

# GRC - International Cooperation

## Disaster Risk Reduction

Analyse hazards, prevent disasters and prepare people



# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

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# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Introduction

### Introduction

Disastrous natural phenomena have often brought untold misery over people in the past and confronted them with enormous challenges in terms of emergency relief as well as rehabilitation. Within just a few hours or even minutes, tropical windstorms (hurricanes, cyclones or typhoons), floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes or tsunamis kill or injure tens of thousands of people, destroy their homes or set the economic development of an area or a whole country back several decades.

Beside the major disasters, a wide range of extreme natural events limited to a small scale, such as landslides, are also apt to repeatedly cause significant damage unless people are aware of these natural hazards and adequately prepared.

Ninety-seven per cent of all deaths caused by extreme natural events today occur in developing countries. The last decades have seen a sharp rise in the number of disastrous natural events and in the numbers of people they hit as well as the economic damage they wrought. The trend is continuing, with more than 200 million people now affected by natural disasters every year<sup>1</sup>.

This has a considerable impact on people's chances of survival, their living conditions and their dignity, all the more so if they are poor and belong to disadvantaged groups in less developed countries.

The German Red Cross (GRC) is part of the worldwide Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, whose components are the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Federation), and presently 186 recognized National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies. The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols

provide an international legal basis for the Movement, with the ICRC, in particular, endowed with a mandate of the international community to act as the guardian of international humanitarian law.

The GRC and the other recognized National Societies derive their mandate and tasks particularly from the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols as well as the resolutions of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conferences, where delegations of the National Societies, the ICRC and the Federation meet with representatives of the states parties to the Geneva Conventions.

National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies have a role as voluntary auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of government authorities. These services are understood to include emergency aid in response to disasters, which must, however, at all times comply with the fundamental principles of the Red Cross or Red Crescent Movement, that is recognize National Societies' neutrality, impartiality and independence.



**People in developing countries are most vulnerable to natural hazards.**

Photo: GRC 2009

<sup>1</sup>cf. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2009: World Disaster Report 2009



# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Hyogo Framework for Action

In addition, the GRC's legal status and mandate in Germany are defined in a specific German Red Cross Act which came into effect in 2008 and manifests the federal government's recognition of the GRC's auxiliary role concerning humanitarian issues.

In Germany, the GRC has developed a so-called complex assistance system focused on ensuring health services and care for the country's residents. This system comprises emergency medical services, health care for the sick, social care for vulnerable people, aid to children and youth, and many other elements. The GRC integrates these multifaceted services into a coherent whole, which enables effective and needs-oriented management of emergencies, damage situations and disasters.

As part of and in consultation with the other components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the GRC also participates in a large number of **humanitarian aid and development programmes and projects** in more than 50 countries of the globe. Such programmes and projects are always run in cooperation with and in support of the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society on site, which is assisted for instance in developing health facilities, and receives inputs for training programmes and for self help.

The GRC thinks it is important that people obtain access to clean drinking water, food and health and that their vulnerability to disasters declines as they overcome poverty. The World Disaster Reports of the Federation have repeatedly highlighted these tasks as vital for development.

The GRC takes the line that it is not enough to act when disaster strikes. Though extreme natural events will keep occurring in the future, they need not necessarily have disastrous impacts on the people involved. Natural hazards only become disasters under certain socio-economic conditions (such as for instance population density, the buildings' solidity, the amount of knowledge of natural hazards among the population).

Action to prevent disastrous effects of **extreme natural events** or at least reduce their impact and adequately prepare the people to cope must be taken **before** such events occur. The GRC's track record and long experience in **disaster management** are the key to effective response to the sometimes complex natural hazards of today and tomorrow. These activities include reducing disaster risks and fostering the development of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in order to avert and mitigate human suffering.

## The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and the Hyogo Framework for Action

Since the United Nations proclaimed the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), humanitarian aid and development actors have been moving away from the line of thought that occasionally devastating impacts of natural disasters are inevitable. Local socio-economic and cultural parameters are also crucial to the GRC's work as a community's

proneness and vulnerability to disasters can only be assessed on the basis of these parameters. It must be understood here that especially the less developed countries are more at risk and that different (physical, socio-economic and environmental) vulnerability factors need to be taken into account when planning measures to remedy this situation.

# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Disaster Risk Reduction within GRC disaster management

At the end of the decade, the German IDNDR Committee founded in 1990 was renamed German Committee for Disaster Reduction (Deutsches Komitee für Katastrophenvorsorge e. V., DKKV). The DKKV today supports the interlinkage of research and field work, innovation promotion and knowledge transfer, social dialogue, public awareness raising and self-help structures. The GRC had a decisive role in the establishment of the IDNDR Committee and is today represented in the DKKV's managing committee and its operational advisory board.

