



School Safety

Towards Building Disaster Resilient Schools in Bangladesh

Why School Safety?

School safety was given a major focus by the United Nations International Strategy on Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) when the 2006-2007 World Disaster Reduction Campaign was devoted to the theme "Disaster Reduction Begins at School". This theme was chosen by UN/ISDR because (a) it is in line with the Priority 3 of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: "Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels, and (b) schools are the best venues for forging durable collective values; and therefore suitable for building a culture of prevention and disaster resilience .

UNESCO and UNEP (2004) emphasize on the importance of school safety by stating that, "the upgrading and construction of schools that will be relatively safe during the occurrence of disasters should be part of a nation's long-term planning." It even went beyond to identify the specific reasons for which a school should be made safe; for safety as school buildings can save lives, for shelter as schools be utilized as shelters in emergency period, for continuation of education as education is disrupted in times of emergencies and finally for resource preservation as schools are valuable local investment of a nation.

From Bangladesh's perspective, school infrastructures are most vulnerable during disasters due to poor construction, lack of proper maintenance and many other issues related to the schools. Moreover, as a result of the rapid urbanization and over population in urban areas, schools are growing in an unplanned way to accommodate students in the education system. As a result, vulnerability is ever increasing in the education sector and safety of the students is becoming questionable day by day. Considering all these, school safety has become an issue of major priority to make schools safer for the wellbeing of our next generation.

How Disasters can Affect Schools?

Schools play a versatile role in the communities and hence the impacts of disasters on schools are pervasive. CAMPE, while presenting their annual Education Watch report highlights three major areas through which disasters can affect schools.

Quality of education is affected as the learning environment gets distorted. Access to schools becomes limited due to shelters occupancy and/or bad communication channels. Both these impacts have cumulative and long term effects in communities and hence inclusion.



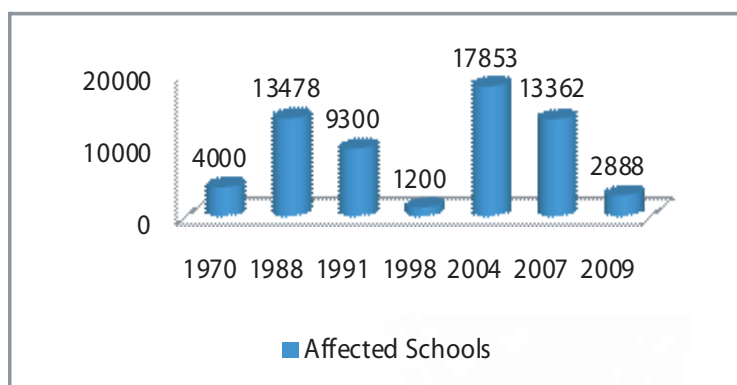


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Disasters and Schools in Bangladesh

Despite considerable attentions and efforts, schools tend to be unsafe in Bangladesh. Every year, considerable amount of schools have to remain close due to natural disasters. The physical losses during disasters are also massive; during the major cyclone in 1970, over 4000 educational institutions were damaged among which many were beyond repair. The 1991 cyclone destroyed 9300 schools in the coastal belts of Bangladesh. Floods of 1998 and 2004 were most catastrophic that the other disasters; in total over 13718 and 17853 schools were affected partially or fully.

In the year of 2007, as indicated by the diagram, consists of Cyclone Sidr and flood where 13,362 schools were affected fully or partially. Although, Cyclone Aila was devastating in terms of effect in people's lives and livelihood strategies, it had comparatively lesser impact on schools; only 2888 schools were damaged fully or partially.



Considering the above stated facts, it is immensely important for Bangladesh to have a comprehensive school safety plan and make schools a safer place for children. As children are the future generation of society and effective change agent of their family, society and schools for creating awareness on any kind of disasters, school authority can take the lead role in planning to promote a culture of disaster safety in school environment ensuring participation of all concerns.

