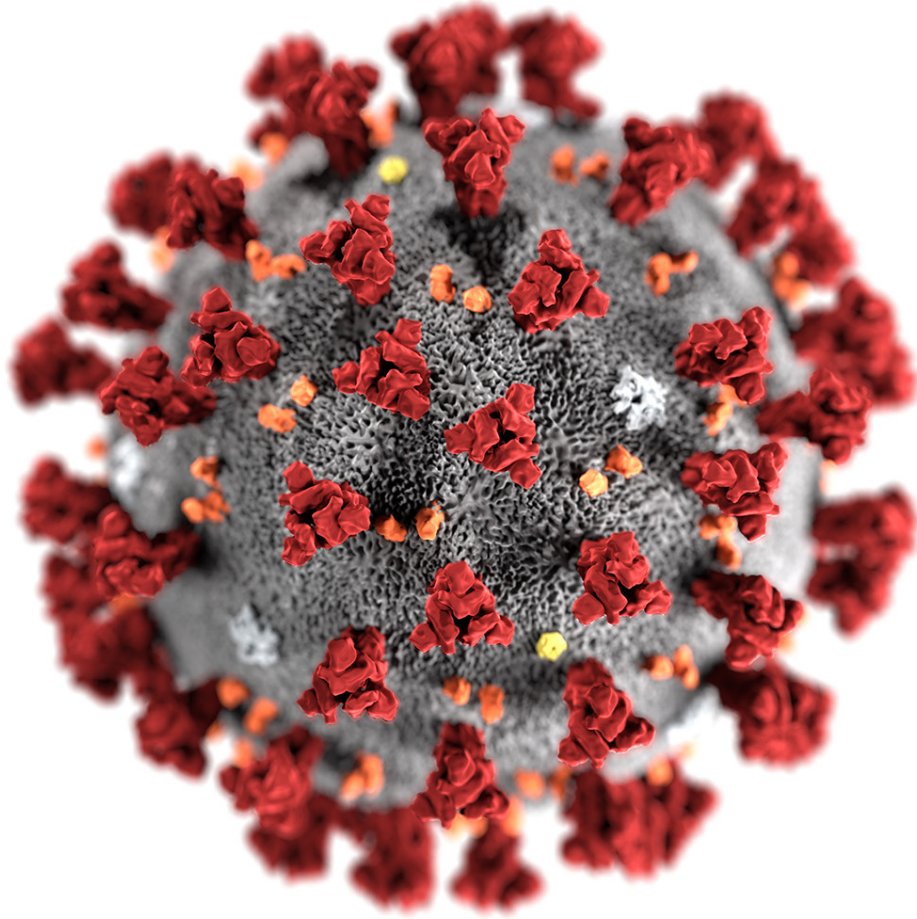




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COVID-19

LESSONS LEARNT

Virtual Think-Tank calls
Insights & Aggregation of outputs





THINK-TANKS OFFERED TO NATIONAL SOCIETY STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS TO DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, INSIGHTS AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS ON THEIR OVERALL COVID-19 RESPONSES.

CALLS TO DATE: 18, 25, 27 MARCH & 1, 3 APRIL 2020

THE NOTES RECORDED BY THE PARTICIPANTS THEMSELVES ARE

[DOCUMENTED HERE.](#)

STORIES AND EXPERIENCES/ INNOVATIONS SHARED BY NATIONAL SOCIETIES ARE **[SHARED HERE.](#)**

INSIGHTS

General Meta Trends

- **NS programming moving sharply towards COVID response** with potential risk of dropping other important programmes.
- **Sharp increase in virtual / online volunteering**, presenting challenges, opportunities including an opportunity for reflection on programming
- Increased creative solution-finding including increasing tendency towards **repurposing existing tools, platforms, materials** due to necessity and scarcity – good example of emergent practice.
- Greater willingness for **more open and experimental engagement between and within NS's**, where lines between domestic and international teams and work are less pronounced and more fluid.
- Challenge of **volunteers being in vulnerable categories** in some cases **counter-balanced by significant volume of spontaneous volunteering**, though volunteer numbers have not increased but dropped in some NS's. Serum immunity, being explored as a way to allow volunteers to return to work, may well be key.
- Working with and **leveraging the strength of local communities** key as always. **Trust bonds are as critical** as ever – these skills need to be further developed.
- **PsychoSocial support will be increasingly important** given this will very likely be a long and protracted crisis.
- There will be **a need to make time for reflection on Organisational priorities and challenges** including Business / Operational Continuity, Programming and Prototyping cultures, fluid communication and collaboration