On the international level, some important initiatives concerning Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) have come into being since the end of the IDNDR. One of the most important and recent contribu-

tions is the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005 – 2015. It reflects the results of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Kobe in January 2005 and constitutes a significant step for the integration of DRR into a sustainable development policy.

The international community has acknowledged DRR is a serious, global and permanent task. The GRC has also identified DRR as a priority. It is second nature to the GRC to support National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on site in preparing for disasters and reducing disaster risks. To the GRC, these sister Societies are experienced local partners integrated into the national DRR schemes of their respective countries.

### Hyogo Framework for Action 2005 – 2015

#### Five priorities for action to reduce disaster risks

1. Ensure that DRR is operational with a strengthened institutional basis at national and local level
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning capacities
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels
4. Reduce major underlying risk factors by taking for example the state of the environment, land use planning and climate change into account when designing development and rehabilitation programmes
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

## Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) within GRC disaster management

The GRC's disaster management aims to support conflict victims and people affected by disasters and according to their needs and to deliver community-based social services. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on site, vulnerable communities and the GRC have been cooperating closely on giving DRR ever-increasing importance in recent years.

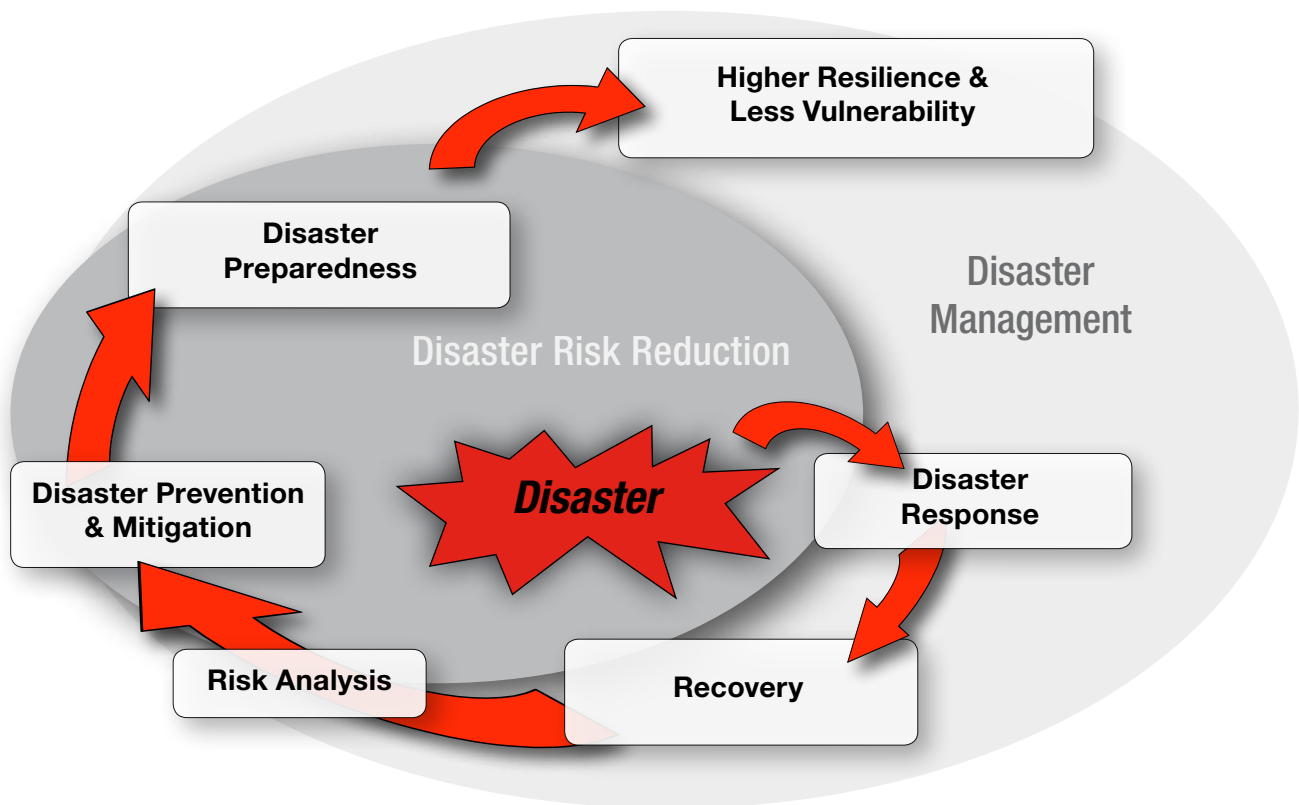
The purpose of these DRR activities is to build communities' self-help capacities and to strength-

en the resilience of particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children and elderly people.

