

RESOURCE RE-PURPOSING

Dhaka Earthquake and Emergency Preparedness - Enhancing Resilience (DEEPER)

A German Red Cross and BDRCS joint initiative funded by European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Office





ADDRESSING COVID-19 IN MEGACITIES

Dhaka Earthquake and Emergency Preparedness — Enhancing Resilience (DEEPER) is a German Red Cross initiative in consortium with Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, British Red Cross, Action Contre la Faim and Christian Aid with funding support from European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Office. Since June 2019, the project is diligently working towards raising awareness and reinforcing urban communities' ability to confront disasters in 18 wards of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC).

The Government of Bangladesh went into a nation-wide shutdown soon after the first cases of COVID-19 was confirmed on 8th March 2020. The nearly two and a half month restrictions wreaked a massive impact on the economy and livelihoods of the urban poor. Income of daily labourer plunged as they fell deeper into debts to meet bare necessities. Mental health conditions rapidly degraded as underprivileged groups became anxious over putting food on the table. News media reported increasing cases of domestic abuse along with several cases of suicides. Although stimulus was offered, many poor households could not receive it due to complexities in the distribution system.

Owing to its strong local presence, the DEEPER team promptly mobilised urban volunteers in

Dhaka South City Corporation to identify the needs of the most vulnerable city habitants: the rickshaw pullers, slum dwellers and those dependent on minimal daily incomes. The assessment discovered that nearly 40,000 households in the selected 18 wards were forced to privation after losing their earnings. The households were largely unaware of services offered for COVID-19 patients in health facilities and were often unnecessarily scared of visiting them. Widespread myths on the treatment of COVID-19 patients made matters worse.

The DEEPER team realized affected household urgently needed food support to survive the pandemic and the shutdown which crippled their earnings. It was also crucial to provide special protection against infection to elderlies and those with medical pre-conditions. Front-line health workers had access only to disposable consumer grade protection equipment whose supply was limited. In the absence of recommended protection equipment for health workers, cases of infections would soon be left unattended. Practitioners would also have to dispel the myths about COVID that were leading to mistreatment of infected cases. Finally, the daily earners needed alternative livelihood support to restore their incomes.



PRIORITY GROUPS FOR RESPONSE SUPPORT

01

Displaced by mobility restrictions

Suffered loss of income

02

03

Female headed households

**Pregnant and lactating women,
differently abled, elderly,
child-headed and chronically sick**

04

05

**Transgender, sex worker
and other disadvantaged identities**

**Females RMG factory workers who
are either laid off or have not
been paid**

06

07

**Dependent on income from
transport workers**

**Dependent on income
from street vendors**

08

09

**Households in slum
areas with large families**



1,550 families received unconditional cash grants of BDT 5,000 (roughly 52 Euros) each through mobile banking service bKash. Given the unprecedented need in DSCC, GRC mobilized additional resources from British Red Cross and German Federal Foreign Office to support 250 and 12,500 households respectively with similar cash grants. Secondly, 173 members of front-line health workers, police force, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) and urban volunteers received virtual training on self-care. The consortium installed 102 wash basins in schools and Ward Council offices to create easier access to hand sanitation. Finally, the project engaged 05 prominent Clinical Psychologists to provide tele-counselling to ease the impending mental stress induced by COVID-19, thereby addressing deteriorating social domestic conditions for women and children. More than 900 individuals received tele-counselling between June and December 2020. The community at large benefitted from DEEPER's awareness campaigns on addressing mental health during the pandemic through posters and audio-visuals on social network.



 **1800**

Households received cash grants of BDT 5000 each.

 **90%**

Of the recipients spent the grants on Food.

 **45%**

Households spent the grant on medical needs

 **76%**

Households averted economic hardships

 **12600**

Additional households were provided similar grants mobilized by German Federal Foreign Office

"It is a great initiative indeed for the most vulnerable peoples when they were passing hard time to earn or searching assistance to meet their particular family need. Please consider as there are still need and more families remained who have not received any support yet from the DEEPER project or the government."

Ranjan Biswas
Councillor, Ward 36
Dhaka South City Corporation





ORGANISATIONAL PREPAREDNESS WITH LOCAL PRESENCE IS THE KEY

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTH

Given their long historical track record of responding to emergencies, the consortium partners had the **organisational flexibility** to swiftly pool institutional capacity and knowledge. This is particularly applicable for German Red Cross, British Red Cross, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and International Federation of Red Cross, globally renowned as first responders to emergencies. In addition, German Red Cross has been managing cash distributions in cyclone prone coastal communities for decades and were able to emulate the intervention in Dhaka at a noticeably short time.

ACCESS TO LOCAL STRUCTURES

BDRCS and GRC had access to many of the local authorities and governance structures in Dhaka which in turn ensured acceptance. Furthermore, BDRCS maintains **liaison with a massive pool of volunteers** who are the first to respond to urban hazards. DEEPER project deployed the volunteers for a rapid assessment which accurately predicted the needs of the affected households in Dhaka South City Corporation. Additionally, the volunteers were instrumental in managing cases of mental health and supervised psychosocial tele-counselling.

LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS

Since the inception of project in June 2019, DEEPER has been fostering **healthy and functional institutional relationships** with Ward Disaster Management Committees, Ward Councils, Fire Service and Civil Defence department and the Dhaka South City Corporation. The actors enthusiastically supported the rapid need assessment and accurate beneficiary selection. On the other hand, GRC and Christian Aid maintained a central agreement with the most widely used mobile banking service, bKash. As a result, bKash disbursed the cash grants to beneficiaries in a matter of days which saved many households from hardship and risk of eviction.

With the relationships already forged, it saved the consortium crucial time that otherwise would have been spent on developing linkages with local actors. The post-grant distribution monitoring report discovered that nearly all the recipients commended the timing of cash delivery.

However, there are still unprecedented needs in resource-constrained urban areas. COVID-19 has aggravated health conditions and economic hardships causing widespread stress. The complex urban setting of Dhaka presents massive challenge towards profiling and targeting of vulnerable households.

The distinctiveness of BDRCS is our local chapters who are community based. The Red Cross youth urban volunteers are our biggest strength. Through these volunteers and our local Red Crescent units we mobilize local authorities quickly and assess the needs to formulate response plans. Their presence and acceptance in the community helps us to respond timely and target effectively. None of this could be possible without the generous support from European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Office

Abdul Jalil
Consortium Manager
DEEPER project