

Disaster risk reduction field sessions in South-East Asia



The IFRC's **South-East Asia regional office** initiated Disaster Risk Reduction Field Sessions for the first time in 2010 in Lao PDR. At the time of publication, five Disaster Risk Reduction Field Sessions had been held in South Asia, South-East Asia and East Asia by the delegation's Community Safety and Resilience Unit. Altogether, 104 participants from 22 National Societies across the Asia Pacific took part in these sessions.

Resilience the key

The IFRC is taking a new approach to building strong and resilient communities. Its comprehensive Disaster Risk Reduction Field Sessions are helping to build communities that can prepare for, adapt to, withstand and recover from external and internal shocks.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Field Sessions combine practical activities with theory to help communities identify and tackle critical vulnerabilities as they draw from years of collective experience.

The sessions were developed through "action learning" and "action research" with communities. Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies have been implementing development programmes for decades. These include:

- › community-based disaster risk reduction
- › community-based health and first aid
- › disaster risk reduction
- › water and sanitation
- › livelihoods and other programmes

National Societies recognize that combining these independent programmes can provide a collaborative synergy that optimises resources and opportunities. Such integrated planning improves programme effectiveness, addressing wider community needs in the event of an emergency.

DRR Field Sessions provide a foundation for understanding risks and their underlying causes, guiding participants towards appropriate risk reduction measures. Field Session participants enhance their skills and share their knowledge.

Field Session objectives

The main objective of a DRR Field Session is to create an integrated multi-sectoral development plan for building safer and resilient communities using a Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) tool.

It aims to exploit collective community strengths and the synergies found in the integrated programmatic approach.

The VCA practiced in the field sessions strives to bring together different people from various programmes with many skills to identify community needs.

It targets Red Cross and Red Crescent professionals and volunteers who have a basic understanding of the Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment tools, but minimal experience of working in development programmes.

Field session participants are taught two important lessons: Firstly, that the consideration of overall risk reduction measures contributing to community resilience is important, and should always be kept in mind. Secondly, that group learning maximizes knowledge sharing as participants simultaneously impart and receive knowledge.



Impressions of a field visit to a village in the Dahampura Community, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Active learning for ten days

A DRR Field Session is carried out over ten days. Participants spend three days in the field and seven days in the classroom. These ten days are made up of practical work, group activities and theory, in a workshop setting. The entire process promotes peer learning and enhances skills based on logic and reality. There are two scenarios in every field session. The first is a case study and the second is a real situation – one that places participants directly in contact with a community that needs assistance. These scenarios are designed to test and sharpen a participant's skills and knowledge about:

- › comprehensive assessment techniques
- › collected information and their systematic organization
- › translating processes from vulnerabilities into potential capacities
- › developing related strategies, and writing a plan of action

Collective multi-sector risk assessment practices drawn from integrated programming and reinforced with practical activities and structured theory, strengthen existing skills in the community. Through working with a real community, participants learn how to maximize Red Cross Red Crescent contributions to improving livelihood, water and sanitation, health and care and DRR. Eventually, when participants become active practitioners, they should be able to prepare their National Society for the implementation of effective resilience activities.

“We set out at midday on a particularly hot day on the outskirts of Colombo in Sri Lanka. Leading the way are a group of ladies clothed in colorful saris. The destination: their homes within the Dahampura community. As we enter the community, known by some as a slum, we see temporary housing, open drains, children playing in doorways, rubbish across the paths and people sleeping away the heat of the day.

Over 5,000 people live in the Dahampura community, which is about 10 kilometres from Colombo, and none of them have formal deeds for the land they live on. As we turn the corner, our team is dumbfounded by the sight of a rubbish heap the size of a five-storey building, covering five acres of land. As we approach the rubbish, the wind picks up and blows the smell and debris towards us. One lady, a community elder, turns to me with a big warm smile and offers her umbrella – a kind but near-futile gesture against the enormous mound of waste. We are on this walk to better understand what challenges face this community, and to develop activities jointly with the people to respond to these challenges. For the Dahampura community, the challenges include regular flooding due to water logging, high rates of communicable diseases and poor sanitation.”

