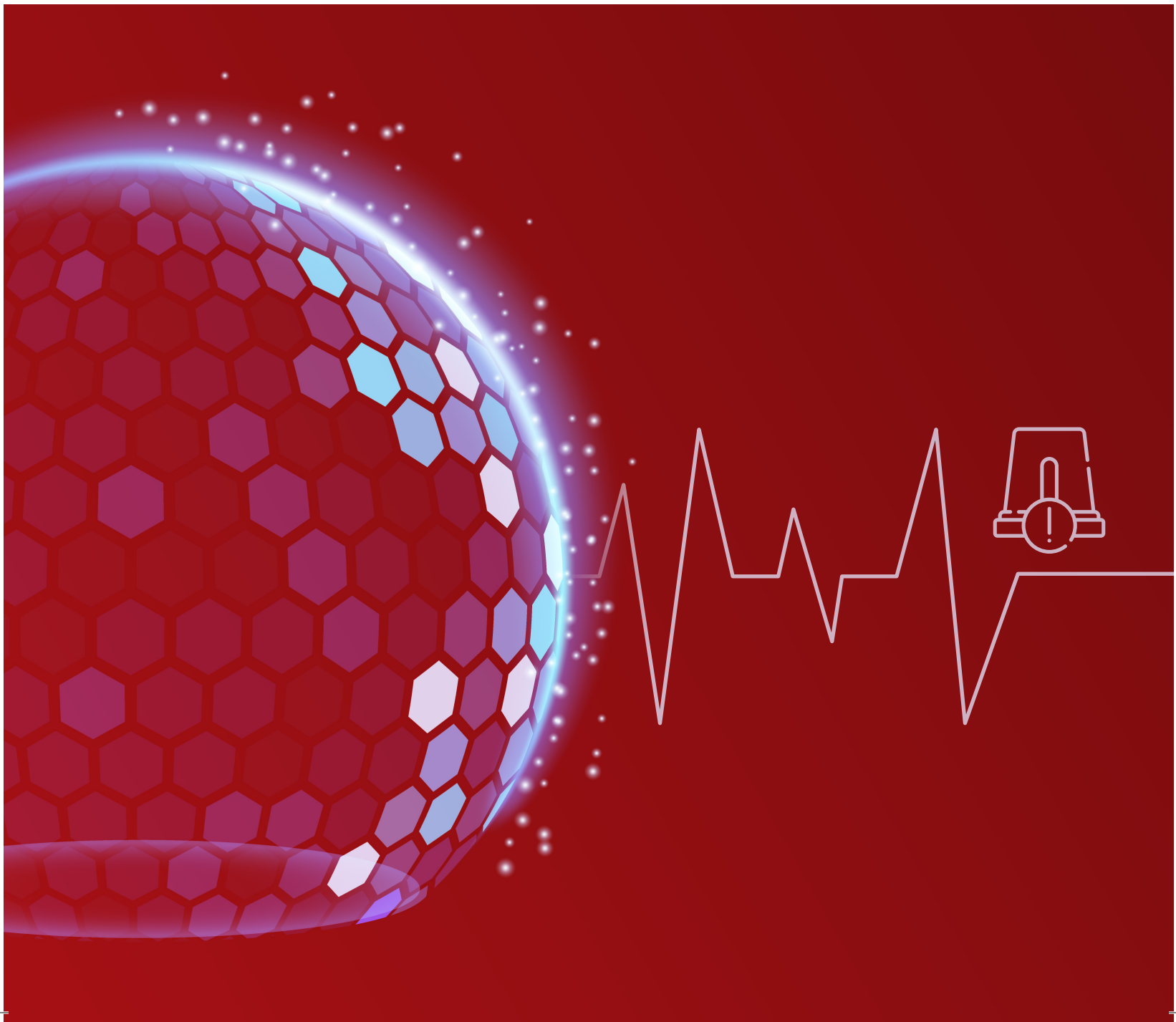


Bangladesh Preparedness Partnership (BPP)

