

Programme Update



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Vietnam

Appeal No. MAAVN001

13 August 2008

This report covers the period 1 January
to 30 June 2008.



With the help of the Vietnam Red Cross Society, awareness of avian influenza prevention has risen. "When I buy birds now, I ask for a vaccination certificate," says Dang Thi Hue from the Phu Long commune in Dong Thap province. "And when I sell them again, I get asked for one." She also wears a mask and boots to feed the birds and clean their pens.

(Photo: International Federation/Alex Wynter)

In brief

Programme purpose: The 2008-2009 support programme aims to strengthen the Vietnam Red Cross Society's role as the leading humanitarian organization in Vietnam.

Programme summary: Activities around disaster preparedness and response, avian influenza preparedness and awareness raising, community-based first aid, and organizational development including volunteering were the main focus areas of the Vietnam Red Cross Society (VNRC) during this reporting period.

The VNRC support to those in need, "Tet for the poor" has become its traditional activity covered by local resources. On the occasion of the 2008 Lunar New Year, the VNRC distributed Tet gifts including cookies, rice or cash to people in need in 41 out of 64 provinces.

The VNRC worked hard to finalize the Red Cross Activity Law draft which was adopted by the National Assembly in June. The head of the International Federation regional office and the head of ICRC regional office, both in Bangkok met with the VNRC leadership and the drafting team to further explain on how Red Cross Law meets international standards, specifically in terms of respecting the Fundamental Principles.

Financial situation: The total budget for 2008 is CHF 1,664,276 (USD 1.54 million or EUR 1.03 million) out of which 34 per cent covered. Overall expenditure to date is 17 per cent for the same year.

[Click here to go directly to the financial report.](#)

No. of people we help: The 2008-2009 support programme seeks to assist 377,903 direct beneficiaries.

Our partners: Multilateral partners who have supported VNRC include: Swedish Red Cross, Japanese Red Cross, German Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, New Zealand Red Cross, and Liechtenstein Red Cross. VNRC has also been supported bilaterally by the American, French, Spanish, and Swiss national societies. VNRC has also been working with government departments, namely in health and disasters, as well as with UN agencies, such as UNICEF, and non-governmental organizations.

Context

Early in 2008, cold, harsh weather and diseases had far-reaching effects on the life of many parts of the population. More than a hundred thousand hectares of young rice and rice crops were destroyed in 16 provinces, including the typhoon-hit provinces of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An. About 12,000 thousand head of livestock in the Northern and Northern Central provinces died due to the cold. The prospects of livelihood became even bleaker with the occurrence of “blue ear” disease in pigs, killing 2,700 pigs all over the country.¹

By the end of April, Vietnam had experienced three acute diarrhoea outbreaks which affected about 4,000 people. Among these, testing since October 2007 has revealed that some 700 are positive for cholera. According to a local newspaper, about 1,800 people in the 19 provinces were hospitalized with cholera. Unsafe food and hygiene were identified as the main reasons. The government intervened strongly through dissemination of information on the dangers of poor hygiene, and employed close monitoring measures to curb the spread. However, the health ministry warned that acute diarrhoea could escalate into an epidemic this summer and asked provinces and cities to tighten control of food safety, especially street food and ‘risky’ food, and to raise people’s awareness of food hygiene.

In immediate response to new needs arising from cold weather, the Vietnam Red Cross and its chapters provided warm clothes, blankets, salt, plastic tents, livelihood support and cash from its own stocks or with the help of local businesses to the most affected, particularly to residents in remote and mountainous areas. Response from the Hochiminh City Red Cross chapter was the first Red Cross intervention featured by national television. By March 2008, VNRC had raised VND 10.3 billion (USD 620,000) through local fundraising to assist the affected communities. While the VNRC headquarters has provided clothes and rice valued at VND 6 billion (USD 380,000) to the 15 worst-hit provinces, the government supported the affected with livestock (such as cows and buffaloes) and seed for agricultural activities.

