

**THE CAPACITY OF CYCLONE PREPAREDNESS  
PROGRAMME AND FLOOD PREPAREDNESS  
PROGRAMME VOLUNTEERS FOR  
GENDER INCLUSIVE PREPAREDNESS**



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UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Summary of the study findings and recommendations</b>		<b>05</b>
I.	Background to the study	07
II.	Objectives of the study	11
III.	Methodology of the study	12
IV.	Contribution of volunteers in disaster preparedness and response: experiences from the past	14
V.	Current capacity of formal volunteers in disaster preparedness and response	16
VI.	The role of gender in disaster preparedness and response	17
VII.	Findings and observations from the focus group discussions	18
VIII.	Challenges for gender-responsive disaster preparedness and response: observations from the key informant interviews	25
IX.	Conclusions and recommendations	27

## ABBREVIATIONS

BDRCS	Bangladesh Red Crescent Society
BS	Bangladesh Scouts
CPP	Cyclone Preparedness Programme
CBOs	Community-based Organizations
CDMP	Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DDM	Department of Disaster Management
DMC	Disaster Management Committee
DMIC	Disaster Management Information Centre
FPP	Flood Preparedness Programme
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
NGOs	Non-government Organizations
PIO	Project Implementation Officer
UDMC	Union Disaster Management Committee
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
UP	Union Parishad
VDP	Village Defence Party

# GLOSSARY

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**Volunteerism in disaster management:** Citizen participation is a key principle of disaster risk reduction and resilience building. However, in most developed countries, emergency and disaster management relies largely on a workforce of professionals and, to varying degrees, volunteers affiliated with official agencies. Individuals and groups who work outside this system have largely been undervalued. Given increasing disaster risk worldwide due to population growth, urban development and climate change, it is likely that 'informal' volunteers will provide much of the additional surge capacity required to respond to more frequent, especially sudden on-set emergencies and disasters in the future.

**Gender:** Gender refers to the social differences between females and males throughout the life cycle that are learned, but which though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures. Gender determines the roles, power and resources for females and males in any culture<sup>1</sup>. So, gender defines social and cultural expectations about what behaviour and activities are allowed, what attributes are valued, and what rights and power one has in the family, community and nation. For example, in one society women may be expected to focus on the family's domestic needs while men engage in the formal paid workforce, whereas in another, both men and women may be expected to contribute to the family's cash income.

**Gender equality:** Refers to both men and women having the freedom to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles or prejudices. There are three issues that gender equality addresses: rights, resources, voice and agency. Gender equality does not mean that men and women have to become the same, rather they should enjoy same level of rights, have equal access to resources and have equally strong voice and agency. Gender inequality negatively affects women and girls, as male tend to have more decision-making power and control over resources denying and depriving their female counterparts. Therefore, efforts to advance gender equality focuses primarily on improving the situation and status of women and girls to bring them at par with their male counterparts.

**Gender equity:** Refers to fairness of treatment for women and men according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent. For example, specific outreach strategies may be developed to ensure that relief assistance reaches female-headed households in societies where the mobility of women is restricted. Likewise, general distribution centres may be created or certain livelihood recovery activities may be designed and implemented specifically by and for women.

**Disaster:** A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and

capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts, that exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope with using its own resources.

**Disaster risk reduction:** Disaster risk reduction is aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development.

**Hazard:** A dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption or environmental damage.

**Early warning system:** The set of capacities needed to generate and disseminate timely and meaningful warning information to enable individuals, communities and organizations threatened by a hazard to prepare and to act appropriately and in sufficient time to reduce the possibility of harm or loss.

**Mitigation:** The lessening or minimizing of adverse impacts of hazards and related disasters.

**Preparedness:** The knowledge and capacities developed by governments, professional response and recovery organizations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions.

**Prevention:** The outright avoidance of adverse impacts of hazards and related disasters.

**Public awareness:** The extent of common knowledge about disaster risks, the factors that lead to disasters and the actions that can be taken, individually and collectively, to reduce exposure and vulnerability to hazards.

**Resilience:** The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management.

**Risk:** The probability of an event and its negative consequences.

**Vulnerability:** The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards.

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<sup>1</sup> (IASC, 2006) Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs - Equal Opportunities Gender Handbook, p1

# Summary of the study findings and recommendations

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This study, conducted in April–May 2017, sought to establish the knowledge levels of volunteers working with the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes in Bangladesh and to identify effective strategies to strengthen their capacity. The study focused on how well informed the volunteers are about the gender-differentiated needs of people in times of crisis. The United Nations General Assembly recognizes volunteers as an important component of any strategy aimed at disaster prevention and management. Bangladesh has a long tradition of using volunteers and an abundance of people eager and willing to help in times of need. The success of the Cyclone Preparedness Programme, for example, has been attributed to its 'simplicity, attention to socio-cultural aspects, and its extensive community-based volunteer and communications network that expedite the delivery of cyclone warning messages' (Habib, Shahidullah and Ahmed, 2012).

The key findings and recommendations that emerge from this research are as follows:

## Gender-sensitive responses

Volunteers working for the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes are generally not aware of the gender-differentiated needs that people may have in anticipating disasters or responding to emergencies. However, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme considers these gender-differentiated needs in their disaster preparedness and emergency responses and includes the issue of gender and gender-based disaster management, albeit briefly, in their basic training programme for volunteers. The cyclone preparedness volunteers are known to always treat female disaster victims with respect. The Flood Preparedness Programme, on the other hand, is newly piloted in flood affected areas and does not yet provide for gender-differentiated needs in their response efforts. The programme does not yet offer any significant training for their volunteers who generally have no prior experience of dealing with disaster emergencies.

Advocacy and strong leadership in gender-sensitive programme activities are key elements in ensuring long lasting results. Organizations have to focus on saving lives during times of emergencies and so gender needs and issues need to be integrated into the established procedures if they are to be given consistent and adequate consideration.

## Training

Understanding the different needs of men and women is a core aspect of disaster preparedness and emergency response, and needs to be central in cyclone and flood preparedness programmes. While most key informants in this study appreciated the Cyclone Preparedness Programme's well-established gender-differentiated responses, the volunteers and staff in both the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes would benefit from in-depth gender-sensitivity training. This emphasis on gender issues in the training programmes for all involved is essential if gender sensitive approaches are to be institutionalized.

A key aspect of any gender training is ensuring that staff and volunteers understand the importance of collecting gender-disaggregated data and identifying the different needs of women and men. The training needs to include practical exercises on identifying and meeting women and men's needs in the disaster management context. Even the basic first aid training courses need to take into account gender differences in vulnerability.

During training courses, women participants should have the opportunity to address large groups of people so they build up their self-confidence and ensure that their voices are heard – they will often need to speak out on behalf of others.

## Planning

Men and women need to be equally engaged in designing, planning, implementing and monitoring disaster mitigation measures. All plans need to be examined for their gender sensitivity. Any post-disaster support that the programmes offer also need to be sensitive to the needs of men and women who may have to cope with changes in their gender roles. For example, a man may need to take responsibility for caring for young children after the loss of his spouse.

## Collaborating

The cyclone and flood preparedness programmes should work with other humanitarian organizations, such as, donors, community-based organizations and international non-governmental organizations, to develop indicators to measure their progress and gauge success and to devise other ways of assessing the impact of the disaster management programmes.

The union disaster management committees (UDMCs) can only function consistently and effectively with the full participation of representatives from the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes. These committees are essential in carrying out post-disaster response work but they can only succeed if volunteers from the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes are involved. These volunteers, who have usually had some training and often some experience in such situations, need to work under the auspices of the committees in assessing loss, damage and needs to ensure unbiased and credible response planning.

## Recruiting

Volunteers play a vital role in community development, and so programmes need to aim for a gender balance and a broader age range among their staff and volunteers. Young people are often targeted in recruiting campaigns but, as they often end up leaving home in search of a better life, the recruitment process becomes a constant cycle as these young volunteers need to be replaced.

As the Flood Preparedness Programme is still establishing itself, it has the opportunity to design a women-friendly volunteer programme to encourage more women volunteers. Many volunteers are from poorer families and there are but very few incentives for them to continue community work after a project ends. However, if they are well trained, these volunteers would continue to provide technical services and guidance to their communities during non-disaster periods and even demand a small fee for their services.

UN Women could consider joining hands with the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes to enhance their capacity in gender-responsive disaster preparedness and response programming. UN Women could offer the technical assistance and resources to ensure the programmes have gender-sensitive mechanisms in place.

UN Women could advocate for the roll-out and implementation of a national gender-responsive disaster preparedness training programme for volunteer networks, such as Urban Volunteers, the Bangladesh Scouts etc.



