Acknowledgement

I would sincerely like to thank all the volunteers, members and staff of the National Societies and Delegations with whom I interacted during the course of this study. The hospitality extended to me was overwhelming and I experienced the true spirit of the movement.

Through the seven years that I have worked with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, this has been the most enriching assignment for me. I am particularly grateful to the volunteers for sharing their thoughts, concerns and motivations. Hopefully this study will lead to the development of more effective programmes and policies.

A special thanks to the Finnish Red Cross for their continued support for South Asia and also endorsing this initiative.

Karishma Khanna
Consultant, South Asia Regional Delegation
New Delhi, March 2006
New Delhi
24th of March 2006

Dear Reader,

It is with pleasure I introduce this new study on women as volunteers in South Asia.

Ensuring full and equal participation of both men and women in the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent has been a priority for the National Societies in South Asia for a long time. In Cox’s Bazaar in 2000 the Secretaries General called for gender sensitisation to be one of the five priorities in the regional OD programme. Since then gender as a priority has been reiterated in several important documents such as the South Asia Regional CAS and the Manila Action Plan.

To live up to the expectations of the Secretaries General, gender has been a top priority for the South Asia Regional Delegation, not only in the regional OD programme but across all regional programmes. Important progress has been made since Cox’s Bazaar in 2000. A regionally developed gender sensitisation module is being used, and in a number of national societies gender focal persons have been appointed.

To further strengthen our support in this area the South Asia Regional Delegation has completed a study on how women today are involved in Red Cross and Red Crescent activities across South Asia and what national societies can do to encourage greater participation of women.

The study is fascinating and encouraging reading. It documents the many ways women are already involved in Red Cross and Crescent work contributing to improve the lives of vulnerable people. It also reflects the barriers women face volunteering and suggest practical ways to overcome those barriers.

My hope is that this study will be a useful tool for all interested in promoting equal participation of both men and women as volunteers in order to deliver better and more comprehensive aid to the people in need of our help.

I would like to thank the Finnish Red Cross for their moral and financial support in conduction this study.

Bob McKerrow
Head of Regional Delegation
South Asia
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TERMS AND DEFINITIONS</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Friendly Volunteer Program Design</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Volunteers Perspective</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for women to volunteer</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key barriers and constraints</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation perspective</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why this study?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming constraints</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation structure and strategy</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPAL</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Women in Nepal</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Development in Nepal Red Cross Society</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarising key recommendations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme schedule for field visits</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRI LANKA</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Women in Sri Lanka</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka Red Cross Society</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarising key recommendations</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme schedule for field visits</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BANGLADESH</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Women in Bangladesh</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh Red Crescent Society</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and recommendations</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarising key recommendations</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme schedule for field visits</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MALDIVES</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Maldives</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Maldives</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and recommendations</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarising key recommendations</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme schedule for field visits</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The equal participation of men and women, at all levels of activities, is high priority for the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies. This has been reinforced time and again in policy documents and international forums such as the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which states that the Federation promises to ensure equal opportunities for men and women of all ages as volunteers in service delivery and National Society leadership.

The purpose of this study is to examine the participation of women volunteers in four national societies in South Asia, which are Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives. To identify barriers and propose inducements for women to volunteer and make recommendations for the national societies to increase their involvement in programmes.

A two fold qualitative approach has been adopted, on the one hand to look at external factors and constraints that affect the status of women in society. On the other hand to explore the role of the organisation structure and strategy that facilitates and encourages women’s participation. Focus group discussions, interviews, observations and review of existing materials were some of the tools that were used.

The participation of women volunteers in the National Societies programme implementation is quite low. Traditionally there are some activities that attract more women such as health and care, psychosocial support, dissemination on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. However this divide is becoming less stringent and increasingly more women are seen in typically male dominated activities such as disaster management, water sanitation and construction. The only limiting factor may be visible in choosing roles that are not physically very demanding. For e.g. in construction, women are involved in carrying materials, rather than digging or other physically strenuous tasks.

There is a clear emphasis on skills development and income generation activities for women which leads to their economic independence and makes them self reliant. Overall it is safe to summarise that women may be encouraged to participate in all nature of activities which are relevant to their communities and needs.

One of the key factors to be kept in mind however is that the aptitude of women may vary according on their social status and education levels. So the training approach has to be adapted accordingly and additional effort put in to motivate them to participate.

In order to achieve tangible results in increasing women’s participation, it is important to understand their motivation to volunteer their time and services. Women are very enthused
Women Volunteers, Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies, South Asia

to serve their communities and see volunteering as a means to acquire new skills, increase self confidence and access information on important issues that affect their lives. The prestige and respect that they receive also plays an important role as compared to their contribution in the household work which may go unappreciated. Many of the volunteers are motivated to join the organisation after receiving aid and support from the national societies in their time of need. These are some of the motivating factors that may be used to encourage and induce women to get involved.

There are certain constraints that women face and one of the main barriers that affect their participation is restriction on movement and interaction in society by family members and communities. Traditionally women are responsible for the household and raising children while the men engage in outdoor activities for income. Changing mindsets and advocating the importance of women’s participation in development activities is complicated and time consuming. Social and religious factors play an important role and in particular communities, religious norms pose an even bigger challenge. In Maldives, widespread physical dispersion of the population is also an influencing factor that affects mobility, especially of women.

Women juggle a variety of roles from cooking, raising children, taking care of extended families and in rural areas they actively participate in agriculture and cattle rearing as well. With the increase in cost of living, especially in urban areas, women are compelled to contribute to the family income and may be handling jobs along with other household responsibilities. This puts pressure on the time available to them for participating in external activities.

In addition to time there are also some practical concerns such as safety and security, transportation, and in some cases a lack of financial resources to engage in field activities or become members of national societies. For the female youth and junior volunteers, parents are anxious about their security and interacting with the opposite sex. In a conflict environment also there maybe concerns about women travelling for field visits or after dark. In some cases it might not be possible for female volunteers to play a role in emergency situations that occur at night. All these practicalities put added pressure on the National Societies and in some cases they find it easier to work with groups that have fewer limitations.

However action definitely has to be taken to lift women out of their inferior social status and promote their participation in development activities. The image of the organisation plays a very important role in achieving this. Dissemination is the most effective tool that can be used. Dissemination about the national societies along with gender sensitisation and advocacy on the importance of the role of women in the country’s development, need to be done continuously. This helps women to gain support and acceptability from their families and communities. Besides holding exclusive workshops on gender sensitisation, it would be more beneficial for it to form an integral part of all trainings and events targeted at communities and within the organisation.

Some consideration needs to be given to allow flexible schedules and women friendly slots for the volunteers, and provide them with a secure and enabling work environment. Interacting with women at the National Society plays a big part in putting women at ease and increasing their confidence to share their view points. Low representation of women among National Society staff is a limiting factor. A male dominated work environment, especially in the branches/units can discourage women from approaching the national society. Female role models within the national societies will also make them aspire to achieve more.
Over the last decade or so, there has been a gradual improvement in the status of women in South Asia and the governments have taken positive steps to facilitate this process. The national societies also need to address women’s concerns in a more systematic and coordinated manner to ensure that their interests are adequately reflected in the policies, programmes and activities. Rather than separate projects focusing on women, a gender perspective should be integrated into all programs.

In Nepal and Bangladesh, gender sensitisation workshops have been held extensively and as a result Women Development Committees and Women’s Forums formed at branch levels. This has been an encouraging start and many women have joined the national society as members and volunteers. However the role of these groups needs to be better defined and integrated in programmes, to support the national society in increasing the participation of women volunteers. A criteria needs to be set for women to become members of these committees based on their past experience and potential to contribute. If a women’s development or gender cell exists, their role should be to support and provide tools and technical advice to programmes on gender issues.

Gender mainstreaming in programmes and clear targets to assess the increased involvement of women volunteers can also be effective tools. There are already examples within the region of awarding and recognising efforts of branches that have put in special effort to increase women’s participation. A similar strategy can also be adopted for the programmes and Women’s committees.

Even in countries which boast high literacy rates, women are not seen in decision making roles. Women tend to follow the traditional model of male leadership and are reluctant to voice their opinions in forums. Some initiatives have been taken, such as the reservation of seats in the executive committees for women in Nepal and Bangladesh. Although this has helped in increasing visibility, achieving the target has not been easy and in many cases women had to be appointed. The degree of participation is also not very satisfactory as individual women find it difficult to voice their opinions openly in a male dominated group. To ensure better impact, more effort needs to be put to build their confidence and acquire skills to actively participate in decision making processes. It will also be easier rather than individuals, for there to be at least two women in the committees who can draw support and encouragement from each other.

