

Participation in Shelter project - from design to implementation and monitoring

Cyclone Sidr (which made land fall on the 15th November 2007) destroyed over two million houses, washed away nearly 2.4 million acres of agriculture land, killed thousands of livestock, and uprooted four million trees in thirty districts of the Bangladesh.

In response Muslim Aid carried out a huge relief operation distributing food and non-food items in the area impacted by Sidr. As part of the relief and rehabilitation programmes Muslim Aid provided livelihood, water and sanitation as well as shelter support in the form of permanent shelters, transitional shelters and semi-permanent shelters.

This case study focuses on Muslim Aid's community participatory approach adopted as part of their permanent shelter project (funded by Muslim Aid core funds) to involve affected-communities during project design, implementation and monitoring. Similar participatory processes were also implemented as part of the ECHO funded transitional shelter project.

Permanent Shelter Participatory Design Exercise

Muslim Aid appointed Hammer International, an international engineering consultancy to carry out the shelter needs assessment and to recommend the best suited shelter intervention. From the 5th-22nd January 2008 the consultant met with a wide range of shelter actors in Bangladesh, and worked with affected-community peoples to identify their preferred shelter design and explore the feasibility of implementing a community managed programme. Consultations were focused in the two areas assigned by the Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) of the Bangladesh government: Mirzaganj Upazilla (Patuakhali district where 400 shelters were planned), and Sharankhola Upazilla (Bagerhat district where 600 shelters were planned).

As part of the participatory design exercise the following steps were taken:

1. The consultant met with people from the affected community to explain about the exercise in detail and form smaller groups based on informal household clusters. Each group consisted of 6-7 people, with women, local masons, carpenters, and engineers encouraged to be part of the groups. At each location between 4 to 6 groups were formed.
2. Each of the groups met to discuss and prepare their preferred house design, and to make a rough estimate of the overall cost based on market prices of material and labour. The consultant and a Muslim Aid representative met with each group separately to offer support, and groups were encouraged to be realistic but creative.
3. Each of the groups presented their designs and cost estimates to the entire village, explaining the size of the house, materials suggested, and estimated costs. The villages then voted and selected the design that they liked the most.

In Pakuakhali the group designs were very similar, at an estimated cost of Tk. 97,600. In Bagerhat the six different designs varied in cost from Tk. 79,800 to 100,000. In this location people voted for the house that cost Tk.100,000. In both locations the house designs were 20'x10' in size with brick foundations and walls, and CGI sheet roofing. They also had RCC columns in four corners with secure fastening and anchoring arrangements. The house designed by the people in Bagerhat also had a veranda.

Through consultation with the beneficiaries a consensus was reached to adopt a design for a 20 feet x 10 feet brick built house with a veranda in both places, taking into considering the needs of the beneficiaries. Muslim Aid disseminated this consensus through community meetings, beneficiaries group meetings, interagency coordination meetings, leaflets, Information board, beneficiaries' pass books and beneficiaries' files.

Shelter implementation through a Community Managed Programme approach

The implementation phase took place over 11 months from February to December 2008. To carry out the shelter project Muslim Aid adopted a community managed programme approach in order to:

1. Empower beneficiary groups, as well as the community.

2. Ensure quality of the work through the beneficiary.
3. Arrange safe custody of construction materials by the community.
4. Build ownership of the project.
5. Develop an example of community as opposed to agency-managed programmes for Bangladesh.

The community managed programme approach centred on ensuring the responsibility for making financial transactions (including procurement of material and labour) and managing the house construction lay with the beneficiaries, while Muslim Aid supported with a series of cash grants and training. The key to this approach was transparency of process and good understanding among beneficiaries about the project and their entitlements, as well as clear understanding among staff. A number of means, outlined below, were employed throughout the project to build awareness and ownership among beneficiaries and the wider community:



Building the final design – the beneficiaries manage the house construction while Muslim Aid supports with a series of cash grants and trainings.

Formal agreement between Muslim Aid and each beneficiary – a formal agreement between Muslim Aid and each beneficiary was drawn up with details of the terms and conditions including the roles and responsibilities of each party in the implementation of the project.

