

Tsunami two-year progress report : Maldives



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 185 countries.

In Brief

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Construction of 400 to 600 houses underway on the island of Dhuvaaafaru

Executive summary

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's activities in the Maldives can be divided into three distinct but overlapping areas: relief and recovery, community involvement, and the formation of a national Red Crescent Society.

Much progress has been made in relief and recovery, with the relief phase all but over, and the focus now is on concluding construction, water and sanitation programmes and transitioning to recovery activities as communities - some brand new - begin to emerge. The Federation and its six in-country partner societies are working hand-in-hand with government agencies and international actors to implement a broad range of activities to give these

communities the best chance of becoming self-sufficient and resilient.

Communities are involved at every stage of the programme process, from consultation on house design to phone-in radio programmes. Dispersed island communities are being given their say on how they see their future developing.

The Maldives is a country facing rapid change, with ever-increasing tourist numbers bringing a chance of unimagined prosperity. Technological advances have seen the islands connected as never before, both to one another and to the outside world. The government is making good progress on the Millennium Development Goals, with education a particular source of pride.

The country has to find its own way in these exciting times, and while there are many benefits such as increasing levels of income, health and education, there are also downsides, illustrated by the increase of injecting drugs and the associated high risk of HIV transmission and rising political tensions. External factors, such as sea level rise and the possibility of another major disaster, must also be faced.

In this context, the successful formation of an independent, strong and neutral Red Crescent society has grown ever more imperative, and, after an uncertain start, the process seems to have received new impetus following a successful joint assessment mission to the Maldives in October.

Background/Operational context

Though the tsunami in the Maldives did not result in the same large loss of life as in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the proportional impact of the disaster was arguably the greatest of the countries affected: over a third of people in the country were affected as were the country's two main sources of revenue, tourism and fishing. Almost two-thirds of its GDP was lost in 2005, precipitating what the Asian Development Bank called a 'fiscal crisis'. However, the economy rebounded strongly in 2006, with tourism figures already back to pre-tsunami levels, having halved in 2005. One million tourists are projected to visit in 2010, while total economic growth will peak at 18 percent in 2007 before settling at a healthy eight percent in the following years.

In response to the disaster, the government drew up an ambitious and wide-ranging National Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, for which fundraising continues. A donor forum in June 2006 brought many government and non-state donors to the Maldives for two days of discussions on the future implementation of the plan. This had been challenging as government staff were drawn back to other projects and the excellent co-ordination seen in the emergency relief phase fell away. Logistically, transporting materials to small islands spread over 200km was made even more difficult because of damage to jetties and harbours.

Direct partnerships with the Government of Maldives were developed, but without a host national society in place, the normally well-established links to the local communities had to be built up from scratch, slowing the transition from relief to recovery. Though six partner national societies (PNS) are now working in the Maldives, only two arrived in the first month after the tsunami.

This resulted in the Federation assuming a major programme implementation role.

Key facts and figures

- In total, RCRC partners have reached 211,666 beneficiaries in recovery and reconstruction in both the emergency relief phase and in recovery – representing over two-thirds of the population of the whole country.
- Rainwater harvesting kits have been delivered to households across 79 islands.
- Nearly 7,500 people have so far benefited from temporary and permanent housing that has been constructed.

Though the Maldives does not suffer from the armed conflict of its tsunami-affected neighbours, rapid political changes have posed difficulties. Political parties have been introduced to the country for the first time, giving rise to tensions in local communities and absorbing some of the attention of senior government officials.

Achievements and challenges

Federation-wide achievements

In both the emergency relief phase and in recovery and reconstruction, the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) achievements reflect the fact that it is one of the government's major partners. High proportions of the affected population have been reached – firstly by emergency relief assistance such as power generators and psychosocial care, soon afterwards through the provision of temporary housing, and finally through a range of ongoing recovery projects. In total, RCRC partners have reached 211,666 beneficiaries – over two-thirds of the population of the whole country.

In many cases, the Movement undertook to address the entire needs of whole sectors. In shelter all material for transitional shelters to house those displaced by the tsunami were financed by the Federation, and most of the reconstructed houses are being built and financed either by the Federation or one of the PNS. Construction of about two-thirds of the houses is now underway. In waste management and water and sanitation, similarly broad interventions have been made – waste clean up programmes and rainwater harvesting kits have reached almost all of the tsunami-affected, a third of the country's population.

A high level of participation – essential to achieve both successful delivery and to ensure sustainability – is evidenced in both the Federation's and PNS programmes. On average 72 percent of programmes include some level of beneficiary or community participation.

