

## IMPACT STORY— PREPAREDNESS FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

### SITUATION BEFORE

Historically, investment in preparedness for response to disasters has been ad hoc, short-term, uncoordinated, and often lacking an evidence-base or way to monitor the progress of investment<sup>1</sup>. The Canadian Red Cross has gained a significant body of experience and learning over the past two decades while supporting National Societies with preparedness. This has been reflected through the evolution of and learning from key tools, initiatives and guidelines including the Well-Prepared National Society (WPNS) and the Disaster Response Capacity Enhancement (DRCE).

The Government of Canada's investment through the First Responder Initiative (FRI) and Strategic Partnership were crucial to this evolution, as it was through this investment that the Canadian Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) drafted the first concept of the National Disaster Preparedness and Response Mechanism in 2011.

The mechanism provides a comprehensive framework to rethink how we view and invest in National Societies' processes, systems, teams and individuals involved in preparing for and responding to disasters and crises. The DRCE, which was developed through the FRI, provided a method to be able to assess the mechanism in a simulated or real event in order to provide clear evidence of how a system functioned. This was done



by an external evaluations team using an agreed framework of critical organizational components and criteria that needed to be in place for the organization to be able to deliver an emergency service, such as procedures, policies, coordination mechanisms, etc. This allowed for the comparison with self-assessments (WPNS) and provided a way to monitor progress and test preparedness system investments for further refinement. This process was further rolled-out across the Strategic Partnership and in other GAC-funded and major donor initiatives.

The evolution of the Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) approach built on these tools to provide a comprehensive way for the Movement to support a National Society enhance its capacity to deliver services in a crisis and/or an emergency response. It also allowed IFRC to fulfil its duty to assist National Societies in risk reduction, disaster preparedness and response actions. The Canadian Red Cross has co-led the development alongside IFRC, gaining support and collaboration from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), donor National Societies and global technical groups. The PER is a key step forward in forging a more evidence-based,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Research findings create a picture of an uncoordinated, piecemeal, 'projectized' approach to disaster risk management capacity building, rather than of a long-term, systematic and coordinated approach.' (Few, R., Scott, Z., Wooster, K., Avila, M.F., Tarazona, M. and Thomson, A. (2015) Strategic Research into National and Local Capacity Building for DRM: Synthesis Report. Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.)

coherent, cross-sectoral approach to support long-term investment at both the local and national levels. Most importantly, it creates an organizational culture of learning, leadership and management of change, which are critical for National Societies to remain relevant, effective and efficient within their mandate as auxiliary to authorities in our rapidly changing world.

## IMPACT

### 1. The establishment of common language to guide preparedness investments to meet global standards

Since 2011, the DRCE, now known as PER, has been rolled out in more than 25 National Societies in the Americas, Africa and Asia-Pacific regions. The approach not only provides an evidence-based way to evaluate National Society disaster response system strengths and weaknesses, but it facilitates an analysis of findings in order to develop comprehensive work plans for disaster risk management. It provides a common language for all actors to start talking about preparedness in a similar way and to work towards meeting globally agreed upon standards, for example the Principles and Rules for Humanitarian Assistance.

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*“Provided a safe space where Senior Leadership get to hear discussions and constructive criticism from staff on key response issues. The analysis of strengths/weaknesses very valuable and provided a platform for conversations across departments on common issues. It is the first time that staff have read/discussed findings of many previous operational assessments (Nepal, 2017).”*

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### 2. National Societies gain an increased understanding of what change is needed within their systems based on evidence and organizational learning

This impact happens when a meta-review of emergency operation evaluations is used as part of PER analysis; or when the PER toolkit is used for the review or evaluation of a real emergency operation, for example, a real-time evaluation or post-evaluation.



