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## Addressing the Needs of the Most Vulnerable Communities through Identification and Selection of at-risk Project Sites

### Summary

Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) is committed towards serving and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable population in the country and this dedication is reflected in both its 2011-2015 vision and mission statements. In every risk reduction programs, the very first step taken by MRCS in assuring the most vulnerable population is reached, is through the selection of most vulnerable townships, village tracts/villages, communities and schools. At each level, appropriate sets of criteria are established to guide the selection process and the process involves local level authorities at state, region, township and village levels, as well as Red-Cross Volunteers (RCVs) and key community leaders. Essential assessments further support the selection with the succinct information on risk and vulnerability levels of the potential target areas.

### Inside Story

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## MRCSS Strategic Approach in Addressing the Needs of the Most Vulnerable Communities

The commitment of Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCSS) towards serving and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable population in the country is reflected in both its 2011-2015 vision and mission statements which quote its vision *“to be the leading humanitarian organization throughout Myanmar working with and for the most vulnerable at all times”* and its mission as *“through its nationwide network of volunteers the MRCSS will promote humanitarian values and community-based initiatives in health and care, and disaster management to improve the lives of the most vulnerable”*.



MRCSS RCVs are carrying out the Initial Diagnostic Assessment

In community-based disaster risk management programs, MRCSS employs participatory approaches to ensure the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups are heard. However, before any of the participatory processes can be put in place, the very first step taken by MRCSS in assuring the most vulnerable population is reached, is through the selection of most vulnerable townships, village tracts/villages, communities and schools. Currently, MRCSS

has five community-based disaster risk reduction programs being implemented in selected areas around the country: Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM), School-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (SBDRR), Urban Disaster Risk Reduction (UDRR) and Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) and the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) program is also underway, overseen by DRR Unit, which was created in 2009 exclusively for this purpose.<sup>1</sup>

## Selection Process of Program Sites

At each level, appropriate sets of criteria are established to guide the selection process. They differ from program to program though it is not that substantial. Following sections describe in detail the selection process at different level and the conditions enacted around it.

### Selection of Most Vulnerable Townships

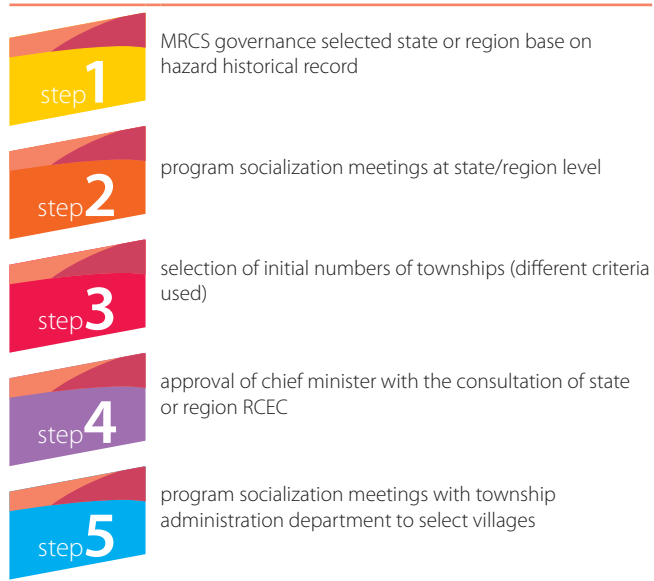


MRCSS Field staff discusses with community members to assess the situation in the village

<sup>1</sup> 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.

In all the risk reduction programs, the selection of most vulnerable townships begins with the review of hazard profile of states and regions in the country. The historical hazard records and hazard assessment findings, if available, are usually the key reference materials. Sometimes the short listing of potential states or regions is simplified by the focus of activity specific program on certain areas such as the DRR program which concentrates on reducing risk in coastal regions. The final decision on in which state or region the planned activities are to take place lies with the MRCS governance. Once the states and regions are chosen, before the implementation begins, program socialisation meetings are convened by MRCS to introduce the new program to the authorities.

