



An irrigation canal fills in Mali's Mopti region, part of a CARE Nederland livelihoods project. Another PfR agency, Wetlands International, is restoring degraded forests and grazing land in the country's Niger Delta to help build healthy ecosystems. (Photo: Adinda Krombeen/CARE)

"But PfR is the first chance we've had to fully integrate environmental work in areas like river basin management with humanitarian risk-reduction."

Innovation, networks

Innovation is the core value of the PfR alliance. Combining three very extensive global networks for the first time – the Red Cross Red Crescent, Caritas (Cordaid) and CARE – with the technical and specialist advocacy experience of Wetlands International will produce a ground-breaking approach to risk-reduction, adaptation and environmental protection.

At the national level in the beneficiary countries, existing cooperation with ministries, meteorological offices, government climate-change focal points and other government institutions (focusing on environmental issues) and CSOs will all be intensified.

The Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre will build on existing cooperation with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the UN and the World Bank. "The basic principle of framing climate change in the same discussion as its humanitarian impacts is now well established," says Maarten van Aalst, who heads the Climate Centre. "The relatively new challenge is to operationalize it in the humanitarian sector – and PfR is a huge step in that direction."

Adds Pieter van Eijk: "PfR's country-based activities will be supplemented by a global strategy to disseminate experience and ensure achievements are sustained and replicated."

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Cordaid's DRR adviser, Sasja Kamil, adds: "We started working on DRR with drought in Africa several years ago. We've also been studying environmental issues. A survey we did in southern Ethiopia, for example, showed that climate-change impacts were killing livestock there and increasing poverty and food shortages."



A new partnership for resilience

May 2011

The backdrop

Natural and man-made disasters have been increasing exponentially over the past few decades, with climate change contributing to extreme weather. Degradation and loss of ecosystems have also been intensifying the hazards that, when combined with vulnerability, cause disaster. But these impacts were rarely, if ever, addressed in a coordinated way in the same programme, until now.

It's well established that the poorest people in the poorest countries suffer disproportionately. Lives, assets, products and crops are lost; livelihoods are cut off; economic growth is curtailed or sent into reverse. Disasters wipe out hard-won gains in poverty reduction, threatening progress toward the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

To improve this situation, five Netherlands-based humanitarian, development and environmental organizations, with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have formed an alliance to reduce the impact of hazards on vulnerable communities. They are the Netherlands Red Cross, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, CARE Nederland, Cordaid, and Wetlands International: the "Partners for Resilience" (PfR).




The PfR will work with communities in the Philippine capital Manila that are regularly affected by floods. (Photo: Yoshi Shimizu/IFRC)



The vision is that disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate-change adaptation (CCA) can be combined with ecosystem management and restoration (EMR) to significantly boost *resilience*: people's ability to withstand shocks in their environment – and critical for helping them escape poverty.

“What’s special about this programme is the inclusion of ecosystem management in real-time humanitarian DRR work in the face of a changing climate,” says Pieter van Eijk of

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Wetlands International. “There will always be extreme weather, but the disasters it generates can be mitigated if we make sure ecosystems are as strong as they can be.”

The transcontinental programme, entitled “Climate-Smart Disaster Risk Reduction”, will make this vision a reality in Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Uganda.

“This is believed to be the biggest programme of its kind in the world, and one of the first,” says Raimond Duijsens of the Netherlands Red Cross, the PfR coordinator.

Aims, strategies

The PfR will work both with people in the countryside and urban slum-dwellers in areas of disaster risk and environmental degradation aggravated by climate change.

The experience shared by the PfR members (several have worked together in the field before) made a large array of interventions feasible. But the new programme focuses on three key areas:

- 1. Strengthening community resilience.** Work at local level will be carried out in close collaboration with communities and encompass disaster preparedness and early warning, livelihood security, preventing environmental degradation, poverty reduction, and the protection of water resources.
- 2. Empowering civil society.** The PfR aim to increase the capacities of civil society organizations (CSO) working on reducing disaster risk and strengthen cooperation between government knowledge centres and non-governmental actors, essential if community resilience is to be reinforced. The work will include: risk analysis; risk-reduction plans; early warning across a range of timescales; support to communities and civil society.
- 3. Policy dialogue.** The PfR will seek to create a policy-context more conducive to DRR and CCA at the local, national and international level to make communities, landscapes and institutions all more resilient.

In concrete terms, the PfR will work with communities to determine the main disaster risks they face, and many local partners have already been recruited. Community-managed projects will enhance the security of livelihoods by, for example, making houses more disaster-resistant and protecting arable land against damage from natural hazards; agricultural and pastoralist techniques will be improved; robust water-supply systems will be

established; micro-credit and risk insurance will be introduced; and good practice shared through methods like participatory video.

Adding to household-level measures, the PfR will implement EMR to ensure the resilience of *landscapes*. Among other projects, the alliance will plant mangrove belts in vulnerable coastal areas, ensure sustainable use of river and marsh water in dry regions, and manage forests and wetlands to prevent floods.

The PfR also believe their programme will be more effective if it can make the institutional environment more conducive to ecosystem-based DRR – from international to grass-roots level. They will promote dialogue and solutions involving government, civil society, the private sector and knowledge centres.

“CARE Netherlands is now the focal point for DRR for the CARE family worldwide and it’s one of our main priorities,” says Celso Dulce, the agency’s representative in the Philippines, who has been working to bring global

Dialogue involving government, civil society, the private sector and knowledge centres 

experience to bear on risk reduction there. “For example, our existing DRR programme takes account of climate trends. We’re working across a wide range of activities and timescales – from emergency planning that incorporates climate-change projections to helping people adjust farming technologies.”



An ex-soldier in a drought-hit mid-highlands area of Ethiopia, where PfR agencies will assist farmers with improved agricultural techniques and water conservation. (Photo: Alex Wynter/IFRC)

PfR case study

Flores and West Timor, Indonesia

The PfR will work in several areas on Flores and West Timor – dry, mountainous islands that are now largely deforested, where run-off after irregular but heavy rainfall has become more extreme, leading to soil erosion, floods and the loss of crops. Dry seasons have become drier; coasts once protected by ecosystems like forests and wetlands are being destroyed. Climate change exacerbates the hazards people face.

The PfR will find ways of helping villagers reduce the hazards they face: the Red Cross, CARE and Cordaid have extensive experience with such community-based assessments. Meanwhile, threats to ecosystems will be mapped and their protective role reinforced – this is the core expertise of Wetlands International. The Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre will help assess the climate risk for the project area across a range of timescales.

Examples of possible strategies for communities, supported by the PfR programme, are building shelters, planting trees, establishing disaster-response committees. The PfR will also work with the local authorities to ensure sound policies and plans are put in place, like sustainable water-management and coastal defence.



A young survivor of Hurricane Felix rests on a broom in a community shelter on Nicaragua’s Mosquito Coast. The PfR states in Central America, like many others, are vulnerable to a wide range of climate hazards, including severe hurricanes. (Photo: Kimmo Lehtonen/IFRC)