

# How prepared are we?

Facing disaster and conflict in the 21st century

The well-prepared National Society:  
phase II of global self-assessment, 2005–2008



OBED WENYO/INDONESIAN RED CROSS



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

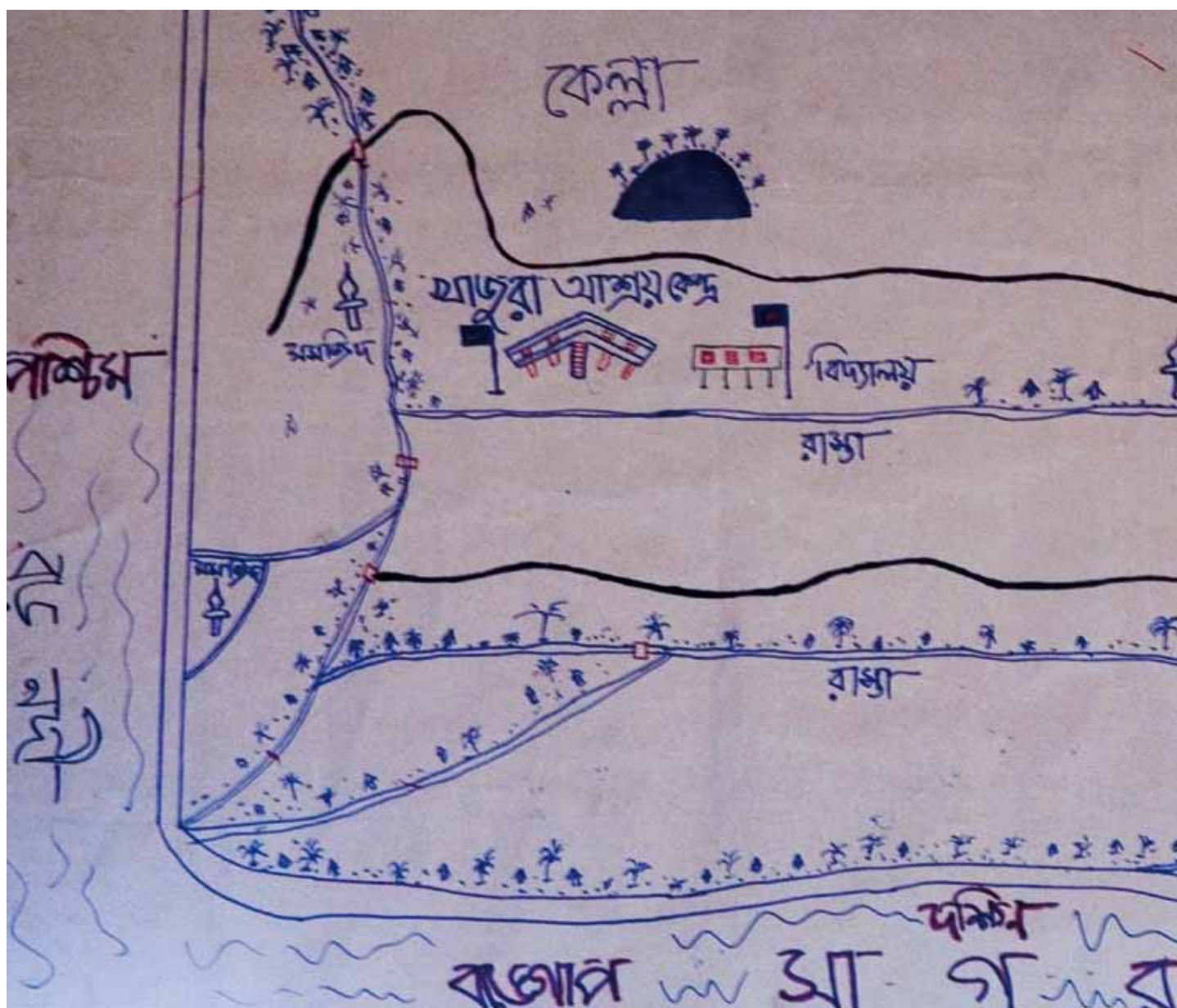
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**Cover.** Residents of Tanjung Benoa village, Bali, Indonesia, and Red Cross volunteers plant mangroves to help stop coastal erosion. The Indonesian Red Cross planted 10,000 mangroves in the village – one for every participant in the December 2007 UN climate change conference in Bali.



