



### **TEHRAN NEIGHBOURHOOD DISASTER VOLUNTEER (DAWAM)**

Three-quarters of the world's population live in areas that have experienced extreme natural events such as earthquakes, tropical cyclones, floods or droughts in the period from 1980 to 2000. The resulting disasters have caused a total of over 1.3 million casualties –an average of 184 deaths per day worldwide– in the period. Furthermore, the impact of natural hazards on human and economic development has been rising due to the increasing vulnerability of human populations.

These stark facts raise several critical points. First, disaster risks of one kind or another threaten almost every setting. Second, the impact of a natural hazard depends not only on the magnitude of the event, but also on the vulnerability of the affected society. Third, society's vulnerability to disaster is determined by a wide range of economic, social and institutional factors, as well as by physical development. Fourth, as a consequence of the previous points, it is apparent that the challenge of reducing vulnerability concerns all segments of the society, not just the responsible specialized agencies.



**Volunteers of DAWAM in Tehran**

The role of local residents in disaster response worldwide experience demonstrates that no official disaster response system can cope adequately with a major seismic disaster. Such disasters may occur only once in several decades and the cost of establishing and maintaining a truly adequate response mechanism would be prohibitive. Thus, when disaster strikes, several days may elapse before official response teams reach all stricken sites. In consequence, a large portion of earthquake victims is rescued not by professionals but by local residents, neighbors and family members. It is confirmed by international experience.

Local residents push themselves to the limit in their wholehearted efforts to rescue loved ones and neighbors. Besides pulling victims from the rubble, their contributions include the provision of vital assistance and support which, in the chaotic environment of the disaster, is extremely important for the survival of victims.

However, in spite of these efforts, the effective contribution of local residents' is severely limited by their lack of preparation. Most "spontaneous volunteers" have scant knowledge or skills regarding search and rescue processes, handling of victims, first aid techniques, etc. There is no team organization or communication structure between them and essential rescue equipment, tools and materials are generally missing. Poorly prepared rescuers may actually cause unnecessary injury to the disaster victims and themselves. When professional civil defense teams do arrive on the scene, there is no clear basis for their collaboration with poorly organized local volunteers.

### **The DAWAM Volunteers approach:**

The DAWAM Volunteers approach is designed to mobilize the potentials of local residents while systematically addressing their weaknesses. A carefully designed program of training and practical exercises imparts the basic knowledge, skills and confidence that volunteers need for effective disaster response. The organization required to coordinate activities – and to maintain group preparedness over the long term– is provided by a DAWAM group structure with clearly defined roles, functions and procedures.

Finally, the effectiveness of volunteers is enhanced by protective clothing, appropriate tools and equipment.

Neighborhood-based approaches are particularly effective because of their adaptation to the specific vulnerabilities, problems and priorities of the local population. Vulnerability is reduced not only by building civil society, and improving the relationships between communities and the official disaster management system.



**Volunteers of DAWAM in Tehran**

### **Overall Purpose:**

The purpose of the Project was to reduce the risk of injury, loss of life and property damage facing the population of Tehran by strengthening the capacity of local community to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters, in particular those arising from seismic hazards, and linking this neighbourhood based capacity to the official disaster management system.

### **Objective:**

The objective of the Project in phase one was to test the appropriateness, effectiveness and sustainability of the neighbourhood disaster volunteer approach in at least five neighbourhoods of Tehran municipality. After the successfully implementation of the phase one, to cover development of this project in all the 375 neighborhoods or Mahalle (in Persian)



**Volunteers of DAWAM in Tehran**

### **Aim:**

The project **aimed** at empowering the volunteer citizens in the selected districts for preparedness, response and reconstruction upon disasters. The project would support establishing a network of such empowered neighbourhood citizens and linking that network to the formal network of district disaster management offices of the TDMMO. These aims were to be achieved through specific activities for training, organizing, and equipping the neighbourhood volunteers, as well as raising awareness at large in the community.

The Project was carried out at a pilot level in five selected neighbourhoods in districts 4, 6, 8, 10 and 17 of Tehran.



DAWAM awareness' meeting

As a way to create a common understanding of the mission and vision pursued by the Project among all the stakeholders, a declaration was formulated.

The declaration called for formation, organization, education and mobilization of volunteer groups in selected neighbourhoods to enhance the preparedness capacity for immediate help and rescue within the first 72 hours after a disaster and until the formal forces arrive to the site.

Establishment of volunteer groups, aimed at mobilizing the potentials of neighbourhood citizens in coping with disasters, included **three main elements:**

- Training and exercise, to gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to respond to disasters in a more effective manner.
- Organizing the volunteers to coordinate the activities and maintain their preparedness in the long run, using specific approaches and methods.
- Equipping the groups with the required tools, clothes and equipments.

### **The volunteer groups would be capable of performing the following functions:**

- Review the risks in their neighborhood;
- Assess the neighborhood's vulnerability;
- Formulate strategies for disaster risk management, including prevention, management and reconstruction through: strengthening the resistance of building and utilities;
- Support the formal disaster management system.
- Support the citizens, neighborhoods, and civil society organizations through increasing preparedness and capacity to cope with disasters.
- Identify the roles and functions of the community in preparedness, management and reconstruction.