SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND PRODUCTION LINKED TO IMPROVED NUTRITION STATUS, RESILIENCE, AND GENDER EQUITY

STRENGTHENING CAPACITY IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The USAID-funded Resilient Food Security Activity, Sustainable Agricultural Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience, and Gender Equity (SAPLING), has been operating in five sub-districts (upazilas) of the Bandarban District in Bangladesh.

Since 2015, the program has:

- Supported disaster response
- Helped communities gain access to resources and services
- Strengthened GOB initiatives, processes, and decision-making processes
- Built community volunteerism and cohesion

This was possible because of the program's collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), traditional leaders, Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD), and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).

In Bandarban District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, data collected in 2016 for the SAPLING baseline found households experiencing, on average, 2.3 shocks per year. The adverse effects of shocks on a household with low resilience capacity can be long-term.

Many of these households face a recovery period every six months, and are sometimes hit doubly hard within a six-month period. They may not have the resources to recover, and their recovery rates might be slower during these periods.

Formative research found that residents felt incapable of reducing their risk of loss. Indeed, few households had access to preparedness and mitigation programs and were unaware of preparedness measures. Coping strategies largely involved reducing food consumption, reducing expenditures, and borrowing money.

Disaster Management Committees (DMCs)

Disaster Management Committees (DMCs) are government-appointed bodies serving at district, sub-district, municipal (pourashava), and union levels. SAPLING revitalized and strengthened functionality of these DMCs from 2016 onwards. They were trained on Disaster Risk Management, Nutrition in Emergencies, and the Disaster Management Act and are now operational per the GOB Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD). As a result of SAPLING's support, DMCs have since implemented disaster management initiatives in coordination with communities.

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CRS CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

HELEN KELLER INTL

ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER SAPLING

- Red Crescent Youth training at district upazila, and community levels
- Revitalization of 4 sub-district, 2 municipal, 24 union-level DMCs
- Increased membership diversity by including traditional leaders of ethnic minorities in each committee
- Facilitated national-level policy change by successfully advocating with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MODMR) for the mandated inclusion of ethnic minority representatives on DMCs. This was formalized in the 2019 revised SOD
- Vertical and horizontal linkages established among DMCs and other agencies and supported by SAPLING
- Local-level needs brought to administrative decision-making bodies

In the 11 most vulnerable unions, SAPLING also trained the union DMCs to facilitate Community Risk Assessments. They engaged a diverse group of community representatives to identify needs for reducing loss of lives and assets when disaster strikes.

These 11 union DMCs now have published Risk Reduction Action Plans that list community-prioritized needs which the GOB and other donors will fund in the coming years.

CDRTs

In the same 11 unions that are most vulnerable to disaster, SAPLING collaborated with the Bandarban Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) to form and train 99 Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs) at the ward level. The CDRTs support union DMCs by engaging in the RRAP review process, disseminating critical information to communities during times of disaster and providing first aid.

In all five upazilas, SAPLING has also supported the BDRCS:

- **To form and train 2,400 Red Crescent Youth volunteers, most between ages 19-29, including 700 young women**
- **Recruited 777 high school volunteers (433 boys and 344 girls) from 15 schools to form Red Crescent school groups**
- **Incorporated disaster response education into he secondary school curriculum**

Urban Community Volunteers

In the two municipalities, SAPLING collaborated with the Fire Service and Civil Defense to establish a corps of Urban Community Volunteers. Both the BDRCS volunteers and UCV are trained on first aid, and disaster response. They acted as first responders and provided much needed support for vulnerable populations in disasters.

To further support preparedness, SAPLING identified the five unions most vulnerable to disaster in which disaster risk management training was provided to all households. They also provided assistance to develop household preparedness plans.

At the same time, SAPLING engaged over 49,000 participant households across all five upazilas. The households took part in discussions on preparedness measures they could take to protect their assets and valuables before a disaster strikes (including risk mitigation in agricultural production).

To ensure increased access to information, SAPLING also worked directly with the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Lab at the Department of Geography and Environment at the University of Dhaka. Here, the program developed a geospatial model to identify risk areas for flash floods and landslide within five upazilas of Bandarban District. This information aids decision makers in disaster management and supports the collaboration between Dhaka University and the GOB Meteorological Department to pilot a community-led Early Warning System (EWS).

Community engagement

SAPLING trained traditional and religious leaders

on disaster risk management and natural resource management to engage influential social structures in community mitigation and response. They raised awareness and promoted natural resource management during these sessions. Through school-based Forest Management Brigades, SAPLING created opportunities for 280 adolescents to learn about natural resource management.

SAPLING engaged community and leaders in civic participation through volunteerism. The program strengthened available decision-making tools for transparent and accountable government processes to meet community needs.

These initiatives contributed to communities in Bandarban becoming more resilient to withstand and recover better from shocks and stressors.

This document is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Hellen Keller Intl and do not necessarily reflect the view of USAID or the United States Government.