## Introduction

It was in 2001 in Lausanne, Switzerland, that National Society disaster-management (DM) officers and disaster-preparedness delegates from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation) first called for a simple analytical tool to support planning for disaster preparedness.

The basis, in its first phase, of “well-prepared National Society” (WPNS) self-assessment was a two-page checklist, augmented for phase II (2005–2008) to include the assessment of both *capacity* and *impact* as well as readiness.

In WPNS phase I, from 2002–2004, almost exactly three quarters of National Societies responded to a specially designed questionnaire that had been piloted worldwide in all the working languages of the International Federation.

Marked improvements can be seen between the two WPNS phases.

Since the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation had sought harmonized approaches to emergency management, WPNS was also revised for phase II to incorporate National Societies’ capacity to deal with natural disasters and conflict.

This provided more precision under general headings such as emergency preparedness – including community-based disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction (DRR), assessment of all kinds, coordination, information and reporting, resource mobilization, advocacy.

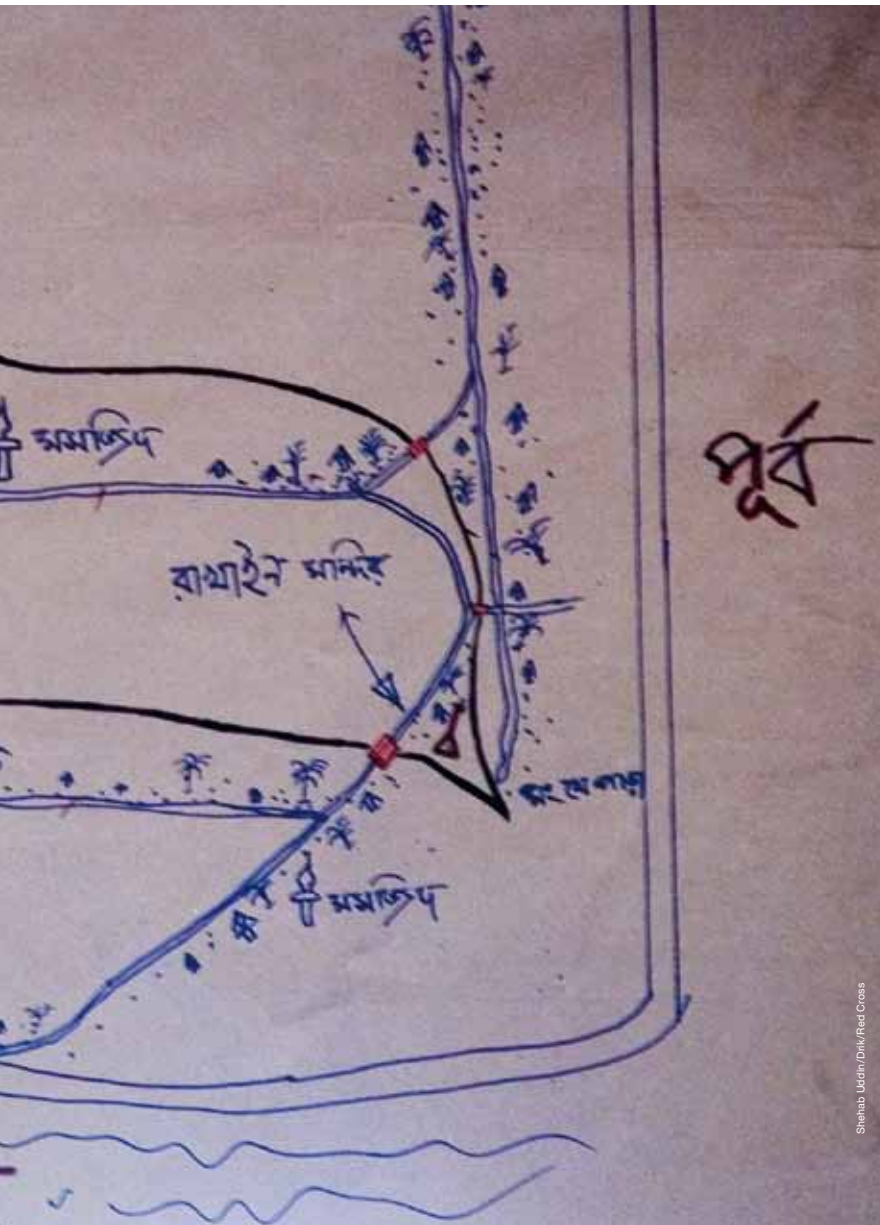
Overall, the WPNS mapping exercise was intended to:

- Facilitate the assessment of disaster preparedness.
- Identify indicators of the effectiveness of global and regional support for preparedness.
- Highlight key areas for the planning of annual and emergency appeals.
- Assist negotiations with Partner National Societies (PNS) and donors.
- Identify National Societies and zones that have specific expertise.
- Identify trends in preparedness.
- Enable National Societies to measure themselves against international standards.