IFRC Advocacy and Campaigns Officer, Jessica London.

Day 1	Plenary Session: Orientation and introduction of concept
Day 2	Plenary Session: Orientation and reinforcement of concept
Day 3	Plenary Session: Development of check list, review and preparation
Day 4 & 5	Field Session: Collection of information by using selected VCA tools
Day 6 & 7	Plenary Session: Information analysis, problem tree and objective tree
Day 8	Field Session: Triangulation of information; validation of problem tree and objective tree; identification of relevant activities
Day 9 & 10	Plenary Session: Information analysis, and lateral analysis of problem tree and objective tree



A DRR Field Session in East Timor

Learning and recommendations

The IFRC's South-East Asia regional office is now assessing ways to improve future field sessions. Topics and issues under consideration include:

- › Making community participatory assessment checklists more realistic and easy for a community to understand in order to develop a risk reduction plan
- › Focusing more on: capacity mapping, risk mapping, social mapping, seasonal calendar, historical profile, risk ranking and stakeholder analysis
- › Greater emphasis on a participant's need to understand local governments and local plans which are directly related to the community being assisted
- › Spending more time within the communities during problem analysis and needs identification

- › Developing a DRR Field Session Manual to scale up skill sets and support integrated planning at National Societies
- › Adding an e-learning module before each field session, to ensure connection between participants and facilitators
- › Adding value by providing participants with a unique learning opportunity for exposure to entry points within VCA investigations for discussions of climate risks with vulnerable populations; and follow up by working using a community-based approach within a community safety and resilience framework.
- › Facilitation, negotiation and advocacy have been identified as important required skills for participants for the sessions.

Dr. Bounma Xayasouk, a Disaster Risk Reduction Field Session participant from Lao PDR commented:

“This 10-day Field Session is one of the most important trainings in my life. I learned about the process and procedure of data collection and analysis and implementing community's problems into the plan in accordance with the facts of reality and local needs. In addition to learning community studies with the community, I also had a chance to share personal experience with other participants from different National Societies.”

“...many issues will be solved through this initiative. Especially the latrine problem since we identified a lot of issues here. Out of these, providing education to raise the awareness on hygiene among people is very important”

A member of the Dahampura community in Colombo, Sri Lanka



A DRR Field Session in China



Participants work in a group to analyze case study problems and related underlying causes. The exploration of relevant activities that can contribute to community resilience after the Disaster Risk Reduction Field Session is also encouraged. Photo: Disaster Risk Reduction Field Session in Sri Lanka, Community Safety and Resilience Unit, South-East Asia regional office, IFRC.

The way forward

The South-East Asia regional office is looking into developing a DRR Field Session Manual in cooperation with the Disaster Management Unit in the Asia Pacific Zone office. The three main topics to be covered in the manual are: (i) the integration of programmes and skills in comprehensive assessment techniques; (ii) a systematic way to compile information and data; and (iii) easy to use processes that facilitate the translation of vulnerabilities into practical capacities, including strategies and a Plan of Action at National Society level.

A resilient community is able to prepare for, adapt to, withstand and recover from external and internal shocks. Furthermore, such communities are also able to cope with social, political and economic disparities that contribute to vulnerability.

The Disaster Risk Reduction Field Sessions run by the regional office can increase a community's ability to recognize hazards and risks, but also capacities and strengths which can contribute to risk reduction. In turn, this process fortifies the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' partnership with vulnerable communities, local authorities, community based organizations and other partners.

Field session participants learn relevant practical skills that they can take back and apply within their own communities for the development of holistic, sustainable and community-driven initiatives to build safer and resilient communities across Asia and the Pacific.



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