

# BANGLADESH FLOODS 2016

## REVIEW OF SURGE PRACTICES

### TRANSFORMING SURGE CAPACITY PROJECT START NETWORK



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**About the CHS Alliance:** The CHS Alliance is a technical partner on the Transforming Surge Capacity Project. The CHS Alliance improves the effectiveness and impact of assistance to crisis-affected and vulnerable people, by working with humanitarian and development actors on quality, accountability and people management initiatives. Formed in 2015 by the merger of Humanitarian Accountability Partnership - International and People In Aid, the Alliance brings together over two decades of experience supporting the sector in applying standards and good practices. For more information visit [www.chsalliance.org](http://www.chsalliance.org).

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## Executive summary

This report presents the results of the third tracking mechanism on the surge response to the devastation caused by floods in Bangladesh in July – August 2016, and is part of the Start Network Transforming Surge Capacity Project. The aim of the mechanism is to track changes to surge practices by examining instances of surge deployment by the 11 operational consortium members (“agencies”) in the course of the project. Members of the project’s research team, Lois Austin, Sarah Grosso and Glenn O’Neil, compiled this report, with the support of the consortium agencies.

The report draws on information derived from desk research, interviews with three people from agencies and their local partners and an online survey of seven agencies. For each instance tracked, the mechanism envisaged a rapid review focusing on the agencies’ practices. As such, the report does not aim to cover the full scope of the surge response to the floods.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Context

Densely populated, with an estimated 165 million inhabitants, Bangladesh is considered to be among countries that are most vulnerable to natural disaster and the impacts of climate change. Bangladesh has one of the world’s largest and most active NGO sectors. It hosts United Nations (UN) agencies and most large international NGOs (INGOs). Disaster management and preparedness enjoys the support of the government down to the local level.

### Deployment and response

The emergency response benefited from the presence of NGOs and government staff across the affected districts. Ten agencies of the Transforming Surge Capacity Project actively responded to the floods. A Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) coordinated by CARE Bangladesh formed the basis of the response plan for the affected districts. Agencies reportedly relied 100% on their national staff for the surge response; no agencies reported surging in staff from outside of the country.

Although agencies stated that the majority of staff deployed were male (73%) rather than female (27%), they often focused on female-led response at the local level. The majority of agencies were active in the food security/livelihoods sector, with the use of cash programming tools being central to the response. The agencies’ response expenditure ranged from US\$ 25,000 to US\$ 725,000, with funding provided by the Start Network being key for the consortium agencies. In general, they did not receive sufficient funding for the response to the floods and their aftermath.

### Collaboration

All the eight consortium agencies surveyed and/or interviewed worked mainly in collaboration with others. According to the agencies, the existing plans, partnerships and networks encouraged a collaborative approach between governmental and non-governmental actors. This was seen in the joint RNA that served as a basis for the response of many actors.

### Challenges

The agencies mentioned lack of adequate funding to meet all the identified needs as a key challenge. As such, they were concerned that communities would run into difficulties in their efforts to rebuild themselves through sustainable livelihoods. Several agencies mentioned that permission was needed from different authorities to access the affected areas. This at times slowed the response and compounded challenges in reaching remote communities. Although many agencies benefited from pre-positioned stocks and in-country supplies, they mentioned the need to purchase materials in the capital, Dhaka, rather than close to the affected areas. Several agencies cited challenges in finding and deploying trained staff for the response.

## BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Best practices and lessons learned were identified in the fields of assessment, community and women-led responses, funding and early recovery. Recommendations included:

### Deployment and response

- Humanitarian actors, national and local NGOs, communities and governments are encouraged to work together in the assessment phase to facilitate a coordinated and effective response.
- Agencies should give priority to deploying more female staff and supporting women-led responses at the local level to increase the quality and effectiveness of responses.
- Donor governments and agencies should be encouraged to continue and increase their rapid funding for the responses of national and local NGOs in crises similar to the floods in Bangladesh.

### Staff and set-up

- Agencies are encouraged to further integrate surge skills training for staff and partners within their existing capacity building approaches.
- Agencies should place further emphasis on building partnerships with local NGOs and civil society organisations, as part of emergency preparedness, to facilitate surge response. They can do this, for example, by training existing staff in surge skills and making pre-arrangements for the rapid release of emergency funds for local partners.

