

case
study

Egyptian Red Crescent : National Disaster Response(NDRT) Mechanism



NDRT Training participants at Dahab South Sinai Egypt 2015 (Photo Courtesy Dr. Nehal)

The Egyptian Red Crescent Society and the MENA Emergency & Crisis Unit specially acknowledge to the Global Disaster Preparedness Centre (GDPC) based in the American Red Cross for funding the realisation of this case study. The results of this important study will be used wisely for planning and evaluation of activities related to the National Disaster Response Team and other actions related on training and monitoring of intervention teams from community to national level.

Compiled by Glenn Rose Consultant with the support of Dr. Nehal Hefny Egyptian Red Crescent and Sadrack Bertrand Matanda MENA IFRC region Office Beirut Lebanon - June 2015.

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1.0 Executive Summary

The Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) under new leadership is undergoing a process of organisational change and development. At the core of this change is the desire to improve and increase the disaster response capacity of the National Society at the branch level by revitalising its national disaster response mechanism and reintroducing national disaster response training (NDRT).

Previous NDRT training of 67 volunteers in 2011 and 2012 have not resulted in any formal activation or usage of NDRT. Demonstrations and civil violence which has plagued Egypt since 2011 required the development of First Aid Emergency Action Teams (EAT). This initiative whilst highly successful and ongoing has been some argue at the expense of the NDRT development. The challenge now is for ERC to also create a national response mechanism which is holistic, sustainable and well-resourced. Consideration will need to be given also to managing NDRT and EAT into a single national capability that is complimentary and integrated rather than as separate entities. This will be a complex undertaking especially when aspects of the headquarters have been “fragmented” and require strengthening.

ERC Leadership have signaled a two year timeframe in order to achieve their objectives during which both capacity and capability initiatives will need to be undertaken at a complimentary pace. This will ensure that volunteers remain engaged and that the day to day and emergency needs of the population are supported. ERC are well aware of the challenges and requirements of this journey and are acknowledging and implementing the necessary changes. ERC should also continue to utilise existing IFRC development frameworks and guidelines including disaster law expertise for its NDRT development to ensure its future sustainability. In addition the following recommendations were developed in support of ERCs vision and were developed after discussions with ERC staff and volunteers.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 In addition to reinvigorating its NDRT, ERC needs to consider also its broader national response mechanism requirements to ensure that there is continued connectedness in its development. This would include the further development and completion of policies, procedures, SOPs, operations room set up ensuring connectedness between HQ departments are also a priority.

2.2 A broader concept note and budget should be prepared which clearly identifies all response development needs rather than just the NDRT training costs. This will help identify the true requirements and their costs for potential donors and may succeed in securing longer term support which may be more sustainable.

2.3 ERC should strongly consider utilising the IFRC National Disaster Response Mechanism guidelines as the template for its development, given that much of its work to date is contained in this document.

2.4 ERC should consider the establishment of a national working group comprising representatives of branch, youth group, EAT, DM and other HQ departments. This could improve integration and cooperation and be the driving force for the proposed response development strategy and plan.

2.5 Branches and volunteers should remain the primary focus of all response and preparedness initiatives.

2.6 Consideration should be given to establishing 4-5 regional teams of volunteers as opposed to a single national team and integrating this with the existing regional warehousing and logistics systems.

2.7 A refresher training for existing NDRT members should be completed prior to any new NDRT recruitment.

2.8 The ERC contingency plan should be revised to include procedures for the management of international assistance for a worst case scenario event. The revised principles and rules for Red Cross Red Crescent disaster relief as well as the statutory role of the Federation Secretariat should be considered. A pre disaster agreement with IFRC clearly prescribing roles and expectations would also be beneficial.

2.9 The IFRC learning platform access should be promoted as mandatory for all ERC volunteers especially NDRT and EAT.

2.10 ERC should seek the continued assistance of the IFRC disaster law program to undertake an analysis of legal issues that will support and enhance the objectives of the ERC response mechanism.