A total of 82 National Societies participated in WPNS phase II (2005–2008): 23 from Africa; nine from the Americas; 21 from Asia and the Pacific; 22 from Europe and Central Asia;<sup>1</sup> seven from the Middle East and North Africa.

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A map drawn by a branch Community Disaster Preparedness Committee (CDPC) of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society’s members and volunteers. The committees are made up of between 11 and 13 members with a high representation of women. They play a key role in disaster preparedness by identifying vulnerability, working with households, alerting and organizing the community.



## The findings

Seventy of the WPNS phase II National Society respondents agreed the International Red Cross Red and Crescent Movement's policies and guidelines are effectively used in their activities, while the governing boards of 53 have a disaster committee that oversees development and implementation of the National Society's policies and plans.

Fifty-six of the National Societies have an emergency-preparedness policy that reflects their legal base.

Almost all National Societies have reported having DM focal points. Fifty-eight of the 82 have a written emergency preparedness or re-

### **Between surveys there was a clear increase in the number of National Societies with emergency-preparedness policies**

sponse plan, and the evidence is that National Societies are well represented in their respective national DM structures.

Fifty-six of the National Societies believe they have systems in place that enable them to respond effectively to disasters and conflicts according to their defined role and responsibilities.

Sixty-one of the respective governments have a national emergency plan in place, and 55 of National Societies say they have a clear mandate in their government's plan.

The two surveys show that, in years separating them, there has been a clear increase in the number of National Societies which have emergency-preparedness policies. But there is little knowledge of the "safer access" model for conflict-based emergencies – one of the main reasons why these are not fully incorporated into emergency management among a number of National Societies. Only 23 per cent cover "conflict management" in their emergency policy.

Sixty-eight National Societies use the vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA) as the main tool for emergency preparedness and response planning.

The project planning process and WPNS are used by 45 and 41 of the National Societies respectively; but fewer than that use tools such as the better programming initiative (16), geographic information system/risk maps (27) and analysis of past disaster trends (26). National Societies, however, do not necessarily have the technical skills to interpret the information these methods generate.

A lesson learned over the past few years, when the emphasis has been on developing community-based systems, is that while communities provide crucial knowledge about local conditions, this information needs to be cross-checked with other data like scientific knowledge and weather forecasts.

Almost all (77) the National Societies say they have established good relations with government ministries and local agencies. With regional and global disaster-response instruments acknowledged to be important for scaling-up in general, 69 of the National Societies are now involved with Federation mechanisms like regional disaster response teams (a considerable improvement over WPNS phase I), 44 with field assessment and coordination teams (FACT), and 38 with emergency response units (ERU).

Almost exactly three quarters of National Societies coordinate with, or are part of, national intervention teams and 46 with provincial intervention teams; 58 have branch intervention teams in place.

Good management of information is key to effective response in emergencies, while good reporting on programmes is essential to improve future programming and gain the trust of partners, including donors. WPNS II emphasized this important part of emergency-management programmes. Again, nearly all (79) of National Societies use information sources such as the International Federation's disaster management information system (DMIS) (up from 48 per cent in phase I), and 57 use FedNet.