### Collaboration

- Agencies are encouraged to review their collaboration at the national and local levels in other countries in light of the positive examples seen in the Bangladesh floods response.

### Early recovery

- Agencies are encouraged to review their exit and early recovery strategies to ensure that affected communities are able to rebuild themselves by way of sustainable livelihoods.
  - Donor governments and agencies are encouraged to allocate funding for early recovery through national and local partners.
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# 1. Introduction

This report presents the results of the third tracking mechanism<sup>1</sup> of humanitarian surge responses as part of the Start Network Transforming Surge Capacity Project. The focus of the report is on surge response to the floods in Bangladesh in July and August 2016.

This report focuses on the surge response of the 11 operational consortium members “agencies”<sup>2</sup> to the floods. It also makes reference to other key surge actors, such as first responders, civil society, governments, the United Nations and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

For each instance tracked, the mechanism envisaged a rapid review focusing on the agencies’ responses. In this regard, the report does not aim to cover the full scope of the response to the floods in Bangladesh.

# 2. Methodology

The research team carried out tracking between December 2016 and February 2017, using three data collection methods. Desk research was carried out to locate and analyse the relevant documentation on the surge response to the Bangladesh floods. The team created and distributed an online survey to the 11 agencies at the global (headquarters) level. Out of the 10 agencies active, seven responded to the survey, with two additional agencies providing information on their response.<sup>3</sup> In addition, to supplement these research tools, the project research team conducted interviews with three individuals from the agencies and their local partners (see annex), in particular senior staff involved in the response to the Bangladesh floods.

# 3. Context

## 3.1. The floods

Monsoon-induced flooding began around 22 July 2016 in central and northern Bangladesh, affecting 19 districts. By August 2016, 3.7 million people were affected, with over 250,000 houses damaged or destroyed. Over 100 people died in the floods and thousands sought refuge in flood shelters. The immediate needs were identified as being food, water and emergency shelter. When floodwaters receded, they left in their wake massive damage to crops, houses and infrastructure, adversely affecting the livelihoods of millions.

## 3.2. The context

Densely populated with an estimated 165 million inhabitants, Bangladesh is considered to be among countries that are most vulnerable to natural disaster and the impacts of climate change. With more than 310 rivers and tributaries and 80% of the country made up of low-lying floodplains, Bangladesh is particularly susceptible to cyclones, storms, floods, droughts, water logging and rising sea levels.

Bangladesh has one of the world’s largest and most active NGO sectors<sup>4</sup>. Working from the grassroots to the national level, NGOs have played an important development role across the country, through their direct actions and partnering with international NGOs. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is present as are UN agencies and most INGOs. Disaster management is the responsibility of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. Disaster management committees also exist at the different levels of the government. The UN cluster system is well established in Bangladesh, with active clusters in food security, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), early recovery, education, health and nutrition<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The first tracking mechanism report was on surge response to the 2015 Nepal Earthquake: [http://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Resources/Articles-and-Research/Nepal-Earthquake-2015\\_Review-of-Surge-Practices.pdf](http://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Resources/Articles-and-Research/Nepal-Earthquake-2015_Review-of-Surge-Practices.pdf). The second report was on response to slow-onset crises: [http://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Slow-onset%20Crises\\_Review%20of%20Surge%20Practices.pdf](http://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Slow-onset%20Crises_Review%20of%20Surge%20Practices.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The 11 operational agencies are: Action Against Hunger, ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, International Medical Corps (IMC), Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid, Plan International, Save the Children, Tearfund. All agencies were active in the response to the Bangladesh floods with the exception of IMC.

<sup>3</sup> Six responses were received to the survey: ActionAid, CARE, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief, Save the Children UK and Tearfund. CAFOD provided information on their collaboration with their partner Caritas that could be incorporated into the survey for some questions. IMC advised that they did not have any operations to respond to the floods.

<sup>4</sup> Asian Development Bank, Overview of NGOs and civil society, Bangladesh.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.lcgbangladesh.org/HCTT.php>



## 4. Surge deployment

When flooding started in July 2016, the Bangladeshi government and civil society mobilised quickly: government services managed to evacuate some 650,000 people to the safety of temporary camps in sites, such as schools and community halls. An ad-hoc Humanitarian Coordination Task Team was held on 4 August 2016 that triggered a Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA). CARE Bangladesh coordinated the RNA ("Multi-sector Rapid Needs Analysis")<sup>6</sup>. The findings were presented to the Department of Disaster Management of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and formed the basis of the response plan for the affected districts<sup>7</sup>.

