

# Safer Cities 8

Case studies on mitigating disasters in Asia and the Pacific

## Channels of Communication - a Challenge

### Public awareness for flood preparedness in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, rickshaw jams are a common occurrence in the municipalities of Gaibandha, Tongi, Shahjapur and Bhuapur. It is the cheapest common mode of transportation. Most people find themselves staring at rear end of the rickshaw in front whilst commuting to their destination. CARE Bangladesh has taken this seemingly mundane situation and turned into an opportunity to promote flood preparedness through a public awareness campaign. Now, when people are caught in rickshaw jams, there is a 1 in 200 chance of being exposed to one of CARE's flood preparedness messages. Placards positioned on the back of rickshaws carry 1 of 6 messages telling people of the benefits of house raising, tree planting or food storage as flood preparedness actions. This is just one of the public awareness initiatives developed under the Bangladesh Urban Disaster Mitigation Program (BUDMP). The project is a collaborative effort between CARE Bangladesh and the Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Program (AUDMP) under the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), core-funded by USAID/OFDA.

**Tongi** is a small and densely populated urban municipality. It is part of the unplanned urban sprawl that lies just outside the parameters of the capital Dhaka City. Each concrete house bears the stamp of last year's flood levels. Shops have raised ground levels to save merchandise from the predictable annual floods. Annual flooding is part of life for the people of Tongi and calendars showing flood periods hang on walls as a reminder. These floods can not be prevented. The best they can do is prepare for their arrival. The vibrant commerce and bustle of this urban enclave literally grinds to a halt when the banks of the river Turag overflow.

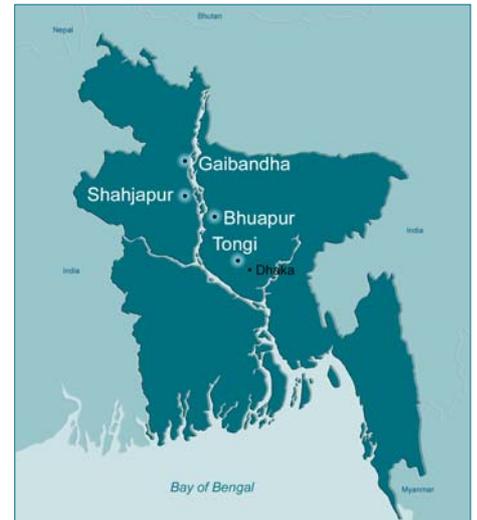


Placards on the back of rickshaws

**Gaibandha** is situated to the far north of Bangladesh. It is a larger, municipality with a smaller population. Life is not easy and people rely on the land, tributaries or the brick factories near by to earn a living. Tree lined, the streets of Gaibandha resemble a rural village. Never the less, there is still a feeling of urban chaos in the main centre where people collide in a jam of assorted vehicles of transportation all attempting to get somewhere to do something. During four months of the year, the mighty Brahmaputra River pours volumes of overflow into the tributaries that meander through this municipality. The banks of these tributaries eventually overflow, inundating the land and the people who live off it.



Streets of Tongi



#### Abstract

This case study describes how a public awareness campaign was developed and implemented by the BUDMP to communicate flood mitigation and preparedness in the selected municipalities of Bangladesh.

A recent field visit raised some vital questions as to the effectiveness of this campaign. Did the messages reach the people? Are people acting upon the messages? Are the messages suited to the situation of the people? What lessons can be learned from the BUDMP experience? This case study attempts to search for answers to these questions.

#### The inside story

- 📁 Why Public Awareness?
- 📁 Developing the Message
- 📁 Channels of Communication
- 📁 Who Received the Message?



## Why Public Awareness?

The devastating floods in 1988 and 1998 seemed to have served as a catalyst for urban flood mitigation activities. Using river soil to raise homes, schools and roads is a traditional coping technique for flood proofing in rural Bangladesh. The BUDMP has adopted this indigenous knowledge to encourage flood mitigation activities in urban communities. Tapping into the available resources, expertise, and labour at the local level, the BUDMP has successfully demonstrated the value of integrating such measures in an organised manner for community preparedness. This was Phase 1 of a pilot project documented in Safer Cities 7. The public awareness program became the main activity of Phase 2, and was launched to communicate the benefits of such flood proofing and preparedness so that communities could become safer.

