



Photo Credit: Bangladesh Fire Service & Civil Defence

SHIFTING PARADIGM:

How PEER has Transformed Disaster Training and Approaches in Bangladesh



Dhaka is no exception to the hustle and bustle of any metropolis. Only the sheer volume of activity is amplified in the megacity. Although the capital occupies 1% of the country's total land area, it houses 22.4 million people (approximately 13% of the national population).¹ The garment industry stands out as the greatest contributor to everyday commuter traffic, employing over 4.4 million people and aggregates over \$30 billion in revenue.

However, the industrial boom has only been a phenomenon of the past decade with an 80% rise in revenue over the last eight years.² Leading analysts conclude that better labor regulations and safety conditions have made Bangladesh an attractive option for international labels.

A working environment that prioritizes its employees' safety has taken shape in the aftermath of tragedies. The most notable disaster incident in recent times was the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013. In less than two minutes, the disaster took more than 1,100 lives and injured 2,500 workers.³

Human-induced disasters like Rana Plaza reap havoc in seconds. Mr. Momen is a Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) first responder who believes that hope can be salvaged amongst the rubble.

"We arrived at the site with four teams and immediately assessed that we would need to recruit a larger number of emergency responders in the coming days."

Mr. Momen is one of the thousands of emergency responders who have benefited by the Program for Enhancement of Emergency Response (PEER) supported training courses. The program has ensured that these integral lessons are incorporated into national curriculum for more holistic training. The community volunteers across the nation have amplified immediate response to disasters from both human-induced and natural hazards.

¹ Minhaj M & Atonu R. Travel mode choice preferences of urban commuters in Dhaka: A Pilot Study. International Growth Centre. 2012. Available at: <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Rabbani-and-Mahmud-2012-Working-paper.pdf>
• <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/20119/dhaka/population#:~:text=The%20current%20metro%20area%20population,a%203.56%25%20increase%20from%202019.>
• <https://borgenproject.org/garment-industry-in-bangladesh/>

² Bangladesh: garment industry's share of total exports 2020. Statista. Accessed August 24, 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/987683/bangladesh-garment-share-total-exports/>

³ Dana T. Why Won't We Learn from the Survivors of the Rana Plaza Disaster? The New York Times. April 24, 2018. Accessed August 24, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/24/style/survivors-of-rana-plaza-disaster.html>

- ▼ Fire Science & Occupational Safety Course participants in FSCD compound



- ◀ Mr. Md. Abdul Momen is the Assistant Director (Training), FSCD, Directorate, Dhaka. He is also the Coordinator of Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) supported Medical First Responders (MFR) / Collapsed Structure Search and Rescue (CSSR) Technical Curriculum Review Group / TCRG.

Making Disaster Response a Unified Effort – THE PEER FSCD PARTNERSHIP

Bangladesh is highly exposed to a multitude of natural hazards like floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, tropical cyclones, and droughts because of its low-lying geographic location, including situated in a highly seismic zone.

The paucity of trained disaster responders has further emphasized the need for a disaster response program that will help to build disaster-resilient communities. In this context, Bangladesh joined PEER in 2003 and has been a part of subsequent stages of the program.

PEER started its journey in Bangladesh under the leadership of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) as the nodal ministry. The FSCD under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) put the institution in an optimal position to collaborate with the Department of Disaster Management (DDM) and MoDMR.

The FSCD is a service-oriented first responding government organization of the People's Republic of Bangladesh under the MoHA. It was established by the Bangladesh government in 1981 with – ***the mission***

*'To protect and save lives and property
for a safe and secured Bangladesh'*

The FSCD prevails with – ***the vision***

*'To acquire competency as one of the leading firefighting
and disaster management organizations in Asia'*

