

Emergency response policy

Introduction

Emergencies can be on any scale, affecting a single household or a local community, causing disruption at a national or even global level. Emergencies are defined as life threatening situations which put people at risk of death or severe deterioration in their health status or living conditions, and which have the potential to outstrip the normal coping capacity of the individual, family, community and state support systems. Emergencies may affect men and women differently, and they in turn have differing ways of coping with emergencies.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent must be able to act in all these life threatening situations regardless of the scope of the emergency, and its actions must be governed by the same policy regardless of the size and level of the response.

Scope

This emergency response policy establishes the basis of Red Cross and Red Crescent emergency response and applies to all types of International Federation emergency response whether carried out by a single branch of a National Society, by an individual National Society or by the International Federation acting collectively.

Statement

The International Federation and each National Society shall:

- **Seek to assist the most vulnerable people in emergencies.** International Federation Emergency Response seeks to protect the life and health of the individual and to ensure respect for the individual through assisting those most affected in obtaining adequate access to basic life support needs. These encompass at a minimum:
 - Adequate safe water and sanitation.
 - Adequate food.
 - Adequate health care including psychological support.
 - Adequate shelter.
- Assistance must be carried out in a manner that does not add to the threat of violence against the assisted population.
- **Recognize the Red Cross Red Crescent role as auxiliary to government in humanitarian services** and thus will not replace or undermine state responsibilities where the potential for appropriate state action exists. In addition, it will not normally replace or duplicate the work that other humanitarian agencies are mandated to carry out.
- **Undertake emergency response according to the Fundamental Principles** of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and apply the principles and spirit of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.
- **Work within the competence of the Operating National Society** and the International Federation. Rely on, but not be limited by, local capabilities and coping mechanisms. Programme beneficiaries, men and women, must be meaningfully involved in the planning and implementation of emergency response.
- **Base their actions on appropriate disaster preparedness programming and planning.** International Federation emergency response programmes are designed and implemented to maximize the possibility of beneficiaries speedily returning to their normal lifestyles, or where this is not possible, to attain a quality of life as free from external aid as possible.
- **Work towards self reliance and sustainability of programming** by both the Operating National Society and the assisted population taking into account the long term effect of emergency assistance on future development opportunities. Operating National Societies should take responsibility to actively plan and pursue their capacity building during emergency assistance operations.

- **Continue until the acute threat to life and health has abated** or, in situations of prolonged threat, until the needs can be more appropriately addressed within the framework of rehabilitation mechanisms.
- **Maximize the strategic advantage of the International Federation by ‘working as a Federation’ to mobilize all appropriate resources**, including the regional structures of the Federation, while ultimately building on the capacity of the Operating National Society.

Financial resources

The primary tool for International Federation emergency response fund-raising is the Emergency Appeal. National Appeals are launched nationally by the National Society concerned. International Appeals are launched by the Federation Secretariat. The Appeal process is governed by National Society regulations and, internationally, by the Principles and Rules for Disaster Relief.

Human resources

Recognizing the vital role of human resources in emergency operations, the International Federation must ensure the proper identification, placement, retention, development, support, administration and management of suitably qualified, trained and experienced personnel to work in the service of the most vulnerable. The International Federation must, with the National Society concerned, be constantly vigilant to minimize the risk to the safety and security of volunteers and staff working for the programmes.

Information resources

The International Federation recognizes data and information as key resources in its emergency response. It is committed to making the Red Cross and Red Crescent a reliable and timely source of disaster related information. Information systems will be designed and implemented in order to maximize:

- The speed, efficiency and effectiveness of emergency response.
- The security and safety of beneficiaries, staff, volunteers and fixed assets.
- The timeliness, accuracy and clarity of reporting and accountability systems.
- The involvement of beneficiaries and local organizations.

Physical resources

International Federation policy dictates that the need for physical resources is well defined, that quality standards are ensured, that delivery is timely, that stocks are adequately maintained and distribution controlled.

Physical assets not used in the emergency response programme or surplus to operational requirements, as the programme scales down, should be deployed to support other emergency programmes when no longer needed for the emergency at hand, subject to national government regulation.

Consistent with the above, the impact of local purchase upon the local economy and well-being of the population should be assessed to ensure that such actions do not cause undue harm. Programme officials should refrain from creating duplicate infrastructures when existing National Society or commercial enterprises can provide the necessary support.

Responsibilities

National Societies and the International Federation have a responsibility to ensure that all emergency response operations and programmes are carried out in compliance with this policy; that all staff and volunteers participating in emergency response programmes are aware of the rationale and details of the policy; and that all relevant governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental partners are adequately informed of this policy.

Reference

This policy was adopted by the 11th session of the General Assembly of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on 25.11.97. The policy replaces all previously established emergency response policies.

Further reference texts

- The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief;
- The Principles and Rules for Red Cross Red Crescent disaster relief,
- The Food Aid and Nutrition Policy,
- The Seville Agreement (November 1997).

For more information, please contact:

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