POLICY BRIEF ON THE STANDING ORDERS ON DISASTER (SOD 2019)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Standing Orders on Disaster shortly known as SOD is considered one of the most comprehensive documents prepared for disaster risk governance not only nationally but globally. Since its inception in 1997, the SOD has been revised two more times: in 2010 and 2019. The SOD is a document, the first of its kind in South Asia, which defines the role of different actors in disaster management from central to grassroots levels within the government's formal tiers. The 2010 version of the SOD was based on a paradigm shift from reactive "disaster control" to a "proactive disaster risk reduction (DRR)" approach; In comparison, the 2019 version focused on many of the key issues related to DRR aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). The latest version has also incorporated views of field-based research.¹ The institutional framework in Bangladesh for disaster management has been expanded up to the ward level, which reaffirms the commitment to operate on a bottom-up basis as opposed to a top-down approach. Furthermore, the inclusion of representatives from women and persons with disabilities in different disaster management committees has created agency for most vulnerable groups. While the policy document has its strengths and opportunities, all relevant stakeholders must understand their roles and responsibilities fully to translate the paper into meaningful action without falling into the trap of the "paper plan syndrome." This policy brief presents constraints and enablers for fully operationalizing the SOD 2019. Furthermore, it makes recommendations to improve SOD functions where necessary.

This document supports the interventions and actions of the government officials, academicians, development practitioners, NGO/INGO and humanitarian workers, private sector officials, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, and organizations for persons with disabilities. While the SOD 2019 is a comprehensive document, it often takes too long to go through the full document. This policy brief summarizes and simplifies the contents of the SOD 2019 in a reader-friendly format. This is not just an abridged version of the SOD 2019, rather it presents a critical analysis of the document, enabling the reader to identify gaps in existing practice and undertake proper and necessary plans and actions.

¹ Reports of IDMVS interns of MoDMR; non-government actors



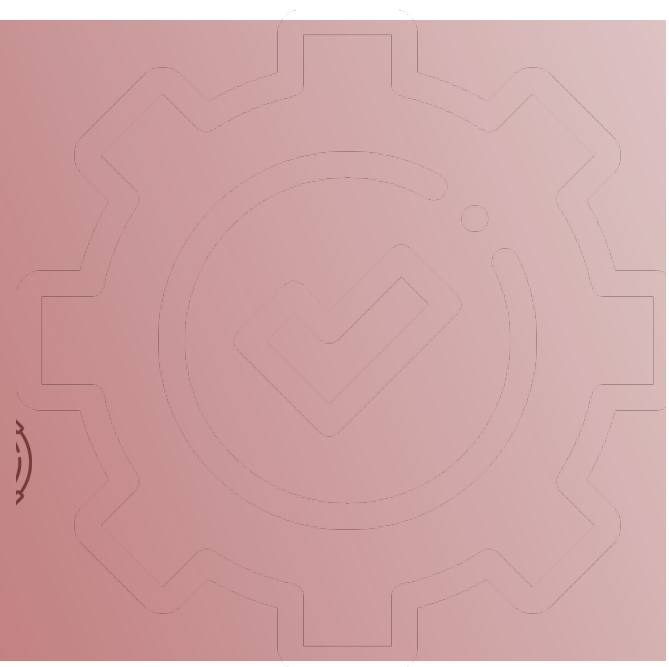
BACKGROUND

Owing to its geographic features, Bangladesh has historically been exposed to several hazards including tropical cyclones, storm surges, riverbank erosion, floods, flash floods, droughts, epidemics, salinity intrusion, cold waves, nor'wester (localized periodic events of thunderstorms and rainfall often exceeding wind speeds of 100 km/h), and earthquakes, among others.

A study conducted from 2014 to 2020 found that Bangladesh experienced 15 major disasters during this period, taking some 1,053 lives and displacing another 9.4 million, damaging 4.6 million houses, causing economic losses of up to 4.1 billion USD, and affecting 42 million people in total. Floods and cyclones were identified as the most relevant affecting 83% and 16.78% of the total 42 million impacted (*NIRAPAD, Start Network, UNCT Bangladesh, 2021*). However, the effects of disasters extend far beyond their period of occurrence. Even the country's inception is heavily intertwined with the massive cyclone of 1970 called Cyclone Bhola and its alarming death toll of 500,000 people. Following this catastrophic event, the "Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP)" was launched in independent Bangladesh in 1972.

