

HAP initiatives in Concern Worldwide: A Case Study of Bangladesh (2008)

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1. CYCLONE SIDR

Cyclone Sidr, a category 4 cyclone, made land fall in the southern and central coastal belts of Bangladesh on 15th November 2007. The cyclone affected 30 out of 64 districts mostly in the southern part of the country. More than 3,400 people were killed, 55,000 people injured and over 2 million families were made homeless. The financial cost of the disaster was estimated at \$1.7 billion. The consequence of Sidr was mainly felt through the destruction of housing and loss of livelihoods (including agriculture crop production, assets such as fishing boats and nets, and other business).

A few national NGOs (including BRAC, Grameen Bank, ASA and Proshika) had been working in the affected areas prior to the cyclone, mainly focused on microfinance and education, and a few had experience of disaster management. Following the cyclone international and national NGOs launched relief operations in the most-affected districts. Concern Worldwide Bangladesh was one of the international organizations that extended their operations to offer relief support in the affected areas.

Concern provided support to Sidr-affected areas through three local Partners; SPEED Trust, SHANGRAM and Dhaka Ahsania Mission. These three Partners had experience of implementing emergency response and rehabilitation programmes in other parts of Bangladesh. Both SPEED Trust and SHANGRAM are based in Sidr affected areas, and were already Partners of Concern Worldwide Bangladesh.

Concern provided financial and technical support to the Partners for implementing the emergency and rehabilitation project. One Concern staff was appointed to each partner's project to provide the technical support for ensuring quality services.

2. RATIONALE FOR STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY

Concern's strategy in Bangladesh is to work with the poorest and most vulnerable people, supporting them to improve their livelihood security, develop coping mechanisms to deal with natural disasters, improve their health and nutritional status, and access education facilities. Therefore, disaster preparedness, mitigation and management is one the focus areas.

Concern undertook the Sidr relief and rehabilitation project considering the vulnerable situation and based on the problems identified in consultation with the affected population in target communities. A number of factors contributed to the drive to strengthen accountability as part of this response:

- The extent of the damage forced all organizations to undertake large responses, and therefore most felt challenged to ensure quality of the work. It was felt that being vigilant of the HAP Standard would help the organization to ensure the quality of its work.
- The organizational commitment to meet the HAP Standards (as part of Concern's obligation as a HAP Member) and the realization of the links between the HAP Standard and Concern's mission and vision.
- The findings of the accountability self-assessment (see below).

3. THE ACCOUNTABILITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

In February 2008, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh worked with HAP to carry out a self-assessment on humanitarian accountability and quality management using the HAP Standard at one project area where Concern was responding to Cyclone Sidr. During the self-assessment particular focus was given to how information was shared with affected-communities; through what methods affected-communities were able to participate in project decision-making; and what mechanisms existed for affected-communities to raise complaints and receive a response. Through this much good practice was identified as well as a number of gaps including:

- Partner staff was not aware of the humanitarian Principles of Accountability or the HAP Standard.

- Community participation in project designing and beneficiary selection was almost missing because it was done mainly through a survey method.
- Community people didn't know the selection criteria, which often caused doubts amongst them about Concern and the Partners.
- There was a lack of information disseminated to affected-communities on the project implementation process and status updates. Information was only disseminated during house visits and at distribution centres on the day of distribution.
- There were no formal complaints handling mechanism or procedure.

4. PILOTING NEW APPROACHES

To address the gaps identified as part of the self-assessment Concern undertook a series of activities focused on their Sir and flooding emergency response and rehabilitation projects. Many of the activities involved trailing new approaches, which were refined throughout and Concern is now looking to review, learn and improve on this practice. Some of the highlights based on activities trailed from March to November 2008 are described below:

a) Ensuring Partner Involvement

It was felt that in order for this initiative to become grounded in the humanitarian approach Partner capacity and involvement had to be ensured. From April-May 2008, Concern in Bangladesh organised two batches training for Partner and Concern Project staff exploring the HAP Principles, humanitarian accountability benchmarks and the HAP Standard. Particular attention was given to benchmark five, which focuses on Complaint and Response Mechanisms. An additional training was organized before starting a new project and oriented Partner field level staff as well as management staff. In total these trainings covered more than 200 staff from Concern and six Partner organizations.

