

The Preparedness for climate change program: an update on the first phase

1. Introduction

In 2006 and 2007, 34 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies joined the Preparedness for climate change program. In this four step program, sponsored by the RC/RC Climate Centre, all national societies organized a workshop for their staff and volunteers to gain a better understanding of the impacts of climate change. By December 2007, 23 national societies had submitted their step 1 workshop report. In this brief report we reflect upon them, to share and evaluate some of the experiences and insights.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies participating in the program (in blue are those that submitted their workshop report in 2007)

<p>Africa Gambia Burkina Faso Kenya Malawi Madagascar Uganda Tanzania Zimbabwe</p>	<p>Caribbean Jamaica Trinidad and Tobago Bahamas Antigua and Barbuda St Kitts and Nevis Guyana</p>	<p>Americas Costa Rica Nicaragua Honduras Guatemala Argentina Bolivia Colombia El Salvador</p>
<p>Pacific Islands Cook Islands Kiribati Solomon Islands Tonga</p>	<p>South East Asia Indonesia Thailand Philippines Laos</p>	<p>Central Asia/ Europe Kyrgyzstan Uzbekistan Bulgaria</p>

2. Workshop participation and organization

All national societies invited staff and volunteers from different levels and departments within the organization. Despite many people's busy agendas, most of the national societies succeeded in obtaining such organization-wide attendance.

The Uzbekistan Red Crescent organized radio coverage of the workshop.

For most of them, this first climate change workshop was a purely internal affair, to raise awareness among staff and volunteers, for them to learn more about climate change and to discuss what it means for their organization. Yet some used it to reach out externally, to organizations that could be partners in tackling the issue.

3. Workshop contents

In general the workshops gave a well balanced introduction to climate change, its scientific aspects and possible implications in the respective countries. All reports indicate that in presenting materials and data, there was good cooperation with external partners and experts from knowledge institutes, meteorological offices, governments and other organizations

The Thai Red Cross linked climate risk management to environment and to the broader risk management agenda by inviting representatives from WWF and the tsunami recovery programme

In some cases it appeared somewhat difficult to remain focussed on the adaptation side of the climate debate and on disaster risk reduction, especially since many external partners do not necessarily share the same humanitarian agenda as the RCRC National Societies.

3.1 Discussing important questions

A number of national societies opted to divide workshop participants into groups to discuss two main questions: how will climate change affect current relief programs, and how should national societies adapt to climate change?

Why the Red Cross involves itself with the issue of climate change was in itself an issue that needed to be discussed – many times the topic is perceived as environmental issue. When the humanitarian consequences of climate change were discussed however, there was hardly any debate among participants on the necessity of the organization's involvement.

All of the National Societies concluded that climate change is indeed an important issue affecting their humanitarian work.

Although National Societies would be making a more detailed analysis of the issues later in the Preparedness for Climate Change program, and the workshop was mostly a first brainstorming session, people came up with several suggestions and interesting ideas for dealing with the rising risks. They pertained to the use (and necessity) of early warning systems and relevant forecast information, specific disaster preparedness activities and awareness raising.

The Red Cross of Zimbabwe already partially analyzed how climate change can be integrated in its current activities and programs. For their elaborate examples, please see table 1.

3.2 Disaster management

Most national societies discussed the relation between climate change and disaster management programs. Most also made a link with their health projects, while some furthermore included (training in) Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment.

The Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) included the topic of micro insurance in their discussions.

Vulnerabilities were linked to very concrete adaptation measures in Kenya and a number of Pacific nations, such as Kiribati and Solomon Islands. National societies talked about the protection and/or planting of mangroves, community based disaster

response training and settlement legislation for vulnerable areas. Such discussion offered useful ideas for overall disaster risk reduction, which may be of much use later in the program.

*In the elaborate reports of **Kenya and Zimbabwe** possible links with Red Cross programs dealing with food security and water and sanitation were also explored.*

4. Awareness raising

Many national societies identified awareness raising as an important first step the Red Cross needs to take in addressing climate change. Not many however, truly explored the possibilities of an advocacy role, with the organization becoming an important (or even leading) national actor promoting the necessity of climate change adaptation to reduce vulnerability.

***The Solomon Islands Red Cross** already advocates on the issue of climate change. It regards itself as a leading organization to raise and ventilate concerns towards government officials and others about the risks run by the most vulnerable people. Generally, the Climate Centre considers it a great asset when a national society publicly and broadly disseminates the message of climate change and the necessity for immediate action.*

A number of national societies, like the Philippines Red Cross, highlighted the importance of jointly developing awareness materials on climate change. They could see developing posters or school materials together with universities or non-governmental organizations, for instance.

