

Newsletter

Issue 12, November 2008

Dear readers!

Here are some updates on the activities of the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre.

For more information, please visit our website at <http://www.climatecentre.org>. Please note that the newsletter published on our website contains active links to background information and photo's.

1. IFRC Secretary General Bekele Geleta will join the RC delegation at the UNFCCC Climate Conference COP 14 in Poznan, Poland 1-15 December 2008

The Red Cross/ Red Crescent Climate Centre and the IFRC are currently preparing for the COP 14. This year we are very pleased with a substantive cooperation amongst a large number of other humanitarian organizations in this preparatory process. Within the Inter Agency Standing Commission (IASC), that established an informal climate change taskforce, we are investing in a coordinated approach with the main humanitarian actors in the field to bring one joint message at the COP.

This has led to the production of a joint paper by ISDR and IASC in disaster risk reduction and risk management. Furthermore the Red Cross Red Crescent will organize a side event on Early warning Early Action (see news item number 4.) during the first week of the conference. At this side event, which the IFRC will host and organize together with OCHA and the Institute for Climate and Society (IRI), we shall demonstrate the first IFRC experiences of using seasonal forecasts for disaster risk management. Read more on our website on our website about Red Cross/ Red Crescent advocacy at the UNFCCC Climate Conference. Read more on our website about Red Cross/ Red Crescent advocacy at the UNFCCC Climate Conference. **All National RC Societies interested to be engaged in the preparatory work for the Climate Change Conference in Poznan (and in Copenhagen next year) are invited to contact with the Red Cross/ Red Crescent Climate Centre, climatecentre@redcross.nl or +31 (0)70 4455**

703. We call upon National Societies to join the IFRC delegation in Poznan, but can't provide financial support.

2. Progress of the Preparedness for Climate Change programme

The Preparedness for Climate Change Program, in which 37 National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies participate, will soon end. Many National Societies will be able to finalize the last phase of the programme successfully and we are happy to see the results. In brief, this programme consists of four consecutive steps, in which the National Societies are supported to assess the climate risks within their countries, align with all possible partners in their country, explore which climate risks are affecting the existing programmes and in the last phase: come up with a concrete action plan to integrate addressing climate risks in the operations of the National Society. In addition to that, most National Societies were able to share their experiences in a regional workshop and exchange ideas and knowledge with other National Societies. This whole process will lead to concrete ideas on how to reduce vulnerability due to climate change. In September and October four regional meetings were held in Mombasa (East Africa), Jakarta (South East Asia), Dakar (West Africa) and San Salvador (Central America plus Colombia). Read more on our website about the regional climate risk meetings. Please find more information about the programme on our website.

3. Your National Society can now request a Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) BEFORE a disaster strikes.

If scientific evidence clearly shows a substantial risk of an emerging disaster, which might hit specific regions in your country, a preliminary DREF request can be granted by the IFRC so that your operations and contingency can lift off ahead of time. This early warning can improve disaster preparedness and response and hence save lives. The supporting evidence needed for a preliminary DREF request can be based on short-term predictions, as well as seasonal precipitation forecasts (from sources like your country's meteorological service, the IRI-IFRC map room, or regional centres with climate expertise, like CATHALAC/SERVIR, CILSS or ACMAD and it can be obtained with assistance from the IFRC. Until very recently it was common to only provide evidence during and after the disaster. We believe this to be revolutionary within the Red Cross Red

Crescent and it can further stimulate National Society to focus also on early warnings and the climate risk management discourse. Please visit DMIS (internal IFRC information site) for more information. The RC/RC Climate Centre has recently facilitated workshop on new tools for climate risk management in two zones (Americas and West & Central Africa), and if there is interested this kind of initiative could be scaled up.

4. Early Warning Early Action

With the IFRC-secretariat in Geneva, the RC/RC Climate centre is working on a paper explaining and promoting 'Early Warning Early Action' -- routinely taking humanitarian action based on scientific information on all timescales. This concept bridges disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response, and integrates information about long-term trends in risk, seasonal forecasts and immediate early warnings for disasters, which should lead to action at international, regional, national and local levels. It is one of the most promising ways to better deal with rising risks in all aspects of our work. Shortly the Climate Centre will launch a special case study on 'early warning early action' which shall explain the concept and the Red Cross/ Red Crescent approach to the subject. This case study will be published on the Climate Centre website at the end of November. Early Warning Early Action will also be the main theme in the production of the World Disaster Report (WDR) 2009.