# I. Background to the study

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Relationships between men and women are powerful forces in every culture and they determine the different roles and responsibilities that men and women have in their communities. However, these roles can also lead to differences and inequalities in men and women's levels of exposure and vulnerability to the impact of disasters and their access to disaster preparedness, response and recovery services.

According to the World Disasters Report 2012, Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. It is affected by yearly recurring floods and cyclones and is subject to a number of other risks, such as earthquakes or droughts. Over the years, Bangladesh has set up an impressive disaster management infrastructure to prepare for and recover from natural disasters. This infrastructure has helped to significantly reduce the number of victims of natural disasters.

When natural or man-made disaster strikes a community, these organizations, set up specifically to manage emergencies, respond automatically and according to a pre-established plan. Each organization has a specific role to play in ensuring an effective response to and recovery from the devastation. Nevertheless, one element in the present system continues to pose a challenge: how to make the most of spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers. These volunteers – our neighbours and ordinary citizens – often arrive on-site at a disaster, ready to help. Yet because they are not officially associated with the existing emergency management response system, their offers of help are often underused and can even be considered problematic to professional responders.

This extensive disaster risk reduction system is built on a number of governmental and non-governmental organizations tasked with prevention and recovery. The lead in organizing and coordinating disaster management activities lies with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) and specifically with its Department of Disaster Management (DDM). Its

mandate is to plan and manage the whole cycle of disaster management, including preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. The basis for any activities in disaster management is defined by the Disaster Management Act 2012. This Act presents a comprehensive plan to introduce an effective disaster management system which is coordinated, objective-driven and capable of handling all kinds of disasters. One of its objectives is to formulate a national body of volunteers to provide a speedy and effective emergency response before, during and after a disaster has struck. This is in line with the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that considers volunteers an important component of any strategy for disaster prevention and management.

The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 identified five priority actions to reduce risks and losses and volunteers would be able to assist in all of these actions, particularly in relation to reaching the community and household levels:

- 'Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation;
- 'Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning;
- 'Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels;
- 'Reduce the underlying risk factors;
- 'Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.<sup>2</sup>

The Bangladesh Disaster Management Act 2012 calls for the formulation of a national body of volunteers for disaster, giving volunteers a formal role in managing disaster and ensuring they are integrated into the current disaster management strategies in Bangladesh. Given the limited resources available at the local and national levels, involving ordinary citizens in managing emergencies is imperative to prepare for, respond to,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/disaster-risk-reduction-and-humanitarian-crisis>

recover from and mitigate the effects of disasters in our communities. Success, however, will require new levels of cooperation and commitment to partnership among the voluntary sector, professional first-responders and all levels of government. While this may be a challenging goal, the priority and long-term value of this work is undeniable.

Bangladesh has a long tradition of deploying volunteers and an abundance of people eager and willing to help in times of crisis. According to a survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2010, a large proportion of Bangladesh society is involved in volunteer work of one form or another. The survey concludes that over 16 million people or 17.5 percent of the population in Bangladesh engage in volunteer work and roughly 75 percent of them are men while 75 percent are active in rural areas. Although most volunteers in Bangladesh are involved informally, there are also notable formal volunteer organizations that contribute to government disaster management efforts and assist other actors through their support for early warning systems, emergency relief and recovery.

## Defining the role of volunteers in disaster relief

Volunteerism has a positive impact at many levels. Firstly, it profoundly influences the volunteers themselves, contributing to their personal growth and encouraging them to be responsible and active citizens. When people volunteer, they become more committed to their communities and they also earn the respect of their fellow community members. Secondly, volunteerism positively affects communities, potentially improving social cohesion and resilience by strengthening trust and solidarity among the people. This community spirit also fosters community ownership of development projects in the area. Involving volunteers as an essential part of the disaster management strategy promotes responsible citizenship and underlines the community responsibility to use the support mechanisms and activate disaster management structures. Tapping into local knowledge

and building capacity within communities supports community-led approaches and strengthens the government's capacity to anticipate and mitigate the effects of natural disasters. All in all, volunteerism often provides more sustainable solutions and enables community members to design and contribute to the development of their communities.

The increasing incidence of disasters has seen an increased involvement of well-meaning individuals, groups, organizations and institutions who step in to assist with relief and response work. Volunteers play a crucial role from the early stages –, rescuing survivors, providing or coordinating emergency relief and medical aid, setting up relief camps, – but their support often extends to post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation activities. Their rapid deployment and diverse skills make it possible to offer immediate support to affected communities. Volunteers could also serve as a key link in the flow of information from affected communities to stakeholders, including government and donor agencies, the media and international aid organizations.

## Defining gender

UN Women defines gender as follows:

*“Gender: refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.”<sup>3</sup>*

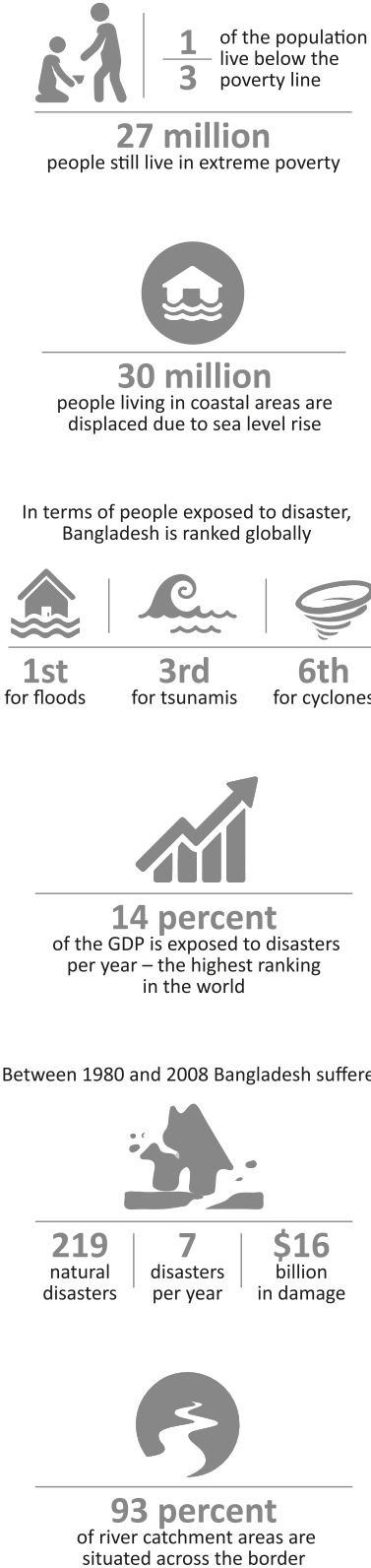
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

Gender does not just refer to 'women'. However, given that women are often in a disadvantaged position in many developing as well as developed countries, the promotion of gender equality implies an explicit attention to women's empowerment. In countries where gender discrimination is tolerated, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards. Not only is the percentage of women and girls who die higher in these countries but also is the incidence of gender-based violence.

### Disaster profile of Bangladesh

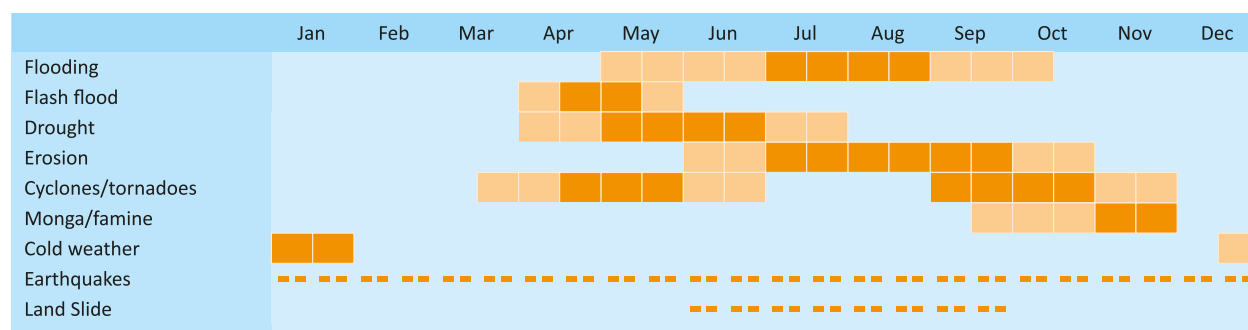
Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world due to its geophysical location, land characteristics, river system and the monsoon climate that render the country highly vulnerable to natural hazards. The coastal morphology of Bangladesh also influences the impact of hazards on the area. Since independence in 1971, the country has endured almost 200 disaster events causing more than 500,000 deaths and colossal damage to the national economy. Being associated with various natural and climate-change induced hazards, Bangladesh has experienced the worst victim rate in the world, as is evident from figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Disaster and climate profile of Bangladesh



