

Building Safer Communities: In South Asia

Unprecedented occurrence of major disasters in South Asia

Natural disasters are ravaging South Asia. Year after year the lives of millions of people are being tragically affected. Between 1993 and 2003 56% of fatalities caused by disasters worldwide occurred in South Asia¹. Since then the 2004 Tsunami and the 2005 Pakistan Earthquake have killed, maimed and displaced South Asians on a huge and unprecedented scale. Furthermore, frequent mega-disasters such as these overshadow other less documented disasters such as floods, which affected an estimated 30 million people in the region in 2007.

Frequency and magnitude of disasters expected to increase

The number of hydro-meteorological disasters worldwide more than doubled from 1996 to 2002². In line with this trend the increasing frequency and magnitude of disasters in South Asia is predicted to continue. Climate change, rapid population growth, and unplanned urbanization pose extraordinary challenges for communities in this highly vulnerable region. Unless coordinated action is urgently improved in order to help communities reduce these risks and withstand natural disasters themselves there is grave danger of further massive loss of life and livelihoods, and possibly the complete destruction of some communities. The poor are at most risk in this regard - those who are forced by extreme poverty to live in high risk areas, such as river banks, and have few resources to fall back on during emergencies.

¹ World Disaster Report 2003

² World Disaster Report 2002

Helping vulnerable communities reduce risks

National Societies, Partner National Societies and the International Federation have been actively working with communities to prepare for disasters for many years. Some examples are: the Bangladesh Red Crescent Cyclone Preparedness Programme that involves 34,000 volunteers and reaches approximately 11 million people; flood mitigation in India in the state of Bihar, and the Orissa disaster mitigation programme in which 23 multipurpose cyclone shelters were constructed in the most cyclone prone villages in six coastal districts; the Nepal community-based disaster preparedness programme that is building resilience in 24 districts of the country; Pakistan and Sri Lanka's recovery and reconstruction programmes, with their emphasise on 'building back better'; the relocation of tsunami-affected communities in the Maldives onto larger,



© Adesh Tripathee / IFRC

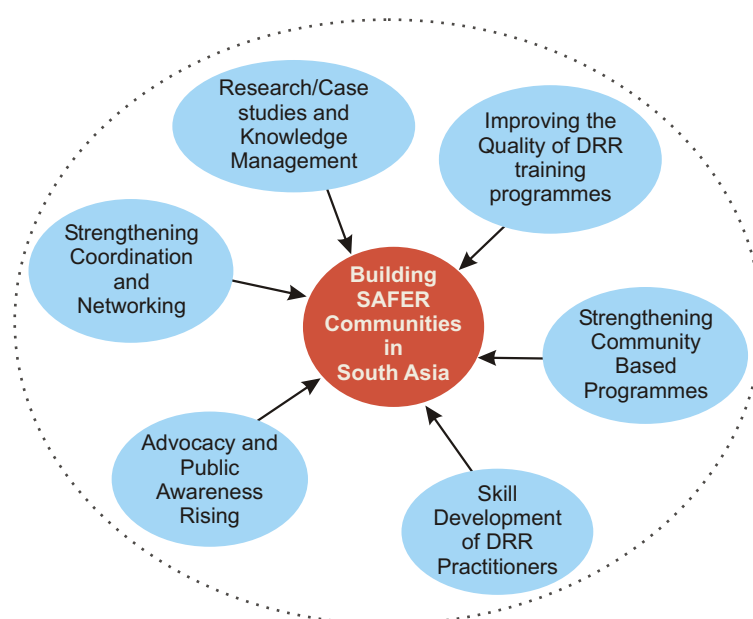
higher, and better resourced island homes; the training of 300 staff and volunteers in community based disaster preparedness and the disaster response units (DRUs) that have been set up in Afghanistan, and many other small-scale disaster mitigation projects across South Asia. Along with the work of the governments, the United Nations and the other national and international agencies involved in disaster risk reduction, the initiatives of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement will help communities to mobilise their own resources. This is crucial to the success of this endeavour.

A coordinated approach for disaster risk reduction

Despite the unqualified success of these programmes in saving lives, more efficient and effective programmes are desperately needed. The impact of recent disasters has clearly demonstrated the need for greater regional cooperation and a coordinated regional approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR). At present Red Cross Red Crescent programmes have different approaches, methodologies and levels of expertise and experience within each country programme.

Building safer communities - sharing experience and knowledge

In response to the rapidly increasing rate of disasters in the region it is vital to strengthen and mainstream DRR programmes in the region through working together. The South Asia Regional Delegation in consultation with its partners has developed a regional disaster risk reduction programme entitled: *“Building Safer Communities in South Asia”*. This programme is guided by the International Federation's strategies and standards in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action. It aims to draw together regional experiences and knowledge to harmonise and standardize Red Cross Red Crescent risk reduction trainings, systems and tools. These will be used in communities all over South Asia and will be made available to all movement partners and external organisations. These will serve to strengthen cooperation with other vital actors in the region at local and national levels.



DIPECHO and DFID and our Partner National Societies are already contributing towards *Building Safer Communities* in South Asia through our Red Cross Red Crescent country and regional programmes. In the face of increasing regional challenges the International Federation's *Building Safer Communities* programme promotes and facilitates more effective cooperation with partner national societies, international NGOs and community groups on the ground. It also creates strong relationships with donors, governments, the United Nations and academic institutions. This is essential to increase the quality and reach of risk reduction measures that create better prepared, safer and more resilient communities. And so for the next two years our goal, in keeping with the global strategies, is to work together with the National Societies to build resilience of their communities. Our goal can only be achieved through an efficient sharing of experience and knowledge between all the organisations with relevant expertise in order to support the volunteers who work with the local communities.

© International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Any part of this document may be cited, copied, translated into other languages or adapted to meet local needs without prior permission from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, provided that the source is clearly stated.

For more information please contact:

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

South Asia Regional Delegation (SARD)
C-79 Anand Niketan New Delhi, India
Phone: +911124111126, Fax: +911124111128
E-mail: india.regionaldelegation@ifrc.org

www.ifrc.org