

Newsletter

Issue 2, July 2004

In this issue...

... the Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre expresses a big Thank You to all of you who sent responses to the first edition of our Newsletter. Your reactions were interesting, encouraging and many! Next to a Thank You, there is a Welcome: to all subscribers in general, and to the many new ones in particular.

As we did in the first Newsletter, we will in this second edition give you an update on our work, and provide references, links and news items in the field of climate change and disaster management. There is the latest about our soon-to-start climate change awareness campaign in the Netherlands; about our pilot projects in Viet Nam and Nicaragua; and about events in the world(s) of climate change and disaster management at large.

The information is grouped around the three main activities of the Climate Centre: raising **Awareness**, taking **Action**, providing **Advocacy**. It is coated in a brand new design, supplemented with organisational news and preceded by these editorial reflections:

Climate change: the main problem?

Climate change is rarely the only cause of a disaster or a severely deteriorating situation. Almost always, disasters result from a combination of extreme weather events and climate change, together with other crises.

In Zambia for example, desperation arose from a convergence of recurrent droughts and a raging HIV/aids-epidemic.



In Afghanistan, conflict went hand in hand with drought to create a devastating humanitarian crisis. And by itself, the extreme 2003 heat wave in France would not have killed so many elderly had it not coincided with a crisis in the country's health and social care systems.

Efforts by governments and humanitarian organisations to respond to or even prevent complex crises often overlook the role of climate change and shifting weather extremes. This happens also within our own Red Cross /Red Crescent Movement. Although the Climate Centre's existence is a clear signal the Movement takes climate change seriously, a centre does not grant immediate full blown awareness of new risks and their consequences.: Integrating climate change into our regular work will take time.

By the same token, integrating disaster management into the climate change debate also requires hard work and time. For their part, policy makers and scientists dealing with climate change tend to ignore the interaction of its impact with other problems and hazards.

For the Climate Centre this means advocating one issue from two sides, telling two different stories depending on our audience. It also means being susceptible to hesitance or even resistance from two sides. Raising awareness on climate change within the world of disaster management sometimes brings the reproach of us not recognising the

complexity of the multitude of other problems. And while emphasising within the climate change community there are more facets to climate change impact than climate change itself, we risk the accusation of polluting the climate change debate with the agenda of disaster risk reduction.

In the end, all we want is to strike a balance and see things in proportion. Climate change is not the only serious problem humanity has to deal with. But neither is it one that can safely be ignored.

Madeleen Helmer
Head Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre

Awareness

Preparations for the very first climate change awareness campaign in the Netherlands are reaching their climax! Whatever this summer might bring – heat waves or never ending clouds – Red Cross teams consisting of 12 volunteers per day, will travel the coastal area of Noord-Holland province from July 25 until August 8. They'll bring along an open air beach quiz on climate change, an exhibition on the consequences of extreme weather events and our changing climate, and simple 'what can I do's' to help counter climate change.

There is a lot of support for the campaign and comes from literally everywhere: from the municipalities we will visit, the local Red Cross branches in those municipalities, from sea-front restaurants and shops, and from foresters organising public dune trips, who will incorporate information in their 'trip talk' on the consequences of climate change for the Dutch dunes.

While many people in the Netherlands will soon learn more about 'the humanitarian consequences of a few degrees extra', many children in Spain already have learned more. Here, on the occasion of World Environment Day (June 5), a climate

quiz was organised by the Spanish Red Cross.

In Barcelona the quiz was played at the Forum of Cultures and aimed at teaching children about climate change and its consequences. The quiz consisted of a 'questioning part', whereby groups of children gained points when rightfully answering questions on climate change, and a 'memory part', using sets of pictures related to climate change.

Anyone curious after the quiz or interested in its possibilities can contact Anna Aragay at the Spanish Red Cross:
annaaragay@cruceroja.org.



Action

As you most likely know, the Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre started its practical and on-the-ground efforts to help vulnerable people prepare for and respond to weather related disasters in the countries of Viet Nam and Nicaragua. In the first edition of our Newsletter we gave you ins, outs and proceedings of both programmes. Here are two programme updates.

