

# Disaster preparedness

## Introduction

The readiness to predict and, where possible, prevent disasters, reduce their impact as well as respond to and cope with their consequences at international, national and local levels is central to the work of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and every individual National Society. This work, key to development, essentially involves reducing the vulnerability of households and communities in disaster-prone areas and improving their ability to cope with the effects of disasters; strengthening the capacities of National Societies in disaster preparedness and post-disaster response; determining a National Society role and mandate in national disaster plans; and establishing regional networks of National Societies that will strengthen the Federation's collective impact in disaster preparedness and response at the international level.

## Scope

This policy establishes the basis of Red Cross and Red Crescent action in disaster preparedness. It applies to all types of disaster preparedness activities at local, national, regional and international levels whether carried out by a single branch of a National Society, by an individual National Society or by the International Federation acting together.

## Statement

The International Federation and each National Society shall:

- **Recognize that disaster preparedness should be one of the primary activities of the International Federation and each National Society**, regarding it as the most effective way of reducing the impact of both small and localized as well as large-scale disasters. The National Society has a role to play at the branch, the national and the international level. These roles shall be complemented by the actions of the Federation at the international level.
- **Recognize disaster preparedness as an effective link between emergency response, rehabilitation and development programmes** and strive to build disaster preparedness upon the competent programming in other key areas Red Cross/Red Crescent work such as in the health sector.
- **Recognize the Red Cross/Red Crescent role in disaster preparedness as complementary** to government and thus will not replace state responsibilities. In addition, the National Society should engage in debate with the government on the focus and nature of the National Emergency Plan and encourage the assignment of a clear role and responsibilities to the National Society, supported by appropriate legislation.
- **Advocate, where necessary, with government, donors, non-governmental organizations and the public, the need for and effectiveness of disaster preparedness.** National Societies should contribute to raising awareness of hazards, levels of risks and coping mechanisms adopted by society and mitigation programmes, such as early warning systems, that may reduce the loss of lives and property when a disaster strikes.
- **Strengthen the organizational structures at international, national and local levels required for effective disaster preparedness.** In particular, prioritize the strengthening of branches and the mobilization and training of Red Cross/Red Crescent volunteers in high-risk areas and the responsibility of National Societies to be prepared to be part of the Federation's international disaster response programming. Integrate or harmonize such activities with institutional development and other relevant programme areas.
- **Improve coordination** by promoting better cooperation and partnerships between National Societies, ICRC, governments, non-governmental organizations and other disaster response agencies at local, national, regional and international levels.

- **Identify those persons, communities and households most at risk to disaster** through assessment and analysis of risks, vulnerabilities and capacities (Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment) as a basis for prioritising location and focus of programming activities.
- **Raise awareness of disaster hazards** through public education, encouraging vulnerable people to take preventative and mitigating actions where possible before disaster strikes. Ensure that the knowledge from prediction and early warning systems can be accessed, understood and acted upon by local communities
- **Improve the ability of vulnerable communities to cope with disasters through community-based disaster preparedness strategies** that build on existing structures, practices, skills and coping mechanisms. Recognizing that a community-based approach is the best guarantee that improvement in disaster preparedness will be realized and sustained, the assisted population must participate in the planning and preparation for disasters. All activities and programmes should be sensitive to issues of gender, generation and the needs of vulnerable groups, such as the disabled.
- **Strive to provide the financial, material and human resources required to carry out appropriate and sustainable disaster preparedness activities.** In particular, maximize the strategic advantage of the International Federation to mobilize all available resources and establish regional networks of National Societies that will strengthen the Federation's collective impact in disaster preparedness.

## Responsibilities

National Societies and the International Federation have a responsibility to ensure that all disaster preparedness activities and programmes are carried out in compliance with this policy; that all staff and volunteers participating in such programmes are aware of the rationale and content of the policy; and that all relevant governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners are adequately informed of this policy.

## Reference

*This policy was adopted by the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on October 26, 1999. This policy replaces all previously established disaster preparedness policies.*

## Further reference texts

- Emergency Response Policy;
- Development Policy;
- Post-Emergency Rehabilitation Policy;
- The Gender Policy;
- The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief;
- The 1997 Agreement on the Organization of the International Activities of the Components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Seville Agreement).

**For more information, please contact:**

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