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Introduction

The people of Assam have lived with grave floods for centuries. They understand nature's cycle of flooding and traditionally cope with it by knowing when it is time to escape and take shelter in

temples, schools or on higher ground. Discussions with those participating in the disaster preparedness pilot project suggest that targeted communities are now starting to consider what they can do to reduce their flood risks.

"I am convinced that one more year and we will be able to create a wave of community action across the flood plains. During each training course I ask the participants to give the Red Cross 15 days a year, the full 24 hours in each day. Even if we retain 10 per cent of the people we have trained as active volunteers in disaster preparedness and response, we have achieved something that did not exist two years ago."

Chandan Chutia, Assam State Branch

Experience has shown that emergency relief assistance does not reach the flood-affected masses before three days. During this period of isolation communities have no choice but to cope on their own. This makes investment in community-based disaster preparedness and self-help a necessity.

The Red Cross experience in Assam underlines the importance of taking whatever time is necessary to turn awareness into action.

This case study is not an evaluation. Its purpose is to underline community-based risk reduction and building organizational capacities as important elements of disaster management. The case study also aims to serve learning by sharing the experiences of the Indian Red Cross Society in risk reduction activities.

India's mighty rivers

In India, natural disasters occur regularly due to the country's geo-climatic situation. Among all the disasters afflicting the country, river floods are the most frequent and often the most devastating. In a country of continental proportions, 85 per cent of the 1,200 millimeters rainfall happens over four months. Three great northern rivers, the Indus, the Brahmaputra and the Ganges, flow through India. The Indus, about 2,900 km long, originates in the Himalayas of western Tibet, flows through the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir state, then enters Pakistan. The Brahmaputra is about 2,900 km long and likewise rises in the Tibetan Himalayas. It flows through Assam state and then south through Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal. The

2,510 km Ganges, known as Ganga in India, rises in the Indian Himalayas and enters the Gangetic Plain northeast of Delhi. At Allahabad it is joined by its major tributary, the Yamuna. The main branch of the Ganges flows through Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal. A second branch meets India, near Kolkata.



Indian Red Cross Society and disaster preparedness



Established in 1920 the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) is one of the largest National Societies in the world, with a network of 650 state, district and sub district branches. Until 2001, the IRCS was primarily relief-oriented with isolated but effective experiences in disaster preparedness such as building cyclone shelters in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, construction of six regional warehouses throughout the country and establishment of a training institute.

Mr. Michael Siromony, a senior disaster management advisor at IRCS headquarters in New Delhi, explains that “because of continuous disasters in different parts of the country, our government made national disaster preparedness planning a priority. The IRCS as a key player in disaster relief also had to rethink its approach towards disaster management.

In 1999, the government of India established the High Powered Committee (HPC) to look at different disaster scenarios. In the meantime, the National Society created a disaster management department at its headquarters in New Delhi, consolidating disaster relief and preparedness staff.

The National Society also converted one of its warehouses into a disaster management centre, fortified the building against earthquakes and equipped it. Additionally, it pre-positioned relief stocks for 10,000 families in its north-eastern regional warehouse in Assam. Due to these measures and the performance of the National Society during the Gujarat earthquake and the floods in 2001 and 2002, the public and the government of India recognize the crucial humanitarian role played by the IRCS in disaster preparedness and relief services.

“What we have learned with the Red Cross is useful to us not only in relation to disasters but also in unifying our communities for a longer lifespan than a disaster”
Diphak Rabha, Goalpara district volunteer, age 20

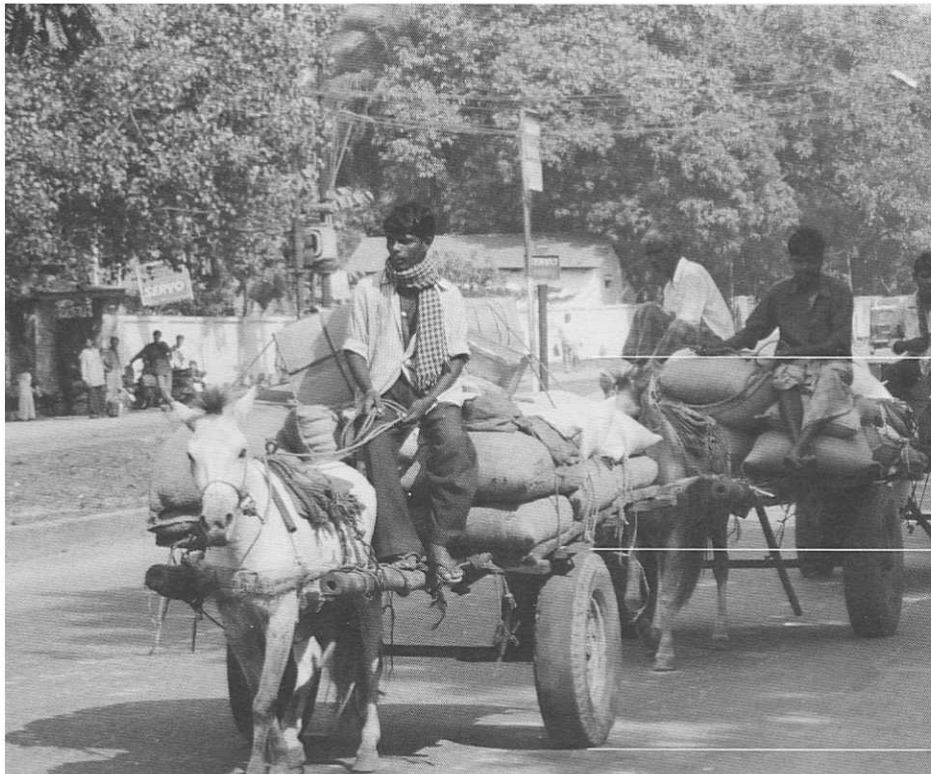
Making a case for disaster preparedness in Assam

The Brahmaputra basin

The Brahmaputra basin extends over an area of 58 million hectares over Tibet, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh and is highly prone to floods. The river arrives in India after emerging from the mountains and the hills, flows in a flat incline for 720 kilometres through the state of Assam, located in the north-eastern part of the country. The river flows east to west and touches almost every district in Assam until Dhubri at which point it turns south to enter Bangladesh.