Source: United Nations Development Programme, climate change, environment and disaster profile of Bangladesh, 2012

Figure 2: Disasters calendar of Bangladesh



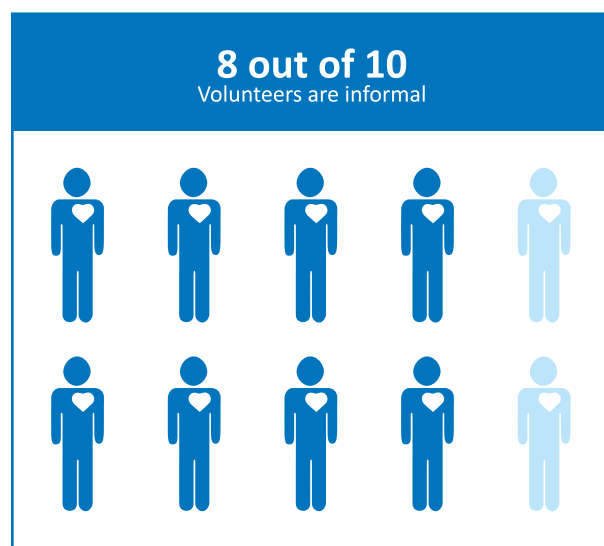
Source: World Food Programme Bangladesh, 2011

### The profile and role of volunteers in disaster management in Bangladesh

Out of the 16.58 million volunteers in Bangladesh, 88.8 percent (14.70 million) volunteer informally while 9.7 percent are affiliated with volunteer organizations. Most of these organizations are non-governmental and non-profit institutions with just 9.9 percent being part of the government.

Both rural and urban volunteers are most notably involved in health care, social welfare, education and religious activities. Emergency response, the only category in the disaster management area in the survey, accounts for only a small percentage of all volunteers.

The positive impact of volunteerism – on society and on the volunteers themselves – has been shown in several studies<sup>4</sup>. Apart from social effects, one can also calculate the economic value of volunteering. In Bangladesh, it is estimated that the recorded hours of voluntary work translate into 117.72 billion hours over a one-year period. Informal volunteering as the most common form of volunteer work in Bangladesh contributes the most to this sum.



<sup>4</sup> Eleanor Brown, "Assessing the value of volunteer activity", 1999. Retrieved from <http://nvs.sagepub.com/content/28/1/3.full.pdf>

## II. Objectives of the study

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UN Women is the United Nations entity responsible for gender equality and women's empowerment, with a mandate to support government and civil society in implementing national commitments to gender equality across sectors. It also has a mandate to promote, coordinate and monitor the work on gender equality across the United Nations system. Over the past four years, UN Women has led research and piloted interventions to increase evidence on how inequality drives vulnerability and to determine ways of reducing inequality and creating more resilient and empowered communities. UN Women has helped develop a greater capacity for gender-responsive and rights-based approaches to climate change and disaster risk reduction at research institutions, in civil society and among government officials across ministries and departments. As part of the evidence-based programming principle, UN Women would like to understand the current capacity of volunteers engaged in disaster management, particularly those working for the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes in Bangladesh. It also seeks to establish their institutional arrangements for gender-responsive community preparedness and response to mitigate the challenges of catastrophic cyclones, floods and earthquakes.

Over the last four decades, volunteers have helped to save thousands of lives and properties in Bangladesh and this unique initiative is well recognized and lauded by the global disaster risk reduction community. However, their role in delivering the gender equality agenda in disaster management is yet to be examined.

The purpose of this study is to establish the knowledge levels of the cyclone and flood preparedness programme volunteers about gender-differentiated needs in disaster preparedness and emergency response and to identify effective strategies to strengthen their capacity. Against this background, UN Women contracted a research consultant to conduct action research to investigate these issues.

The main objectives of the research were:

- To examine the roles, processes and functioning of two volunteer networks: the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes in Bangladesh;
- To establish to what extent the issue of gender is considered in early warning dissemination, evacuation, search and rescue and emergency relief distribution;
- To capture the best practices that the Cyclone Preparedness Programme has used over the years in handling disaster – before during and after the events.

# III. Methodology of the study

The study uses both quantitative and qualitative data sources. Several methods were used to collect as much information and evidence as possible, including, a literature review, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, case studies and observation.



Figure 3: Methods used in the study

## Literature review

All relevant documents needed to be reviewed to gain a full picture of the situation country-wide, including surveys, statistical data, reports on similar studies and literature on similar issues. Publications were sourced from all relevant organizations, including: UN Women, UN Volunteers Bangladesh, United Nations Development Programme Bangladesh, the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme, the Department of Disaster Management, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre, Ansar and the Village Defence Party headquarters.

### Data collection tools

Empirical data were collected using the following tools.



#### a) Focus group discussions

Focus group discussion (FGD) is effective in assessing people's level of understanding as well as their perception on the issue of gender in disaster preparedness and emergency response. These discussions give some insight into how volunteers working in disaster management treat women and men who are exposed to disaster and to what extent they use gender-sensitive disaster preparedness and response approaches.



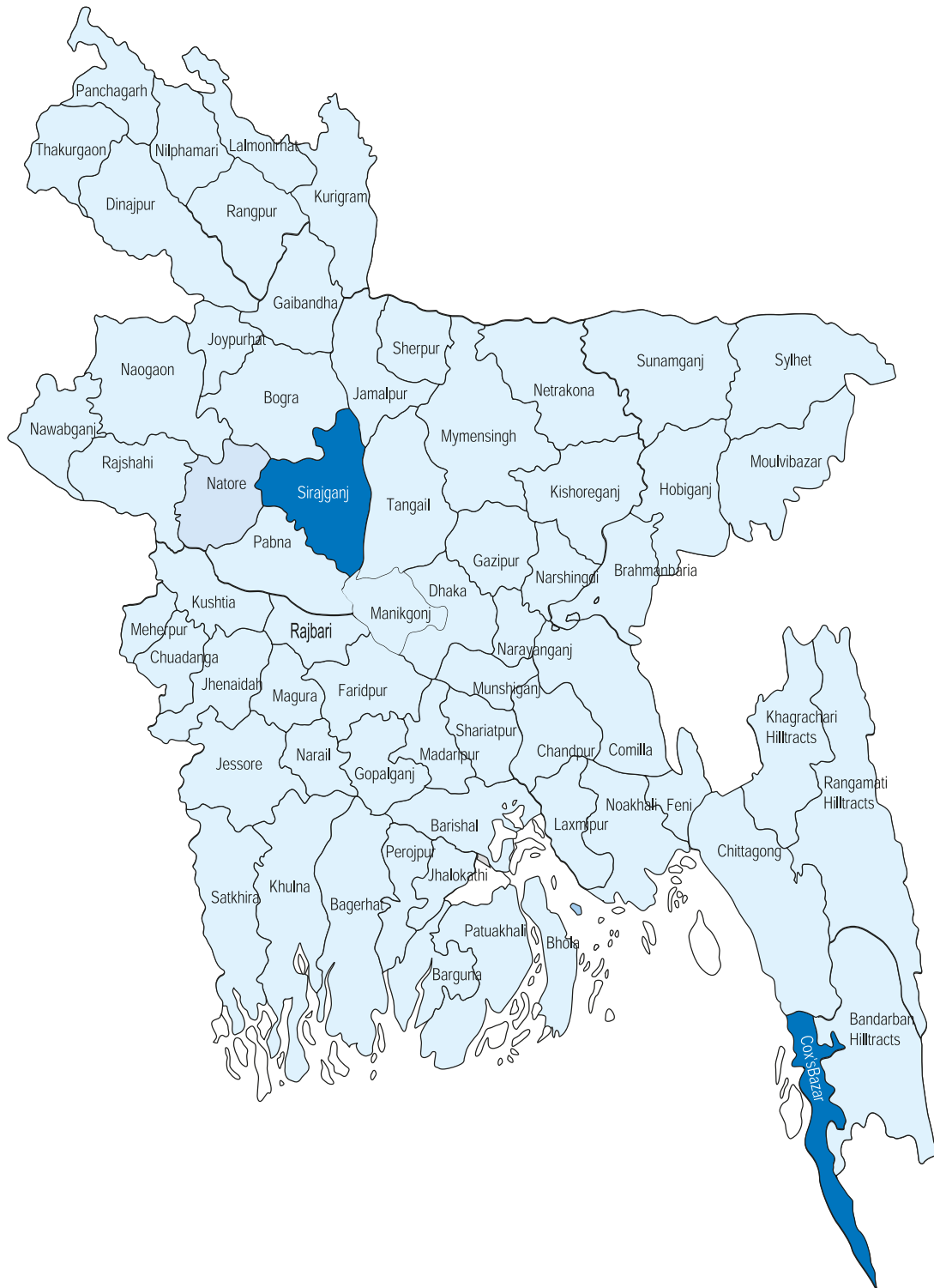
#### b) Key informant interviews

The key informant interviews were conducted to understand how the different stakeholders perceive the current role of the volunteers working with the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes. The focus was on whether the volunteers demonstrate gender sensitivity while handling disaster preparedness and emergency response. The interviews were also used to solicit the stakeholders' suggestions for ensuring effective gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches in their disaster management approaches. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire. At least 20 key informants were interviewed across various levels. These included staff and management from the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes at all levels, in the districts and at headquarters, concerned sub-district heads and project implementation officers, a union council chairman, local élites, officials from the Department of Disaster Management, UN Women, Bangladesh Scouts, UN Volunteers Bangladesh, Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Ansar and the Village Defence Party headquarters.

