

Disaster reduction programme 2001–2008

Summary of lessons learned
and recommendations



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Federation's Global Agenda (2006–2010)

Over the next years, the collective focus of the Federation will be on achieving the following goals and priorities:

Our goals

Goal 1: Reduce the number of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.

Goal 2: Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.

Goal 3: Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.

Goal 4: Promote respect for diversity and human dignity, and reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion.

Our priorities

Improving our local, regional and international capacity to respond to disasters and public health emergencies.

Scaling up our actions with vulnerable communities in health promotion, disease prevention and disaster risk reduction.

Increasing significantly our HIV/AIDS programming and advocacy.

Renewing our advocacy on priority humanitarian issues, especially fighting intolerance, stigma and discrimination, and promoting disaster risk reduction.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2009

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Acknowledgements

This publication has been published with the kind support of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID)

DFID Department for
International
Development

2009

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

P.O. Box 372
CH-1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Telephone: +41 22 730 4222
Telefax: +41 22 733 0395
E-mail: secretariat@ifrc.org
Web site: www.ifrc.org

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Executive summary



Between 2001 and 2008, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the International Federation), in partnership with the British Red Cross and supported by the UK Department of International Development (DFID), implemented a Disaster Reduction Programme with various National Societies in disaster-prone countries in East and Southern Africa and in South Asia. The aims of the programme were to enhance the capacities of the National Societies in disaster preparedness and risk reduction, to contribute to global learning and expertise and to use the experience gained to inform future programmes.

A variety of activities were undertaken, designed to boost disaster preparedness and increase communities' resilience to certain specific risks prevalent in particular countries, such as weather-related hazards in South Asia and the triple threat of drought, chronic food insecurity (poverty) and HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa. At the global and regional level, different mechanisms were devised to facilitate the building and sharing of knowledge and capacities, such as a Disaster Management Information System, a regional disaster management working group, exchanges between National Societies, workshops, identification of lessons learned and case studies.

Two evaluations were conducted, one at the end of each of the two phases of the programme. They looked at the successes of the programme in meeting its stated objectives, the technical quality of programme interventions, the effectiveness of implementation arrangements and management, and the continuity or "sustainability" of interventions.

Overall, the evaluators concluded that, while it was too early to assess the impact of the programme on communities, targets related to community resilience had mostly been met and that in general National Societies had achieved satisfactory initial results. Beneficiary and stakeholder satisfaction were found to be quite high, but results were small scale, tentative and not sustainable without continued external support. The evaluators were less confident of the programme's success with regard to national-level disaster preparedness and response and the knowledge-sharing component of the programme. They found the programme document overambitious, given the time frame and capacities of the National Societies concerned, and technical and managerial support inadequate.

The evaluations identified a number of lessons learned and made recommendations to improve the implementation of such programmes in the future.



1 Introduction



1.1 Background

The Disaster Reduction Programme was conceived in 2001 following a pledge of CHF 2.7 million from DFID for a one-year disaster preparedness and response programme to be implemented by the International Federation, in partnership with the British Red Cross. In the end, the programme spanned seven years in two separate phases, involving 11 countries and a total budget of CHF 7.5 million.

The primary goal of the first phase (2001–2003) of the programme was to enhance the disaster preparedness capacities of seven National Societies in disaster-prone countries in East Africa and South Asia and, based on these experiences, to improve learning and best practice in disaster reduction and response. A deliberate decision was taken to include a group of National Societies that had differing levels of experience and capacity in disaster preparedness and reduction.

The design of the second phase (2005–2008) of the programme was driven by renewed enthusiasm for risk reduction prompted by the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Kobe, Japan, in January 2005 and the adoption at the conference of the Hyogo Framework for Action. The objectives were therefore refined and reoriented to encompass “community resilience” and “risk reduction”, concepts that reflected a shift in approach and language by the International Federation and donors, including DFID, and broader trends in the field of disaster reduction.

The regional focus of the second phase also shifted from East Africa to Southern Africa, while most of the same countries in South Asia participated. Again, a deliberate choice was made to include National Societies with varying degrees of capacity and experience in disaster reduction that would benefit from cooperation with each other.

Evaluations of both phases of the Disaster Reduction Programme were conducted, in 2004 and 2008 respectively, by mixed teams from the International Federation, an implementing National Society, the British Red Cross and DFID.¹ This document is a summary of some of the main findings of the two evaluations. It looks at what worked well and what worked less well and identifies some of the key lessons and recommendations that will benefit the design and implementation of future such programmes.

1.2 Overview of the programme

Phase one of the Disaster Reduction Programme took place between 2001 and 2003, including several extensions, and provided funding to seven National Societies in disaster-prone countries in East Africa (Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan) and South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan) to enhance their local disaster preparedness capacities.

¹ Alexandra Galperin, Summary Report, Joint Evaluation of the BRCS/IFRC/DFID Disaster Reduction Programme 2001–2003, March 2004 (unpublished); Alexandra Galperin, Global Summary Report, Final Evaluation of the Disaster Reduction Programme Phase II 2005–2008, September 2008 (unpublished).

Activities were implemented through National Society structures at the headquarters and branch levels, the aim being to leave behind sustainable national and community-based structures.

Implemented between 2005 and 2008, phase two of the programme was designed to respond to various specific risks prevalent in particular countries, namely Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia in Southern Africa and Bangladesh, India and Nepal in South Asia.² In Southern Africa, activities focused on strengthening the resilience of rural communities in the face of the “triple threat” of combined drought, chronic food insecurity (poverty) and HIV and AIDS through a mix of interventions in the areas of agriculture and livestock.³ The exception was Mozambique, which put the emphasis on community-based preparedness activities for cyclones and floods. In South Asia, activities centred on strengthening the resilience of rural communities to weather-related hazards, in particular floods and landslides. In addition, Bangladesh engaged in an urban earthquake-preparedness initiative.

