International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

HUMANITARIAN OVERVIEW

Briefing paper/ South-East Asia / February 2013

# Major messages

* *An over-arching programme approach to resilience is taking shape*. The pre-existing DRR framework is being broadened with health, which remains a major focus for national societies. Any approach to resilience needs to be cognizant of that. The community and safety resilience unit (CSRU) is gaining acceptance. However, there needs to be a clearer understanding of what integrated programming means as we seek to better unite the humanitarian and development agenda.
* *National societies in SE Asia are well placed to address the (worldwide)**phenomenon of the growth of non-communicable diseases.* Indeed Thai RCS is a world leader in this respect with its medical pedigree and volunteer presence & its long-standing programmes of elderly care support can contribute globally to IFRC’s work in this regard.
* *The level of self-reflection and learning among national societies in terms of disaster management is impressive.* The Thai RCS held a frank lessons learning exercise in the wake of the 2011 floods (classified as the fourth most expensive disaster in history) that provides a platform for improvement in future operations.
* *The UN ‘gets’ the ‘relevance challenge’ of the international humanitarian system.* The UNOCHA leadership is strong in Asia Pacificand grasps the challenge of remaining relevant in such a dynamic region. In an era of ***‘receiving without requesting’*** (for the RCRC too) outside attitudes and systems need to adapt to context not the other way round.
* *IFRC’s revision of its international disaster response mechanisms is relevant for SE Asia.* The national societies of the region (ie Myanmar Red Cross) want to be more involved with the international system. A revision of IFRC’s response mechanisms needs to be accompanied by a change in mentality from IFRC too. The 2010 Haiti earthquake prompted a USD40 million contribution from Thai RCS yet not one Thai RCS personnel served there; a missed opportunity in that its medical pedigree is world class.
* *IFRC is increasingly well positioned in terms of programmatic and institutional partnerships.* Relationships with AusAID, EU & OFDA for instance are all good. This is translating into support for national societies as well as regional programming (ie strengthening and sharing institutional knowledge of VCA approaches in support of community resilience via the field schools). IFRC is also increasingly influential in policy discussions (ie AusAID).
* *IFRC is a stronger player and voice in various inter-agency forums/mechanisms.* For instance, IFRC has been more present, active & influential in the Asia Pacific IASC based out of Bangkok (a zone relationship with significant support from the regional delegation) as well as in the humanitarian country team (HCT) during the Thailand floods of 2011.
* *Momentum on migration is building.* In terms of trafficking Cambodia RC has long been active. More recently, Philippines RC & Indonesia RC are scaling up ambition in this area. In addition to migration, the IFRC global advocacy positions on urbanisation and climate change are the right ones for SE Asia.
* *SE Asia national societies are among those driving the beneficiary communications agenda.* This critical area is being championed by Indonesia, Philippines and Viet Nam RC. These strong, national societies are in a position to be global pioneers of this initiative. The experience of the Thai floods and typhoon Bopha relief operation showed how social media led the agenda in communicating with affected populations while governments & international organisations floundered.
* *IFRC is a credible and established leader of the shelter cluster in SE Asia.* Particularly in Indonesia and Philippines the IFRC has performed well as shelter cluster convener.
* *The Red Cross Red Crescent is scaling up in line with the International Decade of Action for Road Safety.* This issue is undoubtedly moving up the agenda of SE Asia’snational societies. Cambodia RC has a dedicated unit working on road safety. Lao RC, Timor Leste RC (CVTL) & Vietnam RC are also doing more. Within the regional delegation, the partnership with the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) is working well.
* *Clarity of roles between the regional and zonal office has strengthened.* Six years into the zonal era it is encouraging to report that roles and responsibilities are largely defined. The two areas that need a little more work are around preparedness roles (ie contingency planning) as well as surge capacity during emergency response.
* *The global conference on aid effectiveness in Busan delivered a definition of development that enshrines the centrality of resilience.* The role of resilience as a catalyst for integrated programming is clear: why have development if it is then destroyed by disaster.
* *Government disaster management capacity is increasing although the national society role within this varies considerably.* Nevertheless, IDRL (Disaster Law) has been an advocacy and practical triumph in many instances (ie Lao PDR).
* *National societies are having to defend their identity to resist being interpreted as government assets.* This phenomenon has positive and negative connotations and a codifying and strengthening of the relationship with ASEAN is key to managing this issue.
* *Rapid economic growth and growing national society ambition has led to increased opportunities for resource mobilisation:* For both the Thai floods and Japanese earthquake the funds raised ration was five domestic USD for every dollar from overseas. However, national societies, often as part of their public bureaucracies, are at times developing slower than the county around them.
* *The era of social media as a leader & game changer in disasters has arrived:* The Thai floods and typhoon Bopha relief operation were a graphic illustration of social media filling a leadership/communications void from the authorities and various established humanitarian/development actors.
* *As in the west, in-country competition from newer organisations is a challenge to the domestic role of national societies:* RCRC recognition and tradition is very widely acknowledged but current and future performance will determine future market share.

# Contact information

For further information, please contact:

Anne LeCLERC, head of regional delegation, South-East Asia  
[anne.leclerc@ifrc.org](mailto:anne.leclerc@ifrc.org)