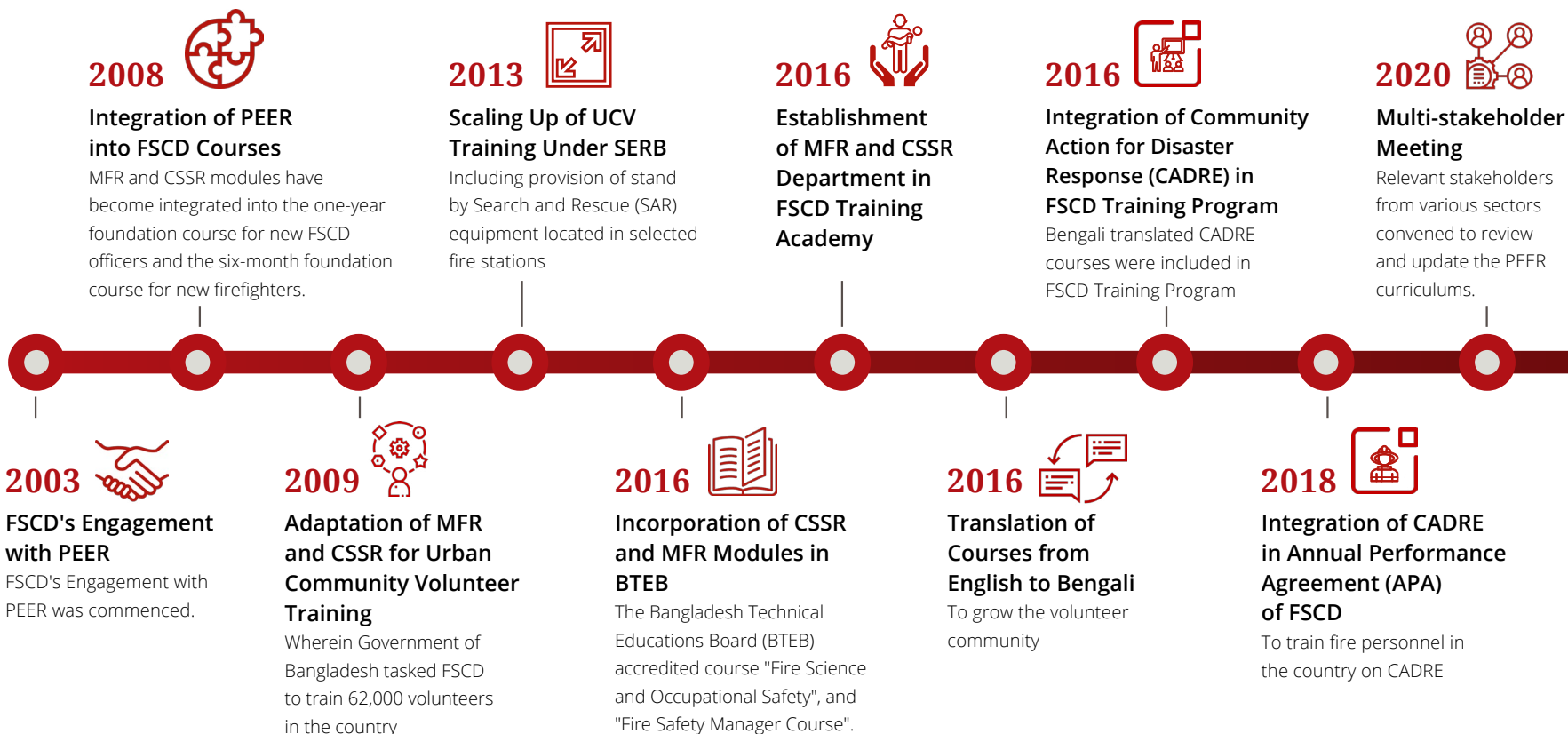


Bangladesh was inducted in PEER in 2003 during Stage 2 together with India, Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines. DDM led PEER Bangladesh as the nodal agency and FSCD as the foremost implementing institution.

Furthermore, united efforts between the FSCD, DDM, and MoDMR have proliferated to PEER collaborations with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), National Institute of Preventive & Social Medicine (NIPSOM), and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).



▼ Key Milestones in PEER Institutionalization



PEER KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE

Rampant urbanization with evolving industrial structures have propelled industrial growth in Bangladesh, especially in mega-cities like Dhaka. However, the high concentration of industrial structures in a densely populated city and the lax building regulations result in frequent fire accidents and building collapses, leading to many untimely yet potentially avoidable deaths.