The Brahmaputra basin's geology and climate have caused constant river channel changes and ongoing erosion. The water flow of the river depends on the intensity of the monsoons. Depending on the severity of rainfall the Brahmaputra can expand its bed up to five times during a flood. There are several principal reasons for floods in this region:

- There are increasing levels of deforestation in neighboring states and countries (Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet).
- Ongoing build up of silt deposits increases the level of the river bed and in many cases the river bed is actually higher than the surrounding farm land.
- Rapid increase in population densities which lead to settlement in unsuitable areas.
- Strong earthquakes cause landslides and lead to constant changes in the course of the river and its tributaries.
- The Brahmaputra carries an average of 2.12 tonnes of sediment per day adding to the severity of floods.



A double impact

During a severe flood, this main road in Guwahati, Assam, can soak under up to two meters of water when the Brahmaputra expands its bed. The source of the water is the monsoon rains and melted snow from the Himalayas, creating a double impact on the severity of floods in north-east India.

Floods in Assam

The chronic nature and the severity of flooding in Assam are well known, with the three greatest recent floods occurring in 1988, 1998 and 2000. Forty per cent of Assam's total geographic area of 7.54 million hectares was the flood zone until 1988. But after the floods of 1988 the size of the flood area increased by 62% per cent. Despite these facts, disaster preparedness was not a priority consideration for this region.

It is estimated that about one million hectares of Assam can go under water at least four times per decade. The state is also located in one of the most dangerous seismic areas of the world. These natural risks coupled with a continuous population growth (22.3 million in 1991 and currently estimated at over 26 million) make for awesome disaster scenarios in Assam. Although the state's main city, Guwahati, is a large urban area accessible by road and air, most of the state is made up of small and remote village clusters making access during emergency relief operations a colossal task.

Earthquakes

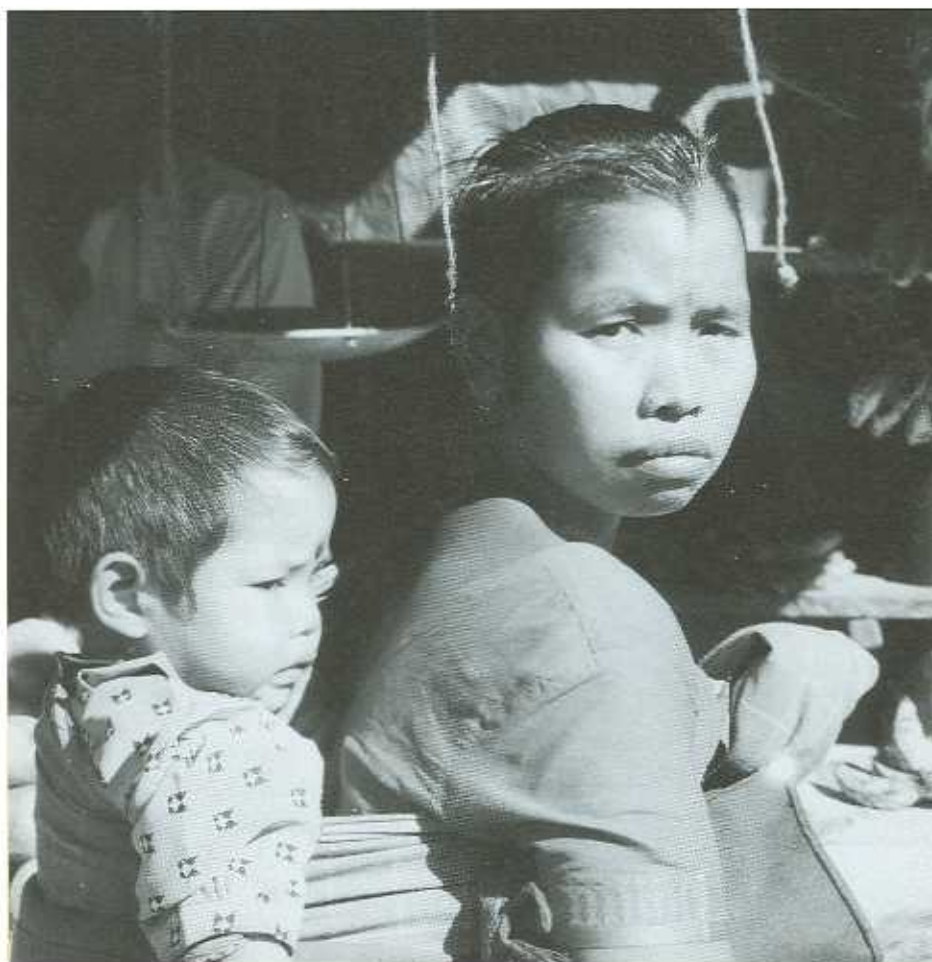
Over 26 million people live in the state of Assam in 23 districts, of which 20 are in flood zones. The area is also the seat of one of the world's worst seismic regions, resulting in a constant change in the course of the Brahmaputra. According to the government of India, between 1897 and 1993, north-east India had:

north-east region

200 earthquakes of magnitude 5.0-5.99
128 earthquakes of magnitude 6.0-6.9
15 earthquakes of magnitude 7.0-7.9
4 earthquakes of magnitude 8.0+

Assam's share of 7.0+

7.5 in 1869
7.6 in 1918
8.6 in 1950
7.2 in 1988



Natural disasters without borders

Disaster risks must be looked at based on natural boundaries and not the political map. Most people interviewed for this case study believe that their natural risk and social structures are very close to Bangladesh. The Assam State Branch central committee discusses enthusiastically what they know of the methods used in Bangladesh. Specifically they believed that involving women in community-based disaster preparedness, creating self-help groups and looking at grain banks as part of disaster preparedness and mitigation are all opportunities that remain untapped in Assam.