The presence of NGOs and government staff across the affected districts boosted the emergency response; for example the Food Security Cluster reported having 1 to 13 partners in each affected district. Ten agencies of the Transforming Surge Capacity Project actively responded to the effects of the floods<sup>8</sup>. Further, local NGOs were able to respond quickly, often with the support of national or international NGOs, based mainly on existing partnerships. Some issues emerged in the selection of affected areas and populations, with some duplication reported between agencies responding. In many areas, the floods had reportedly affected nearly 100% of the population, which complicated the selection of beneficiaries.

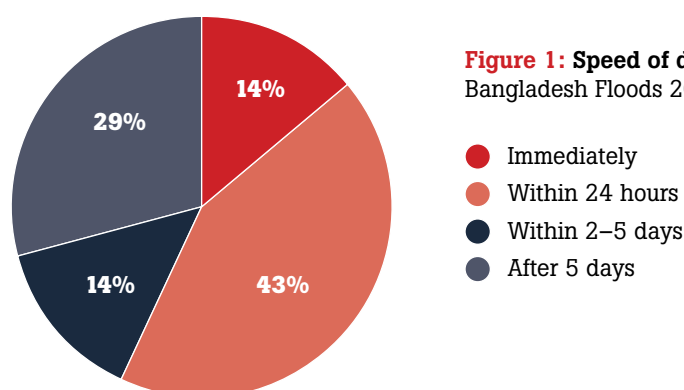
### 4.1. Speed of response by consortium agencies

According to the survey of the consortium agencies, one agency deployed immediately (within less than 24 hours), three responded within 24 hours, one within two – five days and an additional two after five days (see figure below). All agencies benefitted from existing offices and staff in Bangladesh or partnerships with local NGOs. For example, Plan International Bangladesh had 34 local partners throughout the country. National staff led the effort, which facilitated the rapidity of the response. Some agencies were not able to respond immediately because they needed to coordinate and receive the appropriate permissions from government authorities.

<sup>6</sup> The ACAPS/Start Network Briefing Note on Bangladesh Floods (3 August 2016) was also mentioned as a key source for the assessment and consequent response.

<sup>7</sup> Food Security Cluster Bangladesh, River & Monsoon Flooding #3

<sup>8</sup> Of note, Save the Children UK did not respond directly but Save the Children in Bangladesh was involved in the response. The Catholic international development charity, CAFOD, did not respond directly but supported its partner Caritas.



**Figure 1: Speed of deployment for agencies**  
Bangladesh Floods 2016

## 4.2. Staff and set-up

Agencies said they relied 100% on national staff to lead their surge response; no agencies reported surging in staff from outside of the country. They reported mobilising between one and eight staff members to respond to the effects of the floods. Further, given that many reported working through partners, they consequently mobilised the staff and volunteers of partners.

Global and regional offices and network partners (outside of the country) facilitated the response by providing visibility in their countries and networks, financially supporting the response directly or helping to secure funds and providing technical support. For example, CAFOD contributed US\$ 50,000 (40,000 GBP) to Caritas Bangladesh from its general emergency fund. Plan International's regional office in Bangkok provided technical support for the response plan and facilitated the funding request, with finances received from donors associated with the US and UK offices (the Cargill Foundation and the Jersey Overseas Aid Commission, respectively).

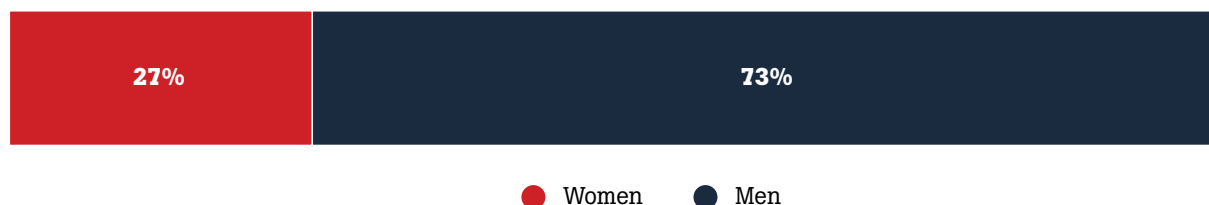
## 4.3. Role of women

Agencies reported that the majority of staff deployed were male (73%) rather than female (27%), which was different compared to agency baseline figures for 2013 – 2014 (55% and 45%)<sup>10</sup>. The ratio of male-to-female surge staff varied markedly between agencies. For example, Islamic Relief and Christian Aid both deployed only male surge staff (one and two staff members, respectively). However, Christian Aid had designed its response to be female-led at the local level, as was evidenced by its local partner, Gana Unnayan Kendra. The statistics do not take into account the local partners who reported a high involvement of women in the response.

