

#8
February – August
2014

Saving Lives Changing Minds

The newsletter of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Pacific Regional Office



Tonga Red Cross Society

A message from the International Federation

Dear partners,

Welcome to the 8th external edition of Saving Lives Changing Minds. In this edition you will read about the diversity of work of the Red Cross in the Pacific – from disaster response to water and sanitation, first aid, community health and development and the empowerment of young women. This edition also demonstrates some of the great collaboration with our partners; government, other civil society actors, regional organisations and multilateral organizations, combining our strengths to make a difference to improve lives.

I hope you enjoy the breadth and depth of activities presented here, representing a selection of highlights and a clear demonstration of the power of humanity.

- Aurélia Balpe, Head of Regional Office, Pacific, IFRC

The Movement in the Pacific

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is saving lives and changing minds across the Pacific, using its network of National Societies, coordinated by the IFRC and in partnership with the ICRC:

- Vanuatu Red Cross Society
- Tuvalu Red Cross Society (in formation)
- Tonga Red Cross Society
- Solomon Islands Red Cross
- Samoa Red Cross Society
- Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society
- Palau Red Cross Society
- New Zealand Red Cross
- Micronesia Red Cross
- Marshall Islands National Volunteer Group (for the formation of a Red Cross Society)
- Kiribati Red Cross Society
- French Red Cross
- Fiji Red Cross Society
- Cook Islands Red Cross Society
- Australian Red Cross
- American Red Cross
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Major events

Rapid response to sinking ship



Marine Vessel MGY sank quickly, killing four passengers.

On 11 July the Vanuatu Red Cross Society formed part of a dramatic response to the sinking of Marine Vessel MGY. The Red Cross acknowledges the quick work of both the Magaliliu and Lelepa communities, especially the leadership role played by community disaster committees – formed and trained by the Red Cross.

07:55 hours: Vanuatu Red Cross Society receives a phone call from the chairman of the community disaster committee. He informs the National Society that Marine Vessel MGY is sinking seven miles from the coast line between Hat and Lelepa Islands. A support vessel has arrived at the scene, but four people are missing. Witnesses are reporting cries for help coming from the capsizing ship. The Red Cross advises the disaster committees in Magliu and Lelepa to organize fiberglass boats from nearby communities to begin search and rescue.

09:00 hours: Four Vanuatu Red Cross Society officers arrive at Magaliliu landing, joined by the director of the national disaster management office, community members and chiefs. A scuba diver and helicopter is organized by the disaster management office, and boats on the west side search for the missing people. Red Cross provides two drums of fuel to support the operation.

11:00 hours: The bodies of four missing passengers are discovered inside the capsized vessel. Two are retrieved, but two cannot be recovered safely before the ship sinks. The recovered bodies are carried to Magaliliu where the women's committee takes care of the bodies according to local custom.

12:30 hours: Red Cross first aid officers and medical teams meet the 35 rescued passengers to check and tend to injuries and enable them to contact family members in other places. The survivors with fewer injuries are transported to the police station to make a witness statement.

14:00 hours: The police and disaster management office transport the two recovered victims to Port Vila Central Hospital for identification.

Major events

Smooth operators in Tonga



Offloading Red Cross supplies during the emergency response to Tropical Cyclone Ian in Tonga.

When Tropical Cyclone Ian struck in January, Tonga Red Cross Society's officer in charge of Ha'apai branch had been in the job for less than a year. Luisa Va'asi Palu left her five-year-old son in hospital and her three other young children with relatives so she could go to work.

For the first three days after the cyclone, the Red Cross satellite phone was the island's only communication with the outside world: luckily Luisa had time to charge the unit, which was donated by the New Zealand Red Cross. Air traffic controllers used the satellite phone to guide planes to land, islanders used it to let their families know they were safe and Luisa used it to communicate with officials travelling to Ha'apai.

As well as having a good supply of pre-positioned stocks, Ha'apai branch volunteers had just finished emergency response training, and the Red Cross had trained most district and town officers in preparation for disasters. This helped the operation to run smoothly, and everyone knew their role.

In the initial response phase, Luisa and 78 volunteers cleared roads, assessed the needs of the 19 villages and distributed blankets, tarpaulins, tents, mosquito nets, hurricane lanterns, kitchen sets, hygiene kits and jerry cans. For the next six weeks a core team of 54 volunteers helped with the recovery and used the skills taught by a New Zealand Red Cross shelter delegate to show people how to use shelter kits to repair their houses. Tonga Red Cross has distributed 400 guttering kits and is starting to focus on transitional shelter.

