

Awareness Continues through Volunteer Sessions

Mymensingh is a disaster-prone city which is mostly under risk of earthquake, water logging and fire hazards. City dwellers are not aware about the cause and effect of the hazards as well as associated risks and vulnerabilities. The Enhancing Inclusive Disaster Resilience Bangladesh project introduced here in 2015 by NGO Forum for Public Health with the support of Oxfam and Mymensingh Municipality contributed to aware the city's people and provided necessary support to develop their resilience against hazards especially against earthquake. Along with some preparedness and mitigation activities, the focus of the Project is to capacitate community people and raise awareness through different types of activities like video show, group sessions, mock drill, drama / role-playing, etc. After the formation of volunteer groups and developing their capacity through different life skills training including URA, search & rescue, psycho-social care, first aid for the continuation of awareness raising among mass level, the volunteers proposed to start different community sessions in their own community on different risks and vulnerability and preparedness measures of disasters. The volunteers faced various risks and challenges identified. They faced constraints such as availing the suitable place, time availability of community lack of session materials, etc. But by getting support from the Project and Councilors they overcame the challenges and organized sessions on different hazards. Relevant IEC materials, white board, fire extinguisher, first aid kit etc were provided through the Project, while the Volunteers gave their time, knowledge and effort, and the community gave their time and space. These sessions are not project prescribed activities but will be largely contributing sustaining sessions reaching to a large portion of community even after the project phase out.

President of Ward Volunteer Group Mr Rabbi (23) said, "As a part of this project we have receiving get different trainings which increased our concept and knowledge about disaster risk reduction and also developed our capacity in taking preparatory measures for disasters. But now it is our responsibility to disseminate this knowledge to mass people. From this viewpoint we initiated community sessions. We would like to thank Oxfam and NGO Forum by supporting us through their guidance and materials which will help us to continue sessions even after the

project period.” Community also understands the importance of these messages and takes the sessions seriously which gradually accelerated mass awareness in different parts of the wards. One participant from Thanaghat, 8 no. ward Razia (35) said, “I saw the fire extinguisher before but did not know its use, but now I am capable to use the extinguisher as well as other easy techniques to stop a small fire.” We hope this community level disaster sessions will be continued by the trained volunteers and the messages will be disseminated within all of the city residents. Thus a city like Mymensingh will get prepared to fight against any hazards by ensuring the resilience at individual level.