The pace of work has varied by sector. Delivery in some areas has been rapid – for example 82 percent of those targeted for improved water sources have already been reached. By contrast, the bulk of housing reconstruction remains to be completed. In some cases the process of planning and beneficiary consultation has been necessarily lengthy, particularly when relocation to a new island is involved. A key lesson learnt is the need for earlier planning for the recovery phase.

Most significant effects on beneficiaries

The commitment to 'build back better' has been a strong influence in the Maldives. Housing is designed to withstand flooding, earthquakes and even moderate tsunamis. A number of community buildings are being built on columns to provide refuge from flooding and sea swells. The country's delicate natural environment is protected through subjecting all major housing, water and sanitation, and construction projects to rigorous environmental assessments.

On three islands, the RCRC is involved in significantly upgrading both the housing and community infrastructure on government-designated 'safer islands'. These islands will not only be better protected from future natural disasters, but will act as regional hubs for population and investment and allow for more efficient delivery of services to islanders.

In some cases, the tsunami has also given the Movement the opportunity to comprehensively address longstanding vulnerabilities. For example, in the process of clearing tsunami debris, the Canadian and Australian Red Cross also saw a clear need for long-term waste management. The result has been a joint programme to build waste management centres on 74 islands and education for communities on basic waste management techniques. The momentum that the project has generated has not gone unnoticed by other funding agencies: the World Bank is now committing \$2.8 million to the solid waste management sector in the Maldives.

Similar 'knock-on' effects may result from the strong focus on the environment in some programmes. In an effort to introduce renewable energy to the Maldives, the Federation has included the installation of solar energy panels in the construction plans for the newly developed island of Dhuvaaafaru. The island has the potential to serve as an example for other islands in the Maldives who are highly dependent on expensive oil imports for their energy needs.

Whilst success can be measured to some extent in indicators and shifting policies in whole sectors, one effect on beneficiaries that is less easy to measure is the restoration of their dignity. The importance of this subject is addressed within components of the Movement's livelihoods programmes. For example, the British Red Cross (BRC) livelihoods programme works with vulnerable individuals and community groups, supporting income generating initiatives by dispersing cash grants and arranging technical support. To-date, 436 families have received assistance to get back on their feet.

On Buruni island for example, the community has long identified the establishment of an oil depot as an opportunity to bring economic development to the island. Now land is being reclaimed to build a six tank oil depot. The island development committee (IDC) is responsible for the project, but is being well supported by other organisations, such as the women's development committee, who contribute their government allowances to the project, cleaning the island for free.

Island chief, Ali Zahir explained:

"The project will be very beneficial for Buruni – not only will it provide employment to those running the depot, it will also stimulate the local economy attracting boats to stop and refuel in Buruni, injecting cash into the local economy ... with the profits earned from the oil depot we will then be able to finish building the area around the tanks, and then invest in the harbour area building a fish market and a shopping area to capitalise on the increasing through traffic."

Economic benefits aside, the project has also brought a renewed spirit of volunteerism and community pride to an island that did not at first benefit from tsunami-related programmes.

Health and Care (including health and watsan infrastructure)

The Movement's work in the health and care sector has been driven by the particular vulnerabilities of the country. The focus on water and sanitation reflects the limited water resources and fragile ecosystem of the hundreds of small islands that make up the Maldives. Limited freshwater resources, the lack of any waste management system, and the unavailability of psychosocial care are key challenges being comprehensively addressed. Health and care beneficiaries outnumber those of any other sector in the country.

Rainwater harvesting kits delivered to households across 79 islands by the Federation – reaching over a third of the country's population – are helping to reduce the pressure on pumping water from shallow groundwater sources, many of which were contaminated by the tsunami. On 15 islands supplementary water supply systems will deliver desalinated water to those islands where rainwater harvesting alone is not sufficient to meet the community's needs – four have already been constructed.

Sewer systems will be built on 10 islands by a combination of the Federation, American Red Cross, French Red Cross, Irish Red Cross, the Hong Kong branch of China

Red Cross and British Red Cross. Some of these systems will include off-reef outfalls and new septic tanks for every household – these will prevent effluent from households from seeping into and polluting the groundwater and will thus improve the health of islanders.

The waste management programme run jointly by the Canadian and Australian Red Cross has had a similarly broad reach. In addition to cleaning up nearly 300,000m³ of tsunami debris on 74 islands, waste management centres are being set up on all of these islands to process and manage waste which was previously dumped on the beach, thrown into the sea, or burnt.

While these areas of work are relatively novel for the Movement, more traditional health and care work is progressing well – the German Red Cross has completed rebuilding 24 out of 26 health facilities and is now installing and sourcing equipment, including X-ray machines and modern laboratories.



