



# NDYS in Action, Newsletter

Natural Disaster Youth Summit Monthly News

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## The VOICE of YOUTH is NEEDED!

Editor: Daniel Paz,  
Salta, Argentina



### Topics

Wisdom in the world on Disaster Reduction

Diseases and lack of essential tools in Bangladesh.

## Diseases and lack of essential tools in Bangladesh

One week after Cyclone Aila struck southern Bangladesh, survivors in some areas are facing acute shortages of drinking water after many water sources were contaminated. Despite relief efforts by the government, NGOs, the UN and international agencies, thousands of people on islands had yet to receive any kind of relief assistance.

Even on the mainland, scores of people were still trapped in their homes, surrounded by stagnant floodwater.

"I don't see any possibility of the waters receding before the end of the monsoon," said a water engineer from the Sharankhola area of Bagerhat District. This translates into the end of September: the consequences of the storm may turn out worse than expected.



Diarrhea is affecting people in a rapid way. This and others diseases are the second enemy now.

Lack of drinking water was forcing many to go hungry as they were unable to cook the food they had received from relief agencies. Over 1,400km of flood protection embankments were washed away by Aila, exposing thousands of villages just as the monsoon is beginning, the country's [Disaster Management Bureau](#) reported. Each day at high tide, water rushes through the damaged embankments and swamps coastal communities, despite the efforts of local people who are trying to repair them.

The main sources of drinking water in coastal areas are ponds, wells and tube wells, but many have been contaminated. Media reports on 30-31 May indicated an increased incidence of diarrhoea, affecting thousands.

Meanwhile, the UN Children's Fund and the government's Department of Public Health Engineering are working with Action contre la Faim, ActionAid, [BRAC](#), CARE, CARITAS, Catholic Relief Services, NGO Forum, Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid, Save the Children USA, Solidarites, Oxfam GB and Water Aid to improve the WASH situation.

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UNICEF is procuring 70,000 bags of oral rehydration salts and pre-positioning 12.5 million water purification tablets, essential drugs and 135.7 tons of high-energy BP-5 biscuits. The World Food Programme (WFP) has also pre-positioned 500 tons of high-energy biscuits.

“We have mobilised volunteers throughout the affected region. They are providing dry food, water purification tablets and oral rehydration solutions,” said Mohamad Abul Quasem, an officer of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS). BDRCS has also deployed six teams for damage assessments and a tracing team, working to locate missing family members.

Organized by the [Directorate General of Health Services](#) and the World Health Organization, close to 700 teams of healthcare professionals were now providing medical support to survivors. More than 3.2 million were affected when Alia swept across large parts of low-lying Bangladesh on 25 May, leaving 167 dead and over 7,000 injured.

Fourteen of the country’s 64 districts were affected, the Disaster Management Bureau reported, prompting some 145,000 people to flee to cyclone shelters, according to the government’s 1 June [situation report](#). According to government estimates immediately after the cyclone, some 600,000 people were estimated to have fled their homes - some to higher ground, some to stay with relatives and some to cyclone shelters.

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Classes stopped because of rains.

## Classes stopped because of rains

More than a third of the primary schools in northern Uganda’s Amuru district, where thousands of people are trying to rebuild their lives after being displaced by two decades of war, lack physical classrooms, according to the district’s education office. Across the country, where primary education is supposed to be free, more than 1.1 million primary-aged children do not attend school, according to UN data compiled by Save the Children.

Thirty-eight of the 95 registered primary schools in Amuru have no classrooms. Fifty-four of the schools have yet to regain their original sites, abandoned when much of the population of northern Uganda was moved into camps during the war against the Lord’s Resistance Army rebel group.

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Many schools and teachers are needed, but many of them are displaced by water.

Amuru district education officer Ben Okwamoi said that 21 of the schools in Amuru had no latrines. Lack of such facilities is known to deter girls in particular from attending school. He also said: “We need a total of 488 classrooms to address the problem of writing and sitting space, which up to 70 percent of pupils lack”. For every teacher in Amuru, there are 78 children, according to the education authority, which also noted that some 46 percent of those teaching at primary level in the district had no formal qualification.

Another concern in the district is corruption. “Last year we recovered up to 9.8 million shillings [US\$4,456] from teachers who claimed payments but did not show up at their respective schools to teach,” district education secretary Gilbert Olanya said.

