



SOUTH/SOUTHEAST ASIA & EAST AFRICA: EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMIS

Fact sheet No. 21 – updated 24 March 2006

This fact sheet is the first in a short series where the tsunami operation in a specific country is given particular focus.

Country in focus: The Maldives

The Maldives is unique in many ways – its surface is 99 per cent water, no point is more than 2.4 metres above seal level. The population of 270,000 is spread over 200 inhabited islands, among 1,190 in the archipelago. The capital Male' squeezes 85,000 people into two square kilometres, making the Maldives a country with one the highest - as well as the lowest – population densities in the world.

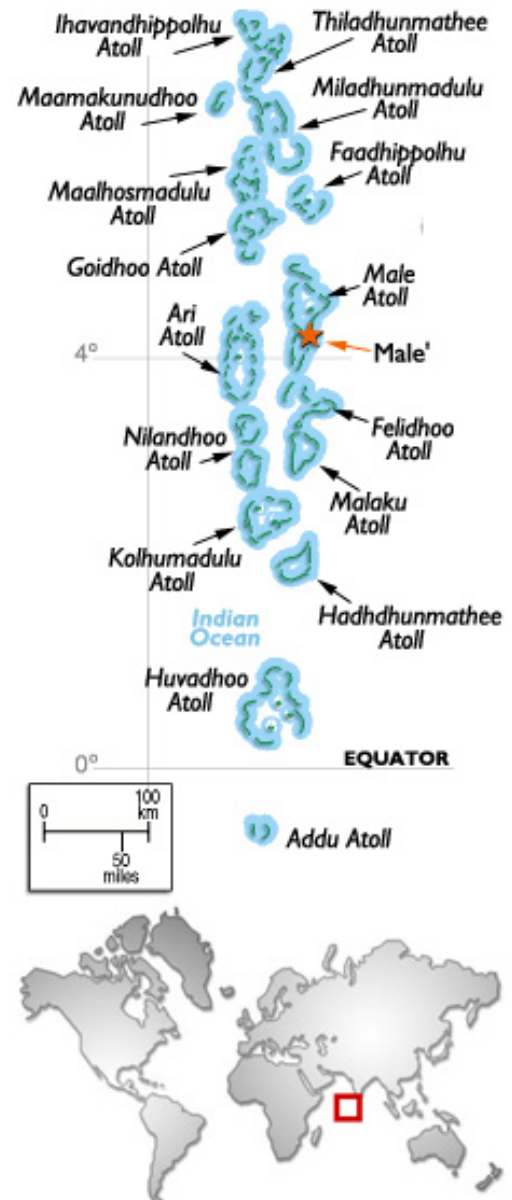
It is also one of the few countries in the world without a Red Cross or Red Crescent national society, although a dedicated band of volunteers, together with International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners, are making rapid progress towards changing that.

Just nine months after the tsunami devastated the Maldives, affecting more people per capita than any other country, a meeting was held for all interested parties to look into the question of forming a Red Crescent Society. Focal Points were identified by the Federation and Maldives Government to facilitate the National Society formation process jointly and in a coordinated manner. A national society in the Maldives will emphasize humanitarian principles, values and action at the community level and help ensure the success of projects for tsunami-affected people.

All partner national societies in the Maldives – the American, Australian, British, Canadian, French and German Red Cross societies – were represented at that meeting and have been staunch supporters of the process ever since. These same representatives helped establish the draft structure, statutes and potential programmes for the national society in formation. The Danish Red Cross was instrumental in supporting the drafting of the statutes.

The Federation's delegation takes an overall lead in working with the government on the process, and recently proposed content for a presidential decree which would bring the Maldives Red Crescent into existence.

However, nothing in the Maldives is as easy as the thousands of tourists who visit this beautiful country might believe, nor as clear as the blue ocean all around. Massive expanses of water throw up as many logistical challenges as any thick jungle or snow-tipped mountain range.



The population of the Maldives, some 270,000 people, is spread across 200 of nearly 1,200 islands in this sprawling archipelago.

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“It has not been an easy process”, says Federation head of delegation, Jerry Talbot. “The political situation in the country is sensitive, and we have to really stress the neutral, independent nature of the Movement.” Aishath Ahmed Didi, one of the rotating chairpersons of the Maldives Red Crescent working group agrees, “the emblem is occasionally misunderstood, with the cross being mistaken for a Christian symbol, so we constantly underline the principles of impartiality and humanity.”