Role and Responsibilities of the first party (Muslim Aid):

1. Maintain close communication with the beneficiary & also provide necessary feedback regarding their work during the implementation period.
2. Provide a passbook & a file where all relevant information relating the construction work would be available.
3. The agreed funds would be disbursed on an installment basis after evaluating on work progress of last installment.
4. Provide the necessary technical assistance for construction work.
5. Monitor the quality of construction materials and workmanship in all activities.

Role and Responsibilities of the second party (Beneficiary):

1. Contract with construction labor, carpenter, wages and drawing up a contract.
2. Identify the source of construction materials and procure quality materials.
3. Transporting and storing the construction items.
4. Participate in the construction work.
5. Complete the construction works on time.
6. Spend the allocated funds only for the construction work.
7. The beneficiary must be the owner of the land and provide all necessary land related documents for verification.
8. To preserve the relevant updated documents in the file.

Beneficiary training, orientations and meetings – at the onset of the programme Muslim Aid conducted beneficiary orientations to explain the shelter construction procedure, payment procedure, and quality control system. In addition local community mobilisers and engineers were trained on project implementation and monitoring, who in turn arranged individual group meetings to share findings on improved implementation. To ensure equal understanding joint orientations were held for masons and beneficiary groups, and addition meetings were scheduled as needed based on findings from monitoring visits by Muslim Aid staff.

The details of meetings were captured by staff using a simple form (see Box 1), which allowed key points discussed, decisions made, and feedback from beneficiaries and other community members to be systemically captured and utilised.

Group formation – as part of the implementation and monitoring process groups of ten beneficiaries from the same village or area were formed. Each group was headed by a leader, who was nominated by the group members to act as the focal person and ensure that the group carried out the agreed roles and responsibilities.

The group formation encouraged peer pressure to prevent any group member from misusing the shelter construction money for other purposes, and also provided a support structure. As needed the group members sat together to share individual problems and solve these through a participatory approach.

Group leaders played a key role in the management of the funds, procurement of quality materials, and coordinating beneficiary labour. Groups procured materials from local markets, ensured these were safely stored, hired masons and necessary labourers where skills were lacking, and ensured the buildings were constructed according to the design and with a plinth above the maximum flood level for the locality.

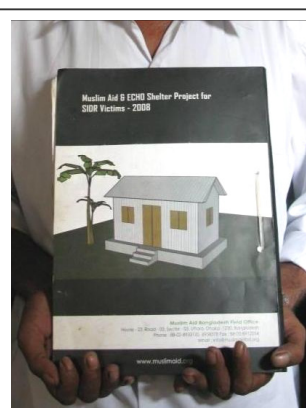
Grant disbursement and building ownership through transparency - in total Tk. 90,000 was given to beneficiaries in four instalments, each made after the completion of a specified activity linked to their shelter construction. Grants were given to female members of the household, and after completion of construction, ownership of the house was registered in the name of the female members of the family.

Muslim Aid provided grant support amounting to Tk. 90,000 for each house and Tk. 10,000 was contributed by the beneficiaries mainly in kind and labour through plinth raising, some unskilled labour, providing storage facilities and transportation costs as well as using the remaining timber from their former house which had been uprooted by the cyclone. In some cases beneficiaries contributed even more than Tk. 10,000 to improve their house like extending the kitchen and decoration. Other beneficiaries were able to raise additional funds in the range of Tk.20,000 to Tk. 50,000 when, due to price hikes, the cost of materials increased.

All disbursements were recorded in a passbook designed by Muslim Aid in consultation with the community. For each beneficiary there were two copies of the passbook and files; one held by the beneficiary and the other kept at the Muslim Aid office. Both copies of the files were updated regularly, for example at each payment both copies of the passbook from the files were updated and signed by both parties. In addition the individual beneficiary files also included copies of all documents related to the project including: the beneficiary survey report, beneficiary application, land ownership certificates, certificate from the legal advisor, a copy of the agreement between Muslim Aid and the beneficiary, a picture of the shelter, bill/invoice of items procured and expense report, and details of the beneficiary selection criteria. Muslim Aid decided to preserve these documents for next three years in the HQ in Dhaka and beneficiaries were requested and motivated to keep these documents in their houses at least one year after completion of the project.

