

Meeting of the DER Sub-Group

16 November 2005

Mr. Monzu Morshed, Programme Officer, WFP chaired the meeting. Mr. John McHarris, WFP Adviser, DPR section was also present. The participants introduced themselves. The attendance list is attached as Annex A.

MAIN POINTS COVERED AT THE MEETING

1. Adoption of the minutes of previous meeting:

The minutes of the last DER meeting held on 5 October 2005 were adopted without any modification. It was suggested that action points/decisions should be mentioned at the end of each agenda/discussion.

2. Review current emergency situation and response by agencies:

Mr. Monzu Morshed briefly talked about the flood that hit the Northern districts in early October. He emphasized that it is always important to know who is doing what and the type of intervention to avoid any overlaps or gaps. He then invited the DER members to briefly update on their current response activities.

CARE-Bangladesh has responded with 15 days food ration to 3500 flood affected families in Rangpur, Gaibandha and Nilphamari districts in two trances. CARE has started cash for work in Kurigram with funding from the UNDP. Islamic Relief informed of its plan to respond to 6500 families mainly with food ration in Joypurhat and Naogaon districts. Oxfam informed that their second phase of flood intervention in the form of cash for work, water and sanitation etc. is on going in Naogaon and Joypurhat districts. WFP will distribute through Oxfam 37 MT of high energy biscuits to assist 29,332 families adversely affected in Naogaon district.

OXFAM is also considering Monga response to address the needs of around 300 people in Gaibandha, Sundarganj, Shaghata and Fulchari upazilas. The main concern is employment creation for 20 days and will be implemented as part of Oxfam's River Basin activity. Monga is integrated into Oxfam responses and its long-term programme activity. This particular intervention through 'cash for work' is targeted at Monga only. CARE reported to have conducted an assessment on Monga in Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat districts. CARE will share their information on Monga response, if any, at a later date through the DER Secretariat.

Ms. Yolande Wright of DFID inquired about the number of 5 hundred thousand (5 lakh) people as per CARE in need of assistance. She was eager to know if this number is an additional need for this year as Monga is a seasonal problem that occurs every year. CARE responded that this was the number of people in need of assistance at the time of their assessment. It is remarked that this year due to untimely flooding the situation has aggravated and the number of affected population is higher compared to other Monga years. John of WFP echoed with Yolande saying that WFP is also struggling with the whole issue of Monga as to how different this year's Monga is compared to other average Monga seasons. John asked the DER members whether or not this year's Monga needs immediate attention in terms of response or more structured intervention is needed to address the complexities of Monga.

Dr. Zahidur Rahim of WHO informed that as per the DGHS control room report, countrywide 132 died of diarrhoea in the month of October. The number of diarrhoea cases increased in Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Sherpur and Tangail districts but the situation is still under control. WFP suggested that one of DER Secretariat staff visits DGHS and WHO to gather information on diarrhoea, basically making a more systematic use of diarrhoea case data and diarrhoea death related data. In general the objective is to strengthen the DER ability to say how does this current situation compare with any other period in time, so in summary it can be said that this is related to the time series database.

Mr. Anwar Hossain of EC asked about the process of collecting information on diarrhoea. In describing the process Dr. Rahim said that DGHS control room communicates with all Civil Surgeon (CS) offices all over the country and then they compile the data received and send the updated report to all the concerning authorities. The ground information sent to CS office are from Upazila Health Complexes and then CS office send these to the control room in DGHS. Mr. William Halder of IFRC requested WHO to show the information collection cycle, so that it will enable all to know how the government collects information from its nationwide sources.

Action:

- 1.CARE will share their information on Monga response, if any, through the DER Secretariat.
- 2.A literature review on “Monga” can be done as a step forward to get a better understanding on the subject.
- 3.DER secretariat staff visits DGHS and WHO i) to gather diarrhoea related data for DER information; and ii) to encourage sharing of the process of health information flow from the fields to the national level.