From its early planning stages, the Disaster Reduction Programme aimed to develop “global learning and expertise”. Different mechanisms were devised to facilitate the building and sharing of knowledge and capacities, including a web-based Disaster Management Information System and the identification of key lessons and the sharing of these lessons within and across National Societies, with the ultimate objective of informing policy and practice. Knowledge sharing also took the form of training, regional and global workshops, a disaster management working group, exchange visits between National Societies, and the production of case studies and publications.

² Pakistan was not included in phase two as it was deemed to have received sufficient support from earthquake funds. India dropped out of the programme in 2007.

³ In Lesotho, a sanitation component was also included.

Key evaluation findings

2.1 Vulnerability assessment

National Societies used a variety of assessment techniques, including vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA). These were mostly localized initiatives focusing on individual branches.

Some National Societies carried out surveys using questionnaires but later had problems analysing the data collected. This showed that, although National Societies have the comparative advantage of being able to reach and collect information in communities not covered by other agencies and non-governmental organizations, they may not have the capacity to analyse that information adequately.

Recommendation: When conducting assessments, National Societies should consider teaming up with more research-oriented organizations or look at cooperation with local universities and research institutions to make up for internal weaknesses in the analysis of data.

The Rwandan Red Cross's approach to VCA was exemplary. It used participatory assessment techniques, learned through training, and analysis of the data was carried out together with community and local government representatives. However, it was unable to respond to the identified needs, as no follow-up activities had been foreseen, leading to tensions with the community and local government. This was later redressed through a community-based food security project. VCAs, as with any assessment based on participatory techniques and community mobilization, risk raising expectations, particularly when research processes are conducted over an extended period (12 days in the case of Rwanda) and depend on the community's sustained inputs and support.



Jean-Bosco Rukirande Musana, Rwandan Red Cross coordinator for Western province, explaining the colour-coded alert system for the Nyiragongo volcano. The flag behind him shows the current state: yellow.

Recommendation: In conducting VCAs, it is important to weigh the benefit of the tool against the challenge of raising expectations in the community. If conducted in very deprived environments, some seed money for follow-up should be reserved.

Recommendation: National Societies need to assess their own capacities to deal with problems as part of VCAs. This can be done either before entering a community (and be used to narrow down the scope of the assessment to match National Society capacities) or together with the community.

In some cases, VCAs were conducted somewhat separately from planning and implementation. Rather than feeding into a process of assessing, monitoring, reviewing and updating, they became ends in themselves and relatively static products. VCAs in community-based programmes need to be conducted at the appropriate, i.e. high-level of resolution, serve the purpose of community mobilization by identifying community capacities, and generate data that can be used for the planning, implementation and monitoring of activities.

Recommendation: Develop better and more tailored support mechanisms for National Societies engaging in VCAs, particularly for those doing it for the first time.

Some National Societies attempted to assemble national-scale hazard or risk maps. Again, this proved a challenge for the National Societies. The task of processing, analysing and representing information geographically on a national scale requires not only specific expertise but also access to reliable data, which may not be readily available. Local hazard maps may be different, and National Societies could produce them at different levels of sophistication depending on available technology and capacities.

Recommendation: If National Societies decide it is in their interests to carry out national hazard or risk mapping, this should ideally be performed in cooperation with the government, universities and/or international agencies to ensure access to data and expertise/technology.

Food distribution in the village of Buge on 8 September 2008 in Wolayita region, Ethiopia.



Jose Cendon/International Federation

The programme supported National Societies in carrying out food security monitoring at community level. This activity had differing levels of success. However, the proper niche of the Red Cross Red Crescent in this area seemed insufficiently defined, and it was not clear how National Societies linked up with other key players active in this field.

The difficulties encountered in this initiative were also reflective of more generic strengths and weaknesses of the Red Cross Red Crescent. Many of the problems documented in food security monitoring and VCAs were so complex or massive that the National Societies either could not deal with them on their own or lacked the required capacity. They needed to attract the attention and stimulate the involvement of other players, such as the

government or relevant international organizations, if they wanted to act in the best interests of affected communities. Interventions, especially food security-related initiatives, need to be strategic and beneficiaries well defined. This calls for more advocacy and a less action-driven approach.

Recommendation: Further test and define National Societies' niche in food security monitoring. Cross-regional consultation might be worthwhile to better define the Red Cross Red Crescent role in this field.

2.2 Actions promoting community resilience

2.2.1 Community mobilization and awareness

With the exception of Mozambique, National Societies in Southern Africa did not start interventions by mobilizing communities around a clearly defined disaster reduction agenda. Owing to the top-down planning of the programme, communities found themselves initially in the role of receiving support services that had been designed for them. In the beginning, therefore, projects were not well rooted in communities and ownership was low. This changed in the course of programme implementation as more solid channels of communication between programme staff and communities began to emerge, as communities started to engage and as community suggestions were eventually taken on board. In response to community suggestions, some programmes went beyond standard interventions and ventured into less-tested areas, such as using “chilli bombs” in Namibia to scare away elephants and the creation of soakaway pits in Lesotho to improve sanitation.

In community-based programmes, it is “normal” to start slowly as the situation and needs are assessed and as communities gradually engage and develop ownership. Process is initially more important than products or outputs.

Community commitment to reduce risks was high in both Nepal and Bangladesh. In Nepal, various villages/communities had contributed 50 per cent of the start-up funds to the establishment of a village income-generating fund. Generous community members donated land for the construction of community centres. In both countries, communities were actively involved in the implementation of the programme. In Bangladesh, a community was seen to initiate mitigation activities on its own.

Community-based programmes need to build on community capacities, knowledge and skills. This does not just refer to the mobilization of community resources, i.e. funds and labour, for programme implementation but more importantly to the use of programme resources to augment community capacity.

