

Establishment of Community Fire Brigade in Bangladesh: A Feasibility Study

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ABSTRACT

The study was undertaken by PSES-“Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards”, a project of GIZ to identify challenges and possibilities for establishment of a community fire brigade as an auxiliary force to existing fire service and civil defense. The definition used in this study is the same as the definition is worldwide. A Community Fire Brigade (CFD) is defined here as a fire department composed of professionals and volunteers who perform fire suppression and other related emergency services for a local jurisdiction.

A self-administered questionnaire was developed for the purpose of the study and piloted. Study areas were Sreepur and Sadar upozila of Gazipur district. Locations of garment factories having long distance from fire stations were taken into consideration while selecting the area of study. A total of 70 informants representing BGMEA, BKMEA, BFSCD, community leaders, factory management, buyers/brands, and NGOs were approached. Also Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used as a means of collecting information.

The desire and call for a community fire brigade was clearly evident in the focus groups and the survey results. Majority of the factory representatives mentioned that due to shortage of fire service people, they are not in a position to get the services from them as per their convenience. They believe wholeheartedly that there is an opportunity to fill a niche with exclusive fire services for the garment factories and the community as well. Majority of the informants mentioned that factory owners will come forward to support in establishing the community fire brigade.

INTRODUCTION

The garment industry is a major engine for economic growth and poverty reduction in Bangladesh. It accounts for over three-quarters of export earnings, contributes around ten percent of GDP, and employs over 4 million workers, mostly women, in more than 5000 factories, mainly in and around Dhaka and Chittagong.

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Currently, Bangladesh is the second largest ready-made garments (RMG) manufacturer after China and by the next five years, Bangladesh will become the largest ready-made garments (RMG) manufacturer. According to a 2011 report by international consulting firm McKinsey & Company, 80 percent of American and European clothing companies planned to move their outsourcing from China, where wages had risen, and were considering Bangladesh as the "next hot spot" making it the "next China" offering 'the lowest price possible' known as the China Price, the hallmark of China's incredibly cheap, ubiquitous manufacturers, much "dreaded by competitors."

Even though the market is growing, but the garment industry is facing a severe image crisis, due to a number of recent fire incidents. These incidents have already put the government, industrialists and the global brands that use the factories under severe pressure to ensure building and fire safety in garment industry in Bangladesh. In order to sustain the industry that has such multiple contributions to the economy and helps produce low cost and high end garments suiting the affordability of a wide range of consumers in the west, there are immediate concerns of workplace safety that must be mitigated.

It is worth mentioning that the "Fire Service and Civil Defense" is the only state-run department in the country that handles fire and other disasters, natural or otherwise, with insufficient manpower strength. Even, the department does not have enough fire stations to successfully tackle big fire incidents. In addition to the limited capacity of fire service department, the location of the existing factories is also a barrier to provide emergency services timely. A problem when a fire breaks out in the factories, in most cases, the fire brigade vehicle has to make a Herculean effort to reach the spot. The road the fire brigade personnel take is so narrow the vehicle can barely fit in. For instance, it took firefighters all night to put out a fire in a factory last year that killed more than 100 people, reportedly because the access road to the factory was difficult to traverse. The recent fire incident at Aswad Composite Mills Limited in Chandra, Gazipur may be another example where firefighters took more than an hour to reach the site, north of Dhaka, from the nearest fire station more than 30 kilometers away.

As a result, the number of deaths and casualties in fire incidents are alarmingly increasing and the industry has to accept the tragedy of death of many people along with monetary damage. Considering the reality of time, it can be a good initiative to set up community fire brigades at risky locations, especially for factories established in high-rise buildings and for the factories having narrow access roads with a long distance from fire station. But it is not an easy task for the government to establish mini fire brigade exclusively for this industry by its own. A very well coordinated effort is needed here with the combined engagement of all the stakeholders related in this

industry. All the stakeholders are needed to get under the same umbrella to ensure safe workplace.

