

Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre Newsletter

Issue 1, April 2004

In this issue...

... the Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre starts off by welcoming you to this first edition of our newsletter! The letter will be sent out every three months to give you an update on the work we are involved in and the activities we carry out. Apart from informing you about us, the letter will also hand you references, news items and links – all in the field of climate change and disaster management.

In this issue, we look back and ahead: what happened to and through us, since our initiation in June 2002? And where do we take it from here? The answers are found in our sections on

Awareness

Action

Advocacy

(summing up the three focus points of our work)

In this issue you will read about a new campaign in the Netherlands to raise awareness on the effects of climate change; our pilot projects in Nicaragua and Vietnam to help people prepare for and respond to disasters; the study 'Preparedness for climate change', providing seven steps towards risk reduction; and more. At the end you will find news items, references & resources and links.

If you wish to respond to (anything in) this newsletter, send a message to climatecentre@redcross.nl. We look forward to your replies!

Red Cross goes Green?

Since the Netherlands Red Cross in January 2001 decided to explore the

impacts of climate change and its consequences for humanitarian aid, we've often been confronted with raised eye brows.

Red Cross and climate change? What's the connection? Has the Red Cross gone green?

It has never been difficult to explain why the Red Cross/Red Crescent is concerned. Climate change will very likely lead to more extreme weather events and spread of diseases. It is expected to lead to more disasters and an increased need for humanitarian assistance. As largest global humanitarian organisation the Red Cross/Red Crescent should be prepared.

But the question itself illustrates a problem: Climate change is known as an environmental issue. Ministries of environment, environmental research institutes and environmental NGOs have taken the lead to address climate change. Their emphasis is – rightfully so – on policies and measures to reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses, which is needed to limit the negative impacts of climate change.

But they have little knowledge about how societies and sectors cope with climate variability and can (or cannot) adapt to the impacts of climate change.

And most of the non-environmental actors in society believe climate change is an environmental issue and they leave it to the environmental sector. This is very unfortunate.

Though many all over the world see that the weather is changing, the consequences for the health and the well-being of us all is not fully understood. Only few 'non-environmental' organisations and institutes understand the risks and take action to prepare for them.

Like for the Red Cross/Red Crescent it is not an issue for the care of the elderly, the ministries of planning, the disaster research institutes, etc. to go green. The issue is that they too will have to prepare for climate change.

Madeleen Helmer
Head Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre

Awareness

It is campaigning time for the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre! This and next year, starting this summer, we will have Red Cross volunteers and students roaming the Netherlands to spread the word on *'Climate change: the humanitarian consequences of a few degrees extra'*.

The campaign starts at the beaches in the northern part of Holland – using an 'open-air-quiz', dune walks and a simple 'hello, did you know that...'-approach of people in swim suit and bikini. Our teams will visit social events, Red Cross branches and anything or anyone with an interest in climate change. Main goal: to raise awareness on how the climate is changing, how extreme weather events are on the rise, and (especially) how all this has real consequences for real people.

The campaign is subsidised by a Dutch organisation promoting sustainable development (NCDO) and entails expansion of our Climate Centre team with a full time campaign leader.

Other signs of the Climate Centre 'firming up' and strengthening its ability to raise Awareness, take Action and to Advocate, are:

- the signing of an agreement of co-operation between the Netherlands Red Cross and the IFRC making the Climate Centre their joint initiative;
- the Centre's official status as a foundation in the course of 2004, with two board members from the IFRC and two from the Netherlands Red Cross;

- the complimenting of the Centre's Board of Advisors (chaired by the former Dutch Minister of Developmental Co-operation Jan Pronk) in the course of 2004;
- the development of programmes and the finding of new funding opportunities within the EU to start with.

Action

How are things in... Nicaragua and Vietnam? As you might have learned through our website, the Climate Centre started its practical and on-the-ground endeavours to help vulnerable people prepare for and respond to weather related disasters in Vietnam and Nicaragua.