In response to the need, the Spanish and the French Red Cross national societies also distributed rice, seed and fertilizer in the Thanh Hoa and Phu Yen provinces respectively.

During the first half of the year, avian influenza outbreak was reported in 12 provinces, claiming the lives of five people. The reason was mainly coming into contact with and/or eating infected poultry. A total of 26,000 poultry were killed to prevent the expansion of the outbreak.

In May, the VNRC joined the ranks of contributors towards the International Federation emergency appeal for the Nargis cyclone-affected people in Myanmar and released USD 20,000 (CHF 21,100) from its own resources.

While the unprecedented relief operation due to the lengthy cold spell has to some extent slowed down on-going projects, support to VNRC follows the plan for 2008-2009 in areas where funding has been secured. Activities focused on disaster management, avian influenza, community-based first aid, and capacity building.

Disaster management

Global Agenda Goal 1: Reduced deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.

Programme objective: VNRC fulfils its designated strategic and implementation role in the context of Vietnam’s disaster management network

¹ Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and local newspapers

Achievements:

The plantation of mangroves which helps to reduce impact of coastal disasters, and disaster preparedness (DP) capacity building continued through the implementation of the Japanese Red Cross-supported coastal protection programme. The activities under this programme were implemented in parallel with the relief operations for 2007's typhoon Lekima.

Under the Japanese Red Cross-funded coastal protection programme, about 22,700 plants of sonnaria, casuarina and bamboo were planted. In some provinces, new plants died due to salt water contamination, a consequence of last year's flood. About 217 poor families, including families headed by women, able to participate in the mangrove plantation activities were selected. The VNRC's ability to mobilize community input is a cornerstone of the mangrove plantation effort. Training in planting techniques was provided to the beneficiaries and Red Cross staff in the project provinces. The selected families were also engaged in taking care of and protecting the mangrove. Additional value from the planting is income generated from fishing in the planted area. Regular monitoring to find solutions to difficulties and follow-up was carried out by the country office.

The VNRC played an active role in preparing people for future threats by providing communities with disaster preparedness knowledge. About 25,000 school pupils and 890 teachers benefited from 30 training courses on disaster preparedness (DP). The acquired DP knowledge is key to helping communities cope with the effects of climate change. Activities under the mangrove programme will continue until 2010.

Typhoon Lekima relief operations largely followed as planned. Rice and household kit distributions were completed in January. Under the International Federation appeal, about 28,000 families received food support whereby each received 30 kilogrammes of rice, and up to 13,450 households provided with family kits containing a mosquito net, a blanket, a water container, a water bucket and cooking utensils. Re-construction of houses started in April after a short interval for reviewing, planning and beneficiary selection. Houses are under construction in many provinces, and up to 1,000 houses are expected to be completed by end of July.

In total, more than USD 3 million (CHF 3.2 million) has been donated through the International Federation and partner national societies (PNS) to support those affected. The French and Spanish national societies have also been working bilaterally to provide rice and household kits in their targeted provinces.

Apart from this, the national society also facilitated the training of 40 participants for the disaster response team. This training gave the participants an opportunity to better understand the Red Cross Red Crescent Fundamental Principles, to know how to gather information on damages and needs, to effectively organize relief distribution points in times of emergency relief, and skills in first aid.

Training in SPHERE standards was also provided to 25 participants including Red Cross members and members of the provincial committee for flood and storm control. Participants were given a better understanding and knowledge on the Humanitarian Charter and on minimum standards in disaster response.

Constraints or challenges

The capacity of the disaster management (DM) department was challenged in the progression of activities under the disaster management component as a whole. There are currently 13 projects/programmes in the form of long-term or relief assistance being implemented by the department with 11 staff, in addition to the VNRC's own planned activities. With a single DM staff covering too many projects, capacity is stretched and outcome per project is likely to be affected.