In compliance to the Bangladesh National Government 'Standing Orders for Disasters 1999', the BUDMP embarked on a public awareness campaign at the community level.

Preparedness can greatly reduce vulnerability within a community. Simple and practical measures using indigenous techniques undertaken at the household level can make a difference to the livelihood security of people. The key is to provide people with the information they need to decide what measures best suit their needs and allow them to make decisions that will spark a change in their everyday lives.

CARE Bangladesh in partnership with local partner non-government organisations (PNGO's), Gano Unnayan Kendra (GUK) in Gaibandha, and the Association of Rural Development (ARD) and Committed organization for Development Extension Services (CODES) in Tongi, National Development Program (NDP) in Shajadpur and BURO-Tangail in Bhupur, embarked on a strategic campaign to attempt to instill a culture of self-reliance and flood preparedness at the community level. In the initial stages of the BUDMP, CARE identified Tongi and Gaibandha municipalities to be significantly vulnerable to the risk of flood hazards.

A Municipal Flood Vulnerability Assessment and a Contingency Plan was developed in Phase 1 of the BUDMP. CARE and the PNGO's collaborated to conduct a baseline study to provide a holistic understanding of the demographic and infrastructure composition of the communities for the development of these two



**PUBLIC AWARENESS** creation is a process used to communicate information, which leads to behavioural change and action at the community level. The origins of public awareness campaigns come from commercial product marketing where the aim is to sell a product, idea or concept. In this instance, the aim is to sell the idea to society that they can minimise their risk and vulnerability through adopting simple preparation and mitigation measures. Simple as the concept sounds, the process of effectively communicating messages relating to a wide and diverse audience with a limited budget and timeframe posed the greatest challenge.

outputs. This baseline study also became a useful source of primary information for the development of the public awareness campaign. A profile of the community was extracted from the information collected. Termed 'audience profiles', these insights provide a window into the daily lives of the people in Gaibandha and Tongi. Audience profiles assist to determine the community's needs, the type of messages to convey, the target audience, and the most effective channels of communication to ensure the dissemination of the message.

The long-term goal of the BUDMP public awareness campaign was to change existing perceptions and attitudes to motivate behavioural change. However, one of the biggest hurdles to overcome was trying to get the message through a barrage of other awareness messages saturating Bangladesh. The skyline is littered with public awareness campaigns advocating or passing on basic information about health, family planning, nutrition, gender equality, arsenic poisoning and HIV AIDS. This is the public awareness landscape in which the BUDMP had to compete with to spread their messages of flood preparedness. The challenge was to reach a broad cross section of an extremely diverse population in two different municipalities consisting of different income groups, occupations, level of education, ages, and gender, all with very different perceptions of their risk to flood hazards.

## Understanding Communication

Communication is a dynamic two way process consisting of a sender and receiver. A public awareness campaign relies upon the effective communication of important information. It also goes beyond the linear process of simple transfer from sender to receiver. People are expected to receive, understand, act upon, and change their behaviour according to the message conveyed in the information. There is a great deal of room for information to be misinterpreted, ignored, and lost. The message can fall upon deaf ears.

*Public awareness campaigners, need to find empathy with the attitudes and behaviours of the audience in order to communicate information to change people's perceptions.*

In the case of the BUDMP, CARE is the sender and the people in the municipalities of Gaibandha and Tongi are the receivers. For effective communication, CARE must understand the community's perception to floods in their everyday lives.

### An Audience Profile



'Begum is 12 years old and she attends the local primary school. She is the youngest in a family of 6 people living in Tongi municipality. She lives in two bedroom concrete house with a tin roof close to the local school. Begum walks to school every day with her friends by the river Turag. Her father is an office worker and her mother is a home-maker. They do not have a TV, but sometimes she watches TV with her brothers at a neighbours house.'



The skyline of urban Bangladesh is saturated with diverse messages

Communities are dynamic, and communication strategies need to be appropriate to suit the diversity of the audience. Feedback at all stages of the campaign ensures the message and the channels of communication are compatible with the community needs. It serves as a form of evaluation for the campaign.

Recognising the need for flood preparedness in the selected municipalities, CARE focused on a campaign that would:

- assist people to become self reliant;
- motivate them to know and understand their rights;
- modify attitudes and beliefs; and
- mobilise available resources for flood preparedness at the household level

### Understand your community

questions to ask ?

Simple questions can provide you with an accurate profile of the audience to begin strategising your public awareness campaign.