Thus, the study was undertaken in an effort to identify challenges and possibilities for establishment of a community fire brigade as an auxiliary force to existing fire service and civil defense.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY FIRE BRIGADE (CFB)

A Community Fire Brigade (CFB) is a fire department composed of volunteers and professionals who perform fire suppression and other related emergency services for a local jurisdiction.

The term "volunteer" contrasts with career firefighters who are fully compensated for their services. Some volunteer firefighters may be part of a Community Fire Brigade that utilizes both full-time and volunteer firefighters. In this way, a station can be regularly staffed for rapid response with apparatus, and the volunteers provide supplementary staffing and staffed apparatus before, during, and after an incident, or while the full-time career staff are out of service doing training.

The term "volunteer" may also be used in reference to a group of part-time or on-call firefighters who may have other occupations when not engaged in occasional firefighting. Although they may have "volunteered" to become members, and to respond to the call for help, they are compensated as employees during the time they are responding to or attending an emergency scene, and possibly for training. An on-call firefighter may also volunteer time for other non-emergency duties as well (training, fundraising, equipment maintenance, etc.).

FIREFIGHTING WORLDWIDE

GERMANY

- German fire brigades are organized on a town/village basis, with each town having at least one brigade.
- In Germany there are about 25,000 local brigades - 24,000 volunteer fire brigades, 800 private fire brigades with public accreditation, which mostly protect large industrial complexes or airports, many private fire brigades with no public accreditation, and 100 public fire brigades compulsory by law for large towns and cities.

- However, public brigades are often supported by and cooperate with volunteer brigades. Some volunteer brigades also have a small core of full-time firefighters paid by local community funds.
- Volunteer fire brigades are usually structured in three brigade categories depending on size and level of equipment.
- Some German fire brigades not only have firefighters, but also ambulance crews. They are estimated to have a total of 1,300,000 active members.

AUSTRALIA

In several states, there are three fire-fighting organizations:

- One is salaried and (primarily) handles urban areas;
- One is (primarily) volunteer and (primarily) handles rural areas and
- The other is government-managed and handles public land (mainly forests and plantations).

Throughout Australia there are many volunteer firefighting departments which are set up by the individual states or territories.

CANADA

- Large cities and most towns have full-time firefighters while smaller towns and other municipalities employ part-time volunteer firefighters.
- Volunteer fire departments are mostly found in rural and remote areas of Canada, with 127,000 such firefighters across the country. Volunteer departments are necessary for areas that cannot afford to staff a full-time department.
- Most urban and larger fire services began as volunteer service and evolved into full-time members.
- All municipal fire departments are publicly operated. Private companies do operate for fire protection on private property (mostly aerospace companies and refineries).
- Local airport authorities operate airport fire departments with assistance from local departments if needed.

INDIA

- In India municipalities are bound by law to have a fire brigade and participate in a regional fire service. Each city has its own fire brigade.
- All the industrial corporations also have their own firefighting service.
- Real estate developer, DLF in Gurgaon last year, launched the country's first private fire brigade.
- Each airport and seaport has its own firefighting units.

UNITED KINGDOM

- Fire and rescue services (FRS) in England are organised on a metropolitan or county basis, mainly owing to the reorganization of the counties in 1974.
- In rural areas, there are often fire stations manned by part-time retained firefighters. Retained firefighters are fully trained personnel who provide cover on top of their regular jobs and live in the vicinity of a fire station.
- In addition there are a number of independent fire services, such as the Peterborough volunteers, the Downe House School brigade and those run by large industrial concerns.

UNITED STATES

- U.S. firefighters work under the auspices of fire departments (also commonly called fire protection districts, fire divisions, fire companies, fire bureaus, and fire-rescue).
- These departments are generally organized as local or county government subsidiaries, special-purpose district entities or not-for-profit corporations.
- According to the National Fire Protection Association, 69 percent of firefighters in the United States are volunteers.
- The National Volunteer Fire Council represents the fire and emergency services on a national level, providing advocacy, information, resources, and programs to support volunteer first responders.