**DRR combines three fields of action** in all. The first contains measures to analyse natural hazards and people's resilience on site (vulnerability and capacity assessments or VCAs), the second comprises activities designed to prevent or reduce adverse effects of future disasters (disaster prevention and mitigation) and the third is about effectively preparing the people at risk for future dis-

# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

Disaster Risk Reduction within GRC disaster management



**Figure 1: The GRC's disaster management spiral**

Source: GRC 2009

asters and strengthening their capacities to cope (disaster preparedness).

Strengthening local capacities to cope with the impact of disasters is a standard endeavour in DRR with the aim to reduce future needs for emergency intervention to a minimum. Complex problems and damage situations require an **integrated approach**. Hence the GRC's double focus on assistance during and after disasters as well as, particularly, on assistance before the next disaster occurs.

The GRC provides such assistance all across the globe, with DRR and its elements accounting for a major part of the inputs into the disaster management spiral mainly in Asia, Africa and Latin America (cf. fig. 1).

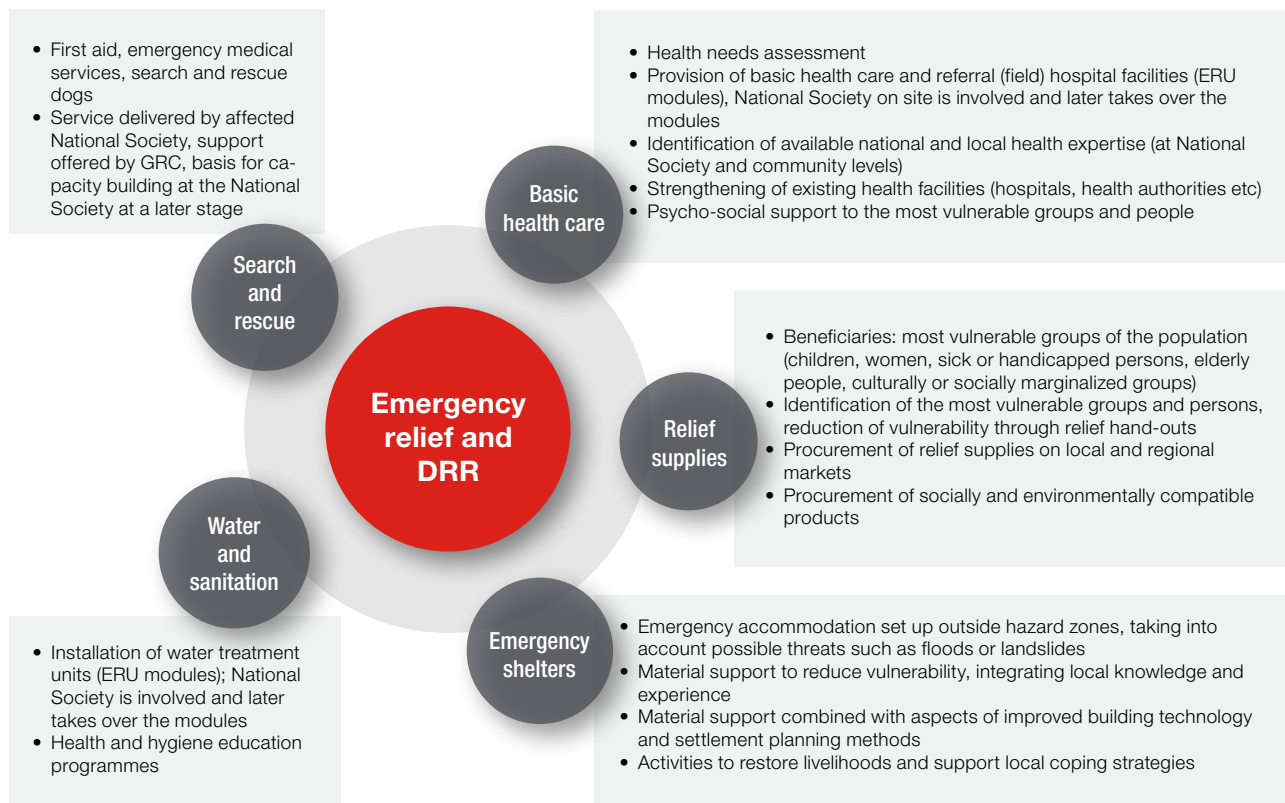
Though activities aimed at DRR play a rather minor role in **disaster relief**, efforts to improve the linkage between the emergency response, reconstruction and the rehabilitation phase start as early as possible in the emergency phase.

The approach known as Linking Relief, Rehabilitation & Development (LRRD) claims that a framework for sustainable development following emergency relief should be set up from the very beginning of an intervention. DRR can be integrated early to function as a link in the LRRD approach.