3. RENA Assessment report and Follow Up

The RENA assessment report has been produced by the DER Secretariat on the basis of the information collected and compiled by different DER members as well as the GoB information. Based on the desk review as to how many population have been affected, how much and what type of resources have been distributed at the operational level among the affected population; three districts Naogaon, Joypurhat and Gaibandha were identified as the most affected ones. RENA was undertaken in these three badly affected districts as per the DER meeting decision in October. Three teams were deployed in these affected areas, which included DER District Information Focal Points (DIFP). The teams collected information, completed the RENA form and sent them to DER secretariat, which then analyzed the data and sent the report to all DER member organizations. The important aspect is now to see how this report can be made most useful to DER member organizations. It was also observed that more information was needed to be able to make concrete recommendations.

UNICEF: Mr. Abdul Awal said that during the RENA assessment exercise he felt there is considerable information gap between the Government of Bangladesh and the NGOs. He stressed that as the GoB is concerned about the transparency of the NGOs, the GoB institutions should be kept involved while implementing any intervention.

CARE: Mr. Biswas appreciated the RENA report. But expressed concern that the assessment was done a bit early, in future he suggested to do this when water starts receding

IFRC: Mr. William Halder said that it is important to decide the time as to when the RENA exercise would be undertaken in case of any disaster because logistically it is difficult to do the assessment and relief operations when water is everywhere. There is also an impact when water recedes. IFRC prefers to do the assessment after recession of the water so that the impact can be assessed clearly. He said that there are two types of floods.. For flash floods interventions can be done immediately. For the slow onset floods, people can see the gradual rise of water level. Only those people could be addressed who have taken shelters on embankments, flood shelters, schools, dry raised lands etc. The question is how to address the people who live in the flood water and cannot come to the flood shelters. To him it is a big challenge. Risk assessment is also important before making any response interventions.

WFP: John mentioned about different kinds of assessment exercises, the RIR and the RENA. The RIR is done immediately after the disaster takes place and the RENA is a more in depth analysis of the situation. Logistically it is easier to move around while doing the RENA exercise that is done during the disastrous time and also after when water recedes. This kind of assessment is required more for the rehabilitation programmes.

EC: Mr. Anwar Hossain of EC said that the report has been very useful although he has some concerns. He mentioned about the number of government safety net initiatives like VGD, VGF, Senior Citizens Allowances etc. but when they did their own assessment, they talked to different persons in the fields and majority people responded that the government support are not adequate. To him, it is very difficult to judge whether any further assistance is required in those districts or not. Another issue is that getting the actual realistic information is a big challenge as everyday different news are published in the newspapers. He emphasized that it is now time to consider what is the actual picture out in the fields. He also suggested that more concrete recommendations should come out from the assessment report rather than general kind of recommendations like need for safe drinking water, food, health and sanitation etc. as he considers DER as the platform for compiling the responses required.

DFID: Ms. Yolande remarked that this report is more qualitative compared to last year's report. But it barely meets the donor needs. From a donor's perspective it was not clear whether to pull money as response for this particular year. She thinks that this report should focus on more specific, stronger recommendations so that the donors and the others who respond can make an informed decision whether or not to respond. Mr. Johnny Sarker of DFID in the same line said that stronger recommendations should reflect the potential for short/medium and long-term response activities.

CEGIS: Mr. Atiq Kainan Ahmed of CEGIS appreciated the report but he has some observations as well. He suggested channelising the more scientific understanding of the disaster itself and the hazard itself. He agreed with Mr. William of IFRC saying that we need to understand the dynamics of flood. Besides, in the assessments, if desk studies could be incorporated it would become more useful and scientific.

Handicap International: Mr. Faizul Kabir shared his observations that in this report there is no clear reporting on disabled people, ethnic groups. He said that Handicap International would respond to the disabled people and heavily relies on the report. So he suggested that more information on these issues should be included.

WFP: John suggested that for any sort of assessment report writing, it should not be the responsibility of the DER Secretariat only but should be a shared responsibility with other DER assessment team members so that it shows greater ownership and consensus among the DER members. John requested other DER members to participate in the report writing process.

The proposal to form a small technical group was well accepted to critic the assessment report either to propose a new format or to review the contents of the whole report to produce more concrete, stronger, precise recommendations. The report should be action oriented and usable by members in all categories specially those who wishes to respond to the current emergency. Oxfam, CARE-Bangladesh, DFID, CEGIS, BDRCS and UNICEF volunteered to be the members of the small team that will work on the assessment report further aided by the Secretariat. As Syed Ashraf of DMB declined to be part of this small group, the DER secretariat would try to include some one from the DMB, DRR or CDMP.