## Selection of the study area

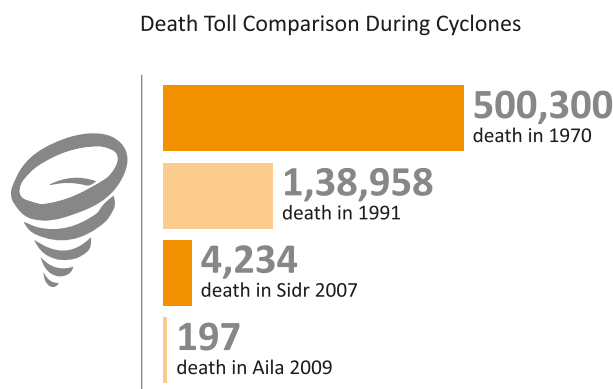
As specified in the terms of reference for this project, two areas of two upazilas (administrative sub-districts) in two districts were selected for the study. However, the selection of the study areas was finalised after consultations with UN Women officials.

Map 1: Selected study areas



## IV. Contribution of volunteers in disaster preparedness and response: experiences from the past

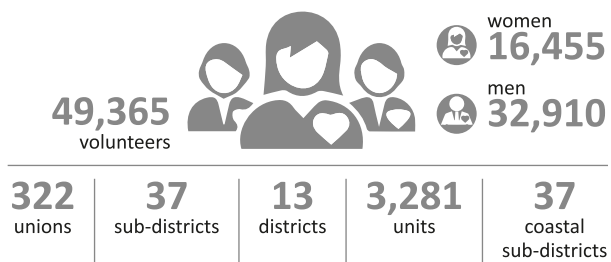
As the Flood Preparedness Programme is a newly formed programme in flood-prone districts, it has no prior experience in flood response. The Cyclone Preparedness Programme, on the other hand, is well established and its volunteers are increasingly relied upon to alert people living in the coastal belt of Bangladesh and help reduce the loss of lives and assets due to cyclones.



People have been volunteering for this programme over the past four decades and the volunteers have faced a number of challenges. These include the limited availability of equipment and resources to allow the volunteers to play their roles effectively during a cyclone. Early warning dissemination is one of the most important duties of these volunteers while search and rescue and first aid are vital once the cyclone hits the area. The death toll due to almost the same category of cyclones is going down in the coastal belt of Bangladesh. For example, the death toll during the cyclones Sidr in 2007 and Aila in 2009 were 4,234 and 197 respectively whereas equivalent figures for the cyclones in 1970 and 1991 were 500,300 and 138,958 respectively.

Local, national and international communities recognize the hard work of the volunteers who have succeeded in saving thousands of lives and properties during cyclones, and risked their own lives in the process. So far the Cyclone Preparedness Programme is the largest volunteering programme in Bangladesh, covering 322 unions with 37 sub-districts under 13 districts. There are 49,365 volunteers working for the programme. These include 16,455 women and 32,910 men who work in 3,281 units (each unit covers one or two villages) in 37 coastal sub-districts. With such large numbers, it is difficult to sustain the same high levels of motivation among all the volunteers all the time. Some factors motivate volunteers but others can be demotivating, like economic stress, loss of family members in disasters, etc. Most volunteers reported having more than one reason for enrolling and the most frequently mentioned were: altruistic concerns for others and for the community, a sense of social responsibility, religious beliefs, and wanting to have a good reputation and be recognized or honoured by their community. Volunteers also considered volunteering as an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills and or to put their own skills to good use.

### Overview: Cyclone Preparedness Volunteering Programme



Over the years, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme has strengthened its team by encouraging women to volunteer for the programme. Around one third of its volunteers are women who have largely been responsible for helping female victims during recent



crises. However, these women volunteers are not always aware of the need for gender-sensitive responses so they tend to take a more traditional approach. Although the cyclone programme is well-known and highly esteemed, it is still struggling to ensure that its response teams can offer a gender-responsive programme.

Women and men volunteers work beside each other and organize a combination of megaphones, flag signals and household visits to make sure everyone is notified in plenty of time to take shelter from the storm. These volunteers have been found to inspire women and encourage them to pack their belongings in plastic and bury valuables in the ground on the eve of any cyclonic event. Encouraging women to prepare and respond is crucial, as in the past they have tended to remain at home during cyclones, afraid they might lose their possessions and their livelihoods if they go to the shelters. The women volunteers helped in this way during the most recent cyclones like Sidr in 2007, Aila in 2009 and Mora in 2017. Women volunteers also tend to be responsible for looking after the elderly and the children.

In male-dominated societies women can be marginalised when it comes to receiving cyclone warning information. However, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme has ensured that its early warning system and its search and evacuation services reach everyone. The programme's post-cyclone services are not as focused on gender-specific responses, for example, they tend to offer generic post-emergency relief items with no special consideration for women's needs.

We learnt from examining the programme's previous services that it makes an invaluable contribution in alerting vulnerable people with timely early warning signals as well as in evacuating people to the cyclone shelters. However, there is still lot of work to be done in ensuring gender responsive disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness planning and programming.

## V. Current capacity of formal volunteers in disaster preparedness and response

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While most of the volunteers in Bangladesh work informally, there are notable formal volunteer organizations that contribute to the government and other organizations' disaster management by supporting early warning, emergency relief or recovery efforts. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, founded in 1973, aims to improve the situation of vulnerable people and mitigate suffering caused by diseases and disasters by 'mobilizing humanity', in accordance with the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. This section focuses on two major national volunteer networks in Bangladesh that work in disaster management to identify their strengths and determine if there are any capacity gaps with regard to gender-responsive disaster preparedness and response.

The Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) has proved to have an effective early warning system. It was established after the devastating cyclone Bhola in 1970 when over 300,000 lives were lost. The programme has set up early warning structures in 13 cyclone-prone coastal districts to inform the population about impending threats. With its volunteer network, it helps to disseminate cyclone warnings to the local villages and has strengthened trust in early warning information coming from the Government of Bangladesh. The information is distributed through volunteers who travel to every village to inform the population about the magnitude and time of impact of forthcoming cyclones. This volunteer network helps bridge the gap between the national government and local communities, allowing better coordination among stakeholders and building trust between local populations and national early warning systems. The success of the Cyclone Preparedness Programme, has been attributed to its 'simplicity, attention to socio-cultural aspects, and its extensive community-based volunteer and communications network that expedite the delivery of cyclone warning messages' (Habib, Shahidullah and Ahmed, 2012).

Currently, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme has around 50,000 active volunteers grouped in small teams ready to go to the lowest administrative levels to disseminate early warning information. The contribution of the programme to disaster management activities in Bangladesh can best be measured by the decreasing

numbers of people killed in major cyclones hitting Bangladesh over the last 40 years. While the programme is not the only contributor to this success, it plays a pivotal role in disseminating information collected by other governmental institutions and warning people living in high-risk areas. Since the devastating cyclone Bhola in 1970 the death toll has been steadily decreasing, it went down from 138,000 during the cyclone in 1991 to 3,400 during cyclone Sidr in 2007 and to 113 during cyclone Aila in 2009. The volunteers are trained to understand cyclones and their behaviour, warning signals and their dissemination, evacuation, sheltering, rescue, first aid and relief operations. The first aid volunteers are trained by programme officers. The only capacity gap that we identified among the volunteers was that they are not aware of gender-differentiated needs in disaster preparedness and response.