Case Studies from the Different DIPECHO Partners in Bangladesh

Actionaid Bangladesh

Research on School Safety

Introduction

Each time a disaster occurs, masses of children are excluded from school and many never return. Past experiences and available evidences shows that education sector was hardest hit along with other sectors in the event of disaster. Starting from Cyclone of 1970, 1991, 2007 and floods of 1998, schools were interrupted due to structural collapse and proximity to the hazards prone



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location. Majority of the schools were closed down in the flood plain areas for more than three months in 1998 and 2007 floods. An estimated, 5,927 educational institutions were fully or partially damaged by Cyclone Sidr, resulting in a total value of damage and losses of BDT 4.7 billion . Cases like fire accident, threat to road injury or accident and stampede are the other human made hazards which make schools more vulnerable. Schools located in the urban and rural areas do have different set of vulnerabilities as the nature of hazards and potential threats are different. There is one common thread between urban and rural schools; lack of culture of safety in schools to have minimum standards/measures to protect students and teachers from any natural or human made hazard threats, learning materials and property. Culture of safety in schools capture issues like child's right, education and DRR policies, institutions, governance, resource allocation, disaster preparedness and family inclusion within the framework of internal and external environment of the school to reduce the impact of any possible threats to children.

Floods and cyclones in the rural heartland of Bangladesh have already pressed the panic button as schools are being used as a shelter which needs to have proper management system in place. Bangladesh has already witnessed the impact of floods and cyclone in education sector and will be under litmus test during any earthquake catastrophe. As per the department of engineering and education, 30 per cent of schools in Sylhet are non-engineered brick structure which does not required high magnitude of tremor to collapse. Many school buildings in Dhaka are not suitable for students to escape during a fire incident due to location, congestion and lack of open space .

The national policy (draft version 2008-2015) on disaster management does recognize the importance of school safety and focused on to develop and implement a school safety program including national school safety plan and school building-level emergency response plans. Government of Bangladesh has taken major initiative to strengthen the physical structure of schools located in hazard prone areas especially in coastal and flood plain areas. Ministry of Education (MoE) is working closely with civil society organizations on cluster approach to have effective response mechanism in place so that education will not hamper and continued as well. Civil society organizations have taken several initiatives on preparing schools to reduce the impact of disaster risks through school safety plans, simulation and mock drills, training students and teachers on first aid, search and rescue and fire safety.

School safety and preparedness is still in the form of choice not as a mandatory requirements for schools in Bangladesh. DRR and education programs and projects require reflecting the coherence in terms of reducing the impact disaster in education sector. Countries like Belize, Iran, Sri Lanka have gone far ahead than institutional commitment. After the Bam (Iran) earthquake, central government passed the School Safety Act, 2006 in the parliament. Belize also has gone mile ahead in bringing the school safety policy into place to protect children from hurricane. In Sri Lanka, the government has developed a national guideline towards making disaster safe school. Cambodia, Lao PDR and the Philippines have brought the 'priority implementation partnerships' to mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into education sector. Ministry of Education in Turkey has made evacuation drills mandatory in all the schools.

3 Damage and Need Assessment 2008, Government of Bangladesh

4 The Daily Star, 4th December 2004



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Rationale and Scope of the Research

The realization of this research work came after the field visit to Action Aid Bangladesh working area in Chittagong and ADPC work under the Comprehensive Disaster Management Program (CDMP) and under DIPECHO with Islamic Relief and Plan Bangladesh. ADPC's training and advocacy component under CDMP was focused on School Safety on Earthquakes where Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong cities were intervened to create awareness among schools and education authorities. Discussion with teachers, students, school management committee, and education authorities was made to understand the how school manages students in terms of protecting their lives during the school hours. It was found that school does practice symbolically in terms of safety measures, but there is lack of understanding by school about the potential threat to the children. In the absence of government regulation on safety and audit measures, school management committee (SMC) does take very little initiatives to ensure the safety of the children. Realizing the impact of disasters (natural and human made) and absence of safety and audit measures in schools, this research is intend to investigate and advocate, how culture of safety can be practiced or adopted to enable the safer environment (internal and external) for the future of Bangladesh-the children, instead of making safety and preparedness, a choice. Especially the study will endeavor:

- " the school safety measures to reduce the impact of natural or man-made hazards
- " Develop the indicators on "Culture of Safety" in schools

Research Methodology and Design

The study is following a comprehensive approach in which both types and qualitative and quantitative data from various primary and secondary sources were collected. Based on the analysis, a conceptual understanding on culture of School Safety is being developed which will further be tested and validated form various stakeholders. Based on the findings and incorporating the feedbacks from the field testing and validation, detail analysis will be developed and



Expected outcomes and limitations

The research intends to achieve the following facts:

- a) Develop indicators of culture of safety for the school in Bangladesh on natural and manmade hazards through pilot testing
- b) Recommend the indicators of culture of safety to mainstream into policy, programs and project on education in Bangladesh.