For the purpose of this study it was very difficult to get accurate and reliable statistics about existing volunteers - the classification of volunteers, distinction between members and volunteers, ratio of male and female volunteers etc. Comprehensive and up-to-date gender-disaggregated data is essential for planning and monitoring, to demonstrate disparities that exist and also display progress.

In addition to looking at low participation of women at volunteer level, the organisation culture also needs to be examined. The representation of women within all the national societies remains extremely unsatisfactory and more so in senior management, governance and programmes. It is definitely more complicated to address the issue in staffing where the priority is to engage the most qualified person and applications of female candidates are few. However steps have to be taken to encourage women to apply and also give opportunities and train existing staff members to take on higher level positions. Higher participation of women ensures that their interests are taken into consideration and also inspires women to join.
In recent years, considerable advances have been made on a regional and country level, to increase women’s participation in the movement activities and advocate for gender issues. However the progress has been very slow and there is a need to propel this issue forward and see concrete results through noticeable improvement in the participation of women.

The area covering women’s participation in the movement is very wide ranging from governance, leadership, management to staff and volunteers. However for the purpose of this study, the focus is restricted to the involvement of women volunteers in the National Societies activities in South Asia.

The South Asia region for the Federation covers Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and recently included Maldives. The countries covered under this study are Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives. Unfortunately Pakistan had to be withdrawn during the course of the study due to practical constraints.

The main objectives of the study are to:

- study the participation of women volunteers in the programme activities of the National societies in South Asia
- identify barriers and recommend inducements for women’s involvement as volunteers in the national society activities; programme specific, nationally and across South Asia
- list possible activities in which women would be likely to volunteer within existing programmes
- list ways in which the above activities might have to be reorganised to facilitate women’s participation and how to increase recruitment of activities targeted at women.

The end result will help the National Societies to take further initiatives in involving women volunteers in their activities and also facilitate cross learning among the National Societies and within regions. Although the study covers individual countries which all have a different set of social issues, there are some common themes that will emerge and towards which a regional approach can be adopted.
Methodology and approach

The aim of the study is not for it to be a full fledged scientific research but a more practical approach, customised to the national society’s requirements. Time and resource constraints also permitted only a snapshot view and this will hopefully be the beginning of a more detailed process and action.

The approach to this study is two fold.

One perspective is that of the volunteers and social structures – role and status of women in society, cultural mindsets that exist, motivation for them to volunteer and the constraints they face?

The other aspect is the organisation itself – why the need for more women volunteers, what the national society can do to help the volunteers overcome constraints and how the organisation structure and strategy supports this initiative.

A qualitative approach was adopted, focussing on behaviour patterns, personal interaction and observations. Field visits were conducted by the consultant, accompanied by a National Society representative, to at least three branches in each country. The criteria for branch selection were identified according to the varying degrees of involvement of women volunteers in the activities ranging from very active to low.

The key methodologies used were focus group discussions with existing volunteers (male and female), communities, women development committees/forums and face-to-face interviews with staff and volunteers. Interactions were held with local organisations working at community level and data available from existing policy documents, reports and brochures was also examined. There was a conscious attempt to cover people of different age groups and demographic profiles.

Efforts were made to conduct group discussions in neutral locations such as community/training centres or out in the open. Groups were organised for an average of 15-20 people and discussions held in their local language. In most cases it was possible for the consultant to interact with the communities and in others the National Society representative translated.

To ensure full participation and ownership by the national societies, an advisory committee was formed at the beginning of the study. The committee consisted of one female representative from each participating National Society. The main role of the advisory committee was to

- advise on the framework and methodology of the study
- link between the consultant, National Society and the community
- help identify and organise resources
- give legitimacy and endorse the validity of the study
- disseminate the results and follow up on implementation
Unfortunately it was not possible to have a representative from Maldives and Bangladesh at the initial advisory group meeting, held in New Delhi, but the outcome was shared with them. A final Advisory Committee meeting was held in March 2006, to comment on and make recommendations for any changes and also propose a follow up plan of action. These have been incorporated in the report.
Terms and definitions

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies volunteering policy (1999):

**Volunteering** in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is an activity that:

- is motivated by the free will of the person volunteering, and not by a desire for material or financial gain or by external social, economic or political pressure;

- is intended to benefit vulnerable people and their communities in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent;

- is organised by recognised representatives of a national Red Cross or Red Crescent Society.

A **Red Cross or Red Crescent Volunteer** is a person who carries out volunteering activities for a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, occasionally or regularly.

A **Red Cross or Red Crescent Member** is a person who has formally agreed to the conditions of membership as required under the National Society’s constitution or rules, and is usually entitled to elect representatives on governing bodies, and to stand for election.

Red Cross or Red Crescent Volunteers may or may not be members of their National Society.

**Gender** refers to the roles, responsibilities, needs, interests, and capacities of both men and women.

Although the gender policy of the Federation advocates for input and equal participation of men and women at all levels within the National Societies, in South Asia the ratio of participation is much more favourable towards men. Hence this study is specifically focussing on the participation of women volunteers in the societies, although it is inevitable that there are linkages to gender equality and mainstreaming as well.
Findings and Discussion

**WOMEN FRIENDLY VOLUNTEER PROGRAM DESIGN**

- **Programme Planning**
  - Targeted recruitment of women volunteers
  - Plan activities that help in skill development

- **Recruitment of volunteers**
  - Dissemination targeted at influential parties like parents, spouse, families, institutions, community leaders etc.
  - Focus dissemination on:
    - Organisation and activities
    - Value of volunteering
    - Significance of women’s participation
  - Use the visibility of women in the National Society as role models

- **Training**
  - Design approach specific to women’s aptitude
  - Encourage women’s participation
  - Include sessions on leadership and decision making

- **Programme Implementation**
  - Flexible schedules to include women friendly slots
  - Transport arrangements for field work
  - Support for child care
  - Safe, supportive and enabling work environment
  - Reward and recognize efforts

- **Service Delivery to the vulnerable**
  - Better access to all sections of the population
  - Programmes cater to specific needs of the community
  - Organisation representative of the people, which generates more confidence
The Volunteers perspective

Motivation for women to volunteer

To serve the community

The primary motivation to volunteer for women is to serve and contribute to the betterment of society. Many of them are from communities that were affected by a calamity or disaster and received tremendous support from the National Society volunteers. This encouraged them also to join the movement and help others.

Women who have suffered personal tragedies through alcoholism and domestic violence, drug addiction or abuse see volunteering as a healing process. Helping other people who are in hardship, gives them immense satisfaction and courage.

Skill development and increase in knowledge

Most of the women volunteers who join the national societies do not have a particular specialisation. They are given training under the programmes in which they are involved. Whether it is for water and sanitation in Nepal, First Aid in Sri Lanka, polio campaigns in Bangladesh or dissemination about the movement and social issues in all the countries.

Learning new skills and increased knowledge is a significant motivating factor and also raises awareness about social issues. This is all the more important if the new skills provide them with income earning opportunities. There is a clear linkage between women’s economic independence and increase in their household status, as well as in society.

For Junior and Youth Red Cross volunteers, experience certificates and technical training also develops their skills for getting jobs in the future.

Recognition and prestige

All female volunteers as juniors, youth and adults are extremely proud of their volunteer status. Once the communities see the positive results of their contribution, they are treated with respect. They get recognition and admiration from their peers and neighbours and are often approached to give advice or solve problems. They can network with people and are able to move about freely, without restriction to discharge their duties. This gives them a sense of
Women Volunteers, Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies, South Asia

Key barriers and constraints

Social Structures

Women are assigned very specific gender segregated roles in society as child bearers and homemakers. The cultural mind set is for women to remain in the house and not participate in outdoor activities. This curtails their freedom and restricts the ways they can get involved.

The degree of restriction could depend on various factors such as the rural urban divide, education levels of families and even geographical differences such as the Terai and hills in Nepal. Within a country, different religious communities may have more stringent rules on the positioning of women. In rural areas and where the communities are poor, there is also resistance from families to engage in volunteer activities which will not lead to economic gain. Consent from their families remains an essential factor for them to participate.
The Kinnea division in the Trincomalee district, Sri Lanka is predominantly Muslim. Danish Red Cross started a psychosocial programme with 13 volunteers out of which 9 are women. Even though their families supported them in joining Red Cross, the community, their extended family and religious leaders exerted a lot of pressure for them to quit. They are able to continue only due to support from their parents who recognised that their work was helping the needy. A very positive indicator for their faith in the organisation was that these women were allowed to participate in a 10 day psychosocial training, which was conducted in Jaffna.

