

POUNDS OF PREVENTION

- A Disaster Risk Reduction Story -

“Pounds of Prevention” is a series of short articles that illustrate how disaster risk reduction works and why it is important. Take a behind-the-scenes look at aid work in action, long before the disaster occurs. How is that possible? Read on!

FOCUS: SOUTH ASIA MONSOON FLOODING

Monsoons are seasonal shifts of prevailing winds that bring rainfall, typically during the months of June through September in South Asia. Monsoon rains are both a regular and vital part of life and a potential source of catastrophic floods. Variability in their characteristics—such as when monsoon rains start and end, total rainfall amount, and rainfall intensity—may have a dramatic impact on people and their livelihoods. In recent years, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have experienced the effects of flooding, including damage to homes, livelihoods, and crops.

Regionally, USAID, together with other U.S. government agencies and international partners, trains and collaborates with scientists throughout South Asia to produce timely weather and flood forecasts, so that early warning can be provided to communities to take appropriate actions. In partnership with the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, for example, USAID has been enhancing the capacity of local and national organizations to reduce the risk of flash flood disasters in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. Additionally, USAID funds country-specific flood mitigation and management initiatives that include the following:

Bangladesh: A comprehensive disaster risk reduction program has included hazard mapping, forecasts and early warning systems, securing potable water sources, supporting physical protection of communities, and training of first responders.

India: In collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service and Indian partners, USAID has helped the country to adapt and apply the incident command system style of emergency management and coordination—important when mounting a response to a flood disaster.

Nepal: To address flood hazards, USAID and partners have helped communities in Nepal to warehouse supplies in anticipation of needs and to keep water and sanitation facilities in good working order. Nepal has also selected the animated Red Panda character as the country’s official disaster risk reduction mascot with the mission of educating the public about disaster preparedness.

Pakistan: USAID, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Hydrologic Research Center have trained Pakistani meteorologists on flash flood guidance systems that utilize data from rain gauges and satellites to monitor potential events. USAID also supports disaster risk management programs in flood-affected communities.

Sri Lanka: Programs have empowered community groups to protect agriculture from floods, including through cleanup of irrigation canals. Communities are better risk aware, prepared, and warned in vulnerable landslide-prone areas. Participants have also learned how to access safe drinking water and maintain good hygiene in the event of flooding.

Through these programs, USAID and partners are taking steps to minimize the adverse impact of monsoon rains, aiming to prevent this recurring event from turning into a disaster year after year. Strengthening people’s capacity to anticipate, cope with, and recover from disasters is an integral part of USAID’s programs.



A flood meter measures water levels during the monsoon in Bangladesh. Photo by Robert Friedman, USAID.



Red Panda—the disaster risk reduction mascot of Nepal—appears in a series of public service announcements to raise awareness of natural hazards.



During periods of flooding, education campaigns, like the one that created the poster above, emphasize the need for proper hand-washing to keep families healthy.