Luisa said that while families seem to be recovering, the emotional effects of the cyclone are still felt. She has noticed an increase in deaths, with at least 20 since the cyclone hit: on some days there are four funerals taking place at the same time.

Major events

Stress and coping



Tropical Cyclone Ian survivors are starting to talk about what they have lived through.

When people are ready to talk about what they have lost and lived through in a natural disaster, it can be time to reach out with psychosocial support, according to the Tonga Red Cross Society. Emergency response teams in Tonga noticed that people were deeply affected soon after Tropical Cyclone Ian swept through Ha'apai in January. "One family described how six adults and twelve children huddled in a small concrete tank for eight hours. The impact that this will have on these people will emerge over time," said Red Cross dissemination officer Polikalepo Kefu.

While survivors first needed practical relief to help them get back on their feet, Red Cross staff and volunteers knew that psychosocial support would make a difference over time. Psychosocial delegate Sue Sweeney was engaged by the Australian Red Cross to train Tonga Red Cross Society staff and volunteers – many of whom were themselves affected by the cyclone. Volunteers were introduced to crisis events, stress and coping, loss and grief, psychosocial first aid and supportive communication, supporting volunteers and staff, and community-based psychosocial support. The training ended with a role-play in a village where participants, including prison wardens, police and women active in their communities, practiced putting their new skills into action.

I believe in the work



Tropical Cyclone Ian survivors are starting to talk about what they have lived through.

"I am proud to work for the Tonga Red Cross Society and happy working with my volunteers. This is a very hard job - it's hard work and as a mother in the island life, being absent from my family has been very hard and it is not the norm in our culture," said Luisa, officer in charge of the Ha'apai branch, "I signed up to the job because I believe in the work Red Cross is doing and I believe I am the right person to do this."

Reaching further

Welcome relief



“The biggest problem is the loss of our food gardens – they will take at least two to three months before we can harvest our local food again,” says Agnes Guliwa from Ngalimera village. She and her husband John lost most of their belongings when their home was inundated with mud and floodwater: “Everything was floating – even the chickens and pigs were taken away with the flood. Many died but some survived and we found them stuck in the mud in the forest.” says Agnes.

Many food gardens were flooded and water sources contaminated. These are often the only source of food for families across the Guadalcanal plains. Only a third of the 1,770 households Red Cross assessed in Guadalcanal Plains have access to a clean water. While all homes in Ngalimera are still standing, every family has been affected. A Red Cross truck arrived at Agnes Guliwa’s village on April 30, bringing tarps and tools, kitchen equipment, hygiene materials, bedding and mosquito nets to 42 families.

Red Cross teams have:

- Treated millions of litres of water for evacuation centres and affected communities in Honiara, reaching 53,000 people.
- Treated water for 10,200 of the most affected communities in Guadalcanal Province
- Installed ‘tippy taps’ for hand washing in Honiaraevacuation centres and 50 more in other parts of Guadalcanal
- Provided hygiene kits and hygiene promotion messages to 12,100 flood survivors.

Long recovery after flash floods



The banks of the Mataniko River, Honiara

Families are starting to return to their homes in Honiara and surrounding plains after the worst floods in Solomon Islands’ history struck the capital in early April. The floods killed 21 people with more missing, washed away homes and property, and disrupted the lives of more than 50,000 people – 10 percent of the country’s population.

The homes of 2,000 people were completely destroyed by floodwaters and families face months of waiting to know when and where they will be allowed to rebuild. The impact can still be seen at every turn along the Mataniko River and in hundreds of communities affected in the Guadalcanal plains.

Help on the way



Bethlyn Tororo, with her children, opens a Red Cross box with much needed supplies in Ngalimera village, Guadalcanal Plains.

The IFRC launched an emergency appeal to deliver humanitarian assistance to more than 60,000 people over nine months. It focuses on safe drinking water and sanitation, shelter kits, essential supplies and hygiene kits, disease prevention and health promotion. Red Cross teams travelled to the flood-affected dirt roads in Guadalcanal Plains to truck in clean drinking water and relief supplies, where more than 40,000 people were affected.

Reaching further

Life skills for young women



School leavers learn new skills.

The Vanuatu Red Cross has finished the fourth and final workshop of its program Empowering Vanua Malagwelo (Empowering Young Women). During the courses, participants learned important life skills such as budgeting, using computers, sewing, cooking and first aid.

The workshops brought together women and girls from Mele Maat, Blacksand, Epau and Eton villages, focussing on youth who are no longer in school and do not have many learning opportunities open to them. The Vanuatu Red Cross hopes that, with further funding, it will be possible to run another round of workshops in 2015 to provide the same opportunities to more young women from Efate.