Pilot project objectives

The key objectives and related activities of the risk reduction initiatives in Assam are to:

- increase ASB capacities to prepare for and respond effectively to recurrent flooding, by training staff and volunteers, pre-positioning of relief material and development of a mobile disaster unit;
- reduce vulnerability to disasters in four communities, by training and raising awareness on risks, preparedness and mitigation measures and;
- promote lesson learning through documentation, videos, written case studies and participatory evaluation.



Setting the criteria for selecting communities

is an important exercise. The Assam State Branch identified the following criteria:

1. Flood affected
2. Vulnerability (health, education and economic status)
3. Population size of no more than 10,000
4. Compact areas with a maximum number of six villages
5. Proximity to Guwahati

A real-time evaluation

During the 2000 flood relief operations, the British Department for International Development (DFID) carried out a real-time evaluation of the International Federation's response to these floods. DFID made critical observations and offered a strong case for giving priority to disaster preparedness for the annual floods.

In their view, not much had been done to improve preparedness and reduce risks since the 1998 floods. The evaluation team argued that a greater priority should be given to activities that can both mitigate the effects of the annual floods and improve disaster response capacities. The real-time evaluation advocated for risk reduction as a primary strategy by supporting locally-known small, low cost and practical interventions.

The argument for disaster preparedness is strong especially since international relief assistance for flood victims is not effective because:

- assistance comes late and reaches relatively small numbers of people;
- India has a national law that prevents the country from asking for international aid,
- floods in Assam are an annual disaster of increasing severity and little can be done in the short-term to address effectively their underlying causes.

A case was made that as the severity of flooding increases, disaster preparedness is a practical way to minimize loss of life and livelihood in a timely and cost-effective manner. The evaluation team argued that "much of these preparedness measures are small in scale, such as strategic stock-piling of food and shelter materials, disinfectant and water storage containers, volunteer and management training, and improving local communications networks". As a result of the real-time evaluation exercise and its conclusions, DFID proposed to fund, through the International Federation, pilot projects in disaster risk reductions in seven countries including Assam, India

Organizing the pilot project

Changing the order of things

Although the Indian Red Cross Society recognized that disaster preparedness had to become a priority, when the time came to put a programme together, the National Society did not have the necessary experience to design a proposal in line with the donor's requirement. The International Federation's regional delegation for south Asia helped the IRCS to develop and to articulate their ideas as part of its efforts to raise the organization's capacities.

"The International Federation wrote the proposal and developed the initial logical framework for the National Society," explains Pankaj Mishra, the IRCS disaster preparedness officer. "There was a great time pressure to produce a proposal but we didn't have the capacities."

The International Federation's disaster preparedness delegate for India, Steve Penny, explained that although the International Federation had to write the proposal "we made it flexible enough to adjust it later based on the ideas, input and direction of the National Society. Our experience proves that following the logical order of each step in the process can not be the most important issue. The logical framework was adjusted twice and the result in our case is that the final project plan reflects everyone's participation, from the selected communities and state branch, to the National Society's leadership and the Federation team." (see annex)

"We had to work hard to introduce the concept of disaster preparedness and mitigation because our tradition is humanitarian relief. We decided that it was best to spend the necessary time to understand the concepts behind disaster preparedness. This created a delay for the donor's timeframe, but we needed the space to understand as an organization what is involved with community based disaster preparedness."

Pankaj Mishra

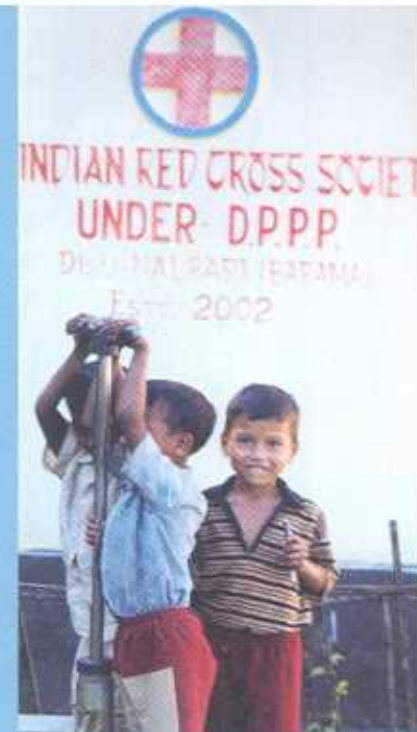
Expanding priorities

"We learn all the time because we are not experts. We don't repeat the same experience every year...and neither do the floods".
Mrs. Barkataki, honorary secretary of Assam State Branch

When the time came for implementing the project, the Assam State Branch had to overcome a set of obstacles. The branch did not have the human resources for programme design and implementation. It also lacked institutional experience in community-based disaster preparedness and mitigation. The process of addressing these gaps for both the Assam State Branch and the headquarters took approximately six months.

Material input for the disaster reduction pilot project

- Mitigation: flood platform, toilets, hand pumps.
- Mobile Disaster Response Units (MDRU) along with Assessment Kit including communication equipment, camping equipment and lightweight portable furniture. The purpose of the MDRU is to support completely National Society Assessment and response teams for one week without replenishment in an environment where there is no electricity, clean water, telecommunications and accommodation in adverse weather conditions caused by cyclones or earthquakes. The team would report back to the operations room in the IRCS Disaster Management Centre (DMC).
- Warehouse renovation for improved storage capacity.
- DP stocks for 10,000 families.
- Office infrastructure at the state branch and district branches.



