

THE **PROYASH** PROJECT



**BUILDING
URBAN
RESILIENCE**



Save the Children

CASE STUDY COLLECTION

BUILDING URBAN RESILIENCE

Front cover: Nahar Akter, 21 - a project beneficiary and member of a Proyash women's group - with her two year old daughter, Tara, sitting in her dressmaking shop, opened with financial support from the project. Nahar participated in vocational training in dressmaking provided by Proyash, which allowed her to become an entrepreneur.

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Please note: Beneficiary names in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

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THE **PROYASH** PROJECT

Proyash is an urban disaster risk reduction project, working to build the resilience and capacity of vulnerable urban communities, women and children in particular, in Mirpur, Savar and Narayanganj, Bangladesh.

The project aims to strengthen existing risk reduction practises in urban settings by building the capacity and skill set of potential actors of risk reduction at family, community and institutional levels, with communities and local disaster management committees being the focal point.

Proyash recognises that immediate risks faced by communities and individuals are as important to building resilience, as disaster risks are. Thus, the project builds resilience through addressing livelihoods and social risks such as sexual and gender based violence.

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Implementing Partner



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Simulating disaster: Fire and earthquake mock drill taking place, with the Fire Service and Civil Defence and garment workers, at an Epyllion Group garment factory, Mirpur, Dhaka.

Overcoming Social Stigma, Representing the Marginalised



Mina's Journey

Mina, 30, is from the City Colony slum in Narayanganj. Being from a marginalised Dalit* family, she has been ostracised her entire life and denied services because of her caste. Mina fought to overcome those societal barriers and worked hard to reach higher education, which she did, and graduated with a postgraduate degree social science - an incredible achievement for someone in her community.

She supported the project as a mediator between implementers and women in the community, which helped, since language and culture was the main barrier.

The Proyash project began its interventions in Narayanganj in late 2015, and Mina became a member of the City Colony Women's Group, where she learned about disaster risk reduction and preparedness, was sensitised on fire and earthquake safety, proper waste management and good hygiene practises, and also how to handle abuse or harassment and understand women's rights.

Proyash supported the formation of a Disaster Management Committee under Ward 15. According to committee formation criteria, a certain number of women and the marginalised must be among the members. The Ward Councillor recognised Mina's proactiveness in bettering women in the community and her sense of leadership, and so he selected her as a member. Mina then became able to represent her community at the various WDMC and City Corporation meetings and give a voice to those that are marginalised. Mina gave a great deal of input during the formation of this committee, brought a sense of togetherness among the women, and provided a necessary link between them and Proyash's initiatives to build resilience. She supported the project as a mediator between implementers and these women, which helped, since language and culture was the main barrier to project work in this community. Mina would convey and reiterate risk reduction messages and how to increase their capacity in between their group sessions.

*Dalit, meaning "oppressed" in Sanskrit and "broken/scattered" in Hindi, is a term for the members of lower castes of India. The term is mostly used for the ones that have been subjected to untouchability. The term also exists in Bangladesh, and City Colony in Narayanganj has a significant Dalit population. They are commonly employed to do 'unclean' jobs such as cleaning and sweeping.

After becoming a member of the WDMC, she has given much input on behalf of the marginalised community on their needs and issues that need addressing in Risk Assessments – especially those involving adolescent girls and women. The community governance body – a group consisting of influential members and leaders of the community – is responsible for management of the City Colony slum. Mina brought the issue of there being no space for the women’s group to convene to this governance body, and requested that they resolve this. Eventually a room – previously used by the governance body – was allocated to them, where they were able to hold their weekly sessions.

One of Mina’s notable accomplishments as a mediator and facilitator for this initiative was the facilitation of three women’s participation in a risk reduction quiz. She also took part in a speech-giving competition on women’s rights and empowerment at an event for International Women’s Day, organised by Proyash, where the Mayor was present, for which she came first place.

“ Before, due to cultural and societal barriers, women were not able to be engaged in other activities that better the community – instead of solely household chores and such. They never thought to engage themselves either. It hadn’t occurred to them that they could actively do something for women’s betterment, that having an input in the community governance body could help them, or even that it was important to share what they thought. ”



Mina talking with a representative of Save the Children Switzerland

Increasing her family's capacity helps Shilpi continue with her education



12-year-old Shilpi, had big dreams and ambitions to become a teacher when she grew up, and change her family's future. Shilpi's parents are poor, but still strived to send her to school. Her father, aged 55, was a day-labourer and was barely able to provide his family with three meals a day. In early 2017, Shilpi was admitted into a private school near her home in Savar, Dhaka, and she was excited to start Grade 6. Her parents continued to struggle to pay the school fees. The school authorities were not understanding of her situation, and Shilpi was mentally strained after she was consistently asked throughout the year to pay her fees on time. Five months into the year, Shilpi had to dropout of school when her parents, as hard as they tried, could no longer afford the fees. She was distraught and saw her dreams become unattainable.

Two months later, Save the Children came to know about Shilpi and her family's dilemma. The Proyash project, helping to build the capacity of the most vulnerable in urban spaces, supported Shilpi's father in setting up a tea stall business and buying necessary materials to get it running. Proyash also supported Shilpi and her family in paying her school fees, and she was able to continue going to school again. "I thought I'd have to start working instead of going to school, but thanks to Proyash, I'm back in class and my family is able to make a better living," said Shilpi. "I feel so happy that I can work towards my dream again and not have to worry about paying the fees and being embarrassed."