First steps to success



Following the course, **Daniella** from Erakor has sold a number of hand-sewn baskets and hand-painted island dresses and is saving up to buy her own sewing machine. **Melika** from Pango used her first aid skills in an emergency situation to stop the bleeding on her brother's leg before he could be taken to hospital.

A chance to rise up



A new outdoor education program on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island is bringing out the best in quiet kids like Jackie Kelly from Gisborne, who might otherwise prefer to play alone.

"I enjoyed walking to Cooks Cove, riding in the army truck and jumping off Tolaga Bay wharf," says Jackie, who was one of 26 children aged between 10 and 12 nominated by their schools to take part in the Rise Up – Tairāwhiti programme. Started this year, Rise Up is organised by New Zealand Red Cross, New Zealand Police, New Zealand Army and other organisations. It teaches a range of new skills, from problem solving to working as a team. Jackie has already put his name down for the 2015 programme and is excited to see what next year will bring.

Te Wharau school deputy Principal Linda Savage says her students that took part in Rise Up were still raving about their experience: "It's so good to hear normally quiet children absolutely buzzing and raving about what they'd done. The only negative thing was that the programme had to end."

Reaching further

Saving lives is our business model

First aid skills contribute to a safer community, and can also generate income for Red Cross National Societies. Ellis coordinates first aid for the Vanuatu Red Cross. Katherine Foster is an Australian volunteer, helping Ellis to turn first aid courses into an revenue stream for the society.

Why is Vanuatu Red Cross delivering commercial first aid courses?

Ellis: We want to continue building a culture of first aid in Vanuatu.

Katherine: And of course, having financial autonomy for the National Society is essential.

How is Katherine supporting you?

Ellis: She is guiding us to gain national accreditation for our commercial first aid courses – we will be the first organisation in Vanuatu to get this. She has developed our understanding of marketing, and how to use the tools we already have to strengthen the Red Cross brand in the marketplace.

What have you accomplished so far?

Ellis: We are introducing new programs to the portfolio. We have restructured our customer database, executed a marketing plan which has seen our commercial training turn profit and we are creating the first ever first aid manual in Bislama. This will make our training tools more relevant for beneficiaries and customers.

Any success stories from clients?

Katherine: After we trained National Customs, one of our participants was at a party when a child fell over and knocked himself unconscious. She was able to keep the scene calm and the child comfortable until an ambulance arrived. It's these essential skills that make a difference in an emergency.

What's next?

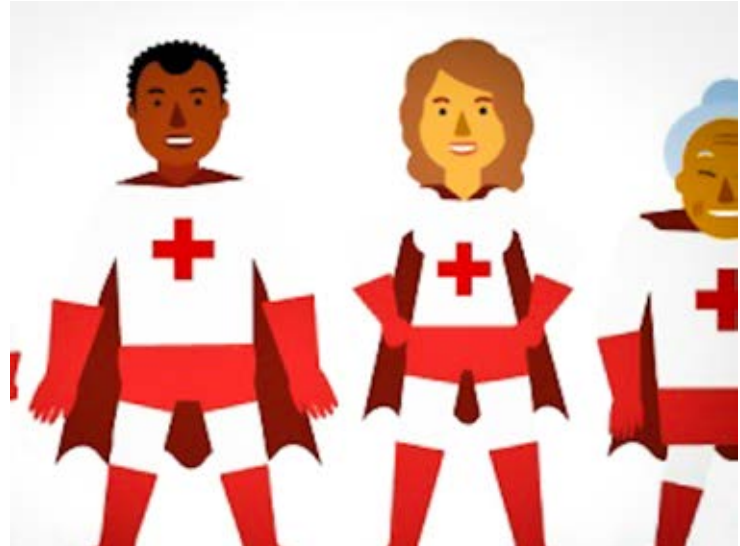
Ellis: We want to expand the courses we teach commercially, including specifically for people who work with children. We want to increase the number of trainings per month; and we want to raise awareness in all communities, to matter how remote, about the importance of first aid.

Australian Volunteers for International Development is an Australian Government initiative. Visit www.redcross.org.au/volunteeroverseas for more information.

First aid for domestic workers

The Vanuatu Red Cross Society provides tailored first aid training for domestic workers who have childcare responsibilities. The training offers people the skills and confidence to properly manage common childhood health problems, including choking, fractures, fainting and nose bleeds

Be a hero



First aid is for everyone, everywhere.

The Red Cross Red Crescent believes that first aid is more than just learning a series of techniques – it is an act of humanity. First aid empowers volunteers and communities to save lives without discrimination. With local people saving 90 per cent of lives after a disaster, first aid training is for anyone who has ever been – or will be – a bystander.