FIREFIGHTING IN BANGLADESH

CAPACITY OF BANGLADESH FIRE SERVICE AND CIVIL DEFENCE (BFSCD)

Fire Service and Civil Defence is the only state-run department working for all kind of rescue missions in Bangladesh including fire safety, safety during air raids and any kind of disaster. In 1982, "Fire Service", the fire defence agency and "Civil Defence", the unarmed warning and rescue force and the general rescue force, was amalgamated into Bangladesh Fire Service & Civil Defence.

Almost 6500 people are working under this department and now the number is increasing for the necessity of saving people's lives and their assets. There are 259 fire service stations, classified into A, B, C category and River fire stations though out the whole country.

Total Fire Stations: BFSCD

Serial No.	Name of Division	'A' - classify stations	'B' - classify stations	'C' - classify stations	River Fire Station	Fire Station No.
1	Dhaka	19	32	16	5	72
2	Chittagong	18	24	10	2	54
3	Rajshahi	7	36	18	-	61
4	Khulna	5	21	8	1	35
5	Barisal	2	16	5	1	24
6	Sylhet	1	11	1	-	13
7	Total	52	140	58	9	259

Among the fire stations in Bangladesh, Dhaka city now has 16 fire stations equipped with about 20 vehicles including water carrying tenders, and pickup vans for carrying pumps. The agency has only two hydraulic ladders which can hose water up to the 14th floor of a building at best and the country does not have helicopter equipped to put off flames in high rises. On the other hand, there are only 10 fire stations in Chittagong city. The fire fighters of this city are unable to douse flames beyond sixth floor of a high rise building. There is no turntable ladder.

LIMITATIONS OF BFSCD

BFSCD authority does not have enough fire stations to successfully tackle big fire incidents. There is no fire service and civil defence station in about half of the upazilas across the country. Although a project for construction of 156 Fire Stations, has been taken up, with a view to establish at least one Fire Station at each Upazila., but still it is in process. There will also need to procure modern fire fighting and rescue equipments to enhance the efficiency and capability of the department.

Besides, BFSCD has no equipped central controlling system to control of its vehicles properly in case of any emergency. After the commencement of any accident, the vehicles from various stations generally travel to provide the necessary support. But without any central control system, in most of cases the vehicles use the same route, which in many times causes unexpected traffic congestion and clogging of road for emergency support. In addition, the authority does not have any database or sufficient resources to develop risk mapping of city areas which cause serious difficulties for location analysis. Moreover, at present the authority has no access to the modern information system (i.e. GIS) and the authority has almost no research initiative.

The major dissatisfaction with the fire fighters is that they often reach the place of fire late. For this reasons they sometimes get attacked by the victims of fire. Firemen can fight for about 30 to 40 minutes with their carried water in a single tanker, which might

be too meagre than the demand. In such cases they had to search for reserve water from nearby buildings or other sources which is seldom found to be sufficient. Though the FSCD has been entrusted with the responsibility of checking the status of fire safety provisions of buildings, the reality is that there is difficult for them with limited human resources to ensure its occupants safety from fire hazards in the building.

Furthermore, the political destabilization of the country is very sensitive which often causes intentional fire and intentional damage of property. With limited manpower and fire fighting equipments the BFSCD usually have to involve with such challenge whose ultimate impact cause the failure to provide the necessary support to general people in case of emergency fire.

COMMUNITY FIRE BRIGADE: NEED OF HOURS

Although most of the countries have community fire brigade, but there is no such brigade in Bangladesh. The community receives fire protection only from the fire stations run by government. But the total manpower of Bangladesh Fire Service & Civil Defence is insufficient in respect of necessity. Also number of fire stations is not adequate. Therefore, development of volunteer fire department in Bangladesh is a need of time.