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Concern Universal

Student Brigades - An ideal Change Agent to build Disaster Resilient Communities

An ideal change agent for building disaster resilient communities

To respond to the high disaster vulnerability of Bangladesh, Concern Universal (CU) and Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) have been working with support from ECHO and Cordaid to pilot innovative approaches to DRR in rural communities of Bangladesh over the Third, Fourth, and Fifth DIPECHO Action Plans for South Asia. School teachers, students and school management committee members are amongst the major stakeholders of the projects that have been implemented and the creation of Student Brigades is the key intervention that supports all of the school-based DRR activities.

The Student brigade model was introduced under the Fourth DIPECHO Action Plan as "organized groups of students trained and capacitated to lead preparedness campaigns and influence behaviors and practices towards disaster resilient communities". The novelty with Student brigades lies in the fact that the skills and knowledge they acquire through the project is not limited to school-based activities but focus on broader community outreach.

HOW RUPA CHANGED THE VILLAGE



Rupali Khatun from the District of Mymensingh was elected as a Student Brigade Leader by her peers at school and received various training relating to Disaster Risk Reduction through the project implemented by Dhaka Ahsania Mission and Concern Universal. One day Rupa's grandfather asked her what she was learning in those training sessions.

As Rupa was sharing with him about disaster preparedness, it prompted her grandfather to tell the story of how the 2004 floods had affected their family. For two

days the entire family had to survive on inadequate dry food because the house and its cooking space had been submerged. This impacted negatively in particular on the younger members of the family. "We didn't know about the portable ovens that you are talking about", acknowledged her grandfather.

After hearing the story, Rupa called her mother and taught her how to build portable ovens. Every afternoon when she came back from school, Rupa would sit with five women of her village to demonstrate the building of portable ovens and share DRR messages. One day she called her grandfather and informed him that she had fulfilled her mission. Her grandfather visited the village and found that every family had prepared portable ovens and stored them safely with a view to use in case of emergency. Proud of his granddaughter, Rupa's grandfather shared with us that: "Rupa had changed the village."



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Under the Fifth DIPECHO Action Plan and within the framework of the "Community-based DRR project" the scale-up and strengthening of the student brigade model has been set as a priority. The project is working with 30 students brigades (900 students) in 30 secondary schools of Barguna and Patuakhali Districts.

Inputs: Building the Long-Term Capacity of the Student Brigades

In order to ensure the effective functioning and the sustainability of the student brigades beyond the project's lifespan, the project emphasized two areas:

" Capacity-building through a comprehensive training package on DRR

" Active and meaningful participation of student brigades in all decision-making processes relating to DRR such as Union Parishad Disaster Management Committees

1. Capacity-Building of Student Brigades:

- Training on Leadership Development and Brigade Management
- Training on Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction
- Training on Early warning
- Training on Search and Rescue and First Aid
- Training on Shelter Management
- Training on management of persons with disability during disaster



As part of the capacity-building plan, the student brigades were provided with first aid and search and rescue equipment, IEC materials on DRR as well as cultural and recreational materials for awareness-raising.

2. Empowering Student Brigades' Voices Through:

- Active participation of student brigades in the Community Risk Assessment process and the development of Risk Reduction Action Plans
- Active participation of student brigade in awareness campaigns on DRR
- Active participation of student brigades in UDMCs

Outcomes: Student Brigades Acting as Change Agents

In all the 30 communities where student brigades have been supported, they have become a key actor in their communities to promote a disaster resilient model of life and development. The students have led innovative activities in schools and within their communities, of which some examples are presented below:

- Preparation of school-based DRR action plans every year
- Preparation and testing of contingency plans in coordination with the school management committees
- Implementation of school-based awareness-raising activities
- Implementation of community-based awareness-raising and mobilization activities
- Identification and implementation of school based small-scale mitigation activities
- Participation in monthly UDMC meetings and UDMC-led DRR events



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The action of the student brigades have not only been instrumental in enhancing the disaster resilience of cyclone-prone communities of the coastal areas of Bangladesh, they have also contributed in the recognition of the key role played by the youth in social action and development by community stakeholders, including local authorities. Through the student brigade model, CU and DAM are confident that the inputs provided within the project will continue to bear fruit once the project is closed, carried forward by a motivated pool of capacitated advocates.

