



*From **h**ere*  
**I STAND**



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# PREFACE

Bangladesh, the most disaster-prone and populous delta on earth, comes with its own opportunities and challenges due to its geographical location. Despite many hurdles, the country has made noteworthy progress on economic growth, human development and gender equality in the last decade. Yet natural disasters frequently threaten, unsettle and sometimes uproot its development gains.

Women, children and other marginalized groups are more vulnerable to disasters, which aggravate existing inequalities. They are more likely to be poor and less likely to have a voice in expressing their needs and priorities when a disaster strikes. Their limited ownership, control and access to resources and productive assets compared to men drives their vulnerability, along with discriminatory social norms and inheritance practices.

If women are seen only through the lens of “vulnerable victims”, this may exacerbate their marginalization further. Gender-based vulnerability should not eclipse women’s immense contributions as agents of change in disaster

management and risk reduction, including in building community resilience. Bangladesh has been applauded globally for integrating gender equality in disaster risk reduction. UN Women is supporting the Government to promote women’s and girls’ full and equal participation and leadership to achieve real change in their lives.

Currently, UN Women, together with the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office for Project Services, supported by the Government of Sweden and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), is working with the Department of Disaster Management, Department of Women Affairs, the Programming Division of the Planning Commission and the Local Government Engineering Department to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in national disaster risk reduction policies and practices, under the National Resilience Programme (NRP). On Bangladesh turning 50, we present “From Where I stand” – a tribute to the gender equality champions who made exemplary efforts in reducing risks and shaping a sustainable future.



### **ALEXANDRA BERG VON LINDE**

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Ambassador  
The Embassy of Sweden  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

It is my privilege to congratulate the people of Bangladesh on the 50th anniversary of Independence. And also congratulate UN Women for capturing the inspirational stories and vintage photographs of the Champions of gender equity in commemoration of the 50-years celebration.

People like these seventeen champions, who challenged gender stereotypes and demonstrated remarkable power and endurance, have laid the foundation of modern Bangladesh. Today, Bangladesh is acknowledged as a model for socio-economic development, empowerment of women and disaster management and community-based climate change adaptation. The Embassy of Sweden is proud to be part of this impressive development journey, together with its partners in the Government and among UN-agencies.

Sincere appreciation to UN Women and the National Resilience Programme-team who took the initiative to record some of the remarkable stories that make up Bangladesh.



### **MATT CANNELL**

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Development Director  
The British High Commission  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

These powerful photos capture the benefits of the National Resilience Programme. They show how people are less threatened by cyclones, improvements in mental health and women's empowerment. The programme is changing people's lives for the better and it provides a strong foundation for future efforts to enhance Bangladesh's resilience. The UK Government is pleased and proud to work with the Government of Bangladesh, UN Women, UNOPS, UNDP and the Government of Sweden to support the development of this programme.



### **GITANJALI SINGH**

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Country Representative  
UN Women Bangladesh  
Country Office

As Bangladesh marks the 50th anniversary of its independence we must celebrate the progress made on women's empowerment and gender equality. This photo essay captures contributions of women and girls and shines a light on their voice, agency, and stories of resilience. It celebrates their role as gender equality champions. I extend my sincere gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh, the Government of Sweden, and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the British Government for supporting the National Resilience Programme that has shaped the development of an inclusive disaster management system keeping women and girls at its center. We look forward to working together with all our partners to scale up investments to make gender equality a lived reality for the women and girls of Bangladesh.

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# REDEFINING HEALTH AND PRIVACY FOR WOMEN DURING DISASTERS

Life in rural Satkhira in south-western Bangladesh has been a constant battle with nature. For many people, living on the front lines of climate change, survival has literally meant coming out of cyclones and floods alive. Salma Khatun, 36, remembers those days well, exhausted with the extra burden women face. Through many cyclones and floods, Salma recalls going hungry for days. Worse still, menstrual hygiene was impossible, “there was no privacy.”