A well-coordinated relief operation where the VNRC plays a coordinating function is the goal of partners. The goal to strengthen holistic planning, a common understanding of the Red Cross role, and improved communication among Red Cross partners is aimed for through the VNRC's typhoon Lekima/flood response activities. The VNRC and its partner national societies realize the importance of holistic planning which seeks to integrate all PNS plans. This will help new donors to VNRC have a clearer picture of needs as well as avoid the possibility of an uneven allocation of support. In addition, when new needs arise, VNRC is expected to take the initiative to bring together all partners for open discussion on emerging needs and plan jointly, for instance, on how to adjust to the rice shortage in some locations due to the spell of cold weather.

Red Cross partners have proposed more dialogue with the VNRC on the role of the Red Cross. One issue is the practice to provide support equally to all provinces, rather than based on individual needs. The Red Cross cannot take over the responsibility of the government to meet all needs. It is, however, able to use its available

resources to meet the specific needs of the most vulnerable. In the VNRC's view of distribution of assistance, this appears to be a contradiction.

Health and care

Global Agenda Goal 2: Reduced deaths, illness and impact from disease and public health.

Programme Objective: The VNRC delivers quality health and care programmes and services that address the needs of vulnerable people in Vietnam

Achievements:

Following successful implementation of phase 1 (March-June 2006) and phase 2 (September 2006-April 2007) of the avian influenza preparedness project and incorporating its lessons learnt, the VNRC embarked on the phase 3 which was co-funded by UNICEF, International Federation and American Red Cross. This phase continued for a period of five months (October 2007-March 2008). Its activities are a part of the International Federation's country appeal for 2006-2007 and were designed by the VNRC health department, in consultation with Federation staff members. The project aims to raise the awareness of people on the dangers of avian influenza through related training and distribution of support, and enhance the preparedness/response capacity of VNRC in public health emergencies in five target provinces.

About 29,000 beneficiaries who were poultry traders, from small-sized poultry raising households or who culled poultry, benefited from this intervention. Some 400 volunteers were recruited to carry out door-to-door education, using UNICEF-printed fliers, for the beneficiaries after receiving training on effective education/dissemination skills. A follow-up study to support organizational learning for the VNRC has been carrying on in three out of five target provinces. A final report on this exercise is to be available by August.

In relation to sharing experiences on community involvement in avian influenza, the VNRC staff and volunteer from the Dong Thap Red Cross chapter presented a case study from the community level at the AHI-NGO-RCRC-Asia partnership on the regional community-based avian human influenza (AHI) management practitioners' workshop held in Bangkok, Thailand.

The community-based first aid (CBFA) programme continued with the development of the VNRC overall plan on first aid, while the finalization of the first aid manual was set as a priority for 2008. The International Federation country office is strengthening its support of the VNRC in ensuring the manual is ready by the end of 2008. A core group of national instructors, including other people highly competent in first aid, will meet in order to complete the manual. This team is also responsible for conveying updates on first aid developments internationally and providing a support function to first aid practitioners at all levels. The ministry of health has endorsed the first draft of the manual.

Effort by the VNRC towards being a leading role-player in recruiting non-paid blood donors was recognized. The national society president is the vice-chair of the newly-established national blood donation committee. Cooperation among the WHO, International Federation and VNRC's blood recruitment department resulted in closer ties with the national institute of haematology and blood transfusion (NIHBT) and the joint training of staff in the recruitment of blood donors, funded by the WHO.

Constraints or challenges

The VNRC faces real challenges in sharing its experience on avian influenza at regional level. Inadequate English language skills prevent the staff and volunteers from VNRC headquarters and chapters to communicate their wealth of experience in working with communities on avian influenza.

The avian influenza and community-based first aid activity staff are compelled to cope with a shortage of human resources. This shortage could be partly overcome if the headquarters considers an involvement of skilled staff from chapters in various nationwide activities such as monitoring.

Capacity and development

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

Programme objective: The VNRC is a strong, relevant and well-functioning society that is more effective at all levels, thus providing better service to vulnerable people.

