Why focus on drowning?

Drowning is a leading cause of death worldwide. It’s a serious, neglected public health threat, claiming the lives of 372,000 people every year.

More than 90% of drownings occur in low- and middle-income countries, where people have higher exposure to the risks associated with open water as they go about their daily lives: collecting water, bathing, fishing and playing.

Drowning deaths mostly occur in rural areas, away from hospitals and out of the sight of policy makers. To end this silent epidemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) now recommends all countries develop national drowning reduction plans.

Why Bangladesh? Why Barisal?

In Bangladesh, drowning is the leading cause of death for children aged 1-17, with 18,000 young lives lost needlessly every year. Disasters and water-related risks affect all areas of Bangladesh, with the Barisal Division bearing the highest burden. Despite the death toll, action to reduce and prevent drowning in Barisal has been absent.

The Barisal Division is situated in the central-southern region of Bangladesh, where several large rivers converge. With a land mass of 13.5 million km² and a population of over 8 million, the Barisal Division is one of the most vulnerable areas in Bangladesh - all of its six districts are affected by water-related hazards and disasters.

There is much to learn about drowning and drowning prevention, but we must take proven, preventive action while research continues. This means urgently targeting vulnerable populations in exposed communities with strategies most likely to save lives.

Margaret Chan, Director-General, World Health Organization
What do we want to achieve?

• Dramatically reduce rates of drowning in the Barisal Division through an integrated and evidence-based approach, using and adapting existing interventions
• Institutionalise interventions through partnerships, securing government ownership and resources to deliver sustainable change
• Capture project learning to develop guidelines which will assist other regions and countries to introduce their own comprehensive drowning reduction strategies.

How will we do it?

1. Better understand the situation by conducting the world’s largest household survey on drowning - determining the size and scale of the problem in terms of deaths, disability, and social impact

2. Raise awareness of drowning among stakeholders and establish a multi-sector drowning reduction forum. The forum will coordinate and influence action to address the burden of drowning throughout the Barisal Division, ensuring that communities, water users and service providers have access to appropriate interventions

3. Create the first comprehensive drowning reduction strategy in Bangladesh, turning a WHO recommendation into practice

4. Use evidence to develop, implement and evaluate interventions. These could include: SwimSafe (survival swimming), SeaSafe (lifeguards), Anchal (crèche), flood rescue, first responders, community awareness and education, school water safety lessons, early warning systems, ferry safety, occupational safety and policy development

5. Share lessons and findings to support others in designing and delivering drowning reduction plans.

Stay updated
To receive a quarterly project newsletter, or for more information, please contact:

Dr. Mujadded Ahmed, Project Bhasa Manager
mahmed@ciprb.org

Who are the project team?
Recognising the value of a collaborative approach, this initiative brings together three world-leading organisations:

Lifeboats
The Royal National Lifeboat Institution, United Kingdom
RNLI.org/international

CIPRB
The Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh
ciprb.org

The George Institute for Global Health
georgeinstitute.org

Project supported by:

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence

"Nobody I know can swim. I don’t want to stand by any longer and watch so many lives being wasted. Everyone deserves the opportunity to be safe in the water; every boy and every girl."

New Community Swimming Instructor