Recommendation: Programmes that are initiated top-down need to allocate a year to enable plans to be adjusted to National Society and community realities.

Recommendation: Community-based programmes should follow a common approach to community mobilization. There needs to be consistency in switching from a service provider to a facilitation role when interacting with communities in this context.

Recommendation: Community resilience programmes need to appraise community capacity, build on this capacity and have an organizational development strategy and component for communities.

Awareness of risk reduction in Southern Africa varied between communities and individuals. Much seemed to depend on the understanding and communication skills of individual project staff working at the local level. Except for Mozambique, which had clearly focused on strengthening community capacities in disaster preparedness, there was very limited engagement in targeted awareness campaigns on the nature and seasonality of hazards, on key vulnerabilities and on disaster management and risk reduction. In some communities, there was no understanding of the purpose of the programme or of risk reduction.

Awareness-raising activities in Bangladesh and Nepal consisted of a mix of direct communication (involving community leaders), street drama, song, leaflets, posters and signs with key messages, drills and simulations. A creative mix, the consideration of local experience and good timing of awareness activities were generally thought to be crucial for success. In some communities, these efforts led to greater awareness of disaster risks and a change of attitude regarding the possibility of doing something about them. Overall, communities seemed to be well aware of the rationale for and the need to reduce risks.

In terms of allocation of resources, the programme overemphasized written materials some of which were not in local languages. Newsletters and bulletins were found to be a less effective approach to capturing attention than well-organized one-off events, such as visits to project sites. Sustained participation in key working groups would also be beneficial in this respect.

2.2.2 Community organization

In most cases, National Societies set up or strengthened structures at community level to help manage programme activities. Whether village-based teams, disaster management committees or risk reduction units, these played a key role in monitoring programme implementation. Depending on needs, these structures could be sub-divided into more specialized committees and units, such as first-aid teams, shelter teams or mitigation teams. They helped select beneficiaries and implement activities, and members were the main recipients of capacity-building initiatives, such as preparedness training.

Not all of these committees were set up in a participatory way. Some lacked clear accountability mechanisms vis-à-vis communities, and in a few cases, doubts arose over the strict application of selection criteria. Overall, National Societies found it difficult to challenge institutional and power relations within communities and worked closely with traditional and government structures.

Recommendation: Community structures generated by community-based programmes should be more than just programme implementation mechanisms. They require designated organizational capacity-building and support.

In Mozambique, the programme centred on building a community-based early warning system, community response capacity and evacuation plans and invested in the establishment and training of local disaster management committees and rescue teams, as well as awareness campaigns. Even though no major disaster occurred during programme implementation, the system was successfully tested during two minor events.

Lesotho and Namibia also included some preparedness measures in community-level activities. Namibia initiated the establishment of a community-based flood early warning system and response teams in Caprivi. In Lesotho, members of village disaster management teams were trained in community-based disaster preparedness (adapted from the Mozambican module).



Community Disaster Preparedness Committee members and volunteers (CDPC) in Kalapra, Barguna, Bangladesh, on 2 June 2007.

In Nepal, the preparedness component included awareness activities, the establishment of a disaster risk reduction unit, a very comprehensive training component, disaster planning, drills and simulations, the construction of community and evacuation centres equipped with response tools, and the establishment of a small emergency fund to support people affected by disasters or accidents. Simulation exercises were found to be particularly effective to raise skills and confidence in preparedness measures. Bangladesh engaged in a similar mix of activities, with the addition of a specific earthquake preparedness initiative in Dhaka that looked at hazard and risk mapping, awareness raising, training in search and rescue, mass casualty management and first aid.

Outside Mozambique, there was limited attention to hazard/risk monitoring and early warning activities. This seemed particularly curious given the focus on weather-related and largely seasonal hazards in South Asia.

Eager to demonstrate the effectiveness of risk reduction, the programme focused on individual hazards: floods, landslides and drought in particular. However, this focus contradicted the multi-hazard approach that is considered to be good practice in risk reduction. A focus on single hazards is too narrow to generate and maintain sustainable interest in community-level disaster reduction. Community capacity needs to be useful to a wider range of situations and be used regularly to attract the interest and support to maintain it. This flaw in the initial programme design led to narrowly focused assessments, plans and activities and undermined the prospective sustainability of efforts.

Recommendation: Promote and strengthen hazard/risk monitoring and early warning activities within the context of disaster preparedness/disaster reduction and community resilience.

Recommendation: Promote a consistent multi-hazard approach to disaster preparedness/disaster reduction considering everyday hazards.

Both in Nepal and Bangladesh, efforts were made to involve women in preparedness and mitigation activities, resulting in a relatively high number of women included in awareness activities and training. In Bangladesh, women were eager to engage on a more continuous basis, but Red Crescent chapters did not necessarily offer easy opportunities for them to do so. In Nepal, women constituted 30–35 per cent of the community risk reduction units, a percentage that could have been improved on. While women did play an important role in the implementation of activities at the community level, the programme did not have a deliberate or clear strategy on how to address gender-related vulnerability issues. Vulnerability and gender are strongly correlated and cannot be ignored by programme implementation guidelines.

Recommendation: Clarify the role of gender within “community resilience” and more specifically within disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

2.2.3 National Society ownership

Ethiopia, Rwanda and Sudan developed policies, plans and guidelines, with differing levels of success and of varying quality. All three National Societies employed external consultants in one form or other for the design of plans and/or strategies. It was unclear how reflective they were of realities and to what extent they were “owned” by the National Society and its branches. Individual plans were too ambitious and tackled too many policy documents at the same time. Progress was also hampered by the absence of clear government policies and plans.

There is a need for clear strategies and policies as National Societies move into disaster reduction and community participation. The exact place of National Societies in this area requires further debate and an assessment of organizational capacities, as well as a clear definition of objectives and modes of operation, especially in environments of extreme deprivation.