Box 1: Form used by staff to capture the main points from their meetings with beneficiaries and community members

Muslim Aid-UK, Bangladesh	
Sharankhola / Rampal / Nazirour / Mirzaganj Field Office	
Shelter Project	
Date: --- / --- / 2009	
Community Meeting / Group Meeting Report:	
Meeting time: ---- / ----	
# of participants: ----- Type of participant: Beneficiary / Mason / Carpenter / Community Leader	
Issues Discussed	Suggestions / Feedback by the Group / Beneficiary
Comments by the facilitator:	



A beneficiary file used to keep key documentation related to shelter construction. Copies of these files were held by Muslim Aid and each beneficiary.



An example signboard used to inform the wider community about Muslim Aid projects. Signboards included information on project deliverables, number of beneficiaries, timeframe and location with phone number for complain or suggestions

Information was also shared with the wider community through information boards placed in public places, community meetings, and leaflets. The leaflets, which contained information in Bangla and English, were also used to share key information with local government, local journalists, donors, and other NGO staff.

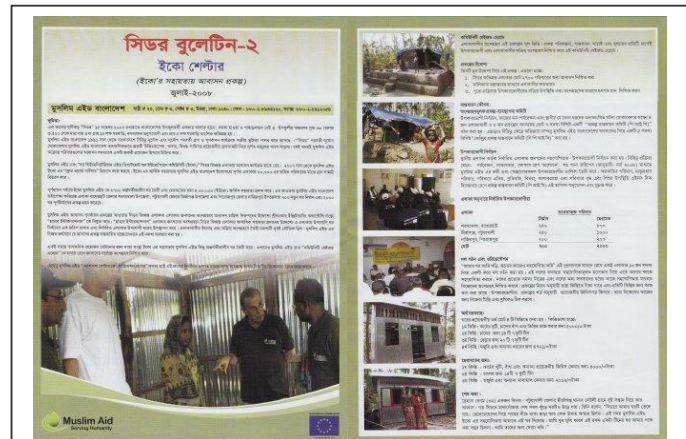
Responding to complaints: The complaints and response mechanism

Muslim Aid introduced a complaint and response mechanism with proper feedback system during the project period. The following procedure was adopted

- Finalized the focal persons from male and female staff and inform the name of the focal person to the beneficiaries through community meetings. Beneficiaries were assured that the name of the complainer name would be confidential and not revealed to project staff.
- Introduced complains and suggestion boxes in visible and easily accessible places for the beneficiaries who were informed of the time that the box would be opened.
- Contact address including phone number of the focal persons communicated with beneficiaries through pass book, beneficiaries file, information board, and leaflet and community meetings.
- All complaints and suggestions recorded in the register and reply was given to the complainant within three days either individually or group meetings and/or by taking appropriate action on the complaint.

Learning reflection from complaints received:

- Due to price hike, cost of construction materials increased beyond the budget for some of the most vulnerable beneficiaries. Muslim Aid received the complaint from the beneficiaries and increased Muslim Aid grant from Tk. 90,000 to Tk. 100,000 for those were really unable to complete their houses.
- Initially, based on the consensus, the design for each houses was the same but after receiving a complaint/suggestion from beneficiaries a more flexible approach was adopted for the two different models of roofing known locally as “Four Part” and “Two Part” which enabled beneficiaries to build their houses as per their own individual choice.



A leaflet designed to communicate key information about the shelter project to a range of stakeholders including beneficiaries and wider community, local government, journalists, donors and other NGO staff.



‘Four Part’ roofing for houses with different coloured paint and entrance step design as per beneficiary’s individual preferences.



'Two Part' roofing but with different painting designs as per beneficiary's individual preferences.

Box 2: Supporting landless families to jointly purchase land

Masuda (27) was married when she was only twelve, but after giving birth to three daughters her husband left her, leaving Masuda and their daughters struggling to even find enough to eat. They lived in a wooden shelter on the bank of a river on khas (public) land in Chal-Rayenda village (Sharankhola Upazilla, Bagerhat district) but Cyclone Sidr not only destroyed her small shelter but also took the life of one of her daughters.

