

Diaries from countries affected by natural disaster: Staff share their impressions about both the challenges and opportunities facing communities affected by natural disaster.

Communities take disaster risk reduction into their hands

Lessons from Bangladesh

By Caroline Borchard, Regional Risk Reduction Associate for Asia, BCPR

Earlier this year I went to Bangladesh to document good practices from the disaster management initiatives undertaken in the country. Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to disasters such as cyclones and floods, with at least a fifth of the country submerged by heavy rains each year. In July and August 2007, flooding killed more than 1,000 people and an estimated 40 percent of the country was underwater, forcing millions to flee their homes. Yet, the importance of disaster risk reduction for development is starting to make strides in Bangladesh. For example, in October 2007, the National Economic Council called for all development projects approved by the government to include components related to risk identification and mitigation. In November 2007, disaster risk reduction, and its linkages with development plans at national and community level, were recognized as key functions of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management. My visit to Bangladesh gave me the opportunity to see how several communities had begun to make disaster risk reduction a reality with the support of UNDP and local non-governmental organizations.



Boy in Bangladesh is sitting at the doorsteps of his flooded home. SOURCE: UNDP BANGLADESH

In This Issue

Staff Diaries

Lessons from Bangladesh	1
Promoting women as leaders of disaster recovery	1
Communities take action to reduce the impact of natural disasters in Kyrgyzstan	3
Protecting communities from natural disasters in Armenia	3
Breaking new ground on disaster risk reduction: Indonesia	4
Spotlight on Staff.	4

Promoting women as leaders of disaster recovery

By Meenakshi Ahluwalia, Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist, BCPR

In times of crisis, it is often marginalized populations, such as women and children, who suffer most. In some countries, gender differences and socio-economic inequalities make women particularly vulnerable to natural hazards. Women can also be at greater risk of violence and inequity during recovery from natural disasters. Some natural disasters, such as droughts, can place an undue burden on women who are responsible for providing water and food for households.

It is critical to address women's issues in both disaster risk reduction and recovery, as disasters do not affect men, ▶

Lessons from Bangladesh (cont)

One of the communities I visited had identified disaster-related risks and had designed a plan to address those risks. We met with members of the non-governmental organization (NGO) involved in this initiative, who described how risks had been identified in the community. Different groups were formed that had specific concerns when it comes to disasters, including women, daily wage workers, the business community and the local disaster management committee, which consists of local government officials. The NGO workers provided assistance to the different groups in identifying the specific problems they face such as the lack of adequate health care to prevent water-borne diseases in times of floods. The groups were then asked to identify the best solutions. In the end, they agreed on an action plan to reduce the community's exposure to disasters. This plan was then presented to the local government, relevant sectoral departments and national non-governmental organizations to mobilize interest and financial resources. Long-term financial support for these plans is crucial to ensure that the risk reduction work achieved by communities is sustained over time.



Flooded area in Bangladesh SOURCE: UNDP BANGLADESH

My colleagues and I also went to see a village that had benefited from the UNDP risk reduction fund. I saw how a community of poor families of farm labourers, who used to live in an area exposed to recurrent floods, had moved to a higher ground built well above recent flood levels. As a result, their houses, sanitation facilities, water hand pumps and livelihoods, such as yarn spinning and vegetable gardening, are now safe. With income protected and better water and sanitation facilities available, many lives and economic assets can be protected when the next flood happens.

These examples show how a small investment in reducing communities' exposure to disasters can go a long way in saving lives and livelihoods when the next natural hazard strikes. **CPR**

Promoting women as leaders (cont)

women and children equally. A 2006 study by the Center for Research in the Epidemiology of Disasters found that women's mortality was higher following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami due to several factors, including the fact that many women were unable to swim. A recent study by the London School of Economics, the University of Essex and the Max-Planck Institute of Economics looked at a sample of 141 countries in which natural disasters occurred during the period 1981-2002. Findings indicate that natural disasters lower women's life expectancy more than men's.

