

How 2 empty buckets can save a life: Bangladesh emergency response course goes local

Case Study

May 2013

SIRAJGANJ, Bangladesh – Each year, the banks of the Jamuna River in Bangladesh swell, engulfing agricultural riverine communities. Annual flood pulse secure the livelihoods of these communities as flooded river banks provide a breeding ground for fish and a healthy substance for rice to grow. However, if communities are unprepared for rising water levels, it puts people at risk of emergencies, such as drowning and other injuries.

Community Action for Disaster Response in Emergency (CADRE) course instructs communities on how to prepare for annual disasters such as floods, and how to organize resources required for emergency response.

“ The problem is, many communities just don't have enough resources available to respond as necessary. In theory we have the skill set to coordinate resources and logistics, but in practice we often don't have the basic equipment required to save lives,

Mr. Ruhul Amin, CADRE course instructor admitted.

Or do they?

With very limited resources Paikpara community members of Srirajganj, are prioritizing emergency care.

During a 5-day CADRE basic training course in Srirajganj participants discovered that, with some creativity, basic equipment is available for emergency response. In fact, participating men were wearing their water rescue devices while other nearby household items such as ladders and drinking water pots provided alternative, localized, emergency equipment options.



Disaster response skills – are they universal?

Within the first 24 to 72 hours after a disaster, local communities are on the front-line of emergency response. Depending on location and scale of emergency, response time may vary.

As this Case Study explores, communities' confidence to respond to emergencies is commonly based on available resources. However, as CADRE participants in this case learned, basic household items can provide the foundations for emergency response materials.

In Srirajganj, communities worked together with CADRE instructors to add value to the course by exploring ways in which the course could be localized to accommodate their lack of emergency equipment.

The CADRE course is flexible, allowing instructors to modify the curricula on site to suit local circumstances. The skills CADRE participants learn are universal; however, the tools used to perform emergency care may vary from community to community.

Water Rescue by lungi: The sarong technique

“When we arrived to conduct the training, we were excited to see that the community was prepared to show us their own life-saving techniques,” Muhammad Murad Billah, ADPC CADRE instructor recalled.

In Bangladesh, rural men wear a traditional sarong, or lungi, which as CADRE instructors learned, can transform into a life-saving tube for water rescue operations.

A young man demonstrated the technique by emerging into the river, then rapidly waving his arms under water. A rescuer can direction the current under his lungi and within moments, the lungi will swell, providing a tube around the man’s waist, enabling him to float to aid the drowning victim’s safety. The air under the lungi will remain intact until the man surfaces from the body of water.

“This technique only works if the victim and the responder remain calm and focused, allowing them the time and concentration to create the lungi flotation device,” Billah continued.

Water Rescue by lungi in 4 steps



Cost efficient stretchers

Agricultural communities in the delta of the Jamuna River, are not only at risk of drowning during flood season. Harvest and planting seasons pose equal threats as arduous labor often results broken limbs, for example. In these cases, emergency volunteers are instructed to secure the victim to a stretcher to ensure safe transport to safety.

Where stretchers are unavailable, bamboo ladders often are. As an alternative, community members use their bamboo ladders, covered in a sarong for safe transport of those unable to walk in an emergency.

Additionally, the same bamboo sticks used to make ladders can be used as splints to protect fractured bones.



Understanding risks, and preparing for hazards

Annual floods, injuries from working in an agricultural environment, dog and snakebites are all hazards, which may call for emergency response. However, in the case Paikpara, before training, community members did not consider such events a hazard.

“Before our training, we did not understand our communities’ hazards and how we can prevent risk,” Selina Begum, 24, CADRE instructor from Paikpara community said.

Although the community has made a request for emergency equipment, Paikpara CADRE course participants learned in what ways they are at risk, and how they can prepare, even with the most basic household supplies available. ■

“ I helped a boy that got bit by a dog after our training. [Of course] I did not have any gloves around, but I had a plastic bag to protect my hands and the boy’s wound. Before the CADRE course I would not have known that to touch a wound without gloves is considered a hazard to one’s health, ”

Shikha Khatun, 23, explained.



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