In the GRC's view, the sustainable DRR activities are particularly well suited to put the LRRD approach into practice by acting as an efficient link between emergency aid, reconstruction and subsequent development.

# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Disaster Risk Reduction within GRC disaster management



**Fig. 2: Examples of emergency relief and DRR at the GRC**

\*ERU = Emergency Response Unit

Source: GRC 2009

Figure 2 illustrates how early links are established between DRR activities and the emergency phase, where the GRC cooperates in search and rescue, distributes relief supplies, and provides emergency shelter, primary health care, and water and sanitation.

Relief supplies are preferably purchased on local or regional markets to avoid exacerbating any existing vulnerability factors. Moreover, care is taken to procure goods that are socially and environmentally compatible. To provide emergency accommodation in shelters set up on safe ground, relevant risk zones such as for instance flood-prone areas are avoided. When basic health facilities or water treatment units of the GRC are used, staff or volunteers of the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society on site are involved and trained at an early

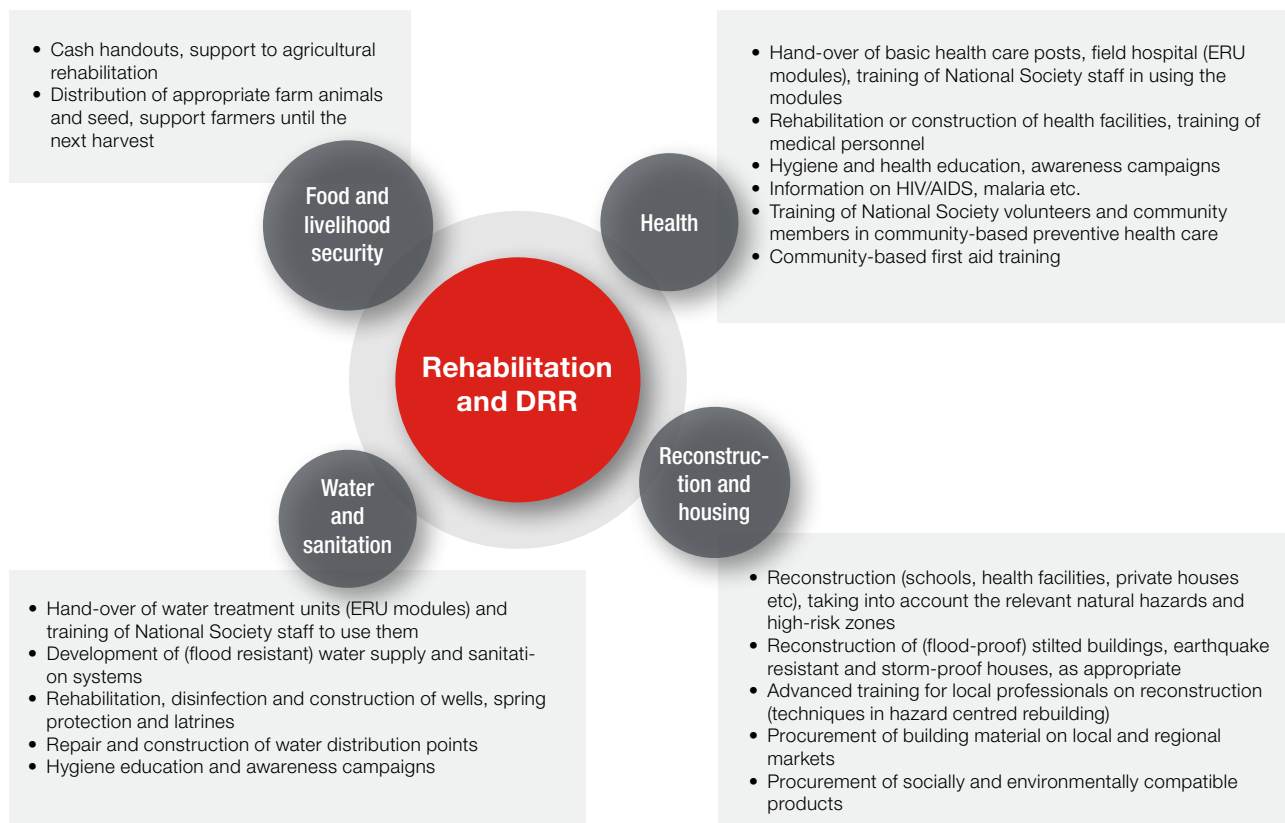
stage to run the facilities on their own later on. The top priority of GRC interventions in the wake of disasters remains, however, to save lives and to provide drinking water, medical care and food.