Example of the contents covered as part of an orientation session on HAP Standard with Concern and partner project-staff:

- What is HAP?
- HAP Principles and Benchmarks?
- Downward accountability?
- Complaint Mechanism and its principle and system development procedure and processes?
- Participatory beneficiary selection techniques (Priority ranking, matrix ranking and Pair wise ranking)?
- What should be incorporated into the upcoming flood response programme?
- What Concern has already done (sharing our success and some case studies)
- Next action plan?



Trainina with Concern and Partner staff

b) Exploring ways to increase community participation in beneficiaries' selection

As part of the training on HAP, facilitated by Concern Worldwide Bangladesh, Partners and Concern project staff jointly developed a participatory beneficiary selection process. Previously the beneficiary selection criteria had been identified by the Partners based on their own understanding, and the beneficiary list developed by discussions with individual household family members during house-to-house visit. The new beneficiary selection process centred around the community themselves identifying the selection criteria, and developing the beneficiary list based on this. The new process is summarised in the following diagram:

1. Village selection:

Information collected during a transit walk is summarised using the 'Village Profile Format'. A well-being analysis is then done to select the village.



2. Beneficiary selection criteria development:

Through a group meeting the beneficiary selection criteria are developed. Emphasis is given to ensure all types of community representation during this meeting. Poor and extreme poor, women, disabled and children are highly encouraged.



All level community representatives share their views



3. Vulnerable households identified:

The community people analyse the well being of households and their vulnerability. Based on this a list of vulnerable households in the village are identified.



Community people prepare a priority beneficiaries list



6. Sharing the final beneficiary list:

After validation the final beneficiaries list is written on poster paper, signed by the participants who developed the list (those who are unable to write request others to add their name), and is hung in a public place (normally on the wall of a house) at community level as per decision by the community people who participated in the process. The community then uses this displayed list as a check during the distribution process.



5. Validation of the beneficiary list:

House-to-house visits are then conducted to validate and finalize the list of project beneficiaries. Validation is carried out by PNGO staff alongside a number of community representatives.



Validation of priority list visiting house to house



4. Priority list preparation:

The community people use Pair Wise Preference / Priority Ranking or Matrix Ranking to identify the eligible beneficiaries.



Results of priority ranking list are presented by the community

The process, along with supporting tools for implementation, was documented to guide Partner staff and was used from October 2008.

Initial results

Between October and November 2008 a total of 6,372 beneficiaries were selected using this approach as part of both Sidr and flood response programmes.

Based on experience this participatory beneficiary selection process takes more than three hours to complete, but received positive feedback from community participants who had the opportunity to discuss several issues during priority listing. The community people are happier with this process and share their views with the visitors to the project.

While most of the community participants spoke easily as the process was related to their own and local issues, strong staff facilitation skills are needed to ensure the effectiveness of this process. Due to limited resources it is challenging to reach conclusions and agreement on the final (limited) list with the community participation. In addition during the process some of the more influential community people try to take the lead, and influence the list base on their preferences.

Initially there was some resistance from the Partners to adopt a more participatory approach to identifying beneficiaries. Some of the Partners had development projects in the affected areas, and intended to give support to their 'group members' (beneficiaries from their development projects) following their traditional selection process. However, after implementing this process the partner staff expressed more positive views - that this process is a better way to select the beneficiaries as it is more transparent and as a result partner staff received fewer complaints from the community about the biasness of the list. As the community decided who is the most vulnerable, services were given on a priority basis.

c) Establishing Community Monitoring Committees (CMCs) and piloting a complaints handling mechanism

The HAP training was used to orientate Partner staff in establishing a complaints mechanism, seek commitment from Partner's Executive Directors, and designed plans to establish a complaint and response mechanism. While the Community Monitoring Committees (CMCs) and the complaint and response mechanism are still being developed and strengthened based on learning to date, the following outlines key elements established as of November 2008 and the initial results observed.

Complaint submission (see diagram over the page)

The following channels were provided for affected-communities to submit a complaint:

- Complaints boxes - in total 24 were set up in each production or distribution centre, and were managed by the *Upazila* Community Monitoring Committee.
- Mobile phone - three mobile numbers were disseminated (the focal person for Complaint handling, the Partner Project Coordinator, and Field Coordinator of Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh).
- Face-to-face - to one of the *Union* Community Monitoring Committee members, or Partner or Concern staff during a field visit.

