

Taking first, but firm, steps in Trinidad and Tobago

The Red Cross of Trinidad and Tobago is one of the 22 national societies that recently started the RC/RC Climate Centre's *Preparedness for climate change program* (see www.climatecentre.org). The first step was taken in September 2006, when a fruitful workshop was held to assess the nationwide threats posed by climate change and identify Red Cross priorities in response. It was agreed at all levels, including senior and executive levels, the Red Cross has a role to play in this matter. Specifically, it should

- help communities understand (the certainty of) climate change and the risks involved;
- emphasize something can be done in response – by individuals and communities, nationally and regionally;
- concentrate on behavioural change and targeted adaptation measures;
- prepare and equip itself to respond to more frequent weather related disasters through its community based network;
- unite response efforts by working together with stakeholders like academics, non governmental organizations, the business sector, the Environmental Authority and the state's Office

for Disaster Preparedness and Management.

Because the issue of climate change is relatively new, the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross believes that raising awareness and changing behaviour requires (further) public debate. People should be asked to think about the kind of world they wish to leave for their children and grandchildren. They should consider whether their ethical concerns reach beyond humans to include other species as well. And they should wonder where *they* think people are to curtail their personal freedom out of concern for others.

Community involvement

At the workshop, the deeply felt importance was underlined to work with communities and volunteers to achieve climate adaptation. The Red Cross will seek their help in putting together for instance a climate change questionnaire: to map out people's present knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding the issue.

Also, it has meanwhile met with the Environmental Management Authority and others and agreed to co-develop 'climate tools' by using input from people at risk. The tools are to be incorporated into existing disaster mitigation and community programs. They will for example classify and inventory the threats communities face. Then, the Red Cross will provide support to communities most at risk to help them reduce vulnerability – in co-operation with other stakeholders, listed in a national database the Red Cross will help to set up.

Debating and working together

Since the workshop, the Trinidad and Tobago national society has participated in several external debates on climate change and their negative impacts, among others at the University of the West Indies and during a radio talk show. Discussions on co-operation are ongoing with the Office for Disaster Preparedness and Management and the Solid Waste Management Authority.

Between the Ministry of Education and the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross a close cooperation already started. The Ministry will help the Red Cross develop both a climate change information and activity booklet to be used in schools. To reach children and youngster further – who have been identified as a key target group – the national society will set up school projects, a website and a kids club as well.

For a larger audience it plans to develop information materials such as posters, while it recently published the first findings of an assessment indicating the risks of climate change in the country and the wider Caribbean area. The assessment outcomes can be found at <http://trinidadandtobago.caribbeanredcross.org>.

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