Masuda participated in the community needs assessment, taking part in open-air public consultations and giving her input into one of the six shelter designs from which the community chose their preferred design.

Masuda said that Muslim Aid was transparent and open about the assessment process and basic criteria used to select beneficiaries. She said that she, like all the other beneficiaries, had to apply to Muslim Aid for shelter with all the necessary documents and evidence of the damage caused by the cyclone. However, as Masuda had been living on the riverbank, on government owned land, she did not have any land and therefore could not provide any ownership certificate.

In order to help some of the landless people Muslim Aid first tried to request land from the government but that proved to be a long and complicated process, so Masuda and another twenty landless families were provided with income generating support which, alongside other sources of finance, helped them to jointly purchase a piece of land. Masuda and the other twenty families were then eligible for Muslim Aid's financial support for building their permanent cyclone-proof housing for each of the families.

When discussing the programme Masuda explained more about how documents are kept by both Muslim Aid and beneficiaries: *"Muslim Aid provided me with a passbook that is easy to understand. There are two copies of the passbook with two different colours; one copy is kept in the MABFO site office and another is held by me. Muslim Aid office tries to make everything transparent by keeping a beneficiary file with all the documents related to the project – one is retained by me and one is kept in the Muslim Aid office. It is good, every agency should do this"*.

When asked how she felt about her new house Masuda replied: *"I have never dreamt to get such a house of my own. Muslim Aid helped by making my dream true. I'm very grateful to all the staff members of Muslim Aid"*

Conclusion

Muslim Aid's strives to serve their beneficiaries, treating them as customers, with respect and dignity, and putting their needs first through the provision of quality service delivery.

The beneficiary participatory approach during project design, implementation and monitoring developed a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries resulting in procurement of quality materials, effective utilization of funds, and timely completion of the project. Through the orientation provided, beneficiaries gained an understanding

for the reasons behind the house design and the need for quality construction so that their house would withstand a future cyclone, and in doing so Muslim Aid was able to overcome the challenges related to people's natural desire to save on costs.

This was the first experience in designing and implementing a project through beneficiary participation for Muslim Aid Bangladesh. The success and lessons learnt have increased the confidence of field staff to implement future development, relief and rehabilitation projects through the community participation approach.

In order to further improve and systematise how Muslim Aid Bangladesh manages quality and accountability a country-level accountability work plan has been developed with staff input. For more details see the case study "Developing a country-level accountability work plan - the process".

Lessons learnt:

1. It is important to develop a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries so that they will build their houses through their own initiative, which ensures they feel part of the process and at the same time this reduces management costs and ensures quality within the time frame.
2. Allowing individual preferences is possible in a large-scale project.
3. Beneficiaries, even those devastated by a disaster, are willing to contribute to upgrading their house by adding some contribution on top of the grant provided by Muslim Aid. This should have been adopted as an approach from the beginning.
4. As the community managed approach requires group work/team work, it increases family cohesion and cooperation among the community.
5. This brick built cyclone-resistant house has increased the dignity of the family, which is very important at the rural level.
6. Through quality housing beneficiaries feel capable and confident in facing the next disaster and in the ability to restore their normal livelihood.
7. The beneficiary-managed method helps combine modern technical and indigenous knowledge, which increases the quality of work.
8. As beneficiaries were involved and informed in a transparent manner in all the processes and procedures involved in the implementation, there was no potential for questions to be raised about misappropriation and beneficiary selection which is very common in such a project.
9. We need to be more cognisant from the outset of the potential for political pressure regarding the selection of beneficiaries and procurement of supplies.
10. In a disaster situation there may be a lack of quality materials in the local market. There is a need to be more proactive steps to avoid being subject to collusion by traders to establish a monopoly market and avoid extortion by local thugs.
11. We need to incorporate the potential for price hike in construction materials into the project budget design.
12. The success of the beneficiary-managed approach depends on the relations the agency has with the local community and other stakeholders.
13. It is necessary to be humble and disseminate information widely to all stakeholders. Muslim Aid was able to generate huge goodwill through its humble approach, information dissemination and its robust feedback process.

We have incorporated all these experience in the new projects from the beginning of the project period which running better than the previous one and making our implementation easier and quicker.