



COUNCIL OF DELEGATES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

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Workshop Report

Improving our combined output by fostering responsibility and partnerships

Workshop Officers

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Rationale

With the proliferation of working modalities within our Movement, particularly bilateral ones, coordination is in many cases a daunting task. A greater number of partners within operations, each with different preferences and requirements put great pressure on the ability of a host National Society or lead agency to assure effective, timely and well-targeted assistance to those in need. Deficiencies in coordination can have serious consequences – first and foremost for the beneficiaries, but also for our relationship with donors, our image and future opportunities.

During the Council of Delegates three consecutive workshops were organized on the issue of collective responsibility and partnerships. The workshops were very well attended and each of them showed very lively debates, indicating a great interest on the issue by all participants.

Working Definition

During the workshops collective responsibility was defined as “the responsibility of all components of the Movement to deliver effectively to beneficiaries in a coordinated and efficient way, without imposing immense bureaucratic burdens on the host National Society. Accountability and transparency to all stakeholders, particularly the beneficiaries, was seen as of utmost importance.

Perspectives

During the various workshops many opinions were expressed. Below these are clustered in different perspectives, on basis of the working definition: beneficiaries, supporting partners, and host National Society, while back-donors were also mentioned as important stakeholders. Generally, building collective responsibility is a learning process that requires open and transparent communication, where mistakes can be made and where we can put lessons learned into practice.

- **Beneficiaries' perspective**

Accountability to beneficiaries, as mentioned often, should be the prime concern in all our cooperation. Beneficiaries should be considered as responsible subjects rather than receiving objects. Ensuring their involvement can be time and energy consuming, and should be adequately planned and budgeted for. The importance of their involvement is also reflected in the Code for Good Partnership, and in the Code of Conduct. They can (and should) play an important role in planning, supervising and even (physically) implementing activities. Some examples indicate that involvement can also constitute cost sharing. An appropriate way to engage beneficiaries is through volunteers, who can act as a liaison between the involved National Societies and the beneficiaries, and their role should be much more valued.

Furthermore it was mentioned that several (major) operations have shown that there is a tendency within the Red Cross to become engaged in activities which are not our natural expertise when resources for such activities become available. In these situations, it was stated, we should consider to what extent we ought to stick to our expertise, and moreover that we should explain well to the beneficiaries (and other stakeholders) the choices we make whether or not to become engaged in such activities, and why.

- **Host National Society**

Bilateralism, it was stated many times, is a reality within the Movement, hence the importance of coordination. All participants agreed that the Host National Society should be in the driving seat regarding all international support, and that all programmes should be contributing to its national Strategic Plan. CAS (Cooperation Agreement Strategies) is generally seen as a means to align the various contributions, MoUs are also considered important specific instruments, while the Seville Agreement is regarded as an important general tool. Its Supplementary Measures state that the National Society should be the Primary Partner of the Lead Agency if not in fact the Lead Agency. Several participants stated however that a number of principles contained within the Seville Agreement is little or not respected, indicating that the general awareness of important tools and instruments is low. The Code of Good Partnership is considered a particularly important instrument because it is specifically designed to benefit cooperation. Since agreements are generally made at Movement level, knowledge and awareness is too often not transferred to national level. To improve this situation many participants stated that leadership on the ground is required.

It was generally felt that the Host National Society should reject support which does not correspond with aforementioned plans or tools, even though this would imply that the Society will miss out on funding for ascertained beneficiaries' needs. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the National Society should also be strict in not accepting different reporting and accountancy formats.

- **Supporting National Societies**

Many participants called for Supporting National Societies to become more aware of the extra burden that their various working modalities put on the Host National Society and should work for more standardization. This standardization should apply to the supporting National Societies' and Federations's own mechanisms as well as to those of their back donors. Furthermore, it was stated that it is important that all international assistance contributes to the strengthening of the Host National Society, and that these efforts are done in a coordinated manner. Additional efforts must be made to convince external donors of this need.

Concern was expressed about the uneven (or even absent) distribution of partnership support over potential host National Societies – several examples were shared which made it very clear that some are receiving excessive support, while others receive hardly any.

- **Institutional donors**

Supporting National Societies should, as mentioned before, seek dialogue with their institutional donors (often governments) to highlight the importance of flexibility regarding reporting and accountability modalities. Furthermore, it was mentioned that National Societies should be aware that the increasingly fragmented working methods within the Movement are being noticed by donors in terms of perception of increased transaction costs and the impact of this on the National Society.

General Considerations

A partnership within the Movement, it was mentioned often, should be a partnership of equals, able to present a united front internally and externally. Movement components must act upon previously agreed plans; respect and support the mandate and mission of other Movement components; and strive to achieve active and efficient coordination. Several discussants stated that monitoring the health of the partnership should be considered as important as monitoring the impact of activities, in order to contribute to ongoing learning. Partnerships should be flexible in terms of reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

Capacity enhancement is seen by the participants of the workshop as part of all operational partnerships – not to be regarded as a programme sector but in fact as a methodology in everything the Red Cross Red Crescent does. Recognising that this is often more difficult in countries affected by armed conflict, and therefore it was proposed during the workshops that a Guidance Document on working with National Societies in situations of armed conflict be developed. Yet tools like the Seven Ones of Operational Alliances, it was added, make as much sense in a conflict environment as they do in a development environment, but require commitment and perseverance.

Coordination has proven to ease the workload of host National Societies. There is nonetheless a cost associated with coordination, and participants of the workshop felt this should be shared on an equitable basis.

In the workshop it was found that basic conditions to work on Collective Responsibility are :

- **Compliance**

The Movement has been using different models to streamline cooperation, like CAS and Operational Alliance. The Code of Good Partnership is designed specifically to streamline partnerships, and is regarded positively, but will only be as good as our compliance with it. For this, it was felt by the participants, partnerships need rules and regulations and measurement of their impact.

- **Insight in complementarities**

The participants of the workshop considered alignment of the various efforts as critically important, applying to supporting National Societies as well as to the Federation Secretariat. The partners need to look beyond their narrow (national) interests. The Code of Good Partnership is designed to create a base of mutual respect.

- **Collective mindset**

Collective responsibility, it was found, requires a shared vision and common understanding of the objectives. A collective mindset is required.

- **Collective interest and impact**

The workshop participants agreed that collective responsibility should be based on collective interest and impact. Many of them questioned how to measure this collective impact – by higher quality of services provided to beneficiaries; by better and more effective use of donor resources; by capacity enhancement of National Societies and local community empowerment

- **Identified needs**

The workshops made clear that partnerships must be based on identified needs, and should only work for the good of those in need. It was stated that in our programmes we should not assume to know best what is good for the beneficiaries, but we should actually appreciate their needs.

Finally, partnerships are seen by the workshop participants as an important instrument for achieving collective responsibility, but can be both a blessing and a burden. Open and frank debate, like in this workshop, are a necessary prerequisite, as well as a willingness to learn. National Societies must adapt to new bilateral modes of working, and must be independent of the political motives of back-donors. Exit from a partnership is as important as its formation.