



## South Asia Link

July 2008

*A forum for the Red Cross/Red Crescent and its partners in South Asia*

### *Monsoon mayhem*

*Heavy rains, flash floods, storms and landslides continue to cause their annual devastation in many South Asian countries.*

*Volunteers and staff from the Red Cross and Red Crescent have been responding to the disasters by helping rescue people, distributing emergency relief and providing essential services, such as health care and clean water. Disaster risk reduction initiatives have shown positive results in alleviating human suffering. The South Asia region's pioneering Integrated Planning Approach -- which provides a holistic approach by combining initiatives such as disaster management and health & care – is obviously the need of the hour.*

*This year's destruction comes following two particularly harsh storm and flood seasons in 2006 and 2007. Last year, over 4,000 people perished in natural disasters, such as the SIDR cyclone and floods, while about 40 million people were affected in the region. 2008 has so far been an easier year but the monsoon season has yet to unleash its full fury.*

### **Al Panico**

(Head of Regional Delegation)  
al.panico@ifrc.org

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### Snapshots from this monsoon



*Residents leave a flooded house at a village in Kalenimulla, Colombo. (Courtesy: Reuters)*



*Schoolgirls cross over an uprooted tree with roads blocked across Assam, India*

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### Sixth DMWG meeting recommends a Regional Reference Centre

*Malini Bhattacharjee, International Federation, South Asia Regional Delegation*

The International Federation's South Asia Regional Delegation (SARD) organised the sixth meeting of the Regional Disaster Management Working Group (DMWG) in New Delhi. The meeting was held during 26 - 30 May 2008 in the Indian Red Cross Society's Disaster Management Centre. The forum recommended that the National Societies (NS) in the region should analyze the possibility of a regional Reference Centre which would provide a database for resources on DM issues.

The meeting's main focus was to develop the South Asia Regional DM plan for 2009-10 in a participatory manner. Based on the outcomes of the fifth DMWG meeting held in Sri Lanka in October 2007, emphasis was laid on the need for an integrated programming approach (IPA) in all DM plans. All country level DM plans for 2008-09 were analyzed and the DM priorities for 2009-10 were identified -- both at the country and regional levels. NS identified areas where they required support from SARD.

The event was supported under the 'Building Safer Communities' initiative by ECHO / DIPECHO and the Swedish Red Cross. A total of 30 DM practitioners



representing six NS' and



seven Country Delegations, the

International Federation's Secretariat and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) participated in the event.

The South Asia DMWG is a regional technical forum for DM managers of the Red Cross Red Crescent NS which was created in 2005. It promotes regional cooperation, knowledge sharing and capacity building among movement partners in the region. The previous DMWG meetings were held in Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka.

Inputs were taken for the development of a Regional Contingency Plan for the upcoming monsoons. Participants also provided their comments and inputs on the Global DMT Project and the Regional DM/ DRR Framework and the National Societies DM Plan 2009-2010. "The meeting provided a good opportunity for participants to share experiences and identify lessons learned, gaps and challenges with regard to their activities," noted Saidmaroof Sadat, DM Manager with the International Federation in Afghanistan.

A detailed update of the South Asian regional Well-Prepared National Society was provided on behalf of the International Federation's Secretariat. The Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre made a presentation on the development of a standardized community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) training curriculum for field practitioners of the Red Cross Red Crescent in South Asia, based on a training needs analysis report.

Finally, the meeting noted that since the DMWG is a forum for the NS, the NS should display more commitment, be pro-active and regularly follow up on the DMWG. It also defined the roles of the NS and the International Federation's regional office. It was reiterated that the role of the International Federation is to primarily provide technical support to the NS and facilitate their coordination.



### **IRCS vows to fight declining female sex ratio in India**

Amit Kumar, *International Federation, New Delhi*

According to the 2001 census there are just 927 girls for 1000 boys in India. The sex ratio has sunk to frighteningly low levels in the prosperous north Indian states like Punjab (798), Haryana (820), Himachal Pradesh (896) and Rajasthan (909).

Although determining the sex of a foetus and terminating the pregnancy based on the test results is illegal in India, about half a million female foetuses are aborted each year because of a social preference for the male child. (These figures are based on estimates from a national survey carried out in 2006.)

Statistics further revealed that one-third of the 12 million girls born every year in India die in their very first year and 25 per cent don't survive beyond the age of 15. To address this problem, the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) had organized a day-long meeting on "combating the declining sex ratio" at its national headquarters in New Delhi on 4 April 2008.

Addressing the gathering, the IRCS Secretary General, Prof (Dr.) S. P. Agarwal said, "Between the hundred years from 1901 to 2001, the ratio of females to males in India fell from 972 to 933 females per 1000 males. But in last 20 years, it has shown a steep decline." He attributed this due to the availability and

misuse of technology like ultrasonography and amniocentesis to determine the gender of foetuses.