On 13 September the IFRC and National Societies highlighted the importance of life-saving skills in disasters and everyday emergencies. The theme for World First Aid Day 2014 was Be a hero. Save lives. First aid is for everyone, everywhere. This year the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement continues last year's call for first aid training to be mandatory in schools, workplaces, and driving license programmes, covering the stages of life where these skills can prove vital.

First aid and more



Vanuatu Red Cross Society is

building the skills of its volunteers. The two-day first aid training course also introduced volunteers to the main programs of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society, child protection policies and procedures, and explained the Seven Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Volunteers learned about the standard operational plan for rapid assistance to the most vulnerable during emergencies without discrimination.

Reaching further

Long-awaited reunion



Red Cross first saved Salah's life, then located his family.

A chance visit to the national office of New Zealand Red Cross has led to a happy reunion for one former refugee from Somalia. Salahudin Guled of Wellington was helping to translate for a friend using the Restoring Family Links service when he realised Red Cross could help him as well.

Salah came to New Zealand in 1992 under the United Nations refugee resettlement programme. His family is scattered across the world. For four years he did not know their whereabouts after his telephone was stolen. He had written to the only address he had, for his brother in the United States, with no reply.

Two months after filing the tracing request, Salah's phone rang. It was his brother in the United States, who had been tracked down by American Red Cross. "He got the Red Cross email, and he rang my mother, my sisters and brothers and gave them all my number. I had phone calls from all over the world – I was awake all night!"

My mother is nearly 80. For four years, all this time I was afraid – maybe she passed away. We talked for half an hour. I didn't want her to cry so I started making her laugh. She's okay, she wants to see me – it's been eight years.

Salah's siblings are trying to organise a family reunion soon, but in the meantime Salah says knowing his mother and siblings are all okay is fantastic: "It was a relief. I'm very happy."

It's not the first time Red Cross has helped Salah. In 1990 after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, he was stranded in the desert between Iraq and Jordan with 360 other Somali nationals, including children and pregnant women. They were without food, water or shelter. The Jordanian Red Cross Society and ICRC received reports of their plight and negotiated with the government for them to enter Jordan. The Red Cross took care of them until UNHCR could resettle them. "Red Cross saved my life when I was living in the desert. Red Cross are here (in New Zealand) and they have helped me again."

Short walk to the tap



New water tanks mean clean water is only three minutes away in Wurup.

Walking into the mountains for 10 kilometers to collect water is a thing of the past for many in the Wurup community in Papua New Guinea's Western Highlands. Wurup local and Red Cross volunteer Alex Dui realised a nearby source of clean water would be useful, particularly to women and children, after participating in training in community resilience with the Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society, supported by IFRC and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO).

He and his neighbours cut long bamboo poles, which they now use to pipe water from the mountains. Twenty community volunteers were then trained by the ICRC and local National Society branch and together they connected the bamboo to plastic pipes and installed two water tanks. One tank stores and distributes water, the other purifies water when it is dirty. Now, it's only a three minute walk to new water tanks, and the community is keen to work with Red Cross on future projects.

Reaching further

King tides bring new volunteers



Newly recruited volunteers distribute food aid in evacuation centres after the Marshall Islands king tides.

When king tides breached sea walls in the Marshall Islands capital of Majuro and nearby islands, flooding displaced 1,000 people. But there were also unexpected consequences for the newly formed Marshall Islands Red Cross Society.

Learning quickly, new Red Cross volunteers conducted rapid assessments alongside government teams, and received and distributed donated food and other essential items to evacuation centres in schools and churches. Along the way, many people offered to lend a hand – some of them from the local community college – and they mostly helped out in evacuation centres distributing goods. By the end of the week, 60 people had signed up as new Red Cross volunteers.

Lifestyle diseases on the rise



First aid trainees learn to assess community health needs and encourage behaviour change

Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and cancer now cause 80 per cent of deaths in the Pacific region. While health professionals are vital to treatment and care, experience tells us that Red Cross community health programmes can address a wider range of community health and social issues.

“When the community said they wanted exercise classes, they really wanted them,” says Danny Vakapora from Cook Islands Red Cross. “Everyone turned out. They took responsibility to start up the sessions and they organised a community hall.”



Australian Red Cross' Pacific Regional Health Program strengthens community-based health programs by training National Society staff and volunteers in health programming. When they know what communities need, Pacific National Societies can design, implement and support programs that encourage behaviour change in a way that is appropriate for local communities.

Reaching further

Durham to Geneva



Helen Durham (centre) is moving to an important new role at the ICRC.