IFRC and BDRCS

School Based DRR

Information dissemination activities to raise awareness on cyclone preparedness in terms of new cyclone early warning signals, evacuation, climate change adaptation etc. with school students is an important ongoing activity of CPP aimed at involving the children of communities vulnerable to cyclones in raising awareness on a large scale at family level within those communities. The activities also include the development and distribution of IEC materials to the students which will help to effectively put more emphasis on cyclone preparedness at family level.

Thirty (30) schools have been selected to participate in RRDP (DIPECHO) project. The criteria for the selection of schools were discussed with BDRCS project staff and agreed as:

- The willingness of the school leaders to participate in the project
- Schools outside the cyclone shelters can also participate.



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School Disaster Management Groups (SDMG) consisting of 30 children per group was established in each targeted school based on the following selection criteria:

- " The willingness of the school children to participate in the project
- " Two different age groups: ages of 8-12 and ages of 13-16
- " Membership should be 50% girls and 50% boys.

To promote peer-education among schoolchildren, a half day long orientation session on cyclone preparedness, early warning, evacuation, mitigation climate change adaptation for the school disaster management groups including 900 students with advanced knowledge and skills and 84 teachers in 30 schools were conducted. The knowledge received by schoolchildren was spread among their family members, siblings and peers. Quiz competitions on DRR issues among children organized at target schools served as an attractive means enable to engage more children into disaster preparedness events. Rallies on Cyclone Preparedness in targeted schools on the eve of national and international disaster reduction days have been organized to make communities aware and highlight messages on preparedness, safe evacuation and response for cyclones.

As part of the school based DRR initiative of BDRCS/IFRC, a co-curriculum on DRR and CC has been developed in a participatory manner. This co-curriculum has been shared with National Curriculum Board of Bangladesh for their feedback and was distributed among the students of selected schools of RRDP project. The risk of community can be reduced by educating children with proper knowledge and skills and this co-curriculum serves as a good means to equip the children with DRR/CC related knowledge and skill.

A drawing and project design competition was organized for the students of the targeted schools under the project. The objective of the event was to raise awareness and understanding among children, youth, and communities on building safer communities by encouraging children and youth to design projects on disaster risk reduction for school and communities. The initiative was taken jointly by the South Asia regional office and the country DIPECHO project in order to promote children as advocates for disaster risk reduction.

In total 3,600 students of 44 schools of Bangladesh have participated in the competition. Thirty three schools from BDRCS working areas and 11 schools from the working areas of DIPECHO Partners in Bangladesh participated in the said competition. The details are given below:

Drawing Competition:

Students (age 8-12 years/VI-VIII Grade students) participated in hour-long class session on DRR. After the orientation process there was one hour for drawing picture on DRR. Selection criterion for Poster was as follows:

- * There should be DRR related message in the drawing
- * Message related to early warning, preparedness or mitigation will get preference
- * Perspective and use of color
- * Innovative idea
- * Cleanliness
- * Use of space on the paper etc.



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The selection process was divided into three steps for selecting best three entries (poster). The steps are as follows:

" Step 1 : School level top three has been selected by school teachers, DIPECHO project staff

" Step 2 : Short listing done by a team of senior officials of BDRCS and IFRC

" Step 3: Finally top three has been selected by prominent artist of Bangladesh Mr. Hashim Khan Professor, Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University, Ms. Samina Nafes, Program Officer Fine Art, Bangladesh Shishu (children) Academy and senior officials of BDRCS and IFRC.

In total nine posters (each position 3) were selected for final competition in Delhi. The selected drawings of children will be used as poster or in other IEC material to raise awareness among mass people.



Designing Project Proposal:

After the orientation children (age 8-12 years/VI-VIII Grade students) and youth (age 13-16 years/IX-X Grade students) were given two days for developing project proposal. Selection criterion for Project Proposal was as follows:

" Project should be managed by children

" Budget should be within the capacity of the children

" Positive impact on the community

" Project should address DRR related issues e.g. preparedness, early warning, mitigation etc.



