



Communication Strategies of Government and Non-Government Organizations of Bangladesh during COVID-19

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Abstract

In early April 2020, Bangladesh was on the verge of an attempted nationwide lockdown due to the spread of the 'COVID 19 pandemic'. During the period of lockdown, the people of Bangladesh tried to maintain the government regulation of lockdown although, by May, multiple citizens tended to return to their normal lives rejecting lockdown as a failed measure by the government. The concept of lockdown that has been imposed by Government of Bangladesh was unworkable due to devastating loss of livelihood as well as lack of compensatory relief from the state. Implementation of the vaccination program by the government of Bangladesh is one of the most effective strategies in protecting the people from the negative impact of 'COVID-19'. Implementation of a 'community-focused healthcare educational campaign' primarily aims in fostering a positive attitude towards the health measures of citizens of Bangladesh. This article focuses on the communication strategies of the government of Bangladesh followed during Covid-19 with the help of conclusive design and secondary data.

Keywords: Communication Strategy; COVID-19; Government of Bangladesh; Livelihood; Non-Government Organizations; Pandemic; Risk-Communication; Psychological Problems.

Introduction

The outbreak of any pandemic situation has historically provided a tough test for the governments of many nations in checking their capacities for designing public policies. In early April 2020, Bangladesh was on the verge of an attempted nationwide lockdown due to the spread of the 'COVID 19 pandemic'. According to World Health Organization, as of 31 May 2020, 6,218,927 confirmed cases including 372,344 deaths have been reported globally. Bangladesh has confirmed their first case of 'COVID-19' on 8 March in the financial year of 2020. In response to the pandemic situation, the government of Bangladesh (GoB), has declared a 'special general leave' from 26 March in the form of lockdown and extended it up to 30 May 2020. During the period of lockdown, the people of Bangladesh tried to maintain the government regulation of lockdown although, by May, multiple citizens tended to return to their normal lives rejecting lockdown as a failed measure by the government. The concept of lockdown that has been imposed by GoB was unworkable due to devastating loss of livelihood as well as lack of compensatory relief from the state.

Due to the outbreak of the pandemic, Bangladesh has faced a humanitarian crisis leading to a shortage of basic needs that includes food, unemployment, and economic as well as financial loss. Besides, food insecurity, social conflict, and even death have been faced by citizens of Bangladesh due to the rise of the 'COVID-19' pandemic. Moreover, the psychosocial and socio-economic well-being of citizens of Bangladesh has been affected due to the subsequent rise of pandemic situations. The public healthcare system along with legislative structure primarily focuses on present preparatory measures, as well as other vital capacities in responses to the pandemic. Implementation of a 'decentralized approach' helps in slowing down the rise of a pandemic. Furthermore, mobilization of healthcare professionals along with steady construction of new medical facilities primarily aims in preventing the rise of a pandemic.

On 5 March, in the financial year of 2020, the government of Bangladesh implemented the 'National Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19', for facilitating planning as well as identifying response level and risk assessment. In the financial year of 2021, in June, there have been 802,305 confirmed cases of 'COVID-19 pandemic' including the death of 12,660 people. The rise of a pandemic has created an adverse effect on the physical as well as psychological wellbeing, the healthcare system as well as a global economic recession for citizens of Bangladesh. Implementation of the vaccination program by the government of Bangladesh is one of the most effective strategies in protecting the people from the negative impact of 'COVID-19'. It has been estimated that the development of almost 287 potential vaccines as well as 102 clinical trials have been released within Bangladesh.

The government of Bangladesh has started its mass vaccination program on February 8 in the financial year of 2021. Moreover, within June 1, in the financial year of 2021, the government of Bangladesh has administered 1.9 billion doses of the 'COVID-19 vaccine' within 231 locations. Knowledge about the 'COVID-19' pandemic, acts as a vital component within the public health as well as prevention of the disease for helping individuals in sticking towards the public health measures. Implementation of a 'community-focused healthcare educational campaign' primarily aims in fostering a positive attitude towards the health measures of citizens of Bangladesh. This article focuses on the perception of the public towards lockdown as well as initiating strategic management in mitigating the pandemic situation in Bangladesh. In addition, attitude, as well as experience regarding vaccinations tends to be observed as a major predictor within the vaccination intentions for citizens of Bangladesh.

