and through the 1990s highlighted NGO adaptive capacity and learning processes, with examples such as the opposition to the Flood Action Plan representing their potential for advocacy and public mobilization. It was also suggested that the final transition towards a microfinance-focused model was partially driven, on the one hand, by efforts to both guarantee access to foreign funding and, in its absence, to guarantee stable operations; and, on the other hand, took place as mimetic effect from most NGOs following the examples of successful early adopters of the microfinance model. Finally, it emphasized how international DM standards—as exemplified by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction—call for increased multi-stakeholder coordination along with the integration of DM efforts with Climate Change Adaptation and Sustainable Development agendas. In this sense, innovative, albeit incipient, approaches linking private sector and NGOs in DM in Bangladesh were shown as potential examples of what this approach looks like when put into practice.

Chapter Two undertook the task of presenting both the institutional and regulatory environments in which NGOs operate in Bangladesh as well as the constraints they face in terms of government policies, coordination failure and limitations from the microfinance-focused model of intervention.

Bangladesh is particularly prone to disasters, with 97.1% of its total area and 97.7% of its total population at risk of multiple hazards (World Bank, 2005). This is

aggravated by Bangladesh's concurrent status as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change. In such an exposed scenario, threats of escalated hazards are a reality and both government and society must build capacity to make Bangladesh more resilient to climate change-induced disaster. The reach, knowledge and mobilizing power of NGOs can be a potential strength as a partner of the government in DRR and as a bridge actor towards a truly multi-stakeholder DM process. In order to address the many challenges referred to in this model, NGOs should continue to learn from their experiences, innovate and develop strategies and approaches capable of responding to increased disaster risk prospects and a highly dynamic socio-economic environment.

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# Role of NGOs in Disaster Management in Bangladesh



Training Module



Research on Disaster Prevention/Mitigation Measures against Floods and Storm Surges in Bangladesh

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## Outline of the Presentation

### 1. Background of NGO approaches to disasters

- 1.1 Values regarded by NGOs
- 1.2 First NGO activities in DM: emergency and relief work
- 1.3 Late 1980s and 1990s: from relief to rehabilitation, disaster preparedness and development
- 1.4 From mid-1990s onwards: the shift towards Microfinance
- 1.5 Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs

### 2. Constraints, Gaps and Challenges

- 2.1 Regulatory framework of operations
  - 2.2 Coordination Failure
    - 2.2.1 Government-NGO coordination failure
    - 2.2.2 Inter- and Intra NGO failure
- 2.3 Limitations and challenges of the microfinance-focused model

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## Evolution of DM approaches by NGOs in Bangladesh



Figure 1: Evolution of DM approaches by NGOs in Bangladesh (made by the authors)

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### 1.1 Values regarded by NGOs

- Bangladesh has a long history of philanthropy and voluntarism that predates NGOs and that are mostly related to religious beliefs as well as social and cultural values.
- Protecting interests, rights and existence of the disadvantaged, poor and vulnerable people was their main philosophy and their programs and interventions were shaped accordingly.

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### 1.2 First NGO activities in DM: emergency and relief

- NGOs emerged already during the first years of Bangladesh's independence (December 1971).
- Despite working in an extended emergency environment, the NGOs involved in relief and rehabilitation soon saw their mission in terms of development.
- Concerning disaster management, NGOs were mainly engaged in emergency-response and relief work during the 1970s and early 1980s.

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### 1.3 Late 1980s and 1990s: from relief to rehabilitation, disaster preparedness and development

- NGOs' accumulated experience with emergency work and the ensuing lessons learned brought a shift of DM Approach from strict relief activities towards a "relief and rehabilitation" approach.
- The programs expanded, going beyond emergency relief operations, and encompassing short-, medium- and long-term rehabilitation programs.

