

SYNOPSIS

Programme Evaluation Report

NRP



National
Resilience
Programme

BACKGROUND OF NRP

The National Resilience Programme (NRP) is a partnership between Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and three UN agencies- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and UN Women to strengthen Bangladesh Government's capacity to design and implement inclusive, gender responsive disaster management and development policies and practices with specific focus on increasing community participation and empowerment of women in responding to and planning for disaster mitigation.

Though the programme was originally planned for 56 months from May 2017 to July 2020, the programme duration has been revised thrice considering the delayed start of programme activities and the restrictions in implementation imposed by COVID-19. During this evaluation exercise between September 2021-January 2022 the third time extension of the programme has been confirmed and is now scheduled to be completed by December 2022.

The programme has been operated through 4 sub-projects implemented in partnership with four government departments and three UN agencies:

1. The Department of Disaster Management (DDM) of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), with technical support from UNDP;
2. Programming Division of the Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning (MoP), with technical support from UNDP;
3. Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) of the Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C), with technical support from UNOPS, and
4. Department of Women Affairs (DWA) of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), with technical support from UN Women.



The overall Goal of the NRP is ‘To sustain the resilience of human and economic development in Bangladesh through inclusive, gender responsive disaster management and risk informed development’. NRP was designed to provide strategic support to enhance government capacity for implementing local risk reduction activities at scale through its own structures and programmes rather than directly implementing local risk reduction activities by the programme itself. The expected outcome of the NRP was ‘Substantial increase in resilience to disaster and reduction in disaster risk, loss of lives, livelihoods and health of men, women, girls and boys and protection of persons, business and communities in Bangladesh’. To achieve this outcome, the NRP focused on 5 specific outputs:

- a. Improved capacities for risk-informed and gender responsive development planning;
- b. Strengthened gender-responsive national capacities to address recurrent and mega disasters
- c. Improved capacity of GoB to achieve resilience through designing and constructing risk-informed and gender-responsive infrastructure system;
- d. Enhanced women leadership capacities for gender-responsive disaster management decisions, investments and policies at national and local levels;
- e. Strengthened disability inclusive, gender responsive community preparedness, response and recovery capacities for recurrent and mega disasters.

Therefore, gender equality is the crosscutting and critical parameter to achieve the 5 specific outputs of the National Resilience Programme.

About the Evaluation of NRP

This evaluation assesses NRP at the conclusion regarding its functioning and effectiveness from an independent third-party outlook. Given the implementation structure and desired outputs of the NRP, the evaluation of the NRP looked into higher level planning and policy aspects at the national level, understanding of capacity and institutional strengthening that has happened through the NRP at the local government level as well as capacity development, understanding and participation in disaster planning and response at the community level. In all these levels, gender inclusiveness imparted through the NRP has been evaluated as evidenced through the inclusion of gender responsive action plans, development agendas or standard operating procedures developed through the NRP. Though the evaluation exercise is unable to represent the final outcome of the programme at the end of its scheduled timeline due to the delayed implementation caused by COVID and subsequent extension of the programme, it provides an analysis on whether the programme has been able to properly start the change pathways that it intended to follow to achieve the programme goal.

The evaluation exercise assesses the performance of the programme and identify key lessons on what worked well for the programme and what did not which would be useful for future interventions. The evaluation has limited scope to recommend any changes in the ongoing plans or activities of the programme because of its imminent end and near full spend of the programme budget.

Methodology

The evaluation has applied the OECD-DAC criteria which includes relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The VfM dimension has been added to the DAC criteria for a more comprehensive evaluation.

The primary starting point of the evaluation has been from the TOC and the results framework for the NRP. The evaluation acknowledges that for a technical assistance programme as complex and broad as the NRP, its contribution cannot be measured only by numbers of interventions supported or tools created, or people

trained. As most of these impacts will have been achieved through significant influencing and collaboration with government counterparts, therefore the evaluation provides a less importance to the numbers achieved in the result framework rather it focused on understanding the key principles of Ownership (within the Government), Strategic engagement (with multiple-ministries and communities), and Complementarity and coordination (inter programme and with other programmes/ donors) to determine the longevity and use of the tools/ guidelines/ policies/ training programmes developed through the NRP within its beneficiaries – government or community. The evaluation therefore sought to establish the process of achieving change rather than focussing on the change itself.