Another cyclone of unprecedented scale took the lives of 138,000 people in 1991 called Cyclone Gorky. The floods originating in 1988 and 1998 also require mentioning due to the incredible damage they inflicted on the country. However, for many years, CPP activities did not continued at the same pace. This changed in the late 1990s when the overall disaster management paradigm shifted from mere relief distribution to risk reduction mechanisms (*Nasreen, 2020*).

Till the late 1990s, disaster management in Bangladesh was mostly centered on relief and rehabilitation efforts. However, given the country's extreme vulnerability to disasters, it has always felt a need for a comprehensive disaster management system, and the failure to manage the aforementioned floods and cyclones finally provided the push required to get it started. Appropriate theories and concepts were first developed concerning successful practices elsewhere. After this, the formation of a legal framework for comprehensive disaster management efforts became imperative. This urgency resulted in the "Standing Orders on Disaster" (SOD).



PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

The task of preparing the SOD was given to the Department of Disaster Management (DDM - formerly known as Disaster Management Bureau, established in 1993) following the 1991 cyclone. In collaboration with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR - formerly known as the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management), they developed the document in the year 1997. Since then, the SOD has been used as a core instrument for concerting disaster management efforts in Bangladesh. International frameworks and policies regarding disaster management also played a vital role in preparing the SOD. Lessons learned from the UN's International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in the 1990s and the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for A Safer World (1994) were taken into careful consideration. The first and second major revisions of the SOD were made in 2010 and 2019 respectively to remain consistent with international frameworks, namely the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005 (HFA), the SFDRR 2015-2030, and the Sustainable Development Goals. The current revision takes into account all 4 priorities stated in the SFDRR and addresses at least 10 of the 17 SDGs

The significance of the SOD 2019 cannot be overstated as it determines the roles and responsibilities of all relevant actors before, during, and after disasters. The document provides guidelines to national and local level committees and organizations, establishes the chain of command and the structural design of each committee, and facilitates a coherent flow of disaster management activities. However, challenges remain in the SOD 2019 and the disaster management system as a whole. These constraints must be identified effective resolution to safeguard the people of Bangladesh from continuous and increasing exposure to hazards.

As part of an integrated approach towards disaster resilience, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)'s Bangladesh Preparedness Partnership (BPP) supports locally-led actions on preparedness for effective emergency response. The partnership aims to facilitate the uptake and implementation of the SOD 2019 in line with the "All of Society" approach. Multi-sectoral engagement for disaster management is a core mandate of the SOD 2019 for an inclusive approach to reduce the risk and impacts of disasters in the country. The BPP promotes the active participation of local actors in government-led emergency management coordination from the national to the sub-national levels through priority interventions.

The partnership envisions achieving its intended outcome of improved coordination through developing multi-stakeholder partnerships, strengthening emergency operation centers, capacity development, and south-south learning and exchange within and beyond Bangladesh.





OBSERVABLE DIFFERENCES IN THE SOD 2019 REVISION

One of the major differences across various revisions of the SOD is alignment with existing international framework. For example, the 1997 issue was based on the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World 1994, the 2010 revision was based on the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005, and the current revision is based on the SFDRR 2015-2030, and SDG 2015-2030. The latest version has also incorporated views of field-based research (e.g., reports of IDMVS interns of MoDMR and non-government actors).

There have also been some observable changes in the structural design of the committees both at the national and local levels. 4 new committees were formed at the national level of the disaster risk management framework, and 8 new committees were formed at the local level. At the national level, these are the Chemical Disaster Management and Awareness Raising Committee, Fire Risk Management Committee, Committee for Disaster Damage and Needs Assessment, and Forecast-Based Financing/Action (FbF/A) Taskforce. And at the local level, Disaster Management Committees and Response Coordination Groups were newly formed at the Ward and Divisional levels.

Apart from that, both national and local level committees saw a significant rise in their member count. There was, on average, a 66% increase in the number of total members for the 12 existing committees at the national level, most notably in the Earthquake Preparedness and Awareness Building Committee and the CPP Policy Committee, rising from 39 to 75 and 6 to 18 members respectively. As for the 9 existing local level committees, the member count increased by an average of 100%, notable examples being the District and Upazila level Disaster Management Committees, rising from 15 to 55 and 12 to 39 members respectively.

The revised SOD 2019 has, for the first time, included experts in several sectors to be nominated by the government such as water resources, climate change, earthquake, disaster management, gender, and social inclusion among others in the National Disaster Management Advisory Committee (NDMAC).