2.11 Supported by input from the ICRC and IFRC, ERC should develop a structure and methodology to harmonise and integrate the EAT and NDRT capabilities.

2.12 The IFRC should continue to proactively support ERC in its response capability development including the provision and facilitation of donor support and technical assistance where required.

2.13 Whilst not within the realms of this TOR, ERC should capitalise on its strong history and linkage between response and rehabilitation programme by developing additional policy relating to national and community based risk reduction measures.

3.0 Introduction

This case study was commissioned by the IFRC Middle East North Africa (MENA) zone after a concept paper was received by the Egyptian Red Crescent to support the reestablishment of a National Disaster Response Team (NDRT). A terms of reference was established (see annex) and a consultant recruited to undertake a study. Initially an additional review member was to be sourced from a Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT) roster however this did not occur due to the lack of an available candidate.

The consultant and author of this report visited ERC for 5 half days and met with a number of staff and volunteers collecting relevant data. This data and the reported relevant strengths and weaknesses identified from discussions have formed the basis of this report and the resulting recommendations.

4.0 Objectives

The key objectives of this study were to:

- Map existing national human resources.
- Review existing national mechanisms to identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Undertake a superficial scope of the legal preparedness of the Egyptian disaster response mechanism as well as the legal preparedness to facilitate international disaster response cooperation.
- Recommend within the scope of the case study, adaptations and improvements to regional mechanisms.¹
- Identify appropriate and measurable baseline indicators for the strengthening of the tool.

¹ The reference to regional mechanisms relates to the national country context.

5.0 Methodology

This study comprised a number of data collection methods these included:

- Desktop document review of
 - ERC publications related to response operations.
 - IFRC DREF reports and regional LTPF reports related to ERC.
 - ERC disaster management strategy and plan of action.
 - ERC disaster response contingency plan.
 - ERC Emergency Action Teams (EAT) promotional and products including videos.
 - Branch power point on response activities.
 - ERC power point (hard copy) on response status.
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- Meetings and discussions with individual staff and volunteers at HQ and branch level.
- Focus groups of NDRT, Branch volunteers and EAT members.
- Joint HQ and volunteer discussion and storytelling with ERC Secretary General.
- Field visit to Cairo branch and community activities.
- Field visit to Cairo youth group and resettlement project.
- Stakeholder interviews were also conducted with:
 - ICRC Egypt office
 - IFRC Regional representative.
 - IFRC MENA Zone Disaster Response Delegate

6.0 Egyptian Red Crescent – a snapshot.

The Egyptian Red Crescent is a proud, experienced and active National Society with a strong history at the national and international levels. ERC was established in 1912 and achieved recognition by the ICRC and admission to the then league of Red Cross Societies in 1924. Egypt has adopted the Geneva conventions and as a result ERC is recognized through statute as a respected auxiliary body the government. Recent internal and regional political turmoil has placed increasing new demands on the ERC in respect to responding to violence, localized disasters and regional displacement. In addition new leadership has signaled a willingness to build on the great legacy of the ERC by strengthening certain aspects of its response operation.

Part of this vision as articulated by the Secretary General is to further develop and reinvigorate its disaster response mechanisms and the services that underpin this. At the core of this initiative is the further development of a national response capability in the form of standardised response teams at the branch regional and national levels. The vision is to be visible, relevant and accountable, nationally in the eyes of the public and government. The Secretary General envisages a timeframe of two years in order to achieve this goal and is in the process of leading the development and implementation of a new plan.

In addition, a restructure of the current ERC headquarters and staff is currently underway. In 2012 and 2013 two NDRT courses were conducted training 67 volunteers. The ERC wish to train a further 105 volunteers thereby ensuring that each branch has a core team trained to a single national level.