As the government-mandated first responding organization, FSCD played the leading role in the response operation of these accidents.

Mr. Momen, recalls that he had never witnessed a disaster with the voracity as Rana Plaza – “We had made our way to the fourth floor when we were informed that it might prove risky to try to attempt a rescue mission.”

His team was exiting the premises when they heard a man crying for help. “I realized he was stuck on the sixth floor. We had to execute the utmost caution as there were 20 to 30 people under him. We were able to provide them with saline drink through a hole near one of the rods until we were able to rescue them.” The team saved more than 40 people that day.

First responders must maintain their composure when faced with time-sensitive emergencies. The uncertainty of these developing events creates further hurdles in their mediation. By combining knowledge with practical experience of trainers from different countries, PEER courses were the first of their kind to address these issues and to broaden the outlook of FSCD responders on response operations. PEER engagement was one of the key catalysts in FSCD operations - both in capacity building and actual responses.

The Spectrum Garment building collapse of Palashbari in 2005 witnessed the death of 70 workers and 100 injured. FSCD was able to intervene more effectively because of the SAR and First Aid equipment that they received from PEER. Such provisional support was provided for MFR and CSSR courses several times between 2004 and 2008.

▼ Basic First Aid Training course



PEER trainees support numerous disaster events including the fire incidents at the FR Tower in Banani, Dhaka on 28 March 2019. Of the 80 to 90 officials deployed from various fire stations, approximately 10 PEER instructors and 15 urban community volunteers were on sight. They were all participants of the Advanced Refresher Training by SERB. The instructors and volunteers assisted in crowd control, water source searching, collecting water, and water supply pipefitting.

We were able to act more efficiently with the PEER knowledge. The emergency equipment supports the method of our mission and we were able to intervene with much greater ease.

Mr. Mohammad Mamun, Deputy Assistant Director of the FSCD, reflected on PEER's support during the 2005 collapse.

PEER, HOPE South Asia, and Strengthening Emergency Preparedness and Resilience in Bangladesh (SERB) are United States Agency for International Development Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID BHA) supported programs that have proven their effectiveness in the national disaster landscape. They have stimulated the demand for further training, capacity development, and engagement by various partners in Bangladesh. Such trainings include refresher and advanced training at a broader country level to engage the local levels. Additionally, partners have recognized the benefits of implementing various training and capacity development programs to improve the life-saving skills of emergency response professionals. Such realization includes acknowledging the proficiency levels of trained emergency responders through USAID BHA's assistance. The quality of training is evident in reported operations skills of more lives saved during response and evacuation.

ADPC planned interventions and activities will help to scale up and scale out strategies into high-risk zones and districts while addressing underlying issues of institutionalization. PEER will continue to build upon the successes of the previous and ongoing programs of ADPC in Bangladesh, particularly the programs supported by USAID BHA. Expanding the scope of the program will be made possible by leveraging the cooperation established with key stakeholders including actively engaging the partners in the ongoing and previous phases. The institutionalization process will greatly benefit from harnessing the high capacity development among training participants and instructors during previous and ongoing programs as well as providing avenues for them to connect. Further refinement of the established and acknowledged processes, protocols, and systems at sub-national and local levels will ensure that the training will be effective and relevant while establishing and maintaining national and international standards.

