

***DRAFT*: Localising Humanitarian Action in the Pacific (low-cost approach)**

National Society Development / **Pacific Regional Office** / April 2013

Background

The regional office has undertaken some analysis on how it can support more sustainable national society-led, locally-resourced community based humanitarian activities.

All small island/large ocean national societies in the region are heavily dependent on international funding and spend a great proportion of their time implementing internationally funded short-term projects. National societies find themselves under constant pressure to deliver project outputs and reporting, leaving limited time to focus on longer term initiatives to strengthen their grassroots branch and volunteer network and to develop more locally driven, locally resourced needs-based community action. Often these internationally funded projects focus on one geographic area and have a level of complexity that requires an international delegate or several, and often, parallel management systems. In a number of circumstances the project is directly implemented by headquarters and branches are bypassed.

In addition to these internationally funded projects national societies are implementing a range of low-cost/no-cost activities at branch level. These activities have evolved organically and have been the key driver in building the foundation or standing capability of these branches and their ability to accomplish meaningful activities without external funding. These humanitarian activities are relatively simple to implement and are deeply appreciated by communities. Importantly they answer a key question articulated by volunteers in almost every branch meeting.

The key question articulated by volunteers

“You know we finished the Red Cross training with such motivation in our hearts, but after we come back what do we do?”

“Honestly I am motivated, interested and want to support my community, I have received a couple of Red Cross trainings and have a group of 10 volunteers / friends”.

“But we do not know what to do or how to do it - after all we have no money”

An example of a low-cost low-tech activity

Junior Red Cross – Meals on Heels

The Junior Red Cross (JRC) on Mangaia Island (Cook Islands) is a highly visible, mobile and self-sustainable group operating out of the Mangaia Primary School. This program has been in operation for 22 years and it is estimated that more than 75 percent of the islands’ population have been JRC members. The program requires no external funding.

The JRC host a range of activities for the 14 to 16 year old students, they learn about the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Red Crescent, first aid, how to prepare for a disaster in the family home and wider community, early warning systems, and relocation planning for the elderly and invalid.

There is a particular emphasis on the elderly, socially excluded, isolated and incapacitated. The number of people in this situation is increasing as the extended family traditions weaken and working age families migrate in search of work.

The idea is simple, the students bring an extra piece of fruit or snack from home to school, they divide the items between the number of targeted vulnerable, pack them into bags and distribute them by foot.

The JRC visit the elderly in pairs providing the fruits or small snacks, staying behind for about an hour to provide companionship, cleaning, washing and other household chores. Importantly the JRC take a note of other hazards such as leaking taps, broken guttering, dislodged downpipes, tank water levels, cracked or broken windows, exposed electrical wires, overgrown long grass (fire hazard) etc.

This information is provided back to the school and branch who then coordinate with various Red Cross volunteers (with handy skills) to arrange a small working bee to resolve these various issues as they arise.

The Red Cross branch has a designated volunteer for each vulnerable household. Volunteers will check on each individual at the early warning stage of a natural disaster. Each person visited is part of the Red Cross branch evacuation plan.

These activities are highly valued in the community, promote social inclusion and directly reduce the risks associated with disasters. Every two weeks volunteers wearing Red Cross T Shirts are visible walking in the community.

A teacher commented: “afterwards the parents of one of the JRC volunteers will wash 20 T-shirts hanging them on the washing line – it’s like free advertising for us”.

What could success look like at branch level across the Pacific?

Branches undertaking monthly low-cost community-based activities that address local needs.

These activities importantly achieve the following:

- Contribute to community resilience in the low-income environment
- Maintain and build the volunteer base through regular enjoyable and meaningful low / no cost activities
- Maintain and build relationships between the branch and surrounding communities
- Maintain and build relationships with local government representatives, traditional leaders, health officers, churches, island administrators, police etc
- Through ongoing low / no cost activities, relationships and trust is established with the community unlocking opportunities to advocate, influence and explore local resource mobilization
- Evolution of a basic branch structure that has sustainable standing capabilities as prioritized through consultation between the branch, their community and HQ (potentially including emergency response, first aid, DRR and hygiene promotion)
- Evolution of a basic plan that brings some logic, continuity and order to these activities
- Evolution of board involvement as situations requiring consideration and decision making arise
- Evolution of branches engaging with their headquarters, discussing their capacity building priorities and development of a balance relationship

The evolution of 20 examples of low-cost / low-tech risk reduction activities

The regional office, with Pacific National Societies, has identified and documented a collection of 20 low-cost activities.

Each activity is articulated by a simple picture of the activity on one side of the poster and a “what you can do” section on the back.

An additional facilitator’s card is available for each activity where slightly more technical information is provided.

In a number of pilot scenarios, branch volunteers have quickly grasped the activities and demonstrated they are able to execute these activities without external funding. Simplicity is key.

The regional office believes that these activities can be the primary driver to a strong branch foundation with standing capabilities. We anticipate that most national societies and their branches will undertake these activities in their own way with their own variations. The activities provided may act as a catalyst for the branch to design and implement their own unique needs-based activities.

Importantly we can resolve the often articulated question as highlighted above:

“Honestly I am motivated, interested and want to support my community, I have received a couple of Red Cross trainings and have a group of 10 volunteers / friends”. “But we do not know what to do or how to do it - after all we have no money”

The wider advantages of a branch with a strong foundation and standing capabilities

Branches have standing capabilities to respond to disasters and emergencies

Branches can more easily scale up during seasonal events

Branches can request specific capacity building that is suited to their own needs and priorities

Branches can absorb, institutionalize, and operationalize external capacity building support

Branches can advocate to HQ the priorities of vulnerable communities

Branches are sustainable entities that are better placed to absorb externally supported projects from time to time

Public authorities, Movement partners and other humanitarian actors have access to an implementing partner with capability at the grassroots

Branches with a stronger foundation and standing capabilities provide a more salient focus for national strategic and operational planning

The IFRC and wider Movement efforts under Strategy 2020, in providing membership services and capacity building will have greater impact and lasting sustainability.

Attachment and Detachment

These basic and sustainable branches provide a secure platform to which national societies can “attach” other more intensive activities (when domestic or international resources allow) focused on developing skills, delivering more intensive services etc and then “detach” (reverting to normal engagement); leaving an increased standing capability without reducing sustainability. The concept of attachment and detachment is significant – because it recognizes the importance of the branch’s own self reliance as well as the reality of the national office’s finite capacity for intensive ongoing engagement.