Contingency plans might be an easier way to get National Societies started on planning for disasters as they appeal to a more action-oriented culture. However, many National Societies will still require guidance and orientation of what contingency plans entail and appropriate processes for their production. Furthermore, future programmes should seek to assist National Societies with simulations of such plans to combine theory with practice.

Recommendation: Future programmes should be more selective and realistic when it comes to the parallel development of various policy documents. The purpose of these exercises needs to be entirely clear. Contingency plans may be a good start for action-oriented National Societies.

Recommendation: Policies, plans and guidelines need to be developed in a consultative process within and outside the National Society to ensure ownership and the reflection of realities. This is of particular importance when defining the terms of reference of external consultants to help pull such processes together.

2.2.4 Structural mitigation⁴

The programme undertook a variety of small-scale physical mitigation activities, strengthened community organizations, helped to draft disaster plans and trained and prepared local teams.

Bangladesh and Nepal focused on physical mitigation of the impacts of landslides and floods. A variety of measures were introduced, some benefiting the community (stabilization of slopes and riverbanks, repair and maintenance of footpaths, cleaning and protection of wells, planting of trees) and others benefiting individuals (relocation or raising houses/shelters).

Communities actively joined in the required works, and technical supervision was adequate. There were a few examples in Nepal where the initiative attracted additional inputs and acted as a catalyst for community and government institutions to interact. However, there was a need for a better technical understanding of the hazard, as well as a more integrated and regional approach, which would require a more active role of government.

In both Nepal and Bangladesh, there was potential to build more on community knowledge, skills and capacities to mitigate risk. Particularly in Bangladesh, risk reduction is not “new” to communities and they had engaged in it before the programme, resources permitting. Various community members had technical expertise, skills and tools in agricultural risk management, shelter construction, economic risk sharing and social mobilization. The Disaster Reduction Programme was most successful where it identified and built on these local capacities.

Recommendation: Define specific contributions of disaster preparedness and reduction to community resilience and realistic common key objectives and key areas for Red Cross Red Crescent support. Core preparedness skills and activities, such as VCA, monitoring of hazards, disaster planning, early warning and first aid in disasters, can be complemented, technical capacity permitting, by selected demonstrative mitigation activities protecting common assets (roads and paths, shelters, wells, pasture, etc.).

Recommendation: Develop a holistic “community resilience” framework that defines common objectives and the scope of Red Cross Red Crescent community-level interventions to reduce vulnerability (disaster preparedness and reduction, health, water and sanitation, organizational development).

2.2.5 Food security and livelihood support

The VCA in Rwanda laid the foundation for a community-based food security project funded by the programme. The project was well implemented and was still ongoing a year after the programme officially ended in Rwanda. However, it raised major questions for the National Society regarding its role and

⁴ In the Red Cross Red Crescent context, disaster mitigation has two components: structural and non-structural. Non-structural mitigation involves building the capacities of communities to assess their vulnerability, monitor risk and prepare community structures to deal with the impacts of disasters. This is the main focus of Red Cross Red Crescent community interventions as it is where its strength lies.

Livelihoods programmes need to be long-term and targeted to address the needs of the most vulnerable. Nepal, November 2007.



Mihal Schlosser/Danish Red Cross

capacities in responding to situations of chronic food insecurity, its ability to reach the most extreme cases of vulnerability, and its ability to raise funds for these types of interventions.

Food security interventions in Southern Africa had the two-pronged objective of meeting the acute needs of food insecure households and improving the longer-term situation by building up “buffers” that could help to absorb future stress. Interventions included: the promotion of drought-resistant crops, vegetable gardens, fruit trees, small-scale irrigation and small livestock farming; the provision of relevant inputs and training; and the strengthening of community organizational capacity. Although the second prong of

the objective was more clearly linked to risk reduction and the building of disaster resilience, the programme concentrated primarily on physical tangibles and on human skills at household level than on the social, institutional and financial aspects of community resilience.

In Bangladesh and Nepal, livelihood interventions aimed to address economic vulnerability, i.e. poverty. They included a modest micro-finance initiative in Nepal, where a small income-generation fund was established. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society provided direct but also small-scale livelihood inputs such as goats, materials for vegetable gardens and sewing machines.

Livelihood interventions are an area where the Red Cross Red Crescent is developing and has comparatively less experience than other, often specialized, development NGOs. Although this component of the programme generated some good results, overall the investments seemed to have had a relatively low impact on household stability or resilience and had not reduced risks for the community as a whole.

Recommendation: Further explore the linkages between food security and disaster reduction and identify where these overlap and differ. Further clarify in what areas of food security the Red Cross Red Crescent can make a meaningful contribution to community resilience.

Recommendation: Innovative food security initiatives should be looked at in the context of disaster response and the rehabilitation of affected populations, not just in cases of chronic food insecurity.

2.3 National Society capacity-building

The Disaster Reduction Programme aimed to strengthen the disaster response capacities of National Societies as a complementary activity to the disaster reduction activities at community level.

Training, mostly of staff and volunteers at branch level, formed an important part of country-level interventions in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Sudan during the first phase of the programme. It ranged from community-based disaster preparedness/first-aid training in Sudan and disaster management training in Ethiopia to the training of provincial response teams in Rwanda. Training covered a range of preparedness subjects and skills, including assessments, hazard mapping, contingency planning, distribution, and water and sanitation.

Mostly, the training was interactive and oriented towards the development of practical skills. However, apart from in Rwanda, certain aspects of the training had relatively little impact. This was especially true of VCA, which would require more than one training event to give people a sufficient grasp of participatory assessment and community mobilization techniques. In this respect, the Rwandan Red Cross was exemplary. It organized three such events and invited an external agency with specific expertise (the Dutch development organization SNV) to lead training events, which was highly effective.