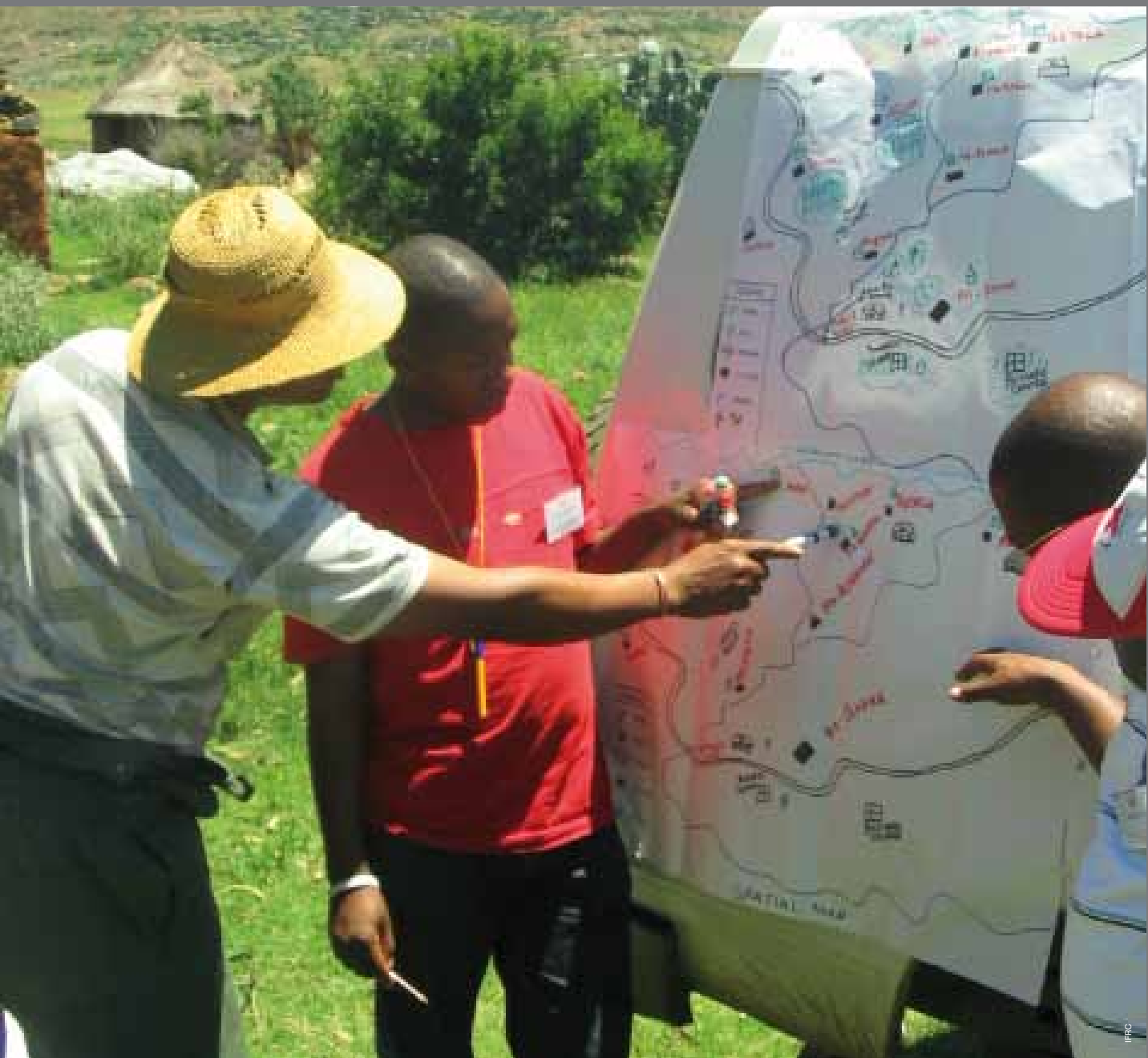
But perhaps not surprisingly, given the resources required, only 28 of National Societies are supporting "people-centred early warning systems". Most National Societies, however, do have someone on call 24 hour a day.

## Lesotho

WPNS was used as a first step toward creating a DM “master plan” for Lesotho. VCA “learning-by-doing” was used in the Lesotho Red Cross Society to find out about and create projects to reduce vulnerability. The VCA helped develop truly community-based risk reduction and was instrumental in creating a working partnership between the National Society and the country’s disaster management authority.

Learning-by-doing empowered community members who were an integral part of the team collecting data, supporting the data analysis and validating information. They were able to draw their own maps showing risk and capacity as well as rank their problems according to priority, and find possible solutions to build safer and resilient households and communities.

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*Creating resilience includes enhancing the knowledge and skills of everyone in the community to cope with and adapt to disasters.*



IFRC

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# Team-building for DM

Disaster management teams have been found to work well at different levels in different contexts – from individual branches to regional teams involving specialists from many countries.

The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society has built the capacity of its *branch* disaster response teams (BDRTs), recognizing the importance of this level of disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Investment in this kind of training paid off in 2008 when floods hit Ampara district, where 100,000 people were affected and BDRTs were deployed to conduct a rapid needs-assessment.