But disasters can also be an opportunity to break these inequalities and build on women's resilience. I recall one woman from Sri Lanka who was so distressed by the loss of one of her daughters in the 2004 tsunami that she carried a photograph of the girl to every community meeting and reminded people to keep looking for her, just in case she survived. Despite all odds, this woman also rose above her loss and found an opportunity to help her family recover by selling homemade snacks to construction workers. Another example can be found in India where the non-governmental organization Swayam Shikshan Prayog, facilitates the involvement of women's groups in monitoring disaster reconstruction efforts. The organization also helps women's groups liaise with national authorities to ensure that mechanisms in place to address grievances following a disaster take both men and women's needs into account.

While there is an increasing recognition that women's talents and resilience in post-disaster recovery need to be nurtured, much more still needs to be done to help women diversify and improve their skills to enable them to earn higher incomes. Having recently joined UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, this is one of the areas I intend to focus on in my support to countries affected by crisis. **CPR**



Woman from Philippines. SOURCE: UNICEF/JUDITH P. DAVIS

Making disaster risk reduction a reality in Kyrgyzstan

By Aynura Alymbekova, Disaster Reduction Adviser, UNDP Kyrgyzstan

My first experience of a natural disaster happened in April 2003, when a massive landslide hit the Kara-Taryk village in southern Kyrgyzstan killing 38 people and sweeping away 16 houses. Since then, I have been working in UNDP Kyrgyzstan on disaster risk reduction, providing support to communities on how to prevent and respond to natural disasters. Thanks to UNDP's support, for the first time, communities are developing their own preparedness and response plans that factor in the risk of a natural hazard. Forty villages in Osh, Jalalabad and Batken provinces have also organized their own voluntary Rural Rescue Teams, which will become part of the state civil defense system managed by the Ministry of Emergency

"In 15 minutes of heavy rain, the village secondary school and 52 houses were flooded."

Situations.

The village of Kyzylordo in the Kattaldyk municipality illustrates the benefits of having a Rural Rescue Team, which includes both men and women. The village of Kyzylordo is particularly exposed to mudflows. Because of land over-exploitation and overgrazing, any heavy rain causes mudflow that results in a loss of human life and destruction of infrastructure. I recall the dramatic event of May 2007 when, in 15 minutes of heavy rain, the village secondary school and 52 houses were flooded. To ensure that the impact of future hazards will be reduced, the village of Kyzylordo established a Rural Rescue Team, which received training and equipment from UNDP. The team identified the best solution to reduce the impact of heavy rain falls – the building of a downstream canal of over 1,000 meters that would run through the village.

In May 2008 the mudflow accumulated again due to heavy rains, but thanks to the canal, the village did not experience any casualties, crop loss or infrastructure damage. Building on this experience, villagers have become more confident that they can prevent the risk of disasters and have started implementing another mitigation project - tree planting – to counter the effects of deforestation and land erosion in the community.

My hope is that the lessons learned from these villages become known at the national level and that they can ultimately influence national policies on disaster risk management. [CPR](#)

Protecting communities from natural disasters in Armenia

By Nino Antadze, Disaster Reduction Adviser, UNDP Armenia

Armenia is a landlocked country located in the Caucasus region exposed to a number of recurring natural hazards, such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, wind storms and hailstorms, which dramatically impact the economy of communities. As the disaster reduction adviser in UNDP Armenia, my main focus is to make communities safer from natural disasters.

UNDP is particularly active in the Ararat region, one of the disaster-prone regions in Armenia. It supports local level disaster risk management, helping communities reduce their levels of vulnerability to natural disasters. UNDP provides training to at-risk communities and assists them in developing and implementing disaster preparedness plans. As part of these plans, and based on a locally-led risk assessment, communities prioritize mitigation activities that will reduce their exposure to natural disasters.

"Our community will be much safer in future floods."