To ensure adherence to the principle of unity, volunteers have been taking to the seas to visit each of the 20 atolls in the Maldives archipelago as part of a well-coordinated exercise in rapid information exchange. One thousand kilometres – and over a thousand islands – separates the northernmost inhabitants of North Thiladhumaathee atoll with their compatriots in Gan, just below the equator. Yet all will belong to the same Red Crescent society, thanks to the preparatory work now being undertaken.



The formation of a national society in the Maldives will emphasize humanitarian principles, values and action at the community level.

Just this week the working group drew up a seven-point “code of conduct” for volunteers; each point guided by one of the Movement’s Fundamental Principles.

Most partners took part in at least one atoll visit, working together with trained presenters from the Maldives Red Crescent working group. Volunteers – some of them active since the first days of tsunami recovery, used methodologies developed by the working group assisted by German Red Cross to bring a greater understanding of the Movement to islanders. Leaflets and other promotion material in the local Dhivehi language have been developed and are proving essential to the information campaign. British Red Cross issues regular newsletters which promote the formation of the national society.

French Red Cross has negotiated that rooms in a regional hospital where it is constructing a major extension will be handed over to the future Maldives Red Crescent branch there. All partner national societies have committed to including an educational component in their programming and will promote greater understanding of the Movement, particularly the role of the Maldives Red Crescent, as their work continues.

National societies not working directly in the Maldives have also been important partners. New Zealand Red Cross sponsored a visit of the Secretary General of the Cook Islands Red Cross to assist the Federation focal point in planning and initiating the process in place. A representative from the Seychelles Red Cross Society also visited the Maldives to give their perspectives on forming national societies on small islands. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has given its full support to the process, and its cooperation delegate works closely with the organizational development delegates in Male’ and New Delhi.

Operational focus: Maldives

As well as the valuable work to form a national society in the Maldives, operations to provide humanitarian assistance to tsunami-affected communities are ongoing. A broad outline of these activities is given below while highlights of operational priorities in the other tsunami-affected countries follow.

Water/sanitation and logistics:

- The final delivery of rainwater harvesting kits is nearing completion on the last of 79 islands targeted by the project. Development of the second phase of the programme will be undertaken in conjunction with American Red Cross, focusing on increasing installation rates through community participation and education.
- The construction of a temporary reverse osmosis unit at Madifushi Island, Thaa Atoll has been completed in response to the urgent drinking water needs of the island community. Similar construction on Maamendhoo, Kolamaafushi and Ghadhoo islands is ongoing, with completion on Kolamaafushi anticipated at the end of March, and the other two by the end of April. The next phase of construction will begin in May.
- Increased focus is being put on development of reverse osmosis management strategies, including greater community involvement to improve the sustainability of the supplementary water supply systems in the Maldives.
- Following completion of the detailed design, tendering documents have been released for the construction of sewage systems on Guraidhoo, Maafushi, Kudahuvadhoo and Gan. This is a joint American Red Cross/Federation project, providing septic tanks and municipal sewers on the four islands. American Red Cross continues community awareness and training on use of the septic tanks, while the Federation will conduct technical training sessions with the community management group to facilitate the sustainability of the sewage system.

Construction:

- On Dhuvafaraaru (the “Green Island” project), contracts for 600 permanent homes will begin in April. House designs and plotting were shared with the community and an information file including house designs, “3-D” artistic impressions and other related documents were submitted to the representatives of Kandoludhoo community, who live in five camps for displaced persons in Raa Atoll.
- Initial designs for a community centre, island administration complex and schools have been approved by the appropriate ministries. Detailed designs are underway and will go to tender at the end of May.
- Housing construction on 50 out of a total of 67 houses is almost complete on Kudahuvadhoo, with provision for 20 more should the need arise. The first seven of 36 houses on Guraidhoo have been completed. The first eleven houses in Maafushi have been handed over to beneficiaries.



As the construction of permanent houses continues in the Maldives, the first completed homes have been handed over to tsunami survivors.

Humanitarian values and information

- There are two ongoing information projects: a public service announcement/video spot “Support the Red Crescent” is taking shape; meanwhile, the Federation and the UN system are collaborating on a photo exhibition at which the Dhivehi version of the “One year after the tsunami” report will be officially launched. This is part of an increased drive to communicate progress and challenges on tsunami recovery to the Maldivian public. Posters and postcards have also been developed along the “Maldives: Tsunami Recovery” theme.

- The Federation's in-country representative was interviewed on TV Maldives and Voice of Maldives radio to support the formation of the Maldives Red Crescent. A media/information group is formulating media and beneficiary information material and communicating internally on the national society formation process.
- The visit of the Federation Secretary General's Special Representative Johan Schaar to the Maldives was covered in local media.
- The handover of completed houses will coincide with the visit of a high-level working group of national society leaders in late March.