ActionAid had an 85% female surge team and implemented its emergency response using the model “Women-Led Emergency Response”. Women leaders of the community helped select beneficiaries, purchased food items and distributed food vouchers and items. ActionAid Bangladesh and its partners provided technical and financial support. The affected communities received positive support in terms of women's leadership and empowerment in the emergency situation. This reflected the role of women in such crises, as this local partner commented:

“We involved women at every step of the decision-making process for our response; as when disaster strikes the women are the first responders and have to manage the family, so women's participation is much needed.”

**Figure 2: Approximate percentage of staff deployed by gender for surge response**  
Bangladesh Floods 2016



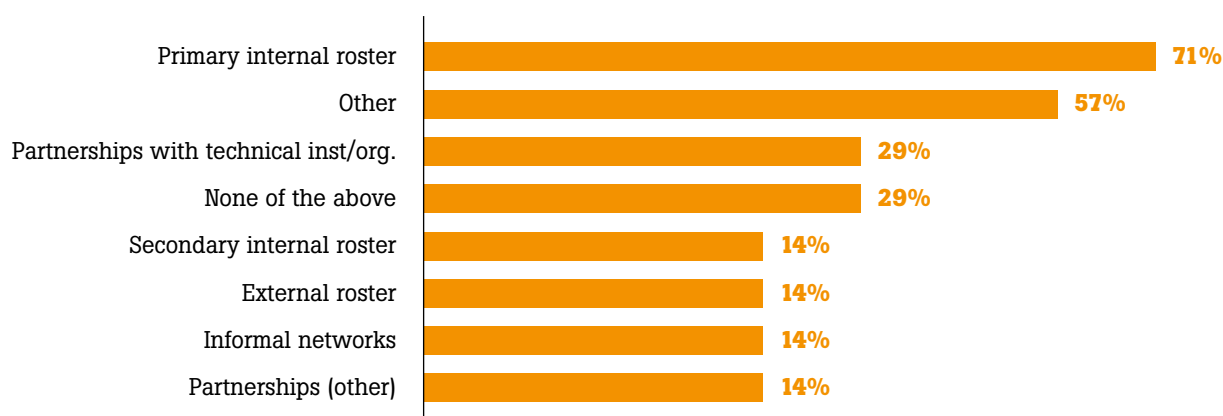
<sup>10</sup> The Start Network, Baseline Report 2015: Transforming Surge Capacity Project – global figures.



#### 4.4. Rosters and registers

As the response was led and staffed by national staff, the main type of roster used was internal, that is, existing staff mobilised for the surge response. Further, those four agencies who responded “Other” in the tracking survey indicated that they used existing staff, for example from the field offices in the affected area. Other agencies reported using staff from other partnerships or networks. For example, LAMB, the main partner of TearFund worked with government district officers (a doctor and a public health engineer) and a doctor provided by a local NGO (RDRS).

**Figure 3: Types of rosters/registers/teams activated by agencies**  
Bangladesh Floods 2016



#### 4.5. Sectoral approaches

The majority of agencies were active in the food security/livelihoods sector, reflecting the immediate need for food, as seen in the figure below. The two agencies who indicated “Other” in the survey mentioned supporting gender and providing technical assistance to NGO partners. Other popular sectors included management and coordination and monitoring, evaluation and accountability.