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### 1.3 Late 1980s and 1990s: from relief to rehabilitation, disaster preparedness and development

- NGOs also expanded principles of the community-based “integrated rural development” to DM and introduced innovative approaches such as “community based disaster management,” “savings for emergency time,” “evacuation during emergency,” “multipurpose cyclone shelters,” “flood shelter in river chars” etc. NGOs’ disaster preparedness programs’ would, however, disappear silently around the year 2000.

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### 1.3 Late 1980s and 1990s: from relief to rehabilitation, disaster preparedness and development

- Funding flow from the foreign donors proved to be adequate during this period. As the numbers of NGOs increased rapidly, the amount of international aid funds were coming to NGOs “ballooned from roughly USD 150 million in 1990 to nearly USD 450 million in 1995, the peak year of the decade” to 2000 (Stiles, 2002 cited by Davis, 2006).

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### 1.4 From mid-1990s onwards: the shift towards Microfinance

- Starting from mid-1990s, most of the NGOs became engaged in microcredit programs, which are rooted in a different “philosophy” and view on “development models.”
- The central motivation of what would engender a transformation into Microfinance Institutions (MFI) was to survive a potential funding

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### 1.4 From mid-1990s onwards: the shift towards Microfinance

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### 1.4 From mid-1990s onwards: the shift towards Microfinance

- In the funding processes, NGOs came to focus onto the financial sustainability, rather than on sustainable livelihoods for the poor for the sake of their own survival and they saw emerging microcredit programs as the only viable alternative. (Cited by Davis 2006 from Fernando and Devine, 2003).
- Almost all the leading national and local NGOs made the transition into microfinance institutions during this.

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### 1.5 Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs: Water

**Concerns Worldwide;** Water tank for rainwater harvesting (Izumi and Shaw, 2015)

Water tank can provides

- income from vegetable marketing
- safe drinking water
- seed storage that helps the family to mitigate crisis during lean periods

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## 1.5 Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs: Water



Figure 1. Water tank for rainwater harvesting.



Figure 2. Vegetable cultivation with rainwater.

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## 1.5 Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs: Water

Floating toilet; an idea of a local civil servant in Sunamganj  
BRAC



<http://innovation.brac.net/blog>

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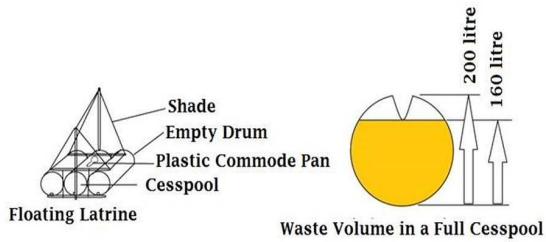
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## 1.5 Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs: Water



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## “HandyPod”; Another example of floating toilet from Tonle Sap lake, Cambodia



**Wetlands Work** (NGO); installed sustainable wastewater treatment systems. A simple, two-container system that filters pathogens out of wastewater (\$125). Waste is collected in the first of two containers, where it settles and is broken down using anaerobic processes over a three-day period, and the pathogen reduction begins. The second barrel is packed with small pieces of polystyrene, which triggers a process that reduces the levels of the remaining bacteria.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/feb/15/safe-toilets-help-flush-out-disease-in-cambodia-floating-communities-tonle-sap-lake> 16

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## 1.5 Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs: Education

**Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha** (founded in 1989); school boat

School boat;

- serves as a school bus
- also has a classroom, book library and electronic resource (solar powered)
- has an internet-linked computer
- the students who get good exam results receive Surya Hurricane solar lanterns which give them better light for doing their homework in the evening.
- 1, 810 children attend classes on 22 school boats (supported by UNIEF?)

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## 1.5 Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs: Education



<http://sowc2015.unicef.org/stories/its-a-boat-its-a-school-its-a-livelihood-booster/>

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## 1.5 Incipient innovations in Disaster Management by NGOs: Agriculture

**The Practical Action;** floating garden

A floating garden will provides;

- enough food for a family to live on throughout the monsoons
- a source of income when surplus is sold at the market

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## 2. Constraints, Gaps and Challenges

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## 2.1 Regulatory framework of operations

- In 1978, the military government promulgated the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Ordinance as a means to exercise some control over the burgeoning NGO sector by actively monitoring the use of foreign donations for voluntary activities.
- For this purpose, the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) was created as the contact point between the State and all NGOs receiving foreign donations in 1990 (Ahmad, 2001).