John shared some ideas on how to respond timely and in a productive manner:

- a. Decision rules in terms of when we would take a decision to make an assessment.
- b. Using information in an objective manner to make a distinction between current situations with the previous ones.
- c. Food security/livelihood security /health education/sanitary monitoring etc.
- d. Main task is to look at the monitoring system and objective indicators that can trigger a decision to respond in a timely fashion.

Morshed summarized the discussion. The assessment report is definitely an improvement compared to the last one, but there is room for improvement. In future, the shortcomings identified should be given due attention so that the report can clearly communicate with the donors and other users about what has happened in the fields, who is doing what, what are the gaps, what are the needs (immediate, short, medium and long term needs) preferably by geographical focus.

Action:

1. Reasonable solution has to be found as to how to address the people who live in the flood water and cannot come to the flood shelters.
2. Risk assessment be given due attention before making any response interventions.
3. DER secretariat will set up a time and will inform the assessment team members of the small group to meet and work on the assessment report to revise this further to elaborate more specific recommendations for informing potential intervention.
4. DER secretariat will ensure that the RENA Assessment Report is posted to the web page once it is finalized.

3. Overview of Monga forecasting and Monga monitoring by CEGIS:

Mr. Atiq Kainan Ahmed of CEGIS presented an overview of various studies and initiatives on the monga situation and risk management strategies in the northern districts of Bangladesh. The main objective of the presentation was to inform the DER group members with a synoptic overview of the ongoing and recent studies/initiatives/publications on the monga situation and risk management initiatives adopted in the northern districts of Bangladesh. He showed the map of the monga prone districts in northern part of Bangladesh.

Mr Kainan presented the different theoretical definitions of monga and also the perceptions of it. His presentation also included the newspapers clippings on monga, people's perception at local level, various prominent initiatives/studies on monga, documentation on monga by DER group, Independent review of Bangladesh's Development, 2004 by CPD etc. He also presented the severely affected upazilas and the moderately affected upazilas under the five monga-prone districts which includes Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamarti, Rangpur and Gaibandha. He also gave an overview of the Monga forecast survey done by Power and Participation Research (PPRC) in 2005. The main forecasts as identified by PPRC for monga this year included i. the severity of monga is likely to be less than that of 2004 ii. Major reasons for this include: Boro crop in 2005 was robust and has given stronger household food security, good production of jute and tobacco crop and good price received in Nilphamari, iii. Absence of excessive rain as well as drought compared to 2004 flooding. iv. Early flash floods allowed for increased cultivation coverage, v. Two new Spar embankments in Nilphamari has improved physical protection, vi. Early start of migration. vii. Roads not damaged by floods so transport could ply, viii. Migration tendency has increased and ix. Labour market transformation towards piece rate in some areas including women's labor groups.

The actions required as per the PPRC report is the use of the list of vulnerable people in 2004 by army personnel to coordinate VGF distribution in 2005, address the marginal farmer groups, old age/widow allowance enhancement, deferral of micro-credit installments in monga and develop strategies to avoid mohazoni credit. The presentation also included some graphical presentation on baseline situation assessment and impact monitoring done in collaboration with SEMP, UNDP and CEGIS. He has also presented one household pilot initiatives at local level by one local level NGO called Thikana. At the end he threw some spiral questions like why monga is affecting in some areas and not the others, why it is affecting some groups more and some groups less, is this only an agricultural vulnerability or this is also linked with the overall livelihoods of people, what are the linkages of monga with the disasters, what aspects of the livelihoods causes lead to severity of the monga situation, what type of support initiatives worked and not worked and finally many more questions related to monga casualty and management.

Mr Sarker of DFID raised a question regarding the initiative taken by Thikana in Kurigram. He challenged that it is unlikely to grow vegetable in that lean period of Ashwin Kartik as water is all over.

