



PHOTO & CAPTION

Volunteers Prepare for Disasters



Photo: USAID/Virginia Foley

A first-aid teacher demonstrates proper bandaging techniques for the most common injuries caused by disasters.

Forty-two men who live in Baruch, a coastal city in Gujarat, India, have volunteered to be Home Guards — private citizens who are trained to support and supplement the police in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency.

Disasters in India are not uncommon. In addition to being prone to natural events like earthquakes, droughts and floods, India is also vulnerable to emergencies such as fire, epidemics, and chemical spills. More than 24 million Indians are affected by disasters every year, and Gujarat has been designated as a high-risk area, particularly for earthquakes. A 2001 tremor in Gujarat killed nearly 20,000 people and left 600,000 homeless.

While financial aid cannot stop disasters, it can be used to reduce communities' vulnerabilities and to mitigate damage after it occurs. USAID is working with the Indian government to support disaster preparedness drills in communities that emphasize first-aid training and show residents how to conduct search and rescue operations, secure water and sanitation, manage shelters and counsel trauma victims.

Gujaratis hope to never experience another event like the 2001 earthquake, but with teams like Baruch's Home Guards trained to respond and provide relief, communities will be ready if disaster does strike again.