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Promoting Community Participation through Development of Community Level Risk Reduction Action Plans

Summary

Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRC) has always attached importance to community participation in its disaster risk reduction initiatives and recognizes that the success of any community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) activities rests on the level of participation of the community from target at-risk areas. Specifically through its on-going CBDRM focused programs, MRC ensures the stakeholders are consulted and invited to partake in all aspects of the process starting from identification and analysis of disaster risks to formulating counter measures using the outcomes. Notwithstanding slight divergences among the approaches used by individual programs in creating enabling environment for participation of the community, significant results have been achieved. Under the facilitation of committed Red-Cross Volunteers (RCVs), community members from target villages and wards and teachers and students from selected schools have undertaken much needed assessments and prepared preparedness and mitigation action plans.

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Community Participation and Disaster Risk Reduction

Community participation has always been at the forefront of any community-based schemes for the simple purposes of ensuring the ownership and improving their awareness thereby warranting the commitment and the sustainability. In the process of community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM), at-risk communities are usually engaged in all aspects of the process starting from identification and analysis of disaster risks to formulating counter measures using the outcomes. This also means that the community is at the heart of decision making about issues that have impacts on their lives. The empowerment of community also calls for greater accountability from the implementers: the higher the awareness level of the community, the better quality of humanitarian and risk reduction services they would demand.

It is universally accepted that any community involvement activities should take into consideration first and foremost the local context and existing local capacities. Definite ways of promoting community engagement involve provision and facilitation of two-way communication flows: providing timely information to the community at the same time establishing a feedback process to capture their inputs and concerns, and adoption of flexible community mobilization mechanisms. It needs to be realized also that participation in recovery and rehabilitation after a devastating event can have positive psychological impact on the affected community and help them overcome the tragedies and traumas.

Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) appreciates the importance and the benefits of community participation in its disaster risk reduction initiatives and, as stated clearly in MRCS 2010 Disaster Management Policy, considers it one of the key implementation strategies to *'keep improving the process of community mobilization within the purview of cost effectiveness and sustainability'*.

MRCS Disaster Management Policy: Community Safety and Resilience Component

- MRCS mobilizes communities to assess its hazards, vulnerability and capacity to generate awareness about potential risks and initiate respective counter measures.
- MRCS supports community-based initiatives in the most vulnerable communities, including early warning, structural and non-structural mitigation, simulation exercises and measures to strengthen and protect livelihoods.
- MRCS organizes social mobilization events at community and school level to generate awareness about the hazards, vulnerability, potential risks and respective counter measures.
- MRCS develops and distributes the advocacy and teaching materials.

Source: MRCS Disaster Management Policy 2010.



Village map, one of the results of the VCA

Participatory Disaster Management Planning Practices in MRCS DRR Programs

MRCS views CBDRM as a process that could transform vulnerable, at-risk communities to be safer and disaster resilient. In the on-going community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) efforts of MRCS, effected through the five programs - the CBDRM program, the School-based Disaster Risk Reduction (SBDRR) program, the CBDRR program, the Urban Disaster Risk Reduction (UDRR)¹ program as well as the DRR program²- community participation is solicited to develop community risk reduction plans and their subsequent implementation.

Notwithstanding slight divergences among the approaches used by individual project and program in creating enabling environment for community participation at every step, all five programs follow more or less the same structure for generating community level preparedness plans. They are by and large: selection of community representatives, provision of basic and relevant trainings for the identified group, conducting assessments, formation of sub-committees/committees, preparation of community level action plan by identifying the preparedness and mitigation activities and the implementation of the plan.

The existing MRCS branches at township levels and the vast RCV networks play the key roles in the implementation of community plans. The first activity usually is to organize orientation sessions in target state/division and township introducing the schemes to MCRS branch members as well as the local authorities and seeking, at the same time, their approval and support. The township MRC branch usually has the final authority to make the decision on identification of

community or school representatives to participate in the early stages of implementation..

Figure 2 provides an overview of the stages where community participation is sought in community level planning process under each program.