Bangladesh is a country of rivers with a total annual runoff flowing through the rivers of about 12,000 billion cubic metres. The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre under the Bangladesh Water Development Board constantly monitors the water levels of different river basins like the Brahmaputra, Ganges and Meghna basins and provides day-to-day information. The aim of the centre is to protect the lives and property of rural people through effective information dissemination. Most rural people live with water and do not leave when the water level rises above the average monsoon levels. While this seems normal, a poor understanding of early warning and prolonged inundation can result in loss of property and even of human life.

Considering the success of the Cyclone Preparedness Programme across coastal areas of Bangladesh, the Flood Preparedness Programme was piloted under the auspices of Ansar-Village Defence Party with technical support from the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme and the Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre. Initially, Sirajganj and Gaibandha districts were selected and nine sub-districts were covered. As with the cyclone programme, the strength of the flood programme is that it functions at the community level. Given that it is still in its initial phase, the programme still has a long way to go before it has a fully-trained volunteer force.

## VI. The role of gender in disaster preparedness and response

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Gender shapes the extent to which men, women, boys and girls are vulnerable to and affected by emergencies and disasters, as well as the kinds of responses that are feasible in different communities and societies.

Understanding that men and women face different obstacles can help in developing more effective programmes that ensure that everyone's needs are met. Some of the issues that can arise particularly for women victims are as follows:

- Cultural constraints on women and girls' mobility can hinder self-rescue, for example, when women may not leave the home without a man's permission or may be reluctant to seek shelter because there are no separate, private spaces for women so they would have to share facilities with men. Facilities in cyclone shelters for water and sanitation, women's privacy, food storage and general maintenance have been reported as poor.
- Some women may not be as physically strong as men which is partly due to biological differences but may also be due to prolonged nutritional deficiencies caused by women having less access to nutritious food than men. There is considerable evidence that a lack of physical skills, such as the ability to climb trees or to swim, has been a major contributing factor to disaster fatalities among women.
- There are many instances of women and girls facing difficulties in accessing relief or recovery assistance following a disaster, as well as being exposed to demands for sexual favours or the risks of rape and other forms of sexual and physical abuse in camps and other temporary shelter arrangements.
- Fear of theft of goods discourages some people from using the cyclone shelters. Some women's perception of their domestic responsibility for the household assets in the absence of the male head of household inhibits them from leaving their homes.
- As men usually form the majority of poor migrant labourers, their wives and children, as well as older people who remain in the family home, may be more exposed to the impacts of local disasters.

## VII. Findings and observations from the focus group discussions

In order to determine the capacity for gender-inclusive disaster preparedness among the cyclone and flood preparedness programme volunteers, two focus group discussions were conducted with the volunteers in Cox's Bazar and Sirajgonj respectively. The discussions were held with volunteers from both the cyclone and the flood preparedness programmes. As the flood programme is still at the pilot stage, it was not possible to discuss all the following issues with the flood programme volunteers since they do not yet have the same level of experience as their counterparts working in the cyclone programme.

- *The meaning of gender*

When asked about the meaning of gender, 75 percent of cyclone programme respondents understood gender as 'sex-based social structures' while 25 percent favoured the definition of gender as the 'socially-constructed characteristics' of women and men.

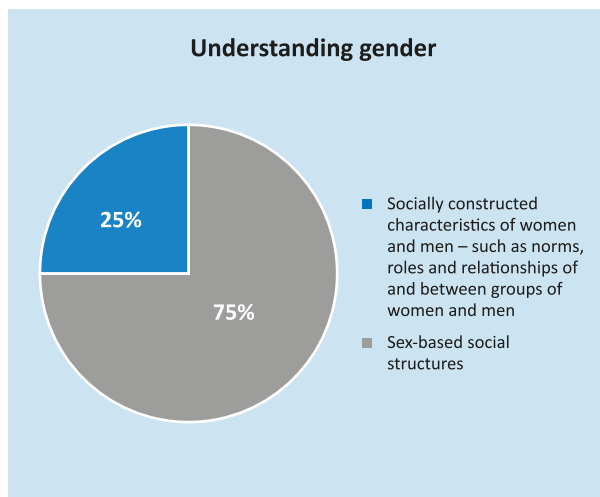


Figure 4: Focus group discussions with Cyclone Preparedness Programme volunteers: Understanding gender

When asked the same question, 60 percent of the flood programme respondents understood gender as

'sex-based social structures' while 30 percent favoured the definition of gender as 'socially-constructed characteristics of women and men'. The rest (10 percent) chose personal identification as their definition of gender.

Both groups of volunteers had mixed views about the changing role of gender in the workplace and the impact this has had on family life.

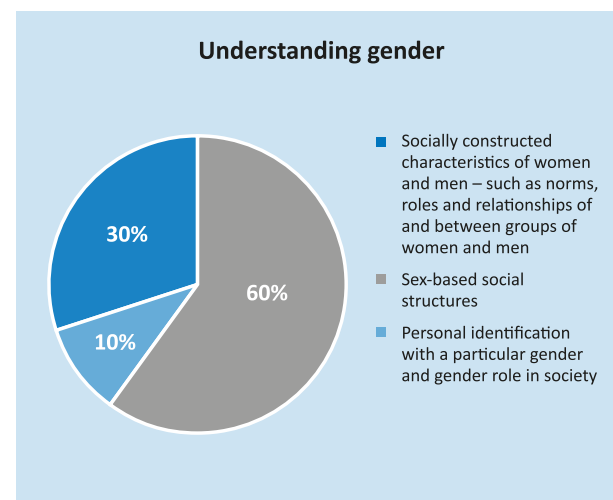


Figure 5: Focus group discussions with Flood Preparedness Programme volunteers: Understanding gender

When it came to the socially-constructed characteristics of men and women, the views were more conflicted. Most respondents thought there was a natural segregation between the sexes which eventually determined the gender roles in many aspects of society. We thus need to develop a shared understanding of our experiences if we are to ever close the gaps in our world views and make the changes needed to improve everyone's lives.

- *The meaning of gender equality*

Most of the cyclone programme volunteers perceived gender equality as denoting equal rights for men and women while the rest saw gender equality as sexual equality or men and women having equal access to basic rights.

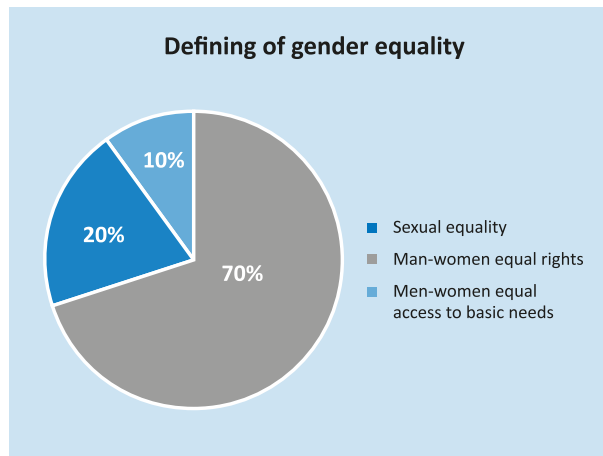


Figure 6: Focus group discussions with cyclone programme volunteers: defining gender equality

Most of the volunteers applauded the trend of men and women taking on different kinds of work and suggested that women should return to their traditional roles in society.

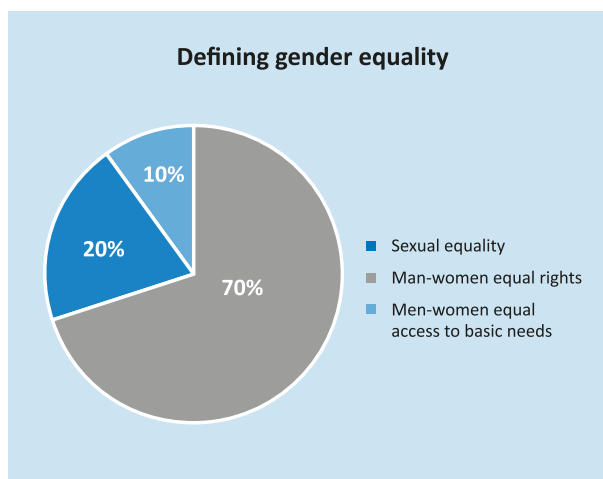


Figure 7: Focus group discussions with flood programme volunteers: defining gender equality

When analysing the attitude of the volunteers to work, it was evident that the men and women were looking for the same rewards, including stimulating colleagues,

mutual values and challenging work. Based on their experiences, however, men might be more likely to achieve those work goals. Women's experiences, on the other hand, may diminish their sense of satisfaction. Consequently, women tend to have a lower threshold when it comes to deciding whether to leave the world of work or not.