▼ Fire Safety
Management Course

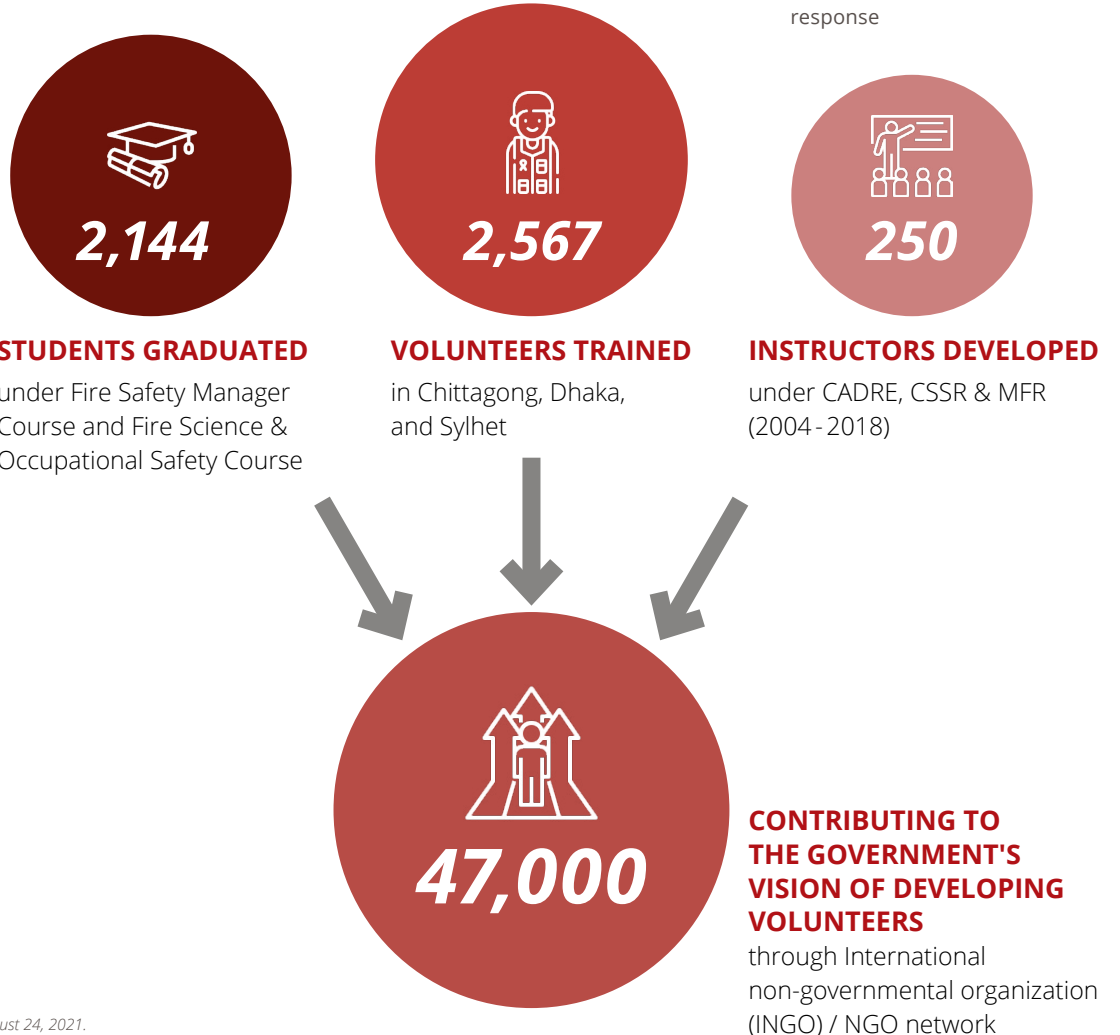


Experience has guided FSCD in the evaluation of the training curricula. The primary objective of the FSCD was to train urban community volunteers to act before the event of a massive earthquake, enabling volunteers to work with the FSCD team in a complementary manner.

Earthquakes are the second most probable disaster in Bangladesh (9.2 out of 10), only after floods.⁴ The FSCD realized that volunteers have no experience or knowledge of firefighting. Awareness of fire incidents has become even more crucial as the number of these events has risen by 22.5% to 24,074 between 2019 and 2020.⁵

The capacity to fight fires takes time to cultivate. FSCD integrated a short lesson on 'search and rescue' into the three-day urban community volunteer training. The session concentrates on how volunteers can support the fire service to make the FSCD actions more efficient. They are now able to provide basic and advanced levels of training; the higher level course is for those who live near the fire station. They instruct participants on firefighting systems and provision of psycho-social support to disaster affected communities.

⁴ Risk Index of Natural Disasters in Bangladesh for 2021, by Type. Statista. Accessed August 24, 2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/987683/bangladesh-garment-share-total-exports/>
⁵ Muntakim S. Record number of fires last year: 24,074 incidents, Tk 330cr loss. The Daily Star. February 10, 2020. Accessed August 24, 2021. <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/fire-incidents-spike-1865701>



Strengthening in Scale:

THE PEER CURRICULA EXPANSION IN BANGLADESH

FSCD is striving to adopt a more sustainable approach in capacity building and disaster response by institutionalizing PEER. FSCD has garnered substantial achievements in PEER institutionalization in the last 20 years.