The preparation of training events went hand in hand with the preparation of materials and handouts that were taken from a range of sources. The Ethiopian Red Cross Society developed operational guidelines, which were used for training, and the Rwandan Red Cross put together a training package that continued to be used in training and refresher courses and had defined a training curriculum. However, there was a concern to what extent certain materials had been adapted to country contexts and institutionalized.

Recommendation: Several training events need to be envisaged to familiarize National Societies with participatory techniques (e.g. VCA) from scratch, if need be. Identify local expertise.

Recommendation: Where feasible, look at the institutionalization of training resources and capacities, including adaptation to local contexts. This requires additional resources.

Recommendation: Integrate health and disaster preparedness and reduction components more clearly into the training of National Society branches and disaster response teams so that they become part of the everyday role of volunteers.

Most National Societies in the second phase of the programme prioritized the risk reduction objectives at community level over those that were designed to enhance their own response capacities. As a consequence, the performance in this area was generally weak and fewer targets were reached. Exceptions were Mozambique, which focused on building preparedness and response capacity at all levels, and Nepal, which strengthened the preparedness/response capacities of its chapters.

The comparative advantage of the Red Cross Red Crescent is its volunteers and its local presence outside national capitals. This opened up the possibility of building more sustainable channels of support to

communities. However, in poor countries, this presence was not necessarily strong, i.e. branches faced important organizational and material constraints to engage with vulnerable communities. With the exception of Mozambique, Nepal and to some degree Bangladesh, branches had limited or no influence on the design of activities and received limited or no capacity-building support. This endangered the continuity of even modest activities, such as monitoring, beyond the completion of the programme. Implementing community-level programmes through contracted programme teams without a sufficient involvement of and investment in branches potentially undermines the advantage of the Red Cross Red Crescent: its local presence. It also bears the risk of overextending National Societies into areas where they have no or very limited capacity.

Recommendation: Capacity-building programmes should be based on clearer descriptions of: a) the status quo of National Society capacities at the start of the programme; b) the need to build or improve these capacities; and c) a set of qualitative indicators that would help to monitor progress.

Recommendation: If National Society to National Society capacity-building is to be practicable, programmes are advised to adopt a sub-regional approach, with a small number of countries that are physically close to each other and share similar risks.

Recommendation: Ensure that capacity-building programmes are based on clear assessments of the status quo, i.e. capacities and added value, needs and the absorption capacity of National Societies.

Recommendation: Ensure that community resilience programmes appraise community capacity, build on this capacity and have an organizational development strategy and component for communities.

Recommendation: Training, especially at branch level, needs to avoid vertical approaches and be integrated with training in other programme areas, such as health.

2.4 Partnerships

The impact of the Disaster Reduction Programme on relationships with external partners was difficult to measure, as no clear baselines existed on the number and quality of relationships before the programme. Most National Societies had good relations with their governments before the start of the programme, in particular with national disaster management agencies, and central governments continued to recognize the importance of National Society contributions in the area of disaster management. Relations with government departments at local level reached a new and practical quality during joint implementation of programme activities. In Nepal, government departments supported local risk reduction activities with in-kind contributions.



PMI volunteers are planting mangrove trees in potential vulnerable areas of Aceh Jaya.

Witda Anggraeni/American Red Cross

Recommendation: Build on the interest expressed by and input from governments and other agencies in the programme and look at the possibility of future and more systematic, even formalized, cooperation with them.

The sustainability of investments in disaster preparedness and reduction and especially in risk reduction depends on the ability of National Societies to attract funding outside the Movement's traditional boundaries. Donor support will often be linked to government frameworks, and it is therefore important that the Red Cross Red Crescent undertake concerted efforts to link up with such frameworks and at the same time promote its role with locally represented donor agencies. This would require support and strategic advice from the International Federation.

Recommendation: The International Federation should assist National Societies in becoming better "partners" for international agencies in order to increase their self-reliance.

In some cases, potential donors may perceive the National Society as being too close to the government and therefore not independent and not occupying a space in civil society, i.e. outside the realms of the State and market. National Societies need to be aware of these possible perceptions and to be able to explain the difference between the role and legal status of a National Society and the status of an average non-governmental organization (NGO). They also need to be prepared to highlight in what way the Red Cross Red Crescent deals with possible government pressure to undertake certain types of interventions and target groups, i.e. how it ensures that interventions are guided by the fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Contacts with external partners in Southern Africa were mostly limited to technical experts at the regional level. In South Asia, programme management staff had established closer relationships with a number of actors, particularly with donors and international NGOs. Such contacts had led to good funding levels of disaster reduction-related programmes in the region.

Recommendation: Promote the specific and unique contributions of the Red Cross Red Crescent to risk reduction more confidently to the outside world.

From a positive perspective, National Societies made maximum use of their auxiliary role vis-à-vis governments and were often successful in engaging the expertise, human and sometimes even material resources of government departments in the delivery of services to communities. On a less positive note, the programme put the auxiliary status of National Societies on its head in countries where the governments had no interest and no resources/capacities in risk reduction (or a combination of both). National Societies became – even if only on a small scale – the only providers of risk reduction services (drought/landslide/flood mitigation) at the community level. Their interventions were too limited in scope and size to generate significant impact. However, they generated mostly unrealistic expectations.

Recommendation: Review the National Societies' relationship with governments and the meaning of "auxiliary status" in the light of the experience of this programme.

Recommendation: As knowledge of the different global and regional agencies participating in disaster preparedness and risk reduction debates and/or activities increases, the building of relationships should focus on those players that have the potential to add value to International Federation initiatives and strategic thinking. Future disaster reduction programmes should be more specific about relationship-building, i.e. the objectives, expected outputs and benefits of these partnerships for National Society capacity-building.