Participatory Planning at the Ward and Village Levels

Figure 1 Participatory Process at Ward and Village Levels⁵



Selection of Community Representatives

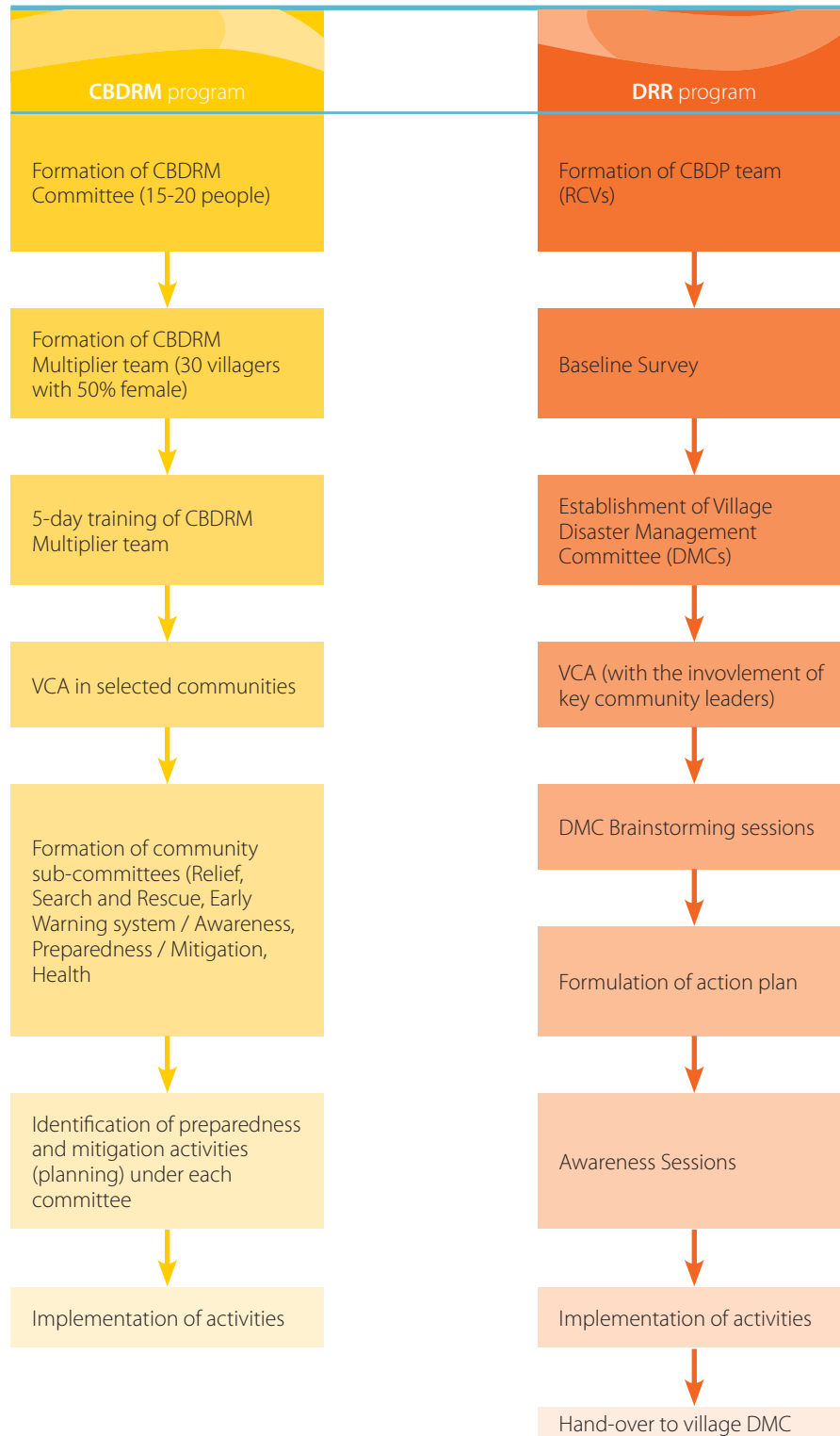
Although the background of community members selected are different, dictated by different focus of each program: village/township residents for CBDRM and DRR projects and ward level residents for UDRR, the criteria established for selection are the same³, as described below.

- Those from most vulnerable townships/village tracks/wards;
- Those who are well respected;
- Those who can spare their time for communities when needed;
- Those having basic skills for communication; and

¹ A project implemented by MRCS (DM Division) and funded by Norwegian Red Cross.

² DRR Program is being implemented in partnership with French Red Cross. For management purposes, a separate unit, DRR unit, was created within the Disaster Management Division of MRCS

³ Based on the criteria established in the CBDRM Implementation Guidelines of MRCS.

