



150 years of humanitarian action
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REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP

PROMOTING AND ENHANCING THE RED RESPONSE: WORKING WITH EXTERNAL ACTORS

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(A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The workshop focused on the fundamental strategic questions of when and how we should seek to cooperate and coordinate with external actors. There was discussion of what funding streams should look like and how the potential risks of operational relationships could best be mitigated. Participants stressed the need to ensure respect for the Fundamental Principles and to establish fair and equal partnerships. There was also agreement on the necessity for National Societies to meet the expectations placed upon them concerning accountability and transparency. Many issues were raised and participants expressed a desire to continue discussions as part of the process of strengthening Movement coordination and cooperation.

(B) GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

It is important to ensure that all partnerships uphold respect for the Fundamental Principles.

- Our acceptance and access depend on our image, which in turn relies on our perceived respect of the Fundamental Principles.
- Our choice of partners can affect our reputation (although we are sometimes overly cautious in this regard).
- Government recognition and support for the National Society's identity and respect for the Fundamental Principles is essential.
- It should not be forgotten that National Societies are auxiliaries to the public authorities.

To meet people's needs as effectively as possible, we need to coordinate with other actors working in the country.

We need to continue to fight for partnerships on equal terms.

- The Burundi and Kenya Red Cross Societies have shown how this is possible.
- We should not accept temporary implementing partnerships under which we are assigned discrete tasks and no voice.
- We should not accept unequal pay terms between local actors and those working for international non-governmental organizations and international organizations.

There is a continuing need for guidance as to how best to coordinate with, rather than be “coordinated by,” United Nations (UN) actors. This guidance must be disseminated and followed by all Movement components.

When working with external actors, we need to establish a common understanding of key terms, such as “protection” and “vulnerability.” It is important that we remain clear on which population groups are the most vulnerable and that we meet their needs. We must ensure that our service and work is inclusive.

Among the good practices identified were joint exercises with the UN, civil-protection agencies and other actors, and the sensitization of governments to the unique nature of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and to the Fundamental Principles of the Movement as a whole.

We require common approaches, policies and strategies, and these must be clear and easy to understand. There is a need for continuing guidance on who National Societies are expected to coordinate with and how. The cluster system of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs presents unique challenges in this regard, as it brings funding but can also impose overbearing coordination obligations.

It is important to keep in mind that each situation is different, with a complexity of its own.

We also have to be aware of the accountability and compliance obligations that are imposed on us. We need to have robust systems that meet the demands of our funding partners. At the same time, we may need to stand up to onerous reporting obligations that drain our capacity to respond.

Negotiations and agreements are critical, and any support that the ICRC and the Federation can provide in this regard is welcome.

(C) CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There was a call for clear and simple policies or guidelines, including model agreements, which can be adapted to each context. Existing policies and guidance should be followed. There was also a call for greater clarity regarding the means and mechanisms for ensuring an appropriate level and depth of coordination with UN agencies, in particular the cluster system.
2. We must progress from being seen as ad-hoc and task-specific implementing partners to equal operational partners, and ensure the sustainability and reliability of such partnerships. There is a need to work together to ensure fair and appropriate agreements, avoiding onerous reporting obligations and unfair payment conditions.
3. We should make sure that our definition of “vulnerable persons” coincides with that of

our partners, rather than that of UN agencies, and ensure that we serve our stakeholders accordingly.

4. It is necessary to manage the balance between the humanitarian imperative, security risks and threats to our image. We should not be afraid to pursue partnerships, as they are opportunities to better serve the most vulnerable.
5. Respect for the Fundamental Principles remains an essential means of ensuring access, acceptance, a good reputation and security.
6. Increased demands on and opportunities for local actors must be met with systems of transparency and accountability.
7. Participants welcomed the focus on external actors in the initiative to strengthen Movement coordination and cooperation. They pointed to the need for strategic alignment on these issues across the Movement.