Shilpi, back in school, learning with her classmates



A better livelihood,
an increased
resilience: Shilpi's
parents and their
successful tea stall



Shilpi's mother, Jarina Begum, said that their family income has increased significantly after opening the tea stall and that'll help them in paying the school fees consistently. "Before, we didn't have enough food to go around, but now we can manage quite well and bear other expenses too. I help my husband to run the tea stall sometimes. Eventually, we were able to open a savings account for Shilpi's future. We put in around 1,000 BDT (10.38 EUR) per month. None of that would have been possible without Proyash's support," said Jarina, aged 50.



**Working with a sub-district
Women Affairs Officer
to build urban
women's resilience**

Khaleda Akter Jahan is an Upazila (sub-district) Women Affairs Officer under the Savar Municipality in Savar, Dhaka. She highlights the risks faced by communities in Savar and how the Proyash project has been effective in creating opportunities for women and mothers in particular, to help them become more resilient in these urban environments.

“ Savar sub-district is an industrial zone and has a population of over a million. There are two export processing zones here. Many people from all over the country come looking for work in this area, both informal and formal. It's also an exit and entry point to many districts outside of Dhaka. Therefore, it's not surprising that urban risks are increasing rapidly here, as more and more people relocate to the area.

The Proyash project has been working with us to build the capacity of our communities in Savar. They work at the grassroots level to address issues including early marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, providing vocational training to vulnerable women and mitigation activities such as road and drainage repairs. All of these areas need to be addressed in this area, so I think it's great that the project has been implementing here for the last couple of years.

"I'm happy to say that we've seen an improvement in the lives of many women since the project began its work here."

"The project has been conducting effective activities with beneficiaries in Savar, that definitely help with reducing the urban risks women have been facing in particular."

Women in our communities face an array of problems everyday and we've been working to eradicate them. In terms of kabinnama [islamic dowry, where the husband gives a dowry to the wife] disputes, we have resolved around 80% of cases, for example. Dowry disputes are very common here where the husband doesn't provide a dowry as promised and it eventually heads towards divorce. We try to resolve the case and come to a mutual understanding before it reaches that stage. In cases where we can't come to a solution in the Department of Women Affairs, then we send them through to the law enforcement agencies where they file a legal case against the groom or his family.

We've also been focusing on tackling violence against women for the last twenty years but still have a very long way to go. There are thousands of women who come to settle here from surrounding districts and look for work in garments. There are many case of violence among such women, and we try to mitigate this through raising awareness and creating a culture of understanding and respect between men and women in our communities.

Working with the Proyash project has been great. The project has been conducting effective activities with beneficiaries in Savar, that definitely help with reducing the urban risks women have been facing in particular. The awareness raising and training sessions for both men and women on gender based violence, domestic violence and the issue of dowry has helped to inform them of their rights and where to go should they need help. After the project started these interventions, the department has received many more cases of violence against women. We have even seen cases come forward from the minority community.

We also worked with Proyash to promote the 109 helpline number (to report child marriage and sexual and gender based violence) at Savar Girls High School, at an event where 1,500 students took part. Everyday we receive around three cases of child marriage, at least. When we receive any phone call or hear of a child marriage taking place, the first thing we do is contact the local elected councillor/chairman to speak directly with the family. If they are not convinced of their wrongdoing then we involve the police. If even that doesn't work, then we take legal action where both sides of the family face arrest, imprisonment of a year and a fine of 5,000 BDT to 50,000 BDT, depending on the families finances. I'm hoping that Proyash continues to work with our department and continue to make a difference, and make more of an impact with the children in our communities, particularly with child marriage. ”



**A Dressmaking
Livelihood:
Vocational
training helps
Nahar increase
her capacity**

**"I have been sharing
what I've learned in
these courtyard
sessions with those
in the community like
myself, and
spreading knowledge
on how to how to
handle risks we
face."**

Nahar, 21, a homemaker, lives in a slum in Zimkhana, Narayanganj City, Narayanganj, with her young daughter, Tara, and husband, Moffajol Hossain, who works at a cake and pastry shop. She is a member of the Proyash project's women's group called the 'Lal Golap' (Red Rose) Group and has been involved in project activities since early 2016. Their family struggles to get by on the small income her husband makes.

Nahar was introduced to the field facilitator of SEEP, Save the Children's implementing partner organisation for the Proyash project. She was selected as a 'PEER Educator' in the project, since many women garment workers lived in the area, who are one of the targeted groups of the project. Nahar attended Proyash courtyard sessions and came to know about issues around disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, child protection, sexual and gender based violence and women's empowerment.

“ I have been sharing what I've learned in these courtyard sessions with those in the community like myself, and spreading knowledge", says Nahar.

"I want to make my daughter's future secure enough... I want to bring in more money myself and contribute to the family financially. Proyash gave me that opportunity."



As part of women's empowerment, Proyash involves women in the 'Lal Golap' group in vocational training such as dressmaking, sewing and beautification skills to improve livelihoods. Most women have shown to be very keen in developing these skills since it is easy to sustain and the fact that such a job can be done from home alongside their household duties i.e. enables them to be self-employed, it is an appealing livelihood to take on. Nahar is one of the women who participated in the two-month long vocational training that was provided by the District office of Department of Youth Development. Among 30 participants, Nahar was praised as being one of the first to get involved.

After completing the training, she began to sew clothes for her neighbours and make dresses to sell in the community. She earns on average 1,000 BDT a month. From this money, she has been able to buy nutritious food for her child and also has a plan to make a deposit in the bank for a savings account. She hopes to earn considerably more during the Eid season. Nahar says, "I want to make my daughter's future secure enough and better than it is now. From what my husband earns, it is difficult to save money to provide her with nutritious food and a good education. So, I want to bring in more money myself and contribute to the family financially. Proyash gave me that opportunity."



Moffajol, her husband, said that, "She is interested to work and supplement my income, which is great since we can now take care of Tara better than before. I want to help where I can and encourage her to continue with her skill."