Women are also seen to represent the family’s honour and if they are independent and outgoing, there is criticism from the communities. It is important to keep in mind that communities are very close knit in rural areas and the influence of community leaders is quite strong. Poverty and gender discrimination have a deep effect on the lives of women. 

**Illiteracy and lack of awareness**

Education systems within countries continue to perpetuate discrimination against girls. Illiteracy and drop out rates for women are noticeably higher then men, which also reflects the traditional role assignment between girls and boys. Parents rely more on girls to help with household chores and are very concerned about their daughters’ safety and adherence to traditions.

As a result, women have limited skill sets and slower grasping power. They do not have exposure to external issues and lack confidence to participate in social activities. The National Society has to put a lot of effort to draw them out and even encourage them to attend
dissemination sessions so that they are familiar with the work of the organisation and believe in their own capability. Their confidence needs to be boosted so that they feel free to express their views and confident about participating in decision-making processes.

Sri Lanka and Maldives boast high literacy rates for both men and women. In spite of this, there is a very low percentage of women in decision making roles. In the workforce, mostly women are found in service functions or junior and middle levels. Even where efforts have been made to include women in governance and management, they are reluctant to voice their opinions in forums.

**Insufficient time and household responsibilities**

Women constantly have to juggle a variety of roles and responsibilities in both urban and rural societies. Whereas in rural areas they are responsible for raising children, taking care of cattle and cooking, in the urban areas more and more women are engaged in jobs to support the family income. Time management is a big constraint for them to volunteer on a regular basis.

Women who are already engaged as volunteers also faced these problems and had to work doubly hard to ensure that their household chores were not neglected. Majority of the men interviewed clearly expressed that the priority for women was to take care of their homes and families. If they were allowed to participate in outside activities they had to ensure that the house and children were not ignored.

Although this poses additional burden and hardship on women, they do not see this as a limiting factor. Most of them are confident that if they are motivated to do something, they will find means to handle their responsibilities. Support from their spouses and families, of course makes it is much easier.

A direct implication of this is that the profile of majority of women volunteers is at junior and youth levels or in the age group of 35 and above. This is when their children are slightly grown up and they have more spare time. As youngsters in schools and colleges also, they are free to participate in activities and there is no gender differentiation.

**Practical Constraints**

Volunteering in the field can require travel to far off and remote places and timings are irregular. For the younger generation, parents are very concerned about the girls’ safety and mingling with the opposite sex. If women do not have any childcare options, it is difficult for them to leave their children and homes. It is essential that they return at reasonable hours and there are cases when the women volunteers maybe unable to participate in emergencies for e.g. if there is an incident late into the night.

Timings also need to be flexible to enable them to take care of their household responsibilities. All this puts added pressure on the national society to arrange for proper transportation and ensure their safety.
**Organisation perspective**

**Why this study?**

Strategy 2010 states the following as one of the priorities under Well Functioning National Societies:

“In many countries, parts of the population are extremely underrepresented in the national society. Achieving a good balance is important not only because of fairness, equality and to ensure lack of discrimination, but also to guarantee that all actions have the greatest possible impact. The International Federation collectively must show a measured improvement in the way that decision-making positions reflect the make up of the population, particularly a better gender, youth and ethnic representation.”

Women continue to face restrictions from participating in social activities and as a result may not benefit from various capacity building initiatives. Having a good representation of women in the organisation makes the community women much more comfortable in approaching the national society and also responds positively to initiatives.

This has been very evident in Nepal and Bangladesh where the setting up of Women’s Development Committees and Women’s Forums respectively has been instrumental in increasing the participation of women in the membership and volunteers. Women draw confidence and encouragement from each other collectively, rather than if they were working alone.

As an organisation targeted at assisting the most vulnerable, there is a need for the national societies to reach and benefit women equally, which constitute more than half of the population in most countries. Increasing the participation of women in the national society will help ensure that their interests are integrated in the plans and programmes, result in a deeper penetration of society and also enable better service delivery.

Although there is no doubt that women’s involvement is required in all activities, there are certain programmes for which it is even more essential such as dissemination of sensitive health issues such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, mother and child care, water and sanitation and psychosocial programmes.

A successful water and sanitation programme helps improve the health and living standards of women, especially in rural areas where women have to carry water from far off places. In Nepal one of the key contributors to the successful implementation of the Japanese Red Cross Drinking Water and Sanitation Programme was the high degree of involvement of women.

Involving more women volunteers improves access to the female population and children as well. This has been extremely relevant in disaster situations, especially in conservative and remote areas where women are reluctant to venture out of their homes, even if it is to receive aid.

In Nepal and Sri Lanka, due to the conflict situations, the number of female headed households has increased substantially and women are taking more and more responsibility for their homes and livelihoods. The same is also true for Maldives as men spend a lot of time away from homes for fishing or working on other islands and overseas. Increasing the knowledge, capacity and confidence of women helps in the development of society as they play a significant role in shaping the future.
Overcoming constraints

Dissemination

The study reveals that dissemination is the most effective method for attracting female volunteers. In areas where the national society branch is actively implementing programmes, women face much less resistance compared to areas where people are not familiar with the organisation and its activities. Dissemination becomes even more important where misconceptions exist and there is a negative history associated with humanitarian and non-government organisations.

Women’s development is an issue for the entire society and has implications for men, women and all generations. So they need to be involved in the response and solution as well. Dissemination needs to be targeted at parents, spouses, families and entire families. If they are familiar with the national society, it makes it easier for women to volunteer. Many of the youth and Junior Red Cross female volunteers also said that if their parents were assured of their safety and knew that they were being well looked after, they would face lesser resistance. An effective way to do this is to invite parents for events where they can familiarize themselves with the organisation and people that their children interact with. Women can also encourage their families to participate in awareness and dissemination campaigns.

Dissemination on the role and value of volunteers helps them gain acceptability and also for people to recognise their selfless contribution. The initial response that many volunteers face is suspicion that they will ask for funds or other aid. Emphasizing the role and importance of volunteers will make their work much easier.

Volunteers inspire their family members to join the Red Cross. They are many cases where entire families of committed volunteers are also members of the society. Although they all may not be active, in time of need or emergency they can be counted upon to pitch in their efforts.

In Maldives, where the process for setting up a Maldives Red Crescent Society is underway, dissemination plays an even more significant role and the organisations commitment to equal participation of men and women needs to be emphasized at all levels.

In Sri Lanka this issue was raised in two out of the three districts where the communities were initially sceptical about the motive of the volunteers to convert them to Christianity. In districts such as Chittagong and Cyllette in Bangladesh also this problem was prevalent and the volunteers had to face a lot of resistance, even pelting of stones on them by some communities. However through persistence they managed to convince the people that their work had no religious connotations and they only wanted to assist them.

Engage in activities that are of interest and beneficial for women

Women are increasingly getting involved even in activities that traditionally fall within the male domain e.g., construction, fishing, agricultural work etc. This goes on to prove that there is no restriction on the capabilities of women to participate. However the reality is also that in countries like Nepal, women are among the poorest in the world, illiteracy rates are high, they
are economically insecure and lack self confidence. Although the idea is for the national society to involve women in their existing programmes, their status and needs cannot be ignored.

Initially the national societies need to engage in some activities that are targeted at women and help improve their skill sets and economic status. This could be a starting point for attracting women to the organisation and then further developing their skills to participate in other activities as well.

Life skills training and saving schemes have been the main thrust of the WDCs and Women’s forums in Nepal and Bangladesh and play a significant role in motivating and attracting women.

**Gender sensitisation**

The traditional outlook of society which limits the role and mobility of women is the main barrier that the national societies face in engaging women volunteers. This is further aggravated in Muslim communities where the status of women is regulated by strict beliefs and typical behavioural patterns.

Social and cultural norms also influence an individuals’ thinking about their own capabilities. Women lack self confidence to participate and give inputs in decision making. Gender empowerment is essential to bring about social change encouraging women to collectively challenge old beliefs and customs.

There is a need to persistently advocate for a gender sensitive society. Awareness has to be spread on the necessity and gains of involving women in decision-making processes and their undisputable role in the development of any society.

In the Manari/Devgaon sub chapter in the Nawalparashi district in Nepal the community is poor and illiterate. They were given gender sensitisation training and orientation in May 2005, after which a womens development committee was formed. Recently they also received training on goat farming from the district chapter and interest free loans for six months to one year. The training has made them confident about their own abilities and they are enthusiastic to learn and take new responsibilities. Before this exposure, they would have hardly spoken a word in such a group discussion. However now they participated confidently and interacted very well.
Women Volunteers, Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies, South Asia

Gender sensitisation should form a part of all dissemination, trainings and forums rather than only holding exclusive workshops. The Women’s forums can support this initiative by providing tools and materials to various departments and ensure that a gender perspective is being adopted in planning.