Who lives in the community?

What are their day-to-day activities?

Do people believe they are at risk from flood hazards?

Do people know about flood risk in their community?

What do they need to know?

What do they do before, during and after floods?

What are the information gaps?

When can they be reached and how?

Who would they listen to?

Do they have any plans?

Who follows the plans?

Do they think they are well prepared to cope?



## Developing the Message

### Building relationships through existing trust

CARE has a good working reputation in both municipalities. They are currently involved in an integrated food security program funded by USAID/OFDA which links directly with local level flood preparedness due to the scarcity of food during flood periods. In the past, CARE has been well received and recognized for their post disaster rehabilitation work in rural areas. This public perception ensured a vital link between CARE and flood preparedness activities. People will listen to a CARE campaign because they trust that the information provided will be reliable and helpful. Using this perception to build upon their existing relationship in the community, CARE conducted a series of focus group meetings to generate support and share key ideas and experiences with key disaster stakeholders. The group identified pertinent factors to consider before conducting the campaign. Three of these were:

- To develop a collaborative approach to highlight the community's best practices as well as lessons learned from previous experiences
- The need to provide solution orientated information
- To provide follow up mechanisms

The populations in the selected municipalities of Bangladesh have differences, but also recognisable similarities. Identifying these similarities allowed the BUDMP to be replicated in other municipalities.

- Using the rickshaw as a conduit of information, their physical mobility, uniqueness and familiarity to display their messages in both municipalities.
- Art and essay writing competitions at primary and secondary schools with prize incentives for children promotes early vigilance and understanding of flood risks.

### Marketing the Message



How do messages reach the people? Borrowed from commercial marketing and now widely used in public awareness is the term 'channels of communication'. These are media through which messages can be conveyed to reach the people they are expecting to target.

#### Placards on Rickshaws -

Even low-income people like rickshaw pullers extended a hand to cooperate with and maintain the communication initiative



- Drama's and folk songs in public places reaches out to the illiterate people.
- Murals, billboards, posters and brochures become a vibrant visual reminder to the mass population.
- Advertisements at movie houses reach the middle class populations before they watch the movie.
- Official letterhead and envelopes in municipal offices bearing 1 of 6 messages transcend municipality boundaries as a tool of advocacy and promotion of the campaign.

### Developing the Message



Simplicity is the key to a good public awareness message. CARE developed simple messages that relate to the needs of the people so they can link their daily activities to the actions being advocated.



Using appropriate channels of communication will ensure effective message transfer



Art competition engaging school children ensures the message reaches young people

## Channels of Communication

### Volunteerism – direct channel



Direct channels to the community -  
“Young power in disaster mitigation”

CARE’s use of young local volunteers turned out to be an effective strategy to muster interest and motivation in the community. Volunteers were used to conduct household semi structured interviews for the baseline study. Their initial introduction to the community through the interviews established an important link that was capitalised upon in the public awareness campaign to follow. The active participation of the young and enthusiastic volunteers formed a direct channel of communication. The volunteers served as effective conduits of information particularly for the low-income illiterate people. Training volunteers and involving them in the process of public awareness contributes to the potential long-term interest and advocacy of flood preparedness in these communities in the future. They were well received by the whole community and displayed remarkable enthusiasm that was captured and coined as ‘young power in disaster mitigation’.



### Snakes and Ladders – secondary channel



CARE considered children as an important secondary audience that can influence adults.

Capturing the interest and encouraging the active participation of children was vital to promoting real, long-term behavioural change in the community. Using the audience profile of a child, a popular board game of snakes and ladders presented a window of opportunity to encourage children to start thinking about floods and the contribution they can make to be prepared. Begum (see her profile on page 3) and her friends were first introduced to the game at school. It was very popular amongst the younger children. Begum quickly understood the awareness messages presented in the game because they were communicated through a fun and enjoyable medium that she could directly relate. She became conscious of the need for her family to prepare for floods, so she brought the game home to show them what they could do. This creative idea succeeded in literally bringing home the message of flood preparedness through an innovative approach.