VOLUNTEERS

- **Many volunteers are themselves in vulnerable categories** so 1:1 interactions are challenging. There is an opportunity to further engage younger audiences including those in higher education.
- **Onboarding volunteers and training them adequately** remains a challenge, not least because this is a very different emergency to most, and there is a large volume of spontaneous volunteering occurring, but technology tools are improving the situation – and also learning from EBOLA and other emergency responses
- **Volunteer insurance is a key concern**, it does not exist in all regions. COVID presents an opportunity to gain ground on volunteer insurance
- There is an **opportunity to train volunteers** where COVID hasn't yet spread and there is a need to accelerate this
- **Safety of volunteers is paramount everywhere** and a key priority for all

PARTNERSHIPS

- NSs are working very successfully in **partnership with normal regular partners**, but also **forging many new partnerships** across different (and sometimes new) sectors including Health Authorities, NGO's, Corporations to acquire and distribute materials, and gain access to vulnerable communities.
- Auxiliary role to Government departments remains strong. However, under COVID-19, RCRC **NS auxiliary roles have**

expanded, bringing both opportunity as well as pressure of expectation (e.g. volunteers under-prepared for certain roles)

- Partner **NSs increasingly supporting and learning from each other** – protective equipment, risk awareness and community activities.
- **Use of unused capacities** including hotels / hotel rooms or students who have time and want to support on the increase, offering great potential

FINANCING

- **Securing adequate Funding** is increasingly challenging – some funding is being redirected to COVID response, but funding approval guarantees can be challenging to secure
- **Business / Operational Continuity** is a key concern looking forwards and requires significant (parallel) focus

DATA

- **Reporting accurate numbers** is a huge challenge and an opportunity – as technical and data skills increase this will accelerate
- Further clarity is needed to understand how personal **Data is being used** and protected and to create and abide by standards and regulations
- Some NS's programming is **now almost entirely focused on the COVID-19 response** which may cause challenges for other programmes supporting other vulnerable groups, a balance which needs to be monitored closely
- There is an increased need for **Scientific research** around COVID-19 and its social repercussions for communities and National societies in the future. Reference Centers can play an important role on this.

COMMUNICATIONS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Increased **need for training and upskilling around digital skills and use of social media** (for many reasons including group calls, accompaniment, hosting communities online etc) given isolation and social distancing rules for volunteers and affected communities
- Many interesting examples of **repurposing of current tools, materials, approaches** etc to be more fit for purpose to the current needs (including Apps for management of rapid volunteering, Apps for reporting disasters, public awareness messaging and associated tools and materials) and perhaps significant opportunity for further repurposing efforts of existing tools and approaches
- Engaging famous singers and songs (**repurposing existing or creating new songs**) to share public messages effective and valuable and could be further explored more widely
- **Strong trust building with local communities** through long-standing engagement and relations, the use of other local languages etc key to working with communities, but also expectations can be raised with communities, expecting greater support which may not be forthcoming
- Strong tendency for accelerated use of online **communications and collaboration tools** (including Social Media) to engage with **affected and at risk/ most vulnerable communities**,
- Challenging to know how to put **simple, correct messages across** and **how to be heard above the “noise”** – communications channels are saturated and there is a lot of mis-information – communicating with both volunteers and affected communities

HEALTH SYSTEMS & MATERIALS

- The **strain on National health systems** is very significant and visible; **costs are mounting; equipment is in increasingly short supply** and **funds need to be raised**. There are many challenges ahead.
- High level of activity around **distribution of medical kits in many NS's** (test kits and other related medical materials) to Hospitals as well as to the **general public (masks, hand sanitizers, hygiene and PSS kits** etc).
- Strong focus on **PSS work** & socialising **health and hygiene habits** (“proper handwashing saved more lives than all antibiotics”) with communities and individuals, particularly with the most vulnerable.
- Significant shortage in **blood banks and blood donation** with some innovative solutions coming to the fore
- **Lack of protective equipment** and disinfectants across countries a major issue for both volunteers and affected communities
- Many NSs are involved with setting up and running (as auxiliary) **quarantine and isolation wards and facilities**

CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS

- Themes covered in table next pages:

- National Society preparedness

- Blood services

- Communication – Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE)

- Clinical care and infection prevention and control (IPC)

- Home care

- Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

- Migration and Displacement

- Protection, Gender and Inclusion

- Quarantine, screening and case detection

- Youth

- Volunteers Onboarding & Training

- Volunteers Safety

- Volunteer Engagement & Scaling

- Vulnerable groups (supporting in general)

Please Note: You can find more details on the Innovative Projects and Initiatives listed below at the [National Societies stories](#) page or in [the minutes of meetings](#).