In a series of firsts for the region and the Movement, Dr Helen Durham will become the director of International Law and Policy at the ICRC in Geneva from 1 July. Helen is the first woman to hold the position in the history of the ICRC and the first Australian to become a member of the directorate. Reporting to the director general of the ICRC, she will contribute to the overall strategy of the organisation. Tasked with reinforcing the ICRC's role as the global leader in international humanitarian law, Helen said she hopes to bring Pacific warmth and friendliness to the job. She will also strengthen humanitarian diplomacy and lead policy development.

Q&A with Helen

What are you looking forward to in your new role?

I want to bring the genuine warmth, friendliness and ways of working from this part of the world to the global context. In the Pacific we have rich experiences of working with governments, militaries and authorities and I look forward to applying this to the challenges that the ICRC faces in IHL.

I hope to bring to the table the experiences of National Societies – in particular the creative ways that we in the Asia-Pacific disseminate IHL. I'm excited to be the first woman to lead the international law division in the history of the ICRC. I will be the director of teams that include thematic lawyers, armed forces delegates, consult lawyers, the policy division and multilateral advisors. It's a big job.

How does it feel to relocate the whole family to Geneva?

In late June I will move with my husband, nine-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son. The kids are excited, though my son is a bit worried about no AFL footy. My musician husband Greg Arnold is interested to do some songwriting with the ICRC.

What will you remember most from your time in the Pacific?

I am honored to have worked for the ICRC Pacific delegation – as Head of Office for ICRC Sydney from 2002 to 2006 and legal advisor to the ICRC Suva regional delegation. We worked with governments to ratify treaties – including the Marshall Islands' ratification of the Geneva Conventions, a big achievement.

I'm very proud of the research that we conducted on IHL in the Asia Pacific through Under the Protection of the Palm. Another highlight was the time I delivered the IHL intensive course for law students at the University of the South Pacific Vanuatu campus. I learned as much as I taught!

Reaching further

How to wash your hands



Tuvalu Red Cross Society shows young students to be careful when they wash their hands.

Straight after a lesson in how to wash their hands properly, first grade students from Funafuti Primary School showed that they were listening with water and soap – then took their clean hands out to get dirty again at morning recess. Eighty-five young students in four classes heard the message about staying healthy by washing their hands in lessons run by Tuvalu Red Cross Society.

Red Cross also used the half-hour session to discuss climate change and adaptation, and what to do before and during natural disasters such as strong wind, high and king tides, drought and tsunami warnings.



Red Cross talks about climate change adaptation and natural disasters with students from Funafuti Primary School.

Water on the radio



A one-hour radio show about water awareness on Radio Tuvalu was a cheap and effective way for the Tuvalu Red Cross Society to commemorate World Water Day on 22 March, along with a walkathon and campaign drive.

Water is a big talking point in Tuvalu: rainfall is the only source of water and low rainfall since 2011 makes water security a big worry for people. On the one-hour radio show, partners talked about water safety and security. Presenters came from the water department, meteorology office, public health office, Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change Project and the Tuvalu Association of Non-Government Organisations.

Red Cross also took advantage of World Water Day to encourage people to check their tanks, gutters, pipes and taps for leaks during the wet season, look after their water supply and boil their drinking water. Volunteers also held a morning walkathon, then drove along the main road in Funafuti to promote key messages and share posters and stickers with households, shops and public areas.

Reaching further

Complex change takes time



Fewer one-off programs, more longer-term partnerships: report

In the last ten years the Pacific has moved away from single, one-off programs to longer-term partnerships for development, according to the Pacific Organisational Strengthening Report by the Australian Red Cross.

To better respond to the needs of the Pacific region, Australian Red Cross and its Pacific sister Red Cross Societies have adapted their programming, with teams investing more in reflections, reviews and evaluations to help provide evidence of what approaches work in particular contexts.

In many cases, this approach is leading to stronger partnerships and discussions about organisational development. In some cases, there are constraints and room for improvement: the report provides a critical analysis of what is good and bad for organisational and capacity development. To obtain a copy of the study, contact Donna: dwebb@redcross.org.au.

The programme

The week involved theoretical and practical sessions, including:

- The history, structure, roles and mandates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- The Movement's fundamental principles
- An introduction to the work of Fiji Red Cross and its change process
- A visit to an urban community project site
- Participation in the signing of the International Disaster Response Law memorandum of understanding between the IFRC and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- Courtesy visits to diplomatic missions
- Discussions on the role and challenges of Red Cross presidents and how to establish collaborative relations between management and governance
- An external session with the Pacific Leadership Programme

What does success look like in the Pacific?