Salma’s outlook began to improve after she participated in NRP training and mentoring. She learned to stock up on dry food and supplies along with articles for her hygiene, and learning that it is prudent to move to a safer location in time. These simple measures can markedly improve well-being during disasters. Women in her locality know they can now weather cyclones and floods better than before.

UN Women, through the NRP, played a vital role in training women in Satkhira’s disaster-prone areas. Inclusive disaster management is building a confident, empowered and resilient group of people. While there is much to be done to achieve changes in people’s behaviours and attitudes, and extend services to support and protect people, Salma hopes for better times ahead.

**Salma Khatun**  
**Satkhira**





# KNOWLEDGE AND TRAININGS ENABLE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Until a few years ago, Manjila had little say in how to prepare for floods. There were times when her husband would attend community meetings about disasters and she would keenly wait for him to come back. "I wanted to know all about it. I asked him about what happened and what decisions were made." Sometimes he would tell her but mostly he would be annoyed with Manjila's curiosity. "As if I had no business having an interest in such matters."

Living in Kurigram district, Manjila had her own ideas. The district has many rivers, and Kurigram's periodic floods are as certain as the seasons that trigger them. "I could not but worry about my children's health and education, but I was not even allowed that."

With the help of the NRP, though, Manjila has found her voice. While she had instinctively thought that stocking up on some essential supplies would help during natural disasters, programme volunteers during disaster preparedness training essentially gave the same message. Strengthened with the insight and knowledge from such support, Manjila and other

women are now taking the lead in disaster management activities before, during and after natural calamities like floods.

"I always wanted to make a point of stocking supplies like ropes and basic tools, but I was never heard," Manjila says. "I can prepare my own family and alert other families too." Having become more proactive in her preparations, Manjila feels she is able keep her family and her community safe. "I cannot thank UN Women enough," she exclaims.

The trainings have led to a substantial difference in the lives of everyone in the community, making it more resilient while ensuring women's rights and participation. Having become more organized before disasters and understanding the different risks and threats, NRP beneficiaries are now working together on other issues that affect their families, such as poverty reduction, improving children's education and health care for a better tomorrow.

**Manjila Begum**  
**Kurigram**

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With improved knowledge and tools on disaster response, we are promoting resilience for a better future.

Dipali Das  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

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“

I no longer fear cyclones or floods because I have learned to overcome them all.

Roksana Khatun  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

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# TIRELESS CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCATES LEAD THE CHARGE FOR EQUALITY

Equal participation in every aspect of life is the answer to so many problems that women face. That is perhaps one of the reasons that women have such a tough time during natural disasters, says Sanowara Begum from Shah Porir Dweep, a remote island in the Bay of Bengal, off Bangladesh's south-eastern coast.

As a member of a civil society organization, Sanowara says, "As a woman, I could never express my opinion before. Only men decided how we would face disasters. We had to stay indoors where everyone thought we belonged."

As a mother and woman, Sanowara realized she had a bigger role to play in family decisions and disaster preparedness after being trained by the NRP. When programme personnel arrived to train women in her community about a year ago, the community was hesitant at first. Now these women have started to demonstrate visible changes, such as undertaking leadership roles while disseminating disaster preparedness messages along with male community members, raising voices to prioritize women's needs during disaster response and recovery.

Sanowara describes how the first step she took was to educate families. After she received the training, she spoke to other women about the roles they could play. "I later observed that the women were still being discouraged from coming out of their houses," says Sanowara. "This took a lot of convincing, but now I think the scenario has changed."

Sanowara and other volunteers of the NRP were tireless in their efforts to educate the community on gender-inclusive disaster management. Now, whenever Sanowara and other women in her community hear cyclone alarms, they come together and discuss what to do. "If the danger signal crosses five or six, we start taking our community members to the nearby cyclone shelter," she says.

Together, Sanowara and the other volunteers help clean and prepare the shelter. "We try to ensure that women and pregnant women are the first to get to the shelter," she says.

