

"Helping One Another" - The Use of WPNS in Southeast Asia

In 2003, a new Federation tool, the "well prepared national society checklist" or WPNS checklist as it quickly became known, was launched. First drafted in 2002, and then further developed during the global meeting of disaster management coordinators in The Philippines in 2003. Essentially an organisational assessment tool, seven main areas of preparedness are identified: *Disaster management (disaster response and preparedness) policy and planning; Organisation structures, systems and linkages; Human resources; Financial and material resources; Relevance; Advocacy and Public Awareness and Effectiveness*. For each area a number of activities were defined against which national societies were to rate themselves.

In Southeast Asia, the use of the WPNS checklist was warmly welcomed by the regions eleven national societies. During an historic meeting in Da Nang, in central Vietnam, national society disaster managers gathered and signed a "framework partnership agreement" in which the WPNS was embodied within one of the four strategic objectives: "The support to individual national societies of the region in meeting their development needs in disaster and conflict management being facilitated and increased". This primarily focuses on co-operation measures in order to meet the disaster management development needs of national societies. Its activities include: "assessment and mapping activities, on the basis of the "characteristics of a well-prepared national society", for identification of development needs, as well as capacities available to meet these needs.

The checklist was modified a little so that national societies could easily address the questions: "*we are: fully prepared, partly prepared, or not prepared*". National society's disaster managers returned from this meeting and used the WPNS as an organisational assessment tool. In Vietnam, over 25 national society staff, all disaster management practitioners gathered together and spent several days to undertake the assessment. In subsequent regional disaster management committee meetings, the seven areas and activities in the WPNS checklist were used for action planning, with some national societies drawing up three to six month action plans.

Revision of the checklist has come to be a part of the these regular bi-annual regional meetings and the "real situation" of the national societies is now an important part of an open honest appraisal of how things are in an environment where sharing the successes and challenges is welcomed and disaster managers seek, along with the regional disaster management unit in Bangkok, ways of providing mutual support: "*for the first time we know where we are can help one another...*"

The WPNS has truly helped to bring national societies in Southeast Asia together and formed an essential part of the development of trust and confidence building among the regions diverse programmes.