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## 2.1 Regulatory framework of operations

- The updated “Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Bill 2016” (FDRB), empowered NGO Affairs Bureau to cancel or withhold the registration of a foreign-funded NGO or ban its activities for committing the offence.
- The law was met with intense opposition by local and international NGOs, UN, and EU experts and also warned that these provisions and the bureaucratic requirements bring the risk of disrupting NGOs’ ability to secure resources and to implement their projects in a timely fashion (EEAS, 2016; OHCHR, 2016).

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## 2.2 Coordination Failure: Government-NGO coordination failure

- The Standing Orders on Disaster (SoD), which is updated periodically and whose last version was issued 2010, determines the governance structure of disaster management in Bangladesh. It broadly divides disaster management in two levels: national and local.
- The SoD requires that government and NGOs coordinate their disaster management and relief activities nationally through the Coordination Committee of NGOs Relating to Disaster Management and locally by requiring all local-level DMCs to have an NGO representative (SoD, 2010).

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## 2.2 Coordination Failure: Government-NGO coordination failure

- INGO personnel expressed views that while Bangladeshi policies and guidelines are appropriate, their implementation is deemed largely deficient and marked by a lack of coordination both between government agencies and between agencies and NGOs. Dysfunctional implementation, such as delayed declarations of state of emergency, as well as political interference by local elites were deemed to be important obstacles for implementing effective disaster responses and avoiding overlapping and duplication of efforts (Ahmed et al, 2017).

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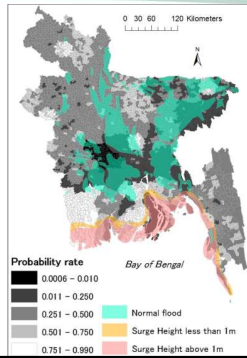
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## 2.2 Coordination Failure: Government-NGO coordination failure

- Moroto et al (2017) combined GIS with a quantitative analysis of possible factors influencing NGO project allocations in Bangladesh from 2009 to 2015 and the government hazard map was superimposed with their estimations for NGO intervention in 4,776 unions.



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## 2.2 Coordination Failure: Inter- and Intra NGO failure

- Moroto et al (2017) analysis suggests that proximity to airports and built-in areas, more densely populated areas and low literacy rates were indicators that made unions more likely to be chosen as project locations, with the opposite being true for areas-affected by water-related disasters such as flood and riverbank erosion.
- While there is no clear cut answer for such the location bias in NGO intervention in Bangladesh, their dependence on foreign donors may limit their project design and ranking of priorities, targets and, most importantly, locations.

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## 2.2 Coordination Failure: Inter- and Intra NGO failure

- The transition of NGOs' focus into microcredit narrowed down the traditional multi-sectoral and social development-oriented approach of most NGOs into the strict boundaries of microcredit provision and management.
- Even though the NGOs' growth in terms of their microcredit fund and catchment area has been remarkable, the boundary of microcredit constrains their programs, as NGOs are not entitled to use any amount of fund from the "interests" they earn against lending for any other activity than microcredit.

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## 2.3 Limitations and challenges of the microfinance-focused model

- GoB asked MFIs to not recover their loan in the disaster-affected areas and/or to exempt their clients from loan repayment for an undetermined period of time of natural disasters.
- Under the current circumstances some MFIs may opt to not disburse any loan to their clients in the aftermath of a disaster despite it being the moment in which victims would arguably be in the most urgent need of investment capital.
- NGOs argue that unless the government declare any disaster “emergency,” most foreign donors do not respond to NGOs’ requests for resources.

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