A brief recapitulation of what proceeded

Between June 2002 and August 2003, five assessments were made of the capacities and needs of different National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to effectively respond to disasters related to climate change. The assessments took place in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Mozambique and the Pacific. They were to

- review the National Societies' disaster preparedness programme and assess its relevance for climate change adaptations;
- assess the National Societies' disaster preparedness capacity, its potential for development and need for additional support; identify organisational constraints on the expansion of the disaster preparedness programme;
- identify key actors in the area of climate change in the country; assess their capacity and connections with (actors in) disaster preparedness; review mechanisms of seasonal weather forecasting, early warning systems reporting on extreme weather events, and disaster preparedness mechanisms;
- assess the need for and feasibility of incorporation of climate change issues within the disaster

preparedness programmes of National Societies, and identify the interest of key stakeholders.

Conclusions of the assessment in the Pacific turned out illustrative for all countries investigated:

“The main focus of high level government and donor initiatives in the Pacific is on research, monitoring and mainstreaming climate change into government planning and policies, with only limited work being done in providing risk management and adaptation assistance to vulnerable communities. In their independent but auxiliary function to governments, the Red Cross National Societies can best augment governmental climate change initiatives through public awareness and long term disaster planning services to communities ascertained as most vulnerable. This partnership role is most welcomed by the national governments’ departments and regional agencies, who are dealing most closely with Pacific climate change and disaster management initiatives.”

“In order to be most effective in addressing the new climate change issues, the Red Cross National Societies ascertain that first of all they need to be well educated in the science and trends of climate change. Secondly, they need to interact closely with other players in the sectors of climate change and disaster preparedness, and thirdly, they need to strengthen their skills and methods in participatory community based preparedness planning and action.”

From these conclusions, programme proposals followed for all five countries / regions. The programmes in Vietnam and Nicaragua are the first to be implemented.

Vietnam

The *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Programme*, which started in the summer of 2003 and followed the assessments mentioned above, was dropped in fertile Vietnamese soil. Weather related disasters and disaster

management were no new concepts for the Vietnamese Red Cross (VNRC), although climate change had not been explicitly ‘embraced’ as part of the problem. Since the late 1990’s the VNRC together with the IFRC has been implementing wide-range programmes building the capacity of both the organisation and communities to prepare for and respond to disasters, and to mitigate the effects of such disasters by reducing risks. Through its considerable involvement in disaster issues, the VNRC has become an influential member of the Vietnamese central agency for disaster management.

The *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Programme* is a partnership between the Vietnamese Red Cross, the Netherlands Red Cross and is funded by the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its aim: to strengthen Vietnamese capacities in reducing the negative effects on vulnerable people of natural disasters, which are enhanced by climate change. Five central coastal or mountainous provinces were selected as project pioneers – Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan.

Having started the project in August, the Vietnamese Red Cross had by the end of 2003 taken the first ‘pilot steps’. With remarkable results, as it had done work on

- strengthening its network with both the disaster management community and the climate change community and promoting the linkage of the two, by initiating meetings with hydro-meteorology related institutions, the National Climate Change Office and several non-governmental organisations and disaster management desks; from this, proposals and agreements followed for the further development of the Project;
- improving the disaster preparedness facilities of local Red

Cross branches participating in the Project, by supplying them with rescue and communication equipment and First Aid kits;

- improving the disaster response capacity of the communities involved, by organising 25 First Aid training courses for 500 Red Cross workers and volunteers; participants were selected from 250 disaster prone communes – 50% of them were women;
- researching models for 'safe houses' that are able to withstand extreme weather events, by organising the design and evaluation of five models made by five provincial construction agencies; the coming Project period entails the actual building of such houses;
- improving skills, knowledge and capacities of Project personnel, by having project officers from both the Vietnamese and the Netherlands Red Cross attend a course of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre on 'Community based disaster risk reduction planning, monitoring and evaluating';
- building the overall capacity of local Red Cross branches in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, by implementing two supportive projects in four participating provinces: a branch development project and a social work skill building project, both covering six months;
- strengthening project ownership by the community and improving project effectiveness by suggesting 'community empowerment measures'; these measures – currently up for approval – are to empower participating communities to assess, plan and implement their own activities on mitigating risks and adapting to climate change.

