National Disaster Management System in Bangladesh

Coordination Mechanisms
Three (3) fora coordinate disaster response in Bangladesh at the national level: The National Disaster Management Council (NDMC), responsible for strategic decisions for disaster management; the Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Committee (IMDMC), responsible for coordination across ministries; and the National Disaster Management Advisory Committee, responsible for policy development and advice. The NDMC is the highest level decision-making body for disaster management in Bangladesh.

Following the 2015 Nepal Earthquake, the GoB decided to establish a National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) to respond effectively to the severe disastrous situations of the unanticipated event. In 2015, a National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC), also termed National Disaster Response Coordination Center (NDRRC), was established at the Secretariat of the MoDMR as a coordination mechanism for disaster response. Emergency operations centers can also be activated at the district levels for the management and coordination of the response through strategic deployment of staff to the field as well as coordination with various clusters and working groups. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) leads the coordination of incoming humanitarian assistance. It coordinates requests for international assistance as directed by the government and NDMC.

Key Policy Documents:

Disaster Management Act No 34 (2012): The Disaster Management Act provides the legal basis for disaster risk reduction and emergency response management in Bangladesh. This Act defines the organizational structure of disaster management at national and local levels, and details the responsibilities of all government departments and committees related to the disaster management system.
Standing Orders on Disaster (1997, revised 2010): The Standing Orders on Disaster detail the roles and responsibilities of each government body engaged in disaster management — ministries, committees, departments and other organizations. It also provides for the establishment of coordination processes at national and local levels.

National Strategy on the Management of Disaster and Climate-induced Internal Displacement (2015): The strategy outlines processes for the management of climate-induced internal displacement that supports the implementation of the Sendai Framework and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. The strategy focuses on internal displacement caused by natural disasters. It does not address cross-border displacement issues. Three phases are addressed: pre-displacement, displacement and post-displacement.

Humanitarian Coordination in Bangladesh
In 2012, a humanitarian coordination system in Bangladesh was established following a consultative process to review disaster preparedness and response arrangements. The review was jointly led by the MoDMR Secretary and, by the UN RC under the auspices of the Local Consultative Group Disaster and Emergency Response (LCG DER) itself co-chaired by the UN and the MoDMR. This process resulted in the establishment of the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT) under the LCG-DER and, of nine (9) humanitarian clusters and several working groups.

Since its inception the HCTT has played an important role in coordinating humanitarian action. It has overseen responses to a range of disaster events in Bangladesh. In addition to its coordination function the HCTT plays a vital role in formalizing and strengthening the relationship between the Government of Bangladesh and national and international humanitarian organizations. Today, the HCTT comprises an additional cluster, the GBV cluster established in 2016, 3 representatives of the national NGO coordination platform led by DDM, 3 representatives of international NGOs representing the INGO emergency sub-committee and two representatives of the donor community. Working groups are: CwG, Shongjog, NAWG. Discussions are on-going concerning the establishment of the ETC Cluster. Moreover, BDRCS is being consulted for leading a new IMWG currently inexistent. IFRC is the co-lead of the Shelter cluster.

Reinforced National Humanitarian Coordination Architecture
To reinforce national ownership and national direction to HCTT’s work, proposals were made in order to strengthen the humanitarian system, especially in preparation for a response to a large-scale disaster response such as an earthquake in an urban centre.

a) Revise membership of the National Disaster Management Committee (NDMC)/Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Committee (IMDMC) to include the UNRC1 and BDRCS’s chairman for supporting the overall guidance to the HCTT. That would foster strategy engagement at the highest level as the NDMC is chaired by the PMO and comprises key authorities (including MoFA).
b) Integrate military-to-military and civil-military coordination mechanism in the overall architecture;
c) Improve dialogue and coordination within the donor community;
d) Strengthen key clusters and inter-cluster groups2 by promoting the recognition of their added-value by the GoB;
e) Integrate in the coordination architecture key tools and services that might be requested by the national authorities in case of large-scale natural disasters (i.e. OSOCC, USAR, EMT);

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1 To include also BDRCS Chairman
2 Emergency Communications Group (ECG); Cash Working Group (CWG); Information Management Working Group; Private Sector Liaison, Gender Working Group (GWG), Community Engagement Working Group
f) Adapt and decentralize the humanitarian coordination architecture that takes notably in consideration the specific context of intervention (e.g. CHT Districts)

The HCTT advocated for the inclusion of the cluster system and the HCTT platform in the current revision of the Standing Order on Disasters (SODs). In addition, the need was highlighted to organize high-level quarterly strategic meetings between NDMC members (that would include the UNRC) with a view to reinforcing humanitarian engagement in support of key national authorities³. The elements of the proposed structure are outlined below. The HCTT advocated for the strengthening of Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination. The PMO has recently established a Consultative Group on Civil-Military Coordination to be led by MoDMR and AFD to facilitate interaction between humanitarian and military actors in disaster response, and to guide the development of policy and strategic advice.

³ Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) - Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)
Some challenges related to Humanitarian Coordination:

- The DM system of Bangladesh is developed based on poverty-focused interventions under the regular safety-net programme. Considering that the MoDMR-managed national relief fund has not yet been established as per DM Act, a nationally funded response to a large-scale disaster is possible through the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund.

- Complex and challenging hazards are mentioned at the policy level (Refugee crisis excepted), but the overall directions of the DM system are not made implementable.

- There is a clear and explicit legislative and policy framework which provides guidance for strong inter-ministerial coordination but in reality MoDMR does not convene all relevant ministries for coordination.

- National emergency response capabilities are positioned in Cox’s Bazar, limiting possible interventions in other districts in the months to come. Reestablishing pre-crisis capabilities is costly and time-consuming.

- MoDMR’s time/attention mostly focused on the refugee response, hence challenge in co-leading HCTT’s work. HCTT’s meetings are now rare and preparedness for response is slower.

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