Some 24 schools in Gulu and Amuru districts have been selected for rehabilitation, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“Five primary schools in Amuru District are still displaced due to lack of basic infrastructure, including classrooms, latrines, teachers’ accommodation and clean water, at their original sites. The schools – Abbot, Pogoogwera and Marawobi in Pabbo sub-county, Abalokodi in Atiak sub-county, and Kochlipakia in Koch Goma sub-county – await assistance from the district and partners to effect return,” OCHA said in a monthly bulletin.

“Although donors have increased their focus on meeting the education needs of children” in fragile, conflict-affected countries, “there is still a long way to go”, Save the Children warned in the 2009 edition of its annual Last in Line, Last in School report, which examines donor trends in such states. “Education has positive long-term effects that contribute to the rebuilding of systems in the aftermath of an emergency or crisis,” it said. “Funding levels need to increase significantly, and support must be given to innovative aid delivery mechanisms, if the [Millennium Development] goal of universal primary education is to be achieved by 2015,” it urged.

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## Topics

### Wisdom in the world on Disaster Reduction

Invest for a better future, something known

# Invest for a better future, something known

Natural disasters may be unavoidable, but human vulnerability to those disasters is not. "What kills, and what destroys, is the vulnerability of the population," said Margareta Wahlström, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The second biennial session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, which opened in Geneva on 16 June, has adopted the slogan, Invest today for a safer tomorrow. The concept is being promoted seriously.

Philippines senator Loren Legarda noted that China managed to save US\$12 billion in rehabilitation costs thanks to its \$3 billion investment in flood control. "We need to look at disaster risk reduction as an investment rather than a cost," says Legarda. "In the long term it will be much more effective."

One of the goals of this year's conference is to secure a commitment of funding for disaster risk reduction from money that has already been approved for humanitarian relief and development aid. "We're not asking for more money," says Brigitte Leoni, head of communications for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), "We're asking to use the money in a different way."

The conference is introducing a dramatically updated mortality risk index (MRI), which uses computer modelling to show which countries are most at risk from earthquakes, floods, tropical cyclones and landslides. A team of 20 scientists worked for two years on the study, based on data from thousands of tropical cyclones, earthquakes, landslides and floods.

Bangladesh, China, India and Indonesia fall into an extreme high-risk category partly because of the size of their populations. Colombia and Myanmar are in the same category because of the relative risk to their smaller populations. When it comes to vulnerability, poverty and poor governance play a major role. Myanmar, which lost more than 130,000 people in tropical Cyclone Nargis, is an example when lack of warning and preparedness combined to raise the casualty level. More surprisingly, the United States is listed in the same risk group as Haiti, Ethiopia, Nepal and Honduras, partly because the US is especially vulnerable to tropical hurricanes and earthquakes, but also because the US has pockets of poverty, which make some of its population particularly vulnerable. An example was Hurricane Katrina.



Many deaths and material losses can be minimized if there are more invest in investigation and mitigation...

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No matter what action is taken, some countries will always be at risk, but even if it cannot be completely eliminated, the loss of life can be reduced. Bangladesh lost more than 500,000 people during Cyclone Bhola in 1970. It subsequently built 2,500 cyclone shelters on elevated concrete platforms and trained more than 32,000 volunteers to help in evacuations. When Cyclone Sidr struck in 2007 with an enormous sea surge, the death toll was less than 4,000.

Despite these precautions, Bangladesh continues to lose people because over-population and poverty force people to live in vulnerable areas. Wahlström said that at some point governments need to ask themselves, "Is this viable? Can you continue to grow in these areas?" What is clear is that preparedness can reduce the losses due to natural disasters, and in the long term it is an investment well worth making.

"Our message," says Wahlström, "is that you have a choice."



**Comments:** I really feel sad because of all those kids that cannot attend classes. This is the most important part for a country and for oneself. Here we can see when everything is down, like for example teachers don't teach and claim money, children don't attend classes, many people in incorrect places, etc. Only good and narrow people with the minimum hope of progress will be enough to change things a little bit. Another thing I want to say is that I agree completely with the fact that an invest in preparedness and disasters mitigation is not a waste of money. Of course results will be satisfactory, but the time to act is now...don't forget things are happening too fast.

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*"Communication saves lives!"*