



## PREPARING THE YOUNGER GENERATION TO BECOME AGENTS OF CHANGE IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



New voluntary organization formed by the Child and Youth Group



Child and Youth Group members disseminating cyclone early warning messages

Bhola is an island district in the south-central part of Bangladesh along the Bay of Bengal. This region is exposed to frequent tropical cyclones, which occur almost every year. The worst one, the 1970 Bhola Cyclone, cost over 500,000 lives and millions of livestock. Several sources declared the cyclone one of the causes of civil war in the then-Eastern Pakistan region, resulting in the birth of Bangladesh as a nation.

Bhola District has one of the highest poverty rates in Bangladesh. Along with the risks brought by climate change, it is exposed to frequent cyclones, salinity intrusion, floods and storm surges, as well as delta island erosion due to sea-level rise. The frequency of these disasters challenges the Bhola District to build community capacity and resilience against disasters and climate change impacts. Plan International Bangladesh identified this problem and began implementing the Inclusive Community Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (ICDRM) project in one upazila in Bhola District. The ICDRM project, funded by Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, provided the external support that was needed to awaken the inherent capacity within the district.

Since 2017, the ICDRM project has empowered 27 youth groups to become agents of change for disaster risk reduction (DRR) in their community. Local NGO Jago Nari, the project partner, has been promoting the rights of vulnerable women and children through the provision of essential services, including protection, education, health care, skills training, socioeconomic development and community participation. Through the ICDRM project, youth groups have been trained on inclusive disaster risk management (DRM), disability and inclusion, culture and gender sensitivity, and the value of child rights-based programming. These trainings were delivered with a gender lens. Groups also received training on early warning, psychosocial first aid and leadership in community DRM and resilience.



COVID-19 Risk Communication by Child and Youth Group

In addition to making the principles of inclusive disaster risk management the foundation of these youth groups, the training has provided technical skills and assistance in developing community risk and hazard maps, preparing contingency plans and enacting disaster risk reduction plans. As a result, all of the 27 wards where a youth group is located now have a ward-level disaster risk map, contingency plan, and disaster risk reduction plan. Furthermore, each village now has a task force of young people responsible for responding to emergencies and future disaster risks.

Disaster coping capacity is inherent within the community members and this project seeks to unlock that capacity within the community by producing agents of change. Agents of change, in this case, youth groups, are critical in the diffusion of new ideas such as inclusive and community-based DRM. In addition, youth are developing leadership skills in preparedness and response during disasters. In the future, these groups can influence and share their knowledge with other young people in neighbouring villages and upazilas, thus making the impacts more widespread, even after the project has ended.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the project has been implemented remotely, since staff could not reach the villages. Despite these challenges, the success of the preparedness and response capacity-building efforts was evident through the

community's efforts to manage the spread of COVID-19 in the midst of the 2020 Amphan Cyclone crisis. The youth groups created a campaign to raise awareness and include school children in community preparedness against the pandemic.

Just before the 2020 Amphan Cyclone struck, the youth groups swiftly responded to the cyclone warning. One anecdote tells how grateful an elder community member was when young people rescued her several hours before the cyclone struck. She had difficulty getting herself to the shelter, and the help from the young group saved her life. This story reflects the potential of making impacts in a community by realizing its inherent capacity through empowering agents of change.

The major involvement of youth in the ICDRM project in Bhola has inspired them to contribute to the community. One of the child and youth groups has even established a voluntary organization named Shanti Shongho Kachia in their village because of the ICDRM project. Wasim (not real name), president of this organization, said,



**“WE WILL CONTINUE THE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION ACTIVITIES AND DISSEMINATE OUR LEARNINGS FROM ICDRM PROJECT THROUGH THIS ORGANIZATION FOR EFFECTIVE DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR OUR COMMUNITY.”**