The study identified 13 success factors for working in the Pacific:

- Long-term engagement
- A strategic approach
- Flexibility
- A holistic approach
- A 'grass roots' focus
- Realistic and joint assessment of capacity
- Projects developed based upon the capacities of supporting partners
- Initiatives based upon the comparative advantages of the Red Cross Movement
- Good coordination
- Strengthen the capacity of groups, not just individuals
- Provide assets, not just training
- Seek flexible long-term funds

Induction for four presidents



Behind every effective National Society is a strong governance structure. In February, four Presidents came together in Fiji to participate in the first joint induction week held for new leaders in the region. The week was jointly organized by the IFRC and ICRC regional teams and the chair of the Pacific Governance Enhancement Programme Working Group, Penny Mason. Penny is also a past President of the New Zealand Red Cross.

Participant feedback and the results of the pre and post workshop assessments demonstrated that the week was valuable for both participants and facilitators. Participants showed an increased understanding of the Movement and their roles and said that it was a great opportunity to share leadership challenges and discuss potential solutions with other presidents.

Reaching further

Low cost, low-tech, high reward



Marshall Islands Red Cross finds low-cost ways to get communities involved

Staff and volunteers at the world's youngest National Society, Marshall Islands Red Cross, have found creative, low-cost, low-tech ways to introduce the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and humanitarian activities to communities around the country.

Taking advantage of the IFRC drought response in Mejit island, local Red Cross staff and volunteers have organised:

- A free movie night: to bring people together for fun and a preview documentary about Red Cross.
- Safe water classes in school: which could be more useful if part of a larger school program.
- Wise water use: free biscuits, coffee and t-shirts were given to community volunteers for help installing new rainwater tanks and gutters as part of the IFRC drought response.
- 'Did you know' posters: shared in communities in English and Marshallese.
- Poster competition: to engage children and families in sharing information about the IFRC drought response and Red Cross.

Partnership in action

Drought response complete



The team installed 23 community tanks across three atolls and islands.

The Marshall Islands drought operation is now complete. The operation reached 1,764 people across all the three atolls and islands, exceeding the program's target. The successful response was the result of good collaboration between the Red Cross, Marshall Islands government, International Organisation for Migration, Secretariat of the Pacific Community Secretariat of the Pacific Community Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), and the WASH cluster

A lower than expected response to IFRC's emergency appeal resulted in revisions to the overall plan, budget and staffing structure. Logistics also proved challenging, particularly transportation and communication with the remote outer atolls and islands. It took days for people and goods to travel between islands by ship, and satellite phones were the only means of communication in many locations.

Major achievements:

- Detailed household level survey and beneficiary consultations to determine the key water and sanitation needs of the communities in each location.
- 49 household tanks and 23 community tanks installed, with additional repairs to other household catchments as required.
- Training on catchment installation and maintenance with volunteers in each location.
- Hygiene promotion and water-related information sessions with diverse groups in each community.
- Support for the official establishment of the Marshall Islands Red Cross Society. This resulted in the adoption of the Red Cross Recognition Act by the government, approval of the National Society's constitution by the Joint Statutes Commission, the election of an interim committee and recruitment and orientation of new volunteers. The new team was later mobilized to respond to a flood in the capital.

Partnership in action

Partnership to improve climate information and reduce disaster risk



Communities map their capacities and vulnerabilities.

The IFRC and the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) are collaborating to improve the way in which weather and climate information is delivered, understood and acted on, by communities living with the everyday impacts of climate change.

This partnership embodies the goal of this year's Small Island Developing States (SIDS) conference which is about the need to form genuine and durable partnerships for the sustainable development of SIDS", said Mr. David Sheppard, Director of SPREP.

"It is about strengthening community resilience by making climate and weather information relevant to the needs of communities living on the frontline of climate change. The Red Cross network allows us to engage with fishers, farmers and villagers on main and outer islands, who depend on weather and climate information for their livelihoods".

The Finnish-Pacific 'FINPAC' project is funded by the Finnish Government and administered by SPREP. IFRC and SPREP are collaborating to implement the community based component of the project which involves the creation of partnerships between National Meteorological Services and Red Cross National Societies in 10 Pacific Nations. They will work with local communities and villages to develop early warning systems and improve dialogue between disaster managers, meteorological services and end users of weather and climate information.

"Communities can dramatically reduce the risks they are exposed to by having a better understanding of climate change and climate variability including El Nino and La Nina and extreme weather events such as cyclones and tides. This is vital if we are to strengthen disaster preparedness and response at the local level", said the IFRC's Regional Representative, Aurélie Balpe

The project has already been initiated in Tuvalu and the Cook Islands. In both locations, consultations have taken place in partner communities as well as training in understanding weather and climate. The communities have identified their priority early warning needs and created their own action plans to reduce the risks they face.