To deal with this situation he advocated for an attitudinal change and stressed the need to empower women in decision making process. He lauded the success achieved at the community level in the north Indian state of Haryana. He said so far this is an independent project of IRCS at the community and at institutional level but support of external partners will give new impetus to its programme.

Ms. Sushma T. Rath, a senior official from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, informed the gathering about the legal provisions laid down to tackle female foeticide. She said, "In order to check female infanticide, the pre-natal diagnostic techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act 1994 has been amended to make it more comprehensive.

It has been renamed as 'Pre-Conception and Natal Diagnostic Techniques (*Prohibition of Sex Selection*) Act'. Punishment under the Act has been made stricter to discourage people from violating the government regulations."

A national level action plan on female foeticide was chalked out in consultation with the state secretaries. Major activities proposed under the project will include direct contact with people through Red Cross volunteers and the setting up of a female brigade at the district level. It was also proposed that strategic development plan 2008-11 should include female foeticide as one of the major activities of the IRCS.

The IRCS with its 12 million volunteers/members has the potential to fight the menace of female foeticide in the affected states.



### Increasing community resilience is **EVERYONE'S** responsibility!

*John Bales, International Federation, Maldives*

Until the unexpected onslaught of the tsunami of 26 December 2004, Maldives had little direct experience of major natural disasters. The tsunami cancelled out development gains accrued through years of patient endeavour, highlighting a need for comprehensive risk reduction measures linked to effective disaster preparedness systems. Ultimate responsibility for ensuring the security and welfare of its citizens rests with the Government but, in the fragmented, maritime environment of the Maldives, disaster management is the responsibility of everyone - not least the people of island communities, themselves.

The remoteness of island communities in the Maldives, access constraints to external support and a crucial need to be able to act quickly and effectively in an emergency require every island to be its own principle saviour, protector and immediate source of aid in times of disaster. Preparedness is the key to success – a community that has taken adequate steps to reduce its exposure to risk, ensured immediate access to appropriate resources when needed, developed contingency plans, organisational capacities to carry them out and routinely practiced emergency courses of action is more likely to be able to cope and respond effectively than a community that is unprepared.

Initiatives intended to reduce risk include:

- \* development of disaster preparedness and risk reduction plans and procedures
- \* establishment, testing and regular practice of secure and universally understood early warning systems and evacuation procedures
- \* strengthening of coastal defences and sea walls
- \* creation of strategically located protective structures – to provide places of safe refuge
- \* plantation of trees and other vegetation – to form windbreaks and tidal swell barriers
- \* rainwater harvesting
- \* change and diversification of livelihood practice – to increase the range of alternative economic opportunities and enhance household resilience
- \* introduction of locally sustainable and efficient waste management practices – to avert environmental degradation and protect community health

Disaster contingency plans provide a framework for emergency action – executing them requires access to specific expertise, skills and resources. An effective way to ensure these at island level is the establishment and maintenance of a core group of committed community volunteers trained and equipped to undertake designated activities related to:

- \* early warning dissemination
- \* raising community awareness of disaster preparedness issues
- \* evacuation and rescue
- \* casualty, damage and relief needs assessment
- \* provision of First Aid and psycho-social support services
- \* supervision of shelter/safe haven(s)
- \* harbour and boat safety.

Community based risk reduction and disaster preparedness initiatives reflect local characteristics and priorities but they should also reflect commitment to nationwide aspirations to improve safety and protect the lives of all people in the Maldives - to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience throughout the national community.



*The South Asia Regional Delegation of the International Federation covers  
Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka*

**What's new with you?**

Our Regional Communication Unit would like to know. This is your forum. Please help us to promote your activities. For editorial inputs/feedback please email [devendra.tak@ifrc.org](mailto:devendra.tak@ifrc.org)

*Useful Links:*

**Pakistan: Where even a single cloud raises old fears**

Almost one year after serious floods struck the southern provinces of Pakistan, many people are still living under tough conditions. The disaster affected 2.5 million people, more than 71,000 houses were damaged and thousands of people were displaced.

<http://www.ifrc.org/Docs/News/08/08051401/index.asp>

**Monsoon rains wreak havoc in Sri Lanka**

"Our volunteers have been working around the clock," says Merrick Peiris, executive director of communications and humanitarian values with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society. "Some areas can only be reached by boat and our priority has been to reach stranded families with supplies of cooked food and clean water, to help them through the worst period."

<http://www.ifrc.org/Docs/News/08/08060406/index.asp>

**To view the calendar of activities involving SARD,** please click: [SARD Calendar](#)

or visit

<http://www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=southasiard@gmail.com&ctz=Asia/Calcutta>

**South Asia Link published by:**

**South Asia Regional Delegation,  
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,  
C-79, Anand Niketan, New Delhi. 110021. India  
Tel: (+ 91 – 11) 24111122 - 27**