**Showing local Red Cross staff and volunteers how the GRC's field hospital works – Training just after the China earthquake of 2008.** Photo: GRC 2008

# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Disaster Risk Reduction within GRC disaster management



**Fig. 3: Examples of rehabilitation and DRR at the GRC**

Source: GRC 2009

**The Recovery, Reconstruction & Rehabilitation phase** provides the first major opportunities to reduce the impact of future hazards and the people's vulnerability to disasters. The priorities of the GRC in this context are water and sanitation, food security and secure livelihoods, health, reconstruction and housing. Figure 3 illustrates how DRR activities are run by the GRC during the rehabilitation phase after a disaster.

The spread of epidemics such as cholera can be prevented by developing water and sanitation systems combined with information on hygiene. Basic food supply can be ensured in the long run by propagating more sustainable farming methods.

Health education can also take place at an early stage. Besides, houses can be rebuilt to better

withstand earthquakes and floods where necessary. Not every activity undertaken in emergency relief or rehabilitation will necessarily connect to



**Reconstruction: earthquake resistant and flood proof houses within a GRC project in Indonesia after the Tsunami of 2004.** Photo: GRC 2008



# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Disaster Risk Reduction within GRC disaster management

DRR, but most can do it or can at least constitute a basis for subsequent strengthening of vulnerable societies' resilience.

**A Vulnerability & Capacity Assessment (VCA)** on site is the starting point of genuine DRR programmes. In this context, the GRC has, for many years, been using a participatory method by which local communities are enabled to recognize their vulnerability to existing natural hazards as well as their current capacity to help themselves.

Local knowledge of natural hazards and pre-established structures such as evacuation routes, safe refuges or functioning village committees are taken into account and incorporated into the programme design.

VCAs help the people on site and the GRC to identify key risks. In addition, VCAs provide information on existing capacities that can be used to eliminate or reduce these risks. And finally, the hazard maps produced in this context imply the identification of high-risk zones and safe spots in the respective area.



**A Philippine Red Cross volunteer presents the hazard map of an area covered by an integrated DRR project supported by the GRC.**

Photo: Rob Few, Federation 2009



**Community members working on a participatory vulnerability and capacity assessment in Tanga, Tanzania.** Photo: GRC 2008

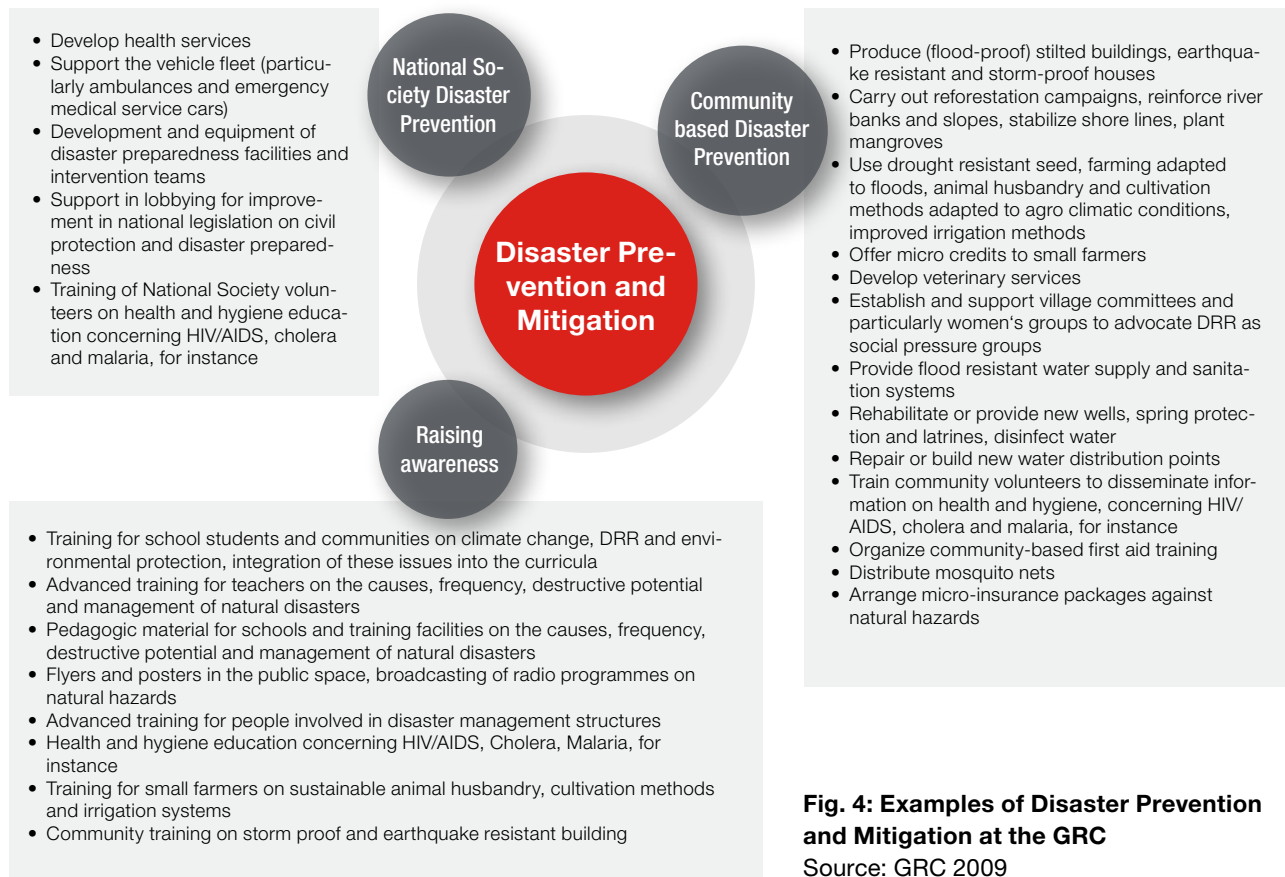
However, VCAs will only make sense and be helpful if they result in tangible activities that will reduce the risks and continue developing the available capacities.