This time was required for both the National Society's headquarters and state branch to adapt the objectives of the pilot project to the needs of the community and increase their understanding of community-based disaster preparedness.

When dealing with recurrent disasters that affect millions of people in remote and unreachable areas, community-based disaster preparedness is not only a preference but a necessity.

"When the flood happens, for the first two to three days people have to wait until relief arrives," explains Mr. Palash Naht, IRCS regional warehouse manager in Guwahati. "IRCS works closely with local authorities and gets involved as soon as access is possible." Because of the time that it takes to access the affected, increasing capacities of communities to cope is an essential part of disaster response strategies.

According to the World Bank, India has the highest concentration of poverty of any country with about 433 million people-over 40 per cent of the population, living on less than one dollar a day.

Today, the Indian Red Cross Society has expanded its priorities from emergency relief services to disaster management and gives due priority to community-based disaster preparedness and mitigation in states vulnerable to natural disasters (see India annual appeal 2003 at www.ifrc.org/global_appeal.)

Material needs

During the initial dialogue about this project the common question was: "What are we going to give to vulnerable people?" The question is valid. When there is a severe flood, it is ultimately material preparedness that will make a difference in rescuing people and taking care of their needs. The need for material input as part of risk reduction initiatives was not avoided by the International Federation's technical team. But before talking about material needs, what they decided to do was to create a process that could meet the overall goal of:

- creating awareness about disaster preparedness;
- establishing an organizational link between disaster response and preparedness; and
- reinforcing an infrastructure that practices disaster management.

Providing tangible relief inputs had to come hand-in-hand with the process of familiarizing the IRCS about disaster preparedness first. After the initial six months, the question was not only "what are we going to give to vulnerable people?" but "what can we do to help the people who are in flood areas to reduce their own risks?"

Assam State Branch

"The Red Cross in Assam is a family", says Mino Choudhury, Assam State Branch central committee member. "We walk, talk and do our work as a family". The Assam State Branch (ASB) is active in responding to floods every year. The branch is also active in health and care for the population through its clinics, hospitals and nursing school. In addition, the branch has two homes for orphans and offers these children care and education.

In the aftermath of the 2000 floods, the ASB knew that it had to expand its programmes and services beyond health and care.

“Our focus has always been on disaster relief, but after the 2000 floods we knew we had to prepare ourselves differently,” recalls Mrs. Barkaraki, the Honorary Secretary of the Assam State Branch. “When we were chosen to be used as a disaster preparedness model for all of India through a pilot project, we did not have a huge infrastructure, but a sound infrastructure that could accommodate the risk reduction project”.

This approach was necessary to give the notion of preparing for recurring disasters a chance to develop as an integral part of IRCS organizational and response strategies.

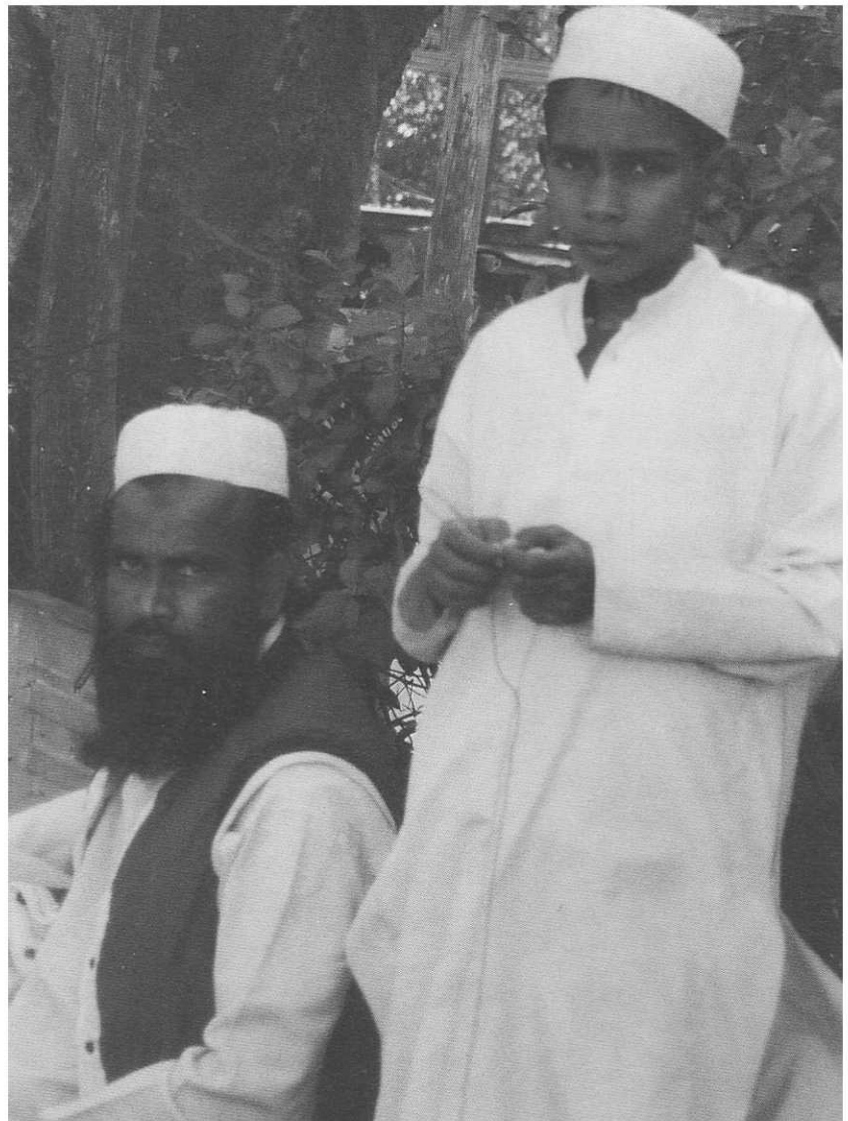
Once the project team successfully communicated the ideas behind risk reduction, the Assam State Branch adjusted its resources and committed the personnel required for the project. This move added a new dimension to the work of the Red Cross in Assam resulting in a change of the community’s perceptions of the organization. Jeuti Sarma, a 22-year-old volunteer in Goalpara district summarizes the view of the community as a result of the pilot project: “Before we thought nurses and doctors was all the Red Cross did. Now we understand the greater scope of the Red Cross in our communities, what it can do for us and with us.”