Figure 2 Stages of Community Participation

SBDRR program

Selection of teacher representatives (2 teachers per school)

SBDRM training for teachers

School Risk Assessment

Formation of SBDRM committee (21 students)

Training for SBDRM committee

Formation of sub-committees (first aid, awareness, preparedness / mitigation)

Formulation of preparedness and mitigation activities

Implementation of activities

UDRR program

Selection of 6 representatives from target wards

UDRR Training for representatives

Formation of ward risk reduction committee

Establishment of School Disaster Safety Team

Multisector assessment

DRR field session / school level awareness session

Formulation of action plan

Implementation of activities

CBDRR program

Formation of CBDRR Supervisory Committee

Formation of Community Safety and Resilience Committee

Multisector Assessment

DRR Field Session

Formulation of action plan

Implementation of activities

- Those having the will and the ability to move around the assigned sites.

The resulting entities also vary from program to program. Under CBDRM program, they are known as **CBDRM Facilitator Team** at the township level and **CBDRM Multiplier Team** (30 villagers with 50% female representatives) at the community level. A similar set up is established under SBDRR program. There is a **SBDRR Facilitator Team** at Township level (2 teachers from each school + 3 RCV + TEO) and a **SBDRR Multiplier Team** at school level (22 students per school). Under the DRR program, there are **focal RCVs for CBDRR** (21 RCVs) and **SBDRR** (7 RCVs) at the township level and **Village/School Disaster Management Committees** at the community/ village level. For UDRR program, an **Urban Risk Reduction Committee** is formed at township level while a **Ward Risk Reduction Committee** (WRRRC) is formed in each ward. Under the newly established CBDRR program, a **CBDRR Supervisory Committee** as well as a **Township Disaster Management Committee** will be established at township level, and **Community Safety and Resilience Committees** (CSRC) will be established at village level.

Equipping the Community Representatives with Pertinent Skills

Once the formation of CBDRM team/committee is finalized, they are provided with essential trainings to acquire the relevant skills vital in the implementation. Following capacity building activities have been undertaken to date:

- DRR program holds Community Based First Aid (CBFA) trainings and mitigation awareness sessions (covering disaster preparedness, shelter management, search and rescue, damages and needs assessment, understanding weather forecast and announcements) for CBDRR teams, village DMCs and community members. Furthermore, for VDMC members, VCA training is offered as well as RCV communication and facilitation training, DMC role and responsibility training, and disaster awareness training. As of 2012, the program has covered 82 villages.

On school level, a Disaster Preparedness and Response (DPRE) training is offered to teachers as well as a Basic First Aid training. Furthermore, the members of the SDMC receive an Orientation Training to School Disaster Management Training.

- CBDRM program organizes 5-day CBDRM trainings for CBDRM Multiplier Teams as well as Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) orientation sessions for CBDRM Multiplier Teams, community sub-committees and additionally selected community members.
- UDRR program provides Urban Disaster Risk Management (UDRM) training and Disaster Risk Reduction Field Session for the facilitators and the WRRRC and school level awareness raising session on non-structural measures in the selected schools of the target wards.
- SBDRR program provides the SBDRR Facilitator Training as well as the SBDRR Multiplier Training after which the VCA is carried out.
- CBDRR program provides Field Sessions for the CBDRR Supervisory Committee as well as the CSRC Team after the Multi-Sector Assessment has been carried out.

Conducting Participatory Community Risk Assessment

Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) exercise, promoted under the DRR programs of MRCS, tries to capture hazard, vulnerability, capacity and people's perception of the risks at the community level. Making this participatory to the community permits targeted population to better understand their environment, be more aware about the known and potential threats surrounding them and also to identify elements at risk as well as safer areas. The trained community members lead and facilitate the enquiry, data crosschecking and compilation and finalization of data under the supervision of township RCVs. The findings are presented in the form of maps and narrative reports which serve as key reference documents for DRR action planning. DRR Program estimates that average 62 community members per village have taken part in its assessment exercises.

DRR Program further extended the participatory assessment process by conducting **household level preparedness assessment** or **household checklist**. Based on the VCA findings, the most vulnerable households of each targeted village are evaluated in terms of their level of preparedness. By 2012 end, more than 3,000 households have been studied under the program. This activity guides the mitigation awareness sessions organized afterwards for villagers to



Community members with the support of the MRCS RCVs carry out the VCA

achieve more effectiveness on disaster preparedness at household level.