Nahar and her husband outside their home in Zimkhana, Narayanganj City



A happy Nahar, posing outside her small dressmaking shop near her home in Zimkhana

Eventually, Nahar saved enough to rent - with support from the project - a small shop near her home to expand her sewing and dressmaking business. She now earns around 3,000 BDT (30.60 EUR) per month, and is able to save considerably more. "I hope to send my daughter to a good school when she's of age. I can do that now since I have this extra income. She can have a better life by getting a good education. I wouldn't have been able to afford that before. Save the Children and the C&A Foundation have helped me in achieving that dream."



Nahar with her daughter, Tara, in her dressmaking shop

Nahar aspires for similar women in the community to receive training like her, and hopes to involve them in the dressmaking business, helping it to grow and become more profitable. She believes it would really transform their lives like it did hers. "There are so many others like me, that want to develop this skill. Hopefully the project can change their lives for the better too. ”

A woman in a pink headscarf is operating a sewing machine in a garment factory. She is focused on her work, with her hands on the fabric. The factory floor is filled with other workers and sewing machines, creating a busy industrial environment. The lighting is bright, and the overall atmosphere is one of productivity.

Garment sewing training secures a livelihood for Koli and a future for her son

"I would go directly to the garment factories and ask for a job, but they would turn me away since I had no relevant skills or experience."

Reshma Akter Koli, 19 years old, lives in Savar, Dhaka. She left school in Grade 9 to be married and now has a one year old son. Koli works in a garments factory, while her husband works in Dhaka City in a cosmetics shop. Initially she went to school in Savar up till she was ten years old, and then moved to study further in Dhaka City since Savar in the past had no nearby schools in the community and was also much dirtier than today. The households were scattered, there were hardly any shops and very little lighting in the streets in the evenings so people would not leave their homes after dark. Private tuition was not available in the community either. Koli understood the importance of learning English to be educated further in Dhaka City, and also to better your chances of employment, but she struggled with learning English when she moved there at a young age. She did not like being in Dhaka City compared to Savar.

“ There were open spaces in Savar. You could play and be at ease,” says Koli. “In Dhaka City, everyone would nap after lunch. Whereas in Savar, everyone would play together. I preferred that. However, there was a park in the Dhaka City where I'd go on the weekend with family and friends. A good thing is in Dhaka City, people keep their rubbish in a specific place and City Corporation has a system to collect it regularly unlike Savar. There was good transport system too.”

"My mother wanted me to study further, but my dad wasn't keen. He said studying up to Grade 5 would be enough. But I stayed in school till Grade 9. When I was in Grade 6, my parents separated. I got married when I was 16 years old and my husband was 21. It wasn't arranged and his family didn't demand any money. The marriage certificate cost about 10,000 BDT (£100). My in-laws are very good to me. My husband works in Dhaka, but comes to Savar every Thursday before going back on Saturday. He moved there to look for better work when I found out I was pregnant.

If my parents hadn't separated, I think I would've been able to study even further. After having a child, I really wish that I had continued with my education at that time. Then I would have a better livelihood and be able to provide more for my child. I have three siblings and at that time, two of us stayed with my mother and two with our father. We helped our mother to do the household chores from childhood. We couldn't share any of our feelings with our father. He is a very temperamental person and didn't take any responsibility for us which pushed my parents apart. I've now been admitted into Open University to study further, so I hope to accomplish more than just studying up to Grade 9."

How did you engage with the Proyash project?

"I would go directly to the garment factories and ask for a job, but they would turn me away since I had no relevant skills or experience. I received garment sewing training from the project, which makes it easier for me to get employment in garments as an 'operator' where you make sweaters, jackets and t-shirts for example. It is different from tailoring. To make one dress, there could be up to 300 operators involved - someone who works on the bottom of the dress, another on the collar etc. After getting this training, I went back to the factory and I got my current job. That was 8 months ago. Now I get 7,000 BDT monthly salary with festival bonuses, overtime pay etc. I can happily say that I can help in my husband in providing for the household. Before I had this job, if I asked him to help with household chores, he'd get frustrated as he would expect me to do them all myself. Now he helps me with cleaning and cooking since we both work full time.

With the money I earn as an operator, I deposit 500 BDT every month in the bank for my son's future and also to help my mother here and there - buying clothes or jewellery as required."

How has Proyash helped your community?

"After Proyash started its interventions in our community, we have a specific place to throw our rubbish and the Municipality collects that waste more regularly. In our monthly community meetings, we discuss violence against women and raise awareness of the government helpline number - 109. Two of my colleagues were suffering and I made them aware of that number. One of them called to report her husband who was divorcing her due to him not receiving a dowry. The case has been resolved and they are still together."

"I received garment sewing training from the project, which makes it easier for me to get employment in garments as an 'operator'"

What other issues do you wish to see the project help with?

"The main problem in our area is water logging, open and poor drainage systems and muddy roads. There are social problems like eve-teasing too. The lack of street lighting makes this situation worse and children are used to sell alcoholic drinks like beer and wine. Some of these children end up drinking and also become engaged with drug dealing. Those who own and run such businesses coerce the children into working for them, and threaten them with death if they speak about who manages them."

What do you like the most about Proyash's interventions?

