

Lessons Learned: Disaster Preparedness for Safer School (DPSS) Project, Bangladesh

Implementing Organization: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS)

Sector: Disaster Preparedness



CONTEXT

Bangladesh is one of the top disaster-prone countries in the world and is affected by natural disasters each year. The damage to a large number of school buildings and the subsequent extensive casualties of school children have been major development concerns. The high likelihood of disasters and the low level of awareness and preparedness of the country also contribute to the concerns. As urban centers are considered more vulnerable, especially to earthquakes, BDRCS with the support of American Red Cross implemented the DPSS project in the cities of Dhaka and Rangpur. The project employed a set of strategic interventions including capacity building activities, school-based disaster preparedness (DP) activities and community outreach. While the project has succeeded in awareness raising and capacity building to a reasonable extent, one shortfall of this initiative was community outreach.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Goal: Reduce the number of deaths and injuries and the social impact caused by disasters through strengthening the capacity of the National Society and by building safer, more resilient schools and communities.

Objectives: 1) to improve hazard awareness and disaster management skills among students, teachers and parents; 2) to increase disaster awareness of communities through disaster awareness and training programs and campaigns using schools as an entry point, and; 3) to enhance the capacity of BDRCS in DP programming, awareness raising, DP measures and advocacy for standardization of disaster management in public schools.

Project Duration: July 1, 2012 – May 31, 2014

Target Beneficiaries: Students in 20 core schools and 30 non-core schools

Location: Dhaka and Rangpur

Hazards: Dhaka: Fires, earthquakes and water logging; Rangpur: Earthquakes and cold waves

ABOUT THE LESSONS LEARNED WORKSHOP The workshop was run by Ranjan Mohnot, Senior Q&L Delegate, using why-how questions to explore insightful learnings of the project, including urban DRR.



Actionable Learning and Recommendations



Sustainability of DP activities in schools: Those activities that required funds, such as refresher trainings, stocking of items for first-aid kits and small-scale mitigation (non-structural) works are at risk of being put on the backburner unless school authorities and parents consider them a priority.

To ensure sustainability of the project activities, it is recommended that disaster preparedness be integrated into the Red Crescent Youth curriculum and that the project activities link with the school curriculum.



Improving awareness and DM skills at schools: To achieve these, the following actions should be included: 1) make the DM learning more fun and engaging for students through activities such as drama, art competitions, etc.; 2) improve water and sanitation facilities for emergency situations; 3) ensure inclusion of simulations in the school calendars, and; 4) conduct more advocacy work targeting parents so they can prioritize safety of their children in schools.

Sensitize

Sensitizing stakeholders: The main challenge faced by the project was to convince major stakeholders, especially teachers and parents, to prioritize school safety. It would have been easier to advocate school safety if stakeholders were consulted with and kept updated starting from the project's design phase. Sensitizing parents also requires addressing their concerns: parents do not feel that preparedness is as much of a priority as scoring the highest marks in exams. However, if the schedule of preparedness activities could harmonize with the schools' exam schedule, there will be less resistance from parents.



Urban disaster risk reduction: Community outreach in urban areas should look different from that in rural areas as the characteristics of an urban population differ vastly from that of rural areas. In villages it is possible to invite community people to a community meeting, but due to the size and availability of urban populations, it would be impossible to invite community people in Dhaka. These demand that urban outreach strategies be designed differently and in a more innovative and creative way. Raising awareness of and building an urban community's capacity for disaster preparedness both need to have a more systematic approach. One idea suggested was to have school waiting rooms for parents or family members of students serve as a place to distribute advocacy materials.



Community outreach strategies: Community participation in the school projects could have been increased through: 1) building urban community awareness/training/outreach strategies using interactive popular theatre mediums, such as street drama, simulation, or contingency planning at the family level; 2) consulting with communities at every stage starting from the project's design phase; 3) empowering and equipping safety clubs to work with communities; 4) participatory monitoring/follow up systems established to improve effectiveness of community outreach activities and; 5) sharing outcomes of the project with the government authorities.



Stakeholder participation in project design: Schools, BDRCS units, Department of Education and Department of Disaster Management should have been consulted during the project design phase.

Design?

Training design: While trainings such as Search and Rescue, First Aid and Disaster Risk Management were useful and UDRT and students were able to put the learned skills into immediate use, some certain trainings were more theoretical in nature and resulted in less impact. In such trainings, more hands-on sessions would have been useful.



Support from adults for child participation: UDRT and students were capable of putting FA skills to immediate use; however, they faced challenges being accepted as first-aiders. BDRCS should inform communities in advance that UDRTs and students are enlisted first aiders. This activity should be part of the recommended development of the community outreach strategies.



Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA): The training on the VCA was perceived as having the least impact because students haven't seen any changes made as a result of the training. This was because, despite the fact that structural mitigation needs were identified, less small-scale mitigation works were undertaken.



Advocate for school safety in curriculum: For school safety activities to be more functional in the national curriculum, it is recommended to: 1) persuade the government to include disaster safety activities in the school curriculum of government schools; 2) have the training manuals of the project endorsed By the Department of Education and; 3) encourage the government to produce advocacy materials=