The pilot project also created a youthful enthusiasm and sense of initiative amongst staff and volunteers of the Assam State Branch, “I am convinced that in one more year, our group will be able to create a wave of community action across the flood plains,” says Chandan Churia, the disaster preparedness training coordinator for Assam State Branch. The branch team emphasized that once they understood the concepts behind disaster preparedness they were able to design their own strategies on how to increase people’s awareness and get them involved

As a crucial first step, the technical support from the International Federation focused on coaching the branch in designing and managing non-service delivery activities, and developing an organizational structure that could accommodate programmes as well as services.

In Balijana, Goalpara district, the estimated 10,000 people in the five villages along the river move inland and take habitual shelter in schools.

Most people here are Mohammadean migrants from Bangladesh and their livelihood is based on the rich and fertile land. Many of the young people in this area do not go to school but are expert swimmers and rowers who can be part of the greater rescue efforts during floods





Direct Direct dialogue Direct dialogue

A stronger case for direct dialogue between donors and local communities can be made when developing local strategies for risk reduction. Too often, the negotiations take place between centralized structures such as headquarters of donors and implementers.

Communities are often invited to come up with ideas after important decisions are already made about what to spend the money on.

In recurrent disaster situations when the risk is high and the aim is to reduce vulnerability, spending money on things that have an immediate impact is probably a more effective approach to saving lives.

This is especially true for remote areas, and donor strategies may benefit from appropriating a larger portion of funds for basic material input such as:

- material for construction of additional floors;
- upgrading warehouses where relief material are pre-stocked;
- hand tools such as shovels and sandbags;
- life boats, life jackets, jerry cans; and
- supporting complete relocation of a disaster preparedness and relief warehouse if the location is not sound, such as the Red Cross regional warehouse around Guwahati, Assam which has its back one metre away from a wall of eroding clay.

First aid as an entry point for disaster preparedness

In 2002, monsoon floods killed more than 780 people and displaced 24 million others in eastern and north-eastern states.

When the pilot project was initiated, disaster preparedness, as a concept or a practicality, did not exist in the work of the branch. What existed were health and care services and a tradition of training people in first aid and as nurses. The first aid training session offered the first opening for a dialogue with both the communities and Red Cross staff on disaster preparedness.

During training workshops on first aid, the pilot project team was able to discuss and to transfer knowledge about the theories and concepts behind disaster preparedness. The first aid training events also served as a starting point for the Assam State Branch to identify eight volunteers from the two pilot districts of Nalbari and Goalpari to undergo a training of trainers on disaster preparedness. The training of trainers covers basic and fundamental aspects of disaster preparedness such as:

- defining disaster management, preparedness and response;
- different phases of disaster management;
- explaining vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA);
- community mapping; and
- presenting mitigation and preparedness activities.

The group discussions on disaster preparedness during the first aid training courses generated curiosity about the subject and had a mobilizing effect. While this interest grew, the branch had sufficient time to translate from English to Assamese the necessary training material provided by the International Federation's regional delegation for south Asia.

The training modules have now been further developed to accommodate the context and culture in Assam. A small but important example is the fact that certain concepts in English do not have the same word associated with them in Assamese.

Community participation

Once the National Society's perspective regarding their role in disaster management changed, the challenge was to ensure that the communities understand their role in reducing risks and preparing themselves before the floods. Chandan Chutia best captures the collective thinking of people in his home region prior to the pilot project: "We have always been aware of the flood problem because no monsoon goes by without a flood in Assam. The majority of our people know how to escape. What they didn't know is that as a community we can prepare and mitigate."

The branch surveyed the targeted areas with a team of 20 volunteers. The volunteers conducted a vulnerability and capacity assessment of the area based on the training provided to them as a key part of the pilot project. The outcome of the survey was then shared with the communities,

As an example, the word 'vulnerability' does not exist in Assamese and the word 'community' refers to specifying religious or socio-economic groups. The Assam State Branch played the lead role in ensuring that such concepts were sufficiently discussed with the communities and that an existing word in Assamese is associated with various concepts. For instance, the term 'community' has been replaced with rural society

Motivation



Greater community motivation can be achieved by supporting activities that are important to the community and reduce vulnerabilities. One example is building water points at community centres such as schools and temples. Listening to the ideas of branches creates the environment for participation. The idea for raised platforms belongs to the IRCS as an appropriate local intervention for targeted communities.

The average cost for a 3,000 square metre platform, equipped with latrines and drinking water is between US\$10,000-20,000, depending on whether the land is purchased or donated. A raised platform of this size provides safety for up to 2,000 people. External funding for building these platforms is usually needed because of the cost of construction machinery.

When floods happen, schools and temples become the first shelter destination for villages and towns. Children's schooling is sometimes interrupted for up to two months. School

officials are strong advocates of building flood shelters next to schools so that children's education doesn't stop during floods. Another option is to build additional floors on the existing school structure.

