



The Red Cross Red Crescent and the Hyogo Framework for Action

Focus on the Asia-Pacific region

The International Federation's Global Agenda (2006–2010)

Over the next two years, the collective focus of the Federation will be on achieving the following goals and priorities:

Our goals

Goal 1: Reduce the number of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.

Goal 2: Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.

Goal 3: Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.

Goal 4: Promote respect for diversity and human dignity, and reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion.

Our priorities

Improving our local, regional and international capacity to respond to disasters and public health emergencies.

Scaling up our actions with vulnerable communities in health promotion, disease prevention and disaster risk reduction.

Increasing significantly our HIV/AIDS programming and advocacy.

Renewing our advocacy on priority humanitarian issues, especially fighting intolerance, stigma and discrimination, and promoting disaster risk reduction.

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International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

P.O. Box 372
CH-1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Telephone: +41 22 730 4222
Telefax: +41 22 733 0395
E-mail: secretariat@ifrc.org
Web site: www.ifrc.org

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Asia Pacific disaster management
The Ampwalk Suite 9.06 (North Block)
N° 218 Jalan Ampang
50450 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
E-mail: michael.annear@ifrc.org
Web site: www.ifrc.org

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Focus on the Asia-Pacific region

Introduction

For more than 150 years, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have been at the forefront of efforts to reduce the impact of natural and human-made disasters and to alleviate the suffering caused by such disasters. As they seek to improve their services for the most vulnerable people, the National Societies have seen their disaster-related activities evolve from purely emergency relief to disaster preparedness and support for recovery and, more recently, to disaster risk reduction. These changes have come about in response to the realization that relief is not enough by itself to mitigate the effects of disasters: resilient communities are those that are able to withstand hazards and have developed capacities and resources that are not wiped out within minutes by a disaster.

With this in mind, National Societies have been working with communities at risk to strengthen their coping capacities and resilience, while building their own capacities at every level to assist the communities and reduce their exposure to risk. It is no exaggeration to say, therefore, that the National Societies have been contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)¹ for many years. However, there is still much that can be done to enhance actions to reduce risk in vulnerable, disaster-prone communities.

Based on lessons learned and good practice from past experiences and using the HFA as a systematic guide, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the International Federation), together with the National Societies, has been fine-tuning its strategies and programmes with respect to disaster risk reduction. This has resulted in the Framework for community safety and resilience, which provides the foundation for all Red Cross Red Crescent interventions in the area of disaster risk reduction and all actions that contribute to the building of safer and more resilient communities.

Framework for community safety and resilience

The International Federation has created a Framework for community safety and resilience. The aim is to support National Societies in the promotion and implementation of a holistic, integrated approach developed with and for communities in response to the multiple hazards they face (including those worsened by climate change) and incorporating health, environmental risks, and economic and social issues. The framework consolidates work undertaken to date to reduce underlying vulnerabilities to disasters as part of the Red Cross Red Crescent's commitments under the HFA.

The HFA is a global undertaking and has been endorsed by most governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As part of this global network, the Red Cross Red Crescent is fully supportive of the framework and has resolved to work towards achieving its goals. All actions taken by the International Federation and National Societies in the context of disaster risk reduction programmes and projects are linked to the five priorities of the HFA.

The Hyogo Framework for Action

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction convened in Kobe, Japan, in 2005 identified five priorities in its action plan, the Hyogo Framework for Action:

- Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation
- Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning
- Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels
- Reduce the underlying risk factors
- Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

In contributing to the HFA, National Societies have two distinct advantages: their own, parallel structures to that of their governments – from the national to the community level – and a worldwide network of members and volunteers who live in the heart of their communities. This puts National Societies in a unique position to assist in, advise on and advocate for the implementation of all of the HFA's priorities for action.

This document describes some of the ways that National Societies in the Asia-Pacific region have been contributing to the implementation of the five priorities of the HFA, grouped according to the main activities under each priority.²

HFA priority 1: Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation

Institutional mechanisms

National Societies in the Asia-Pacific region have made progress in establishing and enhancing their organizational structures with respect to disaster risk reduction. Some have been active in creating or strengthening institutional mechanisms and agreements, clarifying their auxiliary responsibilities with their governments.

In Cambodia, the Cambodian Red Cross Society and the International Federation provided the government with technical and financial support for the development and strengthening of the National Disaster Management Committee to enable it to take on the main responsibility for disaster management in the country.

Multi-sectoral policies and plans

National Societies across the region have been endeavouring to incorporate a risk reduction element into their policies, strategies and plans, as well as mainstreaming it in sectoral programmes, especially community-based programmes. For example, in its disaster management policy adopted in 2008, the Nepal Red Cross Society sets out activities specifically aimed at mainstreaming disaster risk reduction, with a focus on the community level, to be carried out in cooperation with the government and other organizations.

