Investing in disaster preparedness is worth it - both in terms of human lives saved and economic returns. In this story we learn about how developing a **Plan of Action** helped the Costa Rican Red Cross to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Recognition of the auxiliary role of the National Society**

The Costa Rican Red Cross (CRC), as an auxiliary of the public authorities, is one of the largest providers of pre-hospital emergency care services in the country and is part of the first responders to crises, emergencies and disasters at all levels.

To adequately respond to these exceptional situations, the National Society developed a National Response Plan, which establishes the conditions for inter-institutional coordination.

**A Plan of Action before the first COVID-19 case was detected in the country**

As soon as the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, the Costa Rican Red Cross developed a Plan of Action to respond to the pandemic. The objective of the Plan of Action was to fulfill the role as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field and to contribute to reducing disease and loss of life, while protecting the health, safety, welfare and livelihoods of the most vulnerable people.

This plan included **protective measures for staff and volunteers** such as an internal communication campaign showing the use and handling of Personal protective equipment (PPE), and live interviews and chats with space for answering questions; modification of work systems to reduce the risk of exposure of non-health workers; coordination to ensure vaccination of all NS staff and volunteers; etc. Also, CRC has implemented mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for volunteers and staff.
The National Response Plan allowed the development and implementation of a Plan of Action, before the first COVID-19 case was reported in the country.

Due to the uncertainty of the course of the pandemic, the Plan of Action was developed considering the most conservative scenarios, as well as the most extreme ones.

Development and implementation of a business continuity plan, particularly focused in finance, administration, information technology and human resources.

The Costa Rica Red Cross is part of the National Risk Management System, and has been present in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), coordinating the response with all the institutions involved in the emergency.

The Costa Rican Red Cross is part of the Health Cluster that supports all initiatives being implemented by the government to respond to the pandemic.

Protective measures were implemented for staff and volunteers such as an internal communication campaign showing the use and handling of PPE and the creation of spaces for dialogue and the resolution of doubts about its use.

"We had to apply quickly new protocols: now all the patients we are transferring to the hospital are treated as suspicious of COVID-19, until proven otherwise. I had to assume that a possible contagion is part of the work we do, but with protective measures we minimize the risks".

Diego Gómez, paramedic, Costa Rican Red Cross

For more information:
- Costa Rican Red Cross: www.cruzroja.or.cr
- National Society Preparedness: www.ifrc.org/disaster-preparedness

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