

# BANGLADESH 35 YEARS OF NURTURING THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERISM THE CASE OF THE CYCLONE PREPAREDNESS PROGRAMME

It has been more than 35 years that Bangladesh has been sustaining the colossal magnitude of community volunteerism. The challenge for Bangladesh is on how to nurture the 50,000 strong community volunteers of the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) given the dilemmatic tension between bureaucratising and keeping the spirit free.

The CPP arisen from the Country's being extremely prone to disasters and the impact of climate change in one hand; and having the strong compassion and generous culture in the other.

Preparing a Social Map for BDRCS/IFRCs  
Cyclone Sidr recovery intervention



Courtesy: Baruna. July 2008. Kazi Saiful. IFRCs

In the aftermath of the century's deadliest cyclone that killed 300,000 people in 1970, the Bangladesh Red crescent Society (BDRCS) mobilised community volunteers in the coastal regions. At present there are some 42,645 registered, trained, and equipped CPP volunteers in 32 Upazillas in 11 coastal districts of Bangladesh. They have been credited for the dramatic reduction in the cyclone-related deaths from hundreds of thousands three decades ago to tens of thousands and, nowadays, to some three thousands in the last years. The CPP volunteers have been with high degree of discipline, organisation, and devotion engaging in cyclone early warning dissemination, extending first aid, guiding people to cyclone shelters, and assisting in the relief distributions.

The CPP operates an extensive telecommunication network with 130 HF and VHF radio stations that link the field with the Headquarter. Each of Unit Team Leader is provided with a transistor radio to receive the warning that are relayed by the volunteers to the community by using powerful megaphones, handheld sirens, signal flags, and signal Light. Volunteer team leaders are provided with bi-cycles, motor-bikes to assist their mobility to receive and disseminate storm warning signals.

The CPP has grown into a government – civil society joint venture. Whereas the BDRCS maintains the technical and operational components of the Programme the Government contributes to the sustenance of the movement by integrating the organisation component of the CPP into the country's formal administration. Side-by-side with the BDRCS' Director for Operation, government's Director-level position is created at national level, Assistant Directors and Officers at District and Municipal levels respectively. Other organisations are participating in strengthening the CPP. The Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP) continues to support the Programme including its coverage expansion to five newly identified Upazilas in two districts and thus adding 6500 more volunteers into the existing CPP corps. The American Red Cross recently assisted with the volunteers' database updating and the refurbishment of the telecommunication network.

## THE COMPREHENSIVE DISASTER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME (PHASE II)

Disaster Management & Relief Division  
Ministry of Food and Disaster Management



By the virtue of the National Plan for Disaster Management 2010-2015 the CPP has formally becomes part of the disaster management system particularly with regard to preparing the community for tsunami as well as cyclone.<sup>1</sup> The Standing Orders on Disasters (SOD) April 2010, prescribes the CPP to be standing member of the Disaster Management Committees at all levels and to be also member of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR).<sup>2</sup>

Recognising the success of CPP, Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) directorate establishes an urban volunteer network in three largest cities of Bangladesh. The volunteers will be provided with training, equipment and organisation on search and rescue and first aid to face the challenges of making Bangladesh's cities safer and more resilient. This force, which will number 60,000 by 2014, not only represents a significant response capacity, but a clear commitment to one's own community.<sup>3</sup>

There are challenges that constantly confronting Bangladesh in nurturing the volunteerism. These include the need to reconcile the bureaucratisation of the administration of the volunteers which is based on merit, regulation, and compensation in one hand, and the egalitarian and free spirits that binds the volunteers; constantly replenishing the high turnover with new recruitment and training while keeping the existing ones provided with updated knowledge and skills; and strengthening the maintenance of equipment and supplies with accountability framework. Also, there is the need to bring the volunteers from responsive mode closer to the risk reduction and preparedness.

Bangladesh has a lot to offer in the field of volunteerism and is open to having more exchange of experience in this regard. Opportunity has to be identified for other developing countries to visit and learn from Bangladesh CPP setup and operations both in terms of success and constraints and setbacks.

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<sup>1</sup> (Disaster Management Bureau, April 2010)

<sup>2</sup> (Disaster Management Bureau, April 2010)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.undp.org/eu/successstories/working\\_for\\_safer\\_cities\\_in\\_bangladesh.shtml](http://www.undp.org/eu/successstories/working_for_safer_cities_in_bangladesh.shtml)