



Proyash – An Urban Risk Reduction Project Urban Community Volunteers Trained for Disaster Risk Reduction and Response

The Challenge

The number of people exposed to natural and manmade hazards increases as more and more people concentrate in disaster prone areas. Haphazard and unplanned settlements in urban areas are immensely vulnerable to these hazards, including earthquakes, fire, waterlogging, flooding, building-collapse, pollution, improper waste disposal and disease. Despite living in such vulnerable conditions, the urban dwellers rarely receive guidance and education on enabling themselves for a safer environment. In Bangladesh, 18-35 years is considered youth, and they are the prime actors for disaster risk reduction, yet they are significantly lacking in disaster knowledge. The government has developed a strategy to reduce urban risk by creating urban community volunteers with technical support from the 'life saving force', the Fire Service and Civil Defence department. However, identifying volunteers among the youth is a challenge as it is difficult to pinpoint who will be most beneficial. They also lack the motivation and the time to act as volunteers since they are unenthused and preoccupied with their lives more so than rural communities. Moreover, those that are professionals such as engineers, medics, electricians, plumbers etc. are unaware that their skills are of high value in relation to disasters. With the impact of

climate change, disaster risk reduction (DRR) in urban and peri-urban areas has become more significant than ever.

The Solution

In the context of poor governance, community volunteers are seen as a great necessity in Bangladesh, since the government cannot combat the issues of urban risk alone. *Proyash* has the objective to strengthen existing risk reduction practises in urban settings by building the capacity and skill set of youth through the Urban Community Volunteer Programme, namely by:

- **Identifying and engaging young people in volunteering; to work as an extended force of local government authorities**
- **Educating youth on disaster risk reduction and motivating them to act as ‘first responders to disasters’**
- **Building youth’s capacity on ‘firefighting, search and rescue and first aid’ with the support from FSCD**
- **Holding government officials accountable to disaster risk management**

As of 2016, 300 volunteers are already registered with Fire Service and Civil Defence with the support of Save the Children. These volunteers are based in two districts in Dhaka and Narayanganj, and are affiliated with three local fire stations. Further, Save the Children and its implementing partner SEEP (Social Economic Enhancement Programme) are trying to bridge the gap between these volunteers and local government authorities – mainly city corporations – so that they can be used to raise awareness on appropriate waste disposal, maintaining building codes, planting trees, disseminating warning messages etc. all year around.

Lessons for the Urban Context

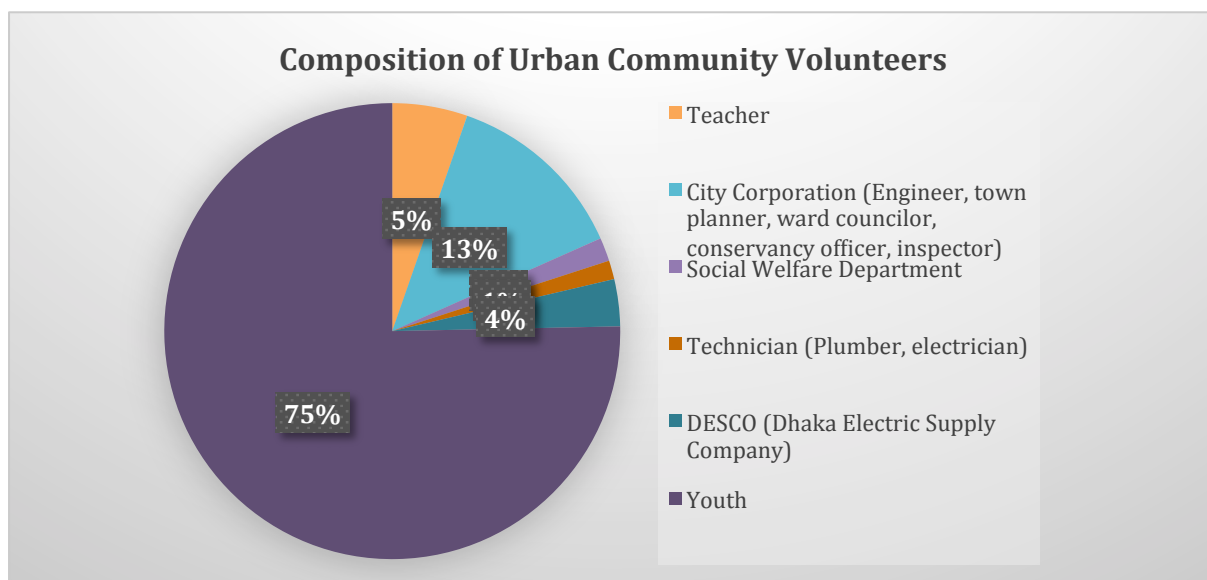
- To qualify as an Urban Community Volunteer, one needs to take a three-day training course with the FSCD. It is a challenge for government officials to invest their time for a consecutive three days. What has been learned is that signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is essential in order for these occupied officials to dedicate their time to the programme. In this understanding, government officials are encouraged to engage themselves in helping their communities and decreasing vulnerability to disaster. To ensure participation of City Corporation officials (engineers, town planners, conservancy officers, ward councilors, inspectors etc.) a MoU has been signed between Save the Children and DNCC (Dhaka North City Corporation).