Situation of COVID-19 in Bangladesh

The 'COVID-19 pandemic', has initiated an adverse effect within the vulnerable population of Bangladesh that ranges from good health to well-being as well as providing quality of education and disruption within the healthcare system, prevailing poverty as well as lack of proper accesses to food along with nutrition tends to culminate improper healthcare facilities leading to increase mortality (Shammi, Bodrud-Doza, & Islam, 2021). The rise of the pandemic situation has led citizens of Bangladesh to the crisis of achieving clean water as well as proper sanitation. Adverse effects of economic recessions, unemployment as well as food insecurity were aggravated within the developing countries such as Bangladesh due to the outbreak of 'COVID 19'. According to UNDP, within developing countries such as Bangladesh, the loss of revenue was estimated to be \$220 billion. The losses within the revenue were estimated to be 55% within the global population of Bangladesh in the field of education, food security as well as nutrition.

The government of Bangladesh has implemented various preventive measures in mitigating the risk of the 'COVID-19 pandemic' such as initiating strict quarantine (Anwar, Nasrullah, & Hosen, 2020). Furthermore, implementation of screening procedures, aggressive tracing of cases, as well as promoting hygiene practices are also put forward as preventive measures in combating pandemic situations in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has been experiencing an increased risk of positive cases of 'COVID 19' due to the conduction of tests since the 4th week of detection. It has been estimated that Bangladesh has a low recovery rate as compared to other neighboring countries. In the financial year of 2020, on 11 August, it has been recorded the recovery rate in Bangladesh was 57.6% and the death rate was 1.32% (Islam, Talukder, Siddiqui, & Islam, 2020b). Furthermore, it has been observed that young professionals and working people tend to develop the risk of 'COVID-19' as compared to other people in Bangladesh. According to a report by IEDCR, there have been 68% of 'COVID' positive cases within the age group of 21 to 50 years in Bangladesh. Due to the outbreak of the pandemic situation, the economy of Bangladesh tends to drop due to the suspension of economic activities such as agriculture. Due to travel restrictions, international trade orders have been canceled leading to a huge economic recession over the nation. On March 25, in the financial year of 2020, the government of Bangladesh declared a lockdown restriction for 10 days that was to be effective on March 26. Due to the imposing of lockdown restrictions, suspension of transportation on roads, rail and water has been banned. Various forms of nongovernmental organizations, businesses, and educational institutes have been halted due to the rise of pandemic situations. However, pharmacies and other unavoidable necessities of people have remained open according to the rules and regulations of the Bangladesh government. On 15th March 2020, the government banned all international flights that had been coming from Europe (Anwar et al., 2020).

Response of Bangladesh Government towards COVID-19 pandemic

In March 2020, the government of Bangladesh has taken major initiatives in controlling the spreading of an epidemic among Bangladeshi people that includes evacuations and restrictions on travel. Moreover, implications

of social distancing, closing down of schools as well as other educational institutions as well as creating awareness about the symptoms of the ‘COVID virus’ through mass media are also being influenced by GoB (Islam et al., 2020). Implementation of the ‘Health Belief Model (HMB)’ is one of the crucial aspects that primarily aim in determining the factors that are associated with vaccination intentions. Implementation of the HMB model by the government of Bangladesh tends to address the susceptibility, severity as well as self-efficacy in engaging behavioral actions against the outbreak of a pandemic. Banik et al. (2021) stated, ‘willingness-to-pay’ implies a monetary program that is associated with an individual that is willing to allocate for obtaining the benefit of the program. It has been estimated that low susceptibility towards the pandemic, as well as safety for new vaccinations, were reported as a vital factor in identifying unwillingness to receive the vaccine by Bangladeshi people. Ali et al. indicated (2021) that implementation of ‘Joel Migdal’s concept of state capacity’ and ‘Michael Mann’s concept of ‘infrastructural power or the capacity of the state’. It primarily aims in determining the dynamics of lockdown within Bangladesh during the outbreak of pandemic situation.