Happy children play in front of the newly installed supplementary water supply system on Gadhdhoo

Developing physical infrastructure has not come at the neglect of less visible health needs – after providing psychosocial care in the emergency phase of the tsunami and immunising nearly half the country against measles, the American Red Cross is now undertaking a programme across eight of the most tsunami-affected atolls to promote psychosocial wellbeing by strengthening community resilience. This relatively recent programme has already reached about 17% of its targeted 65,000 beneficiaries.

A thread running through all of these programmes – and a common concern – is establishing and maintaining strong community involvement and ensuring the sustainability of aid. Water and sanitation infrastructure installed is being managed by committees made up of local islanders supported by operators trained by the Federation and American Red Cross.

The ambitious reach of these programmes has also posed challenges. As new infrastructure is installed, behavioural change is required to maximize benefits – this long-term work requires sustained community engagement.

Emergency relief and disaster management

Soon after the International Federation's field assessment and coordination team identified the areas most severely affected by the tsunami in the Maldives, the Movement acted swiftly to address some of the most pressing needs. Perhaps the two most vital interventions were the provision of 32 generators to restore power and the psychosocial care offered by American Red Cross. The combination of this hardware and software allowed communities to get back onto their feet more rapidly than would have otherwise been the case.

Over 10,000 people were displaced by the tsunami, many of whom faced the trauma of leaving behind devastated islands. The Federation took on the financing of all the transitional shelters needed in the whole country, including some of the non-food items that internally displaced persons (IDPs) required, such as mattresses and gas stoves. Over 800 family apartments and 280 individual rooms have been built to standards that exceed SPHERE guidelines and to a quality rarely reached in temporary housing. The French Red Cross is working in the IDP settlement in Laamu Gan island providing camp management support while it constructs permanent housing nearby.

The particular geography of the Maldives leaves it especially vulnerable to natural disasters, requiring long-term disaster management work at both the community and central government levels. Assistance with developing a national disaster management framework and training government officials has been undertaken by the Federation, who are working closely with the UNDP in this regard.

At the island level, both the British Red Cross and the Federation have begun work on facilitating the identification of vulnerabilities by communities themselves. Some of the solutions proposed, such as planting trees to prevent beach erosion, will be supported by the Movement in the coming months.

The ability of the country to manage any future disasters will also hinge on the establishment and development of a National Society, the particular challenges of which are detailed later in this report.

In the interim, the British Red Cross will extend its disaster management work across the six islands on which it is working, closely integrating disaster management with its housing and livelihoods programmes. For example, new housing is being built to withstand a minor tsunami and rainwater harvesting techniques are being promoted to reduce island vulnerability to fresh water shortages.

Greater work at the community level is planned by the Federation too, who will facilitate vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCA) on a further eight islands. National first aid and dengue fever plans will be developed, with trainers sent to islands to implement these plans at a community level.

A total of 94,730 beneficiaries have been reached in the emergency relief and disaster management sector.

Shelter/housing

While other partners such as UNDP are repairing the majority of houses damaged by the tsunami, the Movement has taken on the immense challenge of reconstruction – sometimes on islands that are being entirely redeveloped. About 30% of the 1,500 or so houses the Movement is building are now underway, and all are expected to be completed in the course of next year. Nearly 7,500 people have so far benefited from temporary and permanent housing that has been constructed.

The work on some islands goes well beyond simply building houses. In line with the government's plans to develop safer islands, on Thaa Vilufushi and Raa Dhuvaafaru the British Red Cross and Federation will be building high-quality housing and protecting beach areas to safeguard islanders against future disasters. Land reclamation work on Vilufushi and developing the virgin island of Dhuvaafaru have posed huge logistical challenges but also afforded new opportunities.

On Dhuvaafaru and in Laamu Gan, where French Red Cross works, a range of community infrastructure (schools, hospitals, roads, community buildings, sewerage systems, etc.) is being developed by the Movement alongside the housing. Where the Movement is not building this infrastructure, strong partnerships with the government and other aid agencies are being forged to ensure development coordination.

The rebuilding of public buildings, recreation facilities and other community infrastructure is also being handled by the Canadian Red Cross on 48 islands, and will be completed next year.

Again, the geography of the Maldives has posed particular constraints. Almost all building materials need to be imported from abroad and transported within the country, across 200km of ocean, which is time consuming and expensive. There is a great shortage of qualified contractors within the country – some of those working with the Movement have had difficulty fulfilling their contractual obligations.