In West and Central Africa, National Societies are using *national* guidelines to improve their response strategy through national disaster response team (NDRT) training.

Similarly, the Middle East and North Africa region is providing increased support for implementation of its NDRT training.

In Yemen, heavy rains in October 2008 resulted in flash floods throughout Hadramaut and Maharah governorates. The Yemen Red Crescent Society opened a 24-hour operations room at its headquarters and deployed a rapid-assessment team. Ten volunteers from the branch in the capital, Sana'a, were deployed and the National Society sent an alert to all the branches requesting them to put team members who had been trained for national intervention teams on stand-by.



Daniel Chana/American Red Cross

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*The American Red Cross is helping Branch Disaster Response Teams of the Sri Lanka Red Cross stockpile supplies for disasters. As a result the Bentota divisional office was able to respond more effectively to three major house fires, a train crash and a cyclone.*



Shehab Uddin/Ork/British Red Cross

Fifty-six National Societies have procedures in place to notify the International Federation if a disaster is on an international scale.

In phase I, nearly 40 per cent of respondents “periodically” monitored preparedness levels; only 25 per cent reviewed disaster-preparedness activities. Phase II, however, examined a more direct approach to monitoring: National Societies were asked whether they have a system in place to monitor progress in their emergency preparedness and response and 51 said they did. Although this does indicate some improvement since the first phase of WPNS, there is clearly a need for more work in this area.

At the same time, an increasing number of donors commission independent evaluations of projects, and a wide range of fact sheets, good-practice guides and case studies are available from the International Federation on its public website.

Fifty-three National Societies said they had communications procedures in place to coordinate between preparedness and response for disaster and conflict, and other programmes such as health or migration.

For WPNS phase II National Society respondents were asked to make an assessment of management capacities at headquarters and branch levels. For simplicity, headquarters management was divided into “good”, “average” or “poor” categories, and branch management into “effective” and “not effective”. (See tables below.)

Thirty-four National Societies rank themselves as having “average” capacities and another 39 said they have “good” disaster-management capacities at the headquarters level.

At the branch level, only 47 were considered to be effective in management – a question not asked in phase I.

Nearly three quarters of National Societies felt they had sufficient skills to fulfil their mandate; 42 per cent test volunteers every year to make sure.

Forty-four National Societies have “well-trained” response teams, most of which also have equally well-trained team leaders, and 31 have the equipment they need to operate “rapidly and efficiently”. Forty-eight hold emergency stocks.

*The CDPC are responsible for the early warning and evacuation of inhabitants in the wake of a cyclone.*

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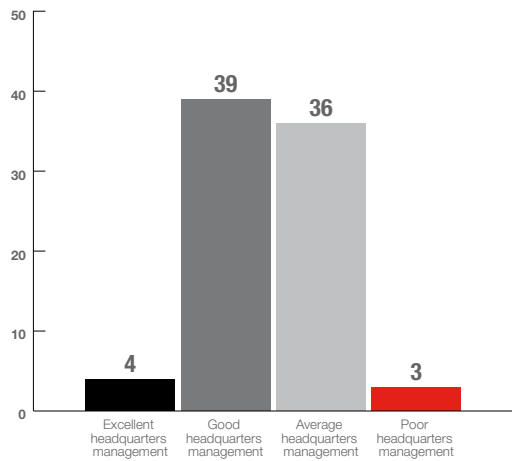


Figure 1. How National Societies assessed their own headquarters management capacities for WPNS phase II.

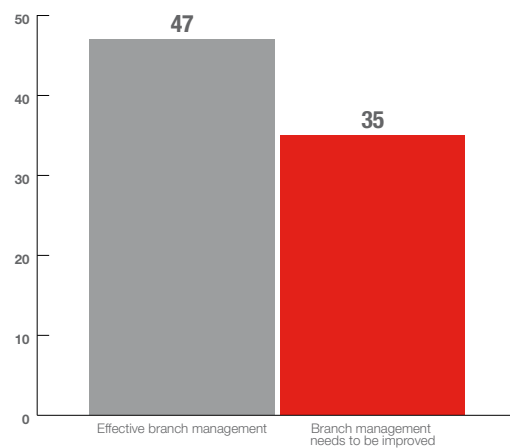


Figure 2. How National Societies assessed their own branch management capacities for WPNS phase II.

Transportation capacities for delivering relief are generally weak: only 31 National Societies have adequate transport facilities to distribute emergency stocks quickly. Less than half have an emergency fund in place and few report using advance supply agreements.