Raising money in the targeted districts is difficult for the district Red Cross. This region has its share of armed conflict and asking for donations can be easily confused with asking for financial aid for rebels active in the guerrilla warfare in the jungles and can therefore threaten the organization's principle of neutrality.

encouraging them to participate in reducing their risks. The branch volunteers and staff also mapped out the demographic risk areas. Although the participants arrived with a relief perspective, the mapping exercise gave them the opportunity to understand that it is possible to prepare for and mitigate disaster risks without compromising relief services.

Since the communities were already aware of their flood-related problems, the invitation to join the training workshops was generally well received. Each time a training session takes place, often the entire village comes together to share flood stories, especially the elderly share their escape stories from great floods. Chandan Chutia underlines the importance of creating an approach that is relevant to their communities: "We weave into the flood stories shared by our people key messages on disaster preparedness. We have a therapeutic approach to encouraging participation. We do what we can to integrate elderly people into our meetings so they can share their stories from different floods...people still cry when they share their untold stories."

When resettlement is not an option

The people who live in these flood plains are ancient communities, deeply rooted in their ways and attached to their livelihood which is primarily agriculture. In addition, the sheer number of people, 26 million, excludes resettlement as a strategy. So the only option is to open dialogue with these communities to see what their views are regarding preparedness and risk reduction. The pilot project provided an entry point for the National Society to initiate such a dialogue with the targeted localities.

Once the concept was understood and people saw the possibility to do something to lessen their risks, the ideas came forward. The raised flood platforms under construction with support from DFID are one example of appropriate local intervention proposed by both the communities and the National Society. Other ideas which emerged led the National Society's headquarters to also focus on pre-positioning relief stocks and increasing preparedness and response capacities through training.



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Raised flood platforms

The raised platforms must be constructed on earthen platforms high enough to remain above flood levels. The earth is compacted and the sides of the platform are sloped and turfed with grass to provide structural stability and resistance to flood waters and prevent erosion.



The raised flood platforms under construction with support from DFID are one example of appropriate local intervention proposed by both the communities and the National Society.

The soil for building these platforms is excavated from the surrounding flatlands leaving large holes in the ground. During the dry season, these holes are often filled with water helping with small-scale farming, fishery or bathing.

The raised platforms can be as vast as 3,000 square metres and elevated close to 2 metres off the ground.

Some results in building local capacities

Performance

Because of the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, the Indian Red Cross Society already knew that disaster preparedness was a priority. What the National Society required was the technical guidance on how to link community-based capacity building to its overall disaster preparedness and response practices.

A concrete example of the benefits of investments made by the IRCS, DFID and the International Federation is the Assam State Branch response to 2002 floods. Compared to the year 2000 disaster, in 2002 the needs assessment took a total of three days as opposed to three months in 2000. In due time, a thorough evaluation of the pilot project will detail key elements that led to this incredible improvement. In the meantime, some of the reasons are already known: enough people were trained and actively participated in carrying out the assessment, and response stocks had been pre-positioned prior to the start of the monsoon season.

Civil society

The project team in Assam is positively surprised by the wave of community interest in disaster preparedness. The participants in both Nalbari and Goalpara districts go out and organize their own local disaster preparedness committees asking for Red Cross support when they need it. It is clear to Chandan Chutia that this project is linking people so effectively; “In our region, usually individual knowledge is kept within families, but now through the stories, the training and a true desire to take action our participants are connecting one family to another and bridging one community with another. We did not expect this when we first heard about the pilot project, but we are pleased about this unexpected outcome.”

Volunteerism

Sachindra Chakravarty is the lead person for the community-based disaster preparedness programme in Nalbari district. He has been involved with the Assam State Branch since 1997. He confirmed that since the initiation of the pilot project in the district, the community participates in most of their risk reduction work. “People participate with free labour during construction activities for latrines and raised platforms and the land is donated by the community. During the last flood, so many people came directly to our Red Cross office to volunteer with rescue missions and helped us survey the area, select the affected people. They even helped us manage the distribution.”

Ownership

Now that the targeted communities have been introduced to disaster preparedness and have been given practical tools, the district branches have asked for further training in disaster response. The project team in Assam believes that this is the result of witnessing a clear difference between 2000 and 2002 operations. The people involved with the pilot project agree that their training in disaster preparedness actually improved their effectiveness in disaster response. They also realized that while their rapid assessment was successful, the IRCS national procedures need to improve further to streamline bureaucratic processes to support the speed and quality of relief services.

Sharing authority

Another important side effect of the pilot project is the IRCS recognition that for any locally-based initiative to stand a chance for success, the organizational capacities of state branches to run community-based programs have to be given a chance to develop.



Local resources

The colossal task of emergency relief assistance for floods in Assam necessitates a close working relationship between district authorities and the Assamese branch of the IRCS. In Goalpara district, the authorities have loaned the Red Cross a building situated well above the flood zone for the disaster preparedness project. The IRCS district secretary for Goalpara is hopeful that the authorities will allow the branch to have permanent access to this location for both preparedness and response activities. This location is ideal as a meeting point for all emergency services in the district prior to and during disasters.

There is now an opportunity for the National Society to examine its procedures to ensure that the organization's centralized system is flexible enough to allow for quick access to resources and localized decision making during emergency relief operations. A decentralized approach delegates authority for use of resources, including money, to branches. This is a key element of organizational preparedness for an effective response to disasters.

Learning

Although National Society strategic plans are given great importance by the International Federation, it cannot mistake the absence of a completed written plan in the National Society with the absence of a sense of priorities. Paid and volunteer staff of National Societies, as members of their respective communities, are aware of the local vulnerabilities and have ideas about how to effect change. The risk reduction programme provided the opportunity to turn those ideas into solutions and put the decision-making responsibility into the hands of the people.

