

# BUILDING CAPACITIES OF PEOPLE FROM RAKHINE TO PREPARE FOR DISASTERS

In late August 2017, widespread violence led to mass displacement of civilians and the suspension of most aid activities in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, resulting in thousands of people fleeing daily across the border into Bangladesh. As of March 2018, more than 750,000 people have fled from the violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar<sup>1</sup> and over 90% of them are living in an extended mega camp settlement which consists of 25 camps in the coastal district of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. The speed and scale of the influx has led to a critical and complex humanitarian emergency, and the influx has created currently the world's largest and most densely populated settlement of displaced persons. This complex humanitarian emergency has been further exacerbated by the possibility of cyclones, floods, and landslides affecting these communities in the coming months.



The scorching heat of the sun adds to the discomfort of the displaced families who are already living in difficult conditions. In addition to that the extended dry weather has increased the instability of the land where their shelters are currently placed.

The cyclone and monsoon season which starts in early May is a huge concern for everyone. Heavy rains combined with the instability of the land could trigger multiple disasters on already vulnerable communities living in make shift shelters built on muddy hillsides. There is an urgent need to ensure that preparedness actions, early warning systems and disaster response capacities are built with the displaced communities to mitigate any hazardous impacts such as mudslides and flooding.

In response to this urgent need, Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) of Bangladesh, a joint initiative of the Government of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), with the support of American Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent Societies (IFRC) is taking action to train camp volunteers as CPP volunteers.



<sup>1</sup> Including previous influx in October 2016

CPP is a world renowned program that has been functioning since 1972 and currently covers at risk areas within 13 coastal districts of Bangladesh with the support of over 55,000 CPP volunteers, who provide early warning messages to their communities in order they can take early action. For the first time, the Government of Bangladesh is including displaced persons from Myanmar in this program in order to ensure they are able to benefit from the existing cyclone preparedness measures. These camp resident CPP volunteers will be responsible for providing early warning messages to their own communities through their camp level CPP units through mega phones, a warning flag system and existing mechanisms such as mosque loud hailers in coordination with the mosque and community leaders in their camps.

Each camp within the mega camp settlement complex will have 10 female and 10 male volunteers trained as one unit under the leadership of two team leaders, who will work closely with the Camp In-Charge of the camps to provide the preparedness and early warning messages in order people can take early action. A total of 500 such camp CPP volunteers will be trained and equipped in the 25 camps that comprise of the mega camp settlement in Kutupalong extension area within the Ukhia sub-district, where over 700,000 people are living in make shift shelter.

The training of CPP Camp Volunteers is currently ongoing with each CPP volunteer training targeting 40 participants, represented by two camp CPP units. The purpose of training different camp CPP units together is to create a network of CPP volunteer units who can not only support their own camp communities but their neighbouring camps in times of need. The CPP volunteer units are formed



with volunteers selected from the already functioning Safety Committees that were established in every camp of the mega camp settlement by IOM and UNHCR and trained by Fire Service Department on Fire Safety measures. In the CPP trainings, participants are able to learn about the basic concepts of disaster risk reduction, hazards and how to mitigate them through disaster preparedness measures. Through interactive discussions, participants were able to identify what hazards they were exposed to and what they needed to do to be better prepared. Most importantly, the participants are oriented on their responsibilities as a CPP Camp Volunteer to provide early warning messages to the community and how they could share their knowledge with others.

"I am so lucky to have attended this training and learned so many new things about disasters. I feel that we as participants should go back to our camps and educate others on what we have learned and also help our community members be better prepared for the upcoming monsoon and cyclone season. I am so thankful for being a part of this training." says Ms. Diloara, a new CPP camp volunteer and resident of Camp 18 in Kutupalong mega camp settlement.

One of the trainers, Ms. Lima Dhar, a Site Monitoring Officer from IOM, who received a Training of Trainers course from CPP and language improvement sessions with linguistic specialists prior to her

becoming trainer, reflected, “I am excited to teach the people from Rakhine and feel that there is potential in everyone to contribute towards making their environment safe.” Being from a host community, she felt that it is a humanitarian prerogative to support the people from Rakhine as they have been through great hardships. She was also well suited to be a trainer given her experience in working in the camps and conducting training sessions on gender and protection issues in the local Rohingya language.

One of the initial activities conducted as part of this initiative was to organize the Training of Trainers in early March to a selected group of CPP volunteers from host communities and participants from BDRCS, IOM, UNHCR and Christian Aid, who are currently working in the camps and have a good command of the Rohingya language and understand the disaster context within the camps.



They were trained to deliver standardized sessions on cyclone preparedness and early warning messaging. At this ToT, the Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner of the Government of Bangladesh, Mr. Md. Abul Kalam, ndc, stated his appreciation for the initiative and was happy to see collaboration from various agencies working on the population movement crisis. He hoped to see these trainers disseminate their new knowledge to the disaster-prone communities in the camps. Experienced trainers from CPP and BDRCS jointly facilitated this ToT which had a strong focus on early warning and disaster preparedness messaging, and gender and protection. Following this initial ToT training, additional language skills training was facilitated during training review sessions with the support from linguistic specialists from Translators without Borders (TwB) before the trainers started training camp volunteer units under the supervision of CPP and BDRCS trainers.

This initiative and trainings are timely and critical given the imminent cyclone and monsoon season since lack of awareness on basic preparedness and early warning could be catastrophic to the already vulnerable and marginalized people from Rakhine. Mr. Ruhul Amin, Deputy Director of CPP Chittagong Region and one of the key trainers, reflected that he was very happy to work with the participants from the affected community and how excited they were to be engaged and contributing to the group discussions. “Having these trainings done at the camp level is very important to the success of CPP because it takes into account the context of the environment they live in and what needs to be done to reduce risks and prepare better. It will save lives.” said Mr. Amin.

In the coming months, this partnership between the CPP, BDRCS, American Red Cross, IFRC and other humanitarian partner organizations will ensure further trainings are held at the camp level and that the trainings will help the people from both Rakhine and the host communities to make them aware of the risks and what they need to do when the first cyclone arrives. It is the first step to make them ready for disasters in Bangladesh territory.