Encouragement to contractors to employ local labour has not always worked as Maldivian labourers have been found to lack the motivation to perform at levels expected in the sub region (much of this is due to higher income levels in the Maldives, and the lack of a large casual labour force, as can be found in neighbouring countries). In some cases, it has been possible to sub contract piecework, such as production of concrete blocks, to local labour.

Maintaining strong communication with and participation of beneficiaries is another key challenge that must be faced over the coming year. Tensions in some communities have arisen over the choices available to them, particularly when it involves relocation to another island. There has not been a strong tradition of grassroots participation in the Maldives and the RCRC will need to continue its support to the government in activities such as consulting beneficiaries about housing plans and designs.

Livelihoods

Livelihoods work within the Movement is being undertaken almost entirely by the British Red Cross, which is working on seven islands. Over 3,000 people have already been reached by the programme.

The BRC offers technical and financial support to enable people to rebuild and strengthen their livelihoods so they are able to withstand future shocks. Over USD150,000 has already been disbursed in small grants to 436 families.

The programme is much more than disbursing grants however – it is probably the most participatory of all tsunami projects in the country. Basing well trained staff in the islands to work closely alongside communities has allowed the BRC to facilitate the development of impressive livelihoods initiatives.

The combination of technical and financial support has been very successful. For example, the combination of small grants and training for farmers in Laamu Isdhoo-Kalhaidhoo (conducted in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture) has seen agricultural production expand into new and profitable areas.

The focus on vulnerability means that BRC work closely not just with those displaced by the tsunami but also their hosts too – a group too often neglected by many aid programmes. The small island of Buruni, for example, took in three times as many displaced people as were originally on the island. Now, the BRC is supporting the local island development committee to reclaim land to build a six tank oil depot to stimulate the local economy.

Organizational Development

As one of the few countries in the world without a National Society, organisational development has focused on establishing a Maldives Red Crescent Society. Nearly 5000 people have participated in public meetings disseminating information on the National Society and the election of General Assembly representatives.

After receiving approval from the government to begin the process, a group of 80 volunteers were organized into working groups on statutes development, programming, and organization of atolls sensitization meetings.

Public meetings and information dissemination programmes were held across the country – which were attended by nearly 5,000 people. Sixty-two representatives to the General Assembly have been elected. Draft statutes have been prepared and sent to RCRC regional delegations for their comments.

However progress has not been as fast as hoped, particularly in electing the 18 representatives to the general assembly for the capital Male'. A joint Federation and ICRC assessment mission was undertaken in October 2006 to find ways to accelerate and improve the quality of the formation process, resulting in the establishment of a new 20-member working group with specific goals and targets.

It is expected that this new infusion of life into the formation process will soon lead to an election for Male' atoll general assembly representatives, the completion of the National Society statutes and submission to the Joint Commission in Geneva for approval, the holding of the first General Assembly and formal launching of the Maldives Red Crescent, and the election of the Governing Board.

Humanitarian Values

While the Maldives is best known for its high-end tourist resorts, the country has substantial societal challenges which a Red Crescent society, supported by the International Federation delegation and its partners, could begin to address.

There is much disaffection in the Maldives, some caused by an unequal distribution of the immense wealth that tourism has brought to an elite, and some related to traditional rivalries between islands and communities. By building a culture of volunteerism, the NS could help reduce intolerance and partisan sentiments at the root of many conflicts. The NS will also need to address the challenge of gender roles in Maldivian society. The Federation can support this by ensuring that women are given equal prominence in the consultative process that will eventually form the NS, and that all communities understand the importance of gender equality.

There is a danger of a serious rise in HIV levels in the Maldives, with studies by UNICEF showing alarming levels of drug use, particularly injected heroin. Anti-stigma and harm reduction programmes are required, though health education and information programmes would be needed first to build awareness.

In addition to disseminating information on the RCRC principles to programme beneficiaries (over 120,000 so far), the Federation will target 20,000 at-risk youth for healthy living programmes, 50,000 youth for humanitarian principles dissemination, and 100,000 general population for information on the RCRC Movement.

The information/humanitarian values department of the delegation has given full support to the process of forming a national society. It was behind the first ever International Red Cross Red Crescent day celebrations in the Maldives on 8 May 2006. Integrating humanitarian values into programme design has been paramount, and is evidenced in the creation of a "Red Cross Red Crescent" radio programme "Voice of Maldives", which among other things, gives beneficiaries a chance to phone in and have their voices heard.

This process of a constant three-way consultation (programme, development, beneficiaries) greatly facilitates speedy resolution of operational versus developmental conflicts, and aids better programming. It also ensures that beneficiaries and communities are the owners of the programmes.

International media such as CNN and local media outlets have been instrumental in highlighting the benefits of the International Federation programmes to Maldivian society.