Egypt's risk landscape is influenced by a broad range of hazards and risks including seasonal floods, earthquakes, landslides, fires, displacement and violence. ERC is structured in a decentralized model, with one branch in each of the 27 Governorates that make up the country serving a population of approximately 81 million people. Each branch is autonomous in its governance and management and receives support and guidance from the Headquarters as required. As with many National Societies some branches are more active and larger with more resources than others. Public demand for services and activities are also influenced by location and exposure to risks including the recent regional cross border displacement from Libya, Gaza and violence in Sinai. Being auxiliary body, ERC participates in disaster response on the national level, in addition to the contribution to the international relief operations.

ERC also provides a range of other services including managing six blood banks and recruitment of donors, health services including managing 9 hospitals, 51 primary health care units, 31 reproductive health clinics, 35 youth clubs, slum and community social services and development, rural development and healthcare and health awareness. More recent activities include school education programmes ² supported by German Red Cross, psychosocial awareness and training for volunteers and the development of a national logistics capability comprising the establishment of four regional warehouses supported by the Swiss Red Cross.

7.0 Disaster Management capacity and capability.

7.1 Headquarters

As detailed in the table below ERC has a strong human resource base from which they wish to grow and develop. At the HQ level there is a national manager responsible for Disaster management and an assistant. They are supported by approximately 6 coordinators who largely work in the Cairo area. These staff are called upon also to work on national initiatives supporting the branches or provide surge when there is a nationally led response. In addition there is a National Emergency Action Team (EAT) coordinator supported by volunteers who coordinates the EAT activities. Overall the national HQ has approximately 40 staff performing various support roles including admin, finance, resource mobilization and training. The DM department work very closely with projects and programmes coordinator who is responsible also for developing new initiatives and projects including the NDRT proposal.

Commentary:

² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZFr66sHllc> for details.

Revitalising a national response mechanism including NDRT development is likely to create an additional workload on an already busy HQ team. The DM manager stresses that they will be able to cope, however it will be important for ERC to consider and develop a work plan and assess the resources required. It will also be important to factor in staff costs and time for the plan of action under development, and include in any future proposals.

Whilst the ERC HQ does have a functioning space for an operations room it is not specifically designed or set up nor has there been any specific operations room training for staff or volunteers. ERC acknowledge challenges in provided authenticated data including confirmed numbers of trained volunteers. Currently the IT and information management systems are planned to be upgraded including a volunteer database which will record the relevant information nationally.

Some informants referred to the current HQ structure as somewhat “fragmented” and requiring “strengthening”. The DM and EAT programmes also share and at times may compete for resources and volunteers. This is acknowledged by ERC and the challenge will be maintaining development momentum and ongoing demand for services alongside proposed internal change.

7.2 Branches

There are 27 branches nationwide in each of the 27 governorates. Each branch has two designated DM/relief coordinators responsible for related activities and leading the local volunteer force. Whilst most of these branches (20 out of 27) have trained DM/relief volunteers they are not formalised as specific branch response teams (BRT), but could be considered as such for the purpose of a new national response framework. In addition it is proposed that each branch also has an EAT team. Some volunteers are members of both EAT and relief teams and some have received NDRT training. This is a common occurrence in many National Societies particularly for committed volunteers. This issue will need to be managed in order to prioritise resources during a response and ensure these tools are well integrated.

7.3 Emergency Action Teams (EAT).

EAT were established in response to the civil violence which broke out in Egypt in 2011. Their role was to primarily provide emergency first aid services in situations of violence. At that time ERC did not have a formal response capability to meet the demand as well there was some reluctance from the ERC to engage in what was a new and uncertain role. Teams comprise of five members who must include female members and a doctor. Supported by ICRC, members were trained in safer access and patient evacuation as well as fundamental principles and dissemination.