A comparison between WPNS phases I and II indicates a slight increase in the number of National Societies with pre-positioned stocks and a slight fall in the number with stand-by emergency funds (although this finding might be

affected by the significant number of new respondents in phase II).

Marked improvements can be seen in capacities between WPNS phases I and II, though a significant number of new National Societies have been added in this phase, with about 33 per cent taking part in both (see tables below).

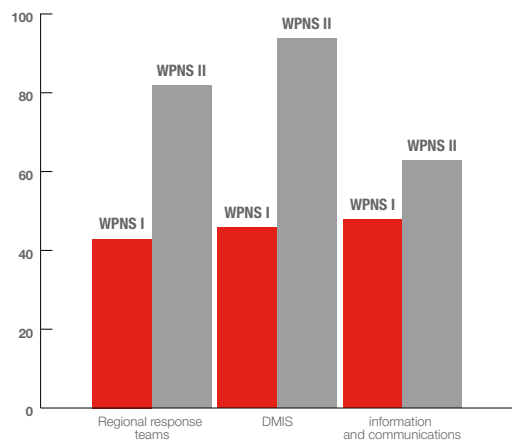


Figure 3. Improvements between WPNS phase I and II, in regional response, DMIS use, communications.

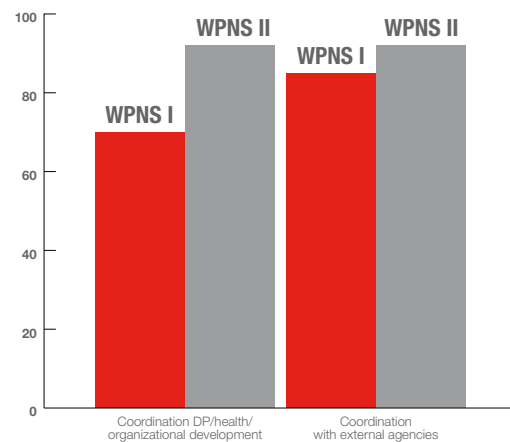


Figure 4. Improvements in internal and external coordination by National Societies.



## People-centred early warning

The volunteer-based early-warning system used by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, which has saved hundreds of thousands of lives since the 1970s, is one of the best known in the world. In 2004 Caribbean National Societies decided to focus on “people-centred” early warning systems, not just technology. The Dominican Republic and Jamaica had youth associations, churches and the Red Cross involved in hurricane warning, evacuation and shelter management. Early warning in Jamaica is community-based, with volunteers going from street to street with megaphones before hurricanes make landfall.

In Mozambique, the National Society developed a community-based early warning system intended to give people at least three days notice of a cyclone alert. This system was put to the test in 2007 with Cyclone Favio, when local disaster committees, supported by the Mozambique Red Cross Society, put into practice skills and techniques learnt through community-based disaster preparedness activities and played a crucial role in alerting communities.

A similar approach, including cable-television messages, was used in Guatemala during the 2005 hurricane season. In Honduras, people used simple flood-level indicators to track rising river levels and report their findings to local radio to prepare for evacuation.

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*A Mozambique Red Cross volunteer joins an early-warning drill in the small community of 24 de Julio as part of its Early Warning, Early Action programme – one of the most successful in the world. By linking community-based Red Cross volunteers with world-class scientific information on storms and floods, tens of thousands of people can be evacuated in good time, as with the floods in early 2008.*



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# Community-based disaster preparedness

After VCAs in Cambodia, “commune committees” have become much more supportive of community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP). The integrated approach to assessment and village preparedness and risk reduction, which also considers risks to health and livestock, ensured that multiple hazards were taken into account.

The CBDP programmes of the Red Cross Society of China exemplify an integrated approach to addressing community risk and working towards initiatives that will render communities safer and more resilient. The programme, developed by the Guangxi and Hunan provincial branches, aims to assist the most flood-prone villages.

It was implemented through sanitation, health and hygiene education, community water-supply and disaster preparedness. In the disaster-preparedness component

of the curriculum, simulations were held in local schools to provide information on what to do in the event of a disaster.

Similarly, the Salvadorean Red Cross Society trained teachers in disaster preparedness and mitigation in more than 100 schools in high-risk communities. Students and teachers developed mitigation and preparedness plans with the help of local Red Cross volunteers. This type of community disaster-education for schools is now implemented by 38 per cent of National Societies worldwide.