Advocating for the institutionalization of disaster risk reduction and its inclusion in the development policies and plans of the local authorities and other organizations has also been a key task of National Societies in recent years. In Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and elsewhere, National Societies have been pressing for the inclusion of community-level disaster risk reduction plans in local government development plans. These efforts have proven highly successful, with governments increasingly accepting this approach and encouraging partnerships with local governments and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Legislation to support disaster risk reduction —

The Indonesian Red Cross Society was invited by the government to participate in a three-year process to develop the National Action Plan for Disaster Reduction 2006–2009 and to formulate guidelines for the National Disaster Management Authority. In addition, the National Society played a key support role to the People's Consultative Assembly in reviewing and providing input to the draft of the Disaster Management Bill.

Many other National Societies, such as those in the Cook Islands, Nepal and Sri Lanka, have participated in similar processes. At the regional and global level, National Societies have also advocated for the implementation of disaster risk reduction activities in accordance with national laws, policies and strategies, both within and outside the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement).

Decentralization of responsibilities and resources

Gradually, clear roles and responsibilities in disaster risk reduction are being assigned and the necessary resources mobilized at different levels. The Malaysian Red Crescent Society, for example, has set up disaster management coordination centres in five zones of the country, expanded its network of chapters and branches to disaster-prone areas and clarified the responsibilities of and resources for each level with regard to disaster risk reduction activities. The Cambodian Red Cross Society is currently implementing a nationwide disaster preparedness programme, which is supporting the decentralization of initial disaster response responsibilities to the 24 branches across the country.

Much has also been done to support community-based disaster risk reduction, a focus being encouraged by the International Federation and implemented by many National Societies throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

Assessment of human resources and capacities

The well-prepared National Society is a key assessment tool that helps National Societies to regularly review their progress in building capacity and enables them to analyse their strengths and identify areas for improvement. It also facilitates tailored support from partners both within and outside the International Federation.

National Societies such as in Laos and Timor-Leste have used the well-prepared National Society tool to develop their disaster preparedness programmes and to identify human resource needs nationally and, most importantly, in hazard-prone areas of the country.

Fostering political commitment

Some National Societies have engaged in advocacy efforts at all levels, from local to global, to promote the implementation of

Chronology of Red Cross Red Crescent commitment to disaster risk reduction

1984 The Swedish Red Cross publishes a groundbreaking study entitled "Prevention is better than cure", stressing the importance of disaster prevention.

1980s A new direction is taken, with development-focused programmes, including community-based disaster preparedness activities, in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

1999 A new disaster preparedness policy recognizes disaster preparedness as a link between emergency response, recovery and development.

2003 The Agenda for Humanitarian Action adopted at the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent affirms a plan of action aimed at reducing vulnerability to disaster impacts and risks.

2005 The International Federation supports the Hyogo Framework for Action and adopts its own Global Agenda, which includes an emphasis on reducing disaster risk.

2007 Disaster management and recovery policies are drafted, along with a disaster management strategy that places a major emphasis on disaster risk reduction.

The declaration Together for Humanity, adopted at the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, affirms the importance of ensuring that "environmental degradation and adaptation to climate change are integrated, where relevant, in disaster risk reduction and disaster management policies and plans".

The Global Alliance for disaster risk reduction is created with the aim of scaling up the International Federation's efforts to reduce disaster risks among the most vulnerable communities where National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies operate.

2008 A Framework for community safety and resilience is developed with a focus on disaster risk reduction through the building of safer and more resilient communities.

disaster risk reduction to their governments and the public, and have made a community-centred approach to disaster risk reduction a focus of their agendas.

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society encouraged local authorities to improve their services and/or policies related to disaster risk reduction for the benefit of vulnerable communities. This included providing access to government livestock services, enforcing river erosion policies and creating awareness of the importance of adopting safe shelter measures.

The Solomon Islands Red Cross has been working closely with the government's National Disaster Management Office, the Solomon Islands Climate Change Division and Office, and the Solomon Islands Meteorological Service to ensure that climate change issues are included in vulnerability reduction

Community participation

In all community-based disaster risk reduction programmes, such as those being implemented by the National Societies in China, Kiribati, Nepal, the Philippines and elsewhere, the participation of community members is encouraged. This not only gives them the opportunity to have their voices heard but also builds their confidence in contributing to the reduction of their vulnerability and reinforcing their coping capacities.

A self-reliant spirit has been fostered in communities through awareness-raising and mobilization campaigns, leading to people taking tangible actions to reduce risk.

HFA priority 2: Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning

Risk assessment

The use of vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA), geographic information systems (GIS) and other risk-assessment tools to identify and monitor disaster risks is now widespread among National Societies.

After the Indian Ocean tsunami, the Indonesian Red Cross Society stepped up its activities, using both VCA and GIS, to identify local risks and relevant solutions for recovery and community-based programmes in the affected areas of Aceh and Yogyakarta. Maps were created to illustrate survey results, shelter locations and housing construction areas. The maps have been used by the National Society to identify further needs and coordinate use of Red Cross and Red Crescent partners' resources.

The Mongolian Red Cross Society, through its regional disaster preparedness centres, has developed a series of regional hazard maps (marking drought areas, earthquake-prone areas, dangerous lakes, hazardous mountains and water sources) in consultation with nomadic herders and volunteers. The regional maps have been consolidated into a national hazard map, which was shared with the government and is used by the National Society to assess its preparedness and response needs.

