

The impact of disaster risk reduction field sessions in Myanmar

Background

In 2010, the IFRC's South-East Asia regional delegation held the first disaster risk reduction (DRR) field session in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), with the aim of empowering communities with information on the underlying causes of natural disasters. With increased awareness and understanding on methods to mitigate the impact of disasters, communities are not only better able to avoid them, they are also more resilient when they happen.

In the following three years, the regional delegation's community safety and resilience unit held a total of six field sessions throughout South Asia, South-East

Asia and East Asia for 148 participants from nine communities (four urban and five rural) from 20 National Societies.

The communities developed nine integrated plans, four of which are being piloted thanks to financial contributions from the Australian Red Cross, Australian Agency for International Development, the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) in Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Timor-Leste. The following case studies highlights the impact that one DRR field session had on communities in Myanmar.



Credit: Myanmar Red Cross Society

What is a DRR field session?

A DRR field session takes place over ten days; participants spend three days in the field and seven days in the classroom. These ten days consist of practical work, group activities and theory in a workshop setting. The entire process promotes peer learning and enhances the development of skills based on logic and reality.

There are two scenarios in every field session. The first is a case study and the second a real-life situation – one that places participants directly in contact with a community that needs assistance. These scenarios are designed to test and sharpen a participant's skills and knowledge about:

- › comprehensive assessment techniques
- › collected data and its systematic organization
- › translating processes from vulnerabilities into potential capacities
- › developing related strategies
- › writing a plan of action

Collective multi-sector risk assessment practices – drawn from integrated programming and reinforced with practical activities and structured theory – strengthen existing skills in the community. By working with a real community, participants learn how to maximize Red Cross Red Crescent contributions to improving livelihoods, water and sanitation, health and care, and DRR. Eventually, when participants become active practitioners, they should be able to prepare their own National Society to implement effective resilience activities.

The DRR field session in Myanmar

The DRR field session in Myanmar was held from 3 to 12 December 2012. There were a total of 29 participants – from the IFRC, partner National Societies and the Myanmar Red Cross Society. All participants had a chance to work with two urban communities in South Dagon township (wards 21 and 71) in Yangon.

Both communities are highly exposed to the risk of fire and flooding, as well as to other health-related risks, such as dengue, tuberculosis and hygiene-related issues. Based on the assessment's findings, there was a high demand for a fire simulation exercise and awareness on safety practices and safe building regulations, hygiene promotion, water and sanitation interventions, and health education and vocational training for long-term income generation.



Feedback from the DRR field session in Myanmar

Three months after the field session, the Myanmar Red Cross Society and the IFRC country office visited two communities, in order to evaluate feedback from members of the community – in Ward 21, New Dagon (South) – which is a flat, low-lying area. The area is a 45-minute drive from the centre of Yangon. Casual labour and street vending are the main occupations of Thein Chaung's residents.

“We have been living in this community for years and, during this time, some people suffered with diarrhea and dengue hemorrhagic fever, but we have no idea how to identify the root cause of this,” explains said 48-year-old Daw Theingi Htwe, a member of the ward DRR committee and chairperson of the first aid committee of Ward 21 of New Dagon (South), Yangon. “The DRR field session has raised awareness in our community. We have learnt about and identified many health-related problems and their causes,” she continues.



Daw Theingi Htwe
Credit: Myanmar Red Cross Society

“In our community, we have a canal that was polluted with rubbish and weeds. After the DRR field session, we organized the community to dig out and clean the canal,” says Daw Theingi Htwe. “We also cleaned the drainage system and encourage people to dispose of their rubbish in the proper place so that we can minimize any health problems. We contacted the township authority and explained our problems. The local authority provided equipment to clean the drainage system, and members of the community cleaned it on their own initiative. Thein Chaung community is clean now,” Daw Theingi Htwe states proudly.

The second community is Ward 71 of New Dagon (South). The area is located in the southern part of Yangon and is also about a 45-minute drive from the centre of Yangon. It became an urban area when the government developed a satellite administration structure in 1992. About 300 households were residing in this ward and this figure has increased to 2,797 in 2013. Most of the locals are casual labourers.



U Aye Lwin
Credit: Myanmar Red Cross Society

“In the field session, I encouraged members of the community to develop action plans for disaster awareness, health talks and basic first-aid sessions, and organized groups in the wards,” explains 36-year-old U Zaw Min Oo, information officer of the New Dagon township Red Cross brigade. “The Myanmar Red Cross Society helped to conduct two basic first-aid sessions for trishaw workers in the communities,” he continues.

Participants such as U Aye Lwin, 54-year old member of the DRR committee and chairperson of the fire alert committee, explains what his role in the training. “I helped to mobilize and organize members of the community on how to reduce the impact of seasonal disasters, and how to prevent health problems,” he says.

Key highlights

“I realized the importance of collective leadership and cooperation by the committee, as well as networking within community-based organizations and other sectors, in order to develop the community. It results in the identification of the communities’ needs. Without the DRR field session, we cannot envisage the activities required or identify needs as felt by the communities, as well as the issues and challenges that communities are encountering on the ground. Red Cross volunteers and the community are maintaining close contact with each other by working together. Also, the community is trying to improve the ward’s drainage system and has raised the level of the street on its own initiative in an attempt to prevent flooding and vector-borne diseases. It shows they would like to change vulnerability into capacity and are ready to participate in the ward development activities led by the Myanmar Red Cross Society.” – **U Zaw Min Oo**

“With the DRR field sessions, I now understand the value of networking with the local authority and other community-based organizations, such as maternal and child welfare associations and the Myanmar Women Affairs Federation, so that the community can be improved through mutual help and collective participation for community development. The DRR field session provided training on how to identify issues and challenges by sector, and it stressed the importance of networking and then the

‘how’, ‘when’, ‘who’ and ‘why’ of carrying out community development.” – **U Aye Lwin**

“The DRR field session created awareness on DRR, health, water and sanitation, proper housing infrastructure and fire prevention in the communities. Now we are better organized. We also know how to prevent health issues and problems from existing in the communities.” – **Daw Theingi Htwe**



U Zaw Min Oo

Credit: Myanmar Red Cross Society

The way forward

The DRR field sessions have benefited both the communities as well as the Myanmar Red Cross Society. The Red Cross continues to work with the core staff trained during the field sessions, in order to train additional staff and volunteers on the field session methodology and process. Many more trainings are planned as a result in 2014.

The IFRC regional delegation is also leading discussions with Myanmar Red Cross Society to develop a standard manual for DRR field schools. It will include a clear outline on the processes and tools so that it will be easy for not only Myanmar Red Cross Society, but for other National Societies in Southeast Asia to implement field schools at the branch and community level. The goal would be to further complement this manual with a simple but visual

aid to reach wider audiences – such as a comic or animation - which demonstrates how to utilise common assessment tools.

Yet the aim is to go even further with the field school sessions. The IFRC is engaging with global Red Cross Red Crescent partners to make the manual a global tool, proposed as an Integrated Risk Reduction Field Session Manual, to be developed by 2015. It would incorporate key modules from the initial guide, including risks on climate change and combining it with real-life experience tips for facilitators. The manual will also look to connect with other National Societies around the globe so that better approaches in DRR are shared and scaled up, making communities safer and more resilient at a community level.



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