



AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

Vulnerable groups are often not involved in, and even left out of, the disaster policy-making process, which results in many decisions related to disaster risk management (DRM) that do not meet their needs, especially for people with special needs. There is an urgent need to create an enabling environment that provides better social inclusion, especially in disaster preparedness. Through the Inclusive Community Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (ICDRM) project funded by Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, Plan International Bangladesh and local partner Jago Nari have designed activities that enable everyone to participate actively, including people with special needs.

Asir and Atika (not their real names) experienced significant changes once the ICDRM project was launched in 2017. At first, they always thought that there was no point participating in community activities, as existing programs ignored their voices in expressing their special needs. This is because the Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC) used to be exclusive and did not consider the involvement of vulnerable groups in creating DRM strategies. Seeing this lack of inclusivity, Plan International Bangladesh established a community-level disaster management group, the Ward Disaster Management Committee (WDMC). This structure has been implemented in other parts of Bangladesh by other NGOs.

In 2019, the Government of Bangladesh adopted WDMCs in the institutional framework of disaster management. This reformation has been a great contribution to a more inclusive DRM policy. Now the selection of committee members and DRM strategy creation are more inclusive. People from various backgrounds are now actively encouraged to participate in and become part of the UDMC, including Asir and Atika.

Asir and Atika are both independent individuals who are working to make a living. People with special needs often overcome significant challenges and they have vast potential as agents of change. Through the ICDRM project, this potential was supported to inclusively develop a disaster resilient environment. When first introduced to the project, Asir and Atika were happy to be involved in the trainings and meetings in their village. They felt accepted and proud to be able to contribute more to the community. They were also thankful for the information on disaster preparedness that was previously unknown to them.

Asir participated in the community risk assessment (CRA) process and developed a local disaster risk reduction action plan (RRAP).



"I AM LIVING IN A DISASTER-PRONE AREA, AND MY PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT WILL NOT HINDER ME FROM CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIETY,"

he explained, when asked why he was happy with the project. Atika expressed the same spirit. Through her participation in meetings, trainings and orientations, she became aware of the importance of disaster preparedness.

As a result, she began participating in the decision-making process and accelerated disaster-resilient development in the community. After the meetings and trainings, she began to be more concerned about claiming the rights of people with special needs. She said,



**"I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT MY RIGHTS
AND ENTITLEMENTS TO STATE;
I WANT TO HELP OTHERS LIKE ME."**

The opportunities they received through the ICDRM project have opened their eyes to the importance of inclusion in their community.

In disaster risk management, reducing vulnerable factors means reducing disaster risks, so strengthening vulnerable groups will significantly impact society. Plan International Bangladesh and Jago Nari understand that the representation of every layer in the community is crucial. The ICDRM project has successfully helped the voices of people with special needs to be heard, helped the DRM committees be more inclusive, and helped communities be better prepared to respond to any disasters that may affect them.