Overview of the Movement Approach to National Society Logistics Development

One solution customised to the specific needs of each National Society “Doing things right vs doing the right thing”

A group of National Societies, together with the IFRC and the ICRC, capitalising on the experiences and learnings from a breadth of logistics capacity building projects, decided to reflect on two things: 1) how longer term impact could be achieved across the members of the RCRC network; 2) how coordination and collaboration could be enhanced.

**DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?**

5 years ago, in response to a large-scale emergency, we donated 15 vehicles to this National Society (NS). We paid for the building of 2 new warehouses and the training of 50 staff and volunteers in warehouse management. However, when we come to support a new emergency response, we find ourselves back where we started.

**SOME TRADITIONAL APPROACHES THAT MIGHT HELP EXPLAIN THIS SITUATION.**

The dilemma: short-term thinking, long-term expectations

Traditional support has been based in short-term projects, targeting quick fixes, mainly around releasing operational logistics bottlenecks identified during emergency response. While being very practical and focused, experience shows that these effects didn’t last long, creating frustration with the effort invested. To use an analogy: an anti-inflammatory cream might relieve pain, but it is unlikely to fix the underlying problem / condition.

‘Do no harm’: total cost of ownership

Many short-term project-based capacity building initiatives did not consider the total cost of ownership in their design. Focusing mainly on the initial one-off cost to build the capacity, both the recipient and the donor did not identify nor factor in properly how to keep that capacity beyond the project’s timeframe (e.g. in 4 or 5 years): how would the National Society cover maintenance and running costs? As a result, well-intended projects could lead National Societies with extra financial pressure and even less capacity.

Technical siloed focus: is it enough to achieve change in an organisation?

Short-term project-based approaches for logistics capacity building focused on operational issues. Logistics experts promoted best technical practises aimed at maximising process efficiency. It lacked two important components: 1) ‘systems thinking’: how logistics integrates and is contingent on other functional areas in the organisation; 2) organisational development: to trigger, manage and sustain changes in an organisation, more than technical expertise in logistics is needed.

Many examples showed the need for more emphasis on strategic thinking: well-defined core activities of a NS (effectiveness) to define and drive the appropriate logistics capacity (efficiency).
A NEW APPROACH FOR NATIONAL SOCIETY LOGISTICS DEVELOPMENT

As an alternative to traditional short-term operational support, a new approach has been articulated with each National Society responsible for driving its own development. External assistance is conceived around helping the organisation to break the vicious circle of daily ‘fire-fighting mode’:

a) Help the NS to find some time and space away from the urgent day-to-day workload in order to think more about the strategic direction.

b) Help the NS to think, reflect and articulate required change via a NSLD plan (it should fit within an overall NS Development Plan, if available, or with other ongoing/planned NS development initiatives like cash preparedness, finance development, HR development, etc.)

c) Accompany the NS to implement the plan (multi-project, multi-year and multi-partner)

Are all National Societies ready for long-term engagement?

Each NS has its own strengths, challenges and environment where it operates. Each NS needs to define the path and rhythm to drive its own development. Even for short-term logistics capacity building initiatives, the new approach can help align expectations around sustainability and minimise running costs in subsequent years.

WHY SHOULD PARTNER NATIONAL SOCIETIES SUPPORT THE NEW APPROACH?

The efforts invested in strengthening National Societies will translate into a stronger RCRC network across the world. This in turn, fulfil the PNS’ agenda: a National Society with sustainable, effective and efficient logistics capacity will be in a better position to implement projects funded by its partners.

WAYS FOR PARTNER NATIONAL SOCIETIES TO SUPPORT THE NEW APPROACH

PNS can support by: a) deploying specialists for the advisory role/technical support; b) providing financial support in the different sub-projects and activities within a NS Logistics Development plan; c) understanding the new approach and promoting it in countries where they work bilaterally or multilaterally.

The approach does not need the commitment of one Movement partner throughout the process. Different partners can support different phases.