During interviews members were able to relate many instances of challenging scenarios and many instances where lives were saved. Initially the role of ERC and EAT was not well known to the public and authorities and some teams were treated with suspicion and aggression. Over time and due to the ongoing role of dissemination and promotion both the public and officials learned to treat EATs with respect and allowed further access. Key to this was the ability of the EAT to be seen as neutral and independent humanitarian body. Many of the volunteers spoken to, were only interested in EAT whilst some were either trained in NDRT or were looking forward to an opportunity to apply. EAT volunteers are also actively engaged in other activities including first aid training and providing first aid at public events. This ensures volunteers remain engaged when their core role was not required. There are plans underway to train a further thirty teams nationwide during 2015 making this initiative a permanent and significant fixture in ERCs response capability.³

7.4 NDRT

ERC initiated NDRT training with support from the IFRC in 2011 and 2012. In total 67 volunteers completed the course. Applicants were pre vetted and required to have a completed basic training already in relief and first aid. Some NDRT members commented that they felt the training and NDRT process was rushed and the content of the course too long. They identified that more specific or tailored training relating to Egypt context would be more beneficial. Training evaluations were completed at the time but these were not made available for this review. NDRT volunteers also expressed some disappointment that no further activity including responses and training had taken place since, and consider a refresher and exercise as a priority to maintain interest. Of the 67 initially trained it is believed that approx. 7 – 10 are no longer available. NDRT recruitment records are maintained in hard copy on each member. There is no database for volunteers and this has been identified by ERC as a priority along with the proposed new IT system.

There has been no official NDRT activation or response to date. Of all the aspects of NDRT volunteers considered that the training and skillset was the most important as opposed to having a singular national team capability. This view was supported also by a number of staff who acknowledged that geographically it would be difficult to pull people from different parts of the country to consolidate a national response in the form of a team. Instead it is argued that a regionally decentralized model of 4 - 5 teams trained to NDRT standard would provide better value for money and more easily manageable during exercises and response. Surge could be provided to regions in Egypt from neighboring Governorates or from Cairo depending on the size of the event.

It should also be noted that ERC has six persons that have attended Regional Disaster Response Team Training (RDRT). ERC management have stated that whilst they are committed to supporting RDRT upskilling and making staff/volunteers available to the wider MENA region,

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTTgt9qMIF4>

their own domestic response development is a priority for the time being. ERC managers also stated that it was unlikely that RDRT would be required or requested to deploy to Egypt as ERC would have sufficient capacity to manage their own demands once their development plan was completed.

Commentary:

ERCs volunteers are its strength according to many that I spoke to and this was reinforced with the groups that I met. The success of the EAT and the fact that so many volunteers trained and untrained are still willing to wait until further NDRT development or training opportunities even though two years has passed since the last activity. Despite the lack of formal activation, NDRT members have been busy training volunteers and undertaking leadership roles with youth groups and other “peacetime” activities and this is testament to their dedication. One concern raised was the perception of competition between EAT and NDRT roles. Some volunteers are members of both. Some volunteers were concerned that all the attention and money had gone to EAT and that was part of the reason NDRT had not progressed. This tension, it is reported, also exists at management level and will need to be addressed if both entities are to continue to flourish and coexist.

8.0 Baseline Indicators

In order for NDRT to flourish and remain sustainable it has been recommended that baseline indicators are established to measure ongoing success. The following have been recommended from which ERC can include in their planning.

Current available baseline data	Figures
# Volunteers nationally	15,000+
# Volunteers NDRT trained	67
# Branches with NDRT trained volunteers	12
# DM/Relief staff (HQ) Management	8
# DM/Relief Coordinators(branch)	54 (2 each branch)
# Branches with EAT members	23
# Volunteers trained EAT	450
# EAT nationwide	94 teams
# Annual branch response activations	50
Proposed additional baselines measurement	
Total # of volunteers NDRT trained	
# of female volunteers NDRT trained	
# of NDRT trained volunteers resigned annually	
# of NDRT trained volunteers deployed	
# of emergency response deployments	
# of NDRT trained volunteers taken part in exercises	

9.0 Disaster Law

ERC recently attended a Regional Disaster Law meeting and is a member of the subsequent working group. ERC acknowledges that disaster law is an important aspect of having a functional response mechanism especially regarding International and cross border assistance. Recently during the Gaza crisis ERC received a significant amount of goods in kind from international donors a proportion of this was unsolicited. ERC are exempt from paying duty or tax on relief goods received internationally as transit. International donations sent to ERC are to be exempted by an approval from the PM cabinet. There are some challenges with this process as to gain specific exemptions approval from Cabinet can lead to bureaucratic delays. This is overcome by temporary exemptions given to ERC until the final approval is issued by the cabinet.

