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THE AXIS OF DISRUPTION

Official Newsletter of the IFRC TISS Programme in Disaster Management



Disaster Management and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Hakima Mwinyi Masud, Cohort XIV

As a health professional, I assumed my biggest concern in a biological disaster would be the physiological implications of disease/toxins. As a humanitarian and a student of disaster management, I realize now that the impact of a pandemic is much more complex than that. Novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), a pandemic declared by the World Health Organisation on 12th March 2020, presented a universal challenge. For the people of Kenya, and particularly Mombasa, a largely tourism dependent county, where I work, live and come from, the socio-economic effects of a global pandemic have been a bigger concern for the populace than the infection itself. Communities have remained highly skeptical of the presence of the disease and the Government first employed a militarized response to force people to comply with COVID-19 measures like

curfews, lockdowns and a ban on public gatherings, with disastrous results.

For humanitarian organisation, it has taken a deliberate effort to remember that disasters cannot be responded to in the same way. It was now 'business unusual'. Unlike in other disasters where responders are not as affected, everyone is exposed to the risks of this pandemic and experiences additional stress in response to COVID-19. Normal activities call for more inputs by humanitarian organisation in terms of personal protective equipment, psycho social support, and facilitation for quarantine for team members who may be potentially exposed during response, at a time when traditional donors are struggling in their own countries. More so, limitations on international travel and supply lines make large scale international mobilization

mobilization impossible. In addition, COVID-19 is an unprecedented situation that is rapidly evolving. Organizations have needed more frequent assessments in order to quickly adapt their programs. Furthermore, COVID-19 impact increases the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse calling for more attention to the potential for our response to create more harm like stigma, exploitation and abuse.

There is a need for a proper vulnerability assessment. How does an organisation decide who is more vulnerable between a business owner and a person living with disability with several safety nets provided by organizations and government entities? Does vulnerability to the disease translate to vulnerability to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic? Does it still stand that women are more affected by disasters than men? Or that the poor are more

vulnerable considering some people of higher socio-economic status had lost more livelihood assets? If resilience is about the capacity to withstand shocks, then how resilient are the middle-class, most of who had to make substantial life changes at great costs to their mental health and whom no-one had prepared or even considered vulnerable? Some organizations like Kenya Red Cross Society employed Community Based Targeting to determine who qualifies for cash aid at this time, a method that seemed to translate to better accountability. This is because many of the traditional communication channels like community meetings and focused group discussions were impossible keeping COVID-19 measures in mind, and thus the processes demanded a lot of innovation. All in all, COVID-19 response has presented an opportunity for all disaster actors to learn and a chance to put all theories to practice

INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE

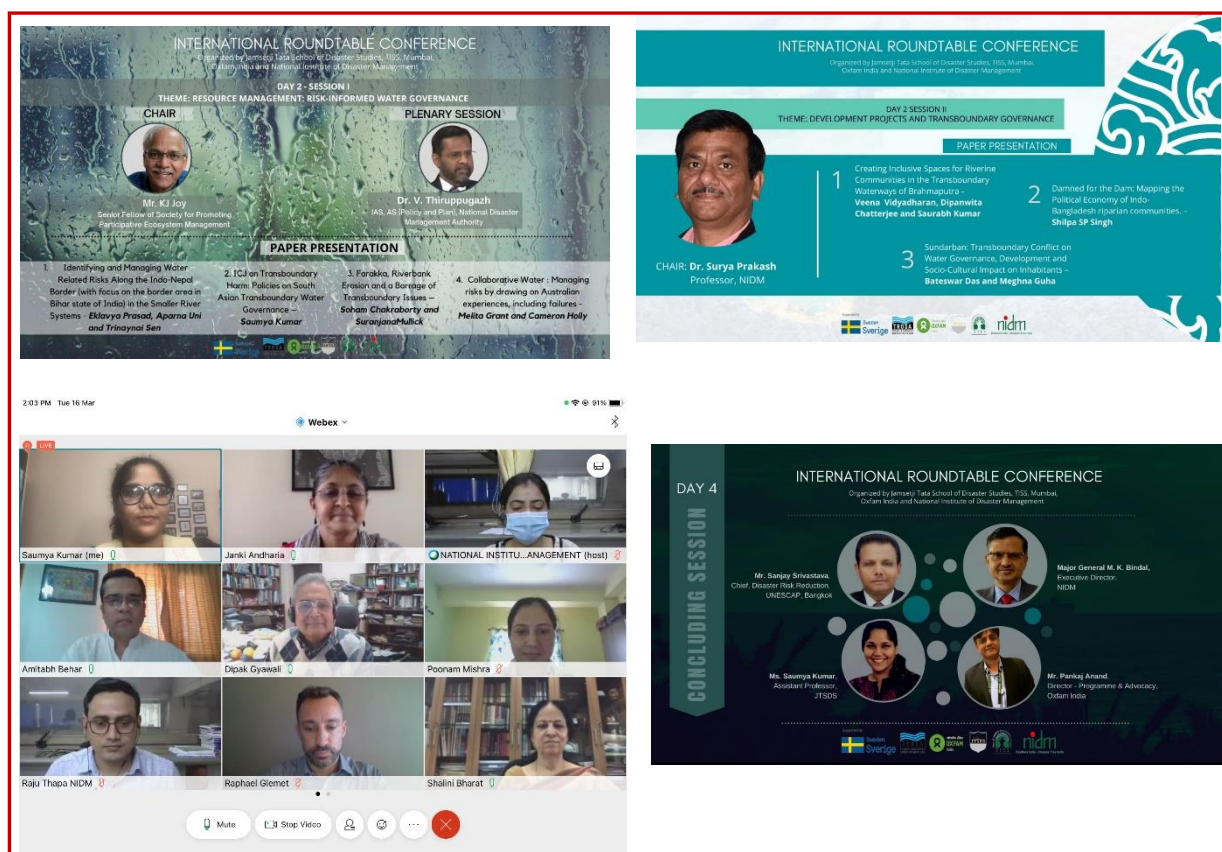
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Oxfam India in collaboration with Jamsetji Tata School of Disaster Studies-TISS and National Institute of Disaster Management organised a 4-day virtual international roundtable conference on:

“SHIFTING LANDS, FLOWING WATERS: TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION FOR WATER & RELATED ISSUES IN SOUTH ASIA

The intrinsic linkages between South Asian countries, rooted in geopolitics, demography, socio-economic and cultural ties, suggest that dynamics in one country often led to cascading impacts – be it policies and practices around use of natural resources or devastating impacts of disasters or changing climatic conditions, and these could potentially affect the entire region adversely. With the growing threats of climate induced disasters, the consequences of an ill-prepared nation or weak transboundary governance processes are likely to be unprecedented and cumulative across the region, which in turn may aggravate fragilities in peripheral and vulnerable geographies.



Among the multi-faceted concerns, transboundary water governance assumes significance and includes the management of various risks and hazards. Water related vulnerabilities must be read along with the various underlying socio-political, economic and administrative systems which influence the general well-being of the riparian communities across nations. The *roundtable focused on examining and exploring in transboundary contexts, the challenges faced by vulnerable communities, efforts to overcome these*. Also, dwelled on possible avenues for intervention by the governments, local communities, the private sector and civil society organisations, while placing the rights of vulnerable communities at the centre stage. IFRC-TISS Programme actively participated in the event with Ms. Nelly Saiti Barasa, Ms. Suranjana Mullick and Ms. Saumya Kumar presenting their paper.

Application of ICT in Addressing Trans-Boundary Water Related Challenges Affecting Public Health¹

Nelly Saiti Barasa, Cohort XIII

South Asian populations along with others in the world grow towards useful natural resources mostly surrounding water. Currently the pressure exerted on these resources remains a challenge for people,

their generations to come and for the environment. Some of the existing challenges include: scarcity and overuse of water for drinking and agricultural purposes; inequitable access to water by

¹ This paper was presented at the virtual International Roundtable on "Shifting Lands, Flowing Waters: Transboundary Cooperation for Water and Related Issues in South Asia organized by Jamsetji Tata School of Disaster Studies-TISS, Oxfam-India and National Institute of Disaster Management

all; over-exploitation & fast depletion of groundwater; vulnerability to frequent environmental hazards such as floods, impact on climate changes; and, pollution and contamination of surface water resources.

These challenges directly affect health resulting in high incidence of diseases and deaths. Most discussions about Trans-boundary water challenges focus on the impacts it has on the political, social and economic environment in general and little is mentioned about the immediate innovative solutions to health for beneficiaries. The vision of UHC is that all people can obtain the quality health services they need. It is also an essential part of the SGDs, to ensure access to quality essential health care services for all. It is evident that the use of ICT is fundamental in Trans-boundary water cooperation and is currently adopted in water resource management to improve water availability, efficiency, accessibility and sustainability. The adoption of ICT in addressing the impact of Trans-boundary water challenges on health will provide effective solutions and as such a positive move towards achieving Universal Health Care. This article reviews to analyse effects of these challenges

on health and the application of ICT in addressing them to achieve universal health coverage. It provides evidence-based recommendations for adopting ICT strategies in areas within these waters to address health concerns.