On the island of Aitutaki in the Cook Islands for example, the Tautu Village Disaster Committee that has been formed will help their community monitor, prepare, respond and recover from disasters. The area is regularly hit by cyclones, and the Committee will motivate the community to take action and take measures to ensure their health and safety such as alert neighbours, evacuate schools and prepare their houses for extreme winds.

Goals

Climate and disaster resilience planning workshops will provide communities with:

- Improved understanding of their vulnerabilities and capacities
- Improved understanding of weather and climate information
- Prioritised weather and climate information needs and recommendations for communication methods
- A clear and achievable community climate and disaster resilience plan
- A pilot project that seeks to improve weather and climate services

Partners

The Government of Finland and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme with:

- IFRC
- Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre
- Pacific Red Cross National Societies University of the South Pacific Pacific Island communities
- National disaster management offices
- Other national and local civil society actors

Partnership in action

FINPAC pilot story: Teone, Tuvalu



Teone is an informal settlement of 80 households living on the coral atoll of Funafuti. Following a baseline survey and participatory assessment, the people of Teone were found to be regularly impacted by storm surges from the west, coastal flooding from the east and vulnerable to droughts that affect their health, safety and livelihoods.

The Tuvalu Red Cross worked inclusively with the community, including older men and women, youth and people with disabilities, to develop an action plan. This plan addresses health, livelihoods, capacity development, early warning, disaster preparedness and water and sanitation.

A community committee will oversee the implementation of the action plan and further develop the adaptation plan with the support of the Tuvalu Red Cross, Tuvalu National Disaster Management Office and Tuvalu Meteorological Service.

Teone's priority actions:

- Construct communal water storage system to address water shortages
- Replace roofing iron with plastic roofing to stop rust from contaminating harvested water
- Maintain household guttering systems
- Construct composting toilets
- Procure waste bins for compost and recyclable waste
- Organize regular community clean-up campaign involving the whole community
- Plant trees and promote home gardening to prevent coastal erosion and protect against high level swells where salt water is affecting homes
- With support of the Taiwan Greenhouse Garden Project, provide vegetable seedlings and technical support. This will promote the eating of home-grown vegetables in order to reduce non-communicable disease

Early birds prepare for disaster



The Red Cross promotes early warning and preparedness across the Pacific. Six communities in northern Fiji are better prepared for flood and cyclone seasons after three months of hard work with the Fiji Red Cross Society to enhance their early warning systems. Vulnerable communities in Vanua Levu worked with the National Society disaster team to strengthen their resilience, identify safe routes and evacuation sites. The team also installed rain gauges in villages and gave training on how to respond to warning sounds.

Village disaster committees will implement the training and work with their communities to activate their early warning plans before each cyclone and flooding season. Red Cross supported these committees to buy tabards, hailers, whistles and helmets to make it easier to assist vulnerable people during evacuations. Disaster drills were carried out as part of monitoring and evaluation of the training, made possible by grants from the Asia Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO).

Partnership in action

Training for shelter cluster

Government and non-government participants worked together to construct emergency shelters in Samoa in July, though fortunately there was no disaster taking place. Rather it was an exercise to strengthen the emergency shelter cluster and evacuation centre management.

Using basic materials and a tool kit, trainees gained practical experience erecting shelters. They learned to manage evacuation centres and evaluate their suitability. Participants considered the SPHERE minimum guidelines for humanitarian response and discussed ways that national and international partners can work together to reduce duplication in response and recovery efforts.

The five-day course was the first of its kind in the region. It was attended by 23 representatives from the Government of Samoa, non-government organisation and faith based organisation. There were also three guest participants from Fiji and Solomon Islands governments and Fiji Habitat for Humanity.

The IFRC and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) partnered to deliver the course with the Samoa disaster management office and Samoa Red Cross Society. It was supported by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) and the Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific project, funded by the partnership of Africa, Caribbean, Pacific countries and the European Union (ACP-EU). Following the enthusiastic response, it is hoped that this will be the first of many such initiatives.

Communities ready



Disaster preparedness takes place at the regional, national and local level. Two communities in the Federated States of Micronesia are better prepared for disaster and more able to offer first aid when it's needed, thanks to recent training by the Micronesia Red Cross Society.

Twenty-one participants from Sokehs and Nett municipalities, including government officials, completed the two five-day training courses. This is the first time that the National Society has combined training in community disaster response in the same session with first aid. This is an important step toward strengthening this combination of core skills that are often used by staff and volunteers during disaster response operations.