Different submission means were used, via different people, to enable community members to raise complaints about harassment, fraud or misconduct from staff if needed.

Complaint processing (see diagram over the page)

The documents of all complaints received were kept in a register, alongside what actions had been taken and the status of each complaint. Complaints received via the *Upazila* or *Union* CMCs were either reviewed and responded to directly by these committees, or referred up to the next level.

Community Monitoring Committees (CMCs) – role in monitoring and complaint handling

Community Monitoring Committees (CMCs) with 5-7 members were formed at two different administrative levels with the aim of monitoring the quality of project work at a local level, and providing one avenue for beneficiaries and community people to raise complaints. Both *Upazila* and *Union* CMCs defined their role and responsibilities at their inception, and documented these in the meeting register. In total 7 *Upazila* and 31 *Union* level CMCs were formed and began functioning by the 4th phase in April 2008. The table below summarises the composition of the CMCs and their main activities:




	Upazila level CMCs (sub-district)	Union level CMCs (sub sub-district)
CMC members	Formed by, and comprised of, Partner local staff, other NGO staff and local elites (e.g. teachers, businessmen).	Comprise of representatives from the project beneficiaries and local elites. The CMC members were selected in a participatory process by the local community people and project beneficiaries. For selection of members the following criteria were prioritised by the community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Availability and accessibility of the person ii. Ability to maintain confidentiality iii. Credibility to people iv. Interest to give the time and take on the role.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Reviewing the security and quality of supplied materials at production centres through fortnightly visits, and the quality of service of the rehabilitation project. b) Reviewing and responding to complaints submitted via the complaints box or complaints referred from the Union CMC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Monitoring the progress of the house carpenters, checking the quality of the materials and desired design of the work at community level. As they are from the same community the Union CMCs visit the working places regularly. b) Receiving and responding to complaints received verbally and via monthly meetings. Complaints that cannot be dealt with are referred to the Upazila CMC, or Partner or Concern staff.

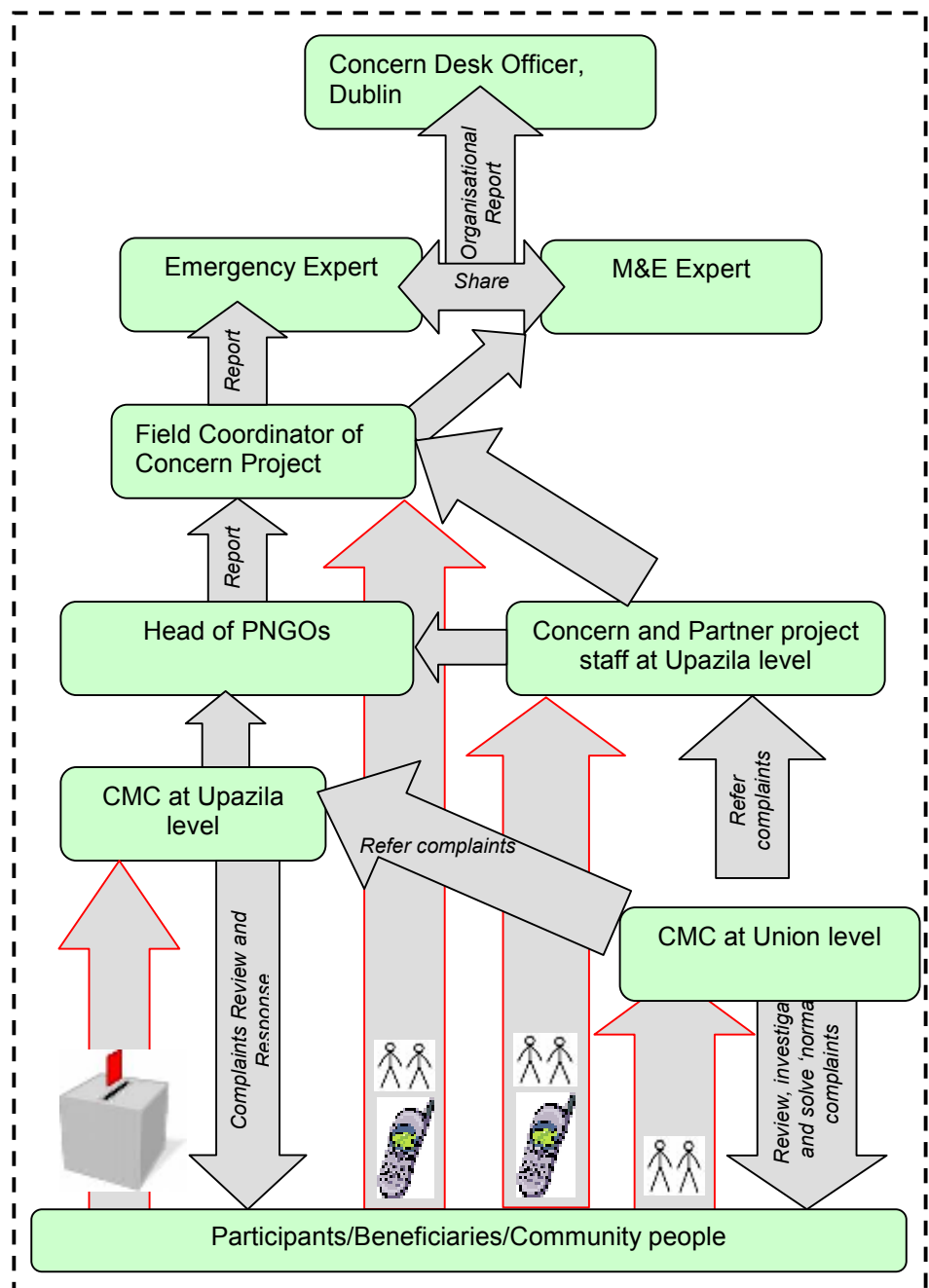
A flow chart summarising the complaint and response mechanism trailed by Concern Worldwide in Bangladesh