The Federation and its international partners will continue to work on the formation of a national society, and will encourage volunteers to take up humanitarian values themes wherever possible. World Days, such as World AIDS Day, World Red Cross and Red Crescent day, the anniversary of the tsunami, and so on, will all be used to profile the international work of the Movement, and to

show how its principles can be applied and embraced in the Maldives.

To this end, funds will be needed for information and dissemination materials, and support required for regional initiatives and to train national staff and volunteers. It was not possible to run a humanitarian values workshop in 2006 due to the uncertainty around the formation of the NS, but this will be explored in the context of a broader joint workshop with ICRC in 2007.

Coordination with other partners and stakeholders

Coordination within the Maldives is comparably easier than in Sri Lanka and Indonesia due to the relatively small number of actors. International partners worked closely with an amenable government through a national disaster management centre established very quickly after the tsunami. Though almost all of the centre's staff have returned to their respective Ministries, some sectors have sustained good coordination. Other areas have suffered as staff return to their original jobs, particular in those sectors that do not fit in neatly with traditional government divisions, such as displaced people.

Strong coordination with the UN family, World Bank and UNDP takes place in various fora at both the country and programme level.

A good example of this is the provision of rainwater harvesting tanks – the Federation focused on household tanks and UNICEF on community tanks. Subsequently *“the Government built on the opportunity provided by IFRC and UNICEF, to commit to providing additional rainwater tanks to not just the tsunami affected islands, but to all households in the Maldives,”* notes Shaheedha Adam Ibrahim, Assistant Director General of the Ministry of Energy Environment and Water.

Certain PNS have tried to strengthen coordination with Maldivian NGOs, although due to the embryonic civil society, NGOs have limited capacity and are only implementing some small projects. Some examples of private sector support for community projects is already being seen, with foreign-operated diving schools supporting reef cleanups on world environment day.

Within the Movement, good practical level coordination has led to the sharing and pooling of resources. For example, two PNS (the Australian and Canadian Red Cross) are engaged in a unique partnership to manage and implement a major waste management project. The project is jointly managed, and finance and administrative staff are shared.

Programme level coordination has also helped members of the Movement learn from one another. Regular weekly meetings are held between Federation and six PNS to coordinate approaches and share information. Where possible, Movement-wide approaches to common challenges are standardised, such as the common RCRC guidelines developed for housing beneficiary selection.

The six PNS present and the Federation have worked together to produce a RCRC Maldives country strategy which will guide the entire Movement.

Efforts to ensure longer-term coordination are already being made. The RCRC took an active role in the Maldives partnership forum established by the government to try to encourage long-term relations with external partners to address the country's needs. A successful first meeting was held in June 2006.

Challenges

The main challenge is the ongoing absence of a national society that will provide a range of RCRC humanitarian services. This prevents a full-scale advocacy/information campaign by a local entity - instead much of the work is done by international delegates or locally hired Federation/PNS staff, resulting in a foreign-dominated image of humanitarian aid.

Once established, the investment made in the Maldives Red Crescent will ensure that community-based approaches to addressing needs are mainstreamed in the country. A wide National Society network will also help overcome the vulnerability inherent in the geographical isolation of dispersed island communities

In relation to programmes, some make tough demands on other stakeholders – the waste management centres for example must be matched by government programmes to collect the accumulated waste or by community initiatives to recycle and reuse.

As a result, much of the work in 2007 will be in strengthening community participation, education, and awareness, as well as completing the outstanding infrastructure work.

Outlook

The Movement has collectively developed a country strategy and agreed indicators to measure progress on a quarterly basis for seven key objectives (involving the community, organizational development, sustainability, quality and accountability, coordination and collaboration, disaster risk reduction, and communication and advocacy).

A major challenge is to form a National Society.

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Though the NS formation has been beset by difficulties, the government has demonstrated goodwill in encouraging the process. Feedback from island communities indicates that they view the RCRC as an organization that can genuinely empower them and add improve their lives.

The Maldives, being a small island state, faces several specific risks. Because of the logistical difficulties of servicing relatively isolated communities, the cost of delivering many services is high. The economy of the country is not well diversified, depending heavily on tourism and fisheries. Any shock to either economic sector, as experienced after the tsunami, negatively impacts the government's ability to sustain services.

The greatest long-term risk – climate change – has been forcefully articulated by the country's President.

Being so low lying, many islands suffer serious problems of beach erosion and salt water incursion into fresh water sources. Sea level rise will only exacerbate these problems, although thoughtful land use planning, community-based disaster management plans, and a strong Maldives Red Crescent Society will help to minimise these risks.

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