2.5 Organizational learning

From its initial planning stages, the Disaster Reduction Programme looked at the development of "global learning and expertise", and different mechanisms were devised to facilitate the building and sharing of knowledge and capacities. Some of these mechanisms took the form of sub-projects, such as the Disaster Management Information System; others facilitated learning and exchange within and between regions or harvested learning, such as case studies.

The Disaster Management Information System was created in 2001 to share disaster-related information in a more timely and efficient manner within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The network provided potentially real-time information on disaster trends and ongoing operations coming from the field but also had more static information on a variety of topics relevant to disaster management.

Inter-regional exchanges included workshops bringing together all the officers involved in the programme, one in Nepal on lessons learned and one at the end of each phase, and exchange visits between National Societies. Intra-regional cooperation took the form of staff secondment and exchange visits.

East Africa turned inter-regional cooperation into a major mechanism to provide technical assistance to National Societies and build their capacities. This was achieved through the establishment of regional “working groups”, which were put under the strategic oversight of the *RC-Net*, a steering and management body composed of secretary-generals from National Societies in the region appointed by their peers.

The idea of the working groups was to combine training and practical experience through deployments. Five working groups were established: Regional Disaster Response Team; VCA and disaster preparedness policy and planning; food security; political disturbances and population movement; and flood/cyclone preparedness. By the end of 2003, 190 members had been trained and had participated in working groups. Working group members performed 22 missions in 2002 and 20 missions in 2003. In addition, they supported several of the country-level activities of the Disaster Reduction Programme.



Shehab Uddin/Orisk/British Red Cross

Local people and Community Disaster Preparedness Committee members and volunteers (CDPC) and CPP Female members and volunteers gathered to watch the drama *iJago Manush* (Beaware) in Babugonj Cyclone Center, Barguna, Bangladesh, on 2 June 2007.

The way in which the working groups reached and involved some 190 National Society staff members set an innovative example of how regional delegations and programmes can contribute more effectively to National Society capacity-building and not just work with a chosen few. The working groups also linked training and application in a way that contributed to the building of practical skills.

Recommendation: Involving regional resources in the implementation of complex programme activities and using their experience and expertise while simultaneously building capacity has been a special feature of the East Africa “working groups”. While this approach may not be feasible in all regions, this model may deserve documentation to catch the experience and make it accessible for other regions and future similar programmes.

In Southern Africa, the regional delegation helped National Societies hook up with each other and facilitated study visits. This led to the transfer of practices from Mozambique to Namibia and Lesotho. A visit to Lesotho led to the adoption of the home garden model in Namibia. The region also successfully used the mechanisms of two peer reviews to suggest changes to ongoing projects.

The experiences of the Disaster Reduction Programme showed that, although exchanges between regions are a good thing in theory, the further National Societies are removed from each other geographically, socially and environmentally, the less easy it will be to pass on applicable knowledge. The fact that two countries are categorized as “developing” does not make it easier to engage in a dialogue on broad themes, such as community participation, resulting in anything more than generic policy recommendations. Knowledge sharing was found to have worked best when peers from within a region with similar needs and interests – communities, branches and National Societies – were given the opportunity to learn from each other.

Recommendation: Exchanges between regions should focus on very specific know-how (food security, early warning for tropical storms) in one National Society and a clear (and felt!) need for such know-how in another National Society.

Recommendation: Exchanges within regions are likely to be more productive, particularly between neighbouring countries working in similar contexts, and where the relationship is built over time.

Recommendation: Future disaster reduction programmes should consider the possibility of funding in-country exchanges between branches that have engaged in “innovative” activities (VCAs, community-based disaster preparedness).

Three of the projected five case studies were produced in the first phase. These were on the cross-cutting themes of risk reduction (India), flood risk reduction (Sudan) and vulnerability and capacity assessment (Rwanda). The case studies suffered from the overall brevity of the programme and were rushed through to meet deadlines.

Time pressure also affected the knowledge-sharing component of the second phase. The programme did not have the solid knowledge management mechanisms to facilitate the transfer and analysis of knowledge

from the local to the global level. Moreover, three years was found to be too short to identify lessons learned and to translate them into knowledge that would be relevant to other National Societies and the International Federation.

Recommendation: In order to share knowledge effectively, the type of knowledge and the way it is shared needs to correlate with the needs and preferences of the intended recipient. This starts with the assessment of needs, selection of clearly defined objectives and target groups, continues with the choice of appropriate language and media for communication of knowledge, and ends with following up on the use of knowledge.

Considerable learning nonetheless took place, first and foremost at local-level. The programme helped some National Societies, particularly the newcomers to disaster reduction, to explore risk reduction and to learn about some of the processes and methods used to plan and implement risk reduction programmes at local-level. It also helped them to appreciate some of the difficulties in working on these issues, engaging with communities and using tools effectively. In South Asia, the programme helped Nepal to deepen its experience in combining community-based disaster preparedness and livelihood interventions. Very useful practical knowledge-sharing activities were conducted between neighbouring National Societies, which informed practice at the project level. However, such learning requires further analysis and refinement before knowledge and more importantly “know-how” that would be useful for at-risk communities and the organization can be distilled.

Recommendation: If future programmes are to target “knowledge sharing”, such activities must be based on a consolidated International Federation strategy on how best and most effectively to exchange relevant experience and expertise across regions, National Societies and programmes.

Recommendation: Review the usefulness and the use of current knowledge products relevant to community resilience, such as assessment tools, guidelines and case studies. Establish clear guidelines on what knowledge products are needed, where and why, who should develop them and how they should be developed.

Recommendation: Further emphasize, document and strengthen more creative, participatory and cost-effective ways of knowledge sharing, for example: demand-driven peer reviews; peer-to-peer consultations (within a region); “write-shops” with practitioners (capturing experience); and branch and community exchanges (within a country).

