

# POUNDS OF PREVENTION

- A Disaster Risk Reduction Story -

*“Pounds of Prevention” is a series of short articles that illustrate how disaster risk reduction works and why it is important. Take a behind-the-scenes look at aid work in action, long before the disaster occurs. How is that possible? Read on!*

## FOCUS: BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is one of the world’s most hazard-prone countries, susceptible to earthquakes, droughts, flooding, tidal surges, and cyclones. To meet the challenges posed by these threats as well as the effects of climate change, USAID, the Government of Bangladesh, and their partners have invested in a comprehensive approach to disaster risk reduction. From hazard forecasts and early warning systems, to community preparedness and mobilization, to training of first responders and climate change adaptation and mitigation, the range of activities seeks to strengthen national and local capacities to lessen, prepare for, and respond to the effects of disasters.

For a country that experiences annual flooding, the importance of timely and easily understandable forecasts cannot be overestimated. USAID, in partnership with scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, has funded flood monitoring, forecasting, and early warning systems to provide critical, location-specific information directly to rural communities in at-risk areas. Likewise, the development of short-, medium- and long-term flood forecasts have allowed farmers to make more informed decisions regarding planting and harvesting.

USAID has worked with coastal communities and the Government of Bangladesh’s Cyclone Preparedness Program to prepare for inevitable floods and cyclones. Efforts have focused on training and supporting the work of local disaster management committees and volunteers, which connect communities and local authorities to information from improved early warning systems. These groups also organize community action in response to disaster alerts, as well as manage and maintain USAID-donated response equipment, such as mobile water purification units, zodiac boats, and water ambulances. The committees have also developed risk maps and contingency plans for their communities.

After Cyclone Sidr in 2007 and Cyclone Alia in 2009, USAID funded the construction of storm shelters with flood- and wind-resistant design elements, such as strengthened and raised foundations. The shelters then served as models for residents as they improved their own homes to protect against flooding. Market access roads, wave protection walls, and river embankments have also been built or improved to keep land from eroding during the rainy season. Likewise, investments in natural resource management and sustainable livelihoods in and around protected areas have helped preserve fragile ecosystems, which are vital for the protection of inland areas in the event of a cyclone.

In addition, USAID has provided funding for medical first responder and hospital preparedness trainings, as well as collapsed search and rescue courses, for both professional and volunteer personnel. Working with the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense Department, for example, USAID has supported the training of both volunteers and professional firefighters throughout the country.

While the people of Bangladesh cannot stop natural hazards from occurring, they can take steps to prevent loss of life, bolster the resilience of communities, and more effectively respond to events when they happen. USAID is committed to helping them do so.



*Disaster risk reduction activities have saved countless lives in Bangladesh. Above, villagers discuss priorities for disaster preparedness, including reconstructing roads affected by previous cyclones, protecting fresh water sources, and improving home foundations. Photo by Robert Friedman, USAID.*