The kinds of complaints that cannot be handled at field-level go up to senior manager level.

Based on this mechanism Concern staff are now refining how complaints are received processed and responded to (in particular looking at how more sensitive complaints can be handled) so that the mechanism is safe, accessible and effective for users.

Key – modes for complaint submission:

-  = complaint box
-  = mobile phone
-  = face to face



Initial results

Complaints data - From last August to December 2008 157 complaints were received in Sidr and Flood response areas. Of these 12% were received via the complaints box, 50% via mobile, and 38% via face-to-face. It was found that many of the complaints received via the box were applications for aid, and the majority of the phone calls received were asking for information. Raising complaints directly with staff became popular, as it was easy, direct and did not require writing skills. In addition this channel also reassured the complainant that their complaint was being heard. As a result of the complaints received via the complaints box four staff were transferred, one staff member was dismissed, and seven beneficiaries were changed.

Initial challenges in complaint handling - community people and beneficiaries started to make complaints, and request information, via mobile phone at late night (in particularly during Ramadan). As a result the Partner staff started to orient the community people on complaints issues, when they can make complaints, what issues they should consider as complaints etc., and the number of late night calls were reduced.

In addition anonymous complaints, and those involving different types of conflict of interests, were challenging to investigate. A number of complaints were not substantiated, and active roles of the CMC members at field level helped in resolving the problem.

Upazila CMCs - as a result of the production site visits the Upazila CMCs have influenced vendors, carpenters and others suppliers to replace low quality housing materials, and to re-build sub-standard houses. While initially the Partner did not consider including project beneficiaries as part of this group, but they are now trying to include them. Based on experience some of the Upazila CMCs were more active, giving time as needed, where as others were less active as their members were busy with their personal jobs. One of the challenges faced was with some of the elites asked for support due to their role as CMC members.

Union CMCs - between April and December 2008 Union CMCs organised 39 meetings, and received complaints related to requests for aid and project quality. A number of challenges were experienced with Union CMC members exploiting their positions to extract bribes from the beneficiaries. This highlights the need to ensure committee members are carefully selected, and there is transparency over their role and expected behaviour (as well as a channel for people to raise concerns) in order to avoid creating another power structure. Learning from this experience was applied to the next rehabilitation and flood response project.