The gift of blood



Jason Joseph receives an award for 17 blood donations in recent years.

In many countries it is believed that people only give blood for friends and family. However, most people donate blood for any person who is fighting to survive. The Samoa Red Cross Society health unit celebrated these vital volunteers on World Blood Donor Day 2014 with the theme Safe Blood For Saving Mothers.

The 2014 Blood Donor Award ceremony was held at the National Society's new headquarters in Tuanaimato, to recognize all regular blood donors. The ceremony is an important event in the Samoan calendar, helping donors to feel good about their contribution and encouraging further donations to save more lives.

Partnership in action

A silent disaster in Fiji



Fiji Red Cross Society works directly with families to combat dengue fever.

Anne-Maree Delaney is an IFRC delegate seconded from New Zealand. Initially deployed to support cyclone season preparations, she quickly found herself responding to an epidemic of dengue fever. Here is Anne-Maree's story:

I've been working in Suva for the IFRC since December last year. Little did I know my arrival coincided with the beginnings of one of Fiji's largest dengue fever outbreaks.

Back in December I was more interested in cyclones. I'd come as 'surge support' for the disaster management team during the annual cyclone season. Pretty soon our team was busy supporting Tonga Red Cross Society with its response to Tropical Cyclone Ian in January.

Meanwhile here in Fiji a silent disaster was occurring. Dengue fever was affecting the lives of many Fijians, causing illness and death. I supported the Fiji Red Cross to prepare its Dengue plan of action and secure funding for its activities. The plan aims to reach 75,000 people in 137 communities and involves 130 volunteers.

Fiji Red Cross teams of volunteers were quickly deployed across the country to dengue 'hotspot' villages identified by the ministry of health. Volunteers carry out door to door visits, delivering Ministry of Health brochures, talking with people about the signs and symptoms of dengue, giving simple treatment advice and referring sick people to health centres. The volunteers also take part in dengue prevention by helping with community clean-up activities and larvicide treatment.

I heard today that the Fiji Red Cross Suva branch team leader has now visited 52 villages. This shows the dedication and commitment of these amazing volunteers who are really making a difference to people's lives with this programme.

The New Zealand Red Cross delegate programme has been running since 1960. It is currently supported by funding from New Zealand Aid Programme through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

It was great to be able to visit Naqali village with the Fiji Red Cross Suva branch volunteers and see them in action. People invited us in to sit with them while our volunteer Marica explained the signs and symptoms of dengue and simple treatment. Many people said they or one of their family had experienced dengue in the last few months. Maria talked to people about recognising and destroying potential mosquito breeding grounds on their property, and made a note of broken drains on one of the main village tracks where water was pooling. At the end of each village visit the team has a debrief with the Turaga ni Koro chief. Fiji Red Cross branch staff will liaise with the Ministry of Health and district health inspectors to make sure the environmental issues are followed up.

Partnership in action

Agreement for disaster law



Aurelia Balpe, Head of the Pacific Regional Office of the IFRC, signs the agreement with Andie Fong Toy, Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

In February, the IFRC signed a memorandum of understanding with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. This agreement will support work to strengthen national policy, institutional and legal frameworks to reduce the risk of disasters, mitigate their effects when they occur and expedite the recovery of communities.

The MOU will help to continue the implementation of the 'IDRL guidelines' for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance. These guidelines were developed to help governments become better prepared for the common legal problems that slow down relief efforts after disasters: bottlenecks related to entry visas, personnel registration, customs clearance, taxation and transport permissions.

In 2012, leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum encouraged forum members to consider the guidelines and to take appropriate measures to strengthen their national policy, institutional and legal frameworks in collaboration with their National Red Cross Societies, the IFRC, the United Nations and other relevant partners. The signing of this memorandum underpins that support. It will provide a platform for joint activities between the IFRC and Forum Secretariat to promote awareness and encourage implementation of the disaster law guidelines.

Strengthening laws and partnerships for responding efficiently and effectively to disasters is a goal of fundamental importance. A 2012 report of the World Bank, 'Acting Today For Tomorrow', said that since the 1950s extreme natural events have affected more than 9.2 million people in the Pacific region and caused damage in excess of US\$3.2 billion, with tropical cyclones being the major cause for this loss and damage. These natural disasters present particular challenges to the countries of the Pacific region because of the geography, small populations, limited transport infrastructure and national resources for specialized disaster response services.

Sponsored by:



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the Pacific wishes to acknowledge and thank the volunteers, staff, supporters, partners and donors who have contributed to saving lives and changing minds throughout the year. This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Community and the Japanese Red Cross. The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Community.