National Societies have also contributed to the development of the International Federation's guidelines for risk assessment, including multi-hazard risks and socio-economic analysis at regional and global level. These tools have been used and adapted to the local context and for disaster risk reduction programming. Increasingly, risk assessments are being shared with other sectors and stakeholders.

Indicators on disaster risk reduction and vulnerability

The International Federation facilitated the extraction of lessons learned and best practices from the Disaster Reduction Phase II programme supported by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). On the basis of these lessons, National Societies in South Asia have been able to contribute to the development of disaster risk reduction indicators and the Characteristics of a disaster-resilient community. The indicators are currently being field-tested by National Societies in the region.



Children drawing what disasters mean to them - This was part of a VCA exercise that was carried out in Sri Lanka.

Data and statistical loss information

The creation of regional networks, such as the South Asia Disaster Management Working Group, the South-east Asia Regional Disaster Management Committee and the Pacific Disaster Management Forum, has improved access to disaster damage and needs data collected by the government and other organizations, facilitating coordinated decision-making by National Societies. Communication systems have been set up and are being maintained by National Societies, and communication channels between National Societies and between National Societies and the International Federation, as well as with other stakeholders, have been enhanced to ensure a smooth and effective information flow.

The International Federation's Disaster Management Information System (DMIS) is now well established and many National Societies have received training in its use, making timely information available in the event of a disaster. The DMIS is widely used as a tool for easy access to disaster-related information.

Sub-regional capacity-building events in East, South and South-east Asia and the Pacific have enabled staff and volunteers from all of the region's National Societies to improve their understanding of and capacities with regard to the data and information assessment techniques that are guided by the International Federation's *Guidelines for assessment in emergencies*.³ Furthermore, many National Societies, for example in Viet Nam, regularly participate in damage and needs and recovery assessment teams alongside representatives of other humanitarian agencies and government ministries.

The World Disasters Report, which is produced annually and is widely distributed to National Societies and other humanitarian organizations, is a recognized reference on disaster statistics from around the world.

Early warning

The Cambodian Red Cross Society has piloted a community-level Flood Early Warning System in the provinces of Kandal, Kratie and Prey Veng as a major component of its disaster risk reduction approach. The pilot project involved working with local community members and Red Cross volunteers, who took daily water-level measurements and set up a system of community notice boards indicating when flooding was likely. The water-level measurements were also relayed to the Mekong River Commission, which was able to monitor the river flow and send additional early warning messages to communities further downstream via radio networks. The project has increased the awareness and capacities of communities to cope with and respond to flood risk.

The early warning capacity of the Red Cross Red Crescent has been strengthened, particularly by National Societies in high-risk countries, through the training of staff and volunteers and by having staff on duty seven days a week, especially during seasonal hazards. Improved procedures exist to ensure that understandable early warning messages are sent out and disseminated to at-risk vulnerable communities (referred to as "the last mile").

When Cyclone Sidr was heading for the coastal areas of Bangladesh in 2007, trained Red Crescent volunteers raised the alarm in the villages, many by riding around on bicycles and shouting warning messages through megaphones. The simple early warning system, made up of 40,000 men and women trained in disaster response, was set in motion when authorities alerted the volunteers to the imminent arrival of the worst cyclone to hit the country in a decade. As a result, an estimated 3.2 million people evacuated their homes and more than a million were safely inside shelters when Cyclone Sidr struck. More than 3,500 people were killed and about 2 million displaced by the cyclone, but United Nations (UN) and Red Cross Red Crescent officials estimate that without the warning system the toll could have been as high as that caused by a cyclone of similar intensity in 1970, which killed 300,000 people.

A number of National Societies have established a rapport with their respective National Meteorological Office to receive timely hydro-meteorological information, enabling them to disseminate this information to the general public through their staff and volunteers. Links with research institutions availing of updated scientific and technological information on hazards have improved knowledge, which has then been applied in disaster risk reduction programming.

The Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has access to and links with the National Early Warning System so that it can receive warning messages and relay them to households and communities through its network.

Fresh initiatives to learn more about new hazards and threats and to devise better means to tackle them have also been taken by a number of National Societies.

HFA priority 3: Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

Information exchange and cooperation

New mechanisms for information sharing and cooperation have been established and developed at global, regional and national level. The South-east Asia Regional Disaster Management Committee, the South Asia Disaster Management Working Group and the Pacific Emergency Management Core Group, at regional level, and the Cambodia Disaster Risk Reduction Forum and the Disaster Preparedness Network Nepal, at country level, serve as forums for National Societies to share experiences, best practices and challenges in implementing disaster risk reduction programmes, to pool knowledge on emerging risks such as climate change, and to seek advice and technical support from their peers and partners.

The sharing of good practice in and knowledge of disaster risk reduction among National Societies, other humanitarian organizations and national authorities is promoted through national and regional meetings and workshops. The regional network of National Societies in South-east Asia meets to exchange experiences and develop a common position on means to address climate change. The collaboration has resulted in a guidance document for National Societies covering issues relating to climate change adaptation. Addressing climate change should not be considered as a new area of activity for National Societies per se but be part of an overall approach to disaster risk reduction and agreement on the use of appropriate tools to assist community preparedness for hazards that are also appropriate for responses to climate change.

