

Bangladesh Gender and Resilience Project

The Project at a glance

The Gender and Resilience project was created as a response to Diakonia's ambition to strengthen its work on disaster risk reduction and to bridge the humanitarian and development work. The vision of the project was to contribute to gender equality and resilient communities through disaster risk reduction innovation projects.

Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country and one of the highest ranked countries in the world risk index. Due to its fragile geographical location and other human induced causes, the country is exposed to frequent disasters such as floods, cyclones, thunderstorms, riverbank erosion and much more. Slow onset disasters such as droughts, arsenic contamination in ground water, water-logging, salinity intrusion and others are making the country vulnerable which dramatically impacts people's lives and livelihoods.

Bangladesh is predominantly a patriarchal society. As result, women are treated differently than men during disasters. In farming practices women

participate both in cultivation and harvesting like men, they also shoulder all responsibilities of post-harvesting activities such as storing harvests, preservation work etc. They also responsible for preserving seeds for next season. In addition, people in affected areas suffer from many diseases such as skin diseases, abdominal disorders, complexity difficulties during pregnancy and menstruation problems due to lack of fresh water. It has been observed that women, girls and children are facing critical health problems compared to men due to climate related disasters.





Women and girls face several challenges during disasters, their concerns and needs are often ignored when any disaster management plans are formulated. Cyclone shelters are often constructed without considering separate toilets and rooms for women. Women are not considered resource persons in disaster risk reduction planning processes. The potential of violence against women and girls also increases during disasters. However, women's contributions to disaster risk reduction are often overlooked, and current national disaster management systems and mechanisms require more emphasis on managing risks in a gender-responsive manner.

Enhancing the Capacity of Youths

Youth led capacity and campaign on gender and resilience (GAR) started in 2018 and was lead by our partner BARCIK. The aim of the project was to enhance the capacity of youths and students to understand disaster risk and how

to prevent and prepare for disasters. The project used the Gender Crunch Model (GCM) to analyze risks and the Sendai framework (SF) as a tool to mobilize local communities and hold authorities accountable. After the training, women and youth developed community based disaster management plans with a special focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised people, which they shared with the local disaster management committees.

When the new cyclones came, and the crisis of COVID-19 started the youth DRR teams were prepared and got involved in saving lives and ensured peoples security as well as their livestock. The youth also started an awareness campaign to the local government, on compliance with the Sendai framework and gender dimensions of disaster responses, on inclusion which is the key to resilience. The youth now work together with the authorities to tackle the crisis. Both youths and women are now part of local Disaster Management Committees (DMC).



The Power of Local Knowledge

The project sites were identified as vulnerable areas due to hazards and disasters. It has also been observed that most of the project and implementing organizations in the area ignore the strength of the local communities, they especially ignore the active involvement of youths in DRR. Global climate crises may be a new threat for them, but the local communities are used to dealing with them.

For centuries they have used their local knowledge, technologies and community interdependence. The massive DRR projects mostly ignore community knowledge. As BARCIK recognizes and respects community knowledge and individual or community insights and strengths, this might be a new way of helping other actors to listen to the communities before planning DRR actions. Inclusion of local knowledge and competence is key to resilience.



I want to be a changemaker

We live in a coastal region and various disasters come and threaten our lives and livelihoods. Our standard of living is getting worse after each disaster. These may be cyclones, heavy rain, droughts, higher salinity in our drinking water and in our fields, among other climate related issues.

The cyclones have completely shattered our way of life. Our houses, furniture, farmland, livelihoods, drinking water, and trees have all been destroyed. They have turned our lives upside down. Every time we must plant new trees and make people prepared. In rural areas, women suffer more. It is exceedingly difficult to handle the severe water crisis as salt water enters our drinking and cooking water. As many women are illiterate, they also have less access to information. Therefore, we need to explain to rural women how to store rainwater.

We received training on disaster risk reduction. After the training we went home to the villages and informed people. We explained how to deal with disasters such as the cyclones.

A lot of work needs to be done to be better prepared and to reduce the effects of the cyclones. We do seed exchanges among farmers, so they have seeds that are more tolerant to salt and droughts.

We have set up a local fish sanctuary in the village and are conserving local fish there with water plants and we plant trees. At the time of disasters, we went from house to house to inform people and we brought pregnant mothers, children, and the elderly to the nearest cyclone shelter. We discovered that there were no separate toilets for men and women in our shelters, so we had to construct a new toilet.

The Union councils (the authorities) now work our side to support us. The local Disaster Management Committee meets with us regularly. If people talk about our work then it can spread from village to village, we do not want to become famous or film stars, we want to be change makers. We want others to be inspired by our disaster related work and to join us.

