

Coordination improved response time and increased concentration during emergency, volunteers report

Case Study



Photo by: ADPC

CADRE volunteers support the Bangladesh Army with response.

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DHAKA, Bangladesh – By nine o'clock am on 24 April 2013, every television channel was broadcasting what was later to be known as the worst disaster in the readymade garment (RMG) industry's history. On that morning, the details were not yet clear: the Rana Plaza building in Savar area near the capital city of Dhaka had, without notice, collapsed. Tens of thousands of people were, in an instant, trapped beneath the rubble of fallen concrete.

That morning, Md. Mahamudul Amin, 24 years old, sat with his family in front of their television, hypnotised. They watched the news in disbelief from their home in the urban Dhaka community of Narinda.

“ My family urged me to rush to Savar to help. They wanted me to respond immediately since I am a Red Crescent Volunteer ”

Md. Mahamudul Amin, 24, a Red Crescent Volunteer, recalled

In-line with his family's thinking, Amin's instincts also called for him to rush to the site as a first responder, “but I knew this was not in line with the [first responder] protocol,” he explained.



Supporting government-led response teams:

The Case of Dhaka's Narinda Community Volunteers

In this Case Study, Amin and the Narinda community volunteers demonstrate their ability to support government-led response teams, within a very short notice. By following procedure, and understanding and complying with established protocols, community-led teams can easily operate alongside government-led and international response teams. This is essential because it allows the different teams to effectively and efficiently interact.

Coordination between community-led teams and government-led response action, such as the Army of Bangladesh, is important for effective management, as each team contributes crucial services to the overall response effort.

Training and preparation: a must

As this case illustrates, community-led teams can take a lead in response efforts for disasters of international significance, as well as smaller and more local incidents.

The Savar incident is such a case: beginning as a local incident, it has garnered considerable international media attention and led to wide-ranging changes in national and international policy for the readymade garment industry.

Narinda community on the front-line

Just six-months prior, Amin joined 23 other youth Red Crescent Society volunteers for a training facilitated by Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, 'Community Action for Disaster Response' (CADRE). The course taught participants such as Amin essential emergency response skills for emergency events. Six-months ago, Amin had no idea his newly acquired skill-set as a community disaster responder was going to be put to test.

Now it was time.

Communities are the first to feel the effects of disasters, and for this reason, are increasingly being understood as essential components of disaster risk management. As the Narinda community team demonstrated, communities provide effective and efficient front-line response. Communities are often the ones who best know the terrain; where to locate supplies for response; local access routes; and they are able to mobilise informal social networks.

One phone call away from response services

Amin said, "I picked up my mobile phone and, one-by-one, started to organize our community volunteers."

A chain of phone calls connected Narinda community volunteers, preparing them for their work ahead as first responders. Within moments, their mobile 'incident command center' was established and every-day people, such as Amin, transformed into volunteers ready to respond to the emergency.

As CADRE teaches, establishing an incident command center is one of the first steps to disaster response, as it lays the foundation for who's doing what and where.

"It didn't take long because we all followed the instructions that we learned on how to coordinate ourselves as responders in times of emergencies."

During the onset of the Savar tragedy, Amin and the Narinda CADRE volunteers, worked alongside government-led response teams by providing crucial and immediate response services.



CADRE volunteers assist Bangladesh Red Crescent Society Disaster

Managing people and resources during emergencies

Reportedly, Amin's decision to spark the incident command system plan among his fellow community volunteers is a result of CADRE training Lesson 5, 'Incident Command System and Triage'. Amin said, "before the CADRE course I really had no idea what the steps were for responding to an emergency."

Lesson 5 of the course focuses on the line of authority from incident commander to the quick organization of logistics, operations, planning and administration.

“ The course taught us how to quickly organize our community – to establish who was doing what and when. It was clear to us that we needed to respond as a community to this emergency, but first we needed to establish our incident command center, ”

said Amin.



Photo by: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

Management Team (left) with dead body management and Triage.

Amin and his community team executed a localized version of an incident command center – one that took place on their mobile phones. As large-scale disasters such as the Savar building collapse are uncommon for Narinda, Amin’s community lacks a centralized command location. However as they learned, having an organized execution plan is all one needs to have to organized and ready to respond.

In times of emergency, logistics and planning must be in place – in this case, Amin’s call formally activated a pre-established system. These systems of alerts and monitoring for volunteers as reported, should be maintained through refresher courses.

One hour later, the community responders were organized and set off together to the scene of the Savar building collapse.

Clear protocols kept volunteers ‘focused’

“When we arrived, the situation was much worse than we thought. We had never seen such a horrible site before,” Amin recalls.

Despite the scene of the collapsed 9-story structure on top of an estimated 6,000 people, the Narinda community volunteers remained collected. They reported to their on-site incident command team – the Bangladesh Army.

“We were so surprised to see how much the Army appreciated our arrival. They immediately assigned us to Triage duty, to assist with sorting injured people and dead bodies,” he said.

“ I had never even seen a dead body from a disaster before,

said Amin.

For the Narinda community volunteers, their ability to secure the incident scene, ensure their own safety, guide those that could still walk to safety, and develop the tagging system for all other injured people were lessons learned from their CADRE training.

CADRE quick response sorting techniques provided the guidelines for Amin’s community to classify victims into colors: red, yellow, green and black. Beginning with those that could walk from the scene, each person was systematically tagged accordingly to severity of injury. The community team leader then collated the tags and reported the findings to their incident commander from the Army.

As Amin reported, obtaining familiarity with established protocols requires training and preparation. The community volunteers must be adequately trained in the overall response process, including key stages in emergency management.

“Keeping organized and focusing on our coordination, kept us calm and focused. It gave us confidence and we [the Narinda community volunteers], in that moment, felt very proud to be first responders,” Amin explained. ■



Asian Disaster Preparedness Center

SM Tower, 24th Floor 979/69 Paholyothin Road, Samsen Nai Phayathai, Bangkok 10400 Thailand

Tel: +66 2 298 0682-92 **Fax:** +66 2 298 0012 **E-mail:** adpc@adpc.net



www.adpc.net



www.drrprojects.net



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@ADPCnet