- *Providing for gender-differentiated needs*

The study explored how far the volunteers provide for people's gender-differentiated needs in disaster preparedness and emergency response. Most cyclone programme respondents (60 percent) gave a positive answer saying that the programme encourages them to take into account victims' gender-differentiated needs although the provision is not fully in practice throughout the programme. For example, just 30 percent of volunteers enrolled are women who are assigned with taking care of female victims before and during a cyclonic event.

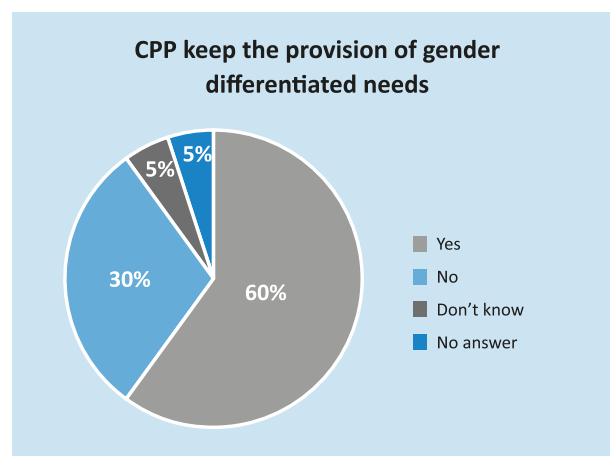


Figure 8: Focus group discussions with cyclone programme volunteers: providing gender-differentiated services

When discussing this issue with the women volunteers, it emerged that they are not well informed about their role in terms of victims' gender-differentiated needs. They simply help evacuate female victims to the nearby cyclone shelter centres without ensuring that the relief assistance is based on gender-differentiated needs. However, 30 percent of the respondents expressed a

different opinion and pointed out the programme's generic or typical approach towards disaster victims. This apparently does not emphasise that gender consideration should be incorporated in their protection strategies or promote the participation of crisis-affected women in humanitarian aid. The programme does not ensure that relief assistance is better targeted and adapted to the differentiated needs of people affected by disasters, conflicts and protracted emergencies.

In responding to this same question, most flood programme volunteers (80 percent) could not respond positively since they considered it too early to judge the situation in this newly launched programme. On the other hand, 20 percent of the flood programme respondents were positive and said that gender-differentiation is incorporated into the flood programme's generic or typical approach to disaster victims.

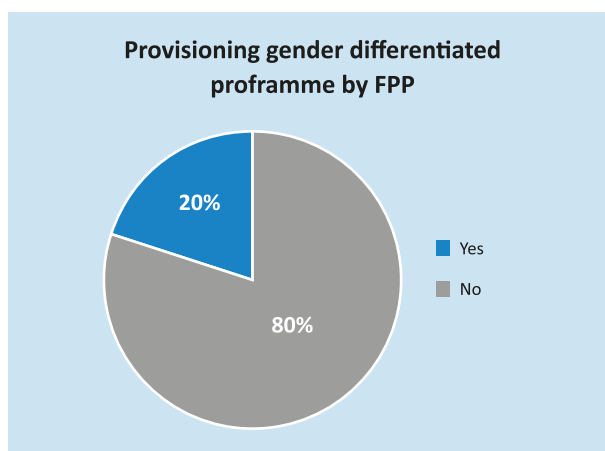


Figure 9: Focus group discussions with flood programme volunteers: providing gender-differentiated services

Integrating a gender approach should be part of the programmes' relief operations. This means doing projects differently rather than doing different projects and often only minor adaptations are all that is needed. Building separate latrines with locks and lights instead of mixed latrines can, for example, reduce the risks of sexual violence against women and girls. Including sanitary pads among non-food items distributed, setting up separate spaces for breastfeeding or distributing food packages that are not too heavy to be carried by elderly women or children are all

considerations that can make aid more accessible for all people in need.

Taking into account gender and age related vulnerabilities can help to incorporate protection strategies and safeguard beneficiaries from risks related to the crisis, the context or the relief operation, including the risk of gender-based violence. In a society affected by conflict where women are traditionally confined to their homes, men might be more likely to suffer from targeted killings, disappearances and arbitrary arrests, for example, while women may lack access to humanitarian assistance. Beneficiaries from all sex and age groups should be encouraged to participate in the needs assessments, consultations, design, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian interventions so their views are taken into account. Boys and girls should also be encouraged to contribute, in accordance with their age and maturity.

- *Training on gender issues*

In the focus group discussions with cyclone programme volunteers, the issue of developing the capacity of volunteers on the gender-based disaster management approach was raised. Respondents were asked if they had received training on this approach. Apparently most of the cyclone volunteers had not had any specific training on understanding the gender aspects in their professional duties. However, a few respondents (10 percent) had participated in training programmes where gender issues were briefly touched upon.



Figure 10: Focus group discussions with cyclone programme volunteers: training in gender sensitivity

In discussing the same issue with the flood programme volunteers, it emerged that none of them has received any training to date.

A gender perspective needs to be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management and education and training. The international community is developing policy and practical guidelines on mainstreaming gender in disaster risk management for national governments. Training is needed to fill the gaps and offer practical guidance on gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management at the local and community levels.

While women's vulnerability in disaster situations is often emphasised, their contributions to the safety of their home and community is generally unrecognized. Women have unique needs in emergency and disaster situations which have to be addressed but they also have unique capacities that form the basis for leadership, participation and working together with men in community-based disaster risk management. In general, the training needs to integrate a gender perspective in disaster risk management and ensure that both women and men have the capacity to address their respective vulnerabilities and protect themselves, their families and their immediate communities.

- *Showing respect for women victims*

Although there are limited institutional mechanisms on the issue of gender-responsive programming, the volunteers treat female victims of disaster with respect and 80 percent of the cyclone programme respondents gave positive opinions on this issue. The Cyclone Preparedness Programme is a highly esteemed social volunteer force and widely appreciated for its professional and fair approach to disaster victims, irrespective of gender and age.

Despite their lack of experience, the flood programme volunteers also reported that they would treat female victims of disaster with respect.

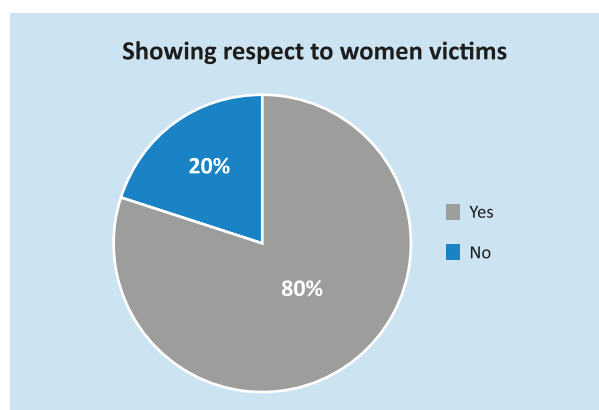


Figure 11: Focus group discussions with cyclone programme volunteers: respect for women victims

The roles played by citizens in emergency and disaster management are widely documented in disaster research. Research challenges the popular perception that disasters unleash chaos and disorganization, with citizens becoming passive victims, either panic-stricken or engaged in antisocial behaviour, such as looting. Women have always had to plan for and contend with disasters and pick up their lives afterwards. Their gendered roles and responsibilities in their paid work and home lives affect women in the course of emergencies and disasters. They are not just victims: they plan for the worst, do what they have to do and respond as needed at home and on the job. Hence, emergency planners, government relief agencies and community-based organizations would benefit from doing a gender-based analysis of their work potential.

By understanding the particular ways that women are likely to be affected by a disaster or an emergency and the contributions that women typically make to coping with and recovering from such events, we can ensure that our communities are better prepared to manage should the worst happen. Women represent one of ten populations considered at high risk during emergencies. Within this large category, some women need extra attention, for example, pregnant women, women with many dependents, women who have experienced or are experiencing abuse, and those who are socially isolated and liable to fall through the cracks.

As a new programme, the Flood Preparedness Programme, will need to work closely with all community members to gain the support, credibility and respect that its success will largely depend on.

- *Gauging awareness of gender-differentiated needs*

The focus group discussions revealed that most cyclone programme respondents (70 percent in total) had a fair idea of how to categorize people's gender-differentiated needs when managing disaster preparedness and emergency response.

