

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER GROUP ***Effective Tool for Community Empowerment in Disaster Risk Reduction***

By Moloy Chaki
Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC)

Introduction to the Tool: COMMUNITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER GROUP

The **COMMUNITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER GROUP** is a tool developed to reduce disaster risk through knowledge skills. The specific objectives of the tool are to:

- Develop a sustainable knowledge transfer process
- Mobilize the community
- Promote disaster preparedness at the family and community level
- Enhance community resilience

Bangladesh is vulnerable to multiple hazards due to its geophysical location, and its communities have come to view disasters as a way of life. However, various initiatives last two decades have helped these disaster-prone communities become more resilient. The Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Center (BDPC) has recognized information sharing as a means of bridging the gap between knowledge and practice. Such knowledge is transferred through “Community-Based Knowledge Transfer Groups” in order to enhance the coping capacities of the communities and to sensitize them to the actions they can take before, during and after a disaster or other emergency.



Project Brief / Application of Tool

The BDPC tested the tool through several projects, including the Empowerment of Coastal Fishing Communities in Disaster Preparedness (supported by FAO), the Promotion of Family and Community Level Flood Preparedness Through Public Awareness Programme (supported by DIPECHO), Community-Based Flood Warning System (supported by USAID) and Reducing the Risk of Disaster Through the Promotion of Rights and Governance (supported by DFID). The tool has been successfully replicated by disaster management practitioners in Bangladesh.



Relevance of the Tool

The low literacy rate along with poor socio-economic conditions restricts this community from gaining knowledge through print or electronic media. Under such circumstances, the BDPC has successfully developed and implemented the ‘**COMMUNITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER GROUP**’ as an effective tool in the field of disaster risk reduction to empower community members and provide access to the knowledge required for mitigating risks.

Application of the Tool

The focus of the project is to empower the community and encourage participation of the community through sensitization, mobilization and raising awareness amongst different groups of individuals as well as the community at large. The '**COMMUNITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER GROUP**' has been instrumental in accomplishing the purpose and aim of the project. The tool is effectively applied as follows:

Step 1: Organize and conduct sensitization meetings

In the initial stage, community meetings are organized with assistance from the elected local government representatives and by involving community leaders and representatives of vulnerable groups. In the meetings, community members are sensitized to the goals, objectives and implementation procedures of the project, as well as to their roles and responsibilities in achieving the goals of the project.

Step 2: Identify change agents

During the sensitization meetings, change agents (CAs) are identified by the communities through a participatory approach. These agents then participate in community-based disaster risk reduction planning and implementation. They are people who are trusted, accepted, recognized and honored by their communities, e.g. religious leaders, teachers, leaders of community-based organisations and social workers.

Step 3: Form Knowledge Transfer Groups

In this step, Knowledge Transfer Groups are formed with the help of the change agents.

Step 4: Enhancing capacity of the Knowledge Transfer Groups

At this stage, different training courses are organized and conducted for capacity enhancement of the knowledge transfer groups. These may address such topics as community-based disaster risk reduction and first aid, early warning dissemination and emergency response.

Step 5: Link Knowledge Transfer Groups with disaster management committees

After capacity enhancement, Knowledge Transfer Groups are introduced to local government authorities (Union Disaster Management Committee).

Step 6: Develop information, education and communication (IEC) materials

To ensure effective communication, user-friendly IEC materials are developed for the members of Knowledge Transfer Groups by incorporating disaster risk reduction messages related to specific hazards.

Step 7: Develop a knowledge transfer plan

To ensure that knowledge is transferred effectively, the Knowledge Transfer Groups develop knowledge dissemination plans that target each and every household.

Step 8: Conduct knowledge-sharing sessions at family and community levels

According to their knowledge dissemination plans, Knowledge Transfer Groups share their knowledge by conducting different sessions at the family and community levels.

Impacts of the Tool

One of the main impacts on the communities was an increase in their disaster risk reduction awareness. Through this project, communities were sensitized to disaster risk reduction processes, and community participation made both the community leaders, service providers and village households more accountable. The overall process led to a better understanding of the risks and highlighted the need to make communities more resilient.

Case Study

In 2004, with the assistance of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC) and the Department of Fisheries jointly implemented a project entitled "Empowerment of Coastal Fishing Communities in Disaster Preparedness." The project was implemented in the southern coastal district of Cox's Bazaar. The **Knowledge Transfer Group** tool was adopted to empower the fishing community in the field of disaster risk reduction. During the course of the project, a cyclone formed near Andaman-Nicobar Island on 17 May, crossed the coastal area of the Bay of Bengal between Teknaf, Cox's Bazaar (Bangladesh) and Akyab (Myanmar) on 19 May at 12:00 noon with a maximum wind speed of 85-90 km. During that cyclone period, the BDPC took the opportunity to assess the impact of the project by observing the communities' response in terms of cyclone preparedness.

The aim was to observe the behavioral change in the people and the extent to which the community organized with regard to cyclone preparedness. The actions taken by the members of local Knowledge Transfer Groups and other stakeholders to disseminate warnings are worth mentioning. These included such measures as hoisting a flag to signal the cyclone status, holding emergency meetings and disseminating warnings door-to-door. The case described below reflects how the Knowledge Transfer Groups enhanced community resilience in coping with a disaster.



Feelings of Mosammat Nasima Khatun, Housewife, South Kutubdia Para, Sadar, Cox's Bazaar

I am 75 years old. My eyesight and hearing have dimmed. On 18 May (2004), after hearing whistling and drum beating, and noticing people hurrying about, I became worried and went to the VO (village organisation) president to learn about the situation. As I approached her house, I noticed a group of men and women talking excitedly. My heart froze with fear, as I came to know that our worst enemy, the cyclone, was about to strike us at any moment. I also learned that they were arranging for the issuance of warnings using the mosque microphone. I have been through the cyclones of 1960, 1970, 1991 and 1997. The 1991 cyclone destroyed my house and other assets worth taka, 10,000/-. We are very poor people. Remembering my losses from the last cyclone, I hurried back home and instructed my family members to assemble everything and put the chickens and ducks in a cage so that we could carry them along in case of emergency. We all agreed to take shelter at the nearby CCDB cyclone shelter or at the diabetic hospital if the signal was raised to great danger. We also arranged ropes to secure the roof, windows and doors of our house before we left. The male members of our family decided to move the children and me first. By the grace of Allah, the cyclone did not strike disastrously in our area, and we were not required to move to the shelter. I acted as an old person at the mock exercise in our village. I also learned about cyclone preparedness from Rezia, Anwara, Bilkis and Kanak (CAs) of our village during family level discussions. The amazing part is that during the May cyclone, I was not that frightened. Being in such danger, I know it is unacceptable, but the enthusiasm among the responsible persons in taking preparedness measures at the community and household levels seemed almost festive to me.