The aim is to succeed in designing and implementing DRR projects which are adapted to needs, based on existing capacities and meaningfully integrated into national civil protection or disaster management schemes.

Based on an analysis of risks, vulnerability and capacities, DRR programmes and projects of the GRC are aimed at preventing or reducing loss and damage caused by future disasters and preparing National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as well as the people in disaster-prone regions for future extreme events.

# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Disaster Risk Reduction within GRC disaster management



**Fig. 4: Examples of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation at the GRC**

Source: GRC 2009

**Disaster Prevention and Mitigation** as undertaken by the GRC comprises activities that contribute to preventing or mitigating the impact of future disasters in the medium or long term. The GRC focuses these activities on awareness raising in general and a community-based approach in particular, as well as support for preventive measures taken by National Societies of disaster-prone countries (cf. fig. 4).

In this context, awareness raising will include for instance transferring technical knowledge of natural hazards and DRR to school students and teachers as well as producing support material for school use.

In the GRC's view, raising awareness for natural hazards is an important precondition for a suc-

cessful introduction of safer building methods or more appropriate, risk-conscious land use within community-based DRR programmes. The de-

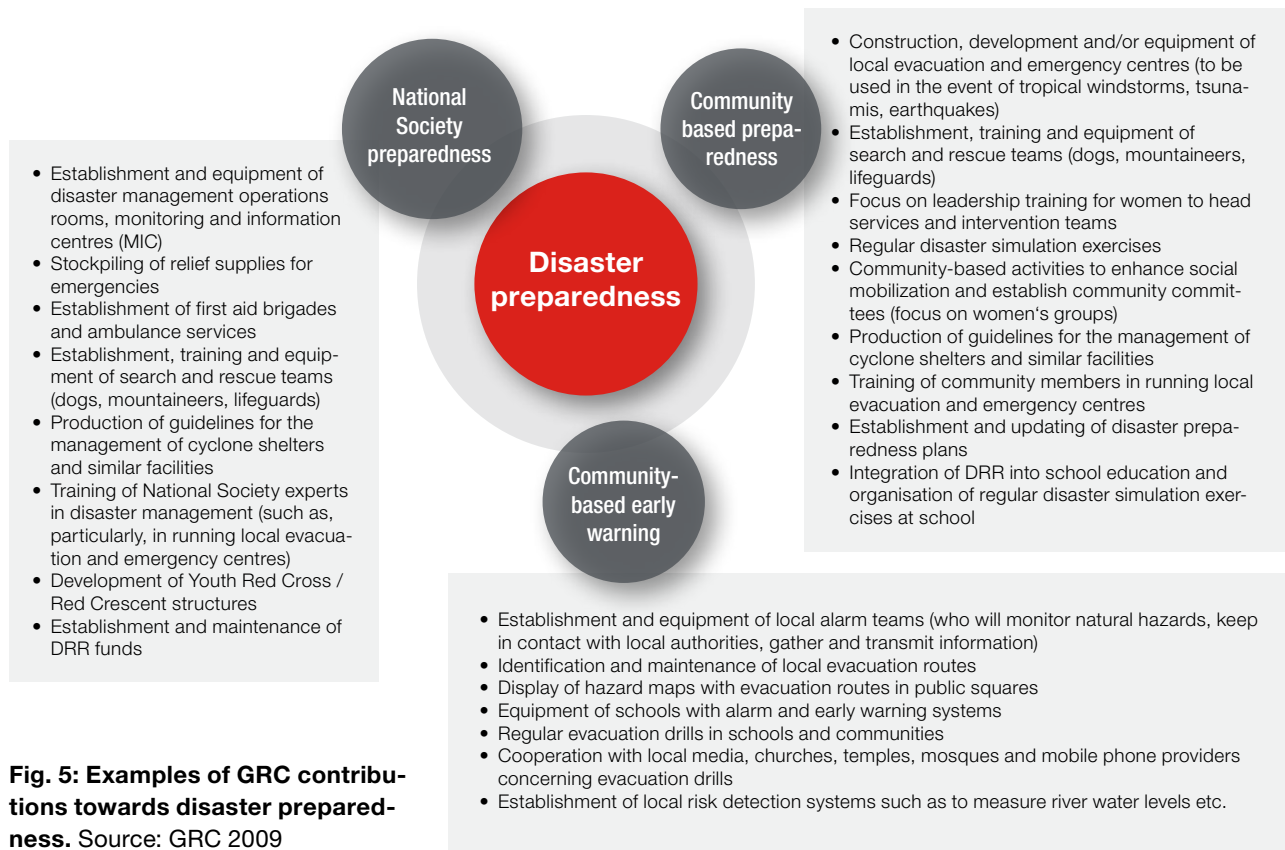


**Community education on disease prevention and the nexus between disease and floods in Angola.**

Photo: GRC 2009

# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Disaster Risk Reduction within GRC disaster management



**Fig. 5: Examples of GRC contributions towards disaster preparedness.** Source: GRC 2009

velopment of local health services run by a National Society can also contribute towards reducing future disaster risks. Disaster prevention and mitigation is most effective where it succeeds in combining infrastructural improvements and awareness raising with development-oriented approaches (such as poverty reduction and in the health sector).

**Disaster preparedness** (preparing for future disasters) is currently one of the GRC's top priorities in DRR. As shown in figure 5, the GRC is here again focusing on a community-based approach and strengthening sister Societies in disaster-prone countries.

Establishing first aid brigades or intervention teams at local level, encouraging communities to



**Training search and rescue dogs of the Iranian Red Crescent – with GRC support.**

Photo: GRC 2007



# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

GRC development cooperation

work out contingency and evacuation plans in a participatory approach, holding regular evacuation drills – these and similar preparations can save lives during earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and tropical windstorms in coastal countries, and the GRC pays particular attention to the participation of women in this context.

Setting up local early warning systems has become particularly important during recent years. Early warning will effectively contribute towards DRR only if it reaches the threatened people on