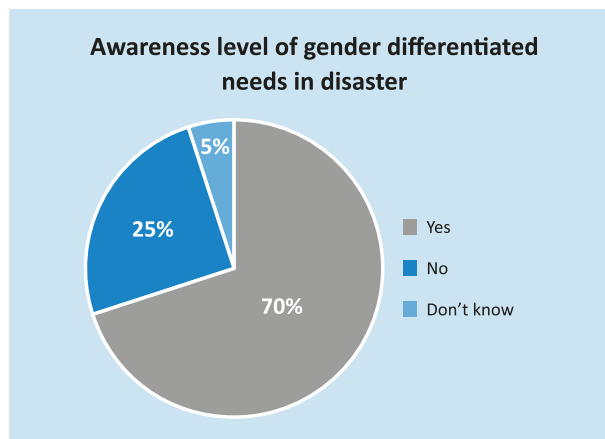


Figure 12: Focus group discussions with cyclone programme volunteers: awareness of gender-differentiated needs

Similar discussions with the flood programme volunteers showed that most (60 percent) had a fair idea of how to differentiate people's needs by gender while 40 percent of them said they did not understand this issue adequately. The Flood Preparedness Programme is still a pilot venture and gender considerations are not yet officially incorporated into its protection strategies.

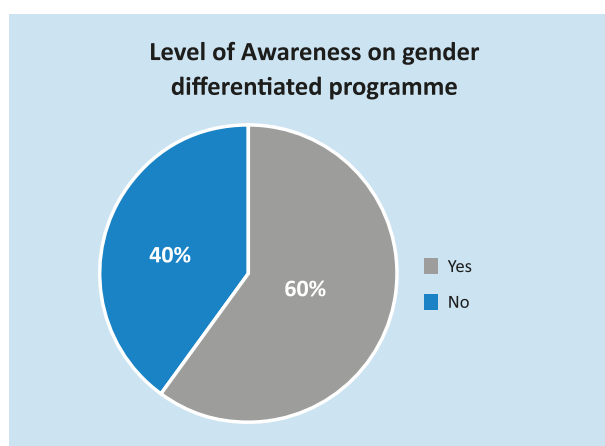


Figure 13: Focus group discussions with flood programme volunteers: awareness of gender-differentiated needs

Natural disasters and man-made crises are not gender-neutral; they have different impacts on women, girls, men and boys. These differentiated needs and specific vulnerabilities need to be addressed. Gender inequality can leave women and girls in a more vulnerable position. Emergencies and crises do, for example, disproportionately affect girls' access to education. Yet women also have specific capacities and skills to contribute to recovery, build peace and foster preparedness as well as promote resilience. While emergency situations can intensify disparities, they are also an opportunity to challenge gender-based inequality. Hence, the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes' responses must highlight gender considerations, including protection strategies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, and promote the active participation of women affected by crises in their humanitarian responses. The programmes need to be committed to ensuring that their humanitarian aid takes into account the different vulnerabilities and capacities of women and men of all ages. This is reflected in their commitment to quality programming of aid for those most disadvantaged in emergencies.

- *Levels of satisfaction with the programme's services*

When cyclone volunteers were asked how satisfied they believed disaster victims (both male and female) were with the services, they offered, they were generally positive. Around 70 percent of the volunteers mentioned the positive implications of their services for their communities while 30 percent were less convinced. They felt that the programme has a long way to go in providing the best possible services for disaster victims due to the structural and functional limitations of the programme.

Gender roles and stereotypes affect the experiences of women and men volunteers and victims during disasters. Women are frequently assigned to tend the ill and injured because they are expected to be natural nurturers or because they generally have more experience in caregiving. Men are expected to be



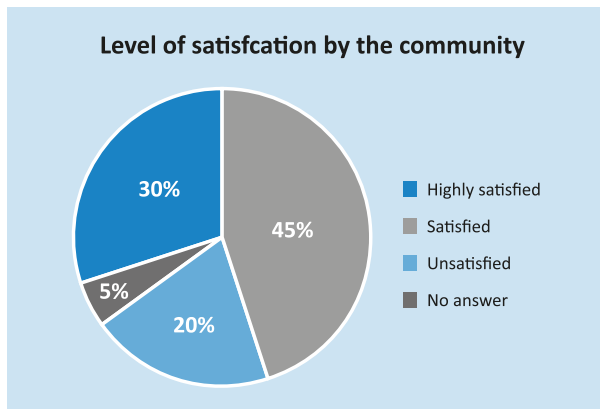


Figure 14: Focus group discussions with cyclone programme volunteers: perceived levels of satisfaction with services

physically stronger than women and will more often be assigned hard physical labour during emergencies. Men’s priorities in preparing for and responding to emergencies often dominate family debates. In daily life, men are usually the ones to decide whether or not to buy insurance or put up hurricane shutters, as well as when to evacuate, where to go, what to take, how to live and when to return.

- *Institutional structures*

In discussing local representation in the Cyclone Preparedness Programme, it emerged that this is an issue of some concern. In talking to volunteers and officials from the programme, there appeared to be a coordination gap between the Union Disaster Management Committee and the programme. The cyclone programme volunteers did not feel that they were adequately involved in post-disaster response work although they were fully prepared and committed to contributing to the Union Parishad efforts. They also felt they would have a lot to offer the committee in the process of assessing loss, damage and needs since, as first responders in remote places, they know who has been most affected.

As a new programme, still finalising its management structures, the Flood Preparedness Programme will need to understand the links between activities undertaken before, during and after a disaster. Also, actions taken in one area need to be referred to and reflected upon when launching similar actions in other

areas. The integrated and holistic approach represented in the disaster management cycle forms the foundation for programmes, projects and interventions in disaster management.

The national disaster management institutional structure acknowledges the importance of the local level in comprehensive disaster management. Union Parishad is the lowest tier of local government in Bangladesh. It represents the local people and is dedicated to serving the rural people in many ways. As per the revised standing orders on disaster, the Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC) consists of 36 members headed by the Union Parishad chairperson. The chairperson can co-opt up to three more members and form groups and sub-groups after considering the local situation and special circumstances.

### Comparing the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) and Flood Preparedness Programmes (FPP)

The CPP volunteers come from all segments of society and everyone has the potential to contribute their strength and resources in times of emergency. They are well seasoned in disaster preparedness and response and particularly in early warning dissemination and evacuation activities. The FPP volunteers on the other hand have the same potential to contribute but, as it has been a newly-launched initiative; they had no previous experience in flood preparedness. Given that the cyclone programme has been up and running for the last 45 years, it attempts to consider gender-aspects, for example, the 30 percent of women volunteers in the programme are simply assigned to helping female victims evacuate to nearby shelters before and during cyclonic events but they are not well informed about gender-differentiated needs. The flood programme has not yet done the paper work so there is no information on their work or plan to address gender-differentiated needs in case of disaster preparedness and response.



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CPP volunteer Surya Begum sounds the early warning signal during a cyclone preparedness exercise.

## VIII. Challenges for gender-responsive disaster preparedness and response: observations from the key informant interviews

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The key gender issues that arose in the course of this study included:

- The impacts of disaster are not gender-neutral;
- Gender roles can change in the wake of disaster;
- Gendered responses can reduce long-term social consequences; and
- Women can be agents of change in reducing the risk of disaster and strengthening resilience.

Making a gender-inclusive assessment of any programme involves the following key issues, among others: ensuring gender-differentiated target groups; collecting sex-disaggregated data; appointing data collectors who represent the target population; using culturally-appropriate and participatory methodology; and training staff and volunteers in gender sensitivity. Gender issues need to be integrated into the design of disaster management structures and be central in capacity-building activities to ensure gender-inclusive disaster resilience at the national and community levels. Equally, gender needs to be taken into account in designing disaster recovery assistance, including: reconstructing community infrastructure; providing water supplies and sanitation; reconstructing housing; restoring livelihoods; reconstructing rural roads; and providing health and education services.

In our interviews with key informants, we discussed similar issues to those in the focus group discussions in our quest to ascertain the levels of gender sensitivity in the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes. The responses generally reflected similar views as those that emerged in the focus group discussions.

- *Gender-differentiated needs*

Most of the key informants believe that the issue of gender-differentiated needs in disaster preparedness

and emergency response should be at the core of the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes. The programmes need to institutionalize the issue and ensure that the volunteers understand and can respond to people's gender-differentiated needs. Most key informants were satisfied with how the Cyclone Preparedness Programme provides for gender-differentiated needs in its planning. However, they conceded that the Flood Preparedness Programme was still at the pilot stage and so it has not yet made any provisions in this regard.

- *Gender sensitivity training*

Key informants reported that although the Cyclone Preparedness Programme includes gender briefly in its training programmes, the treatment of the issue was essentially conventional. The volunteers are not given sufficient training to be able to carry out their work professionally and deliver gender-sensitive services. On the Flood Preparedness Programme, however, the training content has not yet been developed so their volunteers are not particularly aware of the need to differentiate in their treatment of male and female disaster victims.

All the informants believed that both the programmes need to identify effective strategies to strengthen their capacity to cater for disaster victims' gender-differentiated needs.

- *Satisfaction with services*

As emerged in the focus group discussions, key informants believe that disaster victims are satisfied with the services they receive from the cyclone programme volunteers.

