Community mitigation and awarenessraising activities in Central Asia

Turkmenistan

Background

Turkmenistan's Garrygala province is situated in a dry, subtropical area of the country. The local population – 26,000 people, a majority of whom are women, children and the elderly – lives along and depends on the Sumbar River to irrigate their crops. The surrounding mountains' small rivers and streams flow into the Sumbar River. During the rainy season, these small rivers often flood, leading to widespread destruction and fatalities. In the summer, drought is not unusual and leads to a lack of water for crop irrigation. In addition, the unemployment rate in the province is 45 per cent and most of the population, in particular families with many children, are below the poverty level.

The project

- The Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan (RCST) was called on to respond to the province's floods, landslides and drought on an almost annual basis.
- In 2001, the RCST began to construct a landslide protection dam on one of the Sumbar River's tributaries, with the active participation of the local communities and authorities.
- This project aimed at damming the river to reduce the risk from the frequent landslides along the riverbed and to create a reserve of water that could be used to irrigate arable lands during the summer droughts.

Lessons learned

- Since the 5.5-metre-high dam was built, it has protected seven villages downstream from destructive landslides and the RCST has not had to assist people in the area.
- Crops can be grown on a further 88 hectares of land due to irrigation water available in the summer months in the reservoir.



Risk mapping with community in process

- The most at risk communities have increased their income by renting newly arable land and growing and selling agricultural products. For example, a family with nine children rented 4 hectares of land. With the cotton they planted and harvested, they earned US\$ 500 and were able to keep 430kg of cotton oil and fodder for themselves.
- Visibility and recognition of the RCST has increased: local authorities allocated office premises for the local branch; government officials, after visiting the area and seeing the results of the project, decided to replicate it in five other landslide-prone areas of the country.

Kyrgyzstan

Background

Pristan is a small settlement on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan's north-eastern Issyk-Kul province. It has a population of 2,500 people, of whom 70 per cent are poor and elderly. Until 1991, Pristan was prosperous, due to a factory producing military equipment and a busy port on Lake Issyk-Kul. Both industries failed during the political transition period after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unemployment rates were high and young people left the area to search for work. Only the elderly remained. The area is at risk to floods and landslides during the rainy season. Landslide-prone communities used to be protected by diversion channels or 'offtakes', but in recent years they have not been maintained or have been destroyed. As a result, the local population faced frequent disasters. In the summer of 2003, for example, a combination of long rains and severe glacier melt led to floods, which left 300 families homeless and damaged infrastructure.

The project

- The Issyk-Kul branch of the Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan (RCSK) initiated a riverbank reinforcement project jointly with the local community. The project set out to:
 - Establish reliable relations with local communities and local authorities.
 - Carry out a risk assessment with the local community, i.e., drawing up a list of hazards, community resources and risk mapping, SWOT analysis, prioritization of risks.
 - Determine which risk reduction measures would be acceptable to the local community (in this case, reinforcing the riverbank).
 - Meet with community leaders to discuss activities and obtain their commitment to the project.





- Sign a Memorandum of Understanding with parties involved (local community council, local government, Red Crescent, etc.) on the project's implementation and maintenance.
- Implement monitor and evaluate the project, and manage it with participation of selected local community members.

Lessons learned

- In 2004, after the riverbanks were reinforced with stones and gabions (containers filled with earth or other material), the river did not flood.
- Communities felt 'ownership' of the project and are carrying out riverbank maintenance themselves.
- New ideas were developed among the communities involved in risk reduction measures, leading to a change in perception, behavior and awareness of risks.
- The number of volunteers at the local RCSK branch increased.
- The RCSK's image and relationship with local authorities, non-governmental organizations and the local community have improved.

Uzbekistan

Background

In 2001, the Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan (RCSU) set up a community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP) pilot project in Tashkent province, which aimed at increasing disaster preparedness and response capacities and reinforcing coping mechanisms in vulnerable communities. Given the project's success, the RCSU decided to develop further and expand the scope of CBDP programmes throughout the entire country.

The project

- The RCSU, in consultation with Uzbekistan's Ministry for Emergency Situations (MES) and local authorities, identified particularly disaster-prone communities.
- In collaboration with the chosen communities, the RCSU selected 10–15 people as community leaders and trained them in CBDP.

- CBDP groups were made up of 12–16 volunteers selected by community leaders and trained in early warning, participatory vulnerability and capacity assessment, damage/needs assessment, rapid response, first aid, evacuation and relief distribution.
- Trained community leaders and CBDP groups developed disaster preparedness/response plans and awareness-raising activities, including VCA and hazard mapping. They also facilitated disaster drills/exercises with their respective communities and the MES.

Lessons learned

- The community members are better aware of disaster risks in their communities.
- Disaster coping mechanisms are reinforced through training, raising awareness about safety measures and disaster exercises/drills.
- The communities' disaster preparedness and response capacities were increased through developing disaster management plans and VCA/risk mapping.



Community members in Tashkent province

Conclusions from the three countries

An integrated community-based participatory approach to risk reduction has proved successful and effective in reducing vulnerability in disaster-prone communities in Central Asia. The Red Crescent programmes' success depended on close cooperation with local authorities and the local population's commitment to programmes and ownership. The Red Crescent has also strengthened its image, thus becoming a stronger advocate for reducing communities' vulnerability to disaster risk with their government. VCAs have improved risk reduction activities at the planning and implementation stages, by using local communities' existing knowledge and involving them in the design of mitigation projects. The idea was that the local community becomes part of the Red Crescent and the Red Crescent part of the community. For it is the communities themselves that are present and first on the scene after disaster strikes in that crucial time when lives can be saved.

For more information, please contact:

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