



# Popular Theatre

## for Disaster Awareness and Preparedness

### Disaster Risk Management Programme

#### Our approach to disaster preparedness

well-accepted and taken into practice by the people during disasters such as cyclones or floods. Bearing these in mind and with aim to increase awareness of grassroots communities on early warning and disaster preparedness, BRAC DRM programme and BRAC Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) launched popular theatre campaigns in which holistic messages on coping mechanisms during these disasters are disseminated whilst entertaining people living in disaster-exposed locations.

BRAC Disaster Risk Management Programme (previous Humanitarian Programme) prioritises on strengthening preparedness among communities that are vulnerable to disasters through delivery of critical awareness messages. Effective forms of communication are key for ensuring that the live-saving messages are successfully ingrained into the minds of the people. Integration of cultural and community context into the preparedness measures is also important so that messages are

#### Popular theatre for awareness raising

tailored to meet the local cultural context, sensitivity and dialects to improve the communications of the key messages. These include community awareness raising on disasters' impacts on human life and livelihoods; building community preparedness through early warning systems; post-disaster management to facilitate recovery; and building community resilience against future crises. CEP has years of experience in popular theatre and have teams equipped to perform across the country including the most marginalised and hard-to-reach areas where disaster preparedness messages for flood and cyclone need to be disseminated with priority.

Popular theatre is a form of performance staged in rural areas through dramatics, music and dance. Usually, alongside the entertainment, important social messages including disasters, human rights, gender-based violence and education are delivered to the spectators during the performance. The form of art has been popular and a well-accepted in rural Bangladesh for many decades, especially in remote locations where entertainment is scarce due to lack of electricity. The performances, songs, costumes and scripts of the drama are usually

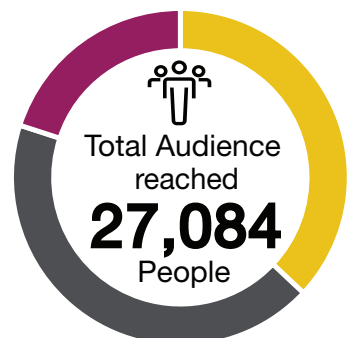
#### Our Achievements

- 🎯 Natural disasters covered: Floods and Cyclones
- 🎯 Number of staged shows: 68 performances
- 🎯 Locations covered: 15 Upazilas of Kurigram, Gaibandha and Satkhira districts.

**37%**  
Children

**43%**  
Male

**20%**  
Female



## Effectiveness

From a feedback collected from a sample of the spectators, the popular theatre has proven to orient the communities with important messages on disaster preparedness.

**98%** of the audience fully understood the drama

**33%** of the audience believe that the drama has raised the level of disaster awareness in their community

**99%** of audience could clearly state emergency items and actions that need to be prepared before crises

**78%** of audience, in average, learned about the negative impacts of disaster on life, livelihood, shelter, asset, and food security

**12%** of the audience said that they learned something new about building household and community-level resilience against disasters

**83%** of audience could state public shelters as a safe place during disaster, especially in cyclone prone areas

**100%** of the audience could describe some form of reliable source of media for receiving disaster warning, among which radio, newspaper, and warning flags are most popular

## Good Practices

**Two-way communications:** Popular theatre scripts are developed in a way that allows actors and performers to directly communicate with the audience through questions and opinion sharing. Often the mechanism includes asking decision-making questions such as what character should pack as dry food or if character should be staying home or going to cyclone shelter. In this engaging way, audiences' information processing capacity and real-time feedback can be collected by the performers. The two-way dialogues with characters live from the stage

makes the audience feel engaged, entertained, and included in the performance.

**Community inclusion:** BRAC's popular theatre performances includes community people as singers or actors. Rehearsals and shows are put on with active participation and contribution of these members which in turn gives rise to ownership and leadership among the performers to continue spreading important messages in the community. Through them, core message dissemination and awareness raising continue to take place within the community even after the performances are completed by BRAC. Including them in the performances also improves dialect delivery, and improvises on contextualising the script according to local culture and acceptance.

## Way Forward

Popular theatre deemed to be a very effective tool for communicating live-saving disaster preparedness messages to communities living in cyclone and flood prone areas. Currently, DRMP is widening its reach and collaborations with popular theatre teams across additional flood and cyclone prone districts, through centrally crafted scripts. The newly improved drama plans address cross-cutting issues such as gender inclusivity, child protection, participation of persons with disability, technology-based innovation, prevention of post-disaster disease

outbreak, youth's role in disaster risk reduction and more. These upgraded scripts are also integrated with crucial messages on the health guideline for COVID-19 prevention measures.

DRMP will expand its popular theatre activities to hard-to-reach haor (wetlands) areas. There are gaps in knowledge and people lack the capacity to cope with recurring and frequent disasters such as flash floods and lightning. Through popular theatre shows, DRMP intends to effectively raise awareness among the people, and help them cope with the challenges of living in these remote locations.

BRAC Disaster Risk Management Programme is focused on building resilience across vulnerable communities and provides holistic humanitarian support to the people affected by both natural and human induced disasters, by working alongside government and other humanitarian actors.

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