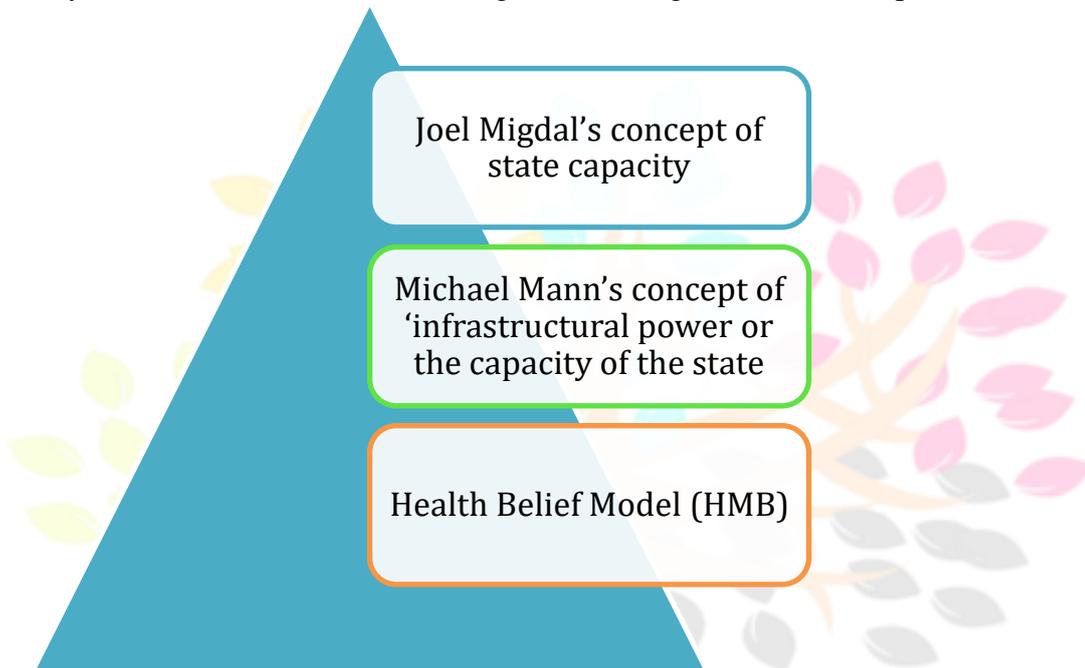


Figure 1: Theories related to COVID 19 protocols

Furthermore, the use of social media has evolved as one of the crucial sources of information to the public during the outbreak of pandemic situations. This in turn leads to effective measures in collecting relevant information that are necessary for both medications as well as treatment against the spread of ‘COVID-19 pandemic’. As cited by Islam et al. (2021) during the lockdown period, Bangladeshi people tend to rely on internet based social media in gathering information related to infections, preventive measures as well as providing proper treatment regulations against the ‘COVID 19 virus’. Within Bangladesh, in the financial year of 2020, in January, the total internet users accounted for 66.44 million. The rapid use of social media played a considerable role in dealing with outbreak within Bangladesh for preventing ‘COVID-19’ from perception of people.

Communication strategy imposed by Bangladesh in combating pandemic situation

Due to the rise of pandemic scenarios, ‘out-of-pocket expenditure’ tends to possess substantial risk of finance within the poor population in Bangladesh. Shammi et al. 2021) mentioned that various communities of Bangladeshi people such as low income families, returnee workers as well as low earner wedges tend to fall below the poverty line due to various complications such as unemployment and increased income. According to BRAC, a Bangladeshi NGO reported that due to the rise of pandemic situation the level of poverty rose up to 6% within Bangladesh. Implementation of support provided by community health care workers during the pandemic situation primarily determines easy access of healthcare services as well as products within the communities of Bangladesh. The influence of community health care workers tends to contribute towards the preparedness of pandemic through initiating community level educators that helps in monitoring surveillance systems as well as helps in filling health services gaps within the citizens of Bangladesh.