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*Cambodian Red Cross volunteers giving instruction on the safe handling of poultry to people in the village of Russey Douch – a location in the Finnish Red Cross-supported element of the International Federation’s avian-influenza appeal. Before the bird-flu programme, villagers say they would have cooked and eaten sick birds quickly; now they bury them.*

The capacity of local communities to reduce risk is key to increasing safety and resilience, with the Red Cross Red Crescent network having great potential for helping communities understand and manage both disaster risks and day-to-day vulnerabilities. In many countries, National Societies can actually be the catalyst for government action in disaster risk reduction and climate-change adaptation.

In the years between WPNS I and II, the International Federation has published a number of manuals for National Societies in a worldwide

**Nearly all National Societies are active in strengthening local capacities through community-based initiatives**

push to raise local capacity. Community-based programmes relevant to preparedness have included first aid and disaster awareness-raising campaigns in schools and neighbourhoods.

In order to make the International Federation's assessment methodology simpler for National Societies, efforts have also been made by its disaster policy and preparedness and health and care departments to harmonize community-based approaches in these areas.

Nearly all (75) National Societies say that, in one form or another, they are active in building and strengthening local needs and capacities through community-based initiatives. These initiatives can include efforts to prepare local response mechanisms for emergency situations, like special teams, simulations and drills, contingency planning, local stockpiling and first aid. Yet only just over half of National Societies run public disaster-awareness programmes.

Disaster-awareness materials used in communities need to be harmonized or coordinated with governments, other agencies and within the Red Cross Red Crescent, and 40 of the National Societies say they do develop such materials "in coordination with" government or other agencies.

Volunteers are integrated into disaster-awareness programmes in nearly 57 National Societies while a similar number target high-risk areas for disaster education.



Gathering information through participatory group meetings. WPNS workshop, Kathmandu, Nepal.

National Societies need to be strong advocates with their respective governments. In this phase of WPNS, the advocacy focus was on four areas. Forty of the respondent National Societies indicated they advocate with their respective governments for mitigation and preparedness activities. Forty-one advocate to promote international law, including international disaster response law (IDRL), as well as other rules and principles relating to disaster response like the Tampere Convention and various UN resolutions.

Only 23 have in-house tools for "legal-risk management".

## How WPNS is being used

The information derived from the WPNS process has been used at the global level in large-scale disasters. National Societies have been using the checklist format at the national level as an aid to understanding their own disaster-preparedness status and planning needs.

As part of its effort to improve National Societies' capacity to prepare for and respond to natural hazards, the International Federation's Americas zone is supporting National Societies in the region in implementing WPNS. This will provide a baseline for disaster preparedness and the drafting of National Society action plans. This initiative was first taken up with the Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadorean National Societies.

In the Americas, studies of the characteristics of a well-prepared National Society show that many have made significant progress in strengthening overall preparedness and capacity, with improved plans and assessment tools, well-trained staff and volunteers, better systems like logistics, human resources and communications, and improved coordination with other actors. At the same time, the need to reinforce branches has become clear, given that first response is both vital and, almost always, provided locally.

National Societies such as those of Laos and Timor-Leste have used WPNS to develop their disaster-preparedness programmes and identify human-resource needs in hazard-prone areas of the country.

The WPNS tool has been useful in understanding an organization's management capacity and programme planning. Country profiles and regional analyses have been produced from feedback. In South Asia the regional delegation produced a case study that provided an overview of the capacities in the region, identified gaps, and suggested ways forward.

WPNS information proved to be a vital source of information for the West and Central Africa, facilitating preparations for the 2008 flood season.

The Haitian National Red Cross Society used information collected in WPNS II for its planning for seasonal disasters, including in the assessment the national headquarters, 13 branches, various PNS and the ICRC.

The Yemen Red Crescent Society undertook a VCA to help design its three-year programme for disaster risk reduction now being implemented in 40 districts prone to floods.

Cambodia has established a community-based programme and uses a modified version of WPNS called "hazards, vulnerability and capacity assessment" to provide a basis for designing community programming.

Finally, WPNS phase III is already being used to inform DRR and food-security baselines.

In brief, WPNS phase II has been used for: developing indicators for the International Federation's formal partnership with the UK Department for International Development; for the chapter on the "auxiliary role" in the IDRL advocacy manual; for the disaster risk reduction situational analysis; for the principles and values policy; by the American Red Cross to develop proposals for various National Societies; and in the emergency appeals for Costa Rica, Cuba, Haiti and Myanmar among others.

