



Photo Credit: Mahmud/Map

Learning from Field:

Guidance for Future Program Implementation

LESSONS LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Caritas Bangladesh (CB) implement the Margret A. Cargill Foundation (MAC) funded Disaster Risk Reduction project Make Us Knowledgeable and Trained in Emergencies (MUKTE II) on the remote Monpura Island in Bhola District, Bangladesh. In May 2019, CRS and CB held an all-staff Lessons Learned Reflection Workshop, with a focus on identifying and analyzing which project-promoted behaviors are likely, and those which are not likely, to continue beyond the end of this project, and why. The findings will inform key sustainability strategies of the project's one-year extension period, as well as those of future CRS and CB DRR initiatives.

PROJECT-PROMOTED BEHAVIOR CHANGES: WHICH WILL CONTINUE PAST PROJECT? WHICH WON'T? WHY?

EXPECTED CONTINUATION: Considering beneficiary motivations, capacities and linkages required for continuation, many key project-promoted behaviors are expected to sustain successfully post-project.

Under **poultry management**, families are likely to continue cleaning cages weekly, raising cages above flood-level, providing nutritious feed to poultry, and timely vaccinating of poultry. They have experienced benefits including reduced morbidity and mortality of their chicks and ducks, meaning more healthy poultry for self-consumption and increased income from sale. Families can continue cleaning and raising cages and providing nutritious feed independently without costly external resources. Vaccination however is less assured due to the need for external resources and linkages.



Under **disaster-resilient vegetable cultivation**, families are likely to continue: fencing in vegetable gardens to protect them from livestock, preserving seeds in safer places to protect them from rain and floodwater for future use, and raising vegetable beds to protect them during floods. Families have experienced the benefits of diversified and year-round harvests, leading to higher quality and increased yields of vegetables for self-consumption and increased income from their sale. Maintaining these practices on existing fields does not require additional resources, though continued support from the local agriculture office will increase the chances of widespread and successful continuation, especially with regard to families obtaining new seeds in future as part of government schemes.

Under **household-level disaster preparedness**, families with financial means, who have their own houses on their own land, are likely to continue: raising the plinth of the house, preserving firewood in raised places, and tightening the house roof and other areas of the house. Families are motivated because they have seen the direct results of these practices, including decreased damage to and/or decreased loss of their assets during floods. It is expected that these behaviors will continue among these families because they now have the knowledge and can continue the practices on their own.

Under **early warning system**, families are likely to continue: listening to the weather bulletins on the radio or tv and taking action accordingly, and keeping livestock in safe locations near the house once EW has been issued by government. Families are motivated to protect and save their lives and assets, and these behaviors require few resources as most families have mobile phones and have shown that they coordinate effectively regarding weather information and disaster preparedness with neighbors who do not have phones or radios. However, going to the cyclone shelter is a practice in question, as families have expressed concerns about inadequate size (including lack of separate space for men and women and lack of separate space for livestock), poor upkeep of shelters, and lack of toilets.



ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES: There are several project-promoted behaviors that are less likely to continue after the end of the project, which can be largely attributed to a combination of the high degree of external technical, financial and/or logistical support relied on thus far to bring about the implementation of the desired behaviour change, and a limited degree of ownership felt by necessary stakeholders to fully assume responsibility to continue beyond project.

Project-formed groups such as the Ward Disaster Management Committee (WDMC), and Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) have been functioning with the strong technical and logistical support of project staff – they have received trainings and handholding support to carry out their roles and responsibilities. The groups will likely not continue to function the same way independently; however, even if they do not continue as ‘official bodies’ beyond project, their formed connections and acquired knowledge will aid the success of future emergency preparedness measures and responses. For example, WDMC members can effectively coordinate with the UDMC and support their communities with early warning and evacuation. Regarding SILC, some groups are ready to function independently; however, most will still

require and at least benefit from additional training and handholding support to function successfully independently.

Similarly, the Vaccinator is a project-created role. Vaccinators will be motivated to continue to provide vaccination and other basic veterinary services as long as there is ample demand for their services, the required supplies are accessible, and the financial cost-benefit ratio is favorable. They will continue to require the technical support of the government livestock officers, and timely vaccine and medicine provisions to isolated islands like Monpura are not guaranteed. High travel costs and excessive logistical challenges may deter vaccinators from providing service in future.