**Sanowara Begum**  
**Cox's Bazar**



## **“NRP MADE ME FEEL THE NEED TO BECOME FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT”**

While prosperity brings financial independence and empowerment, securing a livelihood for poor women in rural Bangladesh is easier said than done. Conservative social customs, religious conventions and general prejudice against women’s education often keep them out of schools, let alone pursue higher education. For those who do go on to become educated, finding paid work and getting cooperation at home is often difficult. Women in general are discouraged from working and encouraged to stay at home. This prejudice is stronger in geographically remote areas of the country most prone to disasters.

Lokkhi Rani from Satkhira has lived these realities. The 34-year-old once spent her days taking care of her two daughters and doing household chores with no scope to find paid work. Her chances for economic opportunities were further constrained by lack of education and a strongly conservative community. Much of her life revolved around what her husband or in-laws decided for her and the family.

But then she came across NRP volunteers and realized she could in fact do a lot more. “I also felt the need to become financially independent.”

The volunteers educated her about the different means to earn her own income. Lokkhi chose farming and has since become an inspiration for her peers in the community. She grows three kinds of vegetables in her backyard and some fruits. “The yield brought me enough profit to support my family,” she says proudly.

The journey has not been smooth. There were taunts and barbs. Some did not like that a woman was trying to earn money instead of doing just unpaid care and domestic work. “I felt uncomfortable when people mocked my family. But I could not give up because of what others thought.”

She put her heart into her small backyard farm and when she succeeded, other women of the community started copying her and are now themselves becoming financially independent.

With an income came better well-being for her and the family. More importantly, a regular contribution to the family budget empowered her to voice her opinion. In a family where she once could not even choose the course of her own life, Lokkhi has now decided that she will put her two daughters and her younger sister through school. She has enough money to pay for their education.

The NRP has helped Lokkhi Rani and many other women like her to stand up for their rights.

**Lokkhi Rani**  
**Satkhira**

“

We keep enough dry food  
in stock to prepare for the  
flood.

Fatema Khatun  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

”







“

We learned the techniques to fight disaster and are now educating the rest of our communities.

Anwara Khatun  
Kurigram

”



# RAISING AWARENESS ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE TO PREVENT DISCOMFORT

Shathi was still in her teens when her family was affected by a flood in rural Kurigram. The family relocated but Shathi was having her period and did not have anything to take care of herself. “There were no supplies at the flood shelter. Nor was there any privacy.”

Limited menstrual hygiene products at disaster shelters, is due to social taboos keeping women from talking about menstruation. Most men are not even aware that such items would be needed in times of emergency.

“This lack of awareness becomes a reason for not just discomfort but even trauma,” Shathi says.

To prevent gaps in menstrual health management during disasters, raising awareness among women is not enough. It is critical to gain the support of men. Since the launch of the NRP in 2018, programme volunteers have been educating

women about their health and raising awareness among men.

“Things are different now. Women and men both received training on how to address women’s hygiene and safety issues before, during and after disasters,” says Shathi. “We were also trained on how to source hygiene products and when and where to stock them.”

Men are now much more concerned about the critical needs of women in their families. They support women more in voicing their opinions and try to help provide for their essential needs. Inclusive disaster preparedness leads to visible changes in people’s lives.

**Jannat Ara Shathi**  
**Kurigram**



 **KCET**  
KALINGA CORONA EPIDEMIOLOGY TEAM  
কালিঙ্গ করোনা এপিডিমিওলজি টিম  
কালিঙ্গ, সাতক্ষীরা।

# WOMEN CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS REDUCING DISASTER IMPACTS AND IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

The physical devastation of natural disasters is often obvious and addressed. Destroyed houses, broken dams and other infrastructure are rebuilt or repaired, albeit slowly and painstakingly. The stress and trauma that disaster victims suffer, however, are less visible and frequently ignored.

Women like Anjuara are now closing this gap by helping vulnerable people both prepare for disasters and manage the after-effects.