"The training that I received is what I appreciate the most from Proyash. Now I am confident that I can continue my life more comfortably and be self-sustaining. I like being an operator rather than a tailor because I get a fixed amount of money. I don't need to rely on customers paying me for my income. I also like that I get extra benefits like festival bonuses and overtime pay. It's also comforting to know that I can work in several locations in the country, since garment factories are everywhere now. If it weren't for Proyash, I wouldn't have the job I do now, I wouldn't be able afford to send my son to school eventually. When my son turns 5, I want to send him to an English Medium School and he could be a doctor, for example, in the future. When my parents separated, we suffered a lot as children. I don't want that for my son. This job gives me that security. ”



Koli (left) and her mother outside their home in Savar

The Empowerment of Women Through Entrepreneurship:

Munia's Experience



Fatema Akter Munia, 22-years-old, lives in a predominantly Bihari* slum in Mirpur, Dhaka. Her family have lived there for three generations. During Munia's childhood, her father did not have a stable job and her family had very little income, hence she was not able to get a proper or consistent education and dropped out of school after Grade 5, when she was only ten years old. After dropping out of school, Munia helped her mother make clothes with a special method of sewing called 'karcupi', along with her brother and sister. Her mother would make a small income with this, that would cover the cost of running their household, including food and other basic necessities. She and her family struggled to make ends meet, and Munia felt hopeless about her own future. In 2013, when Suman was 19, she got married.

“ My life became immensely difficult then,” says Munia. Her husband turned out to be involved in human trafficking, and so she had to divorce him a month into their marriage. Two years later, she married her second husband. “It was a downward spiral and I felt hopeless. I was abused by my mother-in-law profusely.” After three months, she found out she was pregnant and her mother-law would continue to beat her. Around this time, Munia's husband said he did not wish to live with her any longer. “I finally decided to call my mother for help and I went to go and live with her instead. They didn't even visit me at my mother's house throughout my pregnancy. I would try to make them understand, but it didn't work out.” Eventually her mother-in-law admitted that Munia's husband was mentally ill - something that was taboo to mention before marriage - and Munia divorced him. Her son was born in the nearest government family planning centre, and she took out a loan to pay the hospital bill of 10,000 BDT (103 EUR), which her mother was able to pay back on a monthly basis by working as a housemaid.

“It was a downward spiral and I felt hopeless. I was abused by my mother-in-law profusely.”

*Ethnic Pakistanis from Bihar, India, who were left stranded on the Bangladeshi side of the border after independence from Pakistan. They are discriminated against for underlying social and political reasons. These vulnerable communities commonly struggle with poor facilities e.g. lack of clean water, gas/electricity, proper waste management, sanitation and health services. Biharis also find difficulty to register for a National Identity Card due to discrimination.



Munia stands outside her shop with her son.
The sign reads:
Improving the livelihood of vulnerable women.
Fatema Akter Munia.
'Grocery Shop'.
Supported by Proyash: An Urban Risk
Reduction Project

Towards a better future...

A representative of Proyash informed a neighbouring woman in her community about the opportunity to learn to build a better livelihood. Munia heard about this opportunity through her neighbour and decided to attend the Proyash community sessions, along with 50 other women. In these sessions, Munia learned about disaster risk reduction and preparedness. All women were sensitised on fire and earthquake safety in their community, on proper waste management, sanitation and handling abuse or harassment. They were also told there were opportunities for vulnerable women to receive financial support and training from the project in entrepreneurship. Munia, along with several other women, were voted by their peers to be the most in need of this opportunity.

"It felt great to be selected, knowing that I could finally try something that could help me and my son live a better life.", says Munia. "I have some space in the front of my house, where I can start a small grocery shop. So, with financial and moral support from the project, I started business only a couple of weeks ago. It's going well so far. I don't know much about financial management, but I learned from other shop owners like me that have been doing it for longer. I keep a register to record and track my inventory and finances. I am confident that I can manage, especially since I have my parents to help me run the shop. They look after things when I have to rest or take care of my son.



Munia, in her small grocery shop in front of her home

I want to work hard to provide a good life for my child, that's what motivates me to keep going. I hope to send my son to a good school in the future, and I'd like for this shop to expand. ”

Munia explains how there are many more women like her, who are struggling to make ends meet and provide a good future for their children. She hopes that Proyash will continue to help these women and give them the similar opportunities that she's been given.



Women's Participation in Risk Reduction

Action Planning:

Rimi's Experience



Rimi (right), presenting findings from the Urban Risk Assessment to women in her community

Rimi's Situation

Rimi Begum, 35 years old, and her family have been living in Savar, Dhaka for four generations. When she was a child, there were no primary schools nearby, and her house was in a deep rural area, so she and her siblings would have to walk a mile on muddy roads to get to school everyday.

“When it would rain, we would use banana leaves as umbrellas”, Rimi remembers vividly. Her grandparents were not keen on sending girls to school, but her brother protested and instead encouraged her to get an education, explaining that her life would be better if she did. Once she started secondary school, the roads improved, but her journey was twice as far. At this point, girls in her community were discouraged to continue their education, and so it was only Rimi and her cousin that still attended.

After finishing secondary school, Rimi tutored vulnerable children in her community with another teacher, earning 400 BDT (4.14 EUR) a month. "It wasn't for the money really. I wanted to use my knowledge for something good and increase my capacity as a teacher," explains Rimi. Teaching helped Rimi gain confidence, as she used to be a reserved and quiet person.

She enjoyed engaging with others and learning new things, such as women's health, while doing this job. At first, she would teach every subject, until more teachers were recruited and she taught just English and Maths. The tutoring establishment then became a private school.

Rimi then completed a degree when she was 20-years-old, after which, she became a kindergarten teacher. Once she got married, she taught at a private high school. When she gave birth to her son prematurely, she had to stay in hospital for nine days. Following this, she changed jobs yet again, to a high school nearer her home in Karnapara, Savar, where she taught from 2006 to 2011. During this time, Rimi had a second child, and felt overwhelmed with juggling a job, looking after her children and household. "I quit my teaching job after a few years to concentrate on bringing up my children, and also because the salary wasn't at all enough for the effort I was putting in. My husband suggested I just leave too," says Rimi. Now, in my spare time, I help my cousin run his school, but I don't earn anything from that, and I also began tutoring children in the community again. I earn between 5000-7000 BDT (51.70-72.39 EUR) a month doing that.

