Case study

Red Cross Red Crescent good practices in early warning

For the International Federation and National Societies worldwide, community-based early warning is an essential element of disaster risk reduction. Early warning helps to mitigate loss of life and property and to reduce economic losses. By strengthening early warning systems, we help to ensure that development projects, action plans and existing policies are sustainable.
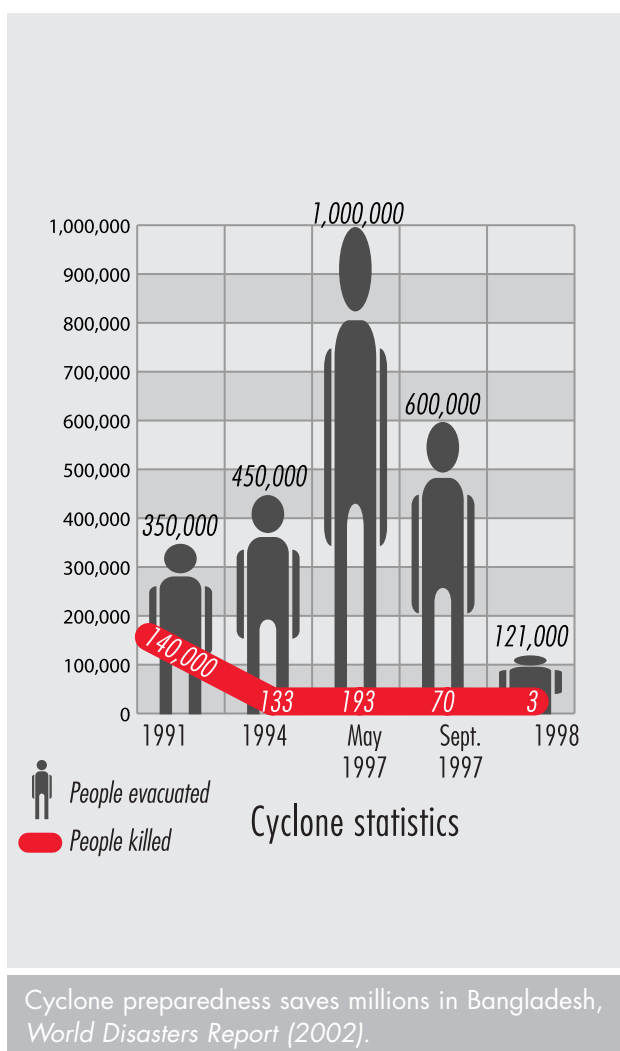
Below are examples of successful community-based early warning systems:

- The Bangladesh cyclone preparedness programme has successfully warned, evacuated and sheltered millions of people from cyclones since its inception in the early 1970s by the International Federation, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and the government of Bangladesh (*World Disasters Report*, 2002).

- Accurate, timely information saves lives. Effective early warning systems are the most obvious way to get this information to populations at risk. In the Caribbean, during 2004's hurricane season, most countries successfully alerted their populations to approaching storms and saved many lives as a result. The key to their success was putting people, not just technology, at the centre of their warning systems (*World Disasters Report*, 2005).

- In the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, youth associations, women's organizations, churches, the Red Cross and many other non-governmental organizations take part in hurricane warning, evacuation and shelter management (*World Disasters Report*, 2005).

- In Jamaica, Red Cross volunteers go from street to street issuing warnings by megaphones, 48 hours before hurricanes are due to hit (Niskala Markku, *Disaster preparedness saves lives*).

- As a result of early warning systems, there were no deaths reported in La Independencia, Guatemala during the hurricane season in October 2005. Volunteers went from house to house announcing over loudspeakers and local cable television the need to evacuate the area before the river flooded. Following the announcements everyone in the community was helped to evacuate. (Rodríguez Manuel, *Tecún Umán, an example of Red Cross support to the community*, http://www.ifrc.org/docs/news/05/05102101/)

© Orissa Disaster Mitigation Programme

In Orissa, India, preparedness drills are organized at local cyclone shelters to ensure that communities know what to do when storms strike.

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

■ When Hurricane Mitch hit Honduras in 1998, a community-based flood early warning system in La Masica municipality, in which local people used simple flood meters to check on river levels, report them by radio and prepare evacuation plans, proved more resilient than the high-tech alternatives (*World Disasters Report*, 2005).

■ Some 2,000 people in Matasse, a rural community in Mozambique, were threatened by flooding from the nearby Save River. In 2001, the Mozambique Red Cross undertook a community-based disaster preparedness pilot project there with support from the Danish Red Cross. The community identified project objectives that reflected their own priorities and Matasse's real needs: planning of mitigation activities; recruitment and training of new volunteers; improvement of wells; participation in rescue training; and distribution of radios to improve early warning (*World Disasters Report*, 2002).

1,000,000
900,000
800,000
700,000
600,000
500,000
400,000
300,000
200,000
100,000
0

1,000,000

600,000

450,000

350,000

140,000

121,000

1991   1994   May   Sept.   1998
            1997   1997

133   193   70   3

👤 *People evacuated*

▬ *People killed*

Cyclone statistics

Cyclone preparedness saves millions in Bangladesh,
World Disasters Report (2002).

■ In 2003, the Cambodian Red Cross Society and the American Red Cross set up an early warning system project in Cambodia. Floods affect parts of the country every year. The project aimed at reducing the risk of vulnerable communities to floods that are greater than normal through improved flood warnings. Flood forecasts and warnings from the Mekong River Commission and the Cambodian government's department of hydrology and rural water supply are circulated to communities, which send back information about water levels to the forecasters. Communities identify flood alarm stages and work together to develop response mechanisms. By October 2005, the project had been implemented in 38 villages by more than 75 trained Red Cross volunteers.
(*Flood early warning information flow*, http://www.redcross.org.kh/news_events/2005/EWS_ 2005.htm)

■ During the August 2002 flash floods and landslides in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, early warning flood alert by the Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and local authorities enabled safe evacuation of people.
(*Help needed for tens of thousands of homeless as flash floods strike* DPR Korea, http://www.ifrc.org/docs/News/pr02/5502.asp)

■ Following landslides in Costa Rica in August 2002, the International Federation obtained funding from the British government to implement an early warning system to alert and prepare communities for future landslides. The Costa Rican Red Cross began a community training programme in disaster preparedness and prevention, community first aid and psychological support. A total of 200 people were trained in disaster preparedness, 100 in community first aid and 30 community members received basic training as radio operators. In 2003, another landslide – similar to that of August 2002 – hit communities in Costa Rica. This time, however, the change in the way communities responded was very clear. People were ready to follow the directions of Red Cross staff and other institutions on site, and showed greater unity and desire to work as a single team. Community training sessions meant that people knew each other and what they had to do, making institutional coordination and decision-making much more effective.
(*Landslide early warning in Costa Rica*, http://www.ifrc.org/docs/pubs/disasters/reduction/ CostaRica-Landslide-en.pdf)

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