- The times that a MoU could not be signed, several consultations were carried out to build a rapport with stakeholders, especially government authorities, in order to associate them with the training programme. In such cases, Save the Children liaised with and sensitised DESCO (Dhaka Electric Supply Company) and the Social Welfare Department so that they could nominate officials to undergo training.
- Keeping Urban Community Volunteers motivated is a challenge and so certain steps have been taken to curb this, including organising events that allow volunteers to congregate. Save the Children organised a highly publicised award-giving ceremony for the volunteers whereby the Minister of Home Affairs was present as Chief Guest and speeches were given emphasising their importance, encouraging their participation in the programme.

Realizing the Full Theory of Change

Innovation

Development of urban community volunteers is not a new initiative, however, Save the Children’s approach is to diversify and include other groups of people into the composition of volunteers. This would include (as shown in the chart below) teachers, the City Corporation, the Social Welfare Department, Technicians and DESCO (Dhaka Electric Supply Company). All these groups were approached to take part in the programme so that emergency response would be undertaken by not only the youth, but also professionals with useful skills needed in times of crisis.



Proyash –an urban risk reduction project has brought innovation in the form of urban community volunteers in three ways:

- 1. Firefighting, search and rescue and first aid training to government officials**
- 2. Technical government authorities as first responders to emergencies**
- 3. Gender-balanced urban community volunteers**

Partnerships

Proyash's focal partners in its Urban Community Volunteer Programme initiatives are the Fire Service & Civil Defence (FSCD) and Dhaka North City Corporations (DNCC). The project initiative heavily relies on logistical support from partner NGO, SEEP (Social Economic Enhancement Programme), to implement its activities in field locations, and on the FSCD for technical support. There are significant contentions with guardianship and deciphering responsibility over the programme between FSCD and DNCC, which will need to be clarified and process of collaboration better defined. Save the Children is currently advocating for this clarification between all parties in order for responsibility over the Urban Community Volunteers to be concrete and well understood.

Voice

The youth and women are prime actors in urban risk reduction, and so a focal point for *Proyash* is youth engagement and also ensuring the participation of females. The Urban Community Volunteer Programme helps to strengthen their role in risk reduction by not only increasing their capacity and be an extended force of local government authorities, but also to create opportunities

to involve them in the risk reduction process and give them a voice. Empowering youth and women in a way such as this, where they gain the confidence to use that voice and become better equipped to help their community during disasters, is the primary goal of the *Proyash* project. Due to existing socioeconomic conditions, cultural beliefs and



traditional practises, women are more vulnerable to urban risk and are rarely included in any risk reduction planning or process. Thus, the process of recruiting volunteers for the programme concentrates particularly on female enlistment in order to meet the 50:50 male/female ratio, which would otherwise be greatly askew. Feedback from youth participants of Urban Community Volunteer Programme has been positive, as they have expressed how they feel more confident, resilient and empowered with the skills and the voice they now possess.

Scale / Sustainability

Those professionals that have useful skills (plumbers, electricians etc.) are easily available in the urban community and are willing to lend a hand during times of disaster. In this case, there has been specific rapport building in order to select the right professionals to participate in the Urban Volunteer Programme. This has proven to be a successful and sustainable method of including professionals with the required skills in the urban risk reduction process.

When the programme is advertised in collaboration with the FSCD, a key criteria was added, which stated that those with particular skills were encouraged to step forward. Furthermore, those that have completed the programme and have been certified, can then carry out these learned skills as well as extend knowledge to others in the community, thus increasing the capacity of the community.

Government officials received a training that can be seen as having a long-lasting effect. They are generally eager to be trained. Engagement and government accountability is needed for efficient and timely response.

Key Learning/ Take Aways:

- i. Partnership with Govt. Authorities is a key to create wider impacts and sustain it
- ii. Participation of 'City Corporation officials increase possibility of multiplier effects
- iii. Promoting Volunteerism through positive reinforcement make good contribution towards building resilient and sustainable urban communities

Appendix

Model	Technical Partnership
Thematic focus	Urban risk, emergency response, youth, volunteerism
Project partners	Implementation partners: SEEP (Social and Economic Enhancement Programme) Technical Partners: Fire Service and Civil Defence department,
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