It is encouraging to mention that the government has realized the reality and has now recognized the importance of community volunteers. With the aim of reducing urban risks, the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP II) has already developed a comprehensive Urban Volunteerism programme. The programme is being implemented by the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management (MoFDM) and is supported by UNDP Bangladesh, UK Aid, Australian Government Aus Aid, Norwegian Embassy, SIDA and European Commission (EC) Humanitarian Aid. CDMP is designed to strengthen the Bangladesh disaster management system and to achieve a paradigm shift from reactive response to a proactive risk reduction culture where tapping social capital is seen as fundamental in responding to large scale urban disasters.

An urban volunteer network has been established and trained on search & rescue and first aid. Considering the need and nationwide attention for meeting a shortfall of rescue operations, the urban community volunteers are playing a vital role to provide city and nationwide support during emergency needs. This force, which will number 62,000 nationwide, not only represents a significant response capacity, but signifies a personal commitment to one's own community. CDMP II is supporting the Fire Service and Civil Defense (FSDC) to train 30,000 urban community volunteers in nine urban centres. An elaborate training module has been prepared with extensive cooperation of CDMP. So far, 19,820 urban volunteers have been trained, of which 3,100 are women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In order to take a decision on the establishment of community fire brigade, GIZ commissioned the study to assess the feasibility and the possible design of such an initiative in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Provide the views and opinions of the stakeholders on establishing community fire brigade;
- Identify the challenges and ways to overcome the challenges in establishing community fire brigade in the existing factory environment; and
- Provide a detail roadmap on how to establish a community fire brigade in the existing factory environment.

METHODOLOGY

In the primary stage of this study, secondary data has been collected from the relevant publications, journals, newspapers and Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense Authority's (BFSCDA) official records. This stage of study helped to conceptualize the fire hazards in garment industry and firefighting worldwide. Furthermore, a time series analysis of the collected data helped to understand the significance of the issue for garment industry.

Two sets of structured questionnaire were developed by the researcher and these were piloted on a small sample. One was prepared for BFSCD professionals and another for other respondents. The selection of the informants was made using a stratified random sampling by grouping each kind of RMG stakeholder into each stratum and sometimes using subjective judgment for obvious stakeholders like BFSCD, BGMEA and BKMEA. A total of 70 informants were approached.

Moreover, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used as a tool to gain HR managers' perspectives on various aspects related to Community Fire Brigade. The first FGD was conducted with members of HR forum, Joydevpur. The second FGD was conducted to get the support of community people, with fewer participants mainly from local community leaders. The last FGD was conducted with BFSCD professionals to discuss more technical issues of community fire brigade.

KEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

INFORMANTS' VIEWS ABOUT COMMUNITY FIRE BRIGADE

- While asking about establishing a mini fire brigade or community fire brigade, all the respondents are in favor of this idea.
- Overwhelming majority of the informants mentioned that factory owners will come forward to support in establishing the community fire brigade.
- Nearly entire informants are of the opinion that community fire brigade initiative will be welcomed by all stakeholders.
- Majority of the informants believe that it could be a good option to set up community fire brigade primarily at Rajendrapur or Zarun, Konabari under Gazipur district. A good number of garment factories are located there.
- Entire informants of the study area mentioned that if any fire incidents happen, it will take nearly one hour to reach a fire service vehicle which is really a threat to them.
- Majority of the factory representatives mentioned that due to shortage of fire service people, they are not in a position to get the services from them as per their convenience.
- Entire informant opined that access roads are available for fire service operations in the study area.
- Majority of the informants believe that community people will give their morale support to establish a community fire brigade but factories should be the key stakeholders for this service.
- A good number of informants representing HR Forum raised an issue: whether the brigade personnel can supplement the role of fire service people, especially in the area of monitoring, training, fire drill, etc.
- While asking about the role of different agencies e.g. BGMEA/BKMEA/Buyer/Factory Management, majority mentioned that all should sit together and outline a policy to operate the community fire brigade and ensure its sustainability.
- One of social compliance experts opined that a contact agreement shall be signed between the service provider and service receivers (local community) before establishing a community fire brigade in a particular location.
- BGMEA/BKMEA can play a vital role to make sure the active cooperation of their members to participate in the process of setting up community fire brigade since

the safety issue is one of the main issues of their business – this is the opinion of majority informants.