Networks and dialogue

Through regional exchanges, the Thai, Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese National Societies were able to draw on their collective experiences to develop a sub-regional approach to the elaboration of contingency plans in the event of flooding of the Mekong river, which transcends national borders. The National Societies shared their individual approaches and pooled knowledge to develop a common approach and format ensuring consistency and also reducing the potential for misunderstandings when engaging in cross-border assistance.

In addition, existing networks for knowledge sharing and support regarding disaster risk reduction activities, such as the DipECHO⁴ partners' network in South-east Asia and regional National Society networks, have been further developed and expanded to be more inclusive of Red Cross and Red Crescent partners.

Glossary

Disaster risk reduction

Risk reduction aims to minimize the impact of natural hazards like earthquakes, landslides and hurricanes on disaster-prone communities by doing everything possible before disaster occurs to protect lives, limit damage and strengthen their capacity to bounce back quickly from adversity. A natural hazard only becomes a disaster when it disrupts society's normal functioning. Risk reduction is a framework of elements ranging from early warning of hazards to community self-assessment and action to reduce local vulnerability.

Disaster

Disaster hits all countries, rich and poor. But it is poor people who usually suffer the most. Poor people often live in unprotected or dangerous environments. A natural disaster can severely disrupt the way they cope with life and hinder their development.

Disasters damage infrastructure, reduce productivity and generate social tensions. Disasters consume precious resources that could be better directed towards development. Disasters can wipe out years of development in minutes. Vulnerable communities are often confined to cycles of disaster and response

To enhance the effectiveness of risk reduction measures, the South Asia Disaster Management Working Group came together to create the Building Safer Communities initiative, supported by DipECHO. A key component of this initiative is to develop a standardized community-based disaster risk reduction training curriculum targeting field practitioners in order to improve the overall quality and impact of disaster risk reduction training programmes in South Asia.

Inclusion of disaster risk reduction in formal and informal education

There are numerous examples of National Society involvement in the development and implementation of school disaster risk reduction programmes, including the development of information, education and communication materials for use in teacher training and disaster preparedness awareness-raising in schools. The National Societies in Fiji, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam and elsewhere have been advocating for the inclusion of disaster risk reduction in formal school curricula, in cooperation with national and international organizations such as Oxfam, Save the Children, UNICEF, GTZ and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR).

The Fiji Red Cross Society recently revised a booklet on disaster preparedness for primary school children first published in 1981 to raise their awareness of hazards and to encourage them to be proactive in reducing risks in school, at home and in the community before and during disasters.

The Nepal Red Cross Society piloted a school-based disaster risk reduction programme from 2004 to 2006 in 40 schools in three districts prone to earthquakes, floods and landslides. Textbooks were produced to help students develop disaster preparedness plans and hazard maps. First-aid skills were also taught. Some 1,000 students participated in peer learning sessions on disaster management. In addition, a safe unit was built in each school to provide shelter during and after disasters.

Training and learning on disaster risk reduction

Many National Societies have developed materials on disaster risk reduction and organized training in community-based disaster risk reduction, damage and needs assessment, and VCA for different target groups, including management practitioners, community members, National Society staff and volunteers, government officials, and staff of other organizations.

In Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the National Societies, with the support of the International Federation and in cooperation with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, have launched an initiative to develop a standardized disaster risk reduction training curriculum for field practitioners and community members. The aim is to improve the overall quality and impact of disaster risk reduction training programmes in South Asia. Pilot training events were conducted in Pakistan and Sri Lanka to obtain comments from field staff and volunteers to ensure that the accompanying handbook on community-based disaster risk reduction is applicable to local contexts.

The International Federation has facilitated the application of VCA by organizing regional and national training workshops on VCA learning by doing and lessons learned from disaster risk reduction and recovery programmes throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

The Solomon Islands Red Cross is developing a new toolkit for working with communities based on its field experience of the International Federation's VCA and WWF's Climate Witness Toolkit. The toolkit is designed to gather baseline information on community vulnerability to disaster and climate change using participatory methods. The Solomon Islands Red Cross will analyse the information collected to identify how it can work with communities to help them better prepare for disasters and the impacts of climate change.

Research

The Indian Red Cross Society undertook research on the role of women in disaster risk reduction and on the relationship between climate change and disasters and then used the results to improve its policy and practice. In 2004, with the support of the International Federation, the National Society also conducted a study on participatory action learning in programming for community-based disaster risk reduction activities to enhance coping skills and sustain community participation.

National Societies, in cooperation with civil society organizations, including academic institutes, are increasingly involved in research or studies on a range of issues related to disaster risk reduction, such as: climate change, avian influenza, migration, risks in urban settings, unknown risks, and the integration of disaster risk reduction into socio-economic development processes.

Public awareness and media

National Societies have developed a wealth of excellent communication materials (brochures, leaflets, posters, plays, street drama, television and radio programmes, etc.), often in cooperation with other organizations, including UN agencies and international NGOs, to raise public awareness of common hazards and to promote practical behaviour to improve safety and resilience.