5. The continuation of fruitful partnerships on climate risk reduction

The IFRC and the Climate Centre cooperate closely with the:

- International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI)
- African Centre of Meteorological Application for Development (ACMAD)
- Centre Regional de Formation et d'Application en Agrométéorologie et Hydrologie Opérationnelle (AGRHYMET)
- Centro del Agua del Trópico Humedo para America Latina y el Caribe (Water Center for the Humid Tropics of Latin America and the Caribbean) (CATHALAC)

Cooperation with these specialized scientific agencies help the Red Cross/ Red Crescent to 'translate' important weather forecast for operational use. The RC/RC Climate Centre and the IFRC have been embarking on a number of initiatives, especially with the IRI

and Cathalac. A number of interns located in Central America and West Africa have occupied themselves to bridge between the available science and the operational disaster management of the IFRC and National Societies. Specific attention was given to the development of climate forecasting tools aimed at strengthening early warning for the Movement, like the development of a flood forecasting tool in conjunction with CATHALAC. The IRI also positioned an intern at the IFRC office in Dakar, Senegal to help shape the collaboration with the IFRC, AGRHYMET and ACMAD to improve the capacity to comprehend the weather forecasts and to make the right interpretations based on the predictions.

Please find below two important achievements: The IFRC and the IRI set up a specific 'help desk' for National Societies that want to understand the more technical information about forecasts in their region. Every RC-related question on observed and projected conditions are given in the most timely and reliable way possible. This partnership proves to be a solid longer lasting collaboration and we can identify the fruits of this partnership in West Africa, where a seasonal forecast indicated an enhanced chance of above average rainfall. This was communicated as a warning from the IRI to the IFRC and an early action could start in the region and a preliminary appeal based on a seasonal forecast was launched by the IFRC: Read more on our website Early action can lead to improved response capacity, hence to saving lives.

CATHALAC and the IRI organized a specific workshop on new tools for disaster management, specifically aimed at improving tools for Red Cross staff. Discussions during this workshop dealt with the use of satellite data for disaster damage assessment, prediction of hydro-meteorological events and information in real time to monitor phenomena like storms of short duration, as well as climatological information of the seasonal trends of climate long period available for the region to aid in the monitoring of extreme weather events.

6. The PAN AFRICAN Conference

At 19 October 2008 the 7th Pan African Conference took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. 53 African National Red Cross/ Red Crescent Societies reflected on today's humanitarian priorities in Africa and aimed to set the agenda of the four years to come. The Climate Centre was present at the Pan African

Conference and gave a general presentation on climate change and climate risk management within the Red Cross/ Red Crescent. In preparation to this Conference the Climate Centre Journalist, Alex Wynter prepared a very interesting case study about climate risks in Africa 'Disasters needn't be disastrous', available on our website (please visit the page with reports & articles)

7. The Pacific Round Table, Samoa October 2008

Held amongst the backdrop of coconut palms and frangipani was the 2008 Pacific Climate Change Roundtable in Apia, Samoa 14-17 October. Governments and civil society met to map out organisations working on climate change in the region, achievements to date, share information and approaches as well as look to the future. 2009 will be the Pacific 'Year of Climate Change' which will call for involvement at all levels to bring messages home not just about the causes of climate change but also practical measures that can be taken to adapt to it. There will be many opportunities for Pacific National Societies to get involved in national efforts. Further collaborations with meteorological agencies and climate science providers in the region are also being fostered as a result of the meeting. During one of the lunch breaks at the meeting the Samoa Red Cross youth volunteers conducted a funny drama routine on climate change to bring the message home that creativity and youth can bring a new vibrancy to talking climate.



