

Disaster Management and Development in Bangladesh: Understanding the Legal and Institutional Effects

Mohammad Tarikul Islam

Associate Professor,
Department of Government and Politics,
Jahangirnagar University,
Bangladesh.
t.islam@juniv.edu

Structured Abstract:

Purpose: How does the legal and institutional framework for disaster management (DM) has become clearer over the years to leverage sustaining development in Bangladesh?

Study Method: The study has been accomplished based on the content analysis.

Findings: legislation and structural setups have fully grasped the essence of disaster management as an integral part of Bangladesh's disaster management system. Unfortunately, it is not exploited to complement achieving SDGs.

Originality: The model adopted by the Government of Bangladesh traditionally consists of three key components of a disaster management approach and guarantees that a comprehensive risk reduction tradition will remain fundamental to all efforts to take care of climate change and environmental management throughout the process. A study on institutional and legal aspects of disaster management complementing development was not found in the contemporary scholarship and this is the reason why it deserves novelty.

Keywords: Disaster Management, Disaster Risk Reduction, SDGs, and Local Government

Introduction

Many scholars, experts and researchers believe that the causes of vulnerabilities because of natural disasters impact on the lives and livelihood of people and some of the actions of different stakeholders and their adaptation strategies certainly enable to minimize the level of vulnerability. In the context of Bangladesh, most research on disaster management focuses on the extent of natural disasters and disaster response management. The Government of Bangladesh has underlined with NGOs, INGOs and donor agencies working in Bangladesh on the direction and role and responsibilities of disaster response and recovery starting from the culture of disaster preparedness and mitigation (CEGIS, 2009).

Sensitivity, consistent with public policy in the pursuit of disaster management, has become one of the major research challenges, particularly in mitigating the effects of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation (ADB, 2004). Moreover, there is a lack of discussion of fundamental issues and relevant adaptations which may affect the level of vulnerability in the near future (UN, 2002). Non-state actors often act as a supporting force in helping the government through various programs in disaster management, climate change adaptation and environmental management.

Disaster management stakeholders and actors in regular discussions with the Government of Bangladesh have seen the official Nexus support disaster / climate change / environmental awareness to integrate disaster mitigation considerations into development planning policies and programs over the past few decades (ADB, 2008). Due to their deliberate involvement in the strategy design and review process, DM has achieved a breakthrough in DM and development in Bangladesh through a highly comprehensive approach to engaging civil society members and development partners.

Literally, the integration of disaster mainstream, climate change and environmental issues into development plans and processes in a coherent way that minimizes the risks of potential damage due to natural causes and hinders overall development means engaging in a systematic inclusive effort (GoB, 2008). Throughout the process development process, Bangladesh is considered as an ideal learner of this movement to reduce the associated risks due to environmental risks as well as because of climate induced migration particularly for those who are living in and around the coastal lines of the country.

Only fair, relevant stakeholders (Bangladesh government, development partners and other non-government actors at the local and international level) have realized that risk identification and management measures should be an integral part of their expansion plans to benefit from joint efforts to sustain the turnaround. Bangladesh will become one of the best resilient countries in the future (DDM, 2012). Moreover, poorly planned and managed metropolitan development, environmental degradation, poverty and inequality and fragile governance tools continue to cause rapid-growing losses and damage associated with widespread threats in Bangladesh, and how can multi-stakeholders work by projecting risk scores?

Literally, disasters, the environment and climate change are the key issues associated with the mainstreamed development goals of Bangladesh government throughout the process of elevating the economic growth even in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the adverse impact of COVID-19 pandemic on SDGs implementation, localizing disaster management and climate change adaptation has been essential through a collective coordinated approach with active participation of multi-stakeholders with technical and financial aid as usual like the past under the dynamic leadership from the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

Disaster management traditionally recognizes the implementation of systematic and comprehensive efforts to reduce or eliminate the risk of potential damage due to both natural and man-made causes as well as adverse effects of climate change and environmental movements (DDM, 2012). This systematic involvement should be incorporated into the mainstream of development planning and processes so that risks can be addressed to achieve better results keeping the spirit of collective efforts under the guidance of the national government.