In PEER stage 5,⁶ the concept of PEER institutionalization is grounded in the nine conditions, representing a comprehensive process for institutionalization.

These conditions provide a framework with critical entry points in each of the nine condition for nodal agencies and implementing partners to consider in planning PEER institutionalization interventions in the countries. PEER has devised a standardized assessment tool to review the status of institutionalization through which measurable and sustained human and institutional capacities in the countries are identified. Utilizing this assessment tool, the FSCD presented major highlights of their institutionalization journey in the Regional Program Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting, held on 4 August 2021.



▲ Strengthening Institutional and Technical Capacities – Highlights from the Institutionalization Process as of December 2021

⁶ Program for Enhancement of Emergency Response (PEER-5) in South Asia Brochure. ADPC. June 2021. <http://www.adpc.net/igo/contents/Publications/publications-Details.asp?pid=1699#sthash.USF2Euds.dpbs>

Quest for Quality:

ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION

As an integral part of PEER institutionalization driven to maintain quality and excellence of education and learning, institutions and programs accredited by official accrediting bodies and professional associations demonstrate that an institution operates according to established qualifications or standards. It also emphasizes quality assurance and a commitment to continuous standard enhancement.

Accreditation and certification of PEER courses have also been pivotal for FSCD. Their members' participation in PEER training has motivated them to introduce MFR and CSSR to their one-year diploma course. The Postgraduates Diploma in Fire Science and Technology was inaugurated in 2020 suitable for the FSCD and other fire fighting professionals under the board of the National University. Students can take these eight-credit courses during their first and second semesters. The collaborative efforts of relevant stakeholders have expedited PEER's curriculum for first responders with a recognition of its relevance in both academia and practical skills.

Mr. Mamun, distinguished PEER as more than just a supporter of their rescue mission –

PEER's lessons have become an integrated curriculum in the one-year foundation course for new FSCD officers and the six-month foundation course for new firefighters since 2008. We have taken the materials for the rescue course from CSSR and the first-aid from MFR.

The training curricula under PEER were designed in a manner to be adapted and disseminated with relevance to the local context. The CSSR courses were specifically conceptualized for the development of volunteers in Bangladesh. The training was recognized and provided by the Government of Bangladesh.

The training eventually became a component of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP) of the government. Additional support from various donor agencies, international non-governmental organization (INGO) have led FSCD to train 30,000 volunteers under PEER.



The FSCD started developing a three-day CSSR course that introduces urban community volunteers to the key lessons of the curriculum. The success of the course has led the FSCD to recruit 250 instructors for CSSR and MFR between 2004 and 2018.

A key milestone for CSSR and MFR was that the Bangladesh Technical Education Board incorporated the lessons from these curricula into their accredited six-month course - 'Fire Science and Occupational Safety' in 2016. The course takes 50 students for each batch and is currently running its eleventh batch. Total 1,100 students have graduated under these courses.

Being able to recognize PEER officially in the form of training or curriculum adds to the values of regional cooperation. But it is essential for national institutions to formally recognize it within their systems. Development of instructors needs to be adopted to the national standards of the country. In the short term, national partners and ADPC together can chart a way forward to support and ensure the sustainability of PEER.