Who developed and implemented the campaign?	What were the messages?	Which channels of communication were used?	Who was the target audience?	Was evaluation conducted?
Who?	Says what?	In which channels?	To whom?	With what effect?
BUDMP	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Before constructing houses please get approval from municipalities</li> <li>2. Keep food supplies for flood times and store food on a high shelf during flood</li> <li>3. Raise your homestead</li> <li>4. Plant more trees</li> <li>5. During flood time, use water from water pump</li> <li>6. Put rubbish in rubbish bin</li> </ol>	Rickshaws, Posters, Calendars, Stickers, Brochures, Government letterhead and envelopes, Movie house advertisements, Murals and Billboards, School art and poetry competitions, Children's, Drama's, Folk songs, and board games.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Disaster Managers</li> <li>• Municipal Disaster Management Committee Members</li> <li>• General population</li> <li>• Civil society</li> <li>• Businesses</li> <li>• Religious Leaders</li> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• School children</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">?</p> <p><b>Question asked:</b> No monitoring or formal qualitative evaluation was conducted.</p> <p><b>Were the messages received and acted upon?</b></p> <p>More questions need to be asked to determine the answer.</p>



## Who Received the Message?

Mohammed is a barber. His shop is located on a busy unpaved road by the dyke in Bhuapur. He set up shop about 10 years ago and trims many beards and heads of hair each day. As a barber, he enjoys chatting to his customers and to the neighbouring shopkeepers. Across the road from his shop, just 10 metres away stands a huge blue BUDMP public awareness campaign mural depicting 6 flood preparedness messages and accompanying cartoons. It was erected 8 months ago, but already foliage is blocking its full view. On a recent visit to see how the campaign was conducted, ADPC asked a few local people what they thought about the campaign. We asked Mohammed whether he knew about the BUDMP public awareness campaign conducted by CARE and

ADPC, he shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. When the mural was pointed out, he mumbled that he only noticed it existed about 3 months ago but had never taken any notice of what it said. He added that there are so many of these murals that they all look the same to him. We asked a customer, a wealthier looking man, who is one of Mohammed's regular clients. He also reacted the same way and commented that he never paid attention to murals because there are too many. Other people began to mill around the area, so we decided to ask them if they knew about the public awareness campaign or the mural they were standing in front of. Out of the 5 shops directly facing the mural, not a single shopkeeper or customer knew anything about the campaign.

Similar random interviews were conducted in front of another mural located outside the municipal offices. The three men sitting underneath could not read so never took any notice, and the crowd gathered to the left had only noticed when we pointed it out. Only 2 men could read, but they had not noticed it either.

### Lessons Learned

A lesson learned is to know your community and how they will best receive the message. An innovative idea is useless if it does not result in an impact.



Mohammed sees too many public awareness billboards. He only noticed this one three months ago. He still has not read the messages.



Public awareness murals outside the municipal government building - illiterate take no notice of these messages.

## Lesson Learned



Stingent research and analysis of the community needs to be conducted to know how best to convey a message that people will relate to and act upon.

This realisation raised some pertinent questions about the effectiveness of the BUDMP public awareness campaign. The unstructured, impromptu, and random sample questions were asked to see if the awareness message had reached the people. From the reactions of the random sample, perhaps murals and posters have outrun their value as channels of communication, particularly in Tongi and Gaibandha. Although the rickshaws provided an innovative and unique channel to exploit, there simply were not enough to have a big impact on the community. Rickshaw placards were only relevant to the literate.

*Literacy rates are low in Bangladesh – 40.6%  
(UNDP 2003)*

*Campaign activities need to think beyond the scope of conventional text based messages to reach the vulnerable illiterate community.*

Conscientious evaluation of peoples reactions to the public awareness campaign was lacking in the BUDMP. Whilst speaking to a woman living next door to CARE's flood proofing demonstration project it became clear that the problem was not what to do, but how to find the financial resources to change her way of life. She was aware of the benefits of homestead raising and planting trees, but lacked the resources to buy the soil to do so. This example indicated that some people know what to do, and outside interventions of financial and technical support can assist to meet this need.

On the other hand, public awareness aimed at school children had a greater impact. The activities such as the snakes and ladders game played by Begum and her friends, art and poetry competitions, and teacher training reached their target audience. Children are easily influenced by new, enjoyable and participatory activities, especially if they can express their experiences and relate to the activities of the campaign. The BUDMP successfully reached the child audience and these efforts need be reproduced year after year so each generation can be exposed to the benefits of local initiatives.