Risk reduction campaign

In recent years there has been a growing recognition that strengthening resilience to disasters is not only about disaster management; a community/household with sustainable livelihoods, good levels of health care and access to a strong and accountable civil society is also better able to withstand hazards. However, it is important that these development gains are protected from disasters. Fully mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in to its development work, therefore, continues to remain a priority for the International Federation. The campaign while continuing to promote disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation, will take measures at all levels – governance, policy, management and practice – to mainstream disaster risk reduction.

In 2006, the Thai Red Cross Society conducted a campaign entitled “Disaster Safety Mind” using mascots, mobile theatre, cartoons, video presentations, calendars and pamphlets to promote disaster preparedness, first aid and fire safety among Red Cross youth volunteers, students and the general public in the tsunami-affected provinces of Phang Nga, Phuket and Satun. In light of the campaign’s success, the National Society was asked to expand the activities into other areas. A total of 5,084 people attended events, including 4,531 Red Cross youth volunteers and students, 258 teachers and 295 community members. The activity also enhanced networking and close coordination with local stakeholders, in particular provincial Red Cross chapters, the Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office, and the Office for Non-formal Education Centres.

On the occasion of World Environment Day (5 June), the Tuvalu Red Cross Society launched a two-week campaign to raise community awareness of climate change impacts and to encourage people to become active agents for sustainable development. Activities included a poster and essay competition in schools, a community-awareness campaign on bio-fuels, and a climate change workshop that featured a screening of *An Inconvenient Truth*. The Tuvalu Red Cross also coordinated a clean-up campaign on Funafuti and sponsored a radio quiz for youth groups, which focused on climate change and disaster risk reduction with a special emphasis on healthy coral reefs and waste management.

The Mongolian Red Cross Society has produced a series of posters outlining preparedness actions for families to take to reduce the impact of drought and “dzud” (severe winter weather conditions) and improve access to feed and water for livestock. The posters have been distributed throughout the country among both urban populations and nomadic herding families.

The Solomon Islands Red Cross, in cooperation with the Environment Ministry, Meteorological Office and National Disaster Management Office, produced a set of posters outlining the impacts of climate change in the country and promoting traditional methods of coping with them. The posters have also been turned into a DVD for use in communities and schools.

HFA priority 4: Reduce the underlying risk factors

The planting of mangroves is being encouraged in coastal areas of Viet Nam to protect the sea dyke system and reduce the intensity of strong winds and sea waves, thus protecting local communities from these potential hazards. In addition, mangrove roots provide excellent conditions for marine creatures, which is helping to balance the ecosystem. Other types of trees are being planted in areas prone to landslides as part of community-based disaster risk reduction programmes.

The Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has incorporated tree-planting into its community-based disaster preparedness programmes in areas threatened by soil erosion. The programme is implemented by Red Cross volunteers and youth alongside technical workers from forestry stations.

Integration of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation

National Societies in the Pacific and South and South-east Asia sub-regions have been implementing climate change adaptation initiatives, including participation in regional forums and workshops, to raise concerns about changing weather patterns and their impacts and implications for disaster risk reduction. They are also integrating climate change adaptation into disaster risk reduction programmes. National Societies in the Cook Islands, the Solomon Islands and Tonga have been especially active in incorporating climate change adaptation into their ongoing disaster risk reduction activities, aware as they are that climate change is a real threat to their countries' populations.

In March 2008, a national Red Cross workshop was organized in Indonesia to define a strategy to reduce the risks and impacts of disaster through climate change adaptation. In achieving this, it was decided the way forward would involve advocacy and awareness-raising, the development of tools and approaches to climate change adaptation, and the integration of climate change into community-based programmes such as disaster preparedness and health promotion. The Indonesian Red Cross Society also intends to integrate climate change adaptation into its existing strategic plans, policies and training materials.

Food security for resilience

Where appropriate, National Societies are helping to boost local agricultural production through projects such as sustainable farming, microfinance, small-scale irrigation systems and the establishment of food insecurity early alert systems.

In response to chronic food shortages that occurred over a two-year period due to drought and the failure of the annual potato crop, the Timor-Leste Red Cross Society supported communities faced with malnutrition and hunger in establishing farming collectives (each comprising 20 members, at least 20 per cent of whom were women) to develop vegetable gardens as an alternative food source. The community was able to generate funds through sales, as well as having fresh vegetables for personal consumption. Upon the request of the community and the Timor-Leste Red Cross Society, the Ministry of Agriculture supported the project by providing the farmers with vocational and agricultural skills development to improve productivity.

Health and disaster risk reduction

"Community First Aid" and "Health in Emergencies" are among National Societies' core activities and are increasingly being integrated into disaster risk reduction efforts. The Lao Red Cross, for example, is piloting a programme integrating community-based disaster preparedness and community-based first aid, the construction of multi-hazard-resistant health facilities and response to avian influenza.