THE WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH

The whole-of-society approach demands the engagement of all stakeholders from government, civil society, NGOs, and academia to families and individuals.

The SOD ensures local representation by forming Disaster Management Committees at every layer of the local government. This goes even further in the 2019 revision through the inclusion of Ward-level Disaster Management Committees. In this committee, there are 12 members, including public-elected officials and representatives for women, teachers, government and non-government organizations, religious communities, persons with disabilities, the media, the local business community, and ethnic minority groups, among others. This diverse pool of members ensures maximum inclusion and that the voice of every demographic is heard, especially minority groups who are often the most vulnerable. A significant degree of inclusion exists in the higher-level local committees as well. The concerns of the local committees are relayed to the national level committees which respond accordingly through interventions and changes in policy making.

The significant influx of new members at the national and local levels also accommodates a greater number of experts and academics.





HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SOD 2019

The revised version (2019) consists of 7 chapters, running over 419 pages. The salient features, policy recommendations, and recommended actions for each chapter are discussed below.

Chapter 1: Background

The first chapter of the SOD 2019 provides a very brief introduction to what it is and how it functions. This section, clearly states that its objective is “to inform all concerned about their roles and responsibilities at every stage of disaster risk management.” It further expands on this by briefly discussing some key actors and the chain of command at national and local levels. This chapter also provides a brief outlook on the geographic features of Bangladesh that makes it so vulnerable to disasters in the first place.

The chapter has remained more or less unchanged in its revisions, though it has been shortened in the recent revision.

Chapter 2: Disaster Risk Management - Policy Structure and Terminologies

This chapter of the SOD 2019 briefly presents the Disaster Management Act 2012, the National Disaster Management Policy 2015, and the National Plan for Disaster Management 2016-2020. Together, they make up Bangladesh’s national policy structure.

This section also displays a clear connection between the SFDRR and the newly revised SOD.

Furthermore, all the relevant terminologies in the field of disaster risk management are clearly defined in this part, as well as relevant guidelines.

The major difference seen in this section of the 2019 revision includes the clear representation of the national policy structure as the aforementioned policies had not yet been legislated at the time of the 2010 revision. This revision also connects the guidelines with the SFDRR, as opposed to the HFA as in the 2010 version.

Chapter 3:
Disaster Risk Management
Coordination at
the National Level

Chapter three describes the major responsibilities of disaster risk management of the MoDMR. With a commitment that the ministry will play a key role in the formulation of policy, laws, and regulations and taking necessary steps for planning, implementation, and monitoring of disaster risk management programs.

1. Key Features:

- Provides the structural basis for 16 national-level disaster risk management committees.
- Establishes the organizational hierarchy at the national level.
- Briefly discusses the roles and responsibilities of all 16 committees at the national level.

2. Policy Recommendations:

- Introducing better regulations and directions for international assistance during and after a disaster.
- Making special arrangements for possible disasters outside of the scope of the SOD.
- Moving beyond single hazard policies towards planning scenarios addressing multi-hazards, especially for health policies.
- Establishing a committee dedicated to innovation and utilization of science and technology in DRR.
- Developing a national fund steering committee to maintain bilateral/multilateral donor agency coordination targeting fundraising following a defined guideline.
- Providing rationale for the addition of new committees.
- Providing rationale for raising the member count in all committees.
- Eliminating ambiguity and avoiding duplication by making the responsibilities more specific for each committee.
- Developing yearly quotas for mock drills and other awareness-raising activities.
- Incorporating all aspects of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) threats into the SOD.
- Recognizing heat waves as a disaster.
- Devising a system to rate the functionality of local committees.
- Establishing educational institutions to enrich the literature and academic field of disaster management.
- Incorporating disaster risk management knowledge at the primary and secondary levels of education.

Chapter 3:
**Disaster Risk Management
Coordination at
the National Level**
(Cont.)

3. Recommended Actions:

- Providing newly established committees with adequate resources to fulfill their responsibilities.
- Practicing openness and measurability of disaster risk management data to upgrade bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries.
- Allocating special research grants for disaster science and climate resilience studies for effective DRR.