Achievements

A reshuffle within the headquarters during the early months of the year resulted in the retirement of several senior managers from their positions and others contracted as consultants in the field of avian influenza and water and sanitation. A water and sanitation coordinator, a long-vacant position expected to coordinate water and sanitation activities being run by three different departments, was finally appointed while a fundraising department, aiming to develop headquarters capacity to raise funds, was created. The VNRC headquarters invited the International Federation's support to build capacity for the newly established department.

Job descriptions for each department and its directors to enable VNRC to produce more focused and coordinated work was not prioritized by the VNRC this year, though there has been interest by the leadership in having a terms of reference (ToR) in place for each department at headquarters.

In the field of financial development, a cost norm has been developed, and the VNRC will be financially supported in a more coordinated and consolidated way as a result of this norm. The cost norm sets an agreed rate of expenditure for work through and with VNRC for the International Federation and partner national societies. The VNRC, the Federation delegation and the six partner national societies have signed the agreement.

In March, a deputy of the VNRC finance department attended the International Federation's finance development workshop in Singapore. Follow-up by the Federation country office has been suggested to strengthen the VNRC finance management in order to meet a more professional finance and accounting standard.

The VNRC six-month volunteering project supported by American Red Cross was completed in March. The Federation has provided technical support from the beginning of the project proposal. Under this support, the VNRC's regulation on volunteer management was developed and was adopted by the VNRC leadership by June. Another result of the project was the dissemination of information on volunteer-related activities, volunteer teams, the definition of VNRC volunteers, etc. on the VNRC website.

The celebration of World Red Cross Day this year was organized by the VNRC headquarters in conjunction with the VNRC's campaign "each Red Cross staff, member, and volunteer selects a specific beneficiary to support". The event in Hanoi was attended by over 1,000 Red Cross members and volunteers from 15 Red Cross chapters. Representatives from the Federation country office, ICRC and the ministries were also present at the event. According to the VNRC report, about 6,000 people/families in need were seen to receive donor support after the campaign.

A similar campaign was launched in Hochiminh City in the middle of May also including fundraising to help people in need, including Agent Orange casualties. The event was hosted by the headquarters and carried out by the Hochiminh City Red Cross chapter. Money collected will be used to build houses, provide livelihoods, distribute wheelchairs to those who need them, and give scholarships to disadvantaged children.

Constraints or challenges

The issue "right people in right place" at the headquarters was the concern of Red Cross partners in Vietnam. For instance, the internal movement of staff at the headquarters resulted in the moving of a skilled disaster management officer to the administration department. This concern was also shared by the Federation office regarding the non-utilization of staff skills learnt from attending workshops and/or receiving international training. For instance, in 2006, VNRC staff attending training sessions and workshops abroad on 37 different occasions; but they have not been encouraged to use these acquired skills in relevant situations.

Finance management will become more efficient when the headquarters is better able to be a guiding force for partners and to support chapters in finance/accounting work more effectively and meet financial reporting requirements and deadlines. The VNRC headquarters acknowledged a lack in human resource capacity in finance at local level. Each level (Red Cross chapter, district, and commune) has only one finance staff whose competence often needs improvement to meet the donor's requirement on finance.

There will be more dialogue to garner VNRC a better understanding of the definition of a "real" Red Cross volunteer. It will be a challenge for the VNRC to manage Red Cross volunteers who carry out Red Cross activities with respect to the Fundamental Principles.

Working in partnership

The VNRC continued to strengthen its partnership with the Lao Red Cross and Cambodian Red Cross under the agreement among the three national societies. Early this year, the three national societies met up in Lao PDR. In addition to the main meeting, the VNRC also had bilateral discussions with the Cambodian Red Cross and Lao Red Cross. VNRC and Cambodia will enhance the health programme with special emphasis on blood, while strengthening all programmes with Lao PDR. It was concluded at the meeting that cross-border activities including emergency relief, eye operations, and health checks free of charge, will be strengthened in the future. VNRC plans to provide health checks at no cost to Laotians living in the border province with Vietnam. VNRC volunteer doctors will cover their own costs or appeal for funding to carry out this initiative.