MUKTE II has made great strides with regard to harnessing government commitment to coordination for and support of project-promoted disaster preparedness behaviors on Monpura; however, ultimately CRS and CB cannot guarantee that key government positions will be in place to provide necessary support, and/or that required future strategic decisions and budget allocations will be made in support of the promoted DR actions. For example, while UDMCs and UzDMC committees will continue functioning as they are designated government bodies, the project has funded



their coordination meetings. Furthermore, the current RRAP may not get revised post-project. The UDMC might continue to support RRAP implementation, but the number of activities will be limited (based on funding allocation). Also, while assurance has been provided for continued post-project support from the Agriculture and Livestock Officers, the frequency will likely not be as it is now. Finally, the Cyclone Preparedness Program (CPP) is a government recognized and supported voluntary group, thus they will continue to exist and operate; however, funding restrictions limit the extent to which they can extend their reach to remote villages.

MUKTE II SUCCESSES

Poultry Management and Vegetable Cultivation as a Source of Income for Families: Families who previously owned 4 or 5 chicks and/or ducks now own an average of 30-40, which is enough for household consumption and additional household income. Similarly, while previously cultivating an uncertain yield of vegetables once yearly, many families are now harvesting high quality vegetables year-round, enough for household consumption and additional income from sale. Not only has this increased individual household income in the project areas, it has affected the local

island economy which no longer relies on lower quality and less diverse produce being imported irregularly and at higher prices.

Women Earning Income and Having a Voice in the Family: With knowledge, training and skills gained in MUKTE II vegetable gardening and poultry rearing trainings, the number of poultry women are rearing increased significantly, and women now cultivate vegetables year-round. Because poultry and vegetables are mostly sold inside the villages, women themselves conduct sales with neighbours and local traders. When male family members bring poultry or vegetables to market, they must bring the earnings to the woman of the HH. This trend has led to women having more say with regard to HH financial decisions. Albeit an unintended project outcome, it has brought significant positive change.

Vaccinators Earning Income and Vaccinations Encouraging Increased Poultry Rearing: The vaccinator 'pilot strategy' was introduced to create an enabling environment for families to access vaccines and to ensure long-term veterinary support. The vaccinators' services encourage families to rear more poultry, which increases HH income. A few families are still reluctant to vaccinate, but most families - as they continue to witness decreased morbidity



and mortality among their poultry, as well as healthy poultry selling at higher prices - are encouraged and motivated to rear more poultry.

Improved Relationships between Villagers and Government Officers: MUKTE II prioritized linkages with livestock and agriculture officers for targeted families to have reliable, long-term access to government schemes. Because of the active engagement with these government officers from project inception, families have the knowledge and confidence to contact them directly to seek their support.

Local Adaptation of the Lifebuoy: MUKTE II provided lifebuoys to 400 fishermen along with user demos. The cost of the externally sourced lifebuoy is too expensive for the fishermen to buy more; however, witnessing the benefits of the lifebuoy through its use in a near-drowning incident, they came together to replicate the concept using locally available, affordable materials. More than 200 fishermen on Monpura Island have already replicated the lifebuoy concept during the project period

CHALLENGES

Male Participation: In fishing communities, men are at sea during the day, sometimes 3-15 days at a time. Small-scale fishermen

fish year-round in rivers and go for work in nearby villages, and those who do deep fishing travel to nearby cities for other work three months out of the year. Men's physical absence in the villages makes it challenging to engage them in project activities. Future work with fishing community families will require working around their seasonal calendar to reach men.

Getting Union Funding for RRAP Activities:

The WDMCs and UDMCs have followed up and negotiated frequently for funding to implement RRAP activities. In future it will be critical to work closely with the Union, especially in budget development. Monpura is remote, with several positions vacant and frequent changes in high-level Upazila positions; spending much time trying to repeatedly garner government support and obtaining approvals challenges and/or delays RRAP activity implementation.

Collaboration with CPP: CPP anticipated a large amount of training support from MUKTE II, but the collaboration was financially limited to inviting them to select trainings and orientations. However, during these events, MUKTE II jointly facilitated simulations in the communities and linked communities with CPP groups for better coordination for potential future time of need.



LESSONS LEARNED

Engaging vulnerable families living on Khas Land: Due to legal restrictions, the project could not support some of the most vulnerable families (who do not own the land on or house in which they live) with DR activities that require physical modifications (i.e. CFW for raising plinth of house, raising vegetable beds). While the project engaged them in other activities through support with seeds, chicken cages, and trainings, an important learning going forward is that the needs of this vulnerable population must be better analyzed, and unique approaches to address their needs, developed.