The Red Cross Society of China, recognizing that community safety and resilience is most effectively achieved through integrated actions, has developed a community vulnerability reduction programme to assist the most flood-prone and flood-affected villages in Guangxi and Hunan provinces. An initial assessment identified all aspects of community vulnerability, needs and possible solutions. The resulting programme combines sanitation (toilet construction), health and hygiene education, disaster preparedness and water supply activities. Through this integrated approach, communities' access to a safe water supply, improved sanitation and hygiene education help prevent the spread of disease, while

health education ensures that they have the resources and knowledge to support a sustainable improvement in their general health and living conditions. In addition, the inclusion of disaster preparedness activities encourages communities to develop locally appropriate strategies to mitigate the impact of disasters and reduce their vulnerability.

Use and protection of public facilities —

Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers and community members are often called upon to assist with the upkeep of public facilities, especially ones constructed in communities and designed to be safer and more resilient to different types of hazards. Cyclone shelters were built in coastal communities of Bangladesh and India, with the support of the International Federation, partner National Societies and other humanitarian organizations, as part of a cyclone preparedness programme to provide safe places for the local people to seek shelter. These places are maintained by community members and Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers to ensure that they are ready for use when needed.

Schools and hospitals are also used for evacuation and temporary shelter when disasters occur. Within recovery programmes in Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, the National Societies are endeavouring to construct or renovate schools and hospitals in a safer manner. Local people can then seek shelter there if a disaster strikes.

Safe multi-purpose community buildings, such as menasa in Indonesia and community centres in Nepal and Sri Lanka, have also been constructed with the



Samoa, September 2007. Fa'apopo Samoata and family are helped by Red Cross volunteers to create a vegetable garden to help fight food shortage for the poor in Palisi, Apia.

contributions of community members and local authorities/agencies. In normal times, these buildings are used for community meetings, training or gatherings, but they can be turned into safe shelters during times of disaster.

Recovery schemes and social safety nets

Within community-based disaster risk reduction or recovery programmes, National Societies are supporting communities in developing local safety nets that can help people facing a crisis. Examples of this are community-managed emergency funds normally set up for small-scale crises. Community committees can decide to use the funds to support vulnerable members suffering from illness and unable to cope by themselves. A recovery policy is being developed by the International Federation.

Vulnerability reduction

Vulnerability is being addressed by National Societies supporting community members in diversifying their livelihoods and income sources. In Mongolia, for example, a livelihood concern for nomadic herders is access to sufficient food for their livestock during the long winters. After a series of dzud in the early 2000s, stocks of feed were running low. To address this problem, the Mongolian Red Cross Society, with support from ECHO and together with the communities concerned, set up a programme of communal hay harvesting, which has successfully ensured that there have been adequate feed stocks for subsequent winters.

In Nepal, a livelihood component of the DFID-supported Disaster Reduction Phase II programme was highly valued by vulnerable groups. Beneficiaries were selected through a participatory process, provided with community-managed loans and vocational training, and given opportunities to diversify their sources of income. Livelihood activities ranged from small businesses, such as small-scale rice trading, to vegetable farming and animal husbandry. As a result of this initiative, the local authorities were able to rank many beneficiaries as having been lifted from the poor to the medium-poor and better-off categories.

Public-private partnership

Partnerships and linkages with the public and private sectors are being developed at all levels to obtain their support for and cooperation in disaster risk reduction activities. The Thai Red Cross Society has established a partnership with Tesco Lotus, a leading retailer in Thailand, whereby the company donates relief items up to a certain value and transports relief goods for free to anywhere in the country. The Singapore Red Cross Society has agreements with McDonald's for food relief, with the Civic Ambulance Services for pandemic response and with Alexandra Hospital for the deployment of volunteers.

Land-use planning and building codes

In their recovery programmes, the National Societies of Indonesia (after the tsunami in 2004), the Philippines (after the typhoon in 2007) and Sri Lanka (after the tsunami in 2004) consulted community members and local authorities on the location and design of new houses to be built so that people would be safer in the event of a similar disaster. To help protect the rights of vulnerable people, the National Societies also negotiated with the local authorities to provide land use certificates to the housing beneficiaries as a precondition of construction in their areas.

Rural development plans and disaster risk reduction

When carrying out VCAs, National Societies are encouraging the establishment of links between community preparedness and response plans and development plans to ensure support from the local authorities and other organizations for programme implementation. Examples of effective partnerships can be found in Cambodia, China and Nepal, where the National Societies have established excellent cooperation with local authorities.

In its community-based disaster preparedness programme initiated in 2003 after severe flooding in previous years, the Cambodian Red Cross Society helped communities in Kratie province set up commune disaster management committees. Villagers, volunteers and community-based organizations worked together to increase understanding of the various hazards facing communities and to teach people how to cope with them. After conducting a VCA, the National Society, in cooperation with the local authorities, facilitated the formulation of community disaster preparedness and risk reduction plans and linked them with community development plans to ensure that the plans achieved both development and disaster risk reduction goals.

HFA priority 5: Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

Disaster management capacities

The International Federation is well known for its disaster response activities. Over time, the National Societies have developed policies, standard procedures, organizational structures, and human and material resources to enable them to provide an effective response to natural disasters and meet the needs of disaster-affected people rapidly and efficiently.

The International Federation has produced a Disaster response and contingency planning guide for National Societies, supports the training of disaster response teams, maintains warehouses with pre-positioned relief stocks, and provides disaster response tools and materials for use at various levels. National Societies are also involved in Inter-Agency Contingency Planning processes at the country level.

