

# Tsunami two-year progress report: Seychelles



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

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*The Seychelles Red Cross uses loudspeakers during tsunami early warning exercises, here with schoolchildren on the beach of Anse Royale, in the south of Mahe Island. German Red Cross supplies include megaphones, life jackets and hooks to save people at risk of drowning.*

## Executive summary

At the time of the tsunami, the Seychelles Red Cross was a small but active community-based organization and was primarily governance driven. Despite its limited capacity at the time, the National Society (NS) responded quickly to the tsunami. Early assessments were carried out and with the help of local donations, relief distributions began within a few days of the disaster.

Support received from the Federation's appeal enabled the NS to recruit additional technical staff. Staff and partners facilitated emergency relief items and conducted livelihoods activities for affected communities. The NS benefited greatly from the increased visibility and the challenge now is to deal with the raised expectations of both the community and the government. The quick response to the disaster demonstrated the value of the

NS, which is now part of the national disaster preparedness committee, and is actively assisting in the setting up of a national disaster plan.

The headquarters is currently operating out of temporary rented accommodation. With the increase in staff and programmes, a new headquarters needs to be established. The Government has pledged a portion of land and the National Society has planned for the construction of a new office and warehouse.

The improved relationship vis-à-vis the national government as well as the local population has put the NS at the forefront of future disaster response. To meet these increasing demands from government, the local population, volunteers and staff, the NS needs to be receptive to the restructuring of its operating framework. The Federation's sub-regional office, whose creation was hastened by the tsunami programme, is committed to helping the NS restructure and improve its operating capacity, and thereby improve their ability to respond to the needs of beneficiaries.

## Background/Operational context

Support to the Federation's appeal was received from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The German and Spanish Red Cross offered bilateral assistance, leading to an increase of six technical staff members in the national society. Prior to the tsunami, the National Society was a small office with limited resources and capacity which was primarily governance-driven. The NS has a good volunteer base that was effective in distribution, clean-ups and follow-up visits to the affected population.

Despite the initial reluctance of the Government to work with the NS in the early stages of the disaster,

relationships have since greatly improved. The NS was subsequently invited to sit on the national disaster committee and is actively assisting in the setting up of a national disaster plan.

### Achievements

Early assessments and response meant that the NS was effective in its relief efforts. The NS demonstrated a good ability to identify the affected population and their needs. Non-food items, including gas cookers, kitchen utensils, mattresses, bedding and fridges were distributed to 150 families in Mahé and Praslin. Some of the mattresses were bought through locally raised funds. An additional 90 mattresses, as well as 60 kitchen utensils were airlifted from the Federation's Nairobi regional logistics centre. Refrigerators were identified as important due to the hot weather on the islands. Washing machines were also distributed to some elderly persons living alone, who could not wash their clothes by traditional methods.

Assessments made on Cerf island identified 12 properties which were badly damaged as a result of the tsunami and subsequent landslides due to torrential rains. The NS assisted the residents of the 12 identified properties through the replacement and distribution of new doors and basic household items.

A large portion of the population being fishermen, assessments made by the NS and 60 fishermen who had lost their livelihoods from the tsunami were identified. The NS replaced lost equipment such as fishing nets and other basic fishing items. Plans made to distribute boat engines to these fishermen did not materialize due to the difficulty encountered by the NS to procure these in Seychelles. They were however distributed to the beneficiaries through another local organization, 'Apostolat de la Mer', effectively demonstrating the improved networking capacities in the NS.

Identifying the Seychelles as a disaster prone region prompted an increase in the procurement of disaster preparedness stock by the Nairobi regional logistics. Fifty kitchen utensils, 20 family tents, 10 office tents, 50 tarpaulins and 50 blankets are now stocked by the NS for use in future disasters. There are also 40 volunteer kits to ensure that volunteers are now better equipped to deal with disasters. The NS is now better equipped to deal with future disasters.

### Changes in the Seychelles Red Cross

The tsunami revealed the susceptibility of the Seychelles to natural disasters. Increased interest in the region has led to a corresponding increase of Red Cross activities,

especially in Seychelles. This has led to the need for increased funding and an improvement in the capacities of the National Societies. With the support of the German and Spanish Red Cross, three additional staff were recruited in Seychelles. These included a finance officer, administration officer and a health officer. The recruitment for a new position of secretary general was finalized in mid-November 2006.



*The Seychelles Red Cross deploys its three staff and some 100 volunteers to check on families affected by the tsunami on Praslin Island.*

Following the tsunami, the Seychelles Red Cross headquarters was flooded out and the current headquarters is operating out of temporary rented accommodation. With the increase in staff, a new headquarters needs to be established. The government has pledged a portion of land and the National Society has made provision for the construction of a new office and warehouse.

The NS has always had a good reputation vis-à-vis the national Government as well as respect from the local population. Few associations responded to the tsunami and even fewer still as effectively as the NS.

As a major player in disaster preparedness in the Seychelles, the NS has had to rethink its strategies and role in the country. Increasing its staff base and activities will mean greater accountability requirements.

### Local capacity

Support from more established partners following the tsunami has led to an increase in the size of the NS as well as its activities, necessitating a change in operational framework at both headquarters and branch levels. Negotiations are continuing for the construction of a new headquarters and warehouse, but progress has been slow. The challenge is to increase NS capacity to ensure that such negotiations are more effective in future.