Chapter 4:
**Disaster Risk Management
Coordination at
the Local Level**

Considering local-level coordination as a prime indicator of effective disaster risk management, this chapter focuses on the institutional strength and coordinated efforts of the Disaster Management Committees within the local government structure: City Corporation, Division, District, Upazila, Pourashava, Union, and Ward Levels. The roles and responsibilities of these committees have been assigned in the context of implementing and coordinating activities concerning disaster risk reduction, preparedness, emergency response, and recovery.

1. Key Features:

- Provides the structural basis for 17 local-level disaster risk management committees.
- Establishes the organizational hierarchy at the local level.
- Briefly discusses the roles and responsibilities of all 17 committees at the local level.

2. Policy Recommendations:

- Developing a more effective system to listen to the voice of the affected people. For example, an anonymous ticket system at the grassroots level to better identify the roadblocks in making local committees functional.
- Acknowledging and addressing gender-specific impacts of disasters.
- Emboldening the role and participation of community people in disaster risk management activities.
- Emphasizing the use of state-of-the-art technology by the stakeholders especially those involved in anticipatory/ impact-based assessment at the local level.
- Addressing accountability with utmost seriousness.
- Systematically incorporating local knowledge and practices.

Chapter 4:
**Disaster Risk Management
Coordination at
the Local Level**
(Cont.)

- Prioritizing a bottom-up approach over the historically prevalent top-down approach.
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation to ensure adherence to the SOD 2019.

3. Recommended Actions:

- Ensuring the participation of women and persons with disabilities in the planning and implementation of disaster risk management activities using an intersectional lens.
- Developing yearly reports to ensure adherence (operationalization) to the SOD 2019.

Chapter 5:
**Responsibilities
and Functions of
Ministries, Divisions,
Departments, and
Agencies for Disaster
Risk Management**

This chapter details the responsibilities and functions to be played by different ministries, divisions, departments, and agencies. Each ministry must include disaster risk reduction and effective disaster response issues in their policies and rules and formulate relevant guidelines thereof.

1. Key Features:

- Provides disaster risk management directives to all ministries, divisions, departments, and agencies for disaster risk management.
- Establishes clear distinction between risk reduction functions and emergency response functions.
- Separates emergency response functions of all relevant parties into four stages: Response Preparedness Stage, Alert/Warning Stage, Disaster Stage, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Recovery Stage.

2. Policy Recommendations:

- Addressing accountability with utmost seriousness.
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation to ensure adherence to the SOD 2019.
- Prioritizing the bottom-up approach over the historically prevalent top-down approach.

3. Recommended Actions:

- Developing yearly reports to ensure adherence (operationalization) to the SOD 2019.

Chapter 6:
Responsibilities of
Field-Level Officials,
Representatives of
Local Government and
Humanitarian Agencies

The role and responsibilities of field-level officials, local government, and humanitarian agencies are highlighted in this chapter, where the Divisional Commissioner will coordinate all of their activities based on the disaster situations. All the relevant officials from different ministries, divisions, authorities, directorates, local administrations, and staff from various non-government organizations at the divisional level will be working on this committee.

1. Key Features:

- Provides disaster risk management directives to all field level officials, representatives of local government, and staff of humanitarian agencies.
- Establishes clear distinction between risk reduction functions and emergency response functions.
- Separates emergency response functions of all relevant parties into four stages: Response Preparedness Stage, Alert/Warning Stage, Disaster Stage, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Recovery Stage.

2. Policy Recommendations:

- Addressing accountability with utmost seriousness.
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation to ensure adherence to the SOD 2019.

3. Recommended Actions:

- Developing yearly reports to ensure adherence to the SOD 2019.

Chapter 7: National Disaster Emergency Coordination

In this chapter, the formation of the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) has been discussed. The NEOC was proposed in a meeting of the National Disaster Management Council held on 5 May 2015. Following this, an expert group was formed mainly to deal with earthquakes and other large-scale disasters. The discussion of the establishment of National EOC (NEOC) is ongoing. H.E. Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh as allocated land to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) in Dhaka to establish the NEOC.

1. Key Features:

- Establishes the basis for national disaster emergency coordination.
- Establishes the basis for civil-military coordination.

2. Policy Recommendations:

- Operationalizing national emergency coordination with measurable targets.