The selection process was divided into three steps for selecting best three entries (PP). The steps are as follows:

" Step 1 :School level top three has been selected by school teachers, DIPECHO project staff

" Step 2 : Short listing done by a team of senior officials of BDRCS and IFRC

" Step 3: Finally top three has been selected by an expert Mr. Sayed Ashraf, Communication Specialist of Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) and senior officials of BDRCS and IFRC.

In total three project proposals were selected for final competition in Delhi. It is expected that based on the selected proposal initiative will be taken in the communities in South Asia.

The final round of winner selection on Regional poster competition took place in New Delhi, India. The Regional Jury including an eminent contemporary artist, executive director from DM SAARC Center, UNICEF as DIPECHO partner and IFRC SARD was held on 29 of June 2010 and regional winners for the competition have been declared. As per the jury's decision the Bangladesh participants' results were announced as below:



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1) Junior Regional Drawing Competition winners are:

Nusrat Sharmin Baishakhi, Class - VII, Mognama High School, Cox's Bazar (BDRCS RRDP project) stood 1st jointly with India;

2) Junior Regional Project Design Winners include:

" Nibraj Halim & Salma Afrim , Class - VII , Moheishkhali Adarsha Uchho Bidaloy, Cox's Bazar (BDRCS RRDP project) stood 1st;

" Torsha & Mahin , Class- VII , Celeste International School, Tangail (BDRCS CBDRR project) stood 3rd;

3) Youth Project Design regional winners are:

Margia, Jannat & Sharna, Class- VIII, Pathorghata Adarsha Balika Madhomik Bidaloy, Barguna (Concern Universal project) stood 2nd.

The award giving ceremony to the prize winners is scheduled later in this year.

Oxfam GB

Zakir Sings to Save Lives

Zakir is 11 and lives with his mother and siblings in a small house by the river Padma in the Char (river island) village of Hakim Mattabar Kandi of Charnasirpur Union which falls under Sadarpur Upazilla in Faridpur District. Zakir's family has lost their house and agriculture land due to floods three times in the last 16 years. Therefore, they moved to Dhaka, but were unable to survive in the big city so returned to the village. But Zakir misses the glamour of Dhaka and watching dance and song on his neighbor's TV through their windows. He always dreamt of being a singer but in the village, there is no television to fuel his passion.

Zakir's house is vulnerable to floods as it's close to the river, however he never saw how he could mitigate the risks his family faced. Until Oxfam GB with the help of three local partners and financial support from European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) started the "Building Community Resilience to Floods in the Central Region of Bangladesh" project in July 2009 in 18 villages and districts of Sharitpur, Faridpur & Rajbari under Disaster Preparedness (DIPECHO) fifth Action Plan.

A key objective of the project is awareness-raising in schools about Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and the easily-adoptable preparations, children and their families can take to minimize such risks. Oxfam





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GB's lessons show children (unbiased and easy to mobilise on DRR messages) can create a multiplier effect in communities. Oxfam GB adopts child-friendly mediums of communication such as video documentary on DRR, monthly school orientation by teachers with DRR Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials such as board games and flip books. These sessions lead to essay/poetry/quiz competitions with winner receiving prizes which motivates children to become better versed in DRR and Water and sanitation (WATSAN) issues. The school orientation campaign has so far reached 9 schools and 2316 children (995 boys & 1321 girls). This also included a one day school fair which promoted flood preparedness practices such as oven making, seed treatment, family survival kits etc. which was followed by a mass-scale DRR fair. The success behind the school campaign is rooted in Oxfam GB efforts to systematically work with the School Management Committee (SMC) to mainstream DRR-related activities in the extra-curriculum. So far monthly school orientations have taken place by SMC in 9 schools for the last 6 months (total 54 sessions). Further, Oxfam GB also developed infrastructure of 3 flood shelters and raised grounds of 3 schools to mitigate risks.