Rimi saw the effects a major disaster can have on a community when the Rana Plaza building in Savar collapsed in 2013, killing more than 1100 people. Her husband and nephew helped in rescuing victims of that tragedy. As her husband works in garments, she hears how corruption takes place, which can lead to disasters such as this.

Involvement in Proyash

Savar is a predominantly industrial area, and like many urban areas, experiences water logging very often. "It's so bad that a lot of the time the children aren't able to go to school and the garment workers cannot get to work. When it rains heavily, the entire area is inundated for around two months since it's low-lying land with poor drainage and poor waste management. We carelessly throw rubbish away and it blocks the drainage all the time. If it rains consecutively for a couple of days, the water comes up to my knee," Rimi explains.

The Proyash project began its interventions in Rimi's community in 2015 and orientated residents on risk reduction, proper waste management and dealing with water logging. These interventions significantly decreased the haphazard rubbish throwing and the area has seen some change in litter blocking the drainage system. The project also campaigns for and raises awareness on issues around child protection, sexual and gender based violence and child marriage in the area.

Rimi heard about Proyash through her niece. After deciding to attend a monthly community session, she was inspired to act as an agent for change as a woman in her community and realised the importance of raising her voice on issues directing affecting them. "Proyash trained us on how to complete an urban risk assessment and facilitated the process," says Rimi. "We found that the primary issue in our area was water logging. I, along with other women participants took our findings to the local ward councillor and the mayor, and presented the plan at a validation workshop. The mayor then gave a speech, in which he assured us that action would be taken to tackle the issue of water logging. We are eagerly awaiting to see the positive change and to see Proyash continue to engage government officials in this kind of work. In my experience, government officials rarely carry out what they say they will do, but in this case, I am a lot more hopeful."

Becoming more resilient against urban risks

Rimi was aware of a recent earthquake in Nepal, and is concerned that if such a natural disaster were to occur in Bangladesh, it would be catastrophic for everyone. She is grateful that she and other women in her community are now equipped with life-saving knowledge on earthquake preparedness too. "I know that we have to protect our head the moment it strikes, to get out into an open space, keep an emergency kit with dry food, water, a torch, medicines etc. in case we are trapped and have to wait for help to arrive."

The risk of fire is also a huge issue in the area. "We would panic and not know what to do. Whenever a fire broke out in the garment factories, it would deeply affect the whole community," says Rimi. Since Proyash, all the women participants of the project had training by the FSCD (Fire Service & Civil Defence) on fire and earthquake preparedness. "Now we always keep a bucket of sand and one of water by our kitchens. I think we're all a lot more confident in handling any small incidents, should they happen. If there is a bigger incident, then we know to call the emergency services."

"I like engaging with the project and seeing how I can make a difference for my community. Ever since I was little, I have had a dream to live in a better place. Somewhere where I don't have to worry about all these risks. Participating in this kind of work makes me hopeful that one day I can provide that safe space for my child. I don't want him to have to miss school because of water logging, for example."

"If Proyash didn't continue to work in our area, then I would still make the effort to advocate and spread knowledge on disaster risk reduction in our community," says Rimi. "I've realised how effective it can be. I feel that the project can spread its work to other urban areas in Savar, which are also facing similar issues, and make a difference there too. ”



Building Resilience: Schoolchildren take initiatives to create a cleaner, greener and safer school environment



Proyash has been working in Mirpur Udayan School & College since February, 2016. Proyash has formed a Student Council (SC) Group consisting 30 members from various classes. A School Disaster Management Committee (SDMC) was also formed consisting 15 teachers. SC members participated in regular SC meetings. It is a monthly meeting where classroom sessions are taken on the topics of DRR (Disaster risk reduction), CCA (Climate change adaptation), CPIE (Child protection in emergency), SGBV (Sex & gender based violence) and waste management.

From these meetings, they have increased their awareness on disaster risks, safety practices and mitigation strategies. They felt motivated to spread their environmental awareness among their other classmates, so they planned to organise classroom sessions for all the students from different classes by themselves. They successfully informed their fellow students on disaster risk reduction initiatives and environmental issues. This enthusiasm from the students created a constructive impact on the teachers and SDMC members. They then also felt motivated and subsequently conducted several SDMC meetings with assistance from the Proyash team.

Student Council classroom sessions



But the activities did not stop at just meetings and awareness raising. These youngsters spoke with Proyash Project representatives and proposed that they themselves wanted to do something for a 'green, clean and safe' school. They also involved their teachers and after discussions, successfully made a work plan and budget. They decided that they would donate their own savings to raise a fund. They have planned to complete 5 tasks in their school:

- Painting a speed breaker in front of their school
- Leaflet distribution
- Tree plantation
- Making posters with emergency numbers
- Waste management campaign

They began their work according to plan, starting with a campaign on waste disposal. The members of the student council went to different classes and described the disadvantages of waste disposal and emphasized the duty of keeping classrooms clean to class captains and students. Their teachers guided them in this process. In addition, they decided to take such steps every 3 months for the overall cleanliness of the school premises. From there, the students went to nearby houses and shops to make the neighborhood aware on waste management issues, highlighting the problems if they did not dispose their waste properly, the health risks, environment pollution and changing climate etc.

The students had prepared the awareness raising leaflets and emergency number posters (i.e. fire service, police station, hospitals etc.) by themselves at their own cost. They also bought different kinds of plants for tree plantation around the school premises and also allocated maintenance tasks of the trees among themselves.

