International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

**Communication in emergencies simulation: ACE programme**

**ACE programme: simulation exercise /** **Semarang** **/ 29 April 2015**

**Background and purpose**

**Step 1**: Below is a disaster scenario. Please present the disaster situation to everyone in the room. Let them read it over for 10 minutes and ask minimal questions but answers should be vague. Each participant should wear the “hat” of an communicator for the government (as part of NDMO). Then split them into 4 groups:

1. Donor
2. Affected communities
3. Government partners
4. Humanitarian agencies
5. Media

**Step 2**: Allow each group to decide together on the top 5 key messages for their target group or audience.

**Step 3**: While they are working, assign various people (Giorgio, Herve, Anne), to give an “injection” so that it is similar to a live disaster.

**Step 4:** After 30-40 minutes, ask them to re-group and evaluate the messages together. Each group can present what they drafted and discussion the effectiveness of the messaging (s*ee the group exercises and discussion questions in the PPT “Communicating in disasters”).*

**This exercise has a two-fold purpose:**

1. **Highlight the importance of communication in emergencies**. Oftentimes, technical staff underestimate the value of communication during an emergency. This includes the need to provide funding for communication support, and also take steps to prepare communication support in advance of an emergency. *(Reference disaster checklist).*

From identifying professional photographers and videographers, to having key social media experts as part of a team, and trained spokes persons – there are key areas of communication that can make or break the reach and impact of an organization during a crisis.

The more that is invested in communication, and the more communication is successfully rolled out in the first 48 hours of a disaster, the more visibility = media coverage = funding = credibility and trust. More importantly, it helps to reach more communities, which is an entirely separate area in itself.

1. **Illustrate how the complementary role of the Red Cross Red Crescent in communicating during emergencies.** The IFRC and its member National Societies can play a very important role in communicating to both communities (beneficiaries) as well as media, donors, and the public, on the aid efforts being conducted during an emergency. The Red Cross mandate, as an auxiliary, is to always complement the work being done by the government at a national and local level. Our communicators are trained to do this and we never blame or shame the government in their efforts. The key is to see the Red Cross Red Crescent as a key partner to improve communication to all groups before, during and after emergencies.

**STEP 1: Present the scenario**

**(separated file)**

**STEP 2: Injections**

**2-4 journalists:** Each can choose a different new agency to represent. They should each come to the table and ask many questions: how many affected? What are the needs on the ground? Why isn’t aid being distributed more quickly? What is the priority right now for you? People are complaining that there is not enough help, what is your response? What is your biggest concern at the present moment? Can you give us a full picture of the situation?

**Local government official**: A government official has given a statement on CNN that international aid agencies are not cooperating with the government. They official claims that the aid being distributed by international aid agencies is not effective, particularly given the cultural sensitivities that are important to respect.

**Community members (affected people, beneficiaries):** a group of community member are seeking for help and assistance, come to the NDMO office, meet the communication person. They also meet journalists and tell their suffer as impact of the disaster. Journalist will bring this message to the 4 team of participants.

**National NGOs:** A strong national NGO, Dwi Pakca Foundation also contact/visit the NDMO communication team to express their concern about what happening on ground. They received information from their branch that community have not received sufficient aid from the authority. They also talk with journalist regarding this concern.

**Prime Minister’s office**: A spokesperson from the PM office has gone on national TV and used her Twitter channel to state that information will not be made available on the situation for at least 48 hours. This includes no information on what aid will be distributed, and which aid agencies will be allowed to continue operating (or let into) the country.

**Red Cross disaster management officer**: The Red Cross arrives at the National Disaster Management Office to coordinate on aid distributions. According to their volunteers in many communities, people are panicking and feeling increasingly desperate.

**Discussion questions**

* Share with the group your experience from this exercise; what worked well and what did not work well?
* From this exercise and your personal experience, which group is it most important to communicate to and why?
* Does your NDMO invest enough in communication? What could you do better? Do you use online communication, audio-visuals, are people trained for media interviews?
* What did you learn about timing from this exercise? Did things evolve quickly and why did you choose the top-line messaging?
* What are some of the challenges you have encountered in this exercise or in a real-life scenario?
* How do you see the role of the Red Cross Red Crescent in all of this?
* What do you value about communication? And what is problematic?