In view of Mr. Kainan these services are available but it needs appropriate/intensive monitoring and supervision. This particular local NGO Thikana provided that kind of supervision. Mr. Syed Ashraf Ahmed of DMB asked if there are any indicators to measure or to identify the monga situation. According to the presentation four issues could be identified as indicators, which are: lack of employment, drop in purchasing power, food crisis and psychosocial phenomenon. In response to the question of any impact of drought or famine situation on monga, Mr Kainan said that drought is a regular problem in Bangladesh. One needs to understand the stress for each crop. There are different studies by BARC and others on this issue but CEGIS tried to concentrate more on an integrated approach for understanding the problem. It is important to understand the hazards, to understand the current status and also these vulnerabilities. If these factors could be integrated together it would then lead to better understanding of risks.

Mr. Syed Shibly of USAID appreciated Mr. Kainan for his excellent presentation. But he asked that what parameters did the report identify to say that the severity of monga would be less this

year (2005) than last year. Mr. Kainan said that according to PPRC monga forecasting report that early migration would happen. It did happen but it has become a failed migration, which give a hard time for post monga situation.

Ms. Yolande of DFID informed about the National Workshop to be held in January 2006. WFP is likely to be involved in organizing the national workshop on Monga with DFID support through PPRC, where active participation of DER members will be expected.

John of WFP praised CEGIS for the excellent presentation. But his comment is on the geography as some monga studies say 5 districts and the other says 8 districts. He said in one year time monga monitoring will be done in a better way but the concern is people should not limit themselves to 5 or 8 districts only. The bigger issue is how this monga could be monitored all over the country in lean seasons and in difficult periods.

Mr. Atiq said that in northern districts all the areas are facing seasonal crisis. But why should we call the five districts the monga prone areas only, as other districts like Chittagong, North-Eastern districts (Haor) are also facing the same situation. The main reason is that the people in these monga prone areas do not have well-structured alternatives beyond agriculture. And as a result people suffer a lot during the lean seasons.

Action:

- a. DER secretariat to circulate the Monga presentation by CEGIS in PDF format to all DER members.
- b. DER secretariat to circulate the report on Monga Forecasting Survey to all once it is approved by UNDP.

4. Recap on DER Working Group Activities:

WG on Earthquake: The representative from DMB, the Chair of the WG has kindly circulated two pages update on Earthquake in Bengali. Mr. Ashraf informed that government has decided to prepare an earthquake response plan with some other organizations with DMB chairing. He asked if the DER group or sub-group have a response plan on earthquake. Mr. Morshed said that if government really would like to formulate an earthquake response plan and wants other DER member organizations to play a role it should be understood by both the parties and strong cooperation is also needed. It was concluded that DER Agencies would be willing to contribute based on their capacity and availability of resources if the government consider to formulate a response plan on earthquake. Mr. Azad of IOM said that they are ready to support the government if they require in formulating the earthquake response plan.

WG on Standards: In Bangladesh different agencies are delivering different quantities of relief materials among the families. With a view to standardize the relief package a working group was set up with IFRC as the chair. Mr. William of IFRC updated the group on this working group. He mentioned that the group would focus on many concepts/issues like assessment reports, assessment tools, better programme initiatives, distribution, selection criteria, logistics and setting up a control room and reporting. They would also focus on the recommendations part so that the donors get clear view of the actual situation. Whenever disaster strikes, IFRC coordinates with the disaster emergency response team, government and other NGOs and then they set up a cell, they do the emergency assessment and then submit the assessment report and post it to the website. He suggests that DER should follow the same procedures. He said that he

would talk to relevant stakeholders on the particular issue of standards but he needs time to do so to set up a concept paper. As soon as it is developed he is going to share this with the DER members. They would also do an analysis on what type of relief materials are distributed, what is available in the country when a disaster strikes, capacity of the NGOs-all these are to be assessed. He talked about SPHERE. But the important issue is to disseminate the sphere issues and make people understand this. He also said about the sphere equipments like logistical support, their availability etc. Based on all these questions, on how to act and how to train the people at the grass root level staff-IFRC is preparing a concept paper which would be shared among the DER members by end of this year. He also added some factors to be considered while preparing this concept paper which includes: Vulnerability Capacity Assessment which leads to risk assessment and hazard mapping, better programme initiative, emergency response, capacities of both the government and local level people, warehousing, WFP's capacity etc. He promised to prepare and circulate the concept paper to all the DER members by end of December 2005.