The methodology was designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data and evidence for the programme evaluation. In particular, the methodology included: (i) desk review of relevant literature; (ii) key informant interviews (KIIs) i.e. interviews with the key stakeholders; (iii) case studies; and (iv) primary and secondary data analysis and VfM assessment. As a first step, the evaluation team undertook a desk review of all the documents, reports and other relevant literatures made available to the team. Further, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with NRP and other government departments, both at National and sub-national level, along with other relevant stakeholders in the programme/this sector. Focus group discussions were conducted with the beneficiaries of the NRP at the National and sub-national level as well as with the project operation teams from the three UN organisations and the PCMT. 4 case studies have been carried out covering the activities from the different project implementing entities. A household survey covering 720 households from the NRP implementation areas were conducted to ascertain whether there has been any perceptible change due to the programme at the ground level. The VfM analysis was done using UK’s ‘four Es’ (economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity).



FINDINGS



Relevance

The NRP is seen relevant in addressing the issues of resilience as identified in the policy documents of Bangladesh and the activities undertaken by the NRP is closely linked to the identified priorities of the GoB at national and sub-national levels. The programme has developed multiple innovative tools and approaches working in a participatory manner with government stakeholders to address disaster and resilience issues in each of the sub-projects undertaken by the three UN agencies. The specific priorities of each of the implementing agencies were identified through extensive consultation with the government counterparts and have mostly been demand-driven. Certain activities have also been undertaken which contributed to the continuation of activities undertaken by previous programmes or by the GoB itself. Logistical support provided for inclusion of gender sensitization, and then publication and dissemination of SoD 2019; taking up the Asset Management System (AMS), the Dynamic Flood Risk Model are some of such examples.

The NRP has therefore responded flexibly by tailoring priorities in line with the specific needs of Bangladesh and have demonstrated significant flexibility to the changing needs of the country in the context of COVID, cyclone Amphan and flood in 2020 where the NRP provided support in tailoring “build back better” strategies and gender assessment of disaster response in real time. Discussions with government ministries and other stakeholders have demonstrated a strong buy-in of NRP activities among government counterparts in different Ministries or other institutional entities.

The NRP has embarked on some very ambitious projects which have the potential to enhance the resilience of Bangladesh in the long run through policy changes and systemic changes. Chief among these are the AMS

implementation, the dynamic flood risk model, the activity on sex and age disaggregated data on disasters with Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics as well as development of Gender Markers for Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), etc.

The design of the NRP as 4 sub-projects implemented by separate UN entities sought to capitalise on the existing relationships of the implementing entities (IE) with the respective Ministries and also to play to the strengths of the individual implementing entities regarding specific goals of the NRP. The sub-programme approach has its benefit in leveraging relationships and complimentary expertise of different IEs. However, it needs a strong co-ordination and central decision-making body among the IEs to ensure the direction of the interventions are aligned towards the common goal of the NRP and leads to strategic policy level changes instead of overly focusing on smaller outputs.



Effectiveness

Overall, the NRP has achieved most of the targeted outputs that each of the sub-projects undertook. Certain activities are in their final stages of implementation or pending validation and/or approval from the GoB. Since the NRP has been provided with an extension till December 2022, based on the present status of the projects it is likely that all the outputs as demarcated in the annual work plans of the sub-projects will be achieved by the end of the programme.

The NRP has however had varied success in mainstreaming resilience and gender sensitisation in government decision making process. Some of the key interventions of the NRP those have already found acceptance with the GOB which includes: inclusion of gender consideration in Standing Order on Disasters 2019 and NPDM 2021-25; Inclusion of the DIA framework in the feasibility report template; Development of Dynamic Flood Risk Model for local level flood management; Implementation of the AMS in LGED from scratch – provides a holistic gender inclusive asset management system including asset management plans for roads and bridges built and maintained by LGED; Piloting of SADDD collection on disasters by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Pilot projects are an effective means to demonstrate and scale up project interventions. Under this programme some pilot actions have been supported which has led to knowledge and awareness generation regarding DRM. However, this are at a very operational level and presently there is no roadmap under the NRP to scale-up and lead to strategic and systemic changes.

The success of the NRP is mainly contributed to the strong technical teams supporting the project implementation and the government's ownership of the NRP. The NRP has benefitted from the enthusiasm of key GOB officials who were willing to achieve transformational changes. However, while the NRP has been successful in the technical aspects of resilience building, when it comes to innovative approaches of gender mainstreaming in planning and disaster management, the NRP had the potential to do better. The NRP needed a more integrated approach in project design and implementation regarding gender issues.

Besides the other effective interventions, the NRP has achieved some extraordinary numbers with respect to people trained through the programme. While the NRP has achieved significant number in people trained, the effectiveness of the trainings provided, and the impacts of the trainings are not apparent in all cases.