Both the Vietnamese and the Netherlands Red Cross have drawn valuable lessons and gained good experiences from the work done so far. They trust the Project will be successfully developed in the coming years, seriously reducing the harmful effects of climate change and extreme weather events for the people involved.

For more information on the Vietnamese Red Cross *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Programme*, please contact Hung at dpccpo@pmail.vnn.vn or Wouter Doevenspeck at wouter.doevenspeck@hn.vnn.vn.

Nicaragua

The Caribbean coast of Nicaragua is situated within the hurricane corridor zone, which makes it prone to tropical storms, depressions and hurricanes. These events frequently cause floods (heavily) affecting the people that dwell in the area. It is more and more likely that because of climate change, the number of extreme weather events will increase.

To reduce peoples' vulnerability to disasters related to climate change and extreme weather, the Nicaraguan Red Cross set up the *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Project* in the first half of 2003, technically and financially supported by the Netherlands Red Cross and the Climate Centre. Three communities in two provinces participate in the Project: the indigenous Miskito communities of Betania and Wawaboom (in Puerto Cabezas province) and the multi-ethnic community of Ell Bluff (in the province of Bluefields). Main goals of the Project: raise awareness on climate change and the need for disaster preparedness, and inform and prepare people in close co-operation with local authorities, community leaders, the media, teachers and students.

One 'theatre of action' for the Nicaraguan Red Cross is the Municipal Committee for Disaster Response, Preparedness and Mitigation. Municipal Committees co-ordinate all efforts in emergency response in a specific region and are composed of several parties including the Red Cross. Here, the Red Cross branches involved in the Project have over the past months put climate change firmly on the agenda. In the Committee of Puerto Cabezas, for instance, the Red Cross organised workshops on the impact of climate change, the necessity of risk management and the process of building disaster preparedness capacity.

A lot of work has also been done 'on the ground':

- over the past months, Red Cross volunteers have given presentations and workshops to community leaders and members, journalists, teachers and students, on climate change and the increased risks of extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and hurricanes;
- active support of the local media in both municipalities has been acquired, resulting in the broadcasting of several radio messages (in Spanish, English and Miskito), radio interviews and television reports on the Project, its goals and its activities;
- awareness-raising materials such as posters and brochures were designed and printed for distribution;
- Community Response Brigades have been set up, consisting of community members (to be) trained in First Aid, disaster preparedness and disaster response; the Brigades are to carry out risk studies in their communities, prepare emergency action plans, develop micro-projects to mitigate the effects of disasters, and assist people in case of an emergency;
- in all three participating communities emergency action plans are being finalised; the plans

for Puerto Cabezas are currently being studied by the Municipal and Civil Defence Authorities.

The eagerness to listen, the signs of interest, the enthusiasm in participation that the people of El Bluff, Wawaboom and Betania display, are quite incredible. And reason for optimism, we believe, concerning the further development of the Project and its eventual results. For more information on the *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Project* in Nicaragua, please contact Marjorie Soto at crholreptic@tutopia.com.

Advocacy

Preparedness for Climate change

The 28th International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in December 2003 was an important moment to further raise climate change and risk reduction issues. Representatives of almost all States, national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross discussed and adopted the global, four year Agenda for Humanitarian Action. During this week the stage was more than good for the Climate Centre to present its first study: *Preparedness for climate change*. The document describes the consequences of climate change for humanitarian relief work and provides aid organisations with seven steps towards risk reduction.

The Agenda for Humanitarian Action, which eventually was embraced by the RC/RC Movement and the state parties to the Conventions of Geneva, refers to the document. The Agenda calls on states and organisations to "reduce the risk and impact of disasters and improve preparedness and response mechanisms" and reads:

States are strongly encouraged to prioritise and provide resources to implement comprehensive disaster risk reduction measures, including measures to address issues relating to climate change and variability. National Societies will increase their co-operation with States and experts in the area of climate change in order to limit the potential negative

impact on vulnerable populations. In so doing they may draw on the recommendations outlined in the report Preparedness for Climate Change as requested by the plan of Action of the 27th International Conference in 1999.