VIET NAM

The *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Programme* which started in the summer of 2003 has recently been revised to prioritise awareness raising and capacity building at both the central and

lower levels within the Viet Nameese Red Cross.

In this context, a three day workshop was organised in April, facilitated by the National Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology. The workshop brought together headquarters' directors and key staff members debating (the integration of) Disaster Preparedness and Climate Change, and did a lot to raise awareness on both the challenges Viet Nam faces here and the need for answers to those challenges.

For while most participants at first argued that climate change issues are environmental, technical and governmental – and hence seem outside the Red Cross' scope or even mandate – they throughout the course changed their minds. "Three short video films on climate change and disasters had a lot of impact. They alerted basically everyone we are on the right track linking climate change and disaster management. The films did a lot for knowledge sharing, advocacy and awareness raising" reports project manager Duong Van Hung.

At the provincial level, accountants of all five provinces participating in the Programme – Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan – were trained on financial and accounting systems. The training showed a lot of relevance to the participants' daily work and was found successful.

Moreover, also at the provincial level, a disaster preparedness training was organised for Ninh Thuan province in May. Key staff members from the different Red Cross districts in the province attended this four day event. It provided basic knowledge and skills on hazards, disasters, awareness raising, disaster preparedness planning and reporting, and search and rescue. Seven out of 15 participants, who had done exceptionally well during the first four days, enrolled in a further Train the Trainer course to become the provincial Disaster Preparedness trainers. In the future, having received courses also on Climate Change, they will pass on their training, knowledge

and skills to local Red Cross staff members and to communities.

Building capacity and raising awareness are crucial in the Viet Nameese Red Cross' endeavours to better prepare for disasters and adapt to global climate change. In the months to come, the Red Cross in implementing the *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Programme* will shift its focus further to the community level.

More information on the programme is available by contacting Duong Van Hung at dccpo@gmail.vnn.vn or Melanie Miltenburg at melaniemiltenburg@vnn.vn.

NICARAGUA

The *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Project* set up by the Nicaraguan Red Cross in the first half of 2003, selected three communities that due to their geographical position and characteristics have historically been affected by hurricanes, storms and tropical waves. As a result, the inhabitants of the communities of El Bluff, Betania and Wawaboom are – through workshops, group studies and informative talks – gaining increased awareness of climate change effects and their relation to recent hydro-meteorological events.

According to the Nicaraguan Red Cross "it turns out interesting to see how the issue of climate change has been scientifically studied by the communities and has been assimilated within their everyday lives. Testimonies show these people see and experience how deforestation can dangerously interact with large and deep rivers. Also, they experience a change in rainfall (patterns) they now link to climate change."

Awareness raising endeavours are at community level, municipal level and at schools and universities. Elementary and secondary school teachers, for example, received a teachers' training on climate change, while at university level climate change has been addressed combined with Risk Management among both students and teachers. University authorities

especially, have shown great interest in the issue, incorporating it in relevant seminars and debates. At present, four students have expressed their desire to focus on climate change and extreme weather events in their graduation work. Together with the Red Cross, they are currently preparing their exact topic and thesis.

Apart from working towards increased awareness, the Red Cross together with the involved communities worked hard also on actual disaster preparedness and response. Local and municipal response brigades have been set up and trained, as well as first aid brigades, evacuation brigades and fire brigades. In addition, and in co-operation with the Nicaraguan Institute for Territory Studies, INETER, pluviometers and radio transmitters have been purchased and installed, as the basics of an early alert system enabling timely evacuations. The radio system will be plugged into the Red Cross frequency at the local level, and will be connected with the municipal committee and INETER. INETER is to provide the communities with information on weather conditions, river level growth and – if necessary – evacuation signals.

El Bluff, Wawaboom and Betania have furthermore at the municipal level been involved in updating response plans and risk maps. They have been working on Shelter Management, the setting up of Emergency Operation Centres, and the process of EDAN: Evaluation of Damages and Needs Assessments. Drills and role plays have been organised several times. Finally, in the area of risk reduction, two micro mitigation projects are currently in progress. The first deals with building shelter houses giving people a place to stay in case of evacuation (and a community gathering place in quiet times). The second consists of constructing a ditch to drain water from a sector in El Bluff to avoid accumulation that might provoke floods.