While the VCA is used in particular in the CBDRM, SBDRR and DRR program, the two newly established programs, UDRR and CBDRR, are using a multi-sector assessment instead of a VCA to capture a more comprehensive picture of risks at community level. The multi-sector assessment should be part of the three-day field session which is conducted on village/ward level including several activities related to disaster preparedness, awareness raising and skill training. In comparison to the VCA, the multi sector assessment allows the program teams to not only identify weaknesses with

regard to disaster preparedness, but also in related fields such as health or livelihood.

Participatory Community Action Planning

The key difference between the different MRCS DM Division programs lies in the dealings with the community groups in preparing the community level action plans.

In each targeted village of the DRR Program, Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMC) are set up each of which has a management board composed of five (5) village leaders. VDMC brainstorming sessions subsequently

organized enable the drawing up of a community level DRR action plan through identification of necessary preparedness and mitigation activities and community priorities, based on the VCA findings and outcomes (hazards, vulnerabilities and capacity needs). The plan highlights the incurred risks, role and responsibilities of the management board and sub-committees of the VDMC, lists available resources, activities to be carried out, emergency focal institutions, etc. A similar process can be found in the newly established UDRR program. The WRRC which is established at ward level is responsible to develop a community action plan together with the community and the ward administrator is then mainly responsible for the implementation of this action plan.

Unlike DRR and UDRR program, CBDRM program does not establish VDMC at the village level but goes straight to forming five-member community sub-committees directly under the CBDRM Multiplier Team. The committees are structured based on different risk reduction functions: Relief, Search and rescue, Early warning, Awareness, Preparedness/mitigation and health. Each sub-committee is then facilitated to develop its own action plan and to administer the implementation on the ground. The plan lists preparedness and mitigation measures, again in reference to VCA findings, including identification of safer places and installation of basic early warning system.



Handover of a Township Emergency Kit to community

Implementing Community Action Plans

When it comes to the implementation of newly developed community action plans, each VDMC of DRR program is further divided into sub-committees to deal with different emergency components (mitigation, information and communication, response, rehabilitation, etc.). Since the roles and responsibilities of each sub-committee are clearly defined within the plan, confusion and overlaps are avoided. To further support the implementation activities, risk reduction kits are distributed to the targeted communities. The kits include early warning equipment as well as equipment generally linked to shelter (blankets, kitchen sets, etc.), safety (buoys, first aid kits, extinguishers, lifejackets, etc.), and information and communication (radio sets, hand speakers, etc.). These different types of equipment⁴ intend to permit community members to cope locally with disaster impacts before any external intervention and enable them to engage in a minimum level of risk reduction and response preparedness. It is anticipated that when the program is over, the management of community level risk reduction undertakings would be hand over to VDMC, making them the main responsible party to update the plan regularly and continue with the risk reduction efforts. Support from MRCS will remain with the periodic involvement of RCVs.

As for CBDRM program, the plan implementation is overseen by the community sub-committees in their respective area of focus with the support of the township branch and in collaboration with local authorities. The mitigation and preparedness activities would include both structural and non-structural attributes with significant community participation. Priority is given to utilizing local resources. Two stark contrasts from DRR program is that firstly CBDRM program opts for participatory monitoring and evaluation throughout the implementation period to ensure the community has a say in improving the activities that would save their lives and safeguard their properties. Secondly, CBDRM program does not have an extensive exit strategy as in DRR program.

⁴ The identification of emergency equipment items is part of the VCA exercise.

Participatory Disaster Risk Reduction Activities at the School Level

Figure 2 Participatory Process at Ward and Village Levels⁵



In rallying for participation at the school level, the **SBDRR program** focused on 10 high schools and 10 middle schools from 10 target townships. Two (2) teachers per school are selected, usually nominated by the headmaster. They are then provided with BFA course, Disaster Preparedness and Response Education (DPRE) training and School Preparedness Plan (SPP) Orientation.

The next activity, school risk assessment, enlists the involvement of both teachers and students under the supervision of township RCVs. Through this exercise approximately 20,000 students in 20 schools have learnt how to identify risks, reduce them and be better prepared for disasters. The families of students have also experienced improvements in their awareness of risks and the actions needed to minimize them, as a result of knowledge received from the students. In some cases, parents of students have been actively involved in helping schools take action to minimize risks.