Anjuara works for one of 56 civil society organizations trained on gender-responsive disaster risk-reduction and resilience under the NRP. Throughout her life, she has seen how disasters destroy homes, assets, hope and dreams. In talking to vulnerable women in affected communities, she realized the depth of distress this caused. Limited preparedness, repeatedly losing valuables, helplessness regarding health and hygiene – all of these left communities with perpetual mental

health issues that were rarely diagnosed or understood.

In training vulnerable men and women on better preparedness and disaster management, Anjuara knew she could help them become physically and mentally more resilient. She reached out to communities around Khulna during Cyclone Amphan and the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing knowledge about rationing resources and identifying and addressing COVID-19 symptoms early.

Anjuara soon saw how mental health improved as people gained resources to manage their stress. “It was an honour for me to be able to help and stand by our people and provide the mental and psychosocial support they need,” she says.

**Anjuara Khatun**  
**Satkhira**

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Now that I earn and have become financially independent, our family is respected and we have become an inspiration to the villagers.

Anjali Das  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

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“

No matter what people say, I grow my own vegetables and fight against poverty equally as the men.

Shilpi Das  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

”





# CAMPAIGN TO ADVANCE EMPOWERMENT AND EQUALITY

When it was her turn to speak, Jamena Begum detailed her problems to NRP volunteers outside her home in Khulna. The volunteers listened intently. After a while, they suggested to the 32-year-old mother of two little boys that her real problem might be her dependence on her husband for financial security. Because she did not earn on her own, she had no agency or authority over household decisions.

The volunteers go door to door in disaster-prone areas, advocating for women's empowerment and leadership, and explaining how gender-responsive disaster preparedness works. During their visits, the volunteers learn about women's daily problems.

While Jamena understood that the root of her problems was her financial dependence, which in turn prevented her from

making decisions for her family and children, she did not know what to do about it. Training helped her overcome this obstacle and become more self-sufficient and able to support her family. Jamena learned how to start growing vegetables in her backyard and went on to sell them in the local market. "And just like that I was actually earning money that I could contribute to the family."

The other women in Jamena's community have become aware of this and are now gradually contributing to their families too. NRP awareness-raising campaigns have helped women learn about the significance of equality and how it can improve their livelihoods.

**Jamena Begum**  
**Khulna**



## FINDING OUR VOICES FOR AN EQUAL TOMORROW

Women in Rebeka Khatun's community in the coastal district of south-western Bangladesh have never been vocal about their needs during a flood or a cyclone. "As a consequence, our priorities have been neglected throughout our lives," says the 32-year-old. She describes how women like hers, her mother or others in the same community could never talk about their needs during natural disasters.

Satkhira is one of the most climate vulnerable districts in Bangladesh, with frequent cyclones and floods. Ignoring women in disaster preparedness initiatives means that they often live in neglect and misery.



“

I am now confident to  
take on the world.

Sharmin Akter Shimu  
Urban Volunteer  
Rangpur

”





“

The NRP trainings equipped me with the knowledge to provide primary aid to anyone injured.

Munny Aktar  
Urban Volunteer  
Rangpur

”



# GAINING CONFIDENCE TO VOICE OPINIONS AND SELF REPRESENTATION

The local headmaster of a village in Kurigram saw a potential leader in Sultana Razia because of her enthusiasm to help others and her sincere participation. So he asked Sultana to lead relocation efforts during a cyclone, breaking tradition in the rural district where men typically are at the helm of affairs. “I did not let the headmaster down either. I did my job, and I did it well,” says Sultana.

NRP training helped strengthen her confidence. She and other women have become torchbearers in crises. Sultana says that in contributing to preparedness and post-disaster recovery, women in the community hold their heads high and tell themselves that they have helped their community prevent damage and lessen hardship. “We know about stocking up on food and to maintain safety and hygiene,” she says.

According to Sultana, change was possible due to initiatives that equipped women like her with knowledge, allowing them to participate in disaster-risk reduction processes.

