Care and RIMES Workshop: 'Strengthening Community Resilience Through Timely Weather & Flood Advisories'

Learning and Way Forward

Background

Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) III is a Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA) funded by the United States Government through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), with complementary funding from the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). In partnership with the SHOUHARDO III program, Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES) implemented the project 'Improved Weather and Flood Information System for Community Based Risk and Resource Management in Bangladesh'. Aiming to the transition of 'what the weather will be' to 'what the weather will do'; the project made an effort to enable risk and resource management in poor and extreme poor (PEP) communities by providing community-focused and multi-sectoral action-oriented forecast information that will enhance their resilience and eventually reduce livelihood risk.

Project at a Glance

- Duration: July 2019 – September 2021
- Project Area: 15 unions of 13 upazilas under 8 districts of SHOUHARDO III
- 10,176 Beneficiaries (65% Female, 35% Male)

- Collaboration with government organizations: Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Department of Disaster Management (DDM), Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), Department of Livestock Service (DLS)

Major Accomplishments

- Operationalization of long-lead (15 days) streamflow forecasting at Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC)
- Customized weather forecast for 75 upazilas of the eight SHOUHARDO III districts in English and Bangla
- Development of forecast-based livestock Decision Support System (DSS)

- Dissemination of early warning, forecast, and advisories via voice messaging
- Development of Disaster Management Committee (DMC) Portal
- Capacity building of community members and national stakeholders

Due to these interventions:

- **The available time for response for farmers increased from 1-2 days to 5 days**
- **Number of participants receiving timely forecasts, early warnings, and advisory increased from less than 20% to 97%**

'Strengthening Community Resilience Through Timely Weather & Flood Advisories' Workshop

To share the project experiences and learnings with USAID and relevant government stakeholders, CARE Bangladesh and RIMES organized a half-day workshop on 28 November 2021 from 10:00 am - 1:00 pm. Mr. Md. Mohsin, Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, attended this workshop as the Chief Guest. Engr. Fazlur Rashid, Director General, Bangladesh Water Development Board, and Ms. Ellen de Guzman, Director, Office of Food, Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance (OFDHA), USAID Bangladesh, were present as Special Guests. Mr. Ramesh Singh, Country Director at CARE Bangladesh, presided over this event. Among others, Mr. Marc Nosbach, Chief of Party, SHOUHARDO III, Mr. Raihanul Haque Khan Country Program Lead, RIMES, and other officials from USAID, SHOUHARDO III, and RIMES were present. Based on the discussions from the lessons learned from the project, the following ways forward surfaced from this workshop:

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

- The experimental 15-days forecast proved to be very useful in detecting flood events 10–12 days ahead while BMD considered the rainfall forecast to be quite reliable. Although the project capacitated FFWC-BWDB to operationalize the system, further awareness-raising is needed among other sectoral stakeholders especially the NGOs on the use and application of this forecast.
- There is high demand for upazila specific iconographic forecast products. This needs to be scaled up across the country. Currently, 17 districts are covered in this portal and there is also a demand from the user side to develop a mobile application for this portal.
- The project conducted limited scale training for the beneficiaries and stakeholders on interpretation and application of forecast in risk and resource management. In general, there are gaps in the contextualization of the risks and sensitization of communities how forecast can be utilized in value-added decision making.

- The project developed a voice message broadcasting platform which has been used as the key channel for dissemination. However, it was revealed from the local level assessment that communities do not only want to listen to advisories but also ask further case-specific questions. An umbrella call center for climate services, through an interfacing agency, can be developed in the future to cater to this need.

- Voice messages can provide advisories, however, the farmers need further understanding to implement the advisories in the field. Explainer videos and IEC materials can help minimize this gap.
- Although the forecast-based advisories can significantly reduce losses, minimize risks; in order to maximize the benefits from these services, additional support, resource availability/mobilization should be ensured in the broader spectrum of Forecast Based Action.
- While mobile services can improve the information delivery manifolds, there are still challenges with advisory service delivery for women. Although the project provided information to women groups, further action is required to ensure women are equally informed. Women have been found to be more proactive in listening to and adhering to advisories in some cases.
- Local Service providers (LSPs) can play an instrumental role in accessing, interpreting, and applying forecast information in the ground. In many cases, they are the first responders to farmer queries.

- Collaboration with the world meteorological station is needed to address the lack of monitoring station.
- Only hydrological information is not enough; meteorological models and inputs are also required.
- Shifting the paradigm from the forecasted weather updates to necessary actions is crucial for long-term development and sustainability.
- Further improvement of the flash flood warning system is needed to minimize losses as the three-day lead time for flash floods is not enough time for people to fully prepare. In this regards, area-specific advisories are crucial.