Demos encouraged families to cultivate disaster-resilient vegetables year-round: Convincing families to cultivate vegetables year-round was not easy as they were accustomed to crop loss due to flooding and heavy rains. Because of their strong reluctance to use their land as demo sites for the introduction of new cultivation techniques, MUKTE II project staff decided to undertake a unique initiative by using their own land as demo sites to show the successes of new vegetable cultivation strategies. It proved successful - since then, more than 300 households have replicated the learning from the demo plots.

Collaboration between Livestock Officer and Vaccinator encouraged vaccinations: Families were quite reluctant to vaccinate

their poultry due to their unfamiliarity with vaccines and fear of harm, which was a setback for the project. It was thus decided that vaccinators and the livestock officer would go to villages together to provide support. Seeing the livestock officer supporting the vaccinator built families' confidence, and likewise the vaccinators' confidence grew with regard to providing vaccines appropriately, identifying symptoms of basic diseases, and providing helpful suggestions.

Importance of witnessing new SILC success to build trust: Because a local organization had previously defrauded community members via the establishment of a fake savings group and disappearing with their savings, target families were reluctant to form a new SILC group. To address this challenge, project staff started their own savings group as a "demo" for villagers. After one year of observing the functioning of this demo SILC group, families started to show interest in becoming members. A key learning here is that trust is required for families to invest their money. When approaching communities regarding SILC initiatives, the project must first earn trust before expecting the same.

Ensuring UDMC is involved in key decision-making steps essential for ownership: The UDMC was engaged in different phases of the RRAP development but not always present at key decision-making junctures. This project-led facilitation process led the key actors to

assume that implementation and monitoring would also be the project's responsibility, which then took many discussions to rectify. An important cross-cutting learning is: identify junctions in the project when the presence of key stakeholders is critical and ensure that they participate fully so they take ownership as appropriate.

Collaboration with Government Livestock Officer and Agriculture Officer for increased buy-in: Past experience has shown families' reluctance to vaccinating livestock or to engaging in disaster resilient vegetable cultivation. So the team engaged the Government Livestock and Agriculture Officers in key project activities from project inception, in an effort to connect them directly with farmers to facilitate communities' access to government schemes, meanwhile holding government officials accountable to their assigned communities. This direct connection is a significant positive outcome of the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Capacity Strengthening for UDMC & UzDMC Members: The single training for UDMC and UzDMC members on roles and responsibilities revealed that these officials had little understanding about their extended roles and responsibilities. To build capacity and enhance skills, training modules and follow-up support should be developed more systematically to meaningfully develop their

roles and responsibilities and leadership, negotiation and budgeting skills.

Working with the Fishermen Community: 70% of the target community on Monpura is engaged in fishing. Future strategies should be developed on how to work closely with the CPP, the Coastguard, and Fishermen Association as important stakeholders in DRR projects.

Expanding the "Demo" Approach for increased visibility: Specifically, for example, demonstrations of improved shelter techniques would be more effective in future at the cluster level, to increase visibility, especially for the UDMC and UzDMCs to witness.

Reaching the vulnerable populations living on Khas land: New project strategies (including advocacy with government) should be considered in future projects to increase coverage of DR initiatives to the most vulnerable, especially those families living on government owned (Khas) land.

Effectiveness of Trainings: It may be worth considering to strategically provide minimal inputs along with trainings initially, to allow beneficiaries to adopt newly promoted practices right away, while ensuring that HHs can sustain access to inputs in future. For example, seeds provided to beneficiaries along with vegetable cultivation training allowed them to implement the newly learned





cultivation practices right away, while the project connected HHs with the local agriculture department to improve their access to government schemes such as seeds distributions. Ensuring that beneficiaries can adopt project promoted practices right away will make training impact more effective.

Consider Funding for RRAP Activities: It may be worth considering including funding for the implementation of some RRAP activities as a project support. UDMC/UzDMC have limited resources to implement RRAP and some conditional start-up grant/ assistance along with appropriate training and technical support may help to jump start the implementation of RRAP activities. Special care will need to be taken that this support strengthens the ability of the UDMC/UzDMC to implement RRAP activities independently in future, rather than hampering a transition to full government ownership.

