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## Consolidation of Community Preparedness through Use of Games, Simulation Exercises and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Materials

### Summary

Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) addresses the need for developing a disaster risk reduction culture at all levels within Myanmar under its Disaster Management Division with the application of various communication and public educational tools such as organizing awareness raising sessions, distribution of information, education and communication (IEC) materials and conducting of drills and simulation exercises. Three major groups of audiences are targeted namely community/households, students and teachers and disaster risk reduction practitioners. This case study looks into the approaches employed by MRCS DM Division to improve the awareness of the target groups and draws out the enabling factors, challenges and lessons learned from the different activities.

### Inside Story

+ Disaster Risk Reduction Education for Public	2
+ Raising Disaster Risk Reduction Awareness under On-going Risk Reduction Programs of Myanmar Red Cross Society	3
+ Enabling Factors	10
+ Challenges	10
+ Lessons Learned and Recommendations	11

### Box 1 Township Selection Criteria

In the 2010 **Disaster Management Policy of MRCS**, community safety and resilience is clearly stated as a fundamental component and it is to be realized with the following measures:

- Organizing social mobilization events at community and school level to generate awareness about the hazards, vulnerability, potential risks and respective counter measures;
- Supporting 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; and
- Developing and distributing the advocacy and teaching materials.

*Source: 2010 MRCS Disaster Management Policy*

## Disaster Risk Reduction Education for Public

Public awareness and public education for disaster risk reduction can empower normal people everywhere to participate in reducing future suffering. The Red Cross Red Crescent has a long tradition of educating communities on disaster risks, increasing safety and resilience through campaigns, informal education, participatory learning and formal school-based interventions. National Societies, chapters and programs have developed a wide array of tools to support these activities (IFRC, 2011).

Working in disaster risk reduction field since the early 2000s, Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) has witnessed and experienced the devastating social and economical impacts of disasters in the country after actively involved in both small and large scale post-disaster operations over the years. The due recognition thus have been given to developing a disaster risk reduction (DRR) culture at all levels (decision-makers, stakeholders, community members, students, etc.) in order to reduce factors contributing to vulnerability. This necessity is addressed by MRCS under its past and on-going programs through various communication and public educational tools This is also in accordance with the MRCS Standard Operating Procedure which deems the development of different IEC materials on hazards, risks as well as possible counter measures is instrumental to maintain public awareness and interests.

# Raising Disaster Risk Reduction Awareness under On-going Risk Reduction Programs of Myanmar Red Cross Society

The five on-going DRR programs implemented under the DM Division of MRCS<sup>1</sup> share the common goal of creating a culture of safety at the community level which is – amongst others – achieved with the use of games, simulation exercises and the distribution of IEC materials in the communities. By and large, target audiences for DRR communication and

education tools of MRCS can be roughly categorized into three levels:

- **Community and household level:** to improve the DRR knowledge and awareness of the community members so that they can cope with disaster by planning in advance and working together as a team. The main messages to convey is what the community and each family can do to prepare for any potential hazard events. Trained red-cross volunteers (RCVs) customarily lead the process and provide any necessary assistance.
- **School level:** to increase the safety factors in schools which are often used as temporary shelters during emergencies and to create DRR savvy generations of school children. The tools used range from formal trainings, circulation of IEC materials, games, competitions, simulations and drills.
- **Practitioners' level:** to further strengthen the DRR capacity of MRCS' officials (HQ and branch levels), Red Cross volunteers (RCVs), affiliated government agencies and partner non-government organizations so as to effectively support DRR initiatives on the ground. For this particular audience group, appropriate advocacy and educational tools and practices are usually employed that concentrate on information sharing and additional skill building.

