



COMMUNITY-BASED PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO MULTI-HAZARD EARLY WARNING

Background documentation for Session 5

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INTRODUCTION

To be effective, early warning systems must be understandable, trusted by and relevant to the communities which they serve. Warnings will have little value unless they reach those people most at risk – who must be trained to react on the message. The Federation and its global network of 183 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies (RCRC), gives full support to developing warning systems but stresses the importance of: 1) establishing local level networks that can both receive and act on warnings and who raise awareness and educate communities of safely actions and 2) taking a multi-hazard approach to assure sustainability by providing active alert, awareness and relevance. In short, what is needed is a culture of preparedness and risk reduction in vulnerable communities. The lesson is that without the right knowledge and tools, people will not know how to act on the early warning information and to help others. Developing systems that are people-centered is central to achieving this goal.

HOW DO WE ENSURE A ‘PEOPLE-CENTERED’ COMMUNITY-BASED EARLY WARNING SYSTEM?

Combination of ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ approaches. Community involvement from the bottom up is essential in order to identify needs, patterns of vulnerability and to develop the legitimacy required to ensure that warnings are acted upon. At the same time, information on regional weather conditions or other factors relating to a specific risk need to flow down from regional and global monitoring systems to civil society networks such as RCRC. Warning systems cannot be fully effective unless supported by joint messaging by trusted partners collectively i.e. government, scientific, academic and RCRC. In particular, there is a need for a strong hierarchy of RCRC staff and volunteers to participate in awareness raising, training, risk assessments, contingency planning, and who are ready to receive and disseminate the warnings, and support communities to react to the messages.

Involvement of local communities and community-based organizations in the process of data collection, monitoring and warning and messaging (awareness raising). The community must be a primary partner in the implementation, involved from the start in the planning, management, and overall implementation process. Communities should also be involved in local hazard, vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCA) and mapping.

Creation of a truly multi-hazard approach – An EWS must be used regularly and equipment maintained at operational at all times. Large-scale hazards, and that includes tsunamis are in many areas too rare to warrant or expect a constant alertness among the potentially affected. Most communities face a range of less dramatic risks, where warning systems may be felt more relevant and be in use more often. Here lies an opportunity for establishing, ‘practising,’ and developing trust in a system, which will, then, be ready also for the big events. To develop this

trust both at local and national levels, partnerships are necessary to create standardised messaging, and to define effective roles for different actors such as government agencies, the RCRC Movement, weather offices, scientific institutions, the police, fire brigade, the media, etc.

Building awareness and education of life saving skills into existing community structures:

Without broad awareness, people will not respond and risk cannot be reduced. Ultimately techniques to develop effective community awareness must be matched to local context to ensure that all members of the local population can relate to warning and preparedness information regardless of differences in education, culture, dialect, income, etc. For example, the experiences of RCRC teams in Indonesia and Vietnam demonstrate the effectiveness of village disaster action teams in tailoring preparedness messages to local communities and supporting community volunteers to lead their communities in taking proactive steps to mitigate the risks those communities face.

Improvement of coping resources of the community to better leverage early warning information and to address emergency needs before external aid arrives. Planning must be given to establish evacuation points and community caches of critical supplies and resources. Damaged areas tend to be isolated for a period of time before external assistance arrives. Pre-positioning of supplies and local mobilization of capacities and needed skills will be critical to the effective coping of the community. Ultimately providing communities with funds and other resources to support local level vulnerability reduction will be a necessary follow-on to any successful plan to strengthen early warning resources.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES CONTRIBUTIONS TO ‘PEOPLE-CENTERED’ COMMUNITY-BASED EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

1. National Disaster Planning and Response Plans

Adhering to their auxiliary role the RCRC in each nation may need to:

- *Strengthen coordination with the national (Governmental) hierarchy of EWS, ensuring a proactive approach to new initiatives to EWS and lobbying for people-centered systems; i.e. the “loudspeakers” where the warning message is issued, and carry the warning all the way to the individuals at risk – and help interpret into a locally most sensible (pre-defined) reaction.*
- *Assist in national and local response planning and supporting community action plans and response teams*
- *Strategic partnerships using volunteer base and community-based preparedness programming as a specific niche for RCRC to implement the national level community-based early warning awareness raising and disseminating system*

2. Improved monitoring and community risk and vulnerability mapping

Risk and vulnerability mapping processes to be truly multi-sectoral not limited to scientific agencies alone. In order not only to address the general hazards relevant across wide areas (earthquakes, cyclone winds and torrential rains), local vulnerability capacity assessments and hazards mapping may be relevant in many communities – this is part of the process of broader community-based disaster preparedness which includes community mapping, awareness raising and simulation or drills which RCRC can help facilitate. Leading to advocacy for local actions on disaster reduction.

3. Community-based early warning systems – volunteer, monitoring risk and warning disseminations

Ensuring ownership and sustainability of communities themselves: recruiting, mobilizing, enabling and training local volunteers and communities. There is a need for a strong hierarchy of

RCRC staff and volunteers to participate in awareness raising, training, risk assessments, contingency planning, and who are ready to receive and disseminate the warnings, and support communities to react to the messages. To ensure the RCRC network reaches most (all) communities in risk areas, a large-scale training and awareness raising effort – with a hierarchy of trained trainers – is needed, including targeted material to each level (adaptable to different hazards and cultures to ensure dissemination)

4. Awareness building and public information (formal and informal)

General hazard knowledge may best be included in school curricula (requires curriculum and material development). This “slow” introduction may be supplemented by local RCRC awareness raising initiatives (basic awareness kits to be developed, ready for adaptation to local settings/customs). Not only for tsunami, there are clear and present dangers for other hazards!

5. Preparedness and Mitigation

Development of a more effective Early Warning System must be viewed as only one part of a broader effort to reduce risks in vulnerable communities such as those surrounding the Indian Ocean. An improved Early Warning System will certainly help people flee to safe areas when danger is imminent. At the same time there is also a wide range of other things communities – small and large – can do to reduce the potential impact of relevant hazards. A few examples: Large parts of the tsunami-affected nations would benefit from reconstructing their society to more earthquake-safe standards (adhere to existing or improved legislation); in many local areas, environmental conservation and rehabilitation of protective coastal mangrove forest or slope-stabilizing forest cover could help reduce risks to wave attack or landslides and flash floods, respectively. RCRC can play a role in many such locally applicable safety measures – this is in addition to the more traditional role of “Red Cross Action Teams” trained in First Aid, rescue etc.

CONCLUSION

The Federation hopes that people focused approaches to preparedness (dissemination, awareness-raising, and education) and mitigation will remain on the agenda of governments *in* affected countries *and* in the donor community. In the long run strengthening community networking between official agencies, local organizations and volunteer groups should be viewed not simply as an efficient way to establish safety-consciousness but perhaps as the only viable way to ensure that new technology and other improvements have their potential and intended impact. The RCRC network, especially the RC Societies in the Indian Ocean, are crucial in mobilizing community participation to ensure hazard warning information does reach those who need to react and we stand ready to partner to help fill that gap.