Appreciation and prestige

Although this relates to the issue of volunteer management at large, it is especially important for women to receive recognition and appreciation for their work. At home, even though they work tirelessly to meet their family’s needs, it is taken for granted. Through volunteer work they feel valued and proud of their contribution. Recognition can be given through experience certificates, badges, caps, uniforms etc. and simply appreciating them for their effort. Cultural programmes and social activities are also big motivators for women and they participate enthusiastically.

‘Teej’ is a very popular and important festival in Nepal in which women keep fasts for the long life and prosperity of their husbands. The Kaski branch NRCS organised a cultural event on the festival in which 16 women groups gave performances on the Red Cross movement and its activities. It was a competition with prize money and judges to assess the performances. The response was very enthusiastic and it was an excellent means for dissemination.

In the Kurunegala branch Sri Lanka the volunteers wear especially designed uniforms and in the Colombo city branch volunteers receive Red Cross vests after completing one year of volunteering. These are small gestures which boost the morale of the volunteers.
Practical Issues

Some adjustments need to be made by the national societies when implementing projects involving women. Special care needs to be taken to ensure that there are no safety concerns for the volunteers and where required transportation arrangements can be made. Timings for the activities should be adjusted to give women time to meet their household demands and does not require them to be out at irregular hours.

Child care facilities are also a concern for many women and the volunteers can be encouraged to make arrangements among themselves, with some support from the national society. It is of course easier in programmes which have regular schedules compared to others. Women can also draw support from the joint family system where they can share their responsibilities with other family members.

The psychosocial programme in Sri Lanka is a superb example of this and the number of women involved is quite high. The volunteers are required to work four days a week for three hours per day mostly in the evenings. This enables them to organise their work and complete their household responsibilities in the mornings.
**Organisation structure and strategy**

The main discussion points under this section are volunteer management in the national societies, gender mainstreaming in programmes and the organisation culture.

One of the most effective methods of analysing the impact of any intervention is to see quantitative results. In Nepal for e.g. the results of their membership drive targeting women was evident by the increase of female membership from 12 to 20.6%. Unfortunately none of the national societies have a database of volunteers that presents a clear picture. Gender disaggregated data is essential to track the current situation and also monitor progress.

Volunteer 2005 also prioritises the development of reliable statistics when it says, “The Secretariat will work to ensure reliable statistics on the number of members, board members and volunteers in National Societies as well as on the total number of volunteer hours”

Volunteer policies and management systems are essential for all the national societies. Even where volunteer or gender policies exist; the responsibility for monitoring their implementation is not assigned and there are no measurable criteria to assess results. As one of the largest volunteer based organization in the world, the resource allocation towards this is nominal.

There is a need to have volunteer coordinators, who can manage volunteer databases and statistics, do profile matching, take motivational initiatives, monitor implementation of the policy, support programmes by assigning volunteers and ensure better gender representation.

Another issue that needs to be explored further is the age-old debate of members Vs volunteers. Since the focus of this study is specifically on women volunteers, this was an important issue. Some relevant questions related to the identification and categorisation of volunteers, for e.g. how much time does an individual need to contribute to be a volunteer? Are all volunteers registered? Do they have to be members? How are records maintained for the volunteers who are not members?

It is easier to keep a record at the Junior Red Cross and youth levels as these groups are linked with institutions. However, it is impossible to validate the figures offered by the societies to determine the numbers of volunteers who are active. There is a requirement for a clear volunteer management policy that addresses issues related to the identification of volunteers, categorisation of members and volunteers, terms and conditions for volunteers such as time allocation and reimbursements. In addition to that, a designated person or department in the national societies that is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Volunteer Policy and maintaining a gender aggregated database of volunteers, linking them to programmes and activities.

One of the lessons to learn from the slow progress over the years in achieving better gender representation is that significant change cannot be achieved by adding marginal programmes for women. A change is required in policies and resource allocations that reflect the interests of women as well as men. For increased involvement of women volunteers in the programme activities, gender perspective must be included at the planning level itself. Programme managers must ensure early interaction with women and improve their participation in
committees, skills training and projects. It is evident that there is a gender disparity at the programme level in the national societies and there need to be stringent guidelines and targets to show tangible results.

Measurable criteria and specific indicators can be set for programmes to have a percentage of involved volunteers as women. Emphasis also has to be given on developing their self-confidence, assertiveness, communication skills and encourage them to participate actively. In Nepal Red Cross Society for e.g. this could be a role for the Women’s Development Section. It can support the programme managers in including a gender perspective in their planning and also facilitate identification of women volunteers to support their programmes with support from the WDCs.

Although the focus of this the study is on volunteers and not staff, both cannot be seen in isolation and the impact of the organisation culture must be factored in. Staff statistics in all the National Societies clearly show a low representation of women at policy making, management and senior programme levels. Most of the female staff are in administrative or support positions. Having female staff, especially at the branch levels makes a favourable impression and encourages other women to participate. If the organisation is seen as having a male dominated environment, it makes it more difficult for the women to convince their families and they are reluctant to join themselves.

In all the countries most of the women joined the national society though existing women staff and volunteers. The setting up of women’s committees and forums in Nepal and Bangladesh respectively has had a snowballing effect in increasing the women’s involvement as members and volunteers. The issue of increased women’s participation and gender equality must be addressed in the culture and all levels in the organisation.
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>27,676,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area covered</td>
<td>140,800 sq km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth rate</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex ratio</td>
<td>1.06 male(s)/female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertility rate</td>
<td>4.19 children born/woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate</td>
<td>66.98 deaths/1,000 live births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate</td>
<td>Population 45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male 62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female 27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religions</td>
<td>Hindu 80.6%,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buddhist 10.7%,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim 4.2%,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kirant 3.6%,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other 0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population below poverty line</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDI rank</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal mortality rate</td>
<td>540/100,000 live births²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CIA World Fact book
Nepal Country Fact Sheet UNDP, HDR 2005

¹ A composite index measuring average achievement in the three basic dimensions captured in the human development index - a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living, adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women. Covers 140 countries.

² Ranked 136 out of 177 countries
Introduction: Women in Nepal

Nepal is one of the least-developed countries of the world in which the majority of the population survives on low productivity agriculture. The key issues in the social sectors are unequal access of various groups of the population to educational and health facilities and geographically unequal spread of services to remote areas. There is a general lack of awareness about health and sanitation, childcare and feeding practices and poor environmental conditions, including lack of safe water. Nepalese women are discriminated against in the laws on property, which deny them inheritance rights in the parental household after marriage.

Nepalese women are at the lower end of the scale in South Asia in terms of the human development and gender development index. The education levels for women are very low and the gender gap in literacy rate is high. If there are resource constraints in the household, the first casualty is the female child’s education. Girls are expected to contribute to the household work and are married off at an early age. Urban women usually marry later than rural women and a higher proportion of females in the Terai (plains) also marry at an earlier age than in the mountains.

Women in mountains and hills are economically more disadvantaged than women in the better-off households, urban areas, and Terai. However social discrimination against women is felt to be more severe in the Terai communities and in the Mid- and Far-Western Development regions.

Initiatives have been taken by the government to uplift the status of women. Quotas have been set at various levels of central and local governance to increase the participation of women. For e.g. 20 percent seats are reserved for women at the ward level of Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Municipality. However without knowledge of the operating political mechanisms, lack of access to education and economic resources, these women are unable to influence and protect their interests. Some organizations like the Asian Development Bank is running a project on training elected women representatives, to educate them and increase their level of involvement in the operation and decision making processes.

Women’s Development in Nepal Red Cross Society

The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) is the largest humanitarian organization in Nepal with a network of 75 districts, 800 sub chapters and cooperation committees under them.

Working actively in the area of women’s development was instigated by the need of the NRCS to have better representation of women at membership, policymaking, management and implementation levels, and also a regional and global prioritisation of gender issues.

A central level women’s development committee was established in 1998 consisting of 5 district and 5 central executive committee members, with the chief of women’s development section as member secretary. The committee discovered that barely 12% of the membership consisted of women. At the operations level also the picture was far from encouraging. The
committee recommended the setting up of a separate women’s development section, which was done in 1998.

Women development committees (WDCs) were gradually set up at district and eventually sub chapter levels. The main objective of the women’s development section and the WDCs is to promote gender sensitisation and increase women membership and participation in the organization, leadership and management.