Through all these activities, Zakir learnt a lot about his capabilities and attained skills (i.e oven making, seed treatment etc.) to minimise the risks for his family during floods. However, the most exciting opportunity was when he won the flood preparation related folk song competition in his school, which qualified him to take part in an inter-school union level competition between 6 schools with over a 100 children. Zakir was trained by two local folk artists (hired by Oxfam GB) and his hard work paid off as he was a huge hit at the competition and was especially invited to sing at the DRR fair at the union level.

Zakir's prize-winning song along with nine other best DRR related songs were compiled and published in a book form (500 copies have already been distributed among school children, tea stalls etc.). However, Zakir's song is the most popular in his village and he is always being asked by his neighbours and teachers to sing, and sings he does, with all his heart because he knows he is saving lives.

Oxfam GB school approach also ensures sustainability as it plans to hand over the school level programmes to the respective SMCs, give re-fresher training to teachers and provide all required DRR-related IEC teaching materials. Lastly, a formal letter from the Government Education Officer will be facilitated giving permission to incorporate DRR-related orientation activities within school extra-curriculum activities.



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Why Plan and IRW Implementing SSP ?

After the completion of 4th DIPECHO Action Plan, it was realized by Plan Bangladesh and Islamic Relief Worldwide that, working with schools on DRR and disaster management is highly relevant to address the risks of schools associated with different hazards. The evaluation report of Plan's 4th DIPECHO action plan also recommended that, "Plan should further develop the schools component of its DRR work, giving greater attention to linkages with the educational authorities and developing clearer tools and methods". In the planning and designing stage of 5th DIPECHO Action Plan, it was decided by both of the organizations that a module on school safety plan will be developed jointly with the technical assistance of ADPC and detail TOR was shared with ADPC to agree upon the roles and responsibilities of each of the organizations. Considering all above facts, Plan & IRW decided to work together on schools safety plan with support from ADPC to avoid duplication of effort and resources.

Why ADPC ?

ADP is a renowned organization in development field especially on DRR and school safety program. They have their wider experience in the area of School Safety in both South East Asia and South Asia region with various institutions. Under the Comprehensive Development Program (CDMP) in Bangladesh, ADPC has developed methodology on School Safety to assess the structural and non-structural vulnerability with regards to earthquake and comprehensive School Safety Manual was developed. Hence based on ADPC's past experience, Plan Bangladesh and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) has decided to work with ADPC to develop a School Safety Manual. A major objective of this manual is to use in facilitation of school safety program under DIPECHO-V action plan by Plan & IRW as well as integrate this manual into school improvement program to make schools safer tomorrow.

Process of Developing the Document

The school safety manual was developed through a consultative process where various stakeholders were consulted to gather the required information. By collecting primary and secondary data on hazards and vulnerabilities of schools, the need for school safety plan was identified. Some focus group discussion and individual interviews with teachers, school committee members and students were also carried out to assess the ground level scenarios. To complement the efforts, related activities carried out by various agencies were also reviewed and Indian experiences of Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS India) and regional experiences of Asian Disaster Management Centre (ADPC) have also been put together in realizing the manual.

Capacity Building Activities on SSP

To effectively formulate the school safety plan and to implement it, a three days ToT was organized by Plan and IRW with the technical assistance of ADPC and SEEDS India. In this training, hazards and vulnerabilities of schools including structural and non-structural mitigation, formation of different tasks forces and their roles and responsibilities, basic issues of first aid, search and rescues were discussed in brief.



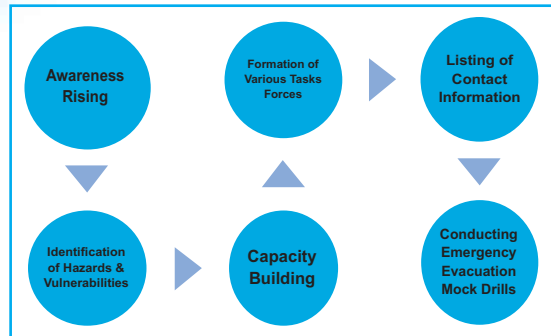
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Steps for Preparing SSP

The school safety plan is prepared in a participatory manner where all the actors of a school are involved. Generally the following steps are carried out to successfully formulate and implement a school safety plan:

Step 1: Awareness rising on school related hazards and vulnerabilities allow the different school actors including teachers, students, school management committee members and guardians to graphs the need for school safety.