1 The CBDRM program is being implemented in different state/regions since 2008 funded by IFRC. In the next year (2013) the CBDRM program is funded by Singapore Red Cross. The UDRR program is funded by the Norwegian Red Cross Society as is the CBDRR program in Rakhine, Yangon, Mandalay and Shan East. Both programs are currently planned for a 2 year period (2013-2014). The CBDRR program in Ayeyarwady region is funded by Hong Kong Red Cross Society for 2 years (2013-2015). The DRR program is funded by FRC/CRC and is implemented over a 5 year period.



Billboard displaying various disaster preparedness posters

## Awareness Raising Activities under CBDRM and SBDRR Program

### Awareness Raising at the Community and Household Level

The Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) program is the main entity working directly at the community and household level. The very first educational activity the community is exposed to is when community members are selected for vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA). The **VCA Guidelines** developed by IFRC and translated into local language (Myanmar) by MRCS serves as the main reference material. The chosen community leaders are oriented on VCA practices and participate in the actual exercise along with RCVs and township branch personnel.

The VCA outcomes are utilized in the community planning and the education and communication needs identified under the assessment become part of the preparedness and mitigation measures. Based upon these needs MRCS provides IEC materials<sup>2</sup> for dissemination at the community level. When the community level disaster preparedness plan implementations are undertaken; the CBDRM Multiplier Teams are assigned with the tasks of conducting **awareness**

<sup>2</sup> Some of these materials are MRCS' own and some are modified versions of the materials developed by DRR institutions at national, regional or international level.

**Figure 1 Climate Change Fan**



**raising** sessions at the community level with support from local authority in coordination with Township Branch (especially with the Second in Command – 2IC) and the respective CBDRM-Coordinator. During the sessions, the community members are introduced to -

- **Storm booklet** that depicts basic information on country's susceptibility to storms and cyclones, how are they formed, their different strengths, how to understand storm warnings and what preparations at the household and community level can be carried out before, during and after a storm or a cyclone makes landfall; and
- **Climate change fan** that explains what climate change means and what impacts are to be expected in the future due to this phenomenon.

Table top simulations and **drills** are also organized in the target areas based on the needs of the community. For instance, fire drills have been planned under the Urban Disaster Risk Reduction (UDRR) program in South Dagon township of Yangon Division as fires have been identified as one of the key vulnerabilities in the VCA.

For a wider coverage, **disaster pamphlets on four major hazards** (earthquake, storm, fire, floods) and **monsoon posters** are circulated at the household level of all target

**Figure 2 Flood Pamphlet (inside page)**



villages. The pamphlets contain information on what to do before (preparedness and mitigation), during (response) and after (rehabilitation) each hazard and monsoon poster gives preparedness directions on how to understand and interpret the warnings: mainly colour coded (five colours with red indicating the highest danger). In target villages in Myebon township of Rakhine state, after receiving the IEC materials, the families have prepared personal emergency kits with encouragement from RCVs.

In addition to the residents living in the project areas, those from outside the targeted villages also benefit from the CBDRM program when four **posters on earthquake, fire, cyclone and floods** are displayed on billboards erected at public places and at busy road junctions. Similarly, the **broadcasting of awareness messages and short notices on radio and TV**: such as hand washing message shown on MRTV, MWD TV and MRTV4 and disaster preparedness awareness aired on Shwe FM and Patamyar FM radios, capture broader range of audiences all over the country. Furthermore, a DRR Awareness DVD Animation was recently developed under the CBDRM program which is especially useful in cases of illiterate community members as the DVD features audio/visual aid that is easier to access from some community members.

## Awareness Raising at the School Level

The school level DRR advocacy is chiefly undertaken under the School-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (SBDRR) program. The direct beneficiaries of SBDRR are students, teachers and headmasters of selected schools and indirect beneficiaries are parents and community members. DRR educational information is shared with the indirect beneficiaries through school level activities such as essay, poem and painting competitions and table top simulation and drills organized to implement the School Preparedness Plans (SPP) where community is invited to watch.