Initially, the women were hesitant, but eventually, they felt confident and motivated enough to voice their opinions. Their experiences affirm the value of NRP advocacy for women’s empowerment and leadership in disaster-prone areas of Bangladesh.

The next task was to prompt behavioural change among the men in their communities. That began through conversations with men around understanding women’s needs and what happens when these are overlooked. Gradually, the resilience programme was able to cultivate an unbiased environment that enabled both men and women to equally share their opinions and shape better and more effective disaster preparedness. Both groups have learned in the process.

“Today, this strength of knowledge is enough to empower me,” says Sultana.

**Sultana Razia**  
**Kurigram**





# CRUCIAL KNOWLEDGE FOR AT-RISK PEOPLE REDUCES VULNERABILITY

Natural disaster is always at the back of her head, says Nurjahan Begum. Safety is a perpetual concern in flood-prone northern Kurigram. The 35-year-old mother of two says she has seen women struggling with their infants during disasters. “Mothers with young children are the most vulnerable.”

The NRP is seeking to put an end to those kinds of traumatic experience by helping women like Nurjahan to practice disaster preparedness. Stocking up on food and knowing what to consume during disasters “is crucial knowledge for people like us who are at risk,” says Nurjahan.

Both men and women are learning about gender-responsive disaster management. Now they know that being prepared is

more than just relocating to safer ground. Young mothers and pregnant women require adequate nutrition and food supplies to remain healthy. Armed with the knowledge from their training, the community knows that being prepared and helping each other is the only way to cope with natural disasters.

Nurjahan believes that women in her community have become both more aware and at ease because they know what to do to cope.

**Nurjahan Begum**  
**Kurigram**

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The dignity kit after disaster is no less than a life-saver for women and adolescent girls.

Asma Khatun  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

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Worrying about menstruation health during floods is a thing of the past now.

Roshna Begum  
Kurigram

”



# GENERATING AWARENESS TO ENSURE WOMEN'S WELL-BEING

When it comes to disaster management, responding to the needs of women and children is crucial. But that is exactly where we have been behind, says Suraiya Siddika, a Disaster Management Committee member in Khulna. “Women have been ignored for a long time and to date they remain unheard. As a result, their needs remain neglected too.”

As a committee member with first-hand experience in the field, Suraiya understands that many women suffer from menstrual and other hygiene-related problems during disasters. This becomes even more critical for pregnant women or mothers with infants. Through the NRP, Suraiya and other committee members are broadening recognition that hygiene maintenance is one of the most pressing women's health issues during crises.

“We have worked hard to create equal grounds by generating awareness among women and men towards ensuring

women's well-being,” says Suraiya. “The women received and shared knowledge about the necessities they require, and men were educated about prioritizing and addressing those needs.”

These awareness activities have been fruitful, benefitting many women who then pass on the knowledge to other families in the community. As a result, Suraiya observed that women were much better prepared for the floods in 2021. They helped each other, along with their own families.

“Their knowledge proved to be critical in ensuring hygiene and safety,” she says. “The loss and suffering were much less.”

**Suraiya Siddika**  
**Khulna**



# “I’M HELPING OTHERS SO THAT THEY DON’T SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS MY LITTLE SISTER!”

Zahura has become a unique asset to her family and community due to her dedication and her training as an NRP volunteer. But the motivation of this young woman from Satkhira is a result of deep personal loss.

“I lost my sister when we were just kids. We were stuck in our small house because the entire village got flooded and the water came into our house.” It was more than three feet high and stranded the family for two weeks. Zahura’s sister, only 11 at that time, had gone out to look for food but never returned.

“We found her body a few days later in the flood water,” says 26-year-old Zahura in a broken voice, her eyes welling up as she thinks about her sibling.

Zahura gathers strength from that painful memory. It drives her to be determined, confident and self-motivated. With sorrow in her eyes and commitment in her voice, she adds, “Losing my little sister was and still is devastating. But now I am helping others so that they do not suffer the same fate.”