The setting up of disaster preparedness stock, as well as volunteer kits will ensure that the NS is better equipped to deal with future disasters. There was no warehouse at the time of receipt of these items so containers for storage had to be purchased. Disaster preparedness training for volunteers was planned for 2005, but was deferred because of a number of priority management issues. Greater effort will need to be expended towards the establishment of a new headquarters and warehouse. Emphasis must also be placed on defining and clarifying roles and objectives of the NS, its staff and volunteers.

There is a need to establish greater support to the management team from the Federation as the sudden increase in staff and activities may undermine the NS capacity and effectiveness. Induction of the new Secretary General will be conducted by the head of sub-regional office in Mauritius, and will take place as soon as the incumbent has taken up the position in mid-December 2006.

There are also considerable challenges in restructuring the operating framework from a governance-driven organization to one that incorporates a management structure. The Federation's sub-regional office is committed to helping the NS restructure and improve its operating capacity, thereby improving their ability to respond to the needs of beneficiaries.

### **Coordination with other partners and stakeholders**

Response to the disaster revealed that the NS has been able to coordinate relief efforts with other actors, leading to greater expectation by other stakeholders.

Support from the German and Spanish Red Cross has ensured that the NS can begin to address the need to increase and strengthen its operational and disaster management capacity. This will be supplemented by support from the sub-regional office in Mauritius, and the regional delegation in Nairobi.

### **Cross-cutting issues**

Increased capacity will ensure a greater outreach to a wider base of beneficiaries around the islands, and better coordination with local actors.

The stocking of material ensures more effective and rapid intervention by volunteers. Planned disaster response training will ensure improvement in the quality of volunteer intervention.

The increase in volunteer base will mean that improved training and coordination will need to be established as a strategy of the NS.

### **Learning and accountability**

The increase in activities of the NS in disaster preparedness has meant that accountability activities will need to be improved. Greater support will need to be provided by the Federation to ensure that the NS can meet all operating requirements, while at the same time ensuring that it is not undermining the NS management team. An organizational development (OD) advisor has been seconded to the NS for two months. The OD advisor has helped the NS in resolving some management issues as well as the recruitment of key staff members, such as the secretary general and a finance coordinator.

The bigger picture for the NS is to become more active in the planning and implementation of disaster preparedness programmes at national level. The improved relationship vis-à-vis the national government as well as the local population has put the NS at the forefront of future disaster response. However, to meet these increasing demands from Government, the local population, volunteers and staff, and the NS leadership needs to be receptive to the restructuring of its operating framework. Training of volunteers in disaster response and the recruitment of key staff shows that the NS can increase its disaster management capacity. However, this will not be successful until governance and management issues are resolved.

### **Outlook**

A Federation sub-regional office for the Indian Ocean islands was set up in Mauritius in mid 2006 to act as support to the NSs in the region, including Seychelles. The sub-regional office will assist the NSs in the planning and implementation of their programmes and strategies, as well as ensuring effective reporting requirements.

The NS is committed to increasing its disaster preparedness capacity and to become more active in the Seychelles by working with Government and local actors. The NS has also planned for disaster preparedness training for its volunteers whose base has increased since the tsunami struck.

The setting up of an improved headquarters and warehouse will ensure that there is better storage of necessary disaster response equipment and relief stock piles.

## Contact information

For further information specifically related to the tsunami operation please contact:

### In Seychelles:

- Colette Servina, President, Seychelles Red Cross Society, Victoria; email: [cservina@yahoo.com](mailto:cservina@yahoo.com); phone + 248.32.46.46 or +248.52.04.45; fax +248.32.16.63

### In Mauritius:

- Susanna Cunningham, Head of Sub-Regional Office for the Indian Ocean Islands, email: [susanna.cunningham@ifrc.org](mailto:susanna.cunningham@ifrc.org); phone + 230.454.69.34; mobile + 230.252.08.55

### In Kenya:

- Per Jensnaes, Head of East Africa Regional Delegation; phone: +254.20.2835 000/124; mobile:+254.736.500 030; email: [per.jensnaes@ifrc.org](mailto:per.jensnaes@ifrc.org)

### In Geneva:

- Johan Schaar, Special Representative for the tsunami operation; phone: +41.22.730.4231; fax: +41.22.733.0395, email: [johan.schaar@ifrc.org](mailto:johan.schaar@ifrc.org)
- Amna Al Ahmar, East Africa Regional Officer, Africa Department; phone +41.22.730.44.27; fax +41.22.733.03.95, email: [amna.alahmar@ifrc.org](mailto:amna.alahmar@ifrc.org);
- Lesley Schaffer, Tsunami Grants Officer; email: [lesley.schaffer@ifrc.org](mailto:lesley.schaffer@ifrc.org)
- Matthew Cochrane, media and public relations officer, phone: +41.22.730.4426; Mobile: +41 79 308 9804; email: [matthew.cochrane@ifrc.org](mailto:matthew.cochrane@ifrc.org)

### In Kuala Lumpur, Asia Pacific Service Centre - phone: +60.3.2161.0892; fax: +60.3.2161.1210

- Igor Dmitryuk, Head of Regional Logistics Unit, ext. 600; email: [igor.dmitryuk@ifrc.org](mailto:igor.dmitryuk@ifrc.org)
- Umadevi Selvarajah, Head of Regional Finance Unit, ext. 140; email: [umadevi.selvarajah@ifrc.org](mailto:umadevi.selvarajah@ifrc.org);
- Jenny Iao, Head of Regional Reporting Unit, ext. 300; email: [jenny.iao@ifrc.org](mailto:jenny.iao@ifrc.org)

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