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Dhaka Earthquake and Emergency Preparedness – Enhancing Resilience (DEEPER) is a German Red Cross initiative in consortium with Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, British Red Cross, Action Contre la Faim and Christian Aid with funding support from European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Office. Under its advocacy component, the project reached out to private sector to scale up awareness on disaster response capacity. The collaboration further envisioned a knowledge hub enabling donors, implementers, authorities and agencies to align urban preparedness strategies.

Since its inception in June 2019, the consortium partners of DEEPER—German Red Cross, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, British Red Cross, Christian Aid and Action Contre La Faim—have been relentlessly pursuing market associations, ridesharing companies and other private actors for a joint-venture. The insightful pursuit has provided far-reaching learnings for designing programs that enhances collaborative and collective approaches. In this backdrop, this document aims to capture and reflect on DEEPER's experience of private sector collaboration in the context of upscaling disaster preparedness in urban areas.

OPPORTUNITY COST OF BETTER RESPONSE



Wards in Dhaka City are connected through a vast network of narrowly built congested roads that have recently popularised the use of motorcycle ridesharing services. Motorcyclists spend the biggest chunk of their time plying through the entire city and, with the right capacity and awareness, could act as the first responders during emergencies. Sensing this opportunity, the project wished to provide a 3-day training on firefighting, search & rescue and first aid to riders of the three most popular ridesharing companies. However, after several unsuccessful attempts to initiate dialogues with the companies, the project realised it was a dead end. Although no official explanation was provided, the project staffs believed that companies feared occupying riders for the training would cause service interruption in many neighbourhoods. In a highly competitive market, even short-term absence of riders would tempt customers to switch to other companies diminishing the hard-earned brand loyalty.

Staff members further believed concerns over forgone income could have contributed to the

companies' reluctance. A typical motorcyclist makes BDT 3000 (roughly 30 euros) per day, that brings the opportunity cost of the proposed training to BDT 9000 for each participant. The allocated budget for training did not have any provision to compensate motorcyclists for lost income.

The project staffs, however, circumvented the hurdle by reaching out to the riders through personal contacts and rapports. After several rounds of discussions with DEEPER, 47 riders agreed to take the training. In addition, DEEPER managed collaborate with several private security companies, who agreed with the project's conviction that property security personnel with good understanding of disaster response can save valuable lives and property by regulating gas and electricity supply in the premises. The security companies and DEEPER reached an agreement that enabled 48 security officers to participate in the 3-day training.

MARKET ASSOCIATIONS' WORST FEARS

Markets in older part of Dhaka's South City Corporation operate in extremely hazardous conditions characterized by lack of concern for evacuation, absence of safety measures and negligence to workplace hazards. DEEPER offered 5 market associations to facilitate risk assessments through eminent experts from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and the Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) Department. The consortium further committed to fund structural and non-structural improvements to reduce vulnerabilities and minimize risk for shoppers and store owners.

The association members, however, appeared apprehensive of the generous offer. The risk of being exposed as mismanaged marketplaces could ruin their goodwill and, hence, business prospects. On the other hand, fire safety audits—a sub-component of market risk assessment—may result in punitive actions under the Fire Prevention and Extinction Act- 2003. Finally, publication of findings might induce a flood of bad press further damaging markets' reputations.

Despite the best efforts from DEEPER, market associations could not be convinced that the overall benefits of the collaboration would significantly outweigh the reputational risks. However, given its risk-free nature, the associations were very responsive to proposed collaboration for awareness raising. The Gausia Market Association gladly organised a mock drill on 13th of February 2021 to commemorate the National Disaster Preparedness Day.



THE PANDEMIC STONEWALL

The DEEPER project aspired to support the government for creating a comprehensively inclusive urban disaster management framework by synthesizing diverse perspectives on risk reduction in urban areas. As the first step towards the goal, the project intended to create a knowledge hub where researchers, policy makers, service providers, academicians, practitioners, private sector and agencies working on earthquake preparedness and disaster risk reduction can exchange ideas and lessons. However, as COVID-19 infections increased and group events were subsequently prohibited, the project team had to improvise. Quick thinking from DEEPER staff members enabled the practitioners to rendezvous through a series of six webinars organized by the private online news portal The Business Standard. Eminent representatives from media, academia, government, DRR professionals and community volunteers enthusiastically participated in knowledgeable discourse on urban preparedness and risk management.

