

Youth volunteers as educators and advocates on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience: Nobo Jatra transforms youth into role models combating climate change in southwest Bangladesh



“We survive cyclones and tidal surges, it is a continuous struggle. During Aila tidal surges were severe and submerged the houses; women, children and livestock were swept away. People did not care about warning message. People living in the coastline becomes courageous through such fight and loss”, Azizur Rahman, a youth volunteer remembers the loss and damage incurred from cyclone Aila.

Gabura is one of the most vulnerable unions in south west Bangladesh - situated on the bank of the Kholpetua river which separates the union from the Sundarban mangrove forest. Heavy rainfall and tidal waves affect people’s livelihoods damaging homes and crops. Cyclones Sidr¹ in 2007 and Aila² in 2009 literally ravaged Gabura. After the disastrous consequence of the

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¹ Highest wind speed was 260 km/h

cyclones, communities in Gabura realized the need for disaster preparedness and wanted to gain skills, unite and take collective action.

From inaction to more proactive role in disaster preparedness

Youth groups in Gabura comprise 18 female and 32 male members. Youth volunteers receive training and gain in-depth understanding about disaster management; in fact, USAID's Nobo Jatra project has capacitated youth as advocates and educators on ground. After receiving training, youth volunteers then go on to cascade training to households on disaster preparedness. As a result, each household has an action plan about disaster preparedness and through household visits youth volunteers follow-up action plans.

Previously, Union Parishad Disaster Management Committees (UDMC), a structure at the local level were largely inactive. Nobo Jatra conducted a gap analysis in Gabura and found that committees were unable to perform despite local demand. Nobo Jatra went on to facilitate youth to play a role in the reformation of UDMCs through two-days training.

Youth volunteers in Gabura union shared, "we have developed a flip chart with photos and graphs to explain topics with regard to disaster risk reduction. We have used photos of previous disaster, relief and rescue operations in the flip chart because photos helps triggering participatory discussion. The purpose to develop such flip chart is to make it easier for participants to understand disaster management issues. Beneficiaries in the household could easily relate issues noted in card with the photo in the flip chart, therefore, they learn quickly."

As part of their role, youth volunteers inform households how to follow-up warning messages about weather through mobile phones, radio, television and with the committee in the Union Parishad. They inform households about warning disseminating system and the toll free number to call. Critical messages are communicated to local communities, including how to protect water options – so that they are able to use the source after the disaster. *"During cyclone Titli³, youth volunteers were very active; they did raise flag and alert people using siren and hand mike in the union," Johurul Islam, a youth volunteer in the union said."*

Using flip charts, youth volunteers coach households about how to preserve dry food, candle, fire boxes, saline, medicines, and pure drinking water that could save lives during and in the aftermath of disaster. They educate family members on how to save valuable documents, certificates and gold when cyclones or tidal surges are imminent. When great-danger message is disseminated, youth volunteers reiterate the importance to move pregnant women, children, persons with disability and elderly people to safe shelters. Counseling is also emphasized to help people overcome grief, shocks and traumas in the aftermath of disaster and the services available

³ Wind speed was winds of up to 150km/h. The cyclone hit Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and South Bengal on 10 October, 2018.

at clinics, NGOs and local government offices are shared. Courtyard sessions and rallies are the main platforms used to reach communities. Youth also play significant role in the mock drills about disaster preparedness.

Usually seven to eight thousand people gather in a simulation on disaster preparedness and youth



members take part in drama, songs, music, choreography and dialogue in the simulation to disseminate awareness messages about disaster preparedness, response and what to do in the aftermath of a disaster. Youth volunteers arrange art competition in schools where children draw pictures about disaster preparedness, which enrich students, parents and teachers on the issue. Youth

volunteers are actively engaged in the entire process from awareness building at households to motivating UDMC for implementing schemes to arrange mock drill on disaster preparedness in each union.

40 Unions of four sub-districts are ready to combat climate change

Gabura is not the only example. All 40 unions, covered by Nobo Jatra are capacitated to reduce the risk of disaster. All 40 UDMCs developed Risk Reduction Action Plan through Community Risk Assessment process. Twenty-five UDMCs received acceleration fund to implement schemes in 2018. The program provided capacity development training to members of disaster management committees at sub-districts level and members of 40 Union DMCs on their roles and responsibilities, 40 youth groups, 621 Village Development Committees and 52,530 vulnerable community people in disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

Youth in the forefront of Nobo Jatra program for disaster preparedness

Gabura Union Parishad has a comprehensive disaster management plan and army of youth volunteers for rescue, response and recovery efforts. Through youth volunteers the wider community are capacitated; knowledge and skill on disaster management are transferred. Departments of disaster management at the District and divisional level and Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief (MoDMR) have recognized the disaster preparedness plan of the Union Parishad and appreciated role of youth. Gabura, by being situated in the South West coastal district, is the most vulnerable to climate change and youth are taking action to save the islanders.