The only way to protect loved ones is better preparedness, as Zahura learned first-hand. Given the opportunity to become a Flood Preparedness Programme volunteer under the NRP, she joined without any hesitation, completing all the trainings through arduous work and perseverance. Now she knows how to prepare for floods, stock dry food and necessary medical items, relocate livestock and take shelter on higher ground.

Zahura now has a weekly routine of reaching out to families. She shares valuable knowledge and educates them, especially women, on how to prepare for floods. She also actively participates in relief activities and pays particular attention to the care of children and women during crisis.

“I think I will devote my life saving lives so that no one suffers a loss like my family,” says a resolute Zahura, who is perhaps the closest we can get to a human shield against floods and cyclones.

**Zahura Khatun**  
**Kurigram**

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Hold on to your courage,  
be prepared and speed up.

Hiramoni  
CSO Representative  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

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“

Discussions around inequalities, women's rights, women's empowerment and leadership in the 'Uthan Boithok' (Courtyard Meeting) enabled and motivated me.

Sahera Begum  
Kurigram

”



# MINIMIZING LOSSES, SAFEGUARDING LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

Life in the coastal districts of southern and south-western Bangladesh is a constant saga of coping with cyclones and floods. Some people have built their houses several times because of natural disasters. Their memories are full of trauma and pain because these natural calamities not only destroy livelihoods but also lives.

A middle-aged woman from the south-western district of Khulna, Chaina thinks of her entire life as a string of disasters. The 48-year-old mother of three says it was out of concern for her family and especially her children that she was determined to do something for preparedness and prevention. That is what she found in the NRP, which trained her and other local women to safeguard their families and communities.

“I remember the horrors of past cyclones. As a volunteer of the government’s Cyclone Preparedness Programme, I must ensure this does not happen again, and I think with the skills and training I received, I was able to play an active role in minimizing losses from cyclones,” says Chaina.

The training included real-life scenarios, where volunteers like Chaina and women from the community performed role-plays in crisis situations. This helped the women better understand preparedness measures. Trainings targeted vulnerable communities, especially women, and included sessions on how to prepare for a cyclone by gathering food and supplies, moving to higher ground and taking necessary measures to ensure primary health needs.

Chaina and other volunteers can now prepare their own families and alert the community about impending disasters. “I get this overwhelming sense of joy knowing that I am helping people safeguard their lives and livelihoods,” says Chaina. “I feel driven to continue my efforts to help as many as I can.”

**Chaina Begum  
Satkhira**



# AN ADORED LOCAL FIGURE EMPOWERS WOMEN AND SAVES LIVES

Monimala is a familiar face in her community in Satkhira, adored since childhood for being helpful and kind. Now a volunteer for the Cyclone Preparedness Programme, Monimala visits every household with her cheerful smile and plays a pivotal role in disaster preparedness by educating and training women.

Women have always been vulnerable to disasters. But men's lack of interest in involving women in tackling disasters has resulted in entire communities suffering even greater losses. Limited preparedness, little participation and representation from women slow community recovery after disasters, with women suffering the most.

The NRP is training Monimala and other volunteers on appropriate messages and knowledge to spread awareness

and knowledge in their communities. This inclusive approach has empowered women, while their leadership has led to better preparedness.

"I think with our involvement, we have been able to empower women to play effective roles so that they have an equal role to that of the men in their community preparing for cyclones," says Monimala.

Along with saving lives as a volunteer, Monimala, a college student, is also preparing for a career where she can lead efforts to do something for her community.

**Monimala Gayen**  
**Satkhira**

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Amid all calamities and catastrophes, we remain prepared.

Bhaduri Rani  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

”





“

The improved facilities for women in cyclone shelters and our preparedness worked as a safety net in the moment of crisis.

Lipika Choukidar  
CPP Volunteer  
Dacope, Khulna

”





# RESILIENT TOGETHER DURING COVID-19

The inclusion of women in decision-making and gender equality are two major goals of many civil society organizations. The NRP has joined 56 groups to initiate gender-responsive disaster management efforts and advocate for women's empowerment and leadership.