The first webinar focused on the alarmingly deteriorating state of mental health across the country. Participants stressed the urgent need to extend mental health support for women, children, community and frontline health workers and laid off employees. DEEPER supported the supposition and highlighted the project's initiative to sustain mental health through psychosocial support to

affected communities in Dhaka South City Corporation via tele-counselling and capacity building of frontline responders. The next webinar touched base on the globally acclaimed community-based model of Disaster Risk Management in Bangladesh. To better decentralize the model, the country has developed a Standing Orders on Disasters (SOD) that outlines the responsibilities at various tiers of national and local administration. Government officials narrated the evolution of the SOD since its inception in the year 1997 to the latest version published in 2019, which is inclusive of the needs of diverse groups including women and children and is mainstreamed under the Disaster Management Act-2012. For better operationalization, participants from international NGOs and multilateral organizations urged the government to disseminate the SOD widely across all the wards in the country and stressed the need for allocating ward level budgets to address risks. The government officials welcomed the suggestions but admitted budget constraints have limited the circulation of SOD only in areas with high vulnerability to cyclones and floods. In their concluding remarks, the official urged the national and international NGOs to support the government to expedite the SOD dissemination in other areas.

The third webinar recognized the role of urban volunteers in tackling emergencies and enhancing disaster preparedness in Dhaka City. Participants

acknowledged the government's initiatives towards championing a globally renowned community volunteer-based approach to combat disasters. Speakers, however, agreed on the existing complexities in coordinating the volunteers and stressed the urgent need for institutional linkages for optimal response.

Building on the topic of volunteer better volunteer management in urban areas, the next episode of the webinar series introduced the pioneering ALARM app that leverages advancement in mobile technologies to improve coordination with volunteers. The existing system of alerting volunteers relies on a chain of personal phone calls between multiple intermediaries until volunteers could be reached. The ALARM app, on the other hand, enables volunteers to instantaneously notify the FSCD of an emergency, who responds by alerting all the volunteers in the city with the single click of a button. Furthermore, the app enables volunteers to navigate to the epicentre using the embedded city map thereby saving precious time. With the integrated digital risk and resource map, the mobile application enables responders to easily identify nearby fire hydrants, evacuation space, schools, hospital and other essential facilities to save lives and attend to injuries.

DEEPER's pursuit of leveraging technology to counter disasters did not stop at volunteer deployment.

In the fifth webinar, the project introduced another mobile app, PREPARE, which familiarizes users with DOs and DON'Ts of effective disaster preparedness through visual illustrations. In addition, the app features immersive games that fosters better retention of DRR messages. Government officials commended the timeliness of the app as group-based disaster awareness activities are largely abandoned during the ongoing COVID pandemic. Officials also reaffirmed that the initiative complements the government's ambition to utilize mobile technology for Disaster Risk Management stated in the National Disaster Management Policy 2015.

The webinar series concluded with an episode that stressed the urgent need to create social protections for poor and vulnerable people during emergencies, much like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. DEEPER representatives presented a brief account of how the project halted its regular activities and reallocated resources to fund unconditional cash grants for urban households whose earnings plummeted due to the lockdown. The project staff further highlighted the role of cash grants that enabled recipients to restore their food supply and avert eviction. Speakers also acknowledged similar cash support provided by the government and urged to mainstream the initiative as a permanent component of the national safety net programmes.

INSIGHTS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS

Project Objectives Must Consider Business Priorities:

As profit-driven entities, private companies are designed to repel collaborations that may disrupt sales or diminish competitive edge. The proposed 3-day training did not factor in the consequent loss in revenues or brand loyalty due to service interruption. On the other hand, lack of compensation for forgone income made matters even worse for individual motorcyclists. Acceptance of such initiative remains uncertain unless modifications are introduced to prevent service interruption and compensate forgone income.

Practitioners Must Consider Reputational Risks:

The market associations' refusal to collaborate with DEEPER can be attributed to two major consequences: risk of bad press and legal penalties. For private shop owners, penalties translate into higher operating costs and negative media coverage threatens the very survival of the business. In the absence of assurance against risks of negative exposure and regulatory actions, market associations will continue to resist such engagements.

Trust Must Be Gained Through Local Presence and Concentrated Efforts:

During the unsuccessful dialogues with DEEPER, market associations members appeared oblivious to the activities of the project. This is because most of the activities were implemented in areas further away from the marketplaces. On the other hand, the consortium partner who initiated the dialogues had little presence in the local community. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand the disinclination of the association members who have been approached by a stranger making claims that could not be verified.

"The overall insight for the future is to find customized individual or small group-level channels to impart key messages. More informal and palatable ways of convincing needs to be promoted which do not shame or blame existing systems. Greater analogy driven stories of other urban context impacts of disaster to livelihoods/economic income will need to be explored to aware masses without causing social panic."

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