Community Monitoring Committee members share their activities over the last month

5. NEXT STEPS

The next steps are to further develop and embed these approaches in Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh and include:

- Forming a core team for taking this forward, and developing an action plan.
- Reviewing the existing complaint and response mechanism with beneficiaries and staff, and using these findings to develop the mechanism further.
- Orienting staff and beneficiaries on the complaint and response mechanism.
- Integrating complaint and response mechanism issues into project M&E systems.

6. FACILITATING FACTORS

Financial and human resources

The financial and human resource support from the organization was a major contributing factor for the success. The financial support included all phase's training for Partner and Concern staff, capacity building for beneficiaries, system development, follow-up visit, and printing of information materials.

Most important factor was the allocation of time to design the project in line with the HAP Standard, and the assignment of a focal person for focusing on HAP at country level. In addition specific responsibilities related to accountability and quality management were incorporated into staff job descriptions.

Budgetary allocation and adequate planning for strengthening accountability at project as well as organizational level is very much needed. This will allow for the development of systems, linkage and networking with other organizations including HAP Members, and exposure and learning visits.

Commitment of senior management and staff input

The continued follow-up from Concern Dublin office, Bangladesh Country Director and Assistant Country Director, as well as input from the HR Quality team; M&E, Right Based Approach (RBA) and Emergency team, Concern and Partner emergency project staff contributed to the progress made. Involvement of higher management to provide strategic support will remain an important factor for continuous improvements in maintaining organisational standards.

7. CHALLENGES OVERCOME

Working with Partners - Establishing downward and horizontal accountability across different levels is a key part of the HAP initiative, but it is challenging to develop common understanding on this with Partners. The Partners do welcome this concept after gaining experience, although there were long and difficult discussions for taking it to field level. Some Partners were disinterested to follow the participatory targeting process and to establish a complaint and response mechanism, fearing the potential conflict these approaches may cause. The trainings helped overcome this as they created a forum where they were able to develop a plan in conjunction with other Partners and Concern.

Not integrated from the beginning - It is also challenging to incorporate the Principles of Accountability in the middle of project implementation; particularly during an emergency response that demands quick delivery of services at large scale. It will be more effective if the organization takes steps to integrate during the project design stage, and to orient staff before implementing the project. Without proper orientation and mind setting on the HAP Standard it is difficult to succeed with moving forward.

8. RESULTS OBSERVED AND LEARNING

Community level

- Community engagement in these processes increased overtime along with community acceptance and trust in the implementing Partners.
- Beneficiaries' selection by community participation, using participatory tools, was very powerful in ensuring people's participation and as a result more people were satisfied with the beneficiary selection process.
- The biases of other stakeholders in influencing the selection process, in particular influencing the selection of certain people, gradually reduced.
- The Community Monitoring Committee's function strengthened the check and control of quality of services against the expected standards.
- The presence of staff relatives in the CMCs created conflict, and has potential for a few members to dominate. This learning was applied in next phase, when any relatives of staff were excluded as a CMC member.

Staff

- The increased capacity of Partner staff on HAP Principles of Accountability and the HAP Standard has made them more open to ensuring downward accountability and setting standards of attitude and behaviour.
- Increased confidence among staff in involving community people to select the project beneficiaries following a participatory process.
- The complaint and response mechanism led to changes in staff attitudes, increasing the closeness and accountability of the staff.

Organisational

- As a result of being sensitized on downward accountability the Concern Bangladesh Programme Quality Unit, which falls under the Learning and Sharing Department, has developed a specific objective related to establishing and promoting downward accountability at programme level. It is envisaged this will also contribute to the overall image of the organization.
- 2009 budget allocation includes funding for the M&E Unit to develop staff capacity on the Principles of Accountability and HAP Standard.

- Feedback from donors (ECHO, DIPECHO) based on project visits also was very appreciative of the HAP progress and initiatives. They appreciated the targeting and Complaint and Response Mechanism (both establishing complaint boxes and CMCs at union level).

9. CONCLUSION

Based on the learning and experiences of Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh, we would recommend others to apply the participatory tools for selecting beneficiaries, and form CMCs at community level as an approach to promote humanitarian accountability during an emergency response and rehabilitation.