## 4.6. Resources

### Finance

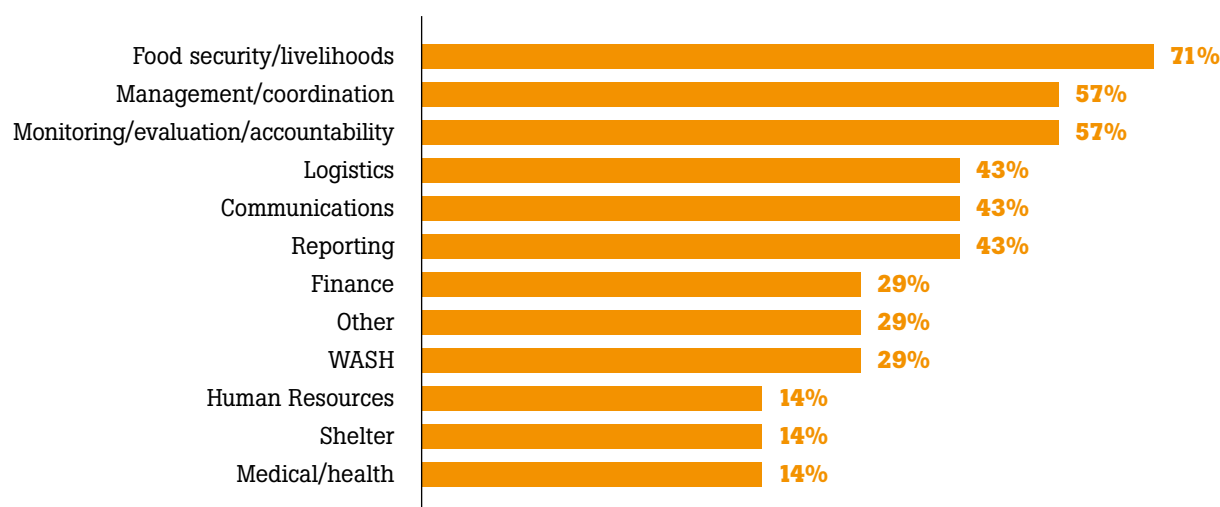
When flooding started, the Bangladeshi government responded by releasing immediate cash support of US\$ 313,000 (25 million BDT) and US\$ 263,000 (21 million BDT) allocated to food support as well as 6,600 MT of rice. The Start Network allocated US\$ 627,000 (500,000 GBP) for the crisis response from the Start Fund. The UN launched a Humanitarian Response Plan<sup>11</sup> seeking US\$ 13.6 million, while the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) launched an appeal seeking US\$ 1.6 million<sup>12</sup>.

Five of the consortium agencies were able to provide their approximate expenditure for the Bangladesh floods response. The expenditure ranged between US\$ 25,000 and \$725,000<sup>13</sup>.

The Start Network funding was key for the consortium agencies. Caritas Bangladesh received US\$ 124,000 (99,000 GBP) for the response and this was the first time that a national NGO was a direct recipient of the Start Fund. The Start Fund also provided funding for the responses of Action Against Hunger, CARE, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and Save the Children<sup>14</sup>. The Cargill Foundation and the Jersey Overseas Aid Commission funded Plan International's response.

Several agencies mentioned that the Start Fund was their only source of funding for the response (in addition to agencies using their own emergency finances). In general, agencies and other actors cited lack of sufficient funding for the response to floods and their aftermath. For example, the IFRC appeal remained 50% under-funded in February 2017<sup>15</sup>.

**Figure 4: Percentage of agencies active per sector in surge response**  
Bangladesh Floods 2016



### Materials and equipment

The materials and equipment most frequently used by agencies were food stocks (four agencies), cash programming tools (three agencies), vehicles and transport equipment and non-food stock (two agencies each), as seen in the figure below. Agencies stressed that they purchased the materials and equipment locally and/or took them from pre-positioned stocks in the country.

The use of cash programming tools reflected the emphasis on cash transfer programming as a key element of the response: The Food Security Cluster reported that 84% of assistance was “food in cash” and 16% “food in kind”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> HCTT, Humanitarian Response Plan, Bangladesh Monsoon Floods (15 August 2016).

<sup>12</sup> IFRC, Emergency appeal operations update Bangladesh: Floods (9 September 2016).