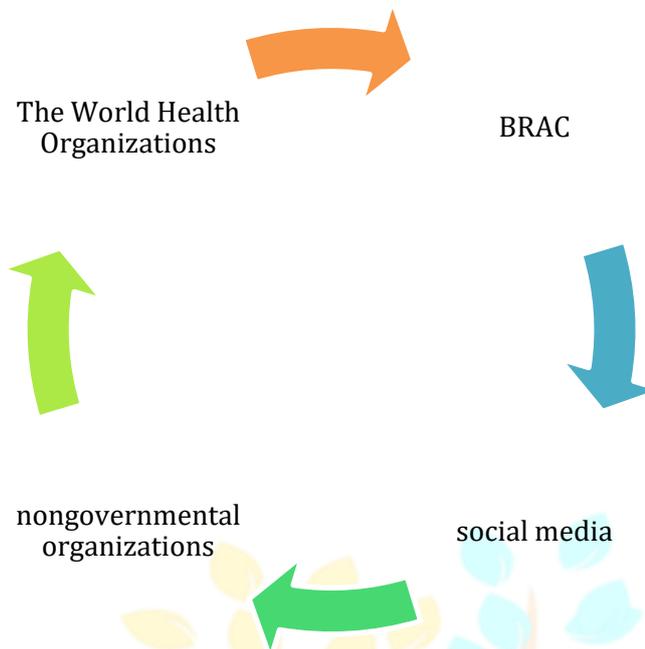


Figure 2: Associations that helped Bangladesh in combating COVID-19 pandemic

Moreover, implementation of social media provides significant collection of data by addressing health information that is not disclosed by healthcare professionals. Islam et al. (2021) stated that opening of social media pages of different hospitals within the varied social media platform aims in ensuring the congenial access of patents regarding health information. Furthermore, various nongovernmental organizations such as businessmen, politicians along with social workers provided food to poor as well as unemployed people during the lockdown period that was being imposed by the government of Bangladesh. Islam et al. (2020) also indicated that '*Bashundhara Group*', one of the most influential business groups within Bangladesh has built a large hospital with almost 2000 bed accommodation with the permission of GoB for treating Bangladesh people that has been suffering from the 'COVID-19 virus'. The management of '*Bashundhara Group*' has kept the patients within their 'Bashundhara Residential Area' at their own cost. The specified business group has also provided marks as well as PPE kit to various hospitals as well as to governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Furthermore, 'The World Health Organizations' has been monitoring the situation of 'COVID-19' within Bangladesh by coordination with GoB in controlling the transmission among the people of Bangladesh. According to 'The Institute of Epidemiology, Diseases Control and Research (IEDCR)', as of May 4, 2020, there have been almost 10,143 confirmed cases that have been registered within Bangladesh. In addition, it was estimated that out of 10,143 cases 186 cases were of death and 'Case Fatality Rate' was to be 1.79% (Islam et al. 2020). According to Khan & Abdou (2021), implementation of 'flipped classroom' is one of the effective communication strategies that have been initiated within higher educational institutes amidst the pandemic scenario. The concept of 'flipped classroom' is one of the pedagogical approaches that lead to dynamic, interactive learning elements within students. Furthermore, implementation of e-learning has led to a psychological distress among the senior students during the outbreak of 'COVID-19 pandemic'. Hasan and Bao (2020) described that due to an imposed lockdown program by the government of Bangladesh, physical access to classrooms has been neglected. It has been estimated that due to the outbreak of pandemic, almost 1.5 billion students have been suffering from institutional closure that tends to cater psychological problems for both students as well as instructors.

Level of response by government of Bangladesh towards pandemic

Various social activists, and press media primarily helped in spreading scientific information regarding corona virus among the huge population of Bangladesh. Furthermore social workers as well as religious leaders also helped in transmitting the information regarding the spread of pandemic. As opined by (Anwar et al. 2020) implications of pandemic situation has led to the growth of fear as well as anxiety among the people of Bangladesh. Imams within the mosques play a crucial role in mitigating the crisis that has been prevailing in Bangladesh due to pandemic. In addition, both media personalities along with religious leaders primarily help in transmission of knowledge about the pandemic in order to reduce the level of fear and stress within the citizens of Bangladesh.

