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# GOOD PRACTICE IN SCALING-UP

*Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific*

## *Scaling-Up Disaster Preparedness in Bangladesh*

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Monu Mia comes from a community of fishermen, for whom even Bangladesh's low mobile phone tariffs are unaffordable. Mr. Monu explains, "When Gorky hit, I couldn't warn my family and others around us to make necessary preparations," he says of the 1991 cyclone that claimed upwards of 100,000 lives. Because of the awareness raising messages that they now receive on Community Radio, his family can move the nearest cyclone shelter in time. "Cyclones have taken many people away from me, this time I'm taking people away from it," he says.

## INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a country vulnerable to natural hazards and the impact of climate change. Every year, the country is struck by several disasters that can include cyclones, floods, droughts and tidal surges, resulting in the loss of assets, livelihoods and lives.

After the catastrophic flood of 1988 and the devastating cyclone of 1991, Bangladesh transformed its approach from "reactive humanitarian relief" after a disaster to "proactive risk management" before the disaster. Today, Bangladesh is one of the best examples in the world of significant achievements and innovation in the field of disaster management.

UNDP's support and partnership with the Government of Bangladesh in disaster preparedness spans four decades. In 2004, the Government and UNDP launched the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP). The first five years of the programme laid the policy and institutional foundation for integrating long-term disaster management with climate change adaptation (through several pilot tests and demonstrations), while the last five years focused on translating those policies into practice at the national as well as community level.

Working closely with the Government and host Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, the programme was able to institutionalise the adoption of risk reduction approaches more widely across several key ministries and their line agencies to ensure it is part of planning and budgeting processes. Over the span of its life, the programme supported well over 2,000 village-, 200 sub-district- and 40 district-level Disaster Management Committees to incorporate disaster risk issues into the planning process. The project also expanded livelihood climate change adaptation activities in hundreds of villages across the 40 most vulnerable districts of the country and trained over 62,000 urban volunteers on search and rescue and first aid. It also implemented urban risk reduction interventions across 45 slums in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet.

## EVIDENCE OF RESULTS ACHIEVED AT SCALE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

The Standing Orders on Disaster, issued by the Government in 1997 and revised in 2010 with UNDP support, have become synonymous with disaster management in Bangladesh. They assign disaster management roles and responsibilities of relevant offices and sectors during normal, emergency and post emergency periods. This led to a comprehensive and government-wide approach that integrates disaster risk reduction into the work of 15 government institutions. Such milestones are now considered fundamental to the transformation that followed. They gave strength to disaster management committees so they could more effectively plan and coordinate risk reduction and emergency response.

With UNDP's support, peasants now have the resources and capacities to build back better their homes after a tropical storm and become resilient in the face of environment threats.



There has been a dramatic reduction in lives and livelihoods destroyed from natural disasters as a result of improved preparedness for disasters. In the 1970s, the country's casualties from cyclones numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Over the next 20 years, the casualties, while still high, declined to tens of thousands. More recently, cyclone Sidr in 2007 had less than 5,000 casualties, with





fewer than 200 lives lost in Aila in 2009, and less than 40 lost in Mahasen earlier this year. This continual improvement created opportunities for scaling up.

## FACTORS IMPORTANT FOR SCALING UP

For the first time, the Disaster Management Programme adopted a wide ranging risk management approach to community vulnerability. It moved from a single agency response to more holistic involvement with Government offices and agencies. The policy and institutional changes helped move the process from reactive relief to proactive risk reduction, thus paving the way for scaling up.

Recognizing the programme's value and the need to continue its transformational agenda, UNDP in collaboration with partners, developed a second phase of the programme that covers 2010-2014. Today, this new phase of the CDMP is the main means for institutional reform, capacity building and reducing disaster and climate risks in vulnerable communities in Bangladesh. It works across 12 ministries, 40 districts, nine city corporations and multiple sectoral partners, including 16 universities and eight training institutes.

Its work includes support to legislative reform and innovate pilot efforts to address climate variability. Policies in Bangladesh now look beyond disasters to future climate risks and this is reflected in the 6th Five Year Plan, which stipulates that disasters and climate change are to be determinants of development. Disaster management is also now an important component of the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

The early years of the CDMP created the policies, partnerships, and targeted pilot efforts that formed a foundation for action. The programme helped define and then align itself with the changing national thinking around disaster management, thus making the scaling up process a joint effort.

‘Two-Storey village’ is the phrase that locals from the surrounding villages use to describe this disaster resilient habitat built with the support of UNDP, and designed with inputs from traditional knowledge.  
Photo: UNDP Bangladesh / Akash

“The programme was able to institutionalise the adoption of risk reduction approaches more widely across several key ministries and their line agencies to ensure it is part of planning and budgeting processes.”

## CHALLENGES

**Programmatic**—Rapid urbanization and the types of risks and scale of disasters associated with it will be a major programmatic challenge. In the aftermath of Bangladesh's biggest industrial disaster in May which left more than 1,100 garment industry factory workers dead, there is an urgency and an opportunity to scale up urban risk reduction efforts through CDMP.

**Sustained efforts and Partnerships**—Over the past decade there has been a recognition within Bangladesh's policy circles of the deep link between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and the need for an integrated approach in policy, programme and implementation. Current mainstreaming efforts through 15 ministries aim to establish a solid foundation for advancing such an integrated approach. Continued engagement of stakeholders, including donors, will be critical to taking these efforts forward.

**Institutionalisation**—There have been major changes to the government's institutional architecture in the wake of the Disaster Management Act 2012, which has created a dedicated ministry and a full-fledged Department of Disaster Management. A concerted vision and effort will now be needed from the government, in collaboration with development partners, to implement the new act.

“Policies in Bangladesh now look beyond disasters to future climate risks.”

## SUSTAINABILITY / EXIT STRATEGY

Promoting and supporting national disaster volunteerism – The new phase will train over 62,000 urban volunteers. Training will include on-the-job education for government employees, the introduction of disaster management concepts at primary and secondary levels, and a post-secondary degree programme.

Resources and Partnership- The number of cost-sharing partners is increasing. The second phase has mobilized USD 78.3 million, up from USD 26.6 million in the first phase.

## ADVICE FOR OTHERS

- 1. Sustained Engagement:** Transformational change requires long-term commitment to partnerships and in disaster risk reduction; there is no “quick fix” available. Engagement is most effective when spread across a range of stakeholders, including all levels of government, NGOs, think tanks and civil society organisations.
- 2. Partnership Frameworks:** Leverage UNDP's impartial, knowledge-broker status to build a partnership network in the disaster sector. This network can include line ministries, local government bodies, NGOs and community based organisations who work together to turn disaster risk reduction concepts into policies, plans and programmes.
- 3. Institutional Capacity Building** is a prerequisite to harness scale-up potential and is at the heart of real transformational change. Establishing a strong institutional framework for disaster risk reduction means that core government policies, plans and programmes require disaster risk reduction principles to be incorporated from the earliest conceptualisation stages.
- 4. Disaster risk needs community level engagement:** The scale-up of effective disaster risk management should be based on action at the community level and should incorporate local needs and aspirations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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