- BGMEA/BKMEA can also play a role in generating/mobilizing regular fund for operational and maintenance cost to run the community fire brigade smoothly.
- Informants from BFSCD mentioned that the Fire and Rescue Service has a statutory duty to ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to ensure there is an adequate supply of water and to ensure its availability for use in case of a fire. Therefore ensuring fire hydrants are in good working order is very important.
- Majority of the informants are of the opinion that the main challenge is the initiative to establish a community fire brigade.
- Almost all the respondents believe that the establishment of Community Fire Brigade is possible within a short period of time; on contrary establishment of fire station by the government is time consuming.

KEY FINDINGS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD)

Key Issues	HR Forum Members	Fire Service and Civil Defense	Community People
Viability	Likewise community police, community fire brigade is also feasible.	The concept of Community fire brigade is widely accepted throughout the world.	Community Fire brigade is very much necessary for the community.
Stakeholders	BGMEA/BKMEA, buyers/brands and shops/industrial/commercial establishment	Local administration, BGMEA/BKMEA and shops/industrial/commercial establishment and BFSCD itself	Local government authority, educational institute, industry
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land for fire station • Cost of Fire Vehicle and equipment • Supply of professional firefighters • Operations cost • Sustainability • Collection of regular subscription or service charges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land for fire station • Procurement of fire engine truck and equipment • Access road • Availability of fire hydrants • Development of volunteer firefighters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operations and maintenance cost • Commitment of community people • Collection of regular subscription or service charges
Way foreword	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just a positive letter from BGMEA/BKMEA can ignite the switch to start. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to establish in shorter time. • Answer/VDP members can be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factory owners should come forward. • Unused land

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will really impress buyers/brands. • Lot of challenges are there but not unachievable. • Operational policy should be prepared. • Administrative structure should design properly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involved. • BFSCD will be ready to provide support in all aspect. • "C" category fire brigade can be replicated. 	Government owned unused land can be used.
Location	Zarun, Kona Bari under Sadar upozila and Banglabazar, Rajendrapur under Sreepur upozila of Gazipur district can be a suitable location for the community fire brigade to start its journey.		

KEY CHALLENGES IN ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY FIRE BRIGADE