Efficiency

Over the programme period, NRP has contributed to developing institutional mechanisms, systems, and methodologies to enhance resilient, and in some case gender-inclusive, planning at national and sub-national levels. Collaborating with relevant government ministries under the existing systems/mechanisms through regular involvement of officials in consultations and building in the process their capacities has reinforced

ownership and enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of NRP. From the initial stages of the NRP there were quarterly review meetings facilitated through the PCMT between the implementing partners and the Government counterparts through the Joint Programme Implementation Committee (JPIC) meetings. The JPIC meetings allowed the government counterparts to maintain oversight over the progress of the NRP intervention, both programmatic and financial.

NRP has contributed in increased awareness at ministry and community level regarding the need of resilient planning and disproportional effect of disasters on women and vulnerable population. By engaging at the grass-roots levels with community members as well as with policy makers at the higher levels, NRP has tried to strike a balance between a top-down approach and a bottom-up approach through (i) developing innovative system enhancements and (ii) capacity building programmes or workshops.

Acknowledging the strengths of the NRP, it is also imperative to note the weaknesses of the programme as possible learning for future programmes. NRP has a unique project management structure which lacks any central decision-making body on the direction of the NRP by itself. Both the JPSC and JPIC set-up are too formal to influence project decisions or facilitate discussions and debate on project ideas. In terms of the coordination of NRP with other development partners working in the same sector but not directly involved in NRP a significant coordination found mainly in two areas- i) taking the learnings/ results into consideration while designing NRP interventions, ii) informal arrangements and coordination with other donors and counterparts during COVID restrictions.



Impact

Given the short time-frame of the NRP, it is too early to assess impact of the NRP programme. The impacts are expected to be significant once the recommendations from all the policy tools and system enhancements are fully integrated and adopted by the governments given that these have been developed in a consultative manner. The initiatives undertaken by the NRP have mostly been just finalised and are yet to be adopted completely by the government. Certain interventions such as the AMS, DFRM, DIA will take much more handholding to be integrated in government systems and support needs to be provided to take these projects to their logical conclusion.

The evaluation findings suggest that NRP has made significant progress against its output targets in all the sub-projects and is highly likely to complete most of the on-going interventions till close of the programme in December 2022. This could be confirmed only at the individual sub-project level since the linkage between the NRP's logframe with the sub-project log-frames is not clear. The AMS (along with the AMPs), DIA (along with the DRIP and hazard maps), ToT activities and integration of training modules in established training institutes, gender mainstreaming in the SOD-2019 and the NPDM 2021-25 are found strong likelihood to be highly impactful. These interventions are more focused activities designed with clear change pathways, largely strategic and closest to completion. While the LGED gender markers, SADDD collection in BBS, training of CSOs on women empowerment, supply chain resilience study, DFRM, DRR-EGPP are identified by the evaluation as the possibly impactful interventions of NRP, the media training on gender sensitisation, local community trainings, earthquake volunteer training and build-back better strategies for Municipalities are categorized under the uncertain impacts. Uncertain impacts are those interventions include projects that are stand-alone and without clear change pathways towards impact, on the other hand possibly impactful are those group of interventions are smaller activities with potential to up-scale, yet to be finished and adopted by the GoB.



Value for Money

The evaluation team concedes that since many of the policies and toolkits developed through NRP have significant potential to strengthen systems and processes but are yet to be fully rolled out or benefits of those which have been piloted or implemented are yet to accrue are difficult to monetize, the efficiency of the NRP with respect to VfM is difficult to measure at this stage. In terms of economy of VfM analysis, the approach of NRP to build on earlier donor funded projects is also a commendable approach and generate value for money on a broader scheme of development and resilience initiatives. Another commendable approach towards Value for Money adopted by the NRP is to make the GoB an equal partner through contribution in cash and kind in the project thereby ensuring ownership and continuity of the project. There was a slow start of the NRP implementation and then hampered by COVID restriction and therefore some interventions are yet to be properly rolled out, and no benchmark for the NRP spending is available. Given the absence of proper benchmark and appropriate cost structures, and with some incomplete interventions it is difficult to measure the efficiency gains by NRP while assessing the VfM. The structure and design of the NRP ensured that the programme has been demand-driven and have responded to the needs of the stakeholders at all times. The implementation of the NRP has led to the government accepting the need for resilient planning and gender mainstreaming and is also willing to change its way of functioning. Therefore, while it is about effectiveness of VfM, the NRP has seen high levels of demand for handholding support as well as cooperation from their government counterparts. However, the selection of activities of the NRP needs a narrower focus to be more effective. Some activities could be consolidated, and focus should be more on policy initiatives rather than one-off activities. The best practice would be to have a policy initiative supported by capacity building and piloting.



