

Stories of Impact

A series highlighting achievements in disaster risk management initiatives

Strengthening Urban Resilience in Bangladesh



RESULTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- GFDRR's technical assistance supported the development of in-depth research on seismic risk and institutional arrangements around disaster in Dhaka through a consensus-building process involving more than 40 stakeholders from relevant ministries and agencies.
- This laid the foundation for the design of the \$173 million Urban Resilience Project (URP). The URP provided government agencies with facilities and equipment to significantly improve emergency response capacity, as well as institutional resources to incorporate disaster risk into development planning.
- By providing access to improved emergency preparedness and response services, the URP benefited the approximately 17 million people living in the cities of Dhaka and Sylhet.
- The URP established a coordination strategy with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency to support the government of Bangladesh in its new approach to urban resilience and ensure the financing of complementary activities, such as supporting public and private construction by strengthening different agencies.

REGION: **SOUTH ASIA**
 COUNTRY: **BANGLADESH**
 FOCUS AREA: **RESILIENT CITIES**

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world.* Over the years, the government of Bangladesh has heavily invested in protecting coastal areas from floods and cyclones. However, the more intricate issue of urban vulnerability, covering both recurrent and large-scale disasters, had yet to be tackled.

The Urban Resilience Project (URP) was the first initiative to address this issue head-on. This groundbreaking program is the product of a collaborative effort between the government of Bangladesh, the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), and the World Bank. It not only provided key government agencies with state-of-the-art emergency management systems and equipment, but also improved building construction planning, design, permitting, and oversight systems in the cities of Dhaka and Sylhet to build a more resilient future.

Context

Dhaka is vulnerable to recurrent natural emergency events and seismic risk. With nearly 15 million people living in the metropolitan area, 28% of which are classified as poor, and about 350,000 migrants moving to the city each year, land use planning regulations and emergency service delivery have failed to keep up with the pace of growth. Fundamental deficiencies in the emergency management system and the lack of local capacity to conduct search-and-rescue often lead to slow response processes that rely on ad-hoc decision making. Similarly, Sylhet, the country's third largest city, suffers from a responsive, rather than proactive, approach to urban management and development. It is also Bangladesh's most exposed city to seismic risk.

Approach

GFDRR and the World Bank undertook a three-year process to reach a consensus among national decision-makers and technical experts on pursuing a common goal to reduce disaster risk. This complex exercise helped inform all aspects of the URP – a program that provided a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to urban resilience in Bangladesh. Project activities focused on:

- Equipping national and local disaster risk management agencies with relevant response resources, including emergency operations centers, interoperable communication systems to exchange information across agencies, search and rescue equipment, and related training.
- Assessing the vulnerability of essential infrastructure, public facilities, and lifelines to better guide future investments in retrofitting.
- Improving construction practices by integrating disaster risk into development planning, establishing the necessary systems to ensure an efficient process for land use and zoning clearance, setting up a professional accreditation program guided by international standards, and putting an e-permitting system in place to manage new construction.

LESSONS LEARNED

Managing disaster risk and promoting urban resilience requires the engagement of a wide variety of experts.

Previous projects designed to understand and manage disaster risk in Bangladesh have experienced limited success as they focused on individual ministries or only technical experts and failed to consider the larger ecosystem. GFDRR's technical assistance helped build consensus around a multitude of specialists, and connected technical experts to decision-makers. This was instrumental in defining new investments to increase urban resilience. The selected interventions are technically robust, operational, and take into account requirements of a broad range of stakeholders, including local and national agencies involved in disaster response and urban development.

Multi-stakeholder consensus building is a long-term process that requires sustained support. The field of disaster risk management requires the involvement of a wide range of backgrounds. Given the diversity of actors and the scope of the challenge, regular interactions and discussions were critical to ensure a successful outcome. Over the span of three years, GFDRR supported 11 visits of international experts to Bangladesh and organized 60 focus group meetings with senior level government officials and civil society around five thematic groups, addressing topics such as governance and emergency management.

Next Steps

Implementation of the \$173 million URP was approved by the World Bank board in March 2015 and is currently under implementation. The first step will be to outfit and equip national and local-level disaster risk management facilities with an interoperable emergency management communication system. Rolling out the professional certification program will also start to foster a culture of risk-sensitive urban development across Bangladesh.

“The country’s main challenge is essentially to improve the emergency response and preparedness, develop strong capacity to manage risks, and build the country’s resilience to natural disasters.”

—Brig Gen Ahmed Khan, Director General, Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense

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*All figures in US Dollars