Dialogue, coordination and information exchange between the disaster management and development sectors

The International Federation has been assisting Pacific National Societies in establishing close working relationships with organizations working in the fields of climate change and disaster risk reduction, such as WWF, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC). The Pacific Communities and Climate Forum, jointly organized in November 2007 by the International Federation, UNDP, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre and WWF, provided an opportunity for the Pacific National Societies and civil society practitioners from the disaster management, health and environment sectors to share the latest information on climate change, put forward ideas for community-based activities in the Pacific Islands region and identify opportunities for further partnership and information exchange.

Coordinated regional approaches

To ensure a consistent approach to disaster response within the Movement, National Societies are encouraged to use and strengthen global and regional disaster response mechanisms and are supported in doing so.

Throughout the Asia-Pacific region, Regional Disaster Response Teams have been established with the aim of optimizing human resources and expertise in support of national and international disaster response operations. In the event of a disaster, team members are deployed at short notice to assist a National Society in conducting a relief operation and to undertake activities such as assessment, core relief functions (i.e. food, water, health, telecommunications, logistics, shelter and restoring family links) and, when required, support for humanitarian coordination.

Within the Asia-Pacific region, a total of 530 potential Regional Disaster Response Team members have been trained, approximately 250 members are currently active and ready for deployment, and 131 have been previously deployed.

Disaster preparedness and contingency plans

The response of the Myanmar Red Cross Society to the deadly Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 was enhanced through effective consultation with the local authorities and the launch of a contingency planning process prior to the cyclone. Through a series of meetings and regular dialogue with 26 government departments, the Myanmar Red Cross Society was able to foster understanding of its role in responding to disasters and the importance of developing contingency plans. As a result of these efforts, the National Society was able to respond to the needs of people affected by Cyclone Nargis immediately after it struck the Ayeyarwady delta and the city of Yangon. Furthermore, as the authorities were fully aware of the National Society's role and actions in such situations, access was permitted to the affected areas and customs duties waived.

National Societies are increasingly developing disaster response and contingency plans for major hazards and conducting simulation exercises at all levels, especially in disaster-prone communities, to ensure that the plans work in practice. The plans are often reviewed and updated annually or in the aftermath of a disaster. Links are also made between the National Society's plans and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's country-level contingency plans.

Emergency funds

Emergency funds (national and sub-national emergency or contingency funds and community funds) have been established at all levels to enable an immediate response to disasters. If a disaster exceeds local capacities to respond, support can be requested from higher up the chain. In the event of a large-scale disaster, national and international appeals can be launched. Approximately 70 per cent of National Societies in the Asia-Pacific region have their own emergency funds in place.

Volunteer participation

Within the Asia-Pacific region, there are currently 62 million Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and members. They make up 65 per cent of the International Federation's total volunteer numbers. National Society volunteers are the backbone of disaster risk reduction activities, so all National Societies strive to increase and maintain volunteer numbers at all times. The Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea improved its volunteer management by formulating guidelines clearly describing the roles of volunteers in emergency response and disaster preparedness, thus helping them to function better in their communities.

In South-east Asia, the National Societies of Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam have developed a set of minimum standards for the effective management of volunteers who contribute to regular and emergency disaster management activities. The aim is to build a healthy and effective volunteer management framework to support and recognize the valuable input of National Society volunteers in meeting the needs of vulnerable communities in preparing for, the mitigation of and the possible prevention of and response to disasters.

Cross-cutting issues

In their programmes, National Societies have also taken into account the cross-cutting issues highlighted in the HFA. These include:

- factoring an integrated multi-hazard approach to disaster risk reduction into policies, plans and programming relating to sustainable development, relief, rehabilitation and recovery activities
- integrating a gender perspective into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes



Pictured, guard Cao Thanh Son, who is the head of 7-10 guards who protect the forest from fishermen who would cut mangroves to expand their seafood farms. In April he looks for the "fruit" of the mangroves, long pods that he can plant into the mud. So far, 30km of Nam Dinh province's 80km coastline have been protected by 10,000 ha of mangroves.

- taking into account cultural diversity, age and vulnerable groups in disaster risk reduction planning
- empowering communities and local authorities to reduce disaster risk
- international and regional cooperation, including the transfer of knowledge, technology and expertise to enhance capacity building for risk reduction.

National Societies' approach to and consideration of these cross-cutting issues in their programming and interventions are outlined below. It is worth mentioning that the International Federation was instrumental in the development of the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (the Sphere Project⁵), which sets standards and indicators for cross-cutting issues, including gender balance and participation. It also had a leading role in the formulation of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief,⁶ which includes the principle of respect for culture and custom.

A multi-hazard approach

The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society applies a multi-hazard approach to all of its community-based disaster risk reduction programmes. Community members, facilitated by Red Cross staff and volunteers, identified hazards and risks facing their communities, such as floods in the monsoon season, drought and fire in the dry season, landslides in mountainous areas, and other health hazards due to environmental degradation. Secondary information on local hazards was also obtained from government hazard and risk assessment data (e.g., the Disaster Management Committee's country risk profile and landslide information from the National Building Research Organisation) to get a clearer understanding of the issues. Possible solutions were then discussed to address the problems caused by the hazards.