Raising awareness and informing their fellow classmates



Raising awareness among their community distributing leaflets to the public and local shops





Their most noteworthy achievement was renovating the speed breaker in front of their school. The speed breaker was worn out and the color became faded, making it difficult for passing vehicles to notice it and thus the area was accident prone and dangerous for students. The students had bought color and paintbrush all by themselves and painted the speed breaker a bright white to make it visible for everyone. Now the vehicles passing by will drive more carefully and the students crossing the road will be out of danger. The locals in the neighborhood gathered and praised the effort of the students. This success evidently shows that, by integrating these youth in disaster risk reduction mechanisms, long term success and sustainability can surely be achieved.



**Creating Child-Led
Opportunities for
Urban Children to
Nurture and
Protect the
Environment**

In urban areas, many children do not have enough opportunities to learn about their surroundings and the natural world around them through physical interaction. Rapidly changing conditions for children as the world urbanizes, opportunities to play outdoors and independent mobility becomes rare in many parts of the world, especially in densely populated countries like Bangladesh. In this context, SCI is advocating for child-friendly cities, where the country's government system is committed to fulfilling children's rights, including their right to participate in community and social life, have green spaces for plants and animals and live in an unpolluted environment. It also embraces the concept that a child can play an active role in making cities better if we allow and encourage them to participate, while supported by their family and friends.

Proyash is determined to educate schoolchildren of urban areas on environmental issues and broaden their knowledge on ways to reduce disasters risks, adapt to climate change and above all, environmental management. This process of raising urban schoolchildren's awareness on their environment began around one and a half years back when the project started working with 14 schools of Dhaka and Narayanganj districts. One of the first successes of the project, students of Morgan Girls High School in Narayanganj planted around 1000 seeds and small plants on 8 June 2017.

Children in the student councils are the 'agents for change' in all these 14 schools. These children are nurtured by the projects through different capacity building initiatives (e.g. training sessions, exposure visits, debates and rallies). Each student council group is led by one teacher from that respective school. With the support of these student councils, Proyash facilitated School Safety Plans (SSP) in each school, with the vision to have a clean, green and safe school. These children are playing an important role in their schools as they disseminate what they have learned from Proyash on disaster and climate risks, child protection in emergency and sexual and gender based violence. Regarding tree plantations, planting trees in and around their school premises is an activity to educate the children that, there are many small initiatives one can do to help nature and protect the environment we live in.



The difference between any other conventional tree plantation and this activity was the fact that these children took their own initiative to bring seeds of seasonal fruits, which they themselves had consumed, and small plants from their homes, that they then planted in small bags, hoping that they successfully sprout and begin to grow. The children wrote their names on the soil bags, each taking responsibility for their own plants – watering them and nurturing them. They are eagerly watching over the small plants since the initiative began.



Restricted planting space/open spaces, concreted paths and contaminated and poorly aerated soil are some of the challenges for tree survival in urban areas. All these plants will initially be kept in the school premises, and the schoolchildren intend to give these plants away, once they grow more, to be planted in various places they will decide upon – roadsides, garment factory yards, other schools and government buildings etc. The children have also expressed that they will be planting some of their own seeds by themselves around their houses. To overcome the challenges mentioned, it was discussed among the children in the student council that they will give these plants to different government and non-government organizations since they have space and designated people who will tend to these plants and trees with care.



‘Connecting People to Nature’, the theme for World Environment Day 2017, implores us to get outdoors and into nature, to appreciate its beauty and its importance, and to take forward the call to protect the Earth that we share. In early June, Save the Children and Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies (IDMVS) of Dhaka University jointly held a Youth Climate Parliament debate and rally at the University of Dhaka to celebrate World Environment Day. The focus was led on environmental issues, exclusively for children and youth, aiming to stimulate their minds and encourage discussion through active participation and connecting them with nature.



A total of 45 students from 6 schools in Dhaka and Narayanganj districts joined together at the event, encouraging schoolchildren and their peers to take action to protect the Earth that we share. The two final teams taking part in the debate were Savar Girls High School from Savar, Dhaka and Morgan Girls High School from Narayanganj. The motion was: 'Current global climate agreements are effective enough to address climate change'. Savar Girls High School were the winners of the debate (against the motion). Present at the event were the Vice Chancellor of University of Dhaka; Director General, Department of Environment and Additional Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.



World Environment Day 2017: Environmental rally at the University of Dhaka



World Environment Day 2017: Youth Climate Parliament Finalists

Children need opportunities to contribute to saving the environment. These small child-led tree plantation activities, environmental debates and rallies have successfully increased the confidence of these urban schoolchildren. Through such activities, these children living in densely populated urban spaces came to know more about the environment and how they can take action themselves. They learned how to plant different types of plants and trees from a skilled gardener, taught how to tend to them and learned why such a practice is important to carry out. When this is usually something these children read in their textbooks and learn in their lessons, through this activity they were able to learn by doing, in the practical and simple task of tree plantation. Similarly, the debate and rally that took place to mark World Environment Day 2017, was a rare and effective opportunity that is expected to contribute in making these children informed citizens who are sensitive towards saving the environment.

Supporting Garment Factories in Improving their Daycare Facilities



Women garment workers in Bangladesh, that are also mothers, struggle to manage their working life while ensuring their young children are cared for. These mothers work to contribute to their household income, as their husband's income alone would not be enough to sustain them. Usually, their husbands are also working long hours and it is difficult for them to find someone to look after their young child. In some cases, they are able to leave them with their grandparents or neighbours, but child protection and risk of abuse often becomes a concern in these circumstances. Many garment factories have daycare centres on the premises that allow workers to bring their children to work, however, there is often a significant lack of standard with facilities and children are not being given the proper care that they deserve. There are also a great many factories that have no daycare or creche facilities whatsoever. From various sessions with women's groups under Proyash, Save the Children has found there to be a great demand from working women for child caring services in their workplace, and a higher standard of childcare in already existing daycares.