Since 1998, 47 women development committees at district level and 138 at sub chapter level have been formed. The membership drive has resulted in an increase of adult women members from 12 to 20.6% since 1998. The Central Executive Committee has also approved a Gender development policy and the number of women volunteers, as well as their participation is on the rise.

A series of gender sensitisation workshops were held for the senior management and WDCs in all five regions, along with a membership drive targeted at increasing the number of female members. A constitutional change was initiated in 2003 whereby it was made mandatory for all executive committees at the sub chapter, district chapter and national headquarters level to have a minimum of one female member. In case a woman was not elected, one would be appointed.

The Women Development Section has been constantly making efforts in coordinating with different departments, programmes and district chapters to promote gender sensitivity, increase women membership and their effective participation. They are currently doing a baseline survey of all the branches to explore the reasons for low membership and staffing of women, ways to build their capacity and the main activities and programmes of interest for them. The output will help them formulate a plan of action.

Observations

The current ratio of women in the national Society as staff and volunteers, especially in senior management needs further improvement. Conscious effort needs to be put in grooming and encouraging women to be able to take up such positions. Although the membership drive has clearly shown an increase in the number of female members, it is difficult to obtain gender-disaggregated data where volunteers are concerned. The members are not necessarily active in the programme activities.

Key constraints that women face are heavy workloads at home, traditional mindsets in society, poor economic status and illiteracy. They lack confidence and awareness about social issues and need to be encouraged to recognise their own potential and capability.

Members of the WDCs have to become members of the national society. In recent years the life membership fee for joining the NRCS was almost doubled to Rs 1025. Even though they are eager to become members, in the absence of their own personal incomes, the high membership fees is a major constraint.

The Strategy 2010 states, “Membership must be available to all volunteers in a way that does not discriminate. For example, the costs of membership ought to be low enough for all people to afford, so that poorer people are not excluded.”
There is definitely a pull from the communities to have income generation activities and skills development training to improve the economic status of women. This can be an influencing factor for attracting new volunteers, who can then be involved in other activities as well. Water and sanitation, saving schemes and skills development training for women are the main focus areas for many non-government organisations (NGOs) in Nepal. Since these programmes have a direct association and benefit for women, they face fewer constraints compared to the Nepal Red Cross Society in attracting women.

*Mushti dan* is a scheme in which women put aside one muthi (fistful) of rice every time before they cook and sell it to earn income. *Saving schemes*, where women save five or ten rupees every month to establish a fund which they can use for their own requirements. These are two popular initiatives that have been started by some WDCs and are popular among other organisations and women groups in Nepal as well.

The Community Based Disaster Preparedness Programme (CBDP) has used this saving scheme as a part of their programme where the groups are encouraged to collect funds which they can use for emergencies. Financial accounting is also a part of the CBDP training curriculum and has a high participation of women. It was very clearly visible in the CBDP training workshop being conducted in Nawalparasi district.
The Junior Red Cross Programme of the NRCS is one of its main strengths. The ratio of girls to boys at this level is very high and it was very impressive to interact with girls who were confident, outspoken and eager to contribute to their communities’ development. The children and youth are very effective change agents in families and communities. First aid, dissemination, water and sanitation and cultural programmes are the main activities they engage in. There are teacher sponsors in schools who are responsible for the JRC circles and all 75 district chapters are responsible to set up circles in schools and colleges. The international friendship programme with the Japanese Red Cross in Nawalparashi and Kaski districts, has been very successful and a volunteer exchange programme has also been initiated with other National Societies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Dissemination about the national society and its activities needs to be done continuously along with awareness campaigns on the significance and role of women in the development of society. This is especially relevant in Nepal where due to the unstable security situation lots of men have moved away from their households and even the country to find work, so the number of female headed households has increased.

Gender sensitisation workshops have been successful in motivating women to form committees and make them aware about their own potential. This positive energy needs to be channelled for maximum impact. Out of the various WDC groups, only some are active whereas others have only received gender sensitisation training. For better impact of the Women Development Committees, a criteria for women to become members, based on
their past experiences or potential to contribute to the programme, can be set. A clear term of reference and agenda needs to be set for the committees.

The issue of increasing women’s participation in the programme activities of the national society has to be approached strategically through integration into its programmes. One of the ways for doing this could be to set targets or evaluation criteria for the programmes to clearly demonstrate the active involvement of women.

The role of the Women’s Development Section at NHQ can support this initiative by providing tools for gender integration into programme planning, coordinate with the district level WDCs to facilitate the involvement of women volunteers in the activities. The responsibility for achieving targets for increased women’s participation has to be shared by all development programmes and management, not the section itself.

Women’s development needs to be seen as cross cutting, rather than a stand alone programme. The women development committees are all volunteer based and funding is a constraint as they do not have their own budgets and the branches may not have resources to support them. The participation of the WDS and WDCs must be factored in the programme plans and budgets, besides which an independent budget to organise events, dissemination and plan women oriented activities.

An annual evaluation is done by the NHQ before the General Assembly, to award the best well functioning district chapter. One of the criteria is gender i.e. the participation of women as staff and members. The Women’s development section has also initiated its own evaluation since 2002, focussing on gender issues and to recognise the efforts and progress made by the branches through workshops, trainings, women’s capacity building initiatives, skill-based trainings and income generation activities. Women’s participation in staffing, executive committees and membership is also assessed. A cash prize is given to the top three performing districts of five, three and two thousand rupees respectively. A similar evaluation can also be done by the districts for the sub chapters; which will have a trickle down effect till the grassroots level.

Gender sensitisation should be incorporated in all trainings and workshops held by various departments. Individual workshops can be held for the women’s development committee members and the content and quality must be monitored so that it is being conducted by people who have received training to conduct the same.
Summarising key recommendations

- Dissemination about the National Society and significance of the role of women in development needs to be done continuously.
- Gender sensitisation to be a part of all trainings, workshops and key events, internal and external.
- Measurable criteria for programmes to increase the participation of women volunteers.
- A focused and standard term of reference for the WDCs which links their role closely to programmes and branch activities.
- Clear criteria for women to become members of the WDCs based on their potential to contribute and past experience.
- Participation of WDCs and WDS to be factored in programme budgets and also have independent budgets for events, dissemination and women-oriented activities.
- Gender disaggregated data is essential for volunteers to evaluate impact.
Programme schedule for field visits

The three branches selected for the study were Nawalparashi, Kaski and Sindhupalchok.

Nawalparashi
Focus group discussions
- District level WDC
- Manari / Devgaon sub chapter WDC
- Women volunteers, CBDP programme
- JRC circle, Siddhartha Madhyamik Vidyalaya
- Mahila Jaagaran, Manari. It is a local NGO working with women issues

Interviews with branch officials and Chairperson of the district chapter:

Kaski
Focus group discussions
- JRC circle, Mahendra Vishwa Vidyalaya
- District chapter WDC and branch officials
- Sub chapter officials, Kahun Sub chapter
- Community women, Kahun
- Armala sub chapter community women
- Sub chapter WDC, Pokhra

Interview
- Siddhartha Club, a local NGO working in education, health, HIV Aids, women and child development and environment issues in Kaski district

Sindhupalchok
Focus group discussion
- WDC and District Chapter officials
- Chelibeti programme, a local NGO working in the areas of with girls trafficking and abuse
- JRC circle, Kodari Secondary High School Tatopani sub chapter
- Community Women, Tatopani
Interview

- Vice chairman of district chapter
- Convenor of WDC district chapter

Kathmandu

Interview

- Secretary General
- Director Youth department
- Former programme chief of the Women’s development Section
- Programme chief of the Women’s development Section
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>19,670,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area covered</td>
<td>65,610 sq km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth rate</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex ratio</td>
<td>0.96 male(s)/female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertility rate</td>
<td>1.85 children born/woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate</td>
<td>13 deaths/1,000 live births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate</td>
<td>Population 92.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male 94.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female - 90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religions</td>
<td>Buddhist 69.3%,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim 7.5%,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hindus 15.5%,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian 7.6%,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unspecified 0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population below poverty line</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDI rank (140 countries)</td>
<td>66 – best in South Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEM&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>72&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<sup>3</sup> A composite index measuring gender inequality in three basic dimensions of empowerment - economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making and power over economic resources.
Introduction: Women in Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan women have a relatively better status than women in the other countries in South Asia. This can be mainly attributed to positive policies introduced by Sri Lankan policymakers, such as free primary, secondary and tertiary education and the establishment of an extensive network of schools, leading to high literacy rates.