*An extensive number of communication tools were listed in the **Trinidad and Tobago report**, like booklets on climate change, school projects on the issue, a website, posters and a kids club. Such tools can substantially increase the understanding of the impacts of climate change within different groups in society, which in turn can lead to better preparedness in general.*

5. Clarification needs (see also FAQs on www.climatecentre.org)

Climate change definitions and issues sometimes (or many times) need clarification, the workshop reports show. The distinction between mitigation and adaptation for instance, was not from the outset clear to all participants. The fact that, in a climate context, mitigation refers to the reduction of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, while adaptation is about reducing the vulnerability of communities prone to the consequences of climate change, warranted a clear explanation (the Red Cross and Red Crescent focuses on adaptation and does not intend to take a political or expert position on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions).

6. Support by the Climate Centre

The intention of Step1 of the Preparedness for Climate Change program was that it should be a simple introduction that could be organized by the national societies themselves, without too much external assistance. Nevertheless, in a few countries, the Climate Centre's regionally based technical advisors Pablo Suarez and Sitanon Jesdapipat facilitated the workshops and delivered introductions, which were highly appreciated. In many other cases, national societies used

specially-prepared Climate Centre videos on the way climate change affects the Red Cross/Red Crescent, also to great acclaim.

Some national societies noted that direct contact with the Climate Centre can be slow, despite its efforts to give program participants all the support they need, and despite its desire to stay in close contact with national societies when they take their next steps. The Climate Centre is increasingly also relying on Regional Delegations of the IFRC to provide day-to-day support to many of the national societies.

7. Conclusions

The Climate Centre was very happy to receive these first round of reports. In general, they indicate that climate change is indeed an issue affecting all of these national societies. The gatherings were generally of a high quality and their discussions seem to have motivated and inspired many of the participants, and succeeded very well in putting climate change on the agenda of the national societies. Some national societies used the workshop not just as an internal means of exploring this new topic, but also reached out externally, to individuals and organizations they believe could be future partners in addressing climate change's consequences.

In a great number of national societies the Step 1 workshop was organized by the their disaster management units, indicating that the issue of climate change was, at least initially, considered mainly as an issue related to natural disasters. Almost all workshops, however, concluded that the scope of affected work areas is

wider and also includes issues related to health and water and sanitation.

The workshops seem to have provided a very good basis for national societies to take the next steps in the Preparedness for climate change program.

A number of constraints has also been identified. The Preparedness program obviously can get under pressure due to other humanitarian priorities, and sometimes the capacity of national societies to take on the climate challenge is rather limited. Nevertheless, 22 out of the 23 NSs who undertook Step 1 have continued to Step 2 and intend to follow the remainder of the Preparedness for Climate Change program.

**Table 1:
Zimbabwe Red Cross Program and activities that are sensitive to climate change**

Program and activities	Possible impact of climate change	Adaptation strategies
1. Food security and livelihoods		
- Distribution of vegetable seeds, nutrition gardens, nutrition promotion, agro-forestry,	- Reduced yields, reduced program impact	- Research on water harvesting techniques large scale (.i.e sand water dams) - Scale up on trainings on garden management with emphasis on water and soil conservation techniques - Include climate analysis in project proposals - Mainstream trainings in climate change and adaptation
- Distribution of seeds and fertilizer	- Reduced yields, reduced program impact	- Research on water harvesting techniques that capture significant volumes of water, scale up on conservation farming promotion - Coordination with the meteorological department on weather patterns, this information will cascade down to the farmers, through ZRCS officers, AREX and livelihood volunteers - Scale up on trainings in farm management in the context of climate change in relations to planting dates, fertilizer application and weeding - Advocate for the production of small grains by farmers through government structures and community leaderships
- Distribution of livestock	- Reduced livestock production as water sources are reduced	- Intensify on agro forestry interventions that are linked to livestock stock feed production
- Conservation farming	- Reduced yields, reduced program impact	- Scale up on conservation farming techniques through trainings and advocacy through government structures and community leaderships
- Food distribution	- Increase demand of food	- Improve food production at HH level - Improve community grain reserves
2. Water and sanitation		
- Borehole drilling	- Reduced program impact	- Research on water harvesting techniques that are economical
- Well deepening	- Reduced program impact	- Research on water harvesting techniques that are economical - Mainstream climate change in trainings
3. Disaster risk reduction		
- Drought tolerant crops - Early warning systems - Floods evacuation plan to higher grounds	- Reduced number of deaths as a result of floods - Reduced harvests - Food relief	- Scale up on Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments, improve community early warning systems - Scale up trainings in disaster risk reduction, mainstream climate change awareness workshops in all trainings and assessments
4. HIV and AIDS program		
	- Higher mortality during droughts - Drought coping strategies may accelerate infection rate	- Explore options for targeting food insecure communities with high HIV incidence