Under the supervision of the teacher representatives, who have already acquired basic DRR skills through various

capacity building activities, **SBDRR Multiplier Team** is formed in each target school with 22 students to coordinate disaster preparedness and emergency response activities. These students are regarded as facilitators and receive orientation and DRR awareness trainings. The SBDRR Multiplier Team is then further sub-divided into sub-committees: first aid, awareness, preparedness and mitigation. They are responsible for developing **School Preparedness Plans** based on main challenges faced during previous disasters.

The **SBDRR component of DRR program** follows the same pattern of activities with the end results as school preparedness plans consisting mainly of conducting awareness raising activities of students and teachers. Based on the recommendations in the plan, tabletop simulation exercises are realized in all targeted schools. In addition to these activities, different teaching learning materials (Risk Land Game, Game 2 Booklet and Disaster Preparedness Response Education (DPRE) Resource Pack) and emergency equipment (BFA kit, hand-speakers, bells, extinguishers, etc.) are provided to each targeted school. The record shows that DRR program manages to complete the school level assessment in all of its 580 target schools. Up to 2012, 80 schools have developed individual school preparedness plan and have sought school-wide validation by displaying them on a flipchart on the wall of classrooms.



Simulation exercise in school

Enabling Factors

Community participation, considered the principal issue under all MRCS on-going programs, is made possible by the following factors.

- **MRCS structure:** MRCS current structure of having a mix of government officers and community leaders at township and state/division levels permits easy entry into local community without having to go through lengthy official approval processes. Because of the historical presence of Red Cross movement and RCVs in Myanmar, the target population is well-versed with the role of RCVs and MRCS works and it makes them respond positively with high levels of participation.
- **The presence of RCVs:** Being also part of the community, the involvement of RCVs in community mobilization helps eliminate any apprehension the community members might have and expedites the acceptance from communities.
- **Local knowledge of RCVs:** Be it a township, a village, a ward or a school, the local RCVs are usually chosen for management and activity implementation purposes. Their ready familiarity with the area and the people ease the tasks of dealing with the community and the authority as well as of conducting such activities as assessments.
- **Coordination of the local authorities:** When mobilizing the stakeholders, the RCVs ensure local authorities' involvement is encouraged through constant information sharing and consultation, especially in the planning and decision making processes. This encourages the authorities to take ownership of DRR issues and activities and to help lobby for greater community engagement.
- **Community willingness:** The willingness of community members is a key factor when it comes to the effectiveness of CBDRR programs. As has been shown in this case study, community participation is a key factor during several steps of project implementation. If the communities are not willing to spend their time and resources on the different steps of program implementation, the program would be less effective and would not yield any sustainable results.

Challenges

MRCS DM Division programs have to face and overcome a series of challenges discussed briefly below.

- One of the main challenges the DRR Program encounter from the outset is the short and limited implementation period of one (1) year per township. It does not give ample time for the community to familiarize themselves with the activities of a subject (disaster risk reduction) which is still new to Myanmar. As a result of significantly reduced induction and learning time, the interest of the population might not be adequately captured nor the local capacities sufficiently improved.
- Local communities are occasionally sceptical of participating as stakeholders in the process due to previous unfavourable incidents (minimal and inconsistent follow-up, etc.) and also they are not used to being consulted. It is thus a challenge to convince communities that their participation would lead to the development of appropriate interventions.
- Sometimes there is a lack of acceptance of the Youth Volunteers by communities; mainly due to their age and experience. Furthermore, their personality and occasional lack of appropriate manners were mentioned as hindrance to their acceptance.
- Some of the program areas are located in remote areas with poor transportation networks. This prevents frequent visits being made to the sites and getting acquaintance with the local population thus minimizing the trust factor.
- Under DRR program, VDMC are composed of people having specific positions in the community (household leader, village leader, etc.) majority of whom are men. In a patriarchal society like Myanmar, promoting women participation in VDMC become a challenge with very few women or none at all holding these positions at township and village levels.