The formal management of international assistance or offers of assistance for the country itself is managed by the Ministry of Foreign affairs. It is unknown if there is a legislative base to this although it is unlikely. ERC report that Government approval is not required for receiving funds from IFRC or other partners or relief items that are deemed to be transient. Their feeling is that receiving foreign team's especially medical personnel would be problematic given the necessity to fulfill the requirements to practice according to Egyptian regulations, cultural considerations and strong sense of state and National Society autonomy.

ERCs mandate as auxiliary to Government is enshrined in its statute and this role entails providing relief to affect parties by crisis or natural disaster at a national level. This mandate also reportedly extends to the self-determining local government structures of the 27 autonomous Governorates each with its own reported legal base. There is no known prescriptive Government policy or legal basis which determines the quality of relief items or disaster operations. ERC enjoys a strong relationship with a variety of Government bodies and Ministry's and is represented on disaster and relief committees at the national and local level. At the core of this relationship and its auxiliary status are the fundamental principles which are acknowledged and well respected by the Government according to ERC. This was demonstrated recently during the violence and with the action of the EAT. This "point of difference" is something ERC is keen to continue to leverage. ERC does not seek Government funding for its activities in order to maintain its neutrality and independence.⁴ ERC does not have any formal cross border MOUs with neighbors but does have partnership MOUS with some likeminded National Societies such as Red Crescent of United Arab Emirates.

Commentary

ERC has recently given more attention to the Disaster law area. ERC consider that the current operational processes they have in place especially around international assistance are

⁴ Copies of the respective legal documents include ERC act were not available from ERC.

sufficient, and that a requirement for foreign teams especially would be unlikely. As ERC revitalises and strengthens its DM capacity it will still be important for ERC to assess and strengthen its legal basis even at the national level, as this can only enhance its work leveraging its auxiliary status especially at the Governorate level. ERC will need to take care in that by doing this they do not compromise their growing status as neutral and independent in the eyes of the communities they seek to serve.

10.0 International Cooperation

ERC advises it is a committed member of the Federation and Movement. ERC regularly contributes to international events and appeals by way of financial contribution both on a bilateral and multilateral basis. ERC receives Government contributions from time to time for international appeals which ERC facilitates. ERC regularly receives delegations and support from like-minded National Societies in the region and is a firm believer in solidarity amongst the membership. ERC also hosts and takes part in many movement workshops and meetings of note, and maintains strong relationships with UN agencies and INGOS working in the region.

ICRC have had a presence in Egypt since 1940 and a strong relationship and partnership with the ERC. This is evident in the quick establishment and success of the Emergency Action Teams. The IFRC is represented by the regional representative for North Africa based in Tunisia and with technical support including DM provided by the MENA Zone office in Beirut. The IFRC previously have provided ERC with financial contributions from the disaster relief emergency fund (DREF) for a variety of natural disasters, complex emergencies including relief activities in Gaza and more recent civil unrest. IFRC are also providing technical support in Disaster Law and with a pending Organisational Capacity Assessment Certification. (OCAC).

Currently the Swiss and German Red Cross are providing technical and financial support for Logistics and school based health promotion respectively.