Save the Children, with the support of the relevant garment management teams, then began the initiative to improve the daycare facilities in garment factories of well known garment groups in Dhaka, including Evinco Group in Mirpur and Quazi Abedin Tex Limited and JK Group in Savar. Together they employ approximately 3000 women. Phulki, a renowned organisation that provides services to train caregivers, helps set up daycare centres to an appropriate standard and monitors daycare management, has been providing technical support to improve the level of care in these factories.

Left: Opening of the daycare at a Quazi Abedin tex Limited factory in Savar, with members from Save the Children, SEEP, Phulki and Quazi Abedin management

The improvement to the facilities and childcare services allowed for a comfortable space for breastfeeding mothers to feed their children during work hours, and the young children are now in a safer, more engaging environment where mothers can rest easy, knowing their children are in good hands. This security then enables these mothers to work with a peace of mind and increases worker productivity - an incentive for garment companies to improve their childcare facilities.

Right: Children being cared for at the improved daycare at an Evinve Group factory, Mirpur



Since the improvements to their daycare centre, Evinve Group have expressed how beneficial it has been to both them and their working mothers. "Save the Children, SEEP [implementing partner, the Social and Economic Enhancement Project] and Phulki have really helped to improve our facilities and create a productive environment where our workers are more at ease because they know their children are happy and safe," says Syed Shahidujjaman, Compliance Manager. "We've received a lot of technical support that we really needed, and we'll strive to keep up these standards and continue to provide a safe space for these children."



Children play in the improved daycare at a Quazi Abedin Tex Limited factory, Savar



**Being an
Urban
Community
Volunteer**

**Rakib's
Experience**

Rakib, 28, lives in Zimkhana, Narayanganj City, Narayanganj, Bangladesh. He runs a mobile phone service and repair shop. He was one of the very first participants to take part in Save the Children's Proyash project, which began in September 2015, and enrolled in the Urban Community Volunteer (UCV) programme. He received 3 days training conducted by the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence (BFSCD), which was organised by Proyash. Rakib was trained to become a first responder for emergency responses, focusing on urban disasters such as earthquakes, fire incidents and building collapse. He spoke about how he gained substantial knowledge on disaster risk reduction and how to help his community during an emergency. Rakib says they clearly explained the roles and responsibilities of a UCV and how to coordinate with the BFSCD after the training completion. "I feel proud that I now can say that I possess the knowledge on how to respond during an emergency. It makes me different from others. It's a special skill I've gained and now I can actively do something to help my community and save lives," says Rakib.

One morning, in March 2017, he opened up his shop to start business of the day and he saw an FSCD car drive past to respond to an incident. Rakib rang the local FSCD station and asked what had happened (a fire broke out) and where he should go to respond to the emergency. Rakib took down the address, closed up his shop and rushed home to change into his bright orange UCV uniform, given to him during training.

Once he arrived at the scene, locals were saying they suspected that the fire started in a kitchen on the ground floor where a t-shirt printing factory was also located. The fire spread quickly in the building because of the chemicals used in printing at the factory. The FSCD officers tackling the fire recognised Rakib as a fully trained UCV and instructed him accordingly, knowing he was fully capable of aiding them. After three hours effort, they were able to control and extinguish the fire. Nobody was harmed, but there was significant damage to the factory. Rakib exclaimed how the FSCD really showed their appreciation to him for taking the initiative to respond to the emergency.

After this event, Rakib responded to two further incidents of fire with the FSCD. Due to his proactive involvement with the FSCD, he is now introduced as the FSCD representative for the area. His friends, family and neighbours feel proud that he is always looking out for vulnerable people in the community in case of disaster. He shares his knowledge on fire and earthquake safety, waste management and child protection issues with those in his community, which he gained from various meetings/sessions for UCVs under the Proyash project.

Rakib keeps a wet jute bag/sack in his kitchen at all times, which is a common place for fire incidents at home. As he has one young child, he is careful to keep the bathrooms locked and keep any large buckets of water half full, so that there is no risk of drowning. He informed his wife about child protection issues and they discussed these issues at length in regard to creating a safe environment for their child.



Rakib, with his fellow UCVs at a training session, dressed in their uniforms

Rakib is very enthusiastic to be involved in this type of social work. He said, “It feels good to protect helpless people. Proyash gives me the opportunity to participate in the UCV training and do just that. If I do not actively use my knowledge than it will be useless. I now attend various meetings with the local government as an identified Urban Community Volunteer, which I feel proud of.” Rakib is connected with more than 60% of FSCD staff through social media and frequently keeps up-to-date on what is happening in the area. In his neighborhood, there are 38 UCVs including him, and he has taken the initiative to make them all nametags for their uniforms at his own expense, since it is helpful during an emergency to recognize one another. Rakib plans to continue UCV meetings and work together with his fellow volunteers if the project ends.



UCV training taking place, facilitated by the FSCD, at the FSCD training complex, Mirpur

Community Participation in Urban Risk Assessment Initiates Reconstruction of Water Logged Slum Pathways



The Proyash project has been working to reduce urban risks in vulnerable areas of Narayanganj, Bangladesh in corporation with the Narayanganj City Corporation. Water logging is very common in low-lying slums in Narayanganj City, and the roads and alleys can become inundated for days, weeks, even months, after heavy rainfall. The residents are faced with a number of hazards including water and vector borne diseases, water contamination and utility cuts. Subsequently, there is great difficulty in getting around the area - children are unable to go to school and people cannot get easy access to their workplace - which places already vulnerable families under huge pressure.