3. Recommended Actions:

- Strengthening the existing emergency coordination plan horizontally and vertically by ensuring the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.
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OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The SOD have tremendously impacted the disaster risk management field in Bangladesh. That being said, there exists further room for improvement in the document as, despite its successes on paper, the SOD largely falls short when it comes to implementation. This policy brief provides the following recommendations to address this challenge and other shortcomings of the document. The recommendations may be considered by government officials and policymakers responsible for the further revision and development of the SOD, which can in turn benefit all stakeholders in the disaster risk management process.

Accountability and Transparency

1. Addressing accountability with utmost seriousness.
2. Developing an anonymous ticket system at the grassroots level to better identify the roadblocks in making local committees functional.
3. Practicing openness and measurability of disaster risk management data to upgrade bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries.
4. Developing yearly reports to ensure adherence to the SOD 2019.
5. Developing yearly quotas for mock drills and other awareness-raising activities.
6. Devising a system to rate the functionality of committees.
7. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation to ensure adherence to the SOD 2019.
8. Providing a rationale for the addition of new committees.
9. Providing a rationale for raising the member count in all committees.
10. Eliminating ambiguity by making the responsibilities more specific for each committee.

Inclusion

1. Acknowledging and addressing gender-specific effects of disasters. Recognizing the specific impacts of disasters on vulnerable communities like women and persons with disabilities and ensuring their participation in the planning and implementation of disaster risk management activities.
2. Including and acknowledging academic institutions as relevant stakeholders in the implementation and development of the SOD 2019, and specifying their roles in risk management and disaster response through knowledge management and scientific research.

Innovation

1. Introducing better regulations and directions for international assistance during and after a disaster.
2. Moving beyond single hazard policies towards planning scenarios addressing multi-hazards, especially for health policies.
3. Making special arrangements for possible disasters outside of the scope of the SOD 2019. For example, the loss of internet connectivity at a national scale was seen in Armenia in 2011 (*The Guardian, 2011*).
4. Allocating special research grants for disaster science and climate resilience studies for effective DRR.
5. Emphasizing the use of state-of-the-art technology by stakeholders especially those involved in anticipatory/impact-based assessment at the local level.
6. Establishing a committee dedicated to innovation and utilization of science and technology in DRR.
7. Recognizing heat waves as a disaster.
8. Incorporating all aspects of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) threats into the SOD 2019.

Local Participation

1. Emboldening the role and participation of community people in disaster risk management activities.
2. Systematically incorporating local knowledge and practices.
3. Prioritizing a bottom-up approach over the historically prevalent top-down approach.

Financing

1. Developing a national fund steering committee to maintain bilateral/multilateral donor agency coordination and targeting fundraising following a defined guideline.
2. Providing newly established committees with adequate resources to fulfill their responsibilities.
3. Avoiding commonalities in defining roles and responsibilities of different committees.



CONCLUSION

The SOD provides all relevant agencies and organizations with specific guidance and direction. However, although the roles and responsibilities of almost all ministries and implementing bodies have been described here, a popular comment is that a “lack of coordination often hampers the disaster response.” In this context, there is a visible need to orient and train organizations about their roles and responsibilities in a coordinated way. Imparting training or building capacities on the SOD should not be limited to routine workshops and seminars. Rather, it should be operationalized for the committees at national and local levels through simulation and exercises where possible. Furthermore, the optimum use of available resources should be ensured for better coordination and collaboration. DRR must be everyone’s business. To that end, a whole-of-society approach that includes government organizations, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, academia, international donors, and all other relevant parties must be undertaken. Each of these entities has a role in either reducing risk or producing the risk. Those who oversee disaster risk management, namely the stakeholders listed above, must understand their roles fully in order to effectively communicate the risks to the masses, making them more prepared to effectively respond to a disaster. This is the right step toward a disaster-resilient Bangladesh. Scientific reasoning, technology-supported risk management processes, and engaging multi-stakeholders, including the private sector and local and national media, must be enhanced.

Implementation of the SOD should be based on integrated policies and plans towards social inclusion. Special emphasis is needed on vulnerable groups, including women, transgender people, persons with disabilities, and indigenous and marginal communities living in remote locations. This must be a holistic emphasis, as their inclusion is a major requirement for good governance in disaster risk management at all levels.

This document was produced by Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen and her team in collaboration with expert members from the ADPC.

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