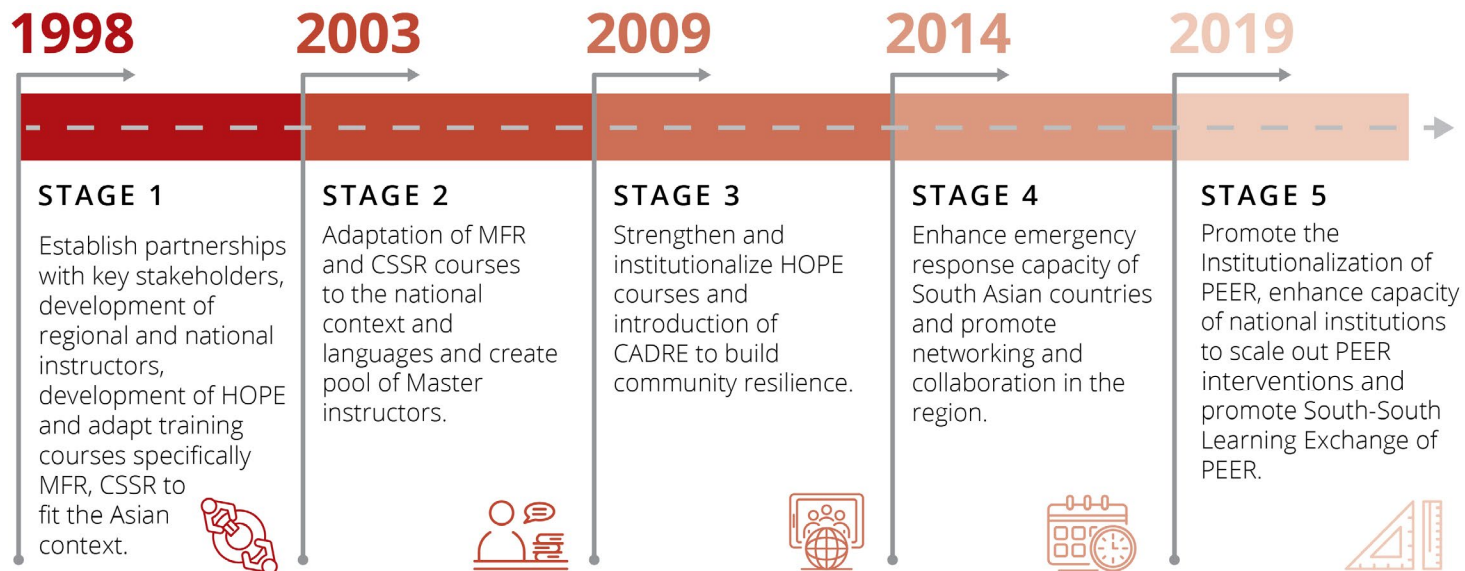
Hans Guttman

Executive Director, ADPC
 chairing the PEER Regional Program
 Advisory Committee Meeting on 4 August 2021.



Photo Credit: ADPC

THE PEER STAGES 1998 – 2021



Community of Practice:

CREATING A CULTURE OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING

MoHA and MoDMR have been instrumental in supporting the FSCD's institutionalization of the PEER courses. The officials under the FSCD have constantly worked towards PEER institutionalization and continue to promote the expansion of the course.

FSCD officials have conducted meetings with master instructors to facilitate experience sharing. Country planning meetings have also been organized to keep relevant actors engaged in these activities.

Furthermore, the PEER instructors of FSCD conducted regional network meetings and organized an email group for updating information about the course. The institute understood that improvement is a never-ending process. With this in mind, they arranged instructor's conferences to improve the training materials through collective perspectives and feedback. Progress and evaluation are synergistic. PEER has provided FSCD with database development training to collect and input PEER database to monitor its impact.



Photo Credit: fireservicestraining.gov.bd



Photo Credit: fireservicestraining.gov.bd

I have trained 22 urban community volunteers as a fireman and assistant fire manager. My career proves the effectiveness of PEER. Following the completion of the course, I became more qualified for my current job. I use my story to inspire others to join the course.

Mr. Abdur Rahim

has grown from student to leader. He is a volunteer of the Fire Service and Civil Defence, Mohammadpur station. Mr.Rahim was a student of the first batch of the Fire Safety Course. The volunteer acquired skills related to search and rescue mechanisms and medical first aid specifically for fire incidents.



Since 2002, the FSCD's engagement with PEER has garnered support from the government agencies, ministries, and international and national non-governmental organizations. The FSCD's Training Directorate continues to partner with PEER through its advanced stages of institutionalization. The reach and impact of these concerted efforts were evident during the national country meeting in February 2020.