One of Proyash's interventions is to provide long-term solutions to these urban risks and help prevent the consequences of water logging. Proyash facilitated training to a Ward Disaster Management Committee (WDMC) under the Narayanganj City Corporation to conduct an Urban Risk Assessment (URA) of a vulnerable area, with participation from many members of the community - including women and children. The findings showed that mitigating risks of water logging along three pathways of a low-lying slum was paramount. Members from the women's group in the slum community, facilitated by Proyash, came forward to advocate to the WDMC the priority risks to address. Thus, Proyash and the WDMC decided to plan and take appropriate action by resurfacing the connecting pathways and roads, raising them substantially and improving the drainage. This process took around 15 days after the assessment findings were produced, with the community providing free labour. Two of the pathways were financed by the WDMC and one through Proyash.



Selina Begum, a member of the women's group, says "The need to repair the pathways was dire. We were getting ill and many of the children had skin problems from walking around in the water. I'm so glad this initiative was taken and we helped to advocate for it."

Nishi Akhter, 14 years old, says, "Now we're able to go to school without having to worry about the water logging and the problems that come with it."



Flooded pathways of the Narayanganj slum

The reconstructed pathways, with better drainage and stability



The community were very happy to see the improvement in their surroundings, and water logging is no longer a severe problem for them. This is a successful outcome that demonstrates the effectiveness of the Urban Risk Assessment (URA) tool, and how it can be used to identify priority risks, map them and find appropriate solutions for the most vulnerable in an urban environment.

Working in **collaboration** with a
City Corporation to **build urban**
resilience:
Speaking to a Ward Councillor



Ashit, Narayanganj Ward 15 Councillor, giving a speech at a Proyash community session with local stakeholders

Narayanganj District is an industrial hub. Narayanganj City has a population of around 2.2 million people. In Ward 15, the land use is considerably industrial and has a population of around 70,000 residents. Many come from the surrounding areas of the city to look for work here. Including daily migrant workers, there are approximately 200,000 working within the ward. The main urban issues faced here are water logging, lack of education in the slums and poor waste management.

Involvement with the Proyash project



Before the project began its interventions in the area, we weren't taking urban risks very seriously," says Ashit Baran Biswas, Ward 15 Councillor, Narayanganj City. "We've slowly come to realise the necessity of risk reduction and management. I have never been involved with any other NGO like this before. We were involved with UNDP urban programming, but it was a very different approach, more geared towards poverty reduction. I really enjoy working with the project since I can see how it creates awareness among City Corporation officials, even if it is gradually. We've never had experience with urban community volunteer initiatives, having a WDMC (Ward Disaster Management Committee) or even mock drills for earthquake and fire. So, it is different and interesting work to be involved with. The City Corporation know that this is their job and they are mainly responsible to implement such initiatives, to solve community risks and problems. The project showed us the way and how we can approach urban risk reduction properly. What's great is that these initiatives are linked with practical, daily life, which everyone can relate to and exercise. We have undertaken several initiatives with project, and now I feel we are at a stage where we're eager to go further and look at future initiatives for the longer term.



Ashit, walking in a rally to raise awareness on the 'Urban Community Volunteer Programme' alongside fellow volunteers that've completed training



Ashit, participating in a fire simulation exercise facilitated by the Fire Service and Civil Defence, in Narayanaganj



Ashit, in procession with locals, students and officials to raise awareness on World Environment Day 2016

I was a participant of the Urban Community Volunteer programme, and I realised then that, disaster and risk preparedness is a huge issue to address. The training made me more sensitised and aware of how important knowledge on this is. Before, we would not observe or even know about International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR), National Day for Disaster Preparedness (NDPD) or World Environment Day. We hadn't any school related activities, didn't arrange mock drills at schools or in our community - things that create mass awareness easily, which now take place often in my ward thanks to the initiatives of the project. There are 99 Urban Community Volunteers in our area now, and they also engage with other issues in the community, not only disaster management, which is good too. It's important that we give proper guidance and follow up with them.

Collaboration is essential between Save the Children, implementing partner SEEP (Social Economic Enhancement Project), City Corporation and other relevant stakeholders, in order for our work to be successful. We're realising that now more and more. The project may work in a small area, but it makes a huge impact on the schools and the community. If we want to sustain these interventions and see the results we've planned, we need to continue to work together and we certainly need more time to see a long-term impact and to have the City Corporation institutionalise these initiatives.

With school level interventions, activities were very challenging to implement since students and staff are busy with their studies. However, the project managed to encourage them to see the benefits and importance of learning about disaster risk reduction, and so they made time accordingly for such school-based activities. Similarly, slum communities were encouraged to participate in conducting Urban Risk Assessments and making Risk Reduction Action Plans. One of the most successful interventions of the project in Narayanganj, I think, is the introduction of the Ward Disaster Management Committee (WDMC) and convincing the mayor of its importance in implementing disaster risk reduction activities. That's why you see in this year's City Corporation plan, financial resources have been allocated to address disaster risk reduction."

What would you like to see in the future with the project?

I think that waste management initiatives need to be improved. It is a big problem in my ward, so I'd like to see more attention towards that by the project. In my opinion, I feel that the duration of the project is not long enough to properly incorporate and sustain risk reduction activities. As a ward councillor, I know it is my responsibility to continue with these efforts, but it is difficult for us due to lack of human and financial resources and technical guidance. Narayanganj City Corporation doesn't have as much capacity as Dhaka North and South City Corporations. It may be possible to continue the infrastructural things, which align with our common agenda, but the awareness raising activities, refresher training for volunteers, school level activities, simulation exercises and mock drills at community and school level is likely to cease without the project's support. Continuing to work alongside the project, I'd be hopeful that risk reduction activities would be institutionalised in the structure gradually. ”



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