Sustainability

The high level of ownership and engagement of the government counterparts in all the ministries with the NRP provides the evaluation team with enough confidence to conclude that the interventions supported by the NRP would continue even in the absence of the project. Having said that, it should be noted that most of the NRP interventions are yet to be fully integrated in the government systems. At the present moment, none of the interventions of the NRP is replicable without external assistance. The programme has not had the chance to mature enough to ensure sustenance without external aid. The design of the NRP with the government being an equal partner will be the biggest contributor to its sustainability beyond the project lifetime, once the project has had the opportunity and time to mature.



LESSONS LEARNT

Some of the lessons learnt from implementation of the NRP is as follows:

- A participatory approach in programme design and implementation ensures greater buy-in by government counterparts. NRP's inclusive design approach followed by tailoring priorities in line with specific requirements of the nodal ministries, has been a major contributing factor for success.
- The NRP's flexible approach of responding to demand-driven initiatives was a key to success and increased both ownership and buy-in among national and sub-national counterparts.

- A sub-project approach is indeed a good approach to leverage existing relationships with government counterparts. However, to be successful in achieving greater value for money, this approach requires a strong coordination mechanism among the IEs.
- For a complex project like NRP it is necessary to have a narrower focus as it is not practicable to try to address all resilience issues through one technical assistance project.
- Technical and capacity building support services need to be institutionalised within existing institutions with similar mandates. One-off training activities do not contribute significantly towards transformational changes. Targeting training and capacity building to either a 'core group' or 'expert group' within nodal departments comprising people at operational levels will have a greater sustainability of policy actions.
- A siloed approach is not the correct way for gender mainstreaming since gender is a cross-cutting issue which need to be addressed by everybody. Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting should be integrated in project designs right from the inception of the interventions
- Knowledge management of the NRP needs to be strengthened to establish the relevance of the project interventions in meeting with the NRP goals
- Internal monitoring of the NRP needs significant strengthening to capture the success as well as failures of the NRP and for identifying process inefficiencies.
- A technical assistance project should aim to work towards more strategic projects instead of smaller interventions. Smaller interventions should always be followed up either with policy directions, up-scaling or mechanisms for replication. Technical assistance programmes take longer time to be adopted and demonstrate impact.

Along with the recommendations provided while discussing the findings of the evaluation the evaluation team suggests some specific recommendation for consideration by donors and implementing partners. Few possible new areas are also recommended to consider.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Donors:

- o Deliverables from a technical assistance programme requires a longer gestation period to be integrated in government systems and even longer time to demonstrate impact. It is thus recommended that technical assistance programmes as complex as NRP be designed with a minimum duration of 5 years and allowing for a longer inception period where the selection of activities can be thoroughly vetted.
- o Increasing the resilience of vulnerable population is intricately linked with economic resilience of the target population, it is thus recommended that a component to leverage additional finance is built into any programme that seeks to address disaster resilience, sustainable planning, livelihood support or climate change.
- o Seeking mandatory inclusion/ consideration actively of gender and social inclusion in all interventions of the sub-projects as well as in the narrative and financial reporting would ensure the gender and social inclusion from a more complete aspect.

Recommendations for Implementing Partners:

- o Enhance the internal monitoring system of the project.
- o Creating a centralised project coordination structure which is empowered to approve projects and budgets, periodically monitor progress and fund utilisation would ensure stricter operational control of the project, better delivery as well as better utilisation of funds.
- o Prepare an exit strategy well in advance of the ending of the project highlighting clearly the steps envisaged for the sustainability of the interventions in the absence of the project. If applicable, guidelines for replication and scaling up of pilots and identification of complimentary projects from other donors that may be used for funding should be included in the exit strategy.
- o Training strategies should always be linked with higher purpose of the training such as to embed policies or tools or guidelines and followed up after adequate time to assess the effectiveness of the training.
- o Gender mainstreaming activity should be 'mainstreamed' in the programme interventions right from the planning stages.
- o Knowledge management system for the project needs to be improved to communicate the relevance of the project interventions to all stakeholders.
- o While the programme has been successful in leveraging informal relation with other donors and donor funded projects, this should be formalised in the programme structure.

Possible new areas to consider for next phases:

- o Government subsidised Weather based livelihood Protection Insurance could be developed in collaboration with International partnerships (such as InsuResilience Global Partnerships) and Bangladesh Bank's sustainable financing policy. This would be immensely beneficial in protecting livelihoods in the aftermath of disasters.
- o Disaster affected population while able to save lives now also needs help to re-build their lives in the after math of disasters. Trainings or tools for rebuilding livelihoods could be included.
- o Along with following the existing practices based on government policies and plans NRP might, as a new intervention if it's continued, look into opportunities to feed back the government process with new knowledge such as threshold for resilience, climate modelling, sustainability indices; specific climate model based projections for inner, major, coastal and meandering rivers and such.



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