The event included government organizations, INGOs, NGOs, district civil surgeons, district relief and rehabilitation officers (DRRO) from Bandarban and Rangamati, and the private sector from Cox's Bazar. The meeting identified the pertinent need to review and update PEER curricula on HOPE, CADRE, MFR, and CSSR. The DDM formed the TCRG to review and update the curriculum of the existing course between June 2020 and February 2021.

The process was orchestrated through desk review, series of consultations with the national and regional experts. The DDM subsequently organized a validation and endorsement of the updated contents with technical support from ADPC. Government organizations, INGOs, TCRG members, National Curriculum Standard Advisory Committee (NCSAC) members, and the World Health Organization (WHO) participated in the validation and endorsement meeting for their feedback which is now being incorporated.

Equipped Through PEER – **TAKING THE FSCD FORWARD**



▲ Trainees from Fire Safety Management Course

The PEER training is taking on a broader institutional role across Bangladesh. The PEER Curricula are designed to be replicable to cascade its knowledge to all responsible actors. The FSCD has initiated a two-day fire safety training for private sector with PEER Modules for 25% of employees in national industries. Such training has expanded to the army, police, media, and other organizations.

The FSCD is currently providing two types of professional training for the private sector workers in garments, factories, and industries. The Fire Science and Occupational Safety and Fire Safety Manager course in 2016 are six-month courses that have been running since 2016 and the latter has trained over 1,000 persons. We have two batches in Chittagong and four in Dhaka. Participants are procuring jobs as fire safety managers following these courses. In 2012, the department trained 24 members of the 14 Engineering Brigade of Bangladesh Army – a department of the Bangladesh Army that is responsible for disaster management - with several PEER curricula used during the two-month term. The training sessions included captains, lieutenants, and majors, and participants who were enabled

with the knowledge and practices to train other departments. The 14 Satrantra Engineering Brigade also cooperated and applied the training during the Rana Plaza incident response.

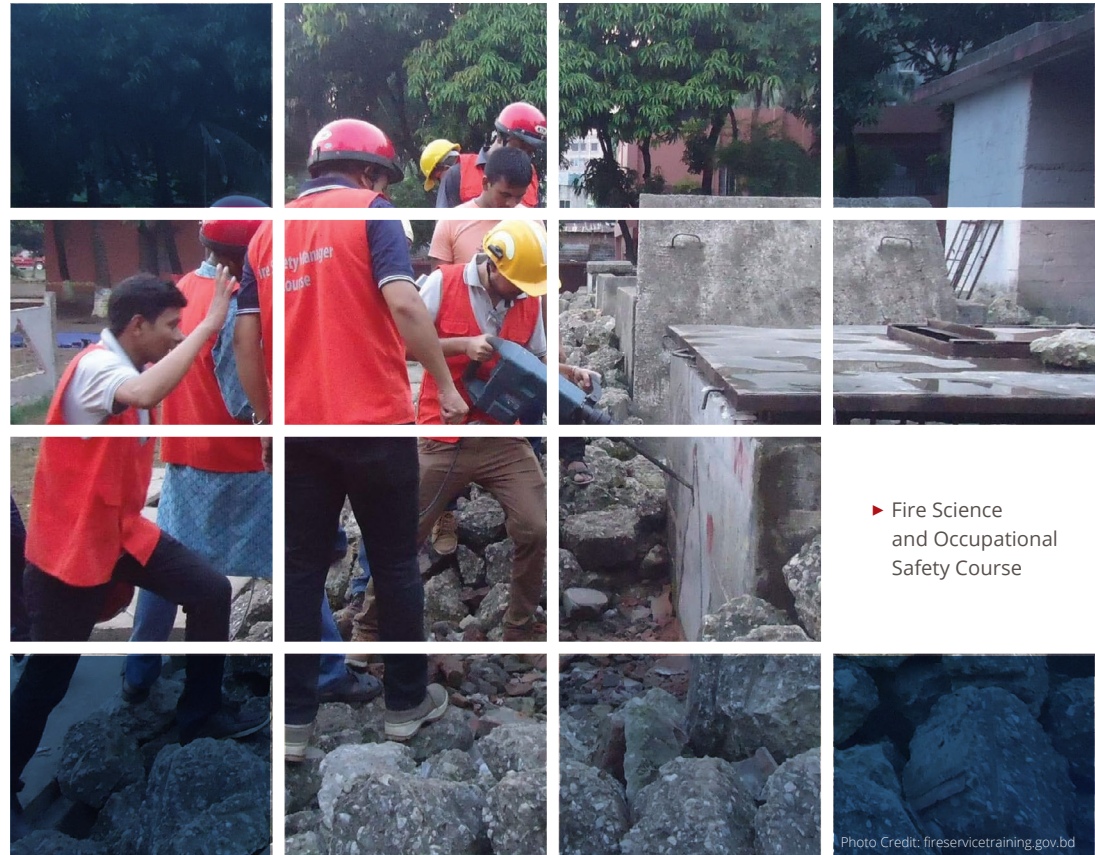
The success and recognition led the FSCD to introduce many courses such as Marine Safety, International Rules and Resolutions, and Landslide Management with the incorporation of PEER content. The program's curriculum has motivated FSCD to build change on multiple platforms and forums with the optimism that everyone can be a changemaker. The FSCD developed an instructors pool for the landslide course to the hilly areas of Chittagong and books for children on disasters that have been accredited by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