Clarifying the fine line between auxiliary and autonomy

Another lesson learned from the 2002 disaster response experience was the need to clarify the fine line between local government and the Red Cross community. The case of Nalbari puts this into perspective.

“Our flood disasters are too great for the government to handle everything alone. The Indian Red Cross relief services are indispensable to post-flood humanitarian needs.”

*Mr. Samria, deputy commissioner,
Gualpara district, Assam.*

In Nalbari, local disaster preparedness initiatives are now managed by a nine member central committee from three different villages as a direct result of the risk reduction pilot project. “We supervise the project and encourage our people to participate and to help the work of the Red Cross in our communities. We decided to form a central committee to oversee activities and prevent problems as a group,” explains the secretary general of the committee, Mr. Madhav Chandra Das. The committee’s membership is cross-generational and its members are civil servants and retired teachers. The key role of this committee comes into focus in ongoing inter-village initiatives for preparedness but especially during relief operations.

During the 2002 disaster relief activities, the community volunteers went door to door to select the beneficiaries and the final list was approved by the central committee. During a group meeting, the central committee members discussed their main problem during these operations. District government authorities made their own list and they then ended up with two different lists of beneficiaries. The government decided to use its own list and ended up distributing food outside of the targeted areas. “The government prepared its list sitting in their offices but we actually went door to door,” explains the committee’s secretary general. “We needed to find a way to coordinate and ensure respect for the independent survey of the Red Cross.”

To prevent this situation from repeating itself in future operations, the Red Cross organized a workshop for the community leaders and district authorities. The aim of the workshop was to create a peaceful environment where the difficulties of the relief distribution could be discussed. The workshop also helped to clarify the line between the job of the government and that of the Red Cross, especially for honorary members of the Red Cross who also hold government positions.

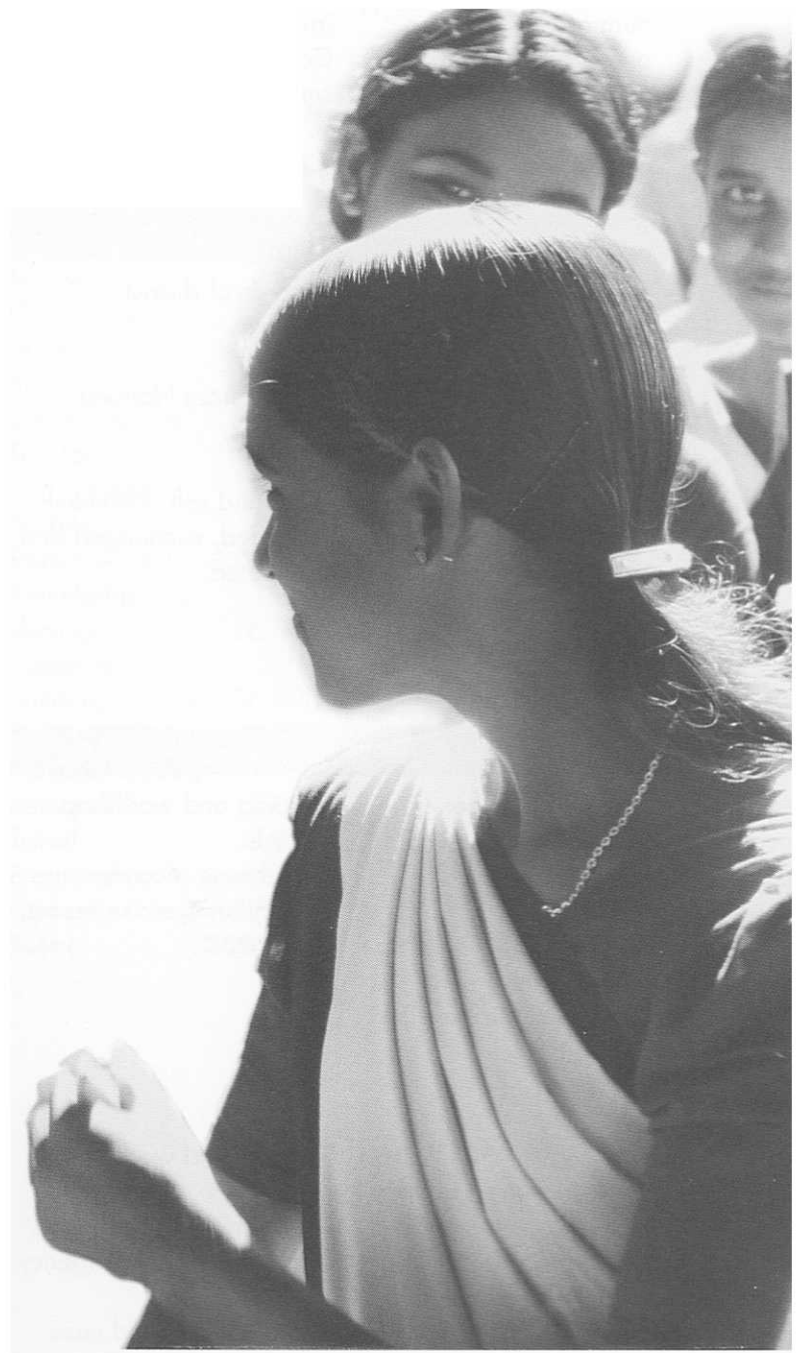
The committee acknowledges that the Red Cross and the government must work together for the benefit of people in need. They also recognize that often the local authorities provide them with a facility when they need one. But the community leaders also emphasize that when there is a disaster the government has authority over two vital parts of an operation - clearance of goods and transport of relief material.