Operational highlights by country

Indonesia

- Nearly 3,000 transitional shelter frames have been constructed to date in 25 villages, with 350 homes completed. With all materials now procured, construction of transitional shelters will increase significantly in the coming weeks.
- The total number of beneficiaries for distribution of food and relief items in Aceh and Nias totals 667,035 people, covering over 158,000 families.
- Relief projects are ongoing with the shipment of 50,000 complementary food parcels to Lhokseumawe and 40,000 food parcels to Meulaboh.
- Supported by Red Cross and Red Crescent partners, Indonesian Red Cross (Palang Merah Indonesia/PMI) volunteers participated in the delivery of the fifth round of the Aceh province polio immunization campaign, which targets high-risk areas. Additionally, PMI volunteers from Aceh Utara assisted the Federation's health team in assessing the reach of the campaign, by going door-to-door in remote areas and villages.
- Handover is completed from the water and sanitation emergency response unit to the Federation team of the mobile water treatment plant at the Banda Aceh local administration water company (PDAM). The plant is currently producing a daily average of 252,000 litres of drinking water. In total, some 6,000,000 litres of water were distributed last month through PMI/Federation delivery points.
- Further training-of-trainers in PHAST (Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation) was conducted in late February 2006 in Banda Aceh attended by Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers from Bireuen, Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar.
- As a part of a broad-based campaign, the Federation continues to support PMI's disaster awareness initiative throughout Aceh province, through the distribution of posters, leaflets, pamphlets, stickers, and manuals to communities and through the school system. Additionally, 30,000 calendars containing messages and paintings on disaster preparedness have been added to the resource materials.

Sri Lanka

- This month an agreement was signed marking the beginning of a collaboration that will help thousands of tsunami-affected families to rebuild their homes. This initiative will increase the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's contribution towards the post-tsunami reconstruction effort. Under this agreement, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement hopes to commit up to USD 31 million in a 'top up' grant initiative that will provide matching funds to grants that have been disbursed to individual families under the government's existing owner-driven housing programme.
- Land is now available for construction of 8,269 homes on 68 sites in 11 districts. Nine schools are also part of the reconstruction and rehabilitation programme. Over 2,000 homes are currently being built, with 190 completed to date.
- Three vocational training programmes in tiling, wall painting, landscaping, aluminium partitioning and carpentry power tools for 100 participants have been completed in Kalutara, Galle and Matara districts. A total of 875 people have now been trained under these programmes. By the end of April 1,375 people in total will have received training and appropriate tool kits. Impact assessments are now underway in Kalutara to see how the new tools and skills have been put to use.

- The Federation is currently developing a new training programme with the ministry of skills development to extend and expand the programme to other districts in the south. The new programme will include training in different skills outside of the construction sector. Some of these courses will be more suitable for women.
- Under a new Australian Red Cross-funded project, the International Organization for Migration held its first mobile eye clinic in Matara on 10 March. The programme aims to reduce visual impairment among beneficiaries through improved accessibility to ophthalmologic diagnosis and care.
- Provision of water and sanitation facilities to transitional shelters continues. In Galle, a tube well, septic tank and latrines have been constructed for one transitional shelter. The well will provide water for 24 permanent houses under construction on the same site.
- The Red Cross and Red Crescent is identifying viable and sustainable alternatives to current costly emergency water purification and distribution of 672 cubic metres per day in tsunami-affected areas. Well cleaning projects along coastal areas and the monsoon rains have contributed to improving the regular water supply. The coastal aquifer has largely recovered from saltwater contamination and many existing wells are providing fresh water again. Demand for treated and tanked water is decreasing proportionally as these existing water sources recover. A two-phased programme will evaluate current water needs and sources by district and identify appropriate alternatives to the current water provision.

India

- The Hong Kong Red Cross branch of the Red Cross Society of China distributed 45 motorized boats, 50 nets and 225 life vests in Andhra Pradesh as part of its bilateral assistance to the Indian Red Cross Society.

Seychelles

- The French Red Cross, together with the Seychelles Red Cross, conducted radio communication training for 12 instructors and 50 operators at headquarters and branch level as part of dissemination and public awareness campaigns.

Somalia

- Analysis and compilation of data gathered from the recent PHAST survey of Somali Red Crescent's Puntland branches is underway. The results will guide new water and sanitation interventions in the region.
- Health planning involving all members of the SRCS's Somaliland and Puntland health teams centered around 2006 programme planning and implementation, and information-sharing on a wide range of health topics.

For more details and news stories, photos and all operational updates related to the tsunami visit:
<http://www.ifrc.org/tsunami>