## Methodology



Just like commercial marketing and product selling, public awareness campaigns also need to adopt the practice of comprehensive research and the development of good methodology. Research provides the background knowledge and understanding necessary for identifying a target audience, selecting the most effective communication channels, and developing a meaningful message.

The BUDMP lacked sufficient research of their community. Although the community was researched through the results of the baseline study in Phase 1, the information collected did not suit the process of the public awareness campaign.

## Lessons Learned



Monitoring and Evaluation is an important step in a public awareness campaign. Greater emphasis of these processes will ensure further reach in the future.

Public awareness has limited scope. The people of Gaibandha, Tongi, Shahjapur and Bhuapur need a campaign that relates directly to their way of life. 'Learning by doing' strategies such as the structural flood mitigation demonstration projects in Phase 1 of the BUDMP provided a practical and appropriate means for communities to witness 'first-hand' how simple changes can be effective.

Time constraints and a limited budget coupled with lack of guidelines and methodology for conducting a good and effective public awareness campaign contributed to the lessons learned by the BUDMP.



*One message placed on the posters read: 'Unplanned urbanisation is the root-cause of urban disasters'. People on the streets were once again asked if they understood the meaning. Unfortunately no one had bothered to read it. Possibly because the process of urbanisation is beyond their control.*

Future public awareness campaigns can learn from these lessons. It would help to better understand the community by tapping into their daily lives, to create simple, innovative and effective campaigns. Providing people with appropriate and relevant information so they can make livelihood decisions and actively change their attitudes and behaviours can reduce their vulnerability and risk to floods. In Tongi, Gaibandha, Shahjapur and Bhuapur, the next flood season will uncover the real success of the BUDMP public awareness campaign.

## Steps for the Future



This pilot project in developing and implementing a public awareness campaign has led to further initiatives to better understand how to conduct a useful and effective strategy for the future. The BUDMP provided important lessons that led to the development of the AUDMP 'Guidelines for Risk Communication'. The need to assist partner organisations like CARE to better plan a comprehensive research methodology and evaluation led to the recently conducted "First Regional Disaster Risk Communication Course" facilitated by ADPC. Other country projects under AUDMP core-funded by the USAID/OFDA are now beginning to incorporate public awareness and communication into their projects. The lessons from Bangladesh have created opportunities to gain a better understanding of how to use public awareness to reduce community risk and vulnerability.



## Further References

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## BUDMP

The Bangladesh Urban Disaster Mitigation Project was launched March 2000 under the Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Program (AUDMP) of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC). The overall goal of this pilot project is to 'Minimise the impact of disaster on livelihood security of vulnerable households'. Both structural and non-structural flood mitigation measures were implemented in two Phases of this project.



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- Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
- Participating community, municipalities and local NGOs.

## Safer Cities

**Safer Cities** is a series of case studies that illustrate how people, communities, cities, governments and businesses have been able to make cities safer before disasters strike. The series presents strategies and approaches to urban disaster mitigation derived from analyses of real-life experiences, good practices and lessons learned in Asia and the Pacific. This user-friendly resource is designed to provide decision-makers, planners, city and community leaders and trainers with an array of proven ideas, tools, policy options and strategies for urban disaster mitigation. The key principles emphasized throughout Safer Cities are broad-based participation, partnerships, sustainability and replication of success stories.

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## AUDMP

The Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Program (AUDMP) is the first and largest regional program implemented by ADPC. The AUDMP started in 1995 with core funding from USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) until 2005. The program was developed with the recognition of increased disaster vulnerability of urban populations, infrastructure, critical facilities and shelter in Asian cities. In an environment where good governance and decentralization are high in most countries' political agenda, AUDMP aims to demonstrate the importance of and strategic approaches to urban disaster mitigation as part of the urban development planning process in targeted cities of Asia.



AUDMP supports this demonstration by building the capacity of local authorities, national governments, NGOs, businesses and others responsible for establishing public and private sector mechanisms for urban disaster mitigation as part of city management. AUDMP also facilitates knowledge sharing and dialogue between key stakeholders to promote replication of AUDMP approaches to other cities and countries worldwide. Currently, the AUDMP approaches have been introduced and sustained by national partner institutions in targeted cities of Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

## ADPC

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) is a regional resource center dedicated to safer communities and sustainable development through disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific. Established in 1986 in Bangkok, Thailand, ADPC is recognized as an important focal point for promoting disaster awareness and developing capabilities to foster institutionalized disaster management and mitigation policies.

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