

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: MOZAMBIQUE

Tropical cyclones frequently visit the southeastern African country of Mozambique. These severe weather systems bring high winds and heavy rains, causing widespread flooding and damage to houses, roads, crops, and livelihoods.

In 2000, the country was unprepared for the impact of multiple cyclones and severe flooding. Residents were unable to evacuate before their villages were overcome with water. More than 700 people perished and thousands more were made homeless.

In the wake of this disaster, USAID, the Government of Mozambique, and many other actors, collaborated to create a comprehensive cyclone early warning system. Countless lives have been saved since, most recently in January 2012, when the country again experienced flooding after the passage of multiple storms in quick succession. Despite the scale of damage, the loss of life was greatly diminished.

What happened in the intervening years to bring about such a different result? The answer is found in both leading-edge technology and tried-and-true community outreach and mobilization.

USAID helped the country harness available satellite imagery and rainfall estimates to monitor storm tracks and impending flood conditions. The Government of Mozambique also created an easy-to-understand, color-coded warning system to tell citizens how long until a storm arrives.

USAID and its partners set up community radio stations—including in remote, rural areas—with broadcast coverage over all coastal and low-lying areas. They also trained staff to receive urgent information about their local area via direct satellite linkages and to relay the government’s warning transmissions.

Volunteers from the Mozambique Red Cross monitor the reports on their USAID-provided household radios. Once they receive the information, they travel throughout the community to warn neighbors about the storm’s approach. They also explain how to keep safe, whether by reinforcing their houses, using identified evacuation routes, or keeping children home from school.

Each step in Mozambique’s early warning system is critical to reducing the risk posed by these natural hazards. While the passage of storms cannot be prevented, the loss of life due to lack of information can be.



A volunteer at a community radio station transmits information educating communities on floods and cyclones in Mozambique as part of the RANET program. Photo by Alexandra Riboul, USAID.



An emergency responder flashes the red cyclone flag to warn people in his community that effects from a storm, such as strong winds and rain, will arrive within six hours. Photo by USAID/FEWSNET.