In terms of IEC materials, all targeted schools are furnished with **SBDRR manual** which explains in details the steps to follow in developing SPP, **four posters on earthquake, fire, cyclone and floods, monsoon poster, pamphlets on earthquake, storm, fire and floods, climate change information fans** and game pack that consists of **Risk Land Game (RLG) and Game 2**. Both games focus on drawing out the level of knowledge the students possess with regards to hazards and hazard risks. They are quizzes that ask a series of questions with yes or no answer. A scoring table is provided

**Figure 3 Flood Pamphlet (outside page)**



**Figure 4 VCA Guidelines (IFRC)**



at the end to determine how well or how little the person knows about hazards in general and how to reduce their risks in particular. Game 2 is relatively the same as RLG but contains slightly more complex questions.

### Awareness Raising of DRR Practitioners

At the DRR practitioners' level, MRCS has general branch communication guidelines, developed in 2008: one document that provides guidance for MRCS headquarter and branch personnel in performing their public education duties. Availability of DRR framework document, adapted from South East Asian context, VCA guidelines and CBDRM Manual, all produced by International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and all in local language, maintains the DRR interests and know-how of MRCS personnel and volunteers at all levels.

### Awareness Raising Activities under DRR Program

#### Awareness Raising at the Community and Household Level

Similar to the CBDRM program, the need to improve disaster preparedness knowledge at household level is dealt with by organizing awareness session in each targeted village to brainstorm and guide members on relevant and appropriate actions to be undertaken before, during and after a disaster. The **awareness sessions** or campaign consists of organizing games: **cabbage game** and **game box**, and distribution of **household disaster preparedness plan booklets, how to build safer shelter booklet** and **four vinyl Posters** each focusing on four disasters: **earthquake, fire, cyclone** and **floods**. The household disaster preparedness plan booklet contains summarized Household Disaster Plan forms for each of potential natural disasters: flood, cyclone, earthquake, landslide and fire.

Besides the awareness sessions, all heads of household in the village are invited to attend an initiation training, where the booklets are part of the learning materials, to explain to them how to organize their families for each kind of disaster. For heads of household who are not able to attend the meeting, those who attended the initiation training meeting will help

#### Brief explanation of "Cabbage Game"

The participating community members are seated in a circle and a "cabbage" is given to one person. While clapping, the participants are asked to pass the "cabbage" to the person on their left. When a facilitator with his/her back to the circle says "stop", whoever is holding the cabbage peels off the outermost layer of cabbage where a question is written. The second facilitator assists the person to read the question and come up with an answer. The game goes on until all questions are answered. In this game, some participants may have to answer more than one question. It does not matter if a participant cannot answer the question. Anyone who wants to try answering is allowed to do so. The main point of the game is to facilitate DRR related question and answer discussion among the participants.

#### Brief explanation of "Game Box"

Two boxes are prepared: one with sheets of numbers (altogether 26 numbers) and other with items that bear the matching numbers. A participant is then invited to draw from the first box of number and then to pick up the corresponding item from the second box. The items are usually household items like candles, matches, whistles, fried food samples or pictures of a thing or an action. He/ she is then requested to explain how the item can help to prepare for a chosen disaster (flood, earthquake, fire, storm) or to explain the picture and link it to preparedness measures that could be carried out.

Figure 5 Four vinyl posters on floods, fire, earthquake and storm



them to understand the forms available with the village disaster management committee (VDMC).

To test out the completed community action plans, the VDMC put into practice different measures or actions defined in the community action plans through a role playing process. The methodology is a tabletop **simulation exercise** which takes into account that the members of committees and their respective sub-committees are the only participants. To use this activity as an awareness mechanism, community members are invited to attend the session as observers. Drills are also organized based on the actual needs on the ground

such as in Min Hla Township of Bago (west) region where fire drill have been organized in collaboration with the township fire department giving the fire is the most devastating and most frequent of all hazards in that targeted township.

To a larger extent, education campaigns were held in five (5) townships of Yangon Division. The interest was to initiate disaster awareness mechanisms beyond the program's previous and current targeted areas. The turnout was very high in term of participation (almost 2,000 persons) and the interest shown was noticeable.



