

Schoolchildren as disaster preparedness ambassador

UNB, Dhaka

The dream of 10-year-old Tasfia Sultana to sit for the primary school examination from a non-formal school in Cox's Bazar was about to be shattered after a nor'wester blew over her area in March this year.

Mohseni para Shikhon School was built in a disaster-prone area of PM Khali Union in Cox's Bazar Sadar in 2013. It was completely destroyed by a mild storm on March 22, putting the future of Tasfia and 33 other disadvantaged children into trouble.

However, the local community rebuilt the school and brought the dreams of these underprivileged children back on track. This time the schoolchildren applied some techniques they were taught under the "Learning resilience: institutionalising school disaster management (SDM) in the education sector in Bangladesh DIPECHO-VIII."

"The community people, guardians, students were all stunned by the incident. I tried to continue their studying in my own yard, but scorching summer heat under the open sky did not allow them to continue," school teacher Monowara Begum told the news agency.

Facing such a situation, she said members of the school management committee collected donation from the community and rebuilt the school at a cost of Tk 10,000, making it a disaster-resilient one.

The schoolchildren have applied the knowledge they gained from the disaster preparedness programme of DIPECHO - a programme supported by the EU's humanitarian aid and civil protection operations - to cope with cyclones and storms. Save the Children has been working with the government to implement the programme.

These schoolchildren are now working as ambassador of disaster preparedness in their localities. They disseminate the knowledge they gained from the school among their family members and community people as well.

"We have learned a lot about what should be done before and after a cyclone. And we all disseminate the lesson of disaster preparedness we learned," said Tasfia Sultana.

Explaining the meaning of red flags shown before a cyclone, she said when a red

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flag is hoisted, the information will have to be disseminated that a cyclone is coming.

"When two red flags are hoisted, there will be a danger signal where all should take shelters at their homes. And when three red flags are lifted, that will be a signal for extreme danger and all should take shelter at cyclone centres or other safe places," said Tasfia.

They applied their disaster preparedness knowledge before the tropical cyclone Roanu that hit Cox's Bazar on May 21, and they contributed to minimising the losses on the aftermath of the natural disaster.

"When we heard that Roanu is coming, we ran around the village and asked the villagers to take shelters at cyclone centres," said Shahabuddin, a primary school dropout who later joined Mohseni para Shikhon School.

Dr Abul Kalam, a community leader, said the role of the schoolchildren in disaster preparedness is commendable as they are contributing to minimising disaster aftermath.

Around 6,000 children are now well informed about cyclone as they learned lessons under the school disaster management (SDM) programme, said DIPECHO Technical Officer Md Helal Uddin.