ECHO/ISDR good practices for resilient communities

Empowerment of the Poor in Disaster Risk Management

The non-structural measures for disaster mitigation includes extensive awareness raising, organizing the community, initiating the use of local resources and integrating the community with government and non-government disaster preparedness and management programs.

This case study is the result of the two year project titled, "Empowerment of the Coastal Fishing Communities" implemented in the coastal belt of Bangladesh. The project was funded by UNDP and FAO.

Case Study:

A cyclone forecasted:
On May 16 2004 at 6 pm a cyclone formed near Andaman-Nikobar islands. It crossed the Bay of Bengal coast between Teknaf (Bangladesh) and Akyab (Myanmar) on May 19 at 12:00 noon with a wind speed of 85-90 km/hr. According to the Bangladesh Metrological Department, the maximum wind speed was 65-90 km within 54 km from the center of the cyclone.

How Mrs. Nasima Khatun, a 70 year old housewife at South Kutubdia Para, Sadar, Coxsbazar responded?

Nasima is very poor. As soon as she was informed about the cyclone, she hurried back home and instructed all her family members to assemble everything, and put the chickens and ducks in a cage so that they could carry them along if the cyclone turned worse. They discussed and agreed to take shelter at the nearby cyclone shelter or at the diabetic hospital if the warning signal increased to great danger. They also arranged ropes to secure the roof, windows and doors of their house, before they left. The male members decided to move the children and Nasima first.

How could a 70 year old village women respond effectively without panicking?

Because she noticed the cyclone warning signal flags hoisted in her village and heard the announcement made through the microphone of the mosque in her village.

How could she interpret a signal flag?

Nasima is one of the many community people who had learnt about cyclone preparedness and interpretation of signal flag from Anwara, Bilkis and Kanak of her village during family level discussions. She also participated as an old person at the mock exercise held in their village.

Who are Rezia, Anwara, Bilkis and Kanak?
Rezia, Anwara, Bilkis and Kanak are the community-trusted people who are known as Change Agents. They are selected by the community themselves.

What were the responsibilities of the Change Agents?
Family and community level discussion
Mock exercise
Cultural events
Warning dissemination
Evacuation and shelter management
First Aid

How the Change Agents enhance their capacities?
They received training
- Disaster management
- First aid

Who activated the Change Agents?
A VDPC has been formed in their village which includes members from the local government, NGO and the community. As members of that committee the CAs carried out their responsibility as a part of the VDPCs work-plan.

What is the basis of the VDPC work-plan?
The activities were identified during PVA exercise.

How support was ensured according to the need of VDPC work-plan?
Incorporation of services of local GOB and NGO in the work-plan
- Sensitization meeting
- Integration of GOB & NGO work-plan with the VDPC workplan
Development of the IEC materials
Promotion use of local resources