- *The role of volunteers*

Research suggests that citizens will always converge on emergency and disaster sites, so emergency services and other organizations need to plan for and manage the participation of these volunteers. This will reduce the risk that untrained and uncoordinated volunteers could disrupt organized responses and reduce the resources available to those affected. It will also maximize the effectiveness of emergency and disaster management programmes that can draw on the immense knowledge, skills, resources, networks and energy of ordinary citizens. We observed that the topic of early warning features in most basic and other training offered. However, only about 10.5 percent of volunteers had been trained in first aid. Almost 96 percent had not had any training in search and rescue. It is unrealistic to expect volunteers to perform their assigned duties without a minimum level of training in these key issues. Furthermore, trained volunteers who are well-versed in disaster management tend to be more effective and motivated than their untrained counterparts.

## IX. Conclusions and recommendations

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The cyclone and flood preparedness programmes need to be effective, disciplined and tightly-knit grass-roots-oriented organizations dedicated to protecting the population and they need to have the community capacity to extend their services. Although the Hyogo Framework for Action identifies gender as a cross-cutting issue, gender still needs to be integrated in disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. Progress has been made in that women are recognized as having the capacity to help reduce risks, rather than being seen as just vulnerable victims of the impacts of disasters but disaster risk reduction policies and programmes still do not effectively incorporate gender-responsive strategies.

### Conduct comprehensive training

Training in understanding the entry points for gender in disaster risk reduction has been identified as a solution to this gap. Programmes need to develop comprehensive strategies and implement training at multiple levels to coincide with disaster risk reduction priorities. Volunteers need to be sensitized to the issues of gender if they are to recognize and understand the importance of these issues in successful disaster management. Integrating gender into disaster management needs to be included as a full chapter in the staff and volunteer training manuals for the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes.

Training programmes must emphasize the value of collecting gender-disaggregated data and identifying the different needs of women and men. Volunteers should be required to do practical exercises on identifying and meeting women's needs in the disaster management context. During training courses, women participants should be given the chance to speak and report to a large group so they develop their self-confidence and can make their voices heard.

Both men and women volunteers need to be trained in basic first aid and this needs to be based on their self-identified needs and priorities.

### Ensure early warning systems reach everyone concerned

Ensuring that vital information reaches all segments of the community is of paramount importance when designing community-based early warning systems. In the past, programmes have sometimes assumed that communicating the danger to one part of the community would ensure that the information gets to all concerned, when in reality this was not the case. Additionally, in some situations where women and other groups had restricted mobility, they were overlooked. Community-based early warning systems should specifically address these issues.

### Consult and engage with community representatives

Programmes need to consult with and seek feedback from both men and women in the community to ensure the contents of their relief packages actually meet their respective needs and are socially and culturally appropriate. They should ideally do this as part of their disaster preparedness planning, before they stock up on relief items.

Differences in vulnerability related to gender need to be taken into account when planning and implementing disaster mitigation measures and so both men and women need to be engaged in project design, implementation and monitoring.

One way of ensuring that programmes engage with the community is to ensure they are adequately represented on the union disaster management committees. These committees need to be vibrant and effective. In post-disaster response work, the committees need to work with the cyclone or flood preparedness programmes so they can respond effectively. The programme volunteers need to be enlisted to help in the process of assessing loss, damage and needs so the planning is unbiased and credible.

## Target women volunteers

In every community, men in decision-making positions seem to accept limited numbers of women volunteers, suggesting no more women are needed. This also means that women are not promoted to more influential positions. However, women need to be empowered to be able to discuss issues on an equal footing with their male counterparts. While they need to develop their capacities in dealing with disasters, they also need to learn to speak out, even in male-dominated environments.

Just like many youth and development projects, the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes should advocate for gender equity in their volunteer base. Volunteers are an essential element in community development and women are often the mainstay of the community.

## Sensitize both men and women

Men in positions of power, such as politicians, government officials with administrative responsibility and officials in groups and communities, need to understand the importance of gender and the implications of gender sensitivity in programme planning and implementation. To ensure this, gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction training is needed for both men and women at all levels. This will help create an environment in which women can fully demonstrate and contribute their knowledge, skills and experience.

## Understand the implications of cultural norms

Understanding the cultural context is essential during any disaster response. For example, in some societies these norms dictate that women should not be examined by a male physician; similarly women's mobility may be restricted and therefore both men and women need to be employed as health personnel.

## Offer psychosocial support

Comprehensive psychosocial support is recommended in any crisis situation. This should include, for example,

counselling on domestic violence and alcohol abuse prevention. The support needs to be sensitive to the needs of some men who may need help coping with changes in their gender roles, for example, if they have to care for young children after the loss of their spouse.

## Design shelters for women and men's needs

Emergency and transitional shelters and support services (toilets, water supply, and lighting) need to be designed to respond to the socio-cultural and economic needs and preferences identified by the men and women who will use them. Privacy and safety need to be considered. This includes, for example, protecting vulnerable men and women who are from ethnic minorities and those who are older or with disability. To ensure their safety, these groups need to be closely monitored.

## Assess gender-differentiated needs

A gender-differentiated needs assessment is essential in any emergency. The same needs-assessment tools are used separately with men and women so the two sets of results can be compared. There are several reasons for doing this. For example, we cannot assume that affected men can adequately represent the needs of their female relatives and neighbours. In some cultural contexts, men are not allowed access to women and female heads of household who are not related to them. Women with badly injured or absent male relatives may end up being left out. Both women and men may also be more comfortable discussing sensitive issues, such as personal hygiene or reproductive health needs, with somebody of the same gender. Finally, different categories and age groups of men and women will have a range of views about needs and priorities. Thus, there will be greater opportunity to identify diverse needs if representative groups are consulted.

Disaster relief efforts need to consider women's specific health needs. Often, pregnant women have lacked access to obstetric care and have miscarried or delivered babies under unsanitary and unsafe conditions. The availability of female and male medical personnel is particularly important after a disaster. This is especially true in certain cultural contexts.

## Collaborate with relevant partners

The programmes need to work with organizational partners and community representatives to develop indicators that monitor progress and measure success and to devise other ways of assessing the impact of disaster management programming.

## Ensure sustainability

Advocacy and strong leadership in gender-sensitive programme activities are key elements in ensuring lasting results. Organizations have to focus on saving lives during times of emergencies and gender needs and issues will not be adequately considered unless they are built into the response plans.

## Work with UN Women

UN Women could join hands with the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes to enhance their capacity in gender responsive disaster preparedness and response programming. UN Women could help them put in place the necessary mechanisms and assist with resources and technical advice. UN Women should advocate at the national level to roll out and implement a gender-based disaster preparedness training programme for volunteer networks like the cyclone and flood preparedness programmes, Urban Volunteers, Bangladesh Scouts etc.

## Developing the volunteer base

Volunteers are a valuable resource when they are trained, assigned and supervised within established emergency management systems. As in donations management, an essential element of every emergency management plan is to clearly designate responsibility for coordinating unaffiliated volunteers on site.

Many volunteers are from poorer families and have little incentive to continue volunteering after a project ends. Also, training for volunteers is often aimed at young people who may move away in search of education or jobs so new volunteers need to be continuously recruited to replace them. By broadening the volunteer base and ensuring volunteers of all ages are well trained, volunteers could provide technical

services and advice to their communities during non-disaster periods and even charge a small fee.

The Department of Disaster Management should create a platform for all volunteer networks across Bangladesh, in accordance with the Disaster Management Act – developing a database of volunteers and offering regular training, refresher courses and simulations. A dedicated wing within the department needs to coordinate with the network and maintain the momentum of recruitment and training. By creating a volunteer coordination team the department will have a mechanism to ensure the effective use of these human resources.

Mobilizing, managing and supporting volunteers is primarily the responsibility of local government and non-profit sector agencies, with support from the state level. Specialized planning, information sharing and management structures are necessary to coordinate efforts and maximize the benefits of volunteer involvement:

- Review local and state hazard analyses and collect community demographic information to identify their implications in managing unaffiliated volunteers.
- Develop relationships with local, state and national voluntary organizations active in disaster management and/or with regional or national groups that can manage unaffiliated volunteers during disaster operations.
- Emphasize the importance of collaboration in pre-disaster planning. Encourage people to become involved in existing community coalitions such as the Community Organizations Active in Disaster.
- Research existing volunteer liability issues and laws that may affect the use of unaffiliated volunteers. Encourage agencies and organizations that take on unaffiliated volunteers to clarify their limits of liability protection.
- Develop media and public education campaigns that encourage people to undertake pre-involvement and affiliation with existing voluntary organizations.

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