The Noramarg and Ditak communities were suffering from overflowing of nearby channels two to three times a year due to heavy rain falls, causing significant damages to infrastructure and livelihoods. The communities agreed that the rehabilitation of their draining system was the first mitigation activity to undertake. One of the Ditak community representatives recently noted, "We were encouraged to participate in the rehabilitation of the drainage system in our village and now our community will be much safer in future floods. We feel more ownership over such initiatives and will make an effort to maintain the channel regularly. We understand the importance of focused disaster prevention activities."

My goal is to ensure that the experiences of the Noramarg and Ditak communities are replicated throughout the Ararat region and in other at-risk regions of Armenia.

 Visit www.undp.org/cpr/newsletters for audio from this story.

Spotlight on Staff

Recognizing staff who contribute to crisis prevention and recovery efforts

Eunice Sarita Mucache

National Disaster Reduction Adviser, UNDP Mozambique

Since March 2008, Eunice Sarita Mucache has served as the National Disaster Reduction Adviser for UNDP Mozambique, providing technical assistance and policy advice to the National Disaster Management Institute, various other government ministries and non-governmental organizations in the country. Eunice's knowledge of Mozambique is extensive, beginning with her first position in 1988 with the Ministry of Education. In 1997, she was appointed Director of Programmes for the Mozambique Red Cross Society. Her disaster risk and reduction experience includes the design of contingency plans, training curricula and materials for local-level workers, volunteers and community response teams, and overall coordination of community-based disaster preparedness and response operations. She was actively involved in the response to the devastating Mozambique floods in 2000-2001 and the flood and cyclone hazards in 2007-2008. Eunice holds degrees in Psychology and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

Zubair Murshed

National Disaster Reduction Adviser, UNDP Pakistan

Zubair joined UNDP Pakistan in October 2006 as National Disaster Reduction Adviser. He has contributed to the development of Pakistan's national disaster strategy and to the establishment of the National Disaster Management Commission and the National Disaster Management Authority. Zubair has supported the replication of these institutions at the provincial and district levels. He has also been facilitating the formulation of a UN Joint Programme for Disaster Risk Management, an initiative involving 10 UN entities. Prior to joining UNDP, Zubair worked for the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center for over a decade, providing technical assistance, training and policy advice on disaster risk management to countries of the South Asian region. He has worked in various disaster-prone countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor Leste, among others.

Success story

Breaking new ground on disaster risk reduction: Indonesia

By Reecha Upadhyay, Gender Specialist Consultant, BCPR, and David Hollister, Disaster Risk Reduction Adviser, UNDP Indonesia

Indonesia broke new ground on disaster risk reduction with the passing of Disaster Management Law 24/2007 in 2007. The scope of the law is far-reaching, affording Indonesian citizens individual rights to protection from and during disasters. This law represents an achievement for the Indonesian Society for Disaster Management (Masyarakat Penanggulangan Bencana Indonesia – MPBI), a national organization supported by UNDP Indonesia, which played a critical role in ensuring that the law's provisions were concrete enough to make disaster risk reduction a reality in Indonesia.

Most importantly, this law has teeth. It lists penalties in the form of substantial fines and jail sentences applicable to individuals and organizations, including those of the government, public and private sectors, for failing to abide by the law. The law includes specific language on direct protection and response services in disasters and outlines the rights of individuals to information, education and training on disaster risk reduction.

The law also calls for the establishment of a new National Disaster Management Agency, which will act as a coordinating entity to make disaster risk reduction operational across relevant ministries. It will also set up provincial disaster management agencies. These agencies will allow for the active participation of community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations and indigenous groups.

With the passing of this law, the government has now made disaster risk reduction one of its nine national development priorities and substantially increased funding for this issue. In 2008, USD 150 million was allocated for pre-disaster mitigation; a significant increase from the USD 16 million approved the year before.

UNDP continues to support the Government of Indonesia through various programmes at national and provincial level to integrate the Disaster Management Law principles in community development activities and to address the structural causes of disasters.

To submit feedback, a news item or an event to the CPR Newsletter, contact: elisabeth.diaz@undp.org.