If you are interested to reach out to any of the National Societies to learn more about their initiatives, please send an email to innovation.team@ifrc.org

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

NATIONAL SOCIETY PREPAR-EDNESS FOR COVID-19

Overcoming social distancing by consulting local branches on how to use digital tools and connect the locals

Use of emergency epidemic trained volunteers (e.g. Ebola) involved

Insufficient or inaccurate data for appropriate evidence-based decision making

Challenge to deal with multiple concurrent crises / emergencies (Croatian RC)

Active conflict in country with 2 different semi-legitimate governments (Lybian RC)

Information sharing between and within NS's

Business / Operational continuity considerations and plans will be critical

NS's not ready to go fully digital

WhatsApp Pilot Plan to receive recommendations from the Red Cross.

Mapping humanitarian action to understand community strengths and channel to where most needed

Domestic Data Team created (510, Netherlands RC).

Building cross-functional response committees

Repurpose APP to report disasters (Swiss RC)

Some branches maintain normal activities, others transformed activities to accommodate and support current situation (Swedish RC)

BLOOD SERVICES

Hundreds of blood drives cancelled

Online service for blood donations appointments (American RC)

Agreement with National authorities that voluntary blood donation actions are exempt from general ban on gathering (Croatian)

Mobile blood donation units (Turkish RC)

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

COMMUNICATION – RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (RCCE)

Communicating to at risk and affected populations through use of songs

Migrants potentially at risk of discrimination if even seen being tested (for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the trust bond with Lebanese RC volunteers is critical)

Trust build better through use of local languages (Indian RC)

Challenging to work in multiple languages for various NSs (Finnish RC)

Established good relationships with local communities for many years raising expectations – people want more than awareness campaigns

Feeding underserved children (500K meals) through partnership with Edu system

Feed Public and Media with relevant information

Information translated into local languages

First Aid learning App FABL (Belgian RC) used in Rwanda to send COVID updates to population

Improving data visualisation (Finnish RC, Norwegian RC)

Actively developing digital tools to engage vulnerable communities (Finnish RC, Norwegian RC)

Online game for sensitisation (Lebanese and German RC)

Famous songs or singers repurpose current songs or create new songs to share vital information (Arab NS's, Ugandan RC etc)

Hotline where everyone can call in and ask questions about the virus and what they can do

CLINICAL CARE AND INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL (IPC)

Not enough antiseptics, masks, gloves and other protective gear for RC local branches (and prices are very high)

Ambulances take patients to hospital facilities – this is very costly. Funds are required to sustain in some NS's

Distribution of "infection control kits"

Exploring use of Drones (Kenyan RC, following Korean RC lead) to sanitise areas & raise awareness (partnership)

Online challenges for children like [#WashYourHands](#) (Portuguese RC)

"Wash your hands" campaign featuring celebrities (Swiss RC)

Use of unused hotels for medical support as well as for volunteers who are working away from home

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

HOME CARE

Home-schooling resources – digital homework help activities stepped up in some NSs

connecting digital volunteers to those that are in need

Volunteers working with children need police check (Norwegian RC)

Digital volunteer service: to carry out activities such as grocery shopping to walking dogs for people who are in quarantine.

Cash Transfers & Contactless payment cards (British RC)

Doctors taking baby monitors to use in hospital isolation rooms when equipment is lacking (NS?)

Drive through meal distribution (American RC)

Activity book created for kids (American RC – GDPC)

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS)

Training too slow for PS workers

National PSS support centres need help – not enough capacity – this is critical as this crisis will be long and PSS increasingly important

Speed course online for psychosocial support

Project Wellness (American RC) – Volunteers calling volunteers

“Humanity Card” (people fill out cards and drop it off to neighbours offering help) (Australian RC)

Toolkit for healthy social connections

Partnership with national theatre and musical institutes to design theatre plays to reduce stress (Croatian RC, Caribbean NS's)

“Shall we Talk” Service – for anyone (HK RC)

Webinars (e.g. MDA) for Caring for personnel

PSS support for kids (Palestine RCS)

Work with gyms to create daily workouts (Portuguese RC)

Celebrities talk to isolated people (Serbian RC)

Internal RC buddy systems - peer support groups (Portuguese RC)

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT GUIDANCE

Tools to communicate remotely with migrants

Exposure of volunteers to travelling communities coming from areas of high infection

Code bars giving direct access to links of interest such as useful videos (French RC)

PROTECTION, GENDER AND INCLUSION

Translated materials into sign language to expand reach.