The Nepal earthquakes of 2015 became a turning point for disaster interventionists in Bangladesh. Mr. Babul Chakraborty, Principal of the FSCD training complex, identifies the 2015 disaster as a presage for amplifying their work, "We translated the courses from English to Bangla with the vision of a growing volunteer community"

The pilot course using locally translated training materials adapted from PEER started with 19 batches in Sylhet. FSCD received support from international and national NGOs such as Action Aid, BRAC, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh, Save the Children, Oxfam International, Plan International Bangladesh, and CARE that led to developing 47,000 urban community volunteers in Bangladesh.

Understanding the courage in the everyday work of frontline emergency responders is the foundation to support their work. Courses such as the CSSR and MFR have bridged gaps between the FSCD and the general population. Approaches to disaster management are rather complex and sometimes perceived as hesitancy or disinterest to act. The courses have addressed these misunderstandings and trepidations which have allowed the FSCD to expand the training across the country.

The training has reached 200 volunteers for every ward in three vulnerable megacities (Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet), and 200 volunteers for the main fire stations in seven cities (Dinajpur, Bogra, Tangail, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Cox's Bazar). The FSCD strives continuously to create a larger community of first responders and urban community volunteers with the training courses and concepts stemming from the knowledge and methods of PEER. It has submitted a project for the year of 2022 with a budget to create 100 volunteers for 427 fire service stations towards a target of developing 62,000 volunteers.



► Fire Science and Occupational Safety Course

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNT

from PEER institutionalization

— The PEER endeavors for institutionalization proved to be very time-consuming as it was not a core mandate of the respective partners. Therefore, these partners have no allocated funds or resources for the institutionalization process. The challenges to achieving institutionalization go beyond the capacity of these partners.

Bureaucratic processes are prolonged as partners such as the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP), DDM, FSCD, MoDMR, and NIPSOM are not the authorities to accredit these courses. Moreover, these processes experience unsteady progression as the respective government officials and focal persons are frequently changing.

PEER Phases 1 to 4 (1998 - 2019) focused on capacity building. Institutionalization was only introduced during Phase 5 of the program. The new concept has introduced challenges in the context of familiarizing PEER partners.

PEER believes that challenges provide insight towards the way forward. Institutionalization is a time-consuming process. Nevertheless, the progression from capacity building to institutionalization is an opportunity to strengthen institutions on the culture of preparedness.

PEER also advocates that creating a sense of ownership is pertinent. When partners become a stakeholder and executor of the institutionalization process, it expedites the process. Mobilization is required on a broader spectrum for implementation. With this consideration, PEER comprehends the need to engage accreditation authorities. Moreover, accreditation is essential in introducing an affiliated credential system that is subsequently followed by eligible institutes and academia.



◀ Ms. Marcia Bernicat, Former United States Ambassador in Bangladesh, in equipment handover ceremony with FSCD volunteers



Photo Credit: firetraining.gov.bd



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