

Key outcomes: AP communications forum 2012

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Background

The 3rd Asia Pacific communications forum was hosted by Thai Red Cross Society and co-funded by the IFRC and ICRC. Held from 5-7 November 2012 in Bangkok, the forum brought together 75 communications professionals from 21 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies across Asia and the Pacific, together with communications counterparts from the ICRC and IFRC Geneva, zone, regional and country offices. Conducted every two years, the central aim of the forum is to promote knowledge sharing and experience amongst Red Cross and Red Crescent communicators.

Agenda overview

The agenda in 2012 focused on building relationships and working together more closely on common communications priorities, while also introducing a range of topics for discussion designed to contribute to the collective learning of the group. The specific topics addressed in the forum were identified in a consultative process led by the steering group of the Asia Pacific communications network, with preferences provided by National Society participants. An overview of the agenda topics are as follows:

- IFRC/ICRC global communications priorities
- Panel discussion: "Communicating in a digital world: how should RCRC adapt to a changing media landscape?"
- Mainstreaming best practice and innovation in social media: IFRC engagement with social media, past present and future directions
- Training: effective media relations and communicating in disasters
- Managing reputational risk: case study of Australia, China and Japanese Red Cross
- Recognizing the role of youth as RCRC communicators
- Fundamentals of developing a good communications strategy
- Public awareness and advocacy: case study of Australia Red Cross
- Broadening our reach: using video and broadcast media for NS positioning
- Improving resource mobilization in emergencies
- Beneficiary communications simulation exercise
- Update on RCRC branding initiative
- NS communications capacity building
- Humanitarian diplomacy and communications: case study by Myanmar Red Cross
- Health care in danger campaign

Key outcomes

Overall consensus on the forum from participants was overwhelmingly positive. Taking into consideration the diversity of communications skills and their focus across Asia Pacific National Societies, specific points for senior management of National Societies to note are as follows

Useful topics for National Society communicators:

- Training on communications in disasters and effective media relations ranked highest.
- Interest was also very high on the international branding initiative, social media, and beneficiary communication, developing a communication strategy and communicating in the digital age.
- Peer-to-peer learning (case studies) was highly appreciated and participants requested more time be dedicated to these sessions in the future.
- A request to engage more as a network and share best practices/resources was also expressed by participants. It was noted that the opportunity to informally network and gather together as colleagues was very valuable and it should not be underestimated.

Points for follow up:

- Communications needs more support within National Societies from senior management; this refers not only to funding but giving value to what communications brings to the work of National Societies, its position within the National Society (where it sits), the long-term plans or commitment and visions for the future.
- Participants expressed the need for improved coordination between Movement partners and improving the way we work together.
- More support is needed in areas of social media and reputational risk management.
- Request to learn more on resource mobilization during emergencies, the Coca-Cola partnership, branding initiative, developing a communication strategy and beneficiary communication.
- Improving coordination and building trust between Movement partners was considered one of the most important issues addressed in the forum. It was also identified as a point for both individuals and different levels of the organization to take up.
- Suggestions on specific initiatives for capacity building (identified in working groups):
 - media training for senior leaders and media monitoring and analysis
 - long-term appointments for staff encourages better engagement and consistency between counterparts
 - human resources approach should ensure the right people with the right skill set are in the job for communications
 - senior leadership to set precedent for positive Movement relations and trainings or workshops on the Seville Agreement

For further information, please contact:

Patrick Fuller, IFRC communications manager, Asia Pacific
Patrick.fuller@ifrc.org

Kate Roux, IFRC regional communications and advocacy manager, South-East Asia
katherine.roux@ifrc.org