Use of U-Report to strengthen humanitarian action

Bangladesh: preparedness plans facilitate early warning system for Cyclone Fani
**Preparedness plans facilitate early warning system for Cyclone Fani**

**CONTEXT**
Bangladesh’s unique geo-location has made it susceptible to various hydrogeological risks, and effects of climate change. The country has always suffered from various types of geographic and hydro-meteorological disasters such as seasonal cyclones. With a large and young population (i.e., 160 million, of which 37% are children), Bangladesh is considered by some to be one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change.

Cyclone Fani was generated as a deep depression and then intensified into extremely severe cyclonic storm at south-west and adjoining southeast Bay of Bengal at the end of April 2019. It made landfall on 3 May 2019 along the Odisha coast and then crossed Bangladesh through the mid-western part on 4 May in a dissipated form, without causing major damage.

**ACTIONS TAKEN**

**Preparedness and planning**
A joint needs assessment was conducted under the leadership of the Government of Bangladesh to better understand the scope of the damage, disruption and distress caused by Fani, as well as to highlight any possible future risks. UNICEF clusters at the national level (WASH, Nutrition, Education) and sub-cluster (Child Protection) actively participated in this process. According to the needs assessment, Fani impacted a total of 28 districts of Bangladesh in three different ways: tidal inundation with storm wind in southern coastal districts; high winds over the mid and mid-western districts; and heavy rainfall over the whole country.

Investments in preparedness by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), in collaboration with other line ministries, concerned departments and development partners, limited the loss of lives and livelihoods caused by Cyclone Fani. They undertook comprehensive preparations to minimize life-threatening situations and the loss of livelihoods.

To ensure community engagement and communication, as well as accountability, the **Shongjog Multi-Stakeholder Platform** (MSP) – a collaborative effort of government, development partners, international and national NGOs, UNICEF and other UN agencies, disseminated cyclone-related preparedness messages and materials to ensure that communities were prepared with key life-saving and action-based information.

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USE OF U-REPORT TO STRENGTHEN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Use of U-Report in the response

U-Report Bangladesh platform enlists over 150,000 adolescent and youth U-Reporters aged between 14 and 34 years who provide feedback on a variety of issues (as of April 2019). Through the U-Report system, UNICEF Communication for Development (C4D) team initiated a nationwide online poll on Cyclone Fani. The purpose of the poll was to understand reporters’ knowledge of information sources, preparedness, and response to Cyclone Fani. The poll results have been published on the U-Report Facebook page and public dashboard. They have also been shared through SMS and digital channels (Highlights from the poll).

RESULTS

Of a total of 144,316 people who received the poll, 39,285 (27%) responded at least one question and 27,920 (19.35%) completed the poll with all seven questions. Among the respondents (n = 39,285) 91 per cent said they knew about Cyclone Fani. Fifty-seven per cent (n = 30,000) said they prepared for Cyclone Fani after receiving the news. When asked about the sources of information:

- 49% said they received messages from internet/Facebook
- 34% said they received messages from television
- 6% said they received messages from radio
- 4% said they received messages from newspaper
- 3% said they received messages from local miking (loudspeaker announcements)
- 3% said they received messages from other sources

Poll results provided useful insights to inform the emergency response. For example, 75 per cent (n = 10,840) of the respondents said they did not go to a cyclone shelter after listening to the advice, which indicates that there should be further on-ground analysis on why no action was taken, on perceptions of risk and vulnerability, as well as and the actual risks of being impacted by the cyclone.

Experience shows that radio has a strong role to play during emergencies in keeping communities updated on the unfolding of events and advising them on practical steps such as setting food aside, taking shelter, etc. However, the poll results (n = 30,000) showed that only 6 percent of the respondents heard messages about Cyclone Fani from radio, while 49 per cent and 34 per cent received messages from the internet/Facebook and television respectively. This is to be expected as U-Reporters will have very a high likelihood of using and relying primarily on information from digital media sources – underlying the importance of a diversified approach in message dissemination catering to the specific audiences, keeping in mind their demographic, diversity and psychographic profiles such as age, gender, location, literacy, behaviour pattern, media preference, etc.

The use of digital tools, such as U-Report, enables humanitarian responders and programmers to make rapid, iterative corrections based on real-time data on people’s perceptions. At the same time, they also highlight areas for further analysis and triangulation through on-ground assessments and consultations with partners, to correctly influence and facilitate social and behaviour changes necessary to minimize risks and reduce negative impacts.

LESSONS LEARNED

Multimedia approach to information dissemination

This exercise has confirmed the advantage of U-Report as a complementary method of information dissemination among adolescents and youth. During Cyclone Fani, early warning messages were disseminated through TV, newspaper, community radio, social media and announcement through speakers.

Depending on the locality and accessibility of specific medium, community members and young people choose different channels for receiving information. Considering coverage and preferences, U-Report should be seen as one of the sources for sharing information rather than the primary source over other sources. Key messages should be consistently and widely disseminated using a variety of communication methods and channels.
Data for action: amplifying the voices of young people
It is important to secure agreement with the government counterparts and cluster coordination groups regarding the data sharing mechanism and spaces where results from U-Report are shared and decisions taken about response activities. As this is a new and innovative approach, it can take a number of discussions and meetings for the government to be fully comfortable with and acknowledge the data coming from U-Report. Therefore, it is critical to start the dialogue with government partners before the disaster and introduce U-Report as an effective tool for early warning and disaster preparedness.

Mainstreaming U-Report as a complementary tool for rapid needs assessment
In the case of Bangladesh, the government’s rapid needs assessment does not make use of any digital tool to gather information from affected areas. Traditionally a set of questions is disseminated through the local authorities in a paper-based format at the onset of disaster situations. U-Report provides a strong opportunity to complement the traditional methods of rapid assessment by providing direct responses and feedback from the affected populations in 24–72 hours turn-around. U-Report also allows young people to seek out life-saving information and services, as well as raise their issues and concerns to decision makers. Advocacy efforts should be supported to advocate for the government focal ministries for disaster needs assessment to consider U-Report as a complementary tool for their needs assessment exercise so that voices of young people, girls and women are better reflected in the response activities.

Development of a disaster preparedness information centre
Before the arrival of Cyclone Fani, there was not sufficient lead time to send U-Reporters early warning messages through the platform. It was recognized that disaster preparedness information needs to be widely disseminated and acted on before the disaster situation occurs. Therefore, UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office has developed cyclone and flood preparedness information in U-Report and sent out multiple disaster preparedness polls along with key messages. It is recommended to regularly carry out polls to raise awareness around disaster preparedness and disseminate life-saving messages during non-emergency time.