time and if they accept it and have previously practised their response. The GRC takes great care to ensure that the communication chain effectively reaches as far as the community level and that no link is missing.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are supported for instance in their development of ambulance or emergency medical services as well as search and rescue teams to improve their response to future disasters.



**GRC-supported first aid training for school children on the east coast of India.** Photo: GRC 2007



**Earthquake simulation exercise at Magara Primary School, Philippines, within an integrated DRR project supported by the GRC.** Photo: Rob Few, Federation 2009

## Mainstreaming DRR into GRC development cooperation

As the importance of projects focused on DRR increases, the GRC is also seeking to further mainstream DRR into **development cooperation**. The GRC has wide experience in supporting long-term community development, with activities focused mainly on health, including water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as food security.

Poverty is a decisive factor in people's vulnerability to extreme natural events. This applies particularly to women and children. Reducing the vulnerability of groups at risk is therefore the GRC's principal

aim in development cooperation. By improving a community's health or nutritional status, the GRC will help reduce poverty and foster sustainable development, strengthening people's resilience to extreme natural events at the same time.

The GRC's overall goal for development cooperation is - as in DRR - to reduce the vulnerability of those who need it most. Improving people's health or nutritional status will help relieve poverty and contribute to sustainable development, thereby also decreasing vulnerability. GRC sponsored de-



# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## The climate change challenge

velopment projects mostly run in rural areas where communities can play a significant part in identifying and reducing local disaster risks. Every development activity must be adapted to geographic, geologic, ecologic, socio-economic, cultural and political conditions if it is to be efficient.

The GRC will therefore pay even greater regard to VCA findings as well as disaster prevention and preparedness and improve their integration into development projects in the future.

Encouraging self-help and strengthening local structures is also essential in development cooperation with the aim to assist individuals, families and communities in developing their lives and im-

proving their preparedness for emergencies. Such assistance must include building local Red Cross and Red Crescent structures, which can provide significant contributions towards mobilising people's potential to help themselves, if they are well rooted in the community.

But mainstreaming DRR into development cooperation is not only a matter of helping people reduce their present poverty and vulnerability to disasters. The GRC also sees DRR as a means to secure the success of development projects and development gains in the long term.

## The climate change challenge

The major challenge currently facing DRR is the anthropogenous - or human-induced - climate change combined with demographic growth, urban development, often unplanned in less developed countries, the resulting reliance on vulnerable supply channels and the over-exploitation of vital resources.

