



PREPAREDNESS
EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

ADAPTING TO THE 'NEW NORMAL'

Botswana Red Cross Society

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Investing in disaster preparedness is worth it – both in terms of human lives saved and economic returns. This story aims to highlight the actions taken by the Botswana Red Cross Society (BRCS) to ensure staff and volunteers could continue to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Protecting first responders

Much like in the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the Botswana Red Cross Society had to adapt its humanitarian response to align with the National Response Plan for COVID-19. This led to the development of a Business Continuity Plan (BCP). The **BCP's priority was to protect the staff and volunteers at all costs.** All teams participated in its development and had to understand their roles in the implementation.

The BCP served as a roadmap for the National Society at a time of uncertainty. It helped to outline the operational structure, which involved sending home team members who could work remotely and did not need to interact directly with the community in their day-to-day activities. The remaining team members were each provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizers as a first line of protection. Additionally, psychosocial support was offered to those who required it due to the mental turmoil the pandemic brought to people's lives. This was coupled with internal COVID-19 support groups that helped staff members give each other support. Those who were working remotely were also provided with internet bundles to help them work more efficiently from home, and those who needed to move around were provided with car stickers to ease their movement during the lockdowns.

All staff members and volunteers were encouraged to get vaccinated. As of February 2022, 98% of the staff and engaged volunteers had completed their vaccination schemes. Since the country started to apply booster shots, staff and volunteers started receiving theirs as well. All these measures have helped to protect staff, prevent severe illness or complications, and enable the teams to better serve their communities.

Improvements for the future

As with anything that is new and created with urgency, some pitfalls were encountered. They now serve as learning points for the future:

- The BCP was mainly reactionary, and not multi-hazard; it is crucial to start working on a multi-hazard BCP in anticipation of future disasters.
- The BCP is focusing on staff and volunteer safety during the pandemic. In the future, the National Society could include further measures in the plan to support the continuity of regular service delivery.
- As much as the National Society was able to attract funding, it is important to have emergency funds available, to avoid delays in the response.
- The BCP only focused on human capital; in the future, other lines of business, such as the supply chain, should be integrated.

BOTSWANA

PREPAREDNESS AREA & COMPONENT RELATED

ANALYSIS & PLANNING



Business Continuity

STATS



As of January 2022, Botswana – with a population of 2.3 million – had registered 239,887 infections and 2,534 deaths.*

*<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/botswana/>

Keys to success



- The **quick response** by the National Society ensured that the BCP was quickly formulated and disseminated to serve the staff and volunteers. The crisis management team was set up rapidly, and this showed commitment and helped step up preparedness and readiness measures.
- **Collaboration between staff members** was key, as purposeful information was shared, thus helping the team better understand the importance of the BCP.
- **Volunteer engagement** also made a considerable difference. The BRCS has a pool of volunteers with diverse educational backgrounds and expertise in health, disaster management and social services. These volunteers were engaged in different response interventions: over 2,500 volunteers supported the country's COVID-19 response. As of February 28, 2022, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, in consultation with the National Society, continues to tap on the diligence of volunteers in response activities.
- **Support offered by headquarters**, such as distribution of PPE and hand sanitizers, mounting of sanitizer dispensers in different points, and temperature checks, helped keep the number of cases amongst staff and volunteers at a minimum.
- **Working from home was made easier** through the provision of amenities such as internet service and laptops for remote staff. The use of e-collaborative tools such as WhatsApp helped centralize information sharing.
- **Psychosocial support** was offered as an essential coping mechanism, not only because of the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic, but also due to the losses faced by staff members, including the death of loved ones. This helped to ensure emotional and mental stability among staff.
- The **BCP guidance and template** provided by the IFRC helped the BRCS to develop a plan considering different scenarios, guide both administrative and in-field operations, and review and update to adapt to the constantly changing global situation and evolving government directives.



"The BCP helped us as a National Society to identify gaps in our contingency plans and determine how prepared we were".

Baboloki Tebatso, Branch and Development Coordinator, Botswana Red Cross Society

"The development of the BCP and its alignment with government directives gave the National Society a clear direction to follow".

Tshepo Garethata, Programmes Manager, Botswana Red Cross Society



For more information:

– Botswana Red Cross: <https://www.botswanaredcross.org.bw/>

– National Society Preparedness: www.ifrc.org/disaster-preparedness

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