The new National Strategy for Natural Disaster Prevention, Response and Mitigation to 2020 issued by the government in November 2007 does not clearly spell out any role for VNRC. As such, urgent discussion with the government needs to be initiated in order for VNRC to clarify the national society's role within this strategy.

The Federation office led by a country representative comprises a disaster manager, a finance officer, an assistant to the country representative who also acts as reporting officer, and an administrator. A consultant was installed to replace the health/organizational development officer who has now left. The team is committed to supporting the national society to improve the standard on implementation and management.

Monthly coordination meetings including VNRC, the International Federation and partner national societies are useful to all partners and the host national society. The Federation representative and a VNRC leader co-chair the forum. Commitment to representation in the meeting by the VNRC and participating national societies will help forge communications and encourage the approach to develop in the same direction.

The water and sanitation working group, consisting of the VNRC, the German Red Cross, the Netherlands Red Cross, and the French Red Cross, was progressing with discussions on common approaches and messages on water and sanitation to the community. The group aimed to unify the existing information, education and communication (IEC) materials on health, and water and sanitation. The VNRC's newly appointed water and sanitation coordinator is expected to facilitate this effort as well as follow up on outcomes from the April regional water and sanitation training workshop organized by the regional office in Hanoi.

The first aid working group, represented by the VNRC, the International Federation office, the French Red Cross, and the Norwegian Red Cross, met to discuss the VNRC overall plan on first aid and its priorities for 2008. The need to finalize the standard manual on first aid by end of August will be the first priority for the VNRC.

Contributing to longer-term impact

The Vietnam programme contributes to the International Federation's Global Agenda principally in terms of goals 1, 2, and 3, as can be seen in the report above. The mangrove plantation programme to reduce impact by disaster and a commitment to help those affected build back better and be more resilient contributed to Goal 1; effective avian influenza pandemic preparedness contributed to Goal 2; and efforts to build first aid capacity with focus on the community-based first aid contributed to Goal 3.

A seminar for executive board members was planned for June to prepare the board for the upcoming partnership meeting. The seminar focuses on the follow-up of the last November General Assembly, International Conference resolutions and was facilitated jointly with ICRC.

Closer cooperation with Lao PDR and Cambodian national societies will further the work already established, with disaster mitigation related to climate change in the Mekong Delta.

Looking ahead

VNRC is preparing an agenda for the partnership meeting to be held in August. VNRC suggested both VNRC and the International Federation co-chair this event. VNRC headquarters has tasked its departments and chapters with developing projects to be presented at this meeting.

During the monitoring of the house reconstruction as a result of typhoon Lekima, it becomes clear that a more thorough training on the International Federation guidelines for construction workers should be done. Contacts

with universities in the major cities will be made to find students to engage with the national society as volunteer monitors who will travel to the sites to educate construction workers on the guidelines.

Based on discussions in a coordination meeting, partner national societies have pledged to negotiate with chapters well in advance of the implications of the Fundamental Principles in relief operations.

How we work	
<p>The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".</p>	<p>Global Agenda Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.• Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.• Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.• Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.
Contact information	
<p>For further information specifically related to this report, please contact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In Hanoi: Mr. Doan Van Thai, Secretary General, Vietnam Red Cross; email: doanvanthai62@yahoo.com.vn; phone: +84.4.942. 8926 ext 203; fax: +84.4.942.4285• In Hanoi: Irja Sandberg, Federation representative, email: irja.sandberg@ifrc.org; phone: +84.4.942.2980 ext. 216; fax: +84.4.942.2987• Federation regional office, Bangkok: Alan Bradbury, head of regional office; phone: +66 2 661 8201, email: alan.bradbury@ifrc.org• Asia Pacific Zone office, Kuala Lumpur: Jagan Chapagain, deputy head of zone office, phone: +603 9207 5700; fax: +603 2161 0670; email: jagan.chapagain@ifrc.org	

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