**Figure 1 Township Selection Process**



The program socialization meetings also serve as platforms to discuss with the authorities and the existing MRCS state/regional Supervisory Committee members about the selection of townships. In order to be able to make an informed decision about the township selection, data is collected by MRCS which is then presented during the meetings at state/region level. Several selection criteria have been established to identify the most vulnerable townships which are explained in more detail in Box 1.

**Box 1 Township Selection Criteria**

1. Prone to natural disaster: Townships that have been affected by disasters in the last 10 years.

*Source of information: Township hazard profiles, historical hazard data etc.*

2. Township Capacity: Townships that scored with an A or at least a B during the Branch Assessment carried out by the OD division. This is to ensure that the township branch is already developed enough to support the implementation of a program.

*Source of information: OD Branch Assessment*

3. Commitment of the Tsp authority and RCEC: Township authorities and especially the RCEC need to be committed to the idea of implementing a program in the township. The actual program implementation is heavily supported by both the township authorities and the RCEC and therefore requires collaboration and commitment of both entities. Townships that do not want to commit should not be chosen as project sites.

*Source of information: consultation meetings with Township authority and RCEC*

4. Presence of MRCS and other DRR actors: Especially in the most disaster prone townships, chances are high that other DRR actors already implement programs. Townships which have not been covered by DRR programs implemented by MRCS and other DRR actors should be favored during the selection process.

*Source of information: consultation meetings with other DRR actors, project documents etc.*

5. Accessibility: MRCS has to consider whether it is feasible to implement programs in certain areas. In some cases, accessing certain project areas is maybe not feasible or not possible at all for MRCS. However, this criterion should not imply that hard to access townships are never selected as project sites. Time as well as budget constraints should be taken into account when talking about accessibility.

*Source of information: information about transportation costs, first hand experiences of RCVs etc.*

6. Socio-Economic status: Even though the socio-economic status of townships should not be one of the key criteria when it comes to township selection, in cases of two townships with similar hazard profile, capacity and commitment, the townships with the lower socio-economic status should be chosen.

*Source of information: township data related to socio-economic status (income, education, occupation, health, etc.)*

### Box 2 Village/Ward Selection Criteria

1. Prone to natural disasters: Village/wards that have been suffering from disasters in the last 10 years.

*Source of information: Village hazard profiles, historical hazard data etc.*

2. Community commitment: Communities need to be committed to the idea of implementing a program in their community. The community members play an important role in the program implementation. Therefore, communities who do not show interest in the program or do not seem to have the capacities to support implementation should therefore not be chosen as program sites.

*Source of information: Initial Diagnostic Assessment, interviews and focus groups with community members*

3. Accessibility: As already pointed out with regard to township selection, it needs to be feasible for MRCS to access a certain area. If the community is very hard to access (both with regard to transportation and communication) it may not be feasible or even possible to successfully implement a program there.

*Source of information: information about transportation costs, first hand experiences of RCVs etc.*

4. Socio-Economic status: Similar to the criterion for township selection, the socio-economic status may influence the selection of a project site. Especially when it comes to two communities that are similar in all other criteria, the community with the lower socio-economic status should be chosen as project site.

*Source of information: Initial Diagnostic Assessment, community data related to socio-economic status (income, education, occupation, health, etc.)*

The shortlist of townships that is developed during the meeting by state/region authorities is then handed back to the state/region RCEC which is responsible to identify the final set of townships in consultation with MRCS HQ staff. In order to increase the engagement of local authorities, the chief minister of the state/region is consulted as well to give his/her recommendations. Finally, the selection needs to be approved by MRCS President. The final selection of the program townships is followed by program socialization meetings similar to the meetings at state/region level.

### Selection of Most Vulnerable Communities at Village Tract/ Village Level

Deciding on the most vulnerable communities takes place essentially by identifying the most at-risk village tracts or villages within the already chosen townships. Detailed information about the selection process for villages was only available for the DRR program as well as the CBDRM program. Both programs are following a similar approach which could act as a learning opportunity for future programs implemented by MRCS.