The work being done in Nicaragua is not only strengthening the capacity of

vulnerable people to respond to weather related crises. It also strengthens the Nicaraguan Red Cross. Actively pushing the issue of climate change on the agenda at all levels, and facilitating discussions and activities, the volunteer corps has made itself visible and (better) known to their communities and – in this process – has gained skills, knowledge and organisational abilities.

If you would like more information on the *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Project* in Nicaragua, feel free to contact Marjorie Soto at crholreptic@tutopia.com.



Training in local communities: Linking knowledge about global climate change with local vulnerabilities to disasters.



Advocacy

Disaster Risk Reduction scientist becomes author of IPCC report

Disaster Risk Reduction specialist John Twigg will be an author of the Fourth Assessment Report (4AR) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Twigg was nominated by the Red Cross (IFRC) and is to be lead author of the Working Group 2 report on 'Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change'.

Together with the International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre has been advocating a better inclusion of the disaster science in the 4AR. Not in vain, it now seems...

Scoping paper on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change

The UNISDR is preparing a scoping paper on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change for the VARG – the Vulnerability and Adaptation Resource Group. The VARG brings together more than ten international institutions or organisations such as the Worldbank, the European Commission, OECD, UNDP and UNEP. The group meets twice a year and in 2003 produced the document 'Poverty and Climate Change' as its first joint writing.

The paper can be found at www.worldbank.com: 'Paper – Poverty and Climate Change: reducing the vulnerability of the poor through adaptation'.

International disaster and climate scientists meet –many for the first time

Disaster Studies of the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands recently organised a meeting where international disaster and climate scientists met – many for the first time. The meeting, on 'Challenges of complexity in coping with climate related disasters', consisted of presentations and discussions. It is interactions such as this that are crucial to create a better mutual understanding of the work and ideas within both communities and to create options for co-operation.

More information on the meeting and an overview of presentations can be obtained via disaster.studies@wur.nl.

Trust fund for Climate Change Adaptation programmes

The Global Environment Facility has initiated a trust fund containing \$50 million for Climate Change Adaptation programmes in developing countries. 5 Million is allocated to a small grants programme, where civil society organisations can obtain a maximum of \$50.000 for small scale adaptation projects. More information: www.gefweb.org.

Organisational News

It was announced, it was awaited, and now it has happened: the Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre since May stands on two feet of its own: the Centre has officially become a foundation! We have a board consisting of four members, selected by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Netherlands Red Cross. Our board members are:

Ibrahim Osman (Director, Policy and Relations Division, IFRC), *Eva von Oelreich* (Head, Disaster Preparedness and Response Department, IFRC), *Marc Hofstra* (the Netherlands Red Cross' deputy director) and *Rein Welschen* (former mayor of the Dutch city of Eindhoven).

Also since May, the Climate Centre staff has been strengthened by contracting two persons in The Hague and Geneva. *Fleur Meijer* in The Hague is to manage our Dutch educational and awareness programme. In the context of this programme, Fleur will work with more than twenty volunteers (mostly students) who will be trained in informing people on climate change. Soon, these volunteers will visit the 370 local branches of the Netherlands Red Cross with presentations on climate change and its consequences

for national and international Red Cross activities.

This Climate Centre programme is financed by the Dutch government and is the first educational programme on climate change and its humanitarian consequences in the Netherlands. For more information, you can reach Fleur at fmeijer@redcross.nl.

Solveig Olafsdottir will start her work as Climate Centre liaison and communication officer at the IFRC in Geneva on the 15th of July. Until December, she is to ensure day-to-day interaction between the Centre in The Hague and the IFRC in Switzerland. Also, she will inform the national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on relevant information regarding climate change and disaster risk reduction. Solveig is reachable (as of 15 July) at solveig.olafsdottir@ifrc.org.

