



Joint Needs Assessment Bangladesh Lessons Learned and Way Forward

“Lessons learned from the multi-agency, multi-sector assessment of water-logging in South-west Bangladesh”

November, 2011

Background

Heavier than usual rains during the end of July and early August 2011 resulted in flooding and a situation referred to as “severe water-logging” in many areas of Bangladesh particularly in the south western districts of Shatkira, Khulna and Jessore, and potentially significant humanitarian needs in Southwest Bangladesh were identified. On 25th August, Disaster Management Bureau (DMB), Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, estimated that over 800,000 people in Satkhira district were affected.¹

ACAPS and ECB had been collaborating on improving JNA. Collaboration at the time of the water-logging had involved a scoping study on coordinated approaches to assessments in Bangladesh and an agreement to move forward on some level of JNA preparedness (although plans for what this preparedness would look like had not been clearly established).

With this as background; Initiated by ECB around 20 I/NGOs, in coordination with WFP, UNICEF, CDMP and others, and with substantive support from ACAPS², conducted a joint needs assessment (JNA) of ongoing relief and recovery needs in relation to the flooding/water-logging in the Southwest. The assessment aimed to understand both the quantitative impact of the water-logging and well as the qualitative impact; i.e., how many people have been affected and how they were affected.

Carrying out an assessment with the involvement of so many agencies presented some challenges, including: coordination, communication channels, and an absence of assessment preparedness. Agencies involved in this assessment committed from the outset to looking at the lessons learned from this experience to identify next steps in developing a stronger humanitarian needs assessment capacity in Bangladesh.

Lessons Learned Methodology

With support from ACAPS and ECB, agencies participating in the JNA convened a lessons learned workshop on 19th October to capture learning and distil action points. During this workshop ACAPS

¹ DMIC, DMB, Summary of “Weather Flood Situation”, from wed24.Aug-2011 to Thu-25-Aug-2011, www.dmb.gov.bd. At this stage around 500 families were mentioned as affected in Jessore and no information reported in Khulna.

² www.acaps.org ACAPS and ECB had been engaged in a process of better understanding and promoting the idea of coordinated assessments in Bangladesh.

shared some of the key lessons learned at the global level in relation to joint needs assessments and developments that attempt to address these lessons.

This report presents:

- **key lessons from the global level** that have implications for the ongoing work to develop joint needs assessment capacity in Bangladesh
- **lessons distilled from field staff** involved in the assessment (collected during the debriefing with team leaders in Khulna immediately after the conclusion of the field work and through telephone interviews)
- **Key learning from the assessment that came out of the workshop** on the 19th October which staff involved in the planning and coordination of the assessment and also the analysis and use of the information it yielded.

Key Lessons from the Global Level

A Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) implies an assessment that is multi- sector and multi agency that ideally takes place in the early phases of a disaster in order to provide humanitarian actors with a common understanding of the magnitude and nature of the impact of a disaster. Concerted, global efforts at improving capacity in JNA are relatively recent. From 2009 there has been a widespread recognition that initial assessments should be joint (also referred to as common or coordinated) and a major push to improve the quality of these assessments. These efforts have included the formation of the Needs Assessment Task Force (NATF), the development of assessment guidance and the creation of the ACAPS project to provide dedicated assessment capacity.

Global Lessons on Joint Assessments

1. It is important to be clear on the objective of the assessment - which decisions are you trying to inform
2. Focus both on how information is provided and how it is used
3. Focus less on primary data collection and have a broad assessment approach rather than just a data collection tool
4. A “shared situation awareness” can be achieved through JNA, but not a detailed understanding of the a situation (primarily phase 1+2) – we must create realistic expectations among all stakeholders
5. There is a lot of appetite for joint assessments at the working level –we can mobilise agencies to work together
6. Shared situational awareness facilitates coordination
7. There is a methodological gap with respect to multi-sectoral needs assessment – we need a robust, adaptable approach
8. Coordination and response takes priority over assessment and analysis - we need dedicated qualified human resources for analysis
9. Joint assessments means adapting the approach to ensure broad ownership – we must be able to adapt approach on the ground (one size doesn’t fit all)
10. Analytical support can be provided from a distance

Lessons Learned from the Field

Several key observations were made by staff who had been involved in the assessment field work.