Under both programs, the village selection starts with the program socialization meetings at township level. Together with the Township Red Cross Executive Committee (RCEC), Red Cross Volunteers (RCVs) and Township Authorities a list of possible target villages is developed based on the criteria in Box 2.

Subsequently, assessments are carried out in the preselected villages to gather additional information especially with regard to community commitment and socio-economic status of the community. While a specific tool has been used under the DRR program (the Initial Diagnostic Assessment Tool), the assessment under the CBDRM program mainly includes a field visit to observe the situation in the particular village. Based on the observations and/or the Initial Diagnostic Assessment, as well as the data available at township level, the final set of villages is then selected. Under both programs, the township RCEC in consultation with MRCS HQ is responsible for the final selection.



Community members point out high risk buildings in their village

## Selection of Most Vulnerable Schools

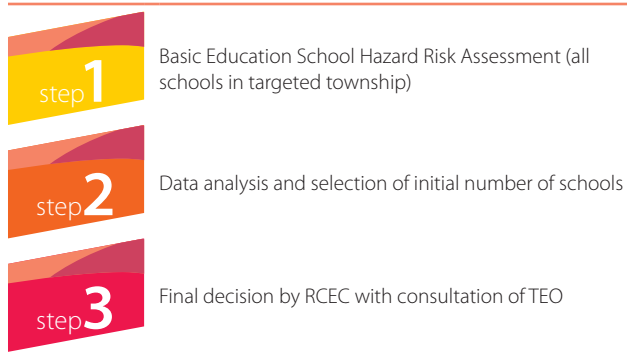
Currently, one stand-alone school-based program is implemented by MRCS, the School-Based Disaster Risk Reduction Program, and the DRR Program as well as the UDRR Program have a school-based sub-component. Two different approaches are followed under the two programs which will both be presented in detail in the following section.

In its selection process, the DRR Program conducts Basic Education School Hazard Risk Assessments for all schools in the targeted townships by distributing the standard form through the Township Education Officer. The assessment focuses on the potential hazards each school is exposed to, the type of school building, experiences of any hazards and their impacts in the recent past (especially interruption to teaching-learning activities), present level of preparedness (presence of a school preparedness plan, existence of temporary teaching location, etc.), support from the community (transportation arrangements for students, support from parent-teacher association etc.) and any past, present or on-going school activity to improve the awareness of the students on DRR. The completed forms are sent back to the Township Education Officer as well as to the MRCS HQ. The Township RCEC in consultation with the Township Education Officer then determines the final school selection based on these outcomes of the assessment. Special priorities are given to

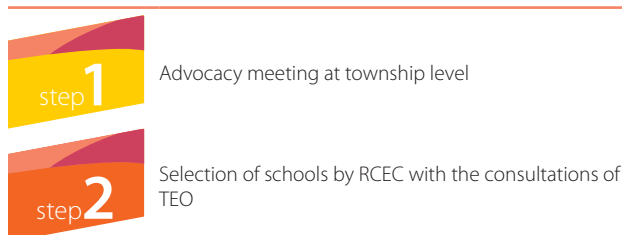
- Risk level - those schools with high risk level that frequently experience hazards;
- Building type and condition - the weaker the structure, the higher the risks;
- Level of collaboration with the community – those schools receiving very little support from the community bear higher risks; and
- Education process – those schools with little or no past, on-going or planned DRR related activities.

In general, under the DRR Program, 25 schools are chosen as target schools in each township; however, depending on the size of the township, more or less schools could be targeted. Important to note is that the selected schools do not need to be in the selected villages. Therefore, the village-based and school-based components of the DRR Program can be completely separated when it comes to geographical issues.

### Figure 2 School Selection Process DRR Program



### Figure 3 School Selection Process SBDRR Program



As for the SBDRR Program, no assessment is carried out at the school level. The Township RCEC in consultation with the TEO selects one school in each village based on two main criteria:

location of the school that it is located in a high risk area and the number of students registered should be more than 300.

Even though the UDRR Program implements several school-based activities, there is no school selection process in place. All schools in the targeted wards are targeted by the school-based activities.