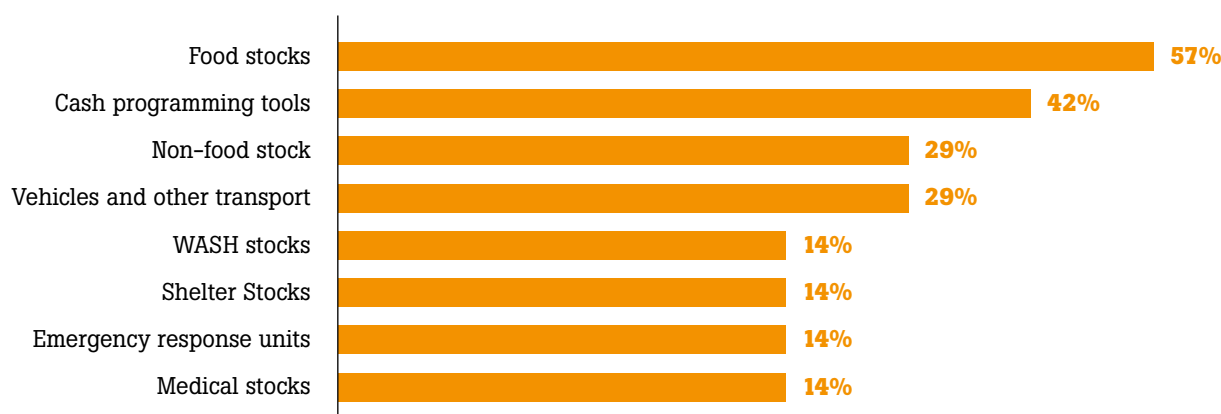
<sup>13</sup> Five agencies expenditure reported (US\$): \$25,000, \$33,000, \$106,000, \$175,000 & \$725,000.

<sup>14</sup> Start Fund awarded locally for flooding response in Bangladesh, 5 September 2014, Start Network, News Article : <https://startnetwork.org/news-and-blogs/start-fund-awarded-locally-flooding-response-bangladesh>

<sup>15</sup> Donor Response, MDRBD017 – Bangladesh – Floods (IFRC): <http://www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals/Active/MDRBD017.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Food Security Cluster Bangladesh, River & Monsoon Flooding #3.

**Figure 5: Materials and equipment used by agencies in surge response**  
Bangladesh Floods 2016



## 5. Collaboration

All eight consortium agencies surveyed and/or interviewed worked mainly in collaboration with others. This is higher level of collaboration when compared to the response following the earthquake in Nepal in 2015 (70%), and markedly higher from the 2013 – 14 baseline (36%)<sup>17</sup>. According to the agencies, the existing plans, partnerships and networks encouraged a collaborative approach between government and non-government actors. This was seen in the joint RNA that served as a basis for the response of many actors. Examples of collaboration among consortium agencies included:

- CARE Bangladesh, as lead of the Needs Assessment Working Group, coordinated the RNA amongst NGOs, the clusters, government services and other stakeholders.
- Christian Aid, Muslim Aid and Action Against Hunger jointly implemented the response in three different areas. Standardised distributions, targeting and information sharing were coordinated with Save the Children, Caritas, the Food Security Cluster and Oxfam. The responding agencies also coordinated with Plan on child protection and education needs.
- ActionAid Bangladesh worked alongside its long-term local NGO partner for its Women-Led Emergency Response that also involved the strong participation of women leaders in the affected communities.
- Christian Aid's partner, Gana Unnayan Kendra, had support from UNICEF, World Food Programme and Tesco Bangladesh (who donated goods).
- TearFund's local partner, LAMB, worked closely with government services and other NGOs, notably integrating staff from these bodies within its response team.

<sup>17</sup> The Start Network, Baseline Report 2015: Op. Cit. Nepal Earthquake 2015, Review of surge practices, Transforming Surge Capacity Project.

## 6. Challenges

### 6.1. Resource management

**Funding:** One of the key challenges raised by the agencies was lack of adequate funding to meet all the identified needs of the RNA, as this agency commented:

“The Joint Response Plan (JRP) recommended providing support for three months to affected population but we were able to provide support for one month only. A significant proportion of the affected population received minimal assistance.”

The agencies also identified the funding of the recovery phase as a major challenge (see below).

### 6.2. Policies and systems

**Access:** Several agencies mentioned that permission was needed from different authorities (down to the district level). While this slowed the response at times, it was not a major obstacle. They mentioned the role played by government officials in facilitating access, as well as challenges seen in reaching remote communities that were only accessible by boat; security could also be an issue.

**Procurement:** Many agencies benefited from pre-positioned stocks and in-country supplies. However, several agencies mentioned the need to purchase materials (such as tarpaulins) in Dhaka because they were unavailable close to the affected areas. One agency also cited challenges that its local partner had in dealing with procurement in an emergency situation.

