

Getting the word out: Women emergency responders in Bangladesh pass message on, train others

Case Study

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DHAKA and **SIRAJGANJ**, Bangladesh - Women in Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka and in the northern district of Sirajganj are reportedly ready to action as community emergency responders. Asian Disaster Preparedness and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society have teamed-up to train communities throughout the country on how to take action in emergencies through a course known to its participants as, CADRE (Community Action for Disaster Response in Emergencies).

"In the past there have been cases of floodwater contaminating water wells. As a result, women needed to walk further to collect water at distant wells, which complicated their daily work schedules," Ms. Shamima Barna, CADRE Bangladesh Country Coordinator explained.

"Additionally, there have been cases of women waiting until dark to avoid humiliation while defecating, which increased their threat of physical molestation. Women are the first to get hit by disasters; CADRE makes sure they're also the first to respond," she continued.

With this in mind, CADRE course coordinators actively seek out a gender balance so the message female participants learn can be spread to other women and girls in their communities.

Women of Paikpara pass the message on

On the outskirts of Sirajganj districts on the banks of the Jamuna River, the community of Paikpara faces continual emergencies. Without an established emergency response system to call on when in need, the community joined the CADRE course in 2011 to learn techniques to help them help others in times of emergency.

Responding to risks from annual floods to snake and dog bites; performing basic First Aid; to resuscitation and setting broken arms, Paikpara's most active first responder team consists of female volunteers.

Shikha Khatun, 22, received Community Action for Disaster Response (CADRE) 'basic training' in October 2011, which was organized in her community with 24 other participants. The CADRE course taught her how to compile hazard information on her community, First Aid, Basic Life Support, Incident Command systems and Triage Dead Body Management Fire Emergencies, Light Search and Rescue Water Emergencies – all necessary for her riverine agricultural community's safety.



Vernacular cultures contribute to emergency response

In Bangladesh, histories of oral traditions have laid the foundation for community training in emergency response. A strong colloquial culture in folklore and story telling makes a compelling case why community training is practical and effective. In many cases, knowledge equates to power.

Within these traditions, women have a central role in passing on knowledge to others as provider and educator of their households. Similar to the CADRE's trainers' approach, women's interaction is highly engaged and may at times include role-play or re-enactment of event.

Women's participation in training others in emergency response is demonstrated to have a lasting effect, long after the course is finished. As illustrated in this Case Study, women are putting their course to the test as they disseminate their knowledge to other community members. On their own, they are holding trainings with very limited resources.

Studies have demonstrated that women are among the most vulnerable in times of disaster. Understanding that women are particularly vulnerable in times of emergencies, the CADRE course ensures 50% female participation and encourages women to take a lead as course instructors.

“Since the training, I have been motivated to keep people aware of hazards and emergency response on a weekly basis,” Shikha commented.

CADRE’s approach is to teach the importance of keeping up-to-date. The more often community members repeat CADRE emergency response lessons to others, the more they will be prepared for unforeseen hazards.

“First aid knowledge is very important for our community because health facilities in our community are quite far from the district hospitals. In emergencies I can provide some basic support to the victim. These are the basic life-saving techniques I teach others,

said Shikha Khatun, 22, who completed the Community Action for Disaster Response (CADRE) ‘basic training’

In 2012 when the Training for Instructors’ course was offered, Shikha took on this challenge. “I learned more in this course on how to reduce loss and how to improve our [community’s] responsiveness to natural disaster.”

CADRE women’s basic training at use in urban Dhaka

Narinda area of Dhaka is one of the capital city’s most populous areas. Traffic, coupled with tall buildings towering narrow roads, often hinders emergency responders’ arrival to the scene on time.

Women in Narinda community testify that their knowledge of CADRE is not only useful for disasters, but for everyday emergency situations.

Farzana Islam, 22, told ADPC, “before taking the initial CADRE course, I was not aware how vulnerable my community was to disaster.” Awareness of disaster vulnerabilities is a central component of the CADRE Training for Instructor course. It enables participants to understand their surrounding and how to identify and prepare for potential hazards.





Among the lessons, CADRE volunteers learn how to apply 'direct pressure' to slow bleeding from an injury. "A friend of mine was injured, and bleeding a lot. I took a clean piece of cotton and raised his injured arm. After cleaning the injured area, I applied pressure on it to stop the flow of blood. The last step was to bandage his arm to protect it," she recalled.

"That day I felt proud to have this First Aid knowledge, it really makes a difference."

In the same community, Dipa Das, 18, a student at Shahid Sharowardi College first joined CADRE as a volunteer of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, but later decided to become a trainer for her community on her own. Dipa works as a receptionist in a private clinic. Although she works around doctors and nurses on a daily basis, she has been able to utilize her First Aid skills.

She recalls a recent time when she was able to use her CADRE training at work, "a mother came [to our clinic] with her 5 year-old son. His hand was injured badly, and needed to stop bleeding immediately." At that very moment there were no emergency doctors and nurses around."

"I applied my First Aid knowledge from CADRE basic training. I was able successfully stop the bleeding, and then locate the doctor for the patient and his mother. All senior doctors appreciated me for this work. From that day onwards I felt so proud to be a volunteer," said Dipa.

Practical emergency response skills taught in the CADRE course are often praised once at use. In the case of Dipa Das and Farzana Islam the encouragement and recognition they receive from those they have helped empowers them to pass their lessons learned on to others and to take action as community leaders in times of disasters.

The front-line responders willing to continue training others

"In a community like Paikpara, if you know First Aid or other basic life-saving techniques, people come to you. You become their life support," said Shikha.

The CADRE course is founded on basic principles of communalism. The course aims to build communities through lessons of emergency response, and encourage them to pass on the knowledge to others.

"As an instructor I am ready to teach others; I am ready to carry on."



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