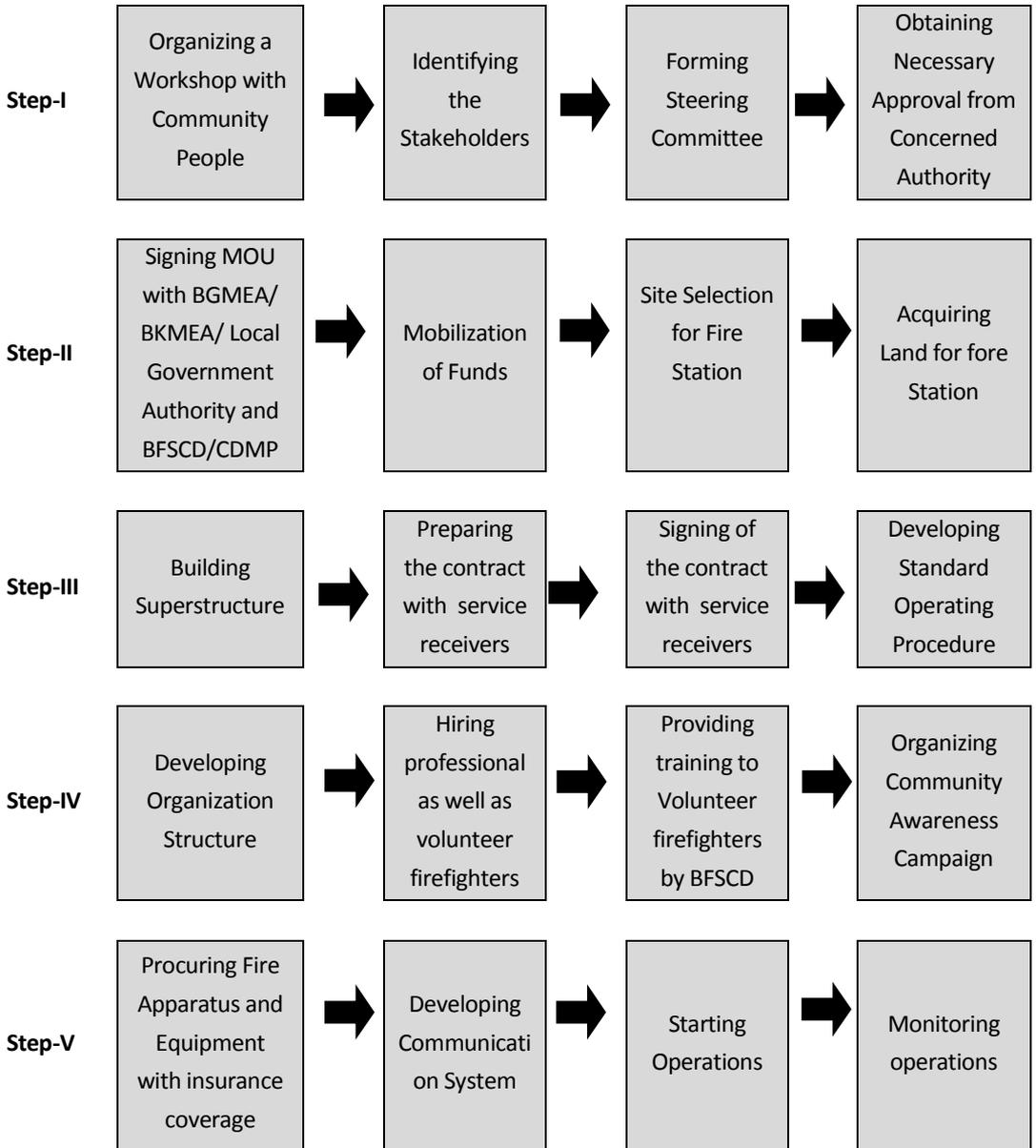
Major challenges, identified and prioritized by the informants, in order to establish a community fire brigade are as follows:

1. Land for fire station in a suitable location.
2. Engineering design of the foundation and primary superstructure framing for the new community fire station.
3. Procurement cost of Fire Vehicle and equipment.
4. Supply of professional as well as volunteer firefighters.
5. Setting up an administrative structure to operate the brigade.
6. Collection of operation and maintenance cost including compensation of regular firefighters.
7. Construction of access road (if necessary).
8. Maintenance of fire vehicles and equipment.
9. Government support/administrative approval (if required).
10. Development of volunteer firefighters on regular basis.
11. Security of the fire station.
12. Availability of fire hydrants that are used to either supplement the water supply for firefighting or to supply/refill the water tank in a fire appliance.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES IN ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY FIRE BRIGADE