Among the notable challenges include the high morbidity and mortality rates emanating from pollution and water related diseases. ICT applications include: mobile application software developed to strengthen community engagement and dialogue to handle their health related needs and provide timely feedback, developed databases of diseases among the inhabitants and linking these diseases to possible trans-boundary water related causes, creating monitoring tool for immigrants coming from a region with a possible disease outbreak and generating alert messages in the event of rising levels of pollution and outbreaks in the region. Intensify use of social media to facilitate awareness campaigns on impact of trans-boundary activities on health and adoption of open-source applications to enhance sharing of solutions that address negative impact of trans-boundary waters on health.

Farakka, Riverbank Erosion and a Barrage of Transboundary Issues²

Soham Chakraborty (JTSDS-TISS Alumni) & Suranjana Mullick (IFRC-TISS Programme Team Member)

Riverbank erosion is the natural or anthropogenic process of gradual removal of materials from banks of rivers. As you know it mainly happens when the force of the river exceeds the holding capacity of the banks. However, riverbank erosion can also be a major contributor to the loss of life and livelihood for several communities across the globe, if they happen in areas where vulnerable communities exist. Similar to that of India, in Bangladesh riverbank

erosion has also affected thousands of people every year who lose their homes, lives and livelihoods. Riverbank erosion is treated as one of the devastating disasters responsible for persistent poverty in Bangladesh due to the enormous destruction of resources and displacement of large numbers of the population. The hazard also has an impact on the high unemployment levels in rural Bangladesh.

² This paper was presented at the virtual International Roundtable on "Shifting Lands, Flowing Waters: Transboundary Cooperation for Water and Related Issues in South Asia organized by Jamsetji Tata School of Disaster Studies-TISS, Oxfam-India and National Institute of Disaster Management

The Ganga-Padma river basin is one of the most ecologically vulnerable areas in today's time. It has been identified as a hotspot for climate-induced conflicts. Construction of bridges for light as well as heavy loads at river banks, "tilla" cutting and the process of sand mining are some of the common causes of riverbank erosion. But, when we take into account the Padma basin of Bangladesh, the Farakka Barrage (situated in West Bengal, India) becomes the main cause of riverbank erosion for the region. The barrage which is 2245m across the Ganga River, was built to divert 40,000 cusecs of water towards the Bhagirathi River (a tributary of Ganga) to flush out sediments. Adding to that a Rail cum Road Bridge is also constructed over it for easier accessibility and developmental purpose.

According to the Helsinki Rule signed in 1966 regarding water rights to international rivers, all basin

states of an international river have the right to access an equitable and reasonable share of the water flow. Over the years, there have been many disagreements between the two riparian nations on an acceptable plan for water allocation rights.

A handful of severe problems have been observed across the Indian boundary in Bangladesh especially in the last two decades. The preliminary literature analysis shows how the barrage adversely affected fishing and navigation and brought unwanted salt deposits into rich farming soil. The transboundary impact was not just limited to the problems stated. It affected

agricultural and industrial production, changed the hydraulic character of the rivers and brought about changes in the ecology of the region. There is a huge contrast between pre- and post-Farakka water supply, where the situation was much better in the pre-Farakka period even in the dry season downstream, more particularly in the Bangladesh part. Due to the fluctuating heavy flow of water caused by the operations of the Farakka Barrage, the alternate dry and wet phases along with the riverbank's triggers erosion.

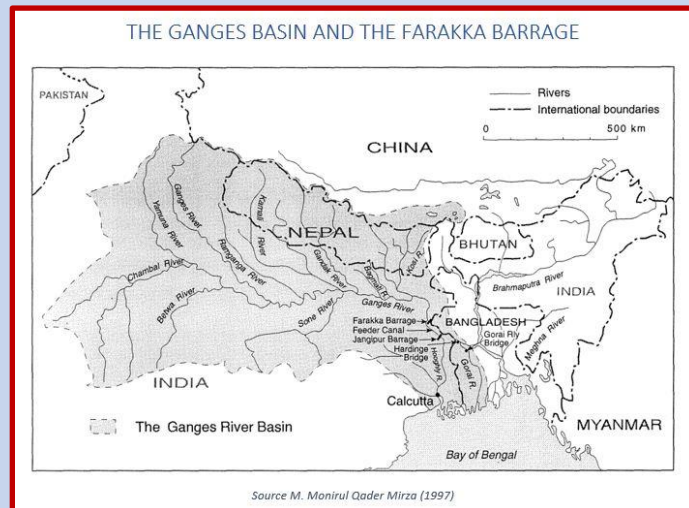
The groundwater level in the highly affected area went down particularly in the district of *Rajshahi, Kustia, Khulna and*

Jessore. The southwest region had been facing the critical problem of salinity intrusion from the Bay of Bengal because of the drastic reduction of freshwater flows.