### 6.3. Staff and set-up

Agencies were generally positive about their ability to mobilise existing staff (based in the capital and the affected areas, often through local partners). However, several agencies mentioned challenges in finding and deploying trained staff for the response.

### 6.4. Early recovery

The mid-to-long-term impact of the flooding on the affected communities was another challenge cited by agencies, which highlighted the need to develop exit strategies for their responses. Given the funding shortage, there was concern that communities would face difficulties in their efforts to re-build their lives by way of sustainable livelihoods. This was compounded by the fact that the majority of communities relied on agricultural activities (mainly livestock), which were extensively damaged or destroyed by the floods. Additionally, it was reported that communities were using negative coping mechanisms, such as borrowing money or selling their assets. Local partners saw the absence of funding for the recovery phase as a major concern.

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## 7. Best practices and lessons learned

The tracking mechanism was able to identify the following examples of good practice and lessons learned:

- The rapid assessment process incorporated feedback from the affected communities on what they saw as their key priorities<sup>18</sup>.
- The RNA was a collaborative process that later facilitated the “buy-in” for the actors in implementing their responses.
- Prior preparation and structures already in place, such as flood preparedness plans, the network of disaster management committees, the cluster system and partnerships between NGOs and local bodies facilitated the coordinated, timely response.
- Women-led response at the local level helped ensure accountability, quality and effective response programming.
- Involving communities in the response supports a more context-appropriate and targeted outcome.
- The availability of rapid funding (from donors and agencies’ central emergency funds) facilitated the response and extended its reach and the number of operational actors.
- Identifying the longer-term needs of affected communities enhances the chances of early recovery.



Food / non-food distribution, Bangladesh floods 2016

<sup>18</sup> Through the Shongjog Multi-Stakeholder Platform on Communication with Communities; see HCTT Multi-sector Rapid Needs Analysis, Op. Cit.

## 8. Recommendations

The following key recommendations are drawn from the findings of this report:

### 8.1. Deployment and response

- Humanitarian actors, national and local NGOs, communities and governments are encouraged to work together in the assessment phase to facilitate a coordinated and effective response.
- Agencies should give priority to deploying more female staff and supporting women-led responses at the local level to enhance the quality and effectiveness of responses.
- Donor governments and agencies should be encouraged to continue and increase their timely funding for national and local NGOs responding to crises that are similar to the floods in Bangladesh.

### 8.2. Staff and set-up

- Agencies are encouraged to further integrate surge skills training for staff and partners within their existing capacity-building approaches.
- Agencies should place further emphasis on building partnerships with local NGOs and civil society organisations to facilitate surge response, as part of preparation for emergencies. This can include training existing staff in surge skills and making pre-arrangements for the rapid release of emergency funds for local partners.

### 8.3. Collaboration

- Agencies are encouraged to review their collaboration at the national and local levels in other countries in light of the positive examples seen in the response to the floods in the Bangladesh floods.

### 8.4. Early recovery

- Agencies are encouraged to review their exit and early recovery strategies to ensure that affected communities are able to rebuild themselves by way of sustainable livelihoods.
- Donor governments and agencies are encouraged to allocate funding for early recovery through national and local partners.



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The Start Network, the state of surge capacity in the humanitarian sector 2015,  
Austin, L & O'Neil, G. Transforming Surge Capacity project:  
<http://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Resources/Articles-and-Research/Surge-Humanitarian-Report-Final.pdf>

**All linked documents accessed on 1 February 2017**

## List of interviewees and survey respondents

Organisation	Survey response	Interview	Document review
Action Against Hunger			•
ActionAid International	•		•
CAFOD	•		•
CARE International	•		•
Christian Aid	•	Local partner: Gana Unnayan Kendra	•
IMC			•
Islamic Relief	•		•
Plan International		•	•
Muslim Aid			•
Save the Children UK	•		•
Tearfund	•	Local partner: LAMB	•

## Persons interviewed

Organisation	Name	Position
Gana Unnayan Kendra (Christian Aid partner)	Anjum Nahed Chowdhury	Director
LAMB (Tearfund partner)	Mahatab Liton	Program Manager
Plan International Bangladesh	Md. Abdur Rahim	Manager Emergency Response