Observations from field staff	Implication
The JNA was different from other assessments they had been involved in. The JNA was different in terms of so many agencies working together and so many sectors covered in the assessment questionnaire. It was also different because of the very clear methodology which used community groups and visits to government officials.	This is something new for Bangladesh ³ , capacity will need to be built.
Mixed agency teams were very well received by government officials at Upazila and Union levels.	In future planning discussion on the mode of coordinated assessment keep in mind the value of mixed agency teams
The training given was not sufficient.	One day training was not sufficient for field teams for whom the approach as well as the questionnaire was new. Training should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better planned• In Bangla• With guidance/reference materials Consideration should also be given to the value of some pre-training (with the understanding that this would not guarantee the trained people would be available) and also to Training of Trainers for JNA.
Assessment questionnaire was difficult to use in some cases.	Teams did not understand all of the questions in the field, not all of the options provided were relevant to the context and some key options were missing. This would also be aided by better training and reference materials.
Not all Union offices new of the D-form or how to fill it out.	Consider capacity building with local officials specifically about the D-form as this is the main source of quantitative information.

³ It is true that developments in terms of a joint assessment began in Bangladesh some years ago and in many ways preceded global efforts. However for a range of reasons many of these efforts have not been maintained. For a discussion of this see the ACAPS ECB scoping study.

Lessons Learned Workshop

Lessons learned from the JNA from the workshop on the 19th October were found to be around the following elements of the assessment:

Lesson	Implications
The information from the assessment was not widely used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the assessment has clear objectives that are linked to decision making • Overarching clarity of concept (what is the JNA about and for?) • Planning of JNA must be based on maximizing utility of information (link to decision making)
The timing of the assessment was too late for initial funding decisions and too early for recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the triggers for the assessment (what would it take to prompt and assessment to take place?) • Consider initial, brief phase 1 assessment information template to get a preliminary understanding of the situation • Consider timeliness (phase 1: 2-3 days, phase 2: after 2 weeks) • Consider planning for Joint Recovery assessments <p>NB these considerations are especially critical in Bangladesh context of slow/creeping onset emergencies.</p>
Initial coordination was challenging because there was no over-arching coordination framework in which the assessment could operate (once it became broader than ECB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and coordination (internal/external): critical to ensuring JNA is embedded in decision-making and response planning • Assessment progress cannot wait until all the coordination issues are resolved. • Look at a well coordinated assessment that can link to INGO coordination as well as other coordination structures as possible.
Roles and responsibilities for key tasks (coordination, data processing, analysis, report writing) were divided on an ad hoc basis. This worked, but how can it be improved and ensured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities required should be established. This will enable stakeholders to define where they can commit based on strengths and capacity. • Key roles such as coordination, data analysis need to be filled
Assessment tool adaptation and compilation took valuable time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools (including questionnaire, data processing) should be based on global good practice but adapted to the context as needed.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at creating a simple toolbox which can be quickly adapted • Consider the global MIRA (should be available soon) • Consider translation into Bangla
Human resources were mobilized quickly; especially for field teams but how can issues such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender balance • Capacity • Coordination staff Be improved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider pre-training • Consider ToT
Pre-crisis information was not adequately used because it was difficult to locate quickly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative data considerations (how do we know how many people are affected?) • Critical challenge for JNA – link to pre-crisis and secondary data availability & incorporation (how to manage this information in advance)
Joint analysis and determination of priorities took place but needs to be strengthened.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint analysis is a critical component of JNA, to enable shared understanding and clear communication / advocacy on needs • How does a group come together to decide on this analysis?
When information was shared, it was well received but donors wanted more in terms of numbers affected and numbers affected to certain degrees (ie how many in direct need of assistance?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and dissemination strategy: Must be in place • Pre-defined to meet needs of decision-makers (how can we address this question of numbers?)

A concluding note on the lessons learned

By their nature, Lessons Learned workshops often focus on “what went badly” and how this can be addressed more than “what went well” and how this can be strengthened. The workshop discussed here also focused on many of the negative features of the assessment.

Several key positive aspects of the assessment should also be noted:

- The assessment, in terms of its methodology and its output report was very positively received by assessment experts at the global level because of its clarity of approach and overall quality.
- Key features of a JNA that are constantly difficult to achieve such as multi-stakeholder buy-in and participation and particularly joint interpretation of information were achieved.
- The practical experience of “learning by doing” probably accelerated the progress on JNA in Bangladesh far beyond a gradual discussion/work-shopping on assessment preparedness.

The Lessons Learned workshop identified implications of the lessons learned in terms of a “way forward”. Key to the way forward was identified as the formation of an multi-agency assessment group that would define in detail next steps around key areas defined as:

- Clarity on overarching objectives for JNA
- Pre-crisis data management
- Quantitative information (how many affected?)
- Assessment linked to coordination
- Assessment tools for Bangladesh (questions, data processing, training)