*School children playing the Risk Land Game*





## Awareness Raising at the School Level

The focus of DRR program at the school level is to build knowledge for headmasters and teachers and to develop awareness for students through the traditional pedagogic process as well as non-traditional fun activities. Headmasters and teachers are trained, initiated and oriented on school based disaster risk management (SBDRM) process with the help of **SBDRM manuals** in order to facilitate the organizing of disaster awareness sessions to students. Targeted schools are also introduced to new teaching materials on DRR; some of which have been developed by different organizations (UNICEF, UNICEF, ADPC, UNDP, etc.) and some others are adapted from materials (particularly the Risk Land Game) developed within and outside of the South-East Asia region. The different teaching materials used are linked to participatory and fun activities (games, songs and poems) in order to facilitate the learning process of children. DRR Games such as **Risk Land Game** (RLG) and Game 2 Booklet are donated to schools where RLG is introduced to grade 4 and grade 5 students. Since the games are kept in targeted schools, it will continue benefiting students year after year.

To consolidate and facilitate the assimilation of tasks considered in school action plans, practical activities are put in place through **table top simulations** (implemented with

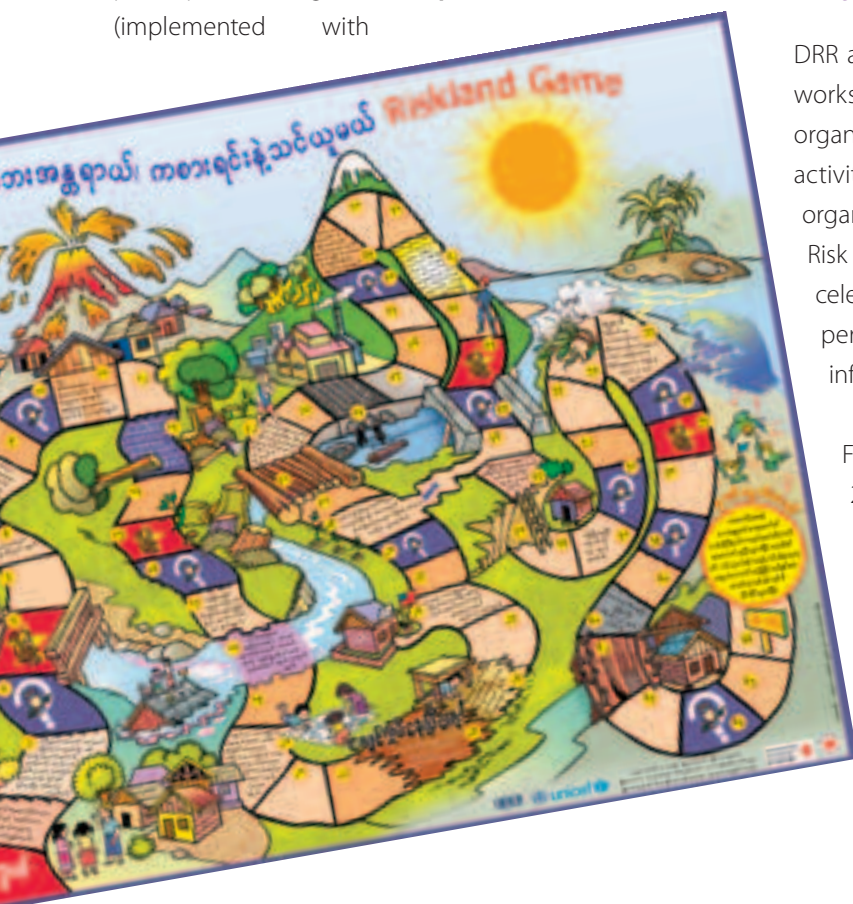


Figure 6 SBDRM Manual (IFRC)



SDMC members) and drills permitting teachers and students to be in real situation. To use this activity as an awareness mechanism, community members are invited to attend the session as observers. In addition, **mock drills** (designed in the DPRE Resource Pack) are also used as opportunities to engage or integrate students by increasing their knowledge through practical sessions and to make them aware of important actions they can undertake.