*“The project has just started
to uplift us and is already coming to an end.”*

Beneficiary, Sesheke, Zambia

The Disaster Reduction Programme reached out to the most vulnerable to make communities safer and more resilient.



2.6 Programme management

2.6.1 Programme design

Initial ideas for a Disaster Reduction Programme were discussed in 2001 during a meeting in Geneva between DFID, the British Red Cross and senior International Federation representatives. Following this meeting, an outline proposal was developed along with a tentative budget at the global level. The selection of participating countries was done in consultation with International Federation regional delegations. Criteria included the country's vulnerability and the National Society's capacity and commitment to the programme. The decision was taken to include one National Society from each region that had only limited experience of disaster preparedness and reduction programming.

As the planning process had started in a top-down manner, initial activities had to be geared to providing National Societies with information and tools to start their own bottom-up planning. Plans and logical frameworks had to be produced to translate the overarching objectives into the varying realities of seven countries in two regions. These efforts to create ownership at national level were overall successful. However, the objectives could have been toned down to match the short-term nature of the funding/programme.

As with the first phase, the planning of the second phase of the programme went top-down in the beginning and then tried to put National Societies in the driving seat in a bottom-up process. Although the evaluation of the first phase had indicated that National Societies needed considerable time to engage with such a reversed planning process, this insight was neglected when initial planning workshops called upon National Societies to present their plans and logical frameworks in the space of roughly two months. This was unrealistic, particularly because National Societies had to agree on the programme design and selection of project sites internally, in particular with branches, and create the structures for implementation, i.e. set up teams, offices, etc.

Recommendation: Programmes should have a minimum duration of 36 months (ideally longer) in order to give sufficient time for capacity building.

Recommendation: Ensure that programmes that are initiated top-down allocate a year to fill plans with National Society and community realities.

Recommendation: Programmes should be timed to fit into the planning frameworks and cycles of the National Societies and the International Federation to support consistent planning and management practices.

There was also an expectation that National Societies could quickly assess and analyse sufficient data to design risk reduction interventions down to the activity level. This somehow overlooked the potential, purpose and nature of the VCA as a planning process that enabled National Societies to engage with communities and mobilize them to design their own risk reduction solutions. It is accepted good practice in community-based risk reduction programmes to devote the entire first year to assessments and community mobilization and to produce more detailed plans in response to community priorities. National Societies received insufficient hands-on support in planning a set of simple but practical steps to initiate the process. Initial project plans were overambitious in terms of number of project sites and suggested activities.

Recommendation: Mixing National Societies with varying capacity levels should continue, while increasing the overall number of less-experienced National Societies benefiting from the programme.

Recommendation: Programmes should have a realistic number of objectives and outputs. If several activities are proposed, these need to be sequenced carefully, ideally supporting each other.

The lesson here is that generic programme ideas conceived in Geneva and London require substantial time to be absorbed by the “field” and translated into actual projects. Moreover, programming needs to be based on community and National Society capacities, not the policy expectations of the International Federation Secretariat and its donors.

Recommendation: Programmes should continue to facilitate the involvement of both top management and technical staff in National Societies and seek to build this from the initial planning stages.

The programme had no exit strategies. This posed a serious problem in those countries where disaster preparedness/disaster reduction was an entirely new approach and where external staff were hired on short-term contracts. They often had substantial responsibility for the programme and had therefore gained a considerable level of expertise that would be lost if they left. While some National Societies managed to fund follow-up contracts, others had to let these individuals go.

Recommendation: Devise realistic exit strategies. Develop longer-term funding plans and strategies filling in for and combining short-term funding from various sources.

Recommendation: Health, organizational development and disaster preparedness aspects should be combined to further integrate the main Red Cross Red Crescent activities, which is indispensable for sustainability at the local level.

Recommendation: Include a solid orientation and capacity-building component in programme design for National Society headquarters and programme staff in regions/countries where disaster preparedness/disaster reduction is new.

Recommendation: Consider the possibility of creating budget lines for the funding of a preparatory phase for community-based initiatives that is reserved for assessment, planning and the development of project documents before the official start.

Recommendation: VCA needs to be further explored as a tool to advance integrated assessments and programming.

Recommendation: Programming for/in disaster-prone regions needs to consider the likelihood of disasters actually occurring and develop contingency plans for when that happens. This could involve designing an alternative use for funding, for example for reviews of the National Society's disaster response operations and the identification of gaps and lessons learned; or for the promotion of disaster reduction approaches while the memory of an actual disaster is still fresh. This obviously needs to be agreed with the donor beforehand.

Recommendation: Involve senior National Society management early on in community-based disaster preparedness/disaster reduction programmes (especially if these require a different approach and way of working with policy implications), keep them abreast of programme developments and sensitize them to the significance of programme approaches and results.

Recommendation: Lobby for longer-term community resilience programmes. Develop field strategies to ensure funding continuity.

2.6.2 Technical support

National Societies require hands-on and tailor-made technical support from the start of a programme, particularly on issues related to assessment, planning, and monitoring of impact, including data collection. The International Federation was most effective in providing such support to National Societies where it managed to initiate and use peer mechanisms within regions.

Following the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action, the International Federation Secretariat adapted its terminology. Thus, the second phase of the Disaster Reduction Programme promoted the concept of “risk reduction”, rather than “disaster preparedness” as it had in the first phase. The result was initial confusion among many National Societies, particularly those with limited previous experience in disaster preparedness or risk reduction programmes, and a noticeable drift into the deeper end of livelihood and community development interventions. This pushed some National Societies not only beyond their comfort zones but also beyond their genuine strengths and comparative advantage.

Risk reduction programmes require both solid management and solid technical expertise. There is a particular need for holistic management based on an understanding of what risk reduction means within the context and capacities of National Societies and how the different components can interact and complement each other to produce the desired outcomes.