Commentary:

Whilst ERC are an active member of the movement, its international cooperation is centered mostly where sharing and learning or support is the focus. ERC do not envisage a time when the IFRC would be called upon to undertake its statutory role to coordinate international assistance for the ERC. Whilst ERC has significant experience in this regard the effects and impact of a significant disaster especially where the HQ is affected cannot be underestimated. Managing multiple partners and offers of assistance both movement and non-movement is particularly time consuming and resource heavy.

ERC did not appear over familiar with the role of the IFRC as shelter cluster convener and showed they had previously filled this role for IFRC during a recent UN cluster activation. ERC would benefit from looking at the lessons from other large disasters and how that might be managed, acknowledging the cultural considerations which would be evident. Supported by IFRC, ERC could be a leader in contingency planning for the region in this regard.

11.0 Policies and Procedures

Two documents that were supplied by ERC were reviewed for background information. The ERC DM strategy and plan of action was compiled in 2013 and is currently under review. This document combines strategy and plans at the national and international level and details a number of planning considerations. ERC confirms it lacks formalised policies to underpin its strategy especially in disaster risk reduction but relies on the Federation 2020 strategy to establish its long term direction.

The second document is the disaster response contingency plan completed in January 2014 but remains in final draft form. This document considers an all hazards approach and details the risk landscape for Egypt and goes on to describe geographical vulnerabilities and capacities especially in relation to logistics. A number of annexes including SOPs, business continuity and other templates are listed in the document these are either unavailable or yet to be developed. This document was developed utilizing the IFRC contingency planning guideline as its basis.

Commentary:

Both documents are aspirational and are a strong attempt to encompass a broad range of activities in a complex operating environment both internally and externally. In doing so some aspects of these documents are duplicitous and the approach taken in trying to convey a lot of information may not be easily recognised or understood by others outside of the HQ. Combining the plan of action with the contingency plan and leaving the strategy document on its own is an example which may be considered for future drafts. Prescribing further the particular use and management of all the response resources including NDRT, EAT and supporting branches would also be helpful. ERC would benefit from reviewing its planning processes and establishing a more holistic approach. This could also better identify the intended audience for these important documents and thereby making them potentially more user friendly for staff and volunteers alike.

12.0 Well Prepared National Society survey results

ERC conducted as part of this review the most recent phase of WPNS. Without a baseline the results are inconclusive. The interpretation of the extent of compliance or completion of WPNS requirements could also be considered somewhat subjective when completed internally. Despite this ERC could be considered to be relatively advanced in its preparedness activity with over a 75% completion rating. The survey as a process has also been useful though in indicating to ERC what it doesn't currently have in place especially in relation to policies and the role of the IFRC secretariat. OCAC if completed by ERC will also compliment the findings and will serve as a helpful tool if the results are re measured in the next few years.

13.0 Study Constraints

Unfortunately due to costs and time restrains this study was reduced from ten to five days and was undertaken also during Ramadan. This meant that it was not possible to travel outside of

Cairo to visit branches and volunteers. Limited office hours at the HQ also meant that the scope of informants at the HQ was limited as was the opportunity to follow up some aspects of the findings and to source further relevant data. Follow up requests for information not readily available at the time and additional photos by email had not been received at the time of the completion of the report. There was some confusion and questions as to the relevance and requirement of this case study on my arrival which was rectified.

ERC are to be congratulated for the welcome they extended to me especially from the volunteers who were keen to tell their story however the timing of study coincided with a pending organisational meaning that some staff were preoccupied with other priorities making some data difficult to retrieve. ERC also acknowledge that some volunteer and response data relevant to this study was difficult to access due to weak IT and lack of appropriate database. This issue is currently being addressed.

Whilst the TOR for this study required an English speaker and writer the large majority of discussions took place in Arabic requiring ongoing translation and interpretation. It was not possible to really get a sense of the broader cultural considerations of NDRT development and its connections to the wider federation response mechanism nor was there a real opportunity to explore the full richness of the volunteer experience with the time available. Attempts were also made to source NDRT case studies, research and relevant lessons from other National Societies and IFRC regions which were unsuccessful within the time limits of this study.