## Enabling Factors

The leading enabling factor in the selection of most vulnerable program targeted areas is the extensive involvement of local authorities. The close working relationship MRCS nurtures over the years with counterpart government officials at various levels expedites any approval process and the access to official data sources since they are already familiar with the MRCS works and have faith in the ability and commitment of the MRCS. Furthermore, the involvement of numerous RCVs enables MRCS to have this extensive selection process. The whole selection process, especially on village and school level requires numerous RCVs who carry out the assessments and field visits and give recommendations to the township branch to pick the most vulnerable project site. Next to the human resources that enable the selection process, the selection process is well defined and guided by explicit steps as well as criteria. The well defined selection process ensures that the selection process is as fair as possible and ensures that the most vulnerable population is actually targeted by MRCS disaster risk reduction programs.

## Challenges

**Obtaining general consensus:** It is important that there is general consensus among the responsible personnel on how communities are selected for project implementation to ensure that the selection is not only fair but also warrants that the most vulnerable communities are actually targeted. Therefore, all concerned parties should be included in the whole selection process on a regular basis to ensure that they feel that their opinion is taken into account.

**Being impartial and transparent:** The primary concern for community selection process is that it has to be impartial,

solely placing the evaluation and conclusion on risk and vulnerability factors, and transparent so that no illicit activities or favouritism are involved. In the case that the implementation team encounters problems that are out of their control such as bad transportation preventing them from conducting initial assessment in certain villages due to poor transportation, these incidents should be documented in details as lessons learned and challenges.

**Avoid unnecessary delays:** It is vital to engage the township authorities from the outset of the program and gain their trusts and commitment early on. Furthermore, some unnecessary delays are caused during the program site selection when bureaucratic procedures prolong the issuance of approval letters at the outset of the programs. For instance, the selection of vulnerable villages get delayed when meeting dates for finalization of targeted villages are repeatedly postponed due to the unavailability of the township administrator and his/her team. A possible solution would be the combination of program socialization and program site selection activities. Keeping the number of official meetings at a minimum could decrease the occurrence of delays.

**Missing linkage between village-based and school-based activities:** Having activities in schools as well as villages at the same time under one program puts additional stress on the program field team of MRCS as they need to support and supervise several activities at the same time. Especially, when the schools are not based in the same villages which have been selected as program sites, the implementation of several activities at the same time in different geographical areas poses a burden for the field team.

**Obtaining historical hazard data:** The official records, if exist at all, are scattered among the different departments where loss and damage records are kept which complicate the data gathering process. Furthermore, the data assessment is only looking into the occurrence of hazard events in the last five years, which might result in overlooking the experience of large scale disasters that occurred before the last 5 years.

## Lessons Learned & Recommendations

- The participatory approach that is taken under all programs for program site selection where MRCS staff, government authorities and RCVs collaborate, proves to be invaluable since it not only lobbies the reception of DRR initiatives by the pertinent authorities, it also served as awareness raising tool for the involved parties.
- In order to be impartial and transparent, standardized assessment forms such as the Initial Diagnostic Assessment as well as the School Risk Assessment tool are beneficial. Using these assessments, the decision to select specific villages/schools becomes more transparent and is easier understandable for all stakeholders.
- A possible solution to avoid unnecessary delays with regard to the program site selection would be the combination of program socialization and program site selection activities. Keeping the number of official meetings at a minimum could decrease the occurrence of delays.
- Linking school-based and village-based program activities is regarded as beneficial for the success of the program. One key step to facilitate the linkage between the activities is by only selecting schools in villages/wards that have already been selected as program sites.



Community members and MRCS Field staff inspect an at-risk village

## References

- Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) CBDRM Implementation Guidelines (2009).*  
*Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) Disaster Management Policy 2010.*  
*Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) Initial Diagnostic Assessment Report Format.*  
*Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) MRCS-FRC Disaster Risk Reduction Coastal Area Program - Initial Diagnosis Assessment Form.*  
*Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) MRCS-FRC Disaster Risk Reduction Coastal Area Program - Basic Education School Hazard Risk Assessment Questionnaire.*

**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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