In June, *Melanie Miltenburg* left for Hanoi to support the Viet Nameese Red Cross staff involved in the *Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness Programme*. Melanie, as a junior delegate for the Netherlands Red Cross, will in particular be involved in the development of educational material and will also co-organise a national seminar on climate change and disaster preparedness. Melanie can be reached at melaniemiltenburg@vnn.vn.

Than on a different track and to round up our organisational news: the Climate Centre's website www.climatecentre.org will be revised. Aesthetically, since our new design guidelines will be applied, but possibly also in content. A site evaluation is planned and if you have any suggestions for improvement, do not hesitate to let us know: good ideas are gifts! You can contact Elike van Sluis at evansluis@redcross.nl if you have any.

News items June/July 2004 (source www.climateark.org)

Fast urbanization drives up temperature in China (China Daily, July 2, 2004)

The urbanization following China's rapid economic growth has impacted climate on a scale much larger than people used to think, scientists say.

The rapid increase in the urban population, particularly in Southeast China, has resulted in dramatic changes in land use, causing the so-called Urban Heat Island effect.

http://www2.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-07/02/content_344794.htm

Low-lying Dutch fear rising seas (Reuters, July 1, 2004)

Global warming and rising oceans will have an "unthinkable" effect on the Netherlands where half the population lives below sea level, Dutch Environment Minister Pieter van Geel said.

The tiny but wealthy Netherlands with its population of 16 million is criss-crossed with canals and rivers, and has battled for centuries to claw back land from the sea and protect itself by building sea walls known as dykes.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L01513278.htm>

Spain in grip of fresh heat wave (BBC, July 1, 2004)

Spain and Portugal are in the grip of a heatwave which in places has already topped last year's high temperatures. The Spanish capital, Madrid, has been sweltering in temperatures up to 39.3C (103F) - a 73-year high.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3856437.stm>

Global warming said to reduce rice yields (Reuters, June 29, 2004)

Global warming affects the productivity of rice crops, threatening future harvests of the grain that currently feeds more than two billion people, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) said on Tuesday.

The research institute said in a statement that field studies conducted at its headquarters in the Philippines over the past dozen years along with weather data showed rice yields declined by 15 percent for every one degree Celsius increase in the mean daily temperature.
<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/108851677758.htm>

Record heat in Alaska sparks a half-million acre forest fire (Napa News, June 29, 2004)

With dry weather and near-record heat in Alaska's interior, wildfires burned on more than a half-million acres of remote forest, but no populated areas faced immediate threat.

One fire burned within two miles of Venetie, a community of 200 on the Chandalar River about 160 miles northeast of Fairbanks and 150 miles west of the Canada border. But a wind shift Sunday led fire managers to decide no evacuations were necessary.
http://www.napanews.com/templates/index.cfm?template=story_full&id=9504BB60-C98D-4568-ADA3-A4E37080A653

Resources & references

www.waterandclimate.org
International Secretariat of the Co-operative Programme on Water and Climate (CPWC:)
PO Box 3015, 2601 DA Delft
The Netherlands
Phone +31 15 215 17 48
Fax +31 15 212 16 76
E-mail p.dorresteyn@unesco-ihe.org.

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
E-mail hvs@ihe.nl.

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.

www.enda.sn/energie/climat

ENDA in collaboration with four focal points (EPA - Ghana, ACTS - Kenya, MFC - Mali, DEEC - Senegal), has launched a few months ago the information for Africa Climate Technology Transfer (iACTT) project. This iACTT project has initiated a web site providing relevant information and data to African stakeholders on climate change issues.

www.tiempocyberclimate.org/newswatch

The Tiempo Climate Cyberlibrary has relaunched its Newswatch facility as a weekly magazine covering the climate negotiations, climate science and climate events worldwide.

Scanning over 50 news sites every hour, Newswatch presents a summary of the week's major climate new stories and links to all the latest news as well as features, comment, interviews and humour. The site is updated on a weekly basis, and more frequently if a major news story breaks.

Links

www.gefweb.org

www.unisdr.org

www.disasterstudies.nl

www.ifrc.org

International Federation of Red Cross and
Red Crescent Societies.

www.climateark.org

Portal on climate change with more web
links.

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