However, there continues to be a gendered norm of male leadership and a high workload on women as they combine employment, domestic tasks, and child care. Women’s economic roles have extended due to educational levels, demand of the labor market and escalating costs of living, but the inequitable gender division of household labor still remains.

There is a need to achieve gender equality and empowerment as the social model contributes to uneven development of the quality of life of women, coupled with inadequate financial resources. A major area of inequality and disadvantage for women is employment. The unemployment rate of women is almost double that of men and a gender-based demarcation of the labor market persists at all levels. Women need to be groomed to take up for higher-level positions in the government and organizations.

Sexual based gender violence (SBGV) has increased in areas and situations of armed conflict, even though the conflict environment is likely to have shadowed lines of gender segregation. This is especially prevalent in areas where the communities have had to relocate and are living in temporary shelters and camps. Numerous NGOs and aid organizations are running programmes on SGBV to support affected women.

Sri Lanka Red Cross Society

Among the countries covered under this study, Sri Lanka seems to have very favourable social conditions which encourage the participation of women. Unfortunately this is not reflected in the national society’s structure. Not only is the percentage of women in the staffing low, not many women are seen in senior level or management positions. The Central Governing Board has no women members and at the Director level also the number is nominal. The situation is much more favourable among the volunteers where there is clear evidence of an equitable ratio of both men and women.

The volunteer management policy is being drafted and is expected to be implemented in 2006. In some of the districts like Trincomalee, the process to hire volunteer coordinators is already underway. The existing Youth policy sets a 40% target for women volunteers.

Observations

Two of the three districts covered under the study were tsunami affected and most of the volunteers had joined the organization only after the tsunami. The high demand for people caused the SLRCS to lose many of its trained volunteers, and at the same time inspired new people to join as members. The official figure of members before and after the tsunami in the Colombo city branch increased from 400 to 26000, 60% of which are women. According to
the branch BEO (Branch Executive Officer) there are many more people willing to participate than the branch can handle.

Six out of the twenty-six district branches in SLRCS have female BEOs. In Kurunegala, which is primarily a Singhalese area, the district branch is particularly impressive with a high participation of women. Majority of the managing committee members, the BEO and Secretary are women. They have a very strong Junior Red cross and First Aid programme with a high percentage of girls. In the two villages visited in the district all the active volunteers were women. The encouragement and open mindedness of the leadership at the branch is an important contributing factor.

Every year the National Society awards a best male and female volunteer. It is an extensive process where all the districts send nominations and based on certain criteria and interviews the award is given during the AGM. The female volunteer of the year 2005 was awarded to the Secretary of the Kurunegala district branch.

In the Trincomalee district, one of the motivating factors cited by the volunteers to join the Red Cross was that it is seen as a sign of protection during conflict. Even though it is one of the few districts that have an almost equal representation of Singhalese, Tamil and Muslim populations, most of the focus groups consisted of Tamils and this was a source of discontent among the sub chapters as well. It is extremely important for the national society to have a fair representation of all the ethnic fractions.

There is a vast difference in the status of Muslim women compared to Singhalese and Tamils. In the Muslim communities women are confined to their homes and not allowed to interact with men outside their families. They are a bit more liberal in cities like Colombo but in most of the other districts, this is one section of the society where women need to be uplifted and encouraged to participate in community activities. Most of them wear scarves or purdah. The more liberal dressing style of the Sinhalese women is at times a cause of antagonism among men as they feel it may have an unfavourable effect on Muslim women.

Interactions were held with local organisations and some Red Cross volunteers who are working with other NGOs. One of the advantages they found of being associated with the Red Cross is that it gives them an opportunity to work in different areas of community development and closely interact with beneficiaries.

Overall women did not cite any major restrictions from the community or their families in participating in movement activities. Although practical constraints of travelling late in the night or out of town were raised, there are also cases like the youth volunteers at Kurunegala, who travelled by trucks and lorries to far away tsunami-affected areas for distributions. Skill development training came topmost in their areas of interest, especially in villages like Paluwewa and Polgahawela Aragoda in Karunegala where people do not have fixed incomes and are eager to learn income generating skills that can help them earn a living.

There is a fixed allowance for volunteers for a limited number of working days in a month. This was raised as a cause of concern by the branches as it challenges the concept of
Women Volunteers, Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies, South Asia

voluntary service and is difficult to monitor, implement and sustain. A much needed volunteer policy and regulations to implement these allowances is being worked upon and needs to be finalised as soon as possible.

Conclusions and Recommendations

With the increase in cost of living, a second income in families has almost become a necessity. Emphasis is on girls to learn new skills, get education and become independent. In addition there are other organizations that need trained people and are ready to pay high allowances to ‘so called’ volunteers. This is making it difficult to sustain the spirit of voluntary service and get skilled people.

An effective way to combat this issue is to promote junior and youth Red Cross circles. This will help in grooming and training volunteers at a very young age and instilling in them a sense of service, as well as spread awareness about the Movement. It will also strengthen links with educational institutions. The Junior and Youth Red Cross programme is strong and well established in some branches but it is yet to be explored to its full potential.

The image and reputation of the national society plays a key role in attracting new volunteers. In most of the community groups there seemed to be a negative perception about NGOs and humanitarian organizations. Some of these are that opportunities are given only to known people and there is an affinity towards own communities. Concern was also raised about it being a Christian organisation and possibly encouraging conversions. It is due to increased awareness through the media and witnessing some of the national societies work, especially after the tsunami, that they felt the motivation and confidence to join.

Positive imaging and dissemination needs to be done continuously for people to understand and feel close to the national society. In Polgahawela Aragoda, the Head Priest of the village came to bless the gathering for the focus group. According to the youth volunteers at Kurunegala also, involving locally respected people is an effective way to gain confidence of the communities.

A gender policy, supported by a volunteering policy that promotes gender equality, will be a good beginning to emphasize the commitment of the governance and management. An implementation model that can monitor the output and impact also has to be formulated. The emphasis needs to be not only on equal participation of men and women but among women also to encourage the more disadvantaged sections like the Muslim communities. The tendency should not be to work with the communities that are more participative and forthcoming as compared to the others.

Gender inequality in management and staffing needs to be addressed and preference given to equally qualified female candidates. There should be a minimum percentage of women in the various executive, managing and technical committees. Although this may seem like an artificial measure in the beginning, it is an effective tool and will help encourage and groom women to take on higher-level positions. Recruitment practices and career planning need to be more encouraging towards women.
Summarising key recommendations

- Dissemination about the national society, its activities and value of volunteers needs to be done actively to win the confidence of people and dispel misconceptions.

- Junior and Youth Red Cross programmes should be promoted in all branches to sustain the spirit of voluntary service.

- Commitment from the governance and management to support gender equality among staff and volunteers to be reflected through formulation of a gender and volunteering policy.

- Besides ensuring equal participation of men and women, disadvantaged sections such as Muslim women must be encouraged to participate.

- Recruitment practices and career planning need to be more encouraging towards women.

- There should be a minimum level of women’s participation in governance and management.
Programme schedule for field visits

The three branches selected for the study were Trincomalee, Kurunegala and Colombo city branch

**Trincomalee**
Focus group discussions

- Community at Nilavely Welfare Centre
- Volunteers at Nilavely Red Cross Training Centre, Kuchevali unit
- Community at Salappaiyarru Tsunami Welfare Centre
- Men Youth volunteers, Trincomalee district
- Psychosocial volunteers and the unit President, Jetta unit, Kinnea Division
- Other organisations – WACCO, White pigeon, Care international, VOVCOD

**Interviews**

- Ratarajah Sutharsini, volunteer
- Chairman and Sr. Project Coordinator

**Kurunegala Branch**

Focus group discussions

- Volunteers at Polgahawela Aragoda
- Paluwewa Village in Giribawa division
- Interviews with Chairman, Secretary, BEO and other branch committee members
- Junior RC volunteers, Dodamgaslanda Central School
- Youth Volunteers, District branch

**Interviews**

- PLAN Lanka
- Secretary Kurunegala district branch

**Colombo City Branch**

Focus group discussions

- Youth and adult volunteers, Mattakuliya Tsunami camp
- Interview with Branch Executive Officer (BEO)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Population</strong></th>
<th>144,319,628</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area covered</strong></td>
<td>144,000 sq km land area and a 580 km coastline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population growth rate</strong></td>
<td>2.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex ratio</strong></td>
<td>1.05 male(s)/female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fertility rate</strong></td>
<td>3.13 children born/woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infant mortality rate</strong></td>
<td>62.6 deaths/1,000 live births</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Literacy rate** | Population 43.1%  
Male - 53.9%  
Female - 31.8% |
| **Religions** | Muslim 83%,  
Hindu 16%,  
Other 1% |
| **Population below poverty line** | 45% |
| **Gender Development Index (GDI) rank** | 105 |
| **Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)** | 79th |

Source: CIA World Fact book  
Bangladesh Country Fact Sheet UNDP, HDR 2005
Introduction: Women in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a patriarchal society, i.e. in the social hierarchy men are considered superior and there are typical roles and behaviour for women that are governed by stringent beliefs. Women’s mobility is restricted, especially in rural areas where they cannot interact with men outside their families and are seen as caretakers of the household and children. They remain particularly vulnerable to living in poverty and gender discrimination is indicated in official statistics on health, nutrition, education and employment. Fulfilment of quotas in government departments also remains far short of target.

