

The H&H Rural Workshops - Realising Potential

Reviewing Building for Safety in Dinajpur District, Northern Bangladesh

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***A Report on Housing and Hazard's Second Pilot
Project with Chetonar Dak in Northern
Bangladesh***

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The main objective of the Housing and Hazards Group is to make hazard-resistant housing available to vulnerable people in regions of the world affected by natural hazards.

The Group's first Pilot Project (H&H Monograph Number I/Report ERC97/115) explored appropriate methods for communicating building for safety information in a rural low-income community in Northern Bangladesh. The second Project, described here, assessed the medium-term impacts of the first Project.

This Report may be quoted freely but please acknowledge its origin as **Housing and Hazards Monograph Number 2.**

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SUMMARY

This report looks at the impact of a pilot workshop programme that sought to help villagers in Northwestern Bangladesh to make their homes more hazard resistant. The approach adopted by the programme is participatory, working with villagers to explore local ideas for strengthening houses and testing these, together with non-indigenous techniques, to discover and learn about the methods bringing most benefit to local housing. The principle is to provide a means of mitigating the effects of hazard, which is appropriate to local social and economic circumstances and vernacular housing forms. It is an approach which promotes self-help and seeks to avoid the dependency and risks associated with high-tech or loan based solutions. It does not advocate a one-design-catches-all message. Rather, it is designed for flexibility, so that its format can be repeated worldwide, using technologies, materials and ideas about home-making that are local to each workshop venue.

The Housing & Hazards Group piloted this approach in Northwestern Bangladesh during its field study in Sundarban Union, Dinajpur District in 1996-7. A year and a half later, Housing & Hazards returned to conduct an in depth assessment of the programme's impact, over a six month study period in 1998-9.

The report describes how it was found that little building work was being done at all in the pilot project area, even in the aftermath of the 1998 Floods. It looks at the causes of inertia in building in general, and at the consequentially low uptake of ideas explored during the pilot workshops -despite the apparent popularity of the workshop approach and its principles among its participants.

An argument for a better resourced programme arises from a discussion of the socio-economic, institutional and gender issues to be addressed if progress is to be made. The argument

- points to the need for field staff to conduct follow up activities and maintain momentum once the workshop course has ended
- makes the case for means tested provision of building materials to the workshop participants, to enable the poorest to carry out the strengthening techniques that they have learnt
- explores the significance of women's contributions to house building and maintenance, and underlines the importance of making better use of the opportunity presented by the workshops themselves for conducting further research into women's perspectives on mitigating disaster
- and argues that if the right base is to be established for making effective programme partnerships with village NGOs in an extended programme, then a co-ordinating office and staff are required to support field workers and to keep the programmes' resources and objectives on track.

The study finds that the workshops in themselves were received as a success, but that to maintain the benefits, more work needs to be done outside the workshops to support the participants in overcoming the daily barriers that make them and their homes vulnerable in the first place. The workshop process offers a real chance of making hazard mitigation a widespread, affordable reality in poor villages. But it is seeking to make progress in a social and NGO climate which has set its sights on a vision of the future based on modem, costly and out of reach 'solutions'. To deal with this last problem, Housing & Hazards has set out proposals for looking more closely at how prevailing attitudes and economic realities can be reconciled in favour of securing a safer future for the poorest and most vulnerable homes and families.

Diligently, and with a critical eye on its development, Housing & Hazards and the Workshop Process is working positively towards success in realising its potential.

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