Need to work with those excluded (i.e.: homeless)

Hearing impaired people

published videos in sign language (Tunisian, Palestine RC) & SMS's supporting people with impaired hearing (Serbian RC)

"Pediis" app (Italian RC) + call centres catering for the hearing impaired

QUARANTINE, SCREENING AND CASE DETECTION

Civil protection authorities asking RC volunteers to work in quarantine – NS neither educated nor appointed legally to do so

Taking test at patient homes and transporting to laboratories is time consuming

Stop Corona- smartphone App (Austrian RC) an app that is tracing recent contacts and is designed to support contact person management (Austrian RC)

Support families who are self-isolating to purchase disinfectants, collect packages, walk the dog etc.

Support the national authorities with a corona hotline helpline + health professional hotline in some countries where national systems are struggling

Solidarity concierge (telephone) system "Red Cross with you" (French RC)

Crash courses provided for new volunteers in quarantine support – in RC quarantine centres (Icelandic RC)

Drive through testing centres to accelerate testing (MDA, Lebanese RC, Swiss RC)

Use of empty hotels as quarantine centres + training of hotel staff (Andorra RC)

YOUTH

Youth preferring chat based comm rather than phone

Facebook live shows with key messages as well as live Q&A (Bangladesh RC, Libyan RC)

Use of Tik-tok

General Youth meetings go online

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

VOLUNTEERS ONBOARDING & TRAINING

Improve their digital literacy skills

Not enough knowledge or capacity in NS's to develop (online) training materials and approaches for all materials required

Slow onboarding of (spontaneous) volunteers and delivery of adequate training

Training needed as this is not a normal health emergency

More use of online technologies for training across the board including Apps (Georgia RC & many others), temporary volunteer courses on youtube (Italian RC), mobile "pocket learning book" (Belgian RC)

Working with National Teacher Training agencies to develop educational videos and materials (Croatian RC – handwashing, infection control measures, stress, creative activities etc)

Volunteer data management system (Finnish RC)

VOLUNTEERS SAFETY

Sharing volunteer's insurance-examples of good practice

Volunteer insurance coverage – where do not have Staff can only deliver services, slowing response (HK RC)

The need to treat bed linen of patients as they would be treated in infectious wards in hospitals

Increasing demand for assistance at home as people in many countries isolated at home now – but capacities of many RCRC limited...

Many volunteers are elderly and at risk of COVID-19 contagion

Volunteers mobilised to produce self-made face shields and masks (due to shortage of commercially available medical face shields) for other volunteers and affected communities (Malaysian, Thai RC)

Donations encouraged of individual protective gear (Portuguese RC)

Where volunteers are elderly, mobilizing other age groups – higher education is closed so exploration of engaging this age group (Swedish RC)

NS HQ are asked to provide insurance for those volunteers who have contracted COVID-19

Some NS's are exploring Serum Immunity approaches so that volunteers can go out and volunteer again (Norwegian RC)

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT & SCALING

Management of large scale Spontaneous volunteering (an ensuring insurance coverage)

Challenge to motivate volunteers (Pakistani RC)

Various platforms to manage spontaneous volunteering (including matching services and simple online training) and linking to those in need (Team Osterreich, Austria RC; FiveUp, Swiss RC; Italian RC), in some cases reviving out of favour platforms

Volunteer DataBases developed

Multilingual chatbot supporting registering process of new volunteers (Swiss RC)

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

VULNERABLE GROUPS (SUPPORTING IN GENERAL)

Not enough capacity to provide support services to all vulnerable groups e.g. those over 65

Heavy level of calls on National help lines

Large volume of requests for help – technical platforms can help review and match (Ready2Help network and possible – Netherlands RC)
Matching platforms – for now, best to use human processing to build trust and help people in right way

1:1 accompanying of migrants now no longer possible physically in many places (now in some NSs done via video calls etc – that transition not as easy as one might think...

Challenges with reaching people in detention centres

Domestic violence and home schooling and education a challenge

1 button computer for people with no digital skills (Norwegian RC)

Digital visits e.g. “Talk Together”, “Telecross” (American RC)

Triage helps (Montenegro RC)

Food, water and hygiene kits

Exploring digital tools aimed at elderly without digital literacy

National Soup Kitchens (Serbian RC)

Meet and Greet in elderly people’s homes replaced with letters and online chats (Swiss RC)

Mentoring services for young migrants now done online / via phone (Swiss RC)

Walk the Dog service for most vulnerable (Swiss RC)

Shelters for homeless people (French RC)