Over the last decade, there has been a gradual change in attitudes and women are more active in both domestic and public life. A quota system for female recruitment in the public sector, free education programme for females and micro credit schemes to encourage self-employment are some of the initiatives taken by the government to improve the status of women. A number of NGOs and organisations also have women oriented programmes like self help groups and loan facilities. A combination of all these factors has helped in improving the status of women and increasing their participation.

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

Under the guidance of the Federation Regional Organisational Development Programme, one of the first initiatives taken in Bangladesh in women’s development was conducting gender sensitisation workshops throughout the country. The workshops were targeted at communities to spread awareness on gender related issues and dissemination about the National Society. Although the BDRCS has officially designated a gender focal person, these workshops are...
being conducted through the Organisational Development Department. As a result of these sensitisation workshops, women’s forums have been set up at unit levels and till 2005. 29 out of 68 branches had established women’s forums.

The average profile of the Women’s Forum members interacted with, is in the age group of 25-40 years and education up to SSC levels and higher. In Bangladesh, women are usually married off before the age of 18 years, so most of them have grown up children, which gives them more free time and they face lesser restrictions at home. All of them are life members of the National Society. The main objective of the forums is to spread gender awareness in the communities and where resources permit, start women focused activities. The forums hold monthly meetings at the units where they identify communities and activities that they want to engage in. They have also been provided with a computer that they are free to use at the unit.

However, the representation of women in staffing levels remains dismal and even though some women have been appointed in the Governing Board, at senior programme and management levels the number is negligible. A Gender policy was approved by the governing board, and in 2005, it was made mandatory for at least 2 out of 10 unit executive committee members to be women. If they are not elected, they will be appointed.

The Junior Red Cross (JRC) programme in Bangladesh was started with 15 schools in 1975 and the Youth Red Cross (YRC) at college level in 1978. They both were merged into Red Cross Youth (RCY) in 1980. There are different categories of volunteers in the BDRCS who are programme specific. The volunteer management policy is currently under revision and one of the recommended changes is to have general volunteers, who can be given training in different programme areas. This will enable better utilisation of the volunteers in a variety of roles.

Observations

The main constraint that the women in Bangladesh face is restrictions from their families and society at large. This is primarily due to the traditional mindsets that limit the role of women to looking after the household and children. Women who do work out of their homes are often treated with scepticism and have to observe high standards of morality.

One of the key motivators for women to volunteer is that it gives them a sense of pride and respect in society. Although women contribute a lot in household activities, their contribution is taken for granted. They are not appreciated for their work, whereas as volunteers, they gain respect and admiration. Women who do manage to convince their families and participate in social activities have to work doubly hard to ensure that their household responsibilities are not neglected.

In communities where the national society has run successful programmes and the people have clearly benefitted, women do not face as many constraints. The Kashinagar Community in Brahmabariya houses 250 families, mostly scheduled castes, and is regularly affected by floods and big waves. It is away from the mainland and accessible only by boat. The BDRCS ran a very successful Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) programme and
provides relief assistance regularly. 25 women squad volunteers have been trained in mother child health care and water sanitation. Even though they are very poor and uneducated, after the training they acquired a great deal of confidence and during the group discussion they were self assured and participative. Women in the community were also extremely eager to participate in Red Crescent activities. They did not anticipate any problems, since their families respect Red Crescent as an organisation that has supported them in time of need.

Women’s forums have been a tremendous step to increase visibility of women in the units. A self-solvency scheme was initiated with some communities in which the members put aside a fistful (mutthi) of rice everyday, which they collect and sell it in the open market. The collected funds are managed by the community through their elected president and secretary and are kept aside for emergencies.

However the Forums terms of reference are not clearly defined and they have not been integrated into the branch activities. The provision of a computer for the groups does not seem to have an added value at this stage, as most of them do not know how to use it and don't have concrete plans of action. Their focus is on starting women oriented programmes independently but in the absence of allocated budgets, this has been very difficult. Skills development and income generation programmes remain a top priority for them.

Within the national society, the proportion of women in staffing is very low especially in management positions. There is a feeling of discontent among female staff members at not having access to equal opportunities and a need to have a forum which can address their concerns.

At the junior and youth levels the equal representation of men and women is most encouraging and the youth volunteers in the units are very active. A national camp is organised annually where volunteers get together, share their experiences and are given leadership, First Aid training etc. A Best volunteer award is given based on an individuals’ attitude and work involvement. Schools are also awarded bi annually for their JRC programmes.

There seems to be a suspicion of humanitarian organisations and NGOs of having ulterior motives, especially in some far-flung rural areas where instances of religious conversions have been reported in the past.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

As head of the household, men make all the important decisions; so motivational campaigns should be targeted at men and women to reduce socio cultural barriers to women’s participation. Awareness campaigns about the organization, its mandate and activities will help dispel any misconceptions in society and gender sensitization to be integrated into all trainings, events and workshops. Women also need to be made aware of their own potential and become self confident to participate in social activities.

There is a natural tendency to work with sections of the community who are forthcoming and readily volunteer their services. Targets for having a certain percentage of the volunteers as women in programmes will help ensure that efforts are made to persuade and encourage women’s participation.
Some adjustments may be needed to assure the volunteers and their families of their safety and provide an enabling work environment. Having female staff members and volunteers in the society is a very comforting factor for women. It also has a snowballing effect and encourages others to join. Establishment of women’s forums is evidence of this, where most of the volunteers have joined due to encouragement and inspiration by existing female members.

There is a need for more clarity regarding the role of the gender focal person and integration with the volunteer department. She can support programmes to have better gender perspective in their planning for volunteers and also guide the women’s forums to be strong and active. The Women’s Forums need to have a clear mandate and their activities integrated into the unit plans and budgets. There should also be criteria for women to join the women’s forums based on their skills, experience and potential to contribute.

One of the best examples in the region for women’s participation is the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) in Bangladesh, which has been very successful in recruiting women volunteers. The CPP covers 11 units and has 35,000 volunteers out of which 5,500 are women. All the 11 units have committees of 12 volunteers each, out of which 2 are women. There is a proposal to increase the committee to 15 members and women to 5. The involvement of women volunteers has made it easier to access households and families and the community women have been extremely enthusiastic to participate.

Although the national society already has some activities and events for volunteer motivation, more initiatives can be taken to encourage and motivate women volunteers. It can be in the form of some kind of recognition for units which have shown improvement and are actively encouraging women’s participation.

**Summarising key recommendations**

- Integrate gender sensitisation in all trainings and workshops and target men and families to advocate the importance of women’s role in development
- Targets for all programmes to involve a certain percentage of women volunteers
- Better representation of women within the organisation to increase the comfort factor for women to approach the national society
- Terms of reference for the gender focal person and the women’s forums to be better defined and treated as a cross cutting role, with plans and budgets incorporated into programmes
- Recognition for units and programmes that show improvement and make an effort to encourage women’s participation
Programme schedule for field visits

The two branches selected for the study were Tangail and Brahmobariya.

**Tangail**
- Focus group discussion with the women’s forum
- Interaction with branch officials
- Visit to the National Women’s Society.

**Brahmobariya**
- Focus group discussion with youth volunteers
- Focus group discussion with the women’s forum
- Interaction with branch officials
- Visit to the Hunger Project
- Focus group discussion with the squad volunteers at Kashinagar community

**Dhaka**
- Focus group discussion with youth volunteers

**Interviews**
- Director of Unit Affairs
- Director Cyclone Preparedness Programme

Interaction with Federation OD Delegate
**MALDIVES**

Population 349,106  
Area covered 300 sq km  
Population growth rate 2.82%  
Sex ratio 1.05 male(s)/female  
Fertility rate 5.02 children born/woman  
Infant mortality rate 56.52 deaths/1,000 live births  
Literacy rate 97.2%  
Male - 97.1%  
Female - 97.3%  
Religions Islam  
Population below poverty line N.A  
Gender Development Index (GDI) rank unavailable  
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) unavailable  

Source: CIA World Factbook
Introduction: Maldives

Maldives boasts a very unique social and geographical structure compared to its peers in the South Asia region. It consists of 1190 islands, out of which 200 are inhabited, grouped into 26 atolls spread over an area of 1,000,000 square kilometers. Male, the capital of Maldives is the commercial center as well as the seat of the government. Roughly a quarter of the population of Maldives lives in Male whereas the rest of the population lives on islands that are traditionally dependent on fishing and to a lesser extent agriculture.