Waterflow dropped remarkably

causing huge sedimentation- transforming and depositing on the river channel.

A major impact is felt in the *Gorai-Madhumati* river system due to the construction of the barrage which is 274km approx. away from the barrage. The river channel of the said water system narrowed gradually from 1972-2018: average river width increase was 118m and decrease width 82m. Satellite and data analysis shows the evidence of Sandbar spatial expansion along with 5.56 sq. km of land accretion on both banks. Farakka Barrage in Bangladesh has amounted to the loss of more than 3 billion US dollars' worth in



Bangladesh, two decades ago. Given the fact Bangladesh faces the wrath of tropical cyclones and flooding every year, currently, the total amount of losses will have increased exponentially. It is needless to say that there hasn't been any positive influence on the massive problems of water scarcity and food security in Bangladesh.

For India, the Farakka barrage has positive impacts like the reopening of the Kolkata port and adequate volume of water flow

downstream Ganga. However, the barrage has also caused mostly negative impacts in every aspect for Bangladesh from depleting their freshwater resources to causing havoc for the vulnerable population in the form of floods and erosion. The irony lies how the Farakka "barrage"- envisioned to reduce risk and cater to the needs of the vulnerable by providing a sustainable solution for the future, in turn aided to churning up a "barrage" of transboundary issues

Irish Red Cross Psychosocial Support of Syrian refugees settling in Ireland

Eoin O'Shea, Cohort XIII

As one might expect, those who had made the perilous journey – and frequently having experienced the ravages of war first-hand – were often beset by various mental health difficulties including depression, anxiety disorders, as well as PTSD. It is quite difficult to understand fully the impact that such disruption in refugees' lives such circumstances bring about. Social networks – as well as physical homes themselves – have often been torn apart. Some of my clients had experienced arrest, torture, seen or heard of family members being injured or killed during aerial bombardments or small arms fire, or had simply made the unimaginable decision to up-end their lives and make the journey abroad in an effort to avoid these same horrors befalling themselves or loved ones.

Ireland had committed to take 4,000 such refugees into our country, with the political will to do so high on the agenda a few years ago. However, despite the medical screenings that incoming refugees received, little systematic effort seemed to be made to assess, also, their mental health status and link those affected with relevant services to address such needs. The Irish red Cross was tasked with managing the practical and housing needs of a smaller sub-section of the refugee population coming to Ireland – these most often included younger, single men who might not be prioritized for the purposes of 'social [i.e., State-provided housing]'. While some such men settled in

remarkably well following their arrival, numerous others were left with the multiple stresses of missing family back home, bereavement, loss of physical and cultural surroundings so familiar to them – and many also suffered from psychological trauma based on their experiences of either the war itself in Syria, or the stresses and strains of the journey to Europe and beyond. If one of our Migration Department's 'Caseworkers' perceived a need to assess mental health difficulties, a referral system was put into place – co-developed by myself and the rest of the team – to ensure that this happened in as timely a manner as possible. Such

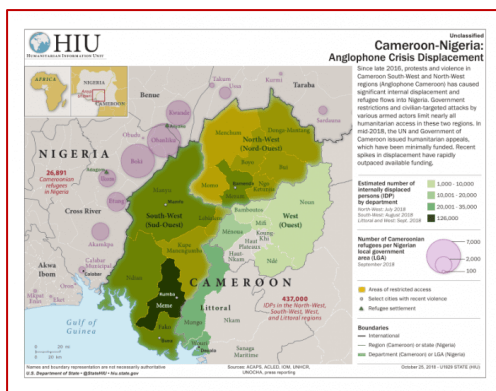


assessments involved meeting with a client on the programme—sometimes using an Arabic-speaking interpreter—and discussing with them their current problems, the history of their experience of the war and the journey afterwards, as well as any other relevant information concerning their mental wellbeing. Following such

assessments, the client should be referred to any relevant service available in their area (itself far from guaranteed to meet their needs). Also providing a basic and bi-lingual ‘Support Plan’ which the client could do their best to follow is both meaningful but also challenging.