## Awareness Raising of DRR Practitioners

DRR awareness raising is pursued notably through forums, workshops, and meetings. In 2010 alone, the DRR program organized different events intending to advocate DRR activities in Myanmar: the DRR Forum, the joint workshop organized with ADPC on 'indigenous knowledge', the Risk Education Campaign, the essay competition, the celebration of the International DRR Day, all of which permit to exchange and share as much as data and information as possible to DRR practitioners.

Furthermore, the program has shared the RLG, the Game 2 Booklets, CBDP booklets and the Household Disaster Plan booklets with more than ten (10) organizations working in the DRR field in Myanmar. The use of these materials by DRR practitioners outside of program targeted areas is expected to extend the impact and consequently sustainability of the program on the DRR field in Myanmar.

## Enabling Factors

- **Availability of IEC materials:** The availability and accessibility of risk reduction IEC materials, MRCS' own as well as of other partner agencies, makes public awareness raising process highly effective. It allows addressing the needs of different targeted beneficiary groups and saves precious time not having to start the process from the scratch.
- **Usage of local language:** All IEC materials produced and used by MRCS have been translated into local language and it proves to be invaluable in attracting the interests of the community members on the ground.
- **Coordination with local authorities:** Strong collaborative partnership nurtured with the local authorities ease the entry into target villages. Plus seeking official permission for the awareness sessions, simulations and drills is simpler and trouble free since the local authorities realize and recognize the positive results that can come out of these activities.
- **Willingness of the community:** In general, populations of Myanmar are very receptive in terms of knowledge regarding natural disasters. The huge impact of cyclone Nargis on society has marked recent collective memory and fosters the willingness of populations to increase their risk culture.

## Challenges

- It is found that at times the available number of IEC materials is not enough for adequate circulation within the community like in the case of household disaster plan booklet. Some of the villages still have not received any posters. These needs to be viewed as lost opportunities and remedies need to be found.
- Although IEC DRR Tools have been validated by the MRCS governance, it is not clear if they have also been validated by national authorities. Such endorsements are crucial since the lack of it might hinder the distribution and sharing of such tools with government based institutions and the chance to reach wider group of audiences or to influence the decision makers.
- Existing IECs exclude illiterate community members from assessing the information. It needs to be ensured that IECs are valuable for all community members.

## Lessons Learned & Recommendations

- Some of the IEC materials are not utilized to the fullest of their potential such as family disaster plan booklet – in some areas they are distributed to each household and in some they are only used as reference. The impacts of such discrepancies should be studied and counter-action formulated.
- Household level awareness raising coupled with IEC material distribution and RCVs support can strengthen the household disaster resilience.
- Sharing of information and IEC materials with other DRR partners help increase the image and status of MRCS and at the same time improve the DRR capacity of MRCS staffs. At the same time it can extend the impacts outside the program areas and consequently enhance the sustainability of the program.
- In a state like Rakhine where certain hazards occur frequently such as cyclones and floods, it is relatively easier to convince families living in the area to be prepared than to persuade those living in an area where hazard occurrences are few and far between.
- There is a need to develop more IEC which also target illiterate. It was e.g. suggested to use more DVDs for awareness raising as well as cartoons instead of text in existing IECs.

## References

- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (2011) Public awareness and public education for disaster risk reduction: a guide, downloadable at [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/globalplatform/entry\\_bg\\_paper~302200publicawarenessddrguideen.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/globalplatform/entry_bg_paper~302200publicawarenessddrguideen.pdf)*
- Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) Disaster Management Policy 2010.*
- Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) Strategic Plan 2011-2015.*
- Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) Standard Operating Procedures.*

**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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