During the pandemic, civil society members played an effective role in ensuring women's safety and well-being. They provided basic knowledge about COVID-19, such as physical distancing and good hygiene, and supplied basic equipment like masks, soaps and hand sanitizers. These activities were crucial during lockdowns and resulted in better preparedness.

Women like Dilruba proactively engaged communities in Satkhira. Besides volunteering for a civil society organization, Dilruba has a job and provides for her family. While the lack of

awareness in her community once left her worried about the safety of her own family, the NRP gave her a platform to help the community in trying times.

According to Dilruba, women have started taking leadership roles and are inspiring others to do the same so they can contribute towards the well-being of their families and the community. Women have learned about risks, helped store food supplies, secured hygiene products, kept their houses clean and always shared knowledge with others on pandemic-related dangers.

**Dilruba Parvin  
Satkhira**



# AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

As a volunteer for the Cyclone Preparedness Programme in Cox's Bazar, Kulsuma has trained women on growing vegetables and other crops in backyards and other fallow land around homesteads. "We have also taught them about food preparedness, reaching out to many families, especially women," she says.

Based on her experience, Kulsuma says women in her community were never part of family discussions because they were not contributing financially. Similarly, they were ignored during local meetings in their communities.

But now, the scenario is a little different, thanks to the NRP. Disaster preparedness training for women has bolstered representation and leadership. Kulsuma and other volunteers provide the training while guiding the community towards better livelihoods and women towards financial independence. Women are advised to grow crops on whatever land is available in their backyards or close to their homesteads.

With proper training, many women can grow their own crops even with adverse weather conditions, sell them in the market and earn for their families. This empowers them and opens space to voice their concerns. Gradually they become equal partners in the household.

"We taught them about seasonal crops and how to generate a profit," says Kulsuma. "We also told them about cultivating different kinds of crops and selling them at markets."

As a mother of three, Kulsuma understands the importance of men being engaged in dialogues to promote women's empowerment and leadership. The volunteers are also raising awareness among men to support their partners so that mothers and fathers can equally build a better future for their children.

**Kulsuma Begum**  
**Cox's Bazar**



“

I always shout out loud to reach the socially excluded people during disasters.

Angur Bala  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

”



“

We prepare for  
disasters in advance  
and keep going ahead.

Md. Abdullah  
CSO Representative  
Kaliganj, Satkhira

”



# HOW CAN MEN ADVOCATE FOR EQUALITY? AN INSPIRING STORY OF SUPPORT

Women in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, suffer due to inequality, and they have always been vulnerable during disasters. “Beginning with my mother, I have been seeing women suffer since my childhood,” says Debashish Dhali from Khulna.

This 36-year-old father of two has a loving wife, Papiya, who contributes equally to the family income. Over the years, he has witnessed a societal transition, women have become steadily more empowered. He is pleased that his wife is so active in looking after the family. Both Debashish and Papiya were trained under the NRP. She led efforts to ensure safety in their community during Cyclone Amphan.

“My wife shares her knowledge with other women, including information she has gathered through training and discussions. She disseminates information on hygiene and disaster preparedness. She advises people on becoming financially independent. I feel honoured to have a wife like her, and I hope more women in our country become empowered like her,” says Debashish.

Along with their disaster preparedness activities, Debashish and Papiya have established equality within their household too. Together they are breaking the ancient tradition that cooking and household chores are a woman’s responsibility. Debashish helps in household chores and there is no job around the house that is beneath him, he says.

Debashish added that the community, although initially sceptical, now applauds his efforts in supporting his wife and her work. Other men in the community have started encouraging their wives to take more active roles too, and women take inspiration from Papiya.

This story is an example of how lived equality makes one feel empowered and empathetic towards others, helping everyone achieve better lives.

**Debashish Dhali**  
**Khulna**



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It is time to fight back  
and take control.

Josna Akter  
Kurigram

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Together we can  
achieve it all.

Beauty Begum  
CPP Volunteer  
Dacope, Khulna

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