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**COMMUNICATION AND NATIONAL
RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT
SOCIETY ACTIVITIES**

1. COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

Communication to promote dissemination

The Philippine National Red Cross

by Edilberto H. Angco

Information and dissemination are integral parts of the present structural design of the Public Relations and Publications Department of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC). Although interrelated, the two activities have distinct functions and objectives that set them apart from each other. A system of this kind seems ideal for any National Society which, like the PNRC, is small in size and has meagre human and financial resources. Owing to budgetary constraints at the PNRC, the Head of the Public Relations and Publications Department has to run the “whole show”, except for the field of dissemination where another key person is in charge.

Information programmes and services

In general information programmes and services are centralized at National Headquarters. For instance, any nationwide information plan or proposal has first to be approved by the Public Relations Committee whose members are on the PNRC’s Board of Governors, before it is implemented through the network of 83 chapters. In the chapters the tasks related to information and dissemination usually fall to the chapter administrators, all of whom have been trained in these specialized fields of endeavour. More often than not, they are assisted by equally proficient chapter service representatives and college students who are also Red Cross Youth members.

Large-scale information or promotion programmes are implemented through the chapters and then methodically interwoven into national or international Red Cross events such as the anniversary of the National Society, World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, Red Cross Flag Week, Blood Donors' Week, Summer Safety, Annual Fund Drive, etc. All these events need public support, and require a sustained media barrage for a certain period. The printed press, television and radio must be used in order to put over key messages. In other cases, a direct communication strategy (public events such as seminars, symposia, conventions and training courses that provide a fertile ground for both information and dissemination) is more suitable. Here, effective use can be made of several different methods, such as slide and film showings and pictorial and graphic exhibitions, all of which lend clarity to the messages we want to impart.

When dealing with the media, possibilities abound. For the printed press, news, photos, features and occasionally sponsored supplements come in handy and, for radio and television, not only news but drama series, live and taped interviews, spots, and even Red Cross songs and dances to put over a more lively image. But these should all fit into a well-planned and cost-effective publicity strategy.

Apart from traditional events, the chapters always have considerable freedom of action to inform the local public about their day-to-day activities, in whatever way is most easily accessible and economical for them, without relying on the expertise of National Headquarters. After all, they are in a better position to cultivate and maintain good media relations, among other things, in their respective localities.

There is obviously a variety of other tried and tested methods that the PNRC has regularly used because of their proven results. Artistically designed posters and inexpensive leaflets, newsletters and other publications meant to reach out to a diversity of audiences still have a strong appeal.

Promoting dissemination through information

In recent years the PNRC has been making considerable use of a core group of media practitioners set up on the national level to intensify its year-round information campaign. The group is known as the "Red Cross Media Volunteer Corps". Its members have been well briefed about the Red Cross in its national and international dimensions, so that they are in a position to talk and write about it with a degree of authority.

The group is called to a meeting at the PNRC National Headquarters at least bimonthly to discuss “what’s new” on the national and international (Red Cross) scene. With their increasing knowledge of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, these media men can be counted upon to write a good piece about the Red Cross and, whenever necessary, to highlight the principles of the Movement and some aspects of international humanitarian law.

In times of major disaster, whether natural or man-made, these media volunteers provide on-the-spot reports. Of course, the features they write give a glowing account of the Red Cross in action. The latest occasion on record was the December rebellion of 1989, when the PNRC was much in the news because of its highly visible efforts to protect and save the lives of wounded combatants on both sides and civilians who fell victim to the fighting. Their reports, published in newspapers and magazines, discussed the use of the red cross emblem, the Fundamental Principles and some rules for behaviour in combat. The same was true on radio and television. As a result, there was a marked increase in public understanding of and respect and financial support for the PNRC.

Being new and experimental, at this stage the media volunteer corps is still considered as a pilot project. However, prospects look bright for its continuing success. When the time comes, it will gradually be expanded to the chapter level, inasmuch as there are community-