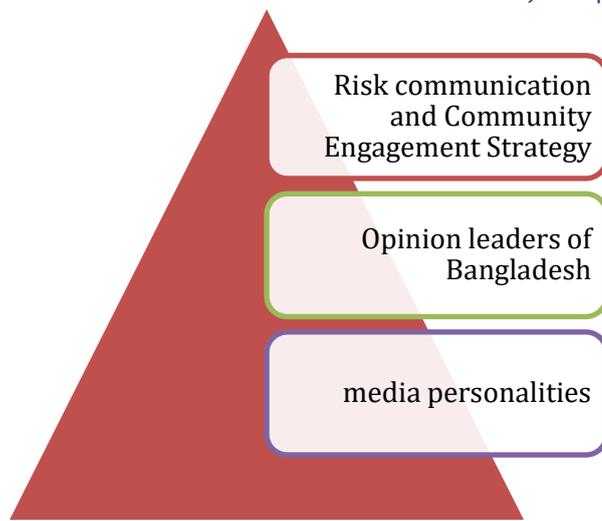


Figure 3: Level of Response

Islam et al. (2020a) proposed that the government of Bangladesh has led to multiple non therapeutic measures for controlling the transmission of pandemic. In order to combat this, the government of Bangladesh has taken multiple steps such as forming a ‘national COVID-19 response’ that has been headed by ‘Ministry of Health. In addition, the government of Bangladesh has led to the cancellation of grand inauguration ceremonies of great personalities such as the birthday of ‘Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’. Furthermore, to mitigate the spread of ‘COVID 19’, GoB has implemented a ban on all public transport as well as closing down of schools and offices. During the outbreak of the pandemic, the government has also launched a ‘Rice for 10TK per Kg’ program for poor and needy people throughout the whole country. Furthermore, an extension of the social safety net program has been initiated by the Bangladesh government to distress people that are prevailing within the society. Besides, various philanthropists, and civil society generously supports the poor community by providing food and money amidst the pandemic situation. As opined by (Islam et al. 2020a) Bangladesh government has also initiated various packages for small and medium enterprises that were worth of USD 11.90 billion. Besides, the relief package also includes cottage industries, agricultural sectors and to health professionals. In addition, to mitigate the shortage of proper health equipment that is required during a pandemic, the government has implemented a diagnostic kit. The diagnostic kit included imported PPE kit, ventilators along with ICU beds that were required on an immediate basis in fighting against ‘COVID-19 pandemic’.

According to Anwar et al. (2020), due to the outbreak of pandemic situation, various international organizations have led to an emergency funding support to Bangladesh. It has been estimated that The World Bank has provided USD 100 million to the government of Bangladesh for combating the transmission of pandemic. Furthermore, implementation of ‘Risk communication and Community Engagement Strategy’ by GoB primarily aims in providing lifesaving assistance to people during pandemic. The implementation of specified strategy has helped in providing public health interventions that have been guided as per ‘The World Health Organization’.

Method

The present study is a qualitative method of in nature. More specifically, it can be said that the study has conducted through conclusive method. It is a type of research that describes a situation, or phenomenon is used to obtain information that can be used to reach conclusions or make decisions, (Nargundkar, 2008). It depends on each secondary data, significantly existing databases that are reanalyzed to shed light on a special downside than the first one that they were established, and first analysis, or data specifically gathered for the study. For this study towards Bangladesh Government and NGOs communication strategies during Covid-19, has used the secondary data sets.

The data sources are authentic and have reliability on that topic. All these data have been collected from websites, books and different authenticate and selective journals. At the time of taking data and resources, a strict timeline of fewer than 5 years has been maintained. All books and journals have taken followed by application of title and abstract screening method (Nourani, et al., 2020). Secondary Data Collections Method has been used by researchers for conducting research based on various communication strategies that have been implemented by the government of Bangladesh. Garcia & Mayorga (2018) mentioned that use of secondary data collections has been taken from various journals, articles as well as online pdf’s that are related to research topics. The use

of journals from Google Scholar related to research topics aims in providing relevant information related to the topic. 'Secondary data collection' makes this research time-effective and cost-effective by retrieving published information from various online articles.

Results

In early February in year 2020 government of Bangladesh was successful in evacuating more than 300 Bangladeshi citizens from China. Government agencies to curb attack of virus moved swiftly for transforming two different religious centers into permanent centers for quarantine. Apart from that, when an initial case of Covid-19 was detected government closed all schools, colleges and encourage all non-essential businesses for opting online business. With aim of ensuring that different frontline based health workers possess necessary PPE to maintain their safety level. Due to this reason Bangladesh Garment based different Manufacturers along with Exporters based Association [BGMEA] presently formed coordination with 5 member companies with aim of converting production line in order to produce 500000 PPE's. Based on a forecast released by Economist Intelligence-based Unit as of 26th March global economy was estimated to contract by 2.2% in 2020.