You can find *Preparedness for climate change* on www.climatecentre.org.

The full text of the 'Agenda for Humanitarian Action' can be found at www.icrc.org.

News items March 2004 (source www.climateark.org)

Melting of Glaciers Requires Urgent Action (Inter Press Service, March 2, 2004)

The melting of glaciers in the Patagonian region at the southern tip of Latin America requires urgent international action, without waiting for the United States to sign the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, Chilean environmentalists and government experts are saying.

The glacial retreat in Patagonia, a region shared by Argentina and Chile, was highlighted by a recent month-long expedition by a team of 25 scientists and activists on the Greenpeace vessel Arctic Sunrise.

<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/0301-10.htm>

Climate change set to poke holes in ozone (Nature, March 3, 2004)

The thinning of the ozone layer over the Arctic could be much worse than we thought, because of a side-effect of global warming.

If the upper reaches of the Arctic atmosphere get colder - a predicted consequence of climate change - then the rate of ozone depletion could be three times greater than currently forecast, according to Markus Rex of the Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research in Potsdam, Germany, and his co-workers.

<http://www.nature.com/nsu/040301/040301-5.html>

Climate findings let fishermen off the hook (Nature, March 4, 2004)

Overfishing is not the sole cause of dramatically declining fish stocks in the north Atlantic Ocean, or worldwide, said marine biologists at a Royal Society meeting last week in London.

Environmental changes such as climate warming may be just as important, they said, urging governments to consider these factors when managing fisheries.

<http://www.nature.com/nsu/040301/040301-8.html>

2003 Summer hottest in 500 years (BBC, March 5, 2004)

European researchers say last summer was the hottest on the continent for at least five centuries.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3536819.stm>

Chinese Meteorologists Warn of Climate Catastrophes (Environment News Service, March 8, 2004)

Some of China's top meteorologists are warning of climate change "catastrophes" that could bring widespread flooding, persistent droughts and sea level rises to China and the rest of the world.

<http://www.climateark.org/articles/reader.asp?linkid=30041>

Carbon dioxide is key suspect in rainforest change (Reuters, March 11, 2004)

Strange things are happening in the Amazonian rainforests, and scientists said on Wednesday that rising levels of carbon dioxide could be the cause. Even in pristine rainforests unaffected by human activities such as logging or burning, researchers have noticed dramatic differences in the growth patterns of trees over the past 20 years. That could distort the forest's fragile balance, affecting rare plant and animal species.

http://www.enn.com/news/2004-03-11/s_13925.asp

Resources & references

Study – Preparedness for Climate change
A study assessing the impact of climatic changes on the frequency and severity of disasters, and the implications of this for

humanitarian response and preparedness.
Order at climatecentre@redcross.nl. Price: €5,00.

Documentary – The heat is on

A 43 minutes documentary on climate change and its effects, and on what can be done. Available on video (PAL and NTSC) and cd-rom. Order at the Dialogue on Water and Climate, P.O. Box 3015, 2601 DA Delft, The Netherlands; phone +31 15 2151882; fax +31 15 2121676; hvs@ihe.nl

Film – From peril to protection

A 10 minutes film on the Red Cross disaster preparedness programmes in Vietnam and Bangladesh. Available on video (PAL and NTSC). Order at climatecentre@redcross.nl. Price: €4,00.

International Climate symbol

A tool for public awareness campaigns, the symbol representing the need to curb climate change and the ability to make a difference. More information at www.saveourclimate.org.

Paper – Poverty and Climate Change: reducing the vulnerability of the poor through adaptation

A paper prepared by the Multi Agency Group. More information at www.worldbank.com.

Links

www.ifrc.org

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

www.ipcc.org

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

www.unfccc.int

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

www.climateark.org

portal on climate change with more web links

www.wmo.ch/index-en.html

United Nations World Meteorological Organisation based in Switzerland

[//iri.columbia.edu/](http://iri.columbia.edu/)

International Research Institute for Climate Prediction (IRI) based in the United States

www.cpc.noaa.gov

Climate Prediction Centre of the United States government (information on El Niño)

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