When the tsunami hit Maldives in December 2004, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies responded to the needs of the affected people with support from other participating national societies. This was the beginning of the process for setting up a Maldives Red Crescent Society and almost 15 months since the disaster, a lot has been achieved.

At the time of the study, preparations were on for conducting the first General Assembly in May 2006. A National Society Working Group has been formed with individuals from different walks of life who are discussing the formation of the national society, its structure, legal basis and management. Dissemination campaigns have been held through media channels and visits to all atolls, to spread awareness about the movement and encourage people to participate.

Women in Maldives

Maldives reflects a fairly positive state of affairs pertaining to the status of women. One of the key contributing factors to this is the equal access to educational opportunities at the islands by both sexes, at least up to secondary school i.e. std VII.

It is at the secondary and post secondary levels that they are left behind in comparison to boys. Higher education is available only on atoll islands, regional education centers or Male and most parents are not comfortable with their daughters travelling and living on their own. Also the average age of marriage for girls is 18 years, which coincides with their education. Traditionally, a woman’s role in society is to take care of the home and children, while the men go out for fishing, work overseas, in Malé and on other islands. The per capita household income is fairly reasonable, which further reduces the need for women to earn. Even though there has been a rise in the participation of women in public life, they still face constraints due to the stereotype gender roles. Maldives has one of the highest divorce rates in the world. However there is no social stigma attached to being divorced for men or women and remarriages are common.

There is no typical form of discrimination against women – they enjoy equal pay for equal work, can inherit property and also have the right to vote. Although they are eligible for candidature to all elected bodies, the constitution clearly states that the President has to be male.

Restriction on mobility acts as the main barrier for women to participate equally in the economic advancement and fully utilize opportunities. It is a chain of events that prevents women from...
getting higher level education outside the islands so that they are not eligible for top level or technical positions. Having completed their education, they are married off and get busy taking care of their homes and families. Employment and growth opportunities on bigger islands, in tourism, fisheries etc. are closed for them as it is not a norm for women to travel for work away from their homes. It is mainly at the atoll islands that opportunities are better and women are working in the atoll offices, hospitals, education centers etc. but primarily in junior and middle level positions.

**Observations**

Each island has an Island Development Committee (IDC) and a Women’s Development Committee (WDC). In the day-to-day running of the country at local levels, atoll or island chiefs play a significant role. However the traditional model of male leadership dominates all decision making positions and an extremely small number of top positions in government bodies are held by women. Even though there are no restrictions on women being appointed as island or atoll chiefs, it has never happened. Except for the President of the Women’s Development Committee, which is mandatory, there are minimal or no women in the Island Development Committees.

The women’s development committees are present on all the islands and in each of the six wards in Male. Although the senior most position holders – President, Vice president, Secretary and Treasurer are paid a minimal allowance, the members of the committee work on a voluntary basis. The committees were set up with the objective of increasing the participation of women in the community’s; however some committees are definitely more active and well organized than others. They are mostly responsible for cleaning and waste management on the islands and hosting guests and cultural events.

In some cases they also run cafes and small shops, health awareness campaigns, skill training classes like sewing, fabric painting etc. The committee members decide on the activities depending on the needs and interest of the community women. Some of the active committees like the WDC at Lhaviyani atoll, make annual plans for their activities and for larger projects, can also apply through the project office or gender ministry for local and international funding.

The Gender Ministry awards the most active WDC among all the atolls. It is an annual event and seminars are organized for WDC representatives in Male and sometimes at atoll level. Funding is given to the winning committee for undertaking projects and women are very enthusiastic to participate.

For the General Assembly, there were a number of female nominations, however very few were finally elected. At the Lhaviyani Atoll, out of 23 nominations almost half were women and it was encouraging that one of the three candidates selected is female. At Thaa Atoll, which has one of the strongest WDCs, a strong female candidate lost by a very small margin and will hopefully participate actively once the National Society is established. In the island communities where everyone is known to each other, winning an election depends a lot on
the popularity and prestige of the individual. There is a tendency among women to vote for the female candidates.

Effort is being made at all levels to involve women’s participation from decision making to implementation of programmes at community level. For the General Assembly nominations women were encouraged to participate. The Chairperson of the NS Working group is on a rotation to ensure that women also get an opportunity to chair the session. However there is a tendency for men to dominate the meetings and constant effort needs to be put to encourage equal participation. A code of conduct for volunteers is also in the process of being adopted which addresses the issue of diversity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

WDCs are good access points on the islands and women are very forward and participative in community work. They also mobilize other women to join in. Providing skills development training can be a good entry level for attracting women to the organization and then channeling their involvement for other activities as well. However it must be kept in mind that the WDCs are closely associated with the government and in some cases a handful of women are always active in forums, which discourages others from participating. A conscious effort needs to be made to target non committee members and persuade others to join.

Women are not accustomed to public speaking and conventionally do not voice their opinions openly in gatherings. There are many female headed households with the men usually away
for long periods of time. Thus it is the women who are active in community work, available for trainings and attend public gatherings.

For the focus group discussion the women were quite vocal among themselves but in the presence of a male outsider or senior official, they were more shy and reluctant. They need to be addressed and encouraged to communicate and voice their opinions.

There are less options and opportunities for employment, especially in the smaller islands. This leaves the youth with a lot of free time; as a result of which many are falling victims to drug abuse. In some islands youth forums and sports facilities exist. There is a great potential for Junior and Youth Red Cross circles which can target both sexes and instill the spirit of community work and volunteerism. The challenge will be of course to ensure that they can be engaged in challenging and interesting activities. Girl Guide groups also exist in Maldives and are active in schools.

Even though 30% of nominations for the General Assembly were women, finally they formed around 16% of the selected candidates. Being elected is also just the beginning, as the main challenge is to ensure that the women members participate actively in forums. Leadership training for women can be an effective way to motivate them to be pro active and confident in leadership and decision making roles. An integral part of the dissemination drive needs to be advocacy on the importance of women’s role in the country’s development.
At the stage of inception of the national society, it is inevitable that there is close interaction with the government. However it is important that the principle of independence is advocated strongly, as well as the organizations commitment to encouraging equal participation. The WDCs felt that sometimes information might not get filtered down to women through the atoll ministries or island committees, as they are male dominated and do not consider women capable for some roles.

**Summarising key recommendations**

- WDCs are very active in community work and can be good entry points in the islands; however non committee members should also be involved.

- Besides ensuring that women are involved in governance and management, they have to be encouraged to participate and voice their opinions in public forums. Leadership training is one option

- There is an excellent platform for Junior and Youth Red Cross circles, to instill the spirit of voluntarism in the communities and channel the youth productively

- Dissemination needs to be done to advocate the role of women in development and
Programme Schedule for Field Visit

The three atolls selected were Male, Raa and Lhaviyani

**Male**

**Interactions**
- Canadian, British, Australian and American Red Cross
- Federation Head of Delegation, Programme Coordinator and Organisational Development Delegate

**Interview**
- UNDP Gender Adviser
- Female NS Formation Volunteer Group Member
- Gender Ministry official

**Raa Atoll, Ungoofaaru Island**
- Focus group discussion with the women’s development committee (WDC)
- Interview with President, WDC and General Assembly nominees

**Lhaviyani Atoll, Naifaru Island**
- Focus group discussion with the women’s development committee (WDC)
- Interview with General Assembly nominees
Further Reading and References


INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES

ALSTON, M., BOWLES, W., 2003 Research for social workers: An introduction to methods. 2nd ed. India: Rawat publications,

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society: The recruitment of female volunteers to respond to disasters, Switzerland 1999a

Gender policy, 12th Session of the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1999b

Strategy 2010: To improve the lives of vulnerable people to mobilising the power of humanity, Switzerland 1999c

Volunteering Policy: Implementation Guide, Switzerland 2002a

Volunteer 2005: Plan for the Federation Secretariat’s work to support the development of volunteering in National Societies, 2001-2005, Switzerland 2002b
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.
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 International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.