Lessons Learned & Recommendations

- Effective coordination and communication with local authorities is an important factor in maintaining their support and participation.
- Community experience and knowledge on coping with disasters should be given priorities in formulating community level action plans.
- Having the volunteer selected through participatory process and demonstrating their capabilities can address the problem of low acceptance of youth volunteers by elders in the community.
- The stronger the participation of the community, the more enhanced their capacity, the greater the ownership and more assured the sustainability in the future.
- In capturing the interests of the community, games, campaign activities and social activities are effective.
- In theory, the community action plans should be renewed every single year preceded by repeat VCAs. However, that isn't done in practice and thus the advantages of doing so and the danger of failing to do so need to be highlighted more strongly.
- The RCVs are the catalysts in sustaining the success at the community level and strategies need to be developed to ensure it continues such as building other village youth as volunteers.

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CBDRR Practices is a series of case studies that illustrate good practices of disaster preparedness and mitigation undertaken by the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) with the goal of reducing the vulnerabilities and risks on the communities living in hazard-prone areas in Myanmar.

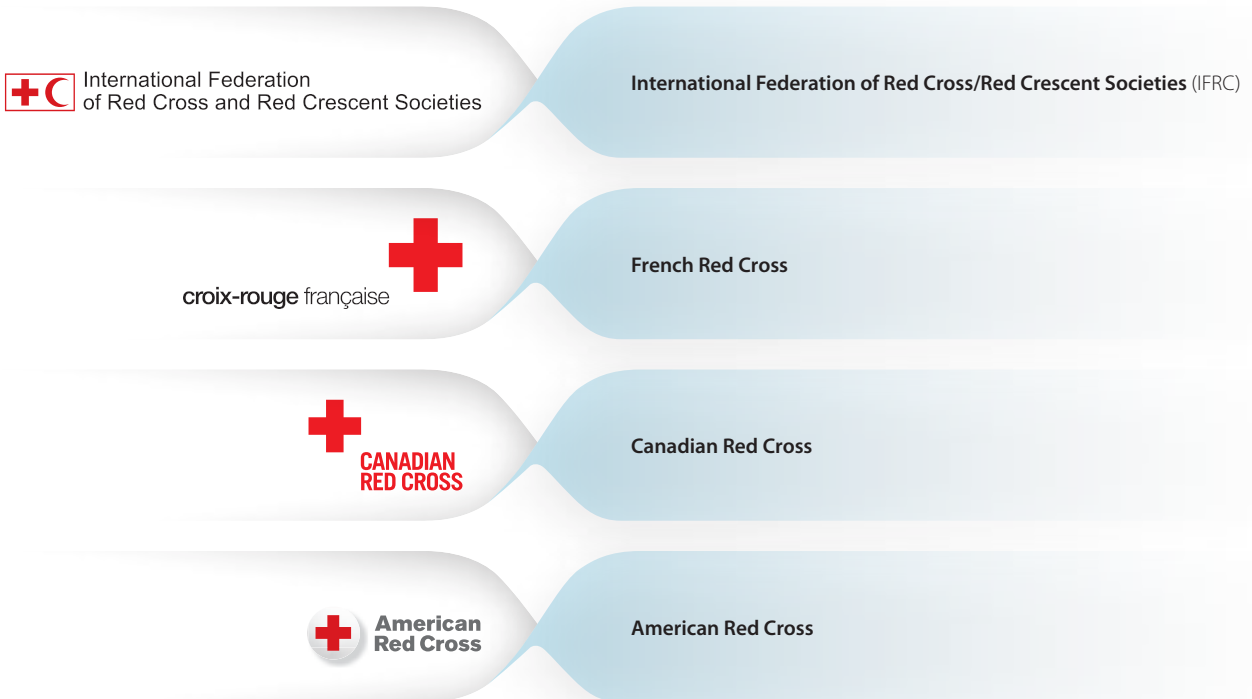
The series with 5 case studies analyse of real-life experience, good practice and lesson learns from the past activities of MRCS in more than 7 provinces and 39 townships in Myanmar. These include awareness generation, capacity building (NDRT/ERT), volunteerism, school preparedness, risk reduction activities in rural and urban settings, and mainstreaming DRM in recovery etc. This practice documentation is best used as a learning input, inspirational trigger and tool for replication.

These case studies are being developed under the initiative to develop CBDRR Framework for Myanmar by the Myanmar Red Cross Society with the help from the IFRC and the PNS such as French Red Cross (FRC), Canadian Red Cross (CRC) and American Red Cross (ARC).

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