Recommendation: Clarify language and concepts used in the field of disaster preparedness (or disaster reduction) for communication with National Societies. Embed this in language already known to and used by National Societies.



Children receiving primary education in South Asia.

2.6.3 Impact analysis

From the beginning, the programme emphasized the need to identify indicators to measure the impact of mitigation and risk reduction. National Societies struggled with these requirements and were given – at least initially – very limited support. VCAs did usually not supply specific enough information to monitor the impact of the programme on community resilience. Little connection appears to have been made between VCAs and their potential to identify small sets of qualitative indicators that could eventually be monitored by communities themselves.

The lack of baselines constituted a challenge for the planning and monitoring of the programme. With the exception of some National Societies, the assessments did not establish the specific information on targeted communities and households to be able to monitor change over time. This was also due to the fact that nobody knew at the start of the programme what changes needed to be monitored and which changes would be indicative of successful risk reduction and increased resilience.

Indicators for community resilience against risks from natural disaster are context specific and therefore need to be developed at the local level, not as a top-down exercise. Communities can come up with their own indicators and can be involved in monitoring and evaluation.

National Societies also struggled with logical frameworks and reporting requirements. More support could have been given to simplify reporting procedures, particularly at local and community level. Precious time was used for the collection of information that was not really relevant to measuring the impact of the programme.

Recommendation: Logical frameworks, if part of programme design, should be used for reporting *and* proactive monitoring. Their purpose should be clear at all levels.

Recommendation: Simplify the use of logical frameworks and other reporting requirements for branches and chapters.

Recommendation: Strengthen and simplify monitoring and evaluation procedures. Promote the development of a few meaningful progress and outcome indicators. Ensure these are realistic to monitor.

Recommendation: Allocate a longer preparatory period for review and evaluation exercises; involve National Societies more meaningfully and make sure objectives, methods and expected results/follow-up are communicated and agreed by all key stakeholders.

Recommendation: A clear format for reporting to donors should be agreed in the initial stages of the programme. Reports should factor in the need to have a clear one- to two-page summary of key issues.

Recommendation: Initiate and fund post-disaster reviews in communities where the programme has engaged in mitigation and preparedness to gather evidence on the longer-term impact of the initiative.

3 Conclusion

Although concerns were expressed in the evaluations over the short duration of both phases (two years for the first phase and three years for the second) and relatively low scale of project interventions versus the breadth, degree and complexity of risks, modest to impressive achievements were noted. Programme targets and outputs, as specified in individual logical frameworks, had mostly been met. Community resilience had been strengthened where direct risk reduction interventions were accompanied by effective community mobilization, organization and training. Beneficiary and stakeholder satisfaction was often good, although some voices suggested that greater use could have been made of existing community skills, experience and capacities. However, a sustainable impact on community resilience vis-à-vis key hazards will require longer engagement, a more comprehensive package and a significantly larger scale of interventions.

Sustainability of community risk reduction interventions depends on many variables. In the context of the Red Cross Red Crescent, sustainability could be focused on three main elements: the level of community organization and ability to initiate and self-organize activities; the ability of branches to interact with communities and continue supporting them; and the degree to which interaction between communities, branches and key partners, such as government departments and their agents, had been strengthened.



Miraji Salum, coordinator of the French Red Cross-supported tsunami preparedness project on the southern Tanzanian coast, stands in front of an educational noticeboard. The Red Cross risk-reduction effort for the tsunami danger is concentrated on shore and also includes risk mapping, evacuation procedures and supplementary first-aid training. Tanzania, June 2009.

Although the evaluators felt it was too early to assess sustainability after just three years of implementation, reflecting the three variables of sustainability mentioned above, they could say that: a) the level of community organization had made progress in countries where this was tackled more systematically (Nepal, Mozambique), although these organizations had not reached solid levels of capacity yet; b) branch capacity was considerably stronger in South Asia than in Southern Africa, though branch roles vis-à-vis communities required further clarification. There was an overall lack of investment in organizational development of branches, which had been detrimental to sustainability; and c), there were emerging and promising contacts with government departments, although these were dependent on project inputs and not formalized. Therefore, programme gains at the community level were not sustainable without further inputs. Prospects for the sustainability of preparedness interventions at the community level were overall higher since this was an area of Red Cross Red Crescent expertise and continuous involvement.

In some communities, the Disaster Reduction Programme led to greater awareness of disaster risks and a change of attitude regarding the possibility of doing something about them. In others, attitudes and deep-seated beliefs proved hard to change and much more would need to be done to engage communities. This applied in particular to enabling communities to self-organize and play a more active role in risk identification, monitoring and the design and implementation of disaster reduction solutions.

By their core mandate, National Societies are obliged to prepare for situations of crisis. Popular and government expectations are high that the Red Cross Red Crescent acts when disaster strikes. This raises two key questions: Do National Societies have the capacities to deal with preparedness for response and to undertake disaster reduction initiatives? And what is the exact role and mode of operation of National Societies in the face of situations of chronic deprivation and food insecurity that would surpass the capacity of any actor on its own, let alone a voluntary agency?

VCAAs, if used more broadly to assess a National Society's own organizational capacities vis-à-vis major problems/vulnerabilities, might help National Societies to find answers to these questions. The secretariat of the International Federation and zone office have a crucial role to play in giving support to such assessments. Issues to be reviewed include not only capacity but also questions regarding the ability to switch from an action-driven culture to advocacy and the ability to raise funds for longer-term mitigation. The issues at stake – the fundamental identity, positioning and absorption capacity of the organization – are not trivial. If a clearer framework for the International Federation's and National Societies' involvement in disaster preparedness and reduction is the final outcome of the lessons learned within this and other programmes, a major step forward will have been achieved.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

Voluntary service

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

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.

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.



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