## Recommendations

WPNS phase II has revealed near unanimity among National Societies on several key practices – like having a DM focal point, or maintaining good relations with the governments to which they act as auxiliaries, or engaging in community-based initiatives. But there were also clearly many other areas where the picture was much more mixed: some do, some do not; some are, some are not. Here is a breakdown of the key areas where the WPNS results suggest room for improvement and standardization:

### Policy, plans and laws

- Develop understanding of emergency-preparedness policy among staff, volunteers and external actors.
- Develop security guidelines for staff and volunteers.
- Train staff and volunteers in the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*.
- Raise awareness of the Sphere standards.
- Disseminate and implement the ICRC “safer access” framework.

### Emergency preparedness

- Develop specially designed emergency-preparedness and response plans for branches.
- Strengthen training for staff and volunteers levels in early warning.

### Community-based disaster preparedness, mitigation and DRR

- Work in an integrated manner under the *Framework for Community Safety and Resilience*, also promoting it both internally and externally.
- Promote DRR activities with government.
- Promote the IDRL project, the safer-communities initiative and the Hyogo Framework for Action.
- Strengthen National Societies’ role in awareness activities like the International Day for Disaster Reduction.

### Assessment

- Implement tools like the better programming initiative, the project planning process, the geographic information system, and risk maps.
- Encourage National Societies to take ownership of emergency-preparedness and response tools.

### Coordination

- Scale-up National Societies’ links to FACT and ERU.

### Information and reporting

- Support National Societies in developing people-centred early warning.
- Use WPNS to monitor performance and impact.
- Implement a system to evaluate emergency-preparedness and response activities at headquarters and branch level.
- Reinforce training for National Society staff and volunteers in reporting.

### Resource and response mobilization

- Secure stand-by emergency funds.
- Promote communications and ensure efficient information flow between headquarters and branches.
- Increase transportation capacities.
- Put supply agreements in place.

### Advocacy and law

- Encourage National Societies to educate their governments on preparedness, mitigation and prevention.
- Encourage National Societies to advocate for international laws and principles on disaster response like the Tampere Convention and UN resolutions.
- Assist National Societies in managing legal risk.

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## National Societies that participated in WPNS Phase II 2005–2008

### Africa

#### West Africa

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Benin  
Burkina Faso  
Côte d'Ivoire  
Gambia  
Ghana  
Guinea  
Senegal  
Togo  
Nigeria  
Sierra Leone  
Liberia  
Niger

#### Central Africa

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Cameroon  
Central African Republic  
Congo (Brazzaville)  
Chad

#### East Africa

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Eritrea<sup>2</sup>

#### Southern Africa

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Lesotho  
Malawi  
Mozambique  
Namibia  
Zambia  
Zimbabwe

### Americas

#### South America

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Brazil  
Chile  
Panama

#### Central America

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Costa Rica  
El Salvador  
Guatemala  
Honduras  
United States of America

### Caribbean

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Haiti

### Asia Pacific

#### South Asia

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Afghanistan  
Bangladesh  
Pakistan  
India  
Sri Lanka  
Nepal

#### South East Asia

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Cambodia  
Indonesia  
Laos  
Malaysia  
Myanmar  
Philippines  
Singapore  
Thailand  
Timor Leste  
Viet Nam

#### East Asia

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China  
Korea,  
Democratic People's Republic of  
Mongolia

#### Pacific

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New Zealand  
Papua New Guinea

### Europe

#### Central Asia

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Kazakhstan  
Kyrgyzstan  
Tajikistan  
Uzbekistan

### Central and Southern Europe

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Albania  
Armenia  
Azerbaijan  
Belarus  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Bulgaria  
Croatia  
Georgia  
Moldova  
Macedonia, the Former Yugoslav  
Republic of  
Russian Federation  
Turkey  
Ukraine  
Montenegro

#### Western Europe

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Finland  
France  
Malta  
United Kingdom

### Middle East and North Africa

#### Middle East

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Iran, Islamic Republic of  
Israel  
Jordan  
Palestine  
Qatar  
Syrian Arab Republic  
Yemen

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<sup>2</sup>. National Society pending admission to the International Federation

# The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

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## Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

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## Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

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## Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

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## Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

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## Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

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## Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

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## Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people.

By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



**Our world is in a mess.  
It's time to make your move.**  
[ourworld-yourmove.org](http://ourworld-yourmove.org)