Step 2: Identification of hazards and vulnerabilities, structural and non-structural variables, in-house capacities and roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders allow them to realize there relative stand point in terms of vulnerability and help them to plan effectively.



Step 3: Training teachers on how to develop evacuation plan, emergency response capacity, first aid, fire safety, search and rescue, disaster management plan for school to ensure the sustainability of the school safety plan.

Step 4: Formation of various task forces including, warning & awareness task force, evacuation task force, Search & Rescue task force, first aid task force, fire safety task force, psychosocial aid task force, site security task force etc. and to assign and sensitize roles and responsively of these task force in time of emergencies.

Step 5: Listing the contact information of all the resource agencies for emergency management

Step 6: Conducting emergency evacuation mock drill to participate, demonstrate and test the evacuation, rescue, fire safety, and first aid skills acquired by the students

Challenges and Constraints

To implement the SSP, the following challenges were faced:

1. Some of the schools are understaffed and hence formation of different task forces was difficult
2. Formation of student club and task force in primary school ensuring participation of students is a challenge
3. Due to unavailability of emergency equipment, it will be difficult for some task forces to perform their roles effectively
4. Participation of SDMC members in implementation of targeted activities in urban environment
5. Limited space and of schools in urban area



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Facts from the Ground

Islamic Relief Worldwide

Looking at the versatile roles of schools, Islamic Relief Worldwide, under the 5th DIPECHO action plan is working towards making schools a safer place for the teachers and children. In such regards, school grounds were upgraded as flood shelters with provision of tube well with elevated platform, community latrines and an access ramp for people with disability. The success of such small-scale mitigation work is evident on the headmaster's (Kaliara Gabragati Govt. Primary School) smiling face as he says:

"It would break my heart to close the school as it would go under water, the parents didn't want to take a chance by sending children to school and rightly so. But now, the school is the flood shelter for the whole community and the school can remain open without disrupting children's education, which makes me very happy."



In addition, School Safety Teams were formed and trained and detailed school safety plans were developed. This process enhanced their understanding about structural and non-structural gaps of the schools and efforts were made to ensure that the school community takes ownership of the plan and make necessary future updates.

Plan Bangladesh

One of the greatest challenges for preparing schools for disasters such as earthquakes, floods and cyclones is the lack of time during the school week to raise awareness, build capacity and carry out mitigation measures in order to make schools resilient to disasters, especially in urban areas where time is an extremely valuable commodity. Not only time but lack of priority for disaster preparedness by teachers and students are missing since disasters are not a daily occurrence and they often struggle to meet their daily basic needs before considering disasters.



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Hence the initial step to start school safety was creating awareness and ownership among the teachers, especially the head teacher of Rose Garden School of Dhaka, which is a junior secondary school (6-14 age groups). Informal and formal meetings for a period of over 1 month were held with them where the objectives of schools safety and process of creating a disaster resilient school were discussed in brief. After the sensitization process, the headmaster and one teacher received a 4 day training on School Safety facilitated by ADPC. Once back at school, the headmaster oriented his teachers with the process of school safety and a detailed action plan to create awareness, capacity and implement mitigation measures for the school was developed.



To ensure student's participation, a student club was formed comprising of students that were interested in disasters and school safety and those recommend by teachers for their leadership potentials. "Before these activities we were not aware of the potential threats of an earthquake. Now, if the earth starts shaking, we all know how to protect ourselves and leave the school safely" said a student club member.

With this analysis at their fingertips they were able to identify risk reduction activities that could increase their schools resilience to earthquakes. Structural mitigation measures such as retrofitting of school building for an earthquake was not within their capacity or resources, therefore they have advocated to local education authority for support in this area. The activities that were within their capacity and resources, such as developing a school contingency plan and conducting mock drill were taken up by the teachers and student club.

The culmination of their activities was to conduct a mock drill to test knowledge and capacitances to effectively deal with a potential earthquake situation. The entire process, from planning to implement a mock drill, took around 8 months in Rose Garden School. To sustain the efforts, the whole process was carried out in a participatory manner.

"As teachers we have the responsibility to teach the future generation of children of Bangladesh on the potential disastrous situation they live in and give them the skills to deal with it, if, god forbid, it happens" the headmaster commented having completed the mock drill successfully.



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