- Local government authority can take lease of unused Khas land (government plot) for the use of community fire station.
- Where can the community buy these vehicles? Just get in touch with Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory Ltd., one of the largest company enterprise of its kind in Bangladesh, under the management of Bangladesh Army.
- As said by one of fire service professionals, the company imports the parts of fire engine and assembles the vehicles domestically. This is perhaps the most cost-effective procurement process to get fire engine and other fire fighting tools.
- According to Fire Service and Civil Defence professionals, the fire truck used in existing “C” type fire station can be taken into consideration for community fire brigade.
- Community people especially the key stakeholders i.e. owners of the factory can share the cost of operations and maintenance.
- BFSCD may be the supervising authority to operate the community fire brigade in the beginning.
- Volunteer firefighters can easily be developed by Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence (BFSCD).
- Retired professional firefighters can be hired for community fire brigade.
- Community fire brigade may supplement the activities of fire service and civil defense in the field of monitoring, awareness and training, fire drill, etc.
- National and international development agencies can finance the establishment of community fire brigade.
- Public-private partnerships may be adopted as a mechanism for funding the establishment of community fire brigade.
- To be safe side, the local authority can construct artificial reservoir on the roof of public buildings and mosques and in some cases street fire hydrants could be installed in limited scale in the locations where natural water sources is very limited.

ROADMAP FOR ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY FIRE BRIGADE:



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Initiatives shall come from the owners association, BGMEA/BKMEA, to own the idea of establishing community fire brigade. They can also play a vital role in generating/mobilizing regular fund for operational and maintenance cost to run the community fire brigade smoothly.
- A joint consultation meeting of owners association, BFSCD, and local government authority is urgently needed to outline a policy of establishing the community fire brigade and ensuring its sustainability.
- If properly approached, international buyers or even development agencies may come forward to contribute to the overall development of community fire brigade.
- One way to keep a steady revenue stream coming in is to charge a "subscription" to the owners of commercial or industrial establishment in the locality.
- Fire stations should not be located on heavily traveled roads, or one-way streets. The street should be of good width, perhaps a secondary arterial which could provide a clear fire lane across the protection area. There should be a minimum of traffic congestion in the area.
- A contact agreement shall be signed among the owners of garment factories before starting a community fire brigade in a particular location.
- Instead of buying land, as it is huge investment, it could be a good option to take lease of unused government Khas land for building proposed station.
- Regarding the primary model of community fire brigade, "B" or "C" type fire station of BFSCD can be taken into consideration to start with.
- Retired professional firefighters can be hired for community fire brigade along with volunteer firefighters.
- As Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief (MoDMR) has already started developing community volunteers under CDMP-II project with BFSCD, they should also be involved with this project. It will ensure continuous supply of volunteer firefighters in the community.
- Community fire brigade may supplement the activities of fire service and civil defense in the field of factory monitoring, awareness and training, fire drill, etc.
- Public-private partnerships may be adopted as a mechanism for funding the establishment of community fire brigade.
- To be safe side, the local authority can construct artificial reservoir on the roof of public buildings and mosques and in some cases street fire hydrants could be installed in limited scale in the locations where natural water sources is very limited.

- Before going for establishment, an implementation model has to be designed in consultation with BFSCD for the effective and efficient operation of the proposed community fire brigade.

CONCLUSION

The desire and call for a community fire brigade was evident in the focus groups and the survey results. Clearly there is an opportunity to fill a niche with exclusive fire services for the garment factories and the community as well.

Survey results indicate an interest not only in fire fighting or rescue but also in fire prevention for garment factories, with community leaders looking for a fire brigade that provides their people with access to the quick services and has dedicated firefighters that surpass other fire service options. Factory owners will pay the higher service charge for what is believed to be a higher value service.

For many key stakeholders link with different government agencies as well as international agencies, either formal or informal, will be a big boost for support and encouragement. Signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with BGMEA/BKMEA will be a compulsion for owners who have factories in the catchment area of planned stations.

Finally, the proposed fire brigade will need to prove itself to realize the service potential measured in this study. Some stakeholders will sit on the sidelines until the new brigade is a known and trusted entity. The speed with which the brigade can realize the service potential measured here will depend on the trust it builds among stakeholders to deliver on its promises in the beginning.

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