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*“We need to have regular simulations, including at the branch level to reinforce the capacity that we have gained through training and to continue to identify areas of improvement. When we regularly test and assess our capacity, we will be better able to respond in a real emergency.” (Haiti, 2019)*

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### 3. Improved coordination within the National Society

National Societies often face a lack of awareness that emergency response requires a coordinated effort of various management, technical and support departments. There is also often an issue of a siloed approach, where

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*“The most important organizational learning gained from this exercise is.... That (the NS needs to) operate as a single unit, removing the silos and integrate with each focal area and section and appreciate the linkages. Information is empowerment and when persons work as a team much can be accomplished (Jamaica, 2018).*

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different departments tend to work autonomously, as well as challenges between headquarters and field-offices. The PER approach helps to create awareness of the positive aspects and necessity of various departments working together. The inclusive approach in all phases of the PER allows the adoption of more coordinated planning among relevant departments in the National Society.

### 4. Better coordinated support for National Society capacity building

National Societies who use the PER often have more than one donor supporting their disaster risk management capacity building. Previously, the support was not necessarily based on an understanding of gaps in components of their disaster risk management system. The PER approach has facilitated a better coordination of support for capacity building through several ways:

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*“One of the best things about the CERA project is that we were supported to use evidence-based tools which we can present to other donors. For example, we presented the radiocommunications feasibility study to two other donors who are now complementing CERA’s work. We expect the same for our DRCE results and will definitely be sharing them with other PNSs.” (Nicaragua, 2019)*

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- (a) a donor National Society adjusts its programming funds to align with and support the PER results, for example as demonstrated in DRC;
- (b) partners co-fund and/or jointly facilitate specific activities, which align with areas of expertise and efficiency, for example as demonstrated in South Sudan, and Ethiopia;
- (c) donor aligns timing to ensure appropriate connectedness and impact. Some National Societies have actively shared PER results with partners in order to solicit new funding for capacity building, for example in Nicaragua.

### 5. Better emergency responses lead by the National Society, especially at the local level

The PER approach can also improve emergency responses. Initial support for the strengthening of the first responder system at the different levels of National Societies has resulted in faster and better quality emergency responses, for example in Ethiopia, DRC, Mali, Nicaragua, Honduras, Dominican Republic, and Haiti. Trained and equipped first responders delivered timely and more effective disaster responses through:

- (a) faster and standardised needs assessments;
- (b) conducting post-monitoring distribution;

(c) better integrating of gender and protection issues as well as community engagement and accountability.

As such, the approach supports the localisation of responses where National Societies are getting stronger at responding to crises and disasters without external support. Similarly, branches that had previously required headquarter support are now more self-reliant. National Societies in Honduras and Nicaragua for example have invested in regional monitoring centres and regionalized training to localise response.

## **6. More resources dedicated to emergency responses**

There is also evidence of an association between resource mobilization and the capacity of the first responder. Improved timeliness and effectiveness of the service delivery of first responders has created confidence in other donors to provide financial support to the National Society. This, for example, has been demonstrated both in DRC and in Nicaragua. First responders were also found to engage in resource mobilization during crisis or in peace time, which was demonstrated in Ethiopia and in DRC.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The PER is continuing to build upon its learnings from the past decade and continues to be rolled out across all regions of the Red Cross Movement. It is increasingly being institutionalized within the global, regional and national IFRC and National Society systems and processes, for example in Disaster Response Emergency Fund ( DREF) reviews, IFRC country planning, and Emergency Appeal plans of action.

A National Society preparedness framework is currently being developed to provide a clear, high-level strategic direction that refines the key principles and elements for enabling National Societies to fulfil their auxiliary role, in line with the Red Cross Red Crescent Fundamental Principles.

This Framework will provide a common, integrated and multisectoral approach to National Society preparedness and will build on the strengths of the PER and other current approaches, as well align with IFRC related strategies and policies<sup>2</sup>. It will push for more integrated action across relevant sectors to support preparedness efforts, and greater coherence between the local and national actions happening on the ground with the current global and regional frameworks, for example the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Grand Bargain, to better operationalize these agendas.

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<sup>2</sup> Strategy 2030, Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance, new IFRC Disaster Management policy and National Society Development Framework