Gender equality and equity situation in Cameroon: Anglophone Crisis

Isabel Jansen van Vuuren, Cohort XIV



Equity leads to equality. “Gender equality, equality between men and women...does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they were born male or female. Gender equity means fairness of treatment for men and women according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities” (UNESCO, 2014).

Cameroon is a heavily patriarchal society where households are typically controlled by men and gender roles assigned to women and men within the house are commonly accepted. Religion, culture and tradition establish the roles and status women can and cannot assume; thus, women and girls in Cameroon depend almost entirely on male-controlled resources and assets, and are consistently inferior in terms of decision-making power.

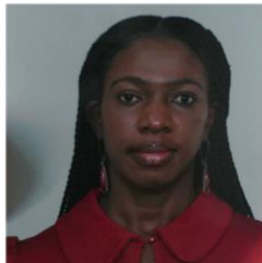
Since 2016 a large number of people (approx. 3 million people) have been displaced in the Anglophone North-West region. The numbers are growing as the conflict increases and no agreement has been reached in the region between separatist groups and the government. While Cameroonian refugees need desperate humanitarian and international aids, the Anglophone crisis was the most neglected displacement crisis in 2018 and

2019. The Norwegian Refugee council raises the Alarm: “mounting violence, political paralysis and an aid funding vacuum contributed to Cameroon topping the list of the world’s most neglected crises for a second year running. Due to a lack of geopolitical and economic interest, a lack of media coverage or the complexity and distance of the crisis, Cameroon undergoes aid shortages and inefficient peacemaking.

In July 2020, talks occurred between leaders of some armed groups and representatives of the Cameroon government. Those meetings reflected the weariness of the population after four years of conflict. However, the national dialogue was limited as many separatist groups refused to join, underlining their leaders stayed behind bars. In March, the UN called for a ceasefire in order to focus on the Covid 19 pandemic, but the military operations have intensified.

FEEDBACK FROM IFRC-TISS PROGRAMME ALUMNI

Hello Readers!



My name is Kathy Ann Morain. I am from the island of Grenada. My island is situated in the southern part of the Caribbean. We are susceptible to many hazards of a hydro meteorological, geological, anthropogenic, biological nature, just to state a few.

I commenced my journey at a student of TISS/IFRC Disaster Management Course in 2013. Due to many challenges, of a health and professional nature, I was unable to complete the course within that course period. I was however, determined to complete the course because I had a deep yearning to explore the content of the modules based on my limited initial interaction with the materials following my enrolment.

After a lapse for several years, I decided it was time to push forward in getting the certification. In March of 2019, I contacted the TISS/IFRC team, expressing my desire to complete the course with the incoming students for that period. The faculty reviewed my application and gave the authorization for the continuation of the course [2019-2020](#).

As I reflect on the journey, it was an extremely challenging one. First, the course content was literature oriented which required extensive reading. Learning how to integrate school with an overactive work load was a daunting task. I had to acquire adaptive skills to manage work and study at the same time which required many sacrifices to accomplish the balance.

The course content was well rounded for persons who want to expand their knowledge in the field of disaster management. The modules are aligned to historical and current theories to give students a comprehensive knowledge on different facets for consideration in ones attempt to understand disasters, their origin, the situations that exacerbate their transformation and the interaction between development and disasters.

One of my biggest comforts throughout this journey was the level of compassion that was exercised by the faculty of TISS/IFRC. The team showed empathy and offered the support that I did not envision, at a student. During my many frustrating moments of lagging behind with the submission of assignments they provided support with coaching and mentorship. My professors and assistants were the best, they provided guidance and their support were significant in my journey.

Today, I am proud to state that I have successfully completed the Disaster Management Course with TISS/IFRC 2019-2020. My knowledge on disaster management has increased. I acquired a meaningful certificate to display for my commitment to the task.

I was able to also share my acquired knowledge with the National Disaster Management Agency (NaDMA), the entity responsible for the management of disasters in my country, as I conducted my Field Practicum with the agency. I worked with The Agency to integrate the theoretical and practical aspects of my learning to undertake a research on "Last mile connectivity" to enhance Early Warning Systems at the community level. My expanded knowledge is constantly utilised in my daily functions within the humanitarian sector.

I will recommend this course to anyone who wants to expand their competency in the field of disaster management since the course provides a broad prospective on disasters with exposure to research, case studies and diagnosis of current crisis globally amongst many other important topics.

Thank you TISS/IFRC for a properly constructed efficiently executed and well managed course. Thank you for heightening my competencies, boosting my confidence and creating the platform of opportunities for my further growth and development as a Disaster Management Practitioner.

Thank you!

**Kathy-Ann Morain
Cohort XIII**



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