5. Update on Historical Time series Data

John, referring to the database mentioned that while building up the time series database it is very important to know the diarrhoea cases and the number of deaths due to diarrhoea. This will help all to compare the current situation with the historical data/situation with regards to diarrhoeal situation. John also informed that the data was collected from the 12 flood affected districts only and this number was compared with the last five year's data. And the picture that came up is that the situation is worse with regard to diarrhoea comparing with past five years but not as bad as previous two years. Morshed agreed with John saying that if we have the time series database then we can compare the situation with previous years, which would eventually help us in taking decisions swiftly. John emphasized to pursue the information available for historical database as these seem to be underutilized. He stressed that if these are correctly utilized it would help us to make analytical decisions.

6. Any Other Business

DMB: Mr. Syed Ashraf of DMB, sought clarification on some of the following points:

- a. IFRC said that they work with government and other donor agencies but unfortunately he did not find any liaison between IFRC and the government.
- b. The current status of the concept of emergency stock piling

IFRC: Mr. William clarified the first concern by saying that the President of the Republic of Bangladesh is the President of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society. He also informed that IFRC has 68 national units all over the country. They do coordination with Ministry of Food and Disaster Management and he is ready to share the meeting minutes with him. In his second question he said that the concept paper will be developed shortly along with guidelines and will be shared with all the DER members.

Mr. Chitta Ranjan Biswas raised a concern as to how to make the best use of the District Information Focal Points (DIFPs) and to build up their capacity when we do the fine-tuning of the assessment report.

Mr. Shahidul Haque of WFP informed all that all English medium schools in Dhaka are collecting money for the monga prone victims. The Daily Star is coordinating this initiative. But they would like to have some agencies working in those areas to channelise these funds. The

fund will be mostly in cash but meals for school children could be there as well. He requested the interested agencies to directly contact Mr. Fahim Monaim of Daily Star at 8124944 to discuss more on this issue.

Mr. Morshed informed all the Local Consultative Group (LCG) are doing a survey on how individual thematic local consultative group is effective to its members organizations. In doing that DER will be sharing all the members e-mail addresses with UNDP, who are actually managing this survey. DER members will receive an e-mail requesting them to participate in the survey process. It would need not more than 5 minutes. This survey is basically to strengthen their capacity to serve better.

7. Date/time of next meeting

Tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, 14 December 2005, 14:00 hrs at UN Common Conference Room, IDB Bhaban 17th floor., Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka.

ANNEX A:

ATTENDANCE LIST

DER Meeting held on 16 November 2005

Organizations	Sl	Name	Organization
GoB	1	Mr. Syed Ashraf Islam	Disaster Management Bureau
Donors	2	Ms. Yolande Wright	DFID
	3	Mr. Johnny Sarker	DFID
	4	Mr. Anwar Hossain	ECHO
	5	Mr. Syed Shibly	USAID
	UN	6	Mr. Abdul Awal
7		Dr. Muhammad Zahidur Rahim	WHO
8		Mr. John McHarris	WFP
9		Mr. Monzu Morshed	WFP
10		Ms. Farhana Pinky	WFP, FC section
11		Mr. Shahidul Haque	WFP, FC section
NGOs	12	Mr. Emdad Moslem	CARE-Bangladesh
	13	Mr. Chitta Ranjan Biswas	CARE-Bangladesh
	14	Mr. Atiq Kainan Ahmed	CEGIS
	15	Mr. Faizul Kabir	Handicap International
	16	Mr. William Halder	IFRC
	17	Mr. Md. Azad	IOM
	18	Mr. Md. Anowar Hossain	Islamic Relief
	19	Mr. Palash Mondol	Nirapad
	20	Mr. Kaiser Rejve	Oxfam
	21	Ms. Kabita Bose	Oxfam
	22	Mr. Golam Md. Billah	Plan International
	23	Mr. Taher Khan	World Vision Bangladesh
	24	Ms. Jennifer Morgan	SC-UK
DER Secretariat	25	Ms. Roushan Ara Begum	DER Secretariat (WFP)
	26	Ms. Meher Nigar Bhuiyan	DER Secretariat (WFP)

Minutes recorded and circulated by: DER Secretariat