All hazards and risks and their possible impacts are taken into consideration during VCAs, a participatory risk assessment process pioneered by the International Federation. Findings from such assessments help to determine the appropriate activities to include in programme design and preparation, for example multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster response plans that address multi-hazard situations.

Gender perspective and cultural diversity

Efforts are being made to address the issue of gender inequality in programme areas. Although ensuring a gender perspective is not just about women – but rather about both women and men – experience shows that women are often adversely affected by disasters owing to expected social and cultural roles or to prejudices.

Maximizing the capacities of both men and women for disaster risk reduction activities increases the effectiveness of such activities and reduces vulnerability more substantially. In the long term, this will help to change gender roles, ultimately achieving gender equality, which is the third Millennium Development Goal.

In its community-based disaster preparedness programme, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society pushed for more female members in the Red Crescent volunteer teams. This enabled the National Society to gain access to some of the most vulnerable women who, owing to local custom, were not allowed to leave their houses or meet in the presence of men, and to get them involved in project activities that resulted in improvements in their lives and those of their families.

On the basis of the Movement's fundamental principle of impartiality, the National Societies recruit staff and volunteers from all backgrounds, irrespective of race, religion or culture, to work alongside each other and to help provide better services to vulnerable groups.

Community and volunteer participation

National Society disaster risk reduction activities are founded on the principle of inclusion of all stakeholders. This means that communities are key partners in developing an understanding of the risks and in designing and implementing jointly identified and prioritized actions to enhance safety and resilience. Communities are at the centre of National Society actions, and volunteers are the backbone of disaster risk reduction actions.

A recent pilot VCA conducted by the National Society in 10 villages in Laos created considerable interest among community members and Red Cross volunteers. The local people got enthusiastically involved in identifying critical issues and finding appropriate solutions and prioritizing community action to reduce the possible impact of future disasters,

thereby reducing their vulnerability. The leader of Nakiaou village in Kham Muon province said: “Thanks to this process, our village benefited. Clearly some actions need to be considered and discussed more among ourselves for future reduction of risk, including the rebuilding of what we call our ‘lifeline bridge’.”

Capacity building and technology transfer

National Societies have a long history of mutual support in terms of both technical and financial assistance. This takes place in the core programme areas of organizational development and disaster management and is guided by the International Federation. Further assistance is received from governments, other organizations and donor agencies.

The International Federation supported the founding of the Maldives Red Crescent as part of the tsunami recovery operation in order to build local capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable communities in the Maldives better and more appropriately.

Communication systems, including the provision and use of information technology and HF/VHF equipment, especially for disaster response in coordination with government agencies and the armed forces, has been introduced, with the support of the International Federation, in the most disaster-prone countries, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. This helps speed up communications during emergencies. Elsewhere, GPS and GIS technology is being used in Indonesia and the Philippines to develop hazard maps and support risk assessments.

The way forward

Since the adoption of the HFA, what has been undertaken so far by Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the lives of vulnerable people in disaster-prone areas in the Asia-Pacific region. However, in order to enhance this good work and help communities build even greater resilience to disasters, there needs to be a significant scaling up of activities and replication of good practice.

National Societies, through their national networks of branches and volunteers operating at the grassroots level, are best placed to implement disaster risk reduction activities in their communities. However, it requires increased funding and a greater flexibility on the part of local governments to incorporate in their development planning actions identified by vulnerable communities and civil society for disaster risk reduction.

Furthermore, it is important for governments at all levels to ensure that a focus on strengthening community safety and building resilience is reflected in national legislation, policies, strategies and programmes.

Reducing disaster risk cannot be achieved by the Red Cross Red Crescent alone. It can certainly make a big contribution, but the systematic reduction of risk can only be brought about through strong working partnerships between all stakeholders, be they the communities themselves, local and national governments, governmental and non-governmental organizations or the private sector.

The challenge for National Societies in scaling up their disaster risk reduction actions is to ensure that they keep a focus on their organizations’ distinctive competencies and comparative advantages, increasing what they are good at and sharing their experiences with others. Each National Society is encouraged to determine its niche in disaster risk reduction in its respective country and to focus on strengthening community safety and resilience, while ensuring that disaster risk reduction is reflected in national policies, strategies and programmes for the achievement of the five priorities of the HFA.

- 1 Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities, World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Kobe, Japan, January 2005 www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa/docs/Hyogo-framework-for-action-english.pdf.
- 2 As stated earlier, disaster risk reduction activities are not static, stand-alone interventions, and many National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have been contributing to risk reduction in their countries for many years. The contributions described here include activities that may have been initiated before the HFA’s adoption.
- 3 International Federation, Guidelines for assessment in emergencies, March 2008, www.ifrc.org/Docs/pubs/disasters/resources/helping-recover/guidelines-emergency.pdf.
- 4 Disaster preparedness wing of the European Department of Humanitarian Aid (ECHO).
- 5 The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Disaster Response, <http://www.sphereproject.org>.
- 6 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief, <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/>.

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people.

By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.