Promoting suggestive measures and fights against Covid-19 fails to be carried out by different governmental agencies without taking support from both private and public sectors. World Economic Forum by forming an association with WHO was successful in forming a COVID-based Action platform with aim of managing response. In a specified country, \$ 636 million was allocated for improvising programs that in turn aim at ecological based restoration of varied rivers of Dhaka. Furthermore, initiation of this program also aims at assisting recovery and spreading of virus through an improved level of domestic wastewater management. Another response that was undertaken by Bangladesh government is to seek assistance from Asian Development banks. This assistance was being undertaken with aim of managing spread of virus in form of seeking medical advice, getting sanitizers and a KN 95 mask.

Conclusion and implication

Thus, based on above discussion it can be concluded that promoting 'Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)' is effective. It plays an important role in managing response gained from a sudden outbreak of disease and in terms of managing COVID-19 RCCE aim at enabling real time-based information. It is also effective in exchanging valuable sources of information and providing advice to varied frontline health providers, outreach based workers along different community members. As Bangladesh is regarded as a lower-middle income-based country and it is regarded as a densely populated area in world was struggling hard to combat spread of COVID-19. Due to sudden outbreak of pandemic scenario and lockdown, Government of Bangladesh reduces a total number of international flights. With the aim of reducing spread of virus, government-imposed thermal-based scanning checking is done and decided to shut down any educational institutions. From an initial week of March as on financial year, 2020 government of specified country postponed all mass form of gatherings including 100th celebration event of birth of 'Sheik Mujibur Rahman'. From 25th March on same year government declared enforcement of sudden lockdown for 10 consecutive days starting from 26th March to prevent spread of virus. With enforcement of lockdown situation travel on water, air along with all air routes and road transportation was also banned. In addition, different non-essential business activities along with different educational institutions were closed. All activities were closed except pharmacies, availability of groceries along using unavoidable necessities.

Leading new announcement is often regarded as \$ 1.9 billion initiatives undertaken by government of Bangladesh that is funded by Asian Development Bank. By implementation of this initiative, government will aim at providing timely financing to assist procurement of Covid-19 vaccines. Apart from that, initiation of a specified program aims at providing support along with gaining technical support in order to strengthen vaccine based delivery system in long term. In different parts of Bangladesh, World Bank primarily focuses on improving economic opportunities both for poor along extremely poor communities. Apart from that \$ 341 million was being invested with a major purpose of providing support to business development and emergency responses.

Bangladesh is a low-income country and due to this reason, it fails to possess noteworthy based health policies along with stringent legislative structures for combating pandemic scenarios. In context of following guidelines published by WHO, government of mentioned country adopted a holistic approach in incorporating and formulating policy-based tools including regulations and technological instruments. Economic disruption caused by a sudden outbreak of pandemic scenario was estimated to threaten millions of livelihood in different parts of Bangladesh. Specified country has more than 50 million workers that are being associated in informal

sector and millions have lost their job. With aim of managing spread of this virus, a Governmental agency installed screening based devices across international-based airports. These screening devices were also installed in land ports that were known to screen around 650000 passengers out of which 37000 people were sent to quarantine on an immediate basis.

In terms of managing Covid-19 governments considered an unconditional based cash program for an estimated period of 3 months at a rate of \$ 95 based on each month. Imposition of a cash transfer program corresponds to a minimum wage that was incorporated for different formal sectors in Bangladesh. Initiation of a different program launched aim at curbing spread of Covid-19 and to restrict unnecessary travelling mainly from International airports. Thus, it can be concluded that it is essential for government of Bangladesh to incorporated strict measures for travel and market activities. If strict restrictions including night curfew, imposing fines on not wearing a proper mask can be imposed spread of Covid-19 virus can be a restriction.

Ethical Approval- Our University has no ethical approval for research. As this is based on secondary data, we acknowledge authors and literature used in this paper. Figures used in the research are produced by current author.

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