Apia, Samoa October 2008

8. Guatemala: growing awareness for climate change (an article by Marie Louise Belanger, Regional Communications Officer IFRC)

Protecting the livelihoods of vulnerable communities against the future effects of climate change can take many different forms. The Guatemalan Red Cross, with support from the Netherland Red Cross (funded through the HERE Campaign in the Netherlands), is working towards this goal by strengthening local capacities to respond to disasters and raising awareness about the effects of climate change. One of the activities involves the planting of saplings near the community school of Sabana Grande in the Chiquimula-region in the southeast of the country. This is done together with teachers, students and parents. Once the trees have grown, they will help keep the local stream in place, a vital water source for the whole community. Read more on our website.

A similar project has kicked off in India and an article on the IFRC website, written by Amit Kumar explains very well how changes in India's annual monsoon cycle are expected to result in a combination of severe droughts and intense flooding in some parts of India. Such extremes in the availability of water resources are likely to have a serious affect on human health, agriculture, forests and wildlife. On World Red Cross Red Crescent Day, the Indian Red Cross Society launched a nationwide tree-planting initiative through its network of 700 branches. Leading the campaign is Professor S.P. Agarwal, Secretary General of the Indian Red Cross Society. He highlighted the need to work together to combat climate change. "There are no easy solutions to global warming and tree planting drives in a growing country like India have the potential to be beneficial to poor and vulnerable populations." Read more on our website.

9. Engaging young people in the Solomon Islands for Red Cross Action on Climate Change

Julie Webb recently wrote a case study capturing the hard work of the Solomon Islands Red Cross on engaging youth on the issue of climate change. Poster competitions, school visits, village assessments, radio programmes and World Environment Day activities have all involved young volunteers. A National Youth Forum on Climate Change will be held in the first week of November and will heavily involve Solomon Islands Red Cross staff and volunteers in creating action plans for risk reduction with the young participants. Read more on our website (go to the Solomon Islands

page on our website or visit the section with reports & articles)

10. Climate Centre films

The Climate Centre is currently working with a number of filmmakers to explore on future possibilities of the production of videos in the coming months. A project to promote climate adaptation in Malawi has been in the works since 2007, and several short films were recently released. Here, villagers in Mphunga village produced a participatory video to share, through video screenings workshops, community-based adaptation practices with four other neighboring communities that face similar problems.

- Film nr. One: 'Adaptation to climate Change by Mphunga Villagers', was 100% made by the villagers on a participatory video approach. It consists of the villagers' perspectives on climate change and how they are adapting by capturing and sharing six of these community-based practices.

- Film number two is called: 'Farmers become Filmmakers' and it includes, interviews with the neighboring villagers and viewers about what they have learned on climate risks and final interviews with the filmmakers about their impressions of making such a film. This film has been selected for the shortlist of the 'Social Dimensions of Climate Change award' and is now proceeding to an independent judges panel. . We also enrolled part of this footage at the video festival at development and climate days during UNFCCC COP 14 in Poland.

- The video 'More than Survival' was made in Tabasco, Mexico. It gives a very good overview on the harsh impacts of climate change on the living conditions. It is a spanish film with English subtitles.

To see more films on climate change and the Red Cross, please visit the Climate Centre film's section at www.climatecentre.org

11. Publications by the Climate Centre Staff

- An interview with Madeleen Helmer: Not just a band-aid in 'Onearth', Published by the natural resources defense council, fall 2008.

- Communicating Climate Risks, by Maarten van Aalst. Published in the Forced Migration Review on climate change and displacement, October 2008

- Video-Mediated Approaches for Community-Level Climate Adaptation, by Suarez, P., Ching, F., Ziervogel, G., Lemaire, I., Turnquest, D., Mendler de Suarez, J. and Wisner, B.. IDS Bulletin 39 (4) 96-104, September 2008.

- International Youth Day: mobilizing Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers on the impact of climate change, article produced in conjunction with the IFRC Youth Department in Geneva, August 2008.

- Climate-Related Disasters: Humanitarian Challenges and Reconstruction Opportunities, by Pablo Suarez, Graham Saunders, Sandra Mendler, Isabelle Lemaire, Jorge Karol, and Laura Curtis in the Journal called: "Places: a Forum of Environmental Design", October 2008 Please contact the climatecentre@redcross.nl if you would like to obtain any of the articles.

For more information and the Red Cross/ Red Crescent Climate Centre Climate Guide (5MB) or the Climate Centre's Annual report 2007 please visit the website at www.climatecentre.org