The central committee reiterated that as a people they prefer “peaceful resolve of all situations on behalf of the collectivity”. Through the community-based disaster preparedness pilot project they have been able to participate in educating the authorities on the international responsibilities of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. They have now reached an agreement with the district authorities that in the future, when a beneficiary list is submitted by the community-based disaster preparedness committee, the government will not cut down or alter the list.

Reflecting on this experience, the president of the disaster preparedness central committee states that “finally all we needed to do was to simply educate ourselves, our community and the government authorities on the roles and responsibilities of the Indian Red Cross Society. It took time, but we believe that the results will speak for themselves during the next flood.”

“We learned about Red Cross procedures and principles. During the workshop we were able to discuss our situation peacefully avoiding quarrels and making sure that we cooperate for the benefit of our people.”

*The committee's president,
Mr Modhab Chandan Ras*



Annex Assam, India

Disaster preparedness risk reduction.

Logical framework

<i>Project summary</i>	<i>Measurable indicators</i>	<i>Means of verification</i>	<i>Important assumptions</i>
GOAL			
Strengthened disaster preparedness and disaster response capacity of IRCS Assam State Branch to further reduce vulnerability of communities during disasters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improved response time by Assam branch to disasters occurring in the state. ■ Higher level of community participation during disaster preparedness and response and improved quality of response by communities. 	<p>Lessons learned exercises.</p> <p>Programme review and evaluation with community involvement.</p> <p>Community ownership survey.</p>	IRCS national headquarters will have sufficient organisational capacity to provide leadership and link this project to a wider IRCS capacity-building programme.
PURPOSE			
To improve disaster response time to chronic flooding in the state, learn from these response programmes, and build community-based mitigation models on this learning experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Two district branches demonstrate an improved ability to develop warning systems and respond to disasters in a timely manner. ■ Four communities demonstrate an increased ability to prevent and mitigate the impacts of small disasters. 	<p>Records of district meetings.</p> <p>Reports from National Societies.</p> <p>Hard and soft documents produced, exchanged and distributed.</p>	Security situation in Assam continues to remain stable and the government of Assam cooperates with the state branch on programme linkages for information sharing.
OUTPUTS			
1 Strengthened capacity of Assam State Branch at state level to predict and respond to disasters in timely and effective manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased number of trained IRCS Assam branch staff and volunteers. ■ Mobile disaster response unit functional. ■ Increased stock level in Assam branch warehouse. 	<p>Training and workshop records.</p> <p>Warehouse records.</p> <p>Simulation exercise report.</p>	Investment in a branch development process is parallel to this programme.
2 Strengthened capacity in four vulnerable communities to undertake community-based disaster mitigation activities as	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Four communities trained in disaster preparedness. ■ Four completed community VCA and community emergency plans. 	<p>Training and workshop records.</p> <p>Community hazard maps and community emergency plans.</p> <p>Video, reports and case</p>	Active community participation.

<i>Project summary</i>	<i>Measurable indicators</i>	<i>Means of verification</i>	<i>Important assumptions</i>
<p>pilot projects in two high flood prone districts of Assam.</p> <p>3 Improved compilation and sharing of knowledge (community-based disaster preparedness) video, case studies, lesson learned exercise) within the IRCS and with other agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mitigation activities have reduced the impact of disasters on target communities. ■ One video and two case studies produced on community-based disaster preparedness and mitigation project. ■ Two lessons learned exercises documented. ■ Distribution and use of IRCS produced or translated disaster preparedness material. 	<p>studies. Post-disaster reports</p> <p>Awareness material in communities and with partner agencies. Workshop reports.</p> <p>Video and case studies. Planning documents.</p>	<p>Assam branch commitment to knowledge sharing remains high.</p>

ACTIVITIES	INPUTS			
1.1 Hire staff and equip disaster management unit in state branch.	<i>Project budget:</i>	<i>CHF</i>	Narrative and financial reports from IRCS.	IRCS capacity is not stretched by a major disaster in India.
1.2 Conduct training for IRCS Assam branch staff and volunteers in disaster management, vulnerability capacity assessment (VCA), project planning and management.	Community projects	64,000	Monitoring visits by International Federation delegates and staff, British Red Cross technical staff and DFID evaluation visits.	
1.3 Procure 7,500 temporary shelters (tarpaulins) and preposition in Assam.	Stock pre-positioning	55,500		
	Transport and storage	4,500		
1.4 Design and equip one fully resourced air-portable mobile disaster response unit (MDRU) with operation room equipment.	Mobile Response Unit	25,000		
	Knowledge sharing	16,000		
1.5 Use MDRU for training, and exercise the deployment through simulation.	Capacity building	36,000		
	Training	40,000		
2.1 Select four communities and establish working relationships.	National Society personnel	15,000		
	Travel	5,000		
2.2 Train communities in community-based disaster risk reduction methods.	Programme support	39,000		
	Total	300,000		

<i>Project summary</i>	<i>Measurable indicators</i>	<i>Means of verification</i>	<i>Important assumptions</i>
<p>2.3 Conduct VCA in selected four communities.</p>			
<p>2.4 Design and implement community risk reduction measures (community-based first aid and disaster preparedness, early warning systems and small mitigation projects) in the targeted communities.</p>			
<p>2.5 Link mobile health teams in Assam branch with disaster preparedness by adding disaster preparedness training in their programme.</p>			
<p>3.1 Conduct structured lessons learned and planning exercises (two for disaster response and two for community-based disaster preparedness pilot project) and develop these as case studies for future training and for sharing with others.</p>			
<p>3.2 Produce a video documentary on community-based disaster preparedness project in one community and use it for learning and sharing experience.</p>			
<p>3.3 Translation and production of DP material in local language.</p>			
<p>3.4 Coordination with governments and NGO's for training and knowledge sharing.</p>			

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary Service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



RED CROSS RED CRESCENT

the *power* of **humanity**



The *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies* promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people.

By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.