The coming decades will bring the threat of an increased frequency and intensity of hydrometeorologic natural events causing dramatic consequences for those who live in the affected areas.

To the GRC, this means the risk of a slow-down in economic development and a sharp rise in poverty, most notably in those countries which are less developed so far. The accessibility of the millennium development goals adopted by the United Nations' member states at the millennium summit in 2000 seems even more doubtful in this light.

Extreme natural events in less developed countries easily cause large-scale disruption to infrastructure already today. A climate-induced decline in freshwater resources, the consequential drop in food

production, proliferation of many diseases and the forecasted increase of storm and flood damages may well accelerate social destabilization.

Weather-related extreme events now account for 75 per cent of all natural disasters<sup>2</sup>. The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) as well as the United Nations have come to describe climate change as an international security risk.

Specific climate models have identified particularly vulnerable countries and regions such as the Sahel zone, West Africa, the Caribbean, India, Bangladesh and Indonesia. These are countries and regions where the GRC is traditionally cooperating with a considerable number of National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies and has been doing so for decades in some cases.

<sup>2</sup>cf. German Committee for Disaster Reduction 2009: *Addressing the Challenge: Recommendations and Quality Criteria for Linking Disaster Risk Reduction and Adaptation to Climate Change*

# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Adapting to climate change

By virtue of the Red Cross Movement's core mandate, addressing climate change and more specifically the humanitarian consequences it has particularly for those who are more vulnerable, is therefore one of the GRC's main tasks.

Solving the climate crisis in terms of actually reducing global warming will depend less on the GRC or other humanitarian organisations than on the success of political negotiations at international level.

But with its network of 186 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and more than 97 million volunteers, members and staff world-wide, the Movement can make significant contributions towards developing public awareness of the problem.

Hence the fact that the Federation was one of the first major organisations outside the environmentalist movement to point out in the 1990s that the threat of climate change had better be taken seriously. At the Federation, the topic is firmly established and embedded at strategic, conceptual and operational levels.

## Adapting to climate change

As our climate changes, it is becoming obvious that adaptation has to come more into focus if we want to cope with the humanitarian consequences. From the GRC's point of view, adaptation to climate change is closely linked to DRR.

The fact that combining adaptation and DRR is necessary and vital has officially been acknowledged at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference held in Geneva in 2007, even by the delegations of the states parties to the Geneva Conventions.

The Conference confirmed the importance of disaster preparedness to also enable people to take



**Haiti floods.** Photo: GRC 2008

The Federation's Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Centre in The Hague was founded in 2002 as an additional reference centre which supports National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in finding ways and means of reducing the risks generated by climate change and bringing its humanitarian consequences to the fore of public and political awareness.

up the challenge of climate change. Moreover, the participants expressed their determination to integrate the topic of climate change into their respective DRR policies and plans as well as mobilise adequate technical personnel and financial resources for this purpose.

The DRR experience and approaches of humanitarian actors like the GRC will therefore have a key role in designing effective adaptation responses. Approaches that have already addressed extreme weather conditions in the past will become pivotal in the future.

# International Disaster Risk Reduction at German Red Cross

## Outlook

Contributions in terms of awareness raising can be just as important in this context as structural protection or adapting farmers' cultivation methods.

The GRC will give climate change and DRR even more attention in the planning and implementation of its international cooperation projects in the fu-

ture. The potential local impact of climate change must be integrated even better into VCAs. Improving the information about the regional differentiation of the specific consequences of climate change will be crucial in this context.

## Outlook

The GRC recognizes the need to sensitize the governments of disaster prone countries, donors and the public at large, as well as NGOs it is in contact with, to the necessity and benefits of DRR.

Its action to this effect depends on the availability of private donations on one hand and donors at national, European and international level on the other.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its endeavours are neither able nor willing to substitute for politics. National legislation on civil protection including DRR is a political responsibility of individual governments. But the GRC can contribute towards strengthening institutions on site, and it can support sister Societies in performing appropriate tasks within such legislation, for instance

by drawing up local and regional contingency and intervention plans.

Though even optimum DRR cannot provide solutions to all humanitarian and development problems, the GRC recognizes its importance as a means to secure the future, which must be a global concern in a globalized world. DRR can indeed help reduce damages, losses of lives and personal distress in many regions across our planet today and tomorrow.

DRR can help safeguard socio-economic and political development gains of a country even after extreme natural events and thereby contribute towards sustainable development and social peace.

# DRK.de

## The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**HUMANITY** The Red Cross, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours – in its international and national capacity – to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**IMPARTIALITY** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours only to relieve suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**NEUTRALITY** In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**INDEPENDENCE** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**VOLUNTARY SERVICE** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**UNITY** There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**UNIVERSALITY** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is world wide.

### Donations account

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