We need to be careful when talking about massive disaster management by adopting sustainable development policies in the context of climate change and environmental degradation in Bangladesh. In fact, in order to ensure the sustainability of the development process from policy planning to implementation, the national government of disaster prone countries like Bangladesh must try to reduce the vulnerability of the poor and other helpless people in the society to the effects of natural disasters A) Transforming disaster management from a traditional response and recovery system to a more comprehensive risk reduction culture by taking an example; B) To establish the legal and institutional capacity of the national disaster management system to improve both response and recovery management at all levels (GoB, 2008).

As a disaster-prone country, we are not serious about bringing Bangladesh into the mainstream of disaster management in our development activities, although in recent times, with the endless stimulus of international actors, the government has begun to realize that risk identification and management should be an integral part of them (GoB, 2008). Progress planning, development methods and governance have been treated as the most priority for the equitable development of the country in line with the SDGs stipulations.

Disaster Management - a Comprehensive Approach: Looking at the Disaster Management Model of the Government of Bangladesh

Coordinating Disaster Management Procedures in Bangladesh the systematic search for disaster management in Bangladesh is not well known in the available literature as well as in the field of action, although Bangladesh deserves praise for adopting a holistic approach from legal matters to institutional building. Moreover, despite having a holistic approach to disaster management, this approach is taken from a variety of programs at the national, international and community levels, and is not redeveloped or reconsidered from time to time in line with field experience and theoretical perspectives (Islam, 2018).

As a result, the implementation of the disaster management, climate change adaptation and environmental management in Bangladesh, as well as the shortcomings of the policy, is not progressing as well as expected, working professionally. Lack of coordination among different stakeholders hinders rapid response as well as disaster management to some extent during an emergency response, is explored through this exercise from the beginning of undertaking. Besides, implementation of the programme with proper monitoring and evaluation gets highest priority as long as good governance is concerned. Political undue influence free credible and on time implementation of DM, DRR and CCA projects is the top most priority and the government must be serious in this regard.

To bring it into the mainstream, the legal and institutional framework for disaster management (DM) has become clearer over the years. In addition, legislation and structural setups have fully grasped the essence of disaster management as an integral part of Bangladesh's disaster management system to complement the national government's efforts to achieve SDGs even in the midst of the COVID epidemic. The model adopted by the Government of Bangladesh traditionally consists of three key components of a disaster management approach and guarantees that a comprehensive risk reduction tradition will remain fundamental to all efforts to take care of climate change and environmental management throughout the process.

The material of the model refers to the use of scientific erosion (including the effects of climate change) as a basis for accurately determining the impending hazardous environment. According to the Disaster Management Model, in order to improve measures for threat management, the risk environment must first be defined to empower relevant actors inside

and outside the government to bring about a paradigm shift in the disaster management culture (UNISDR, 2004).

What we can realize is that in order to define a risk environment, knowledge about the interface of risk and the basics of risk (community) is created and conducted in an organized and analytical manner necessary from the beginning of the joint effort. Defining an environment of risk involves both traditional and recognized risk analysis and involves various stages, such as establishing the context of the socio-political environment.

The Disaster Management Act passed by the Parliament of Bangladesh in 2012 gives role and obligation to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief to manage the national disaster management efforts and involves all ministries and ensures the business of disaster management for all. Under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, the Department of Disaster Management (DDM) was established after the approval of the Disaster Management Act, which passed a decade ago (DDM, 2012).

I will briefly define the role of the disaster management department here. The Department has been authorized to implement the provisions of the Disaster Management Act by reducing the overall sensitivity to the various effects of disasters by taking integrated mitigation measures adopted by various governmental and non-governmental groups related to disaster management and emergency response.

Legal and Institutional Affairs of Disaster Management in Bangladesh

The Disaster Management Framework provides the relevant legislation, strategy and best practice framework under which the work of Emergency Response Management (ERM) in Bangladesh is carried out and implemented (GoB, 2008). The structure includes:

1. Disaster Management Act
2. National Disaster Management Policy (to be formulated and adopted)
3. National Plan for Disaster management
4. Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD)
5. Guidelines for Government at all Levels (Best Practice Models)

The guidelines have been developed as best practice models for governments at all levels and are used to assist ministries, NGOs, disaster management committees and civil society in

implementing disaster risk management. The guidelines will include, among others (The Daily Star, 2011):

- 1) Community Risk Assessment (CRA) Guideline
- 2) Disaster Impact, Damage, Loss and Need Assessment Guideline
- 3) Local Disaster Management and Emergency Fund Management Guidelines
- 4) Indigenous Coping Mechanism Guidebook
- 5) Hazard Specific Risk Assessment Guidelines for Earthquake, Flood, Cyclone, Fire, Drought etc.
- 6) Emergency Response and Information Management Guideline
- 7) Contingency Planning Template
- 8) Emergency Response Management Guideline
- 9) Disaster Information Management Guideline
- 10) Sectoral Disaster Management Planning Template
- 11) Natural Disaster Risk Incorporated Local Level Planning Template
- 12) Guidelines for Road, Water, Industrial and Fire safety
- 13) Guideline for Disaster Shelter Management
- 14) Monitoring and Evaluation Guideline for the Implementation of the Plan
- 15) Guideline for International Assistance Management in Disaster Emergency
- 16) Multi-Agency Disaster Incident Management Guideline

DM Implementation Challenges, Institutional Limitations, Policy Gap and Way Forward

Regarding disaster management approach through the local government institutions, the needs are great but the response of the local government is ill-informed, disorganized and barely recognizable. The agencies do not have a clear mission to act on climate change in a coordinated way, nor are they given the resources to do so (UNDP, 2004). The data simply shows that the officials responding do not know much about disaster management but they believe it is too big an issue for them to handle. Let me talk about the role of local government at the urban Bangladesh in disaster management.

Obviously, the local government cannot stop disaster and its impact but its overall objective should be that the city corporation should do whatever it can do to contribute to the cause of helping the urban residents to mitigate and adapt to climate change and disaster (UNDP, 2018). The fact that it cannot do everything should be no excuse for its doing nothing. While

major cities of Bangladesh have little polluting industry, the Corporation Council can make by-laws to require manufacturers to use carbon capture and recycling and to prohibit water emissions. An appropriate city office can be mandated to enforce the central government's legislation to protect the city's ponds, which could act as mini-carbon-sinks, and are being destroyed with reckless abandon.

Without proper implementation of disaster management, sustainable disaster management policy framework is a meaningless application that will create a float-up answer by imposing explanations from top to bottom. Therefore, the level of enforcement of legal obligations, as well as the implementation of disaster management programs by the relevant disaster management agencies, will be unveiled with this effort. We must be aware of proper environmental management by integrating disaster management into the good governance indicators. We have to make sure that paradigm shift from the relief culture to the disaster risk reduction are linked with climate change adaption and environmental governance.

Disaster risk reduction is a problem in the disaster management department that becomes a system error because a comprehensive national agency is needed to determine the role and strategy for disaster risk reduction. Since the Disaster Management Department operates single-handedly, the system lacks leadership, proper strategy and strategy implementation.

We have to get at the root causes of those kinds of failure and those roots run very deep: into the unsatisfactory distribution of power and revenue between the central and local governments, into Bangladeshi culture, into the failure of local government generally in Bangladesh because it did not develop from a thirst for democracy or devolution of the people but was always a concoction of administrators in the capital, first colonial administrators and later bureaucratic administrators.

Obviously, all that cannot be changed, if only because a lot of it is simply the history of the country. One should not be too ambitious in planning to solve the collapse of municipal environmental governance. Indeed, whether that collapse can be solved at all is a very open question. Some real incremental improvement would be a nice change worth working for.

Some old-fashioned NGO community organising, on environmental action at the community level, might be a good start. Then the structures might work on their own or, if new laws were needed, people might actually obey them because they believe in the importance of such

laws. Laws in advance of the culture change will be fantasy laws, of no impact, like the ones we have on municipal environmental governance now.

Either environmental governance should be “nationalized” in the central government, which has the power and resources to do it, with no role for the municipalities, or the Municipalities should be empowered to levy and collect taxes and make laws without the permission of the central government officers, which would give them the power and resources to do it (UNRCO & MoFDM, 2012). The present structure of putting all the resources and power in the central government and all the responsibility for environmental governance in the Municipalities is like a predictable plan for failure – and it works to do for leveraging the persistent efforts of the national government to localizes effective disaster management empowering the urban and rural level local government bodies (USAID, 2007).

Conclusion

Disaster management policy should not be owned by one ministry but by all government agencies so that a strategic 'joint' approach can be developed and institutionalized to reduce disaster risk to a certain level. The strategy includes joining a capacity building training program for all concerned officers to successfully implement the DRR guidelines. Leadership is an important factor especially for disaster management. It shows the need to strengthen diplomatic relations. In order to empower the UDMC, we must work to create disaster awareness through frequent meetings on the three stages of disaster (past, present and future). Effective UDMC literally contributes to fundraising, setting up disaster warning stations in every UP office, setting up disaster shelters, forming volunteer teams for emergency response, organizing three-step training for disaster management effectively.

Creating social awareness, encouraging community participation in post-climate assessment, disaster response and implementation of government programs certainly plan a great role in disaster management at the grassroot level. As this UDMC works with community-led elected representatives at the grassroots level and mobilizes community support, this committee survives. However, the involvement of women should be mandatory so that the needs and vulnerabilities of the community during the disaster can be realized and effectively addressed.

References

- ADB 2004, *Disaster and Emergency Assistance Policy*, Asian Development Bank, Manila.
- ADPC 2008, *Community-Based Disaster Risk Management field practitioners' handbook*, ADPC, Bangkok
- CEGIS 2009, *State of River Water Flows in Bangladesh and its Impact on Disasters*, Dhaka: CEGIS.
- DDM 2012, *Urban Disaster Risks in Bangladesh*, Dhaka:DDM.
- DDM 2012, *Cyclone Shelter Center: Best Examples of Disaster Loss Mitigation in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: DDM.
- GoB 2008, *Disaster Management Act 2012*, Dhaka: MoDMR.
- GoB 2008, *National Disaster Management Plan (Draft)*, Dhaka: MoDMR.
- GoB 2008, *The Standing Orders on Disaster (revised)*, Dhaka: DMB.
- Islam, MT 2018, 'Despite legislative and institutional arrangements, Bangladesh is struggling to improve environmental governance', London: LSE South Asia Centre.
- The Daily Star 2011, *Disaster and Poverty in Bangladesh*, The Daily Star, Dhaka.
- UN 2002, *Living With Risk – A Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives*. Geneva: United Nations.
- UNDP 2004, *Diminishing Disaster Risk—A Challenge for Development, United Nations Development Programme*, New York: UNDP HQ.
- UNDP 2018, *DM Profile of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: UNDP.
- UNISDR 2004, *Living With Risk: A Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives*, Geneva: UNISDR.
- UNRRCO & MoFDM 2012, *LCG for Disaster Risk Reduction in Bangladesh*, Dhaka:UNRRCO.
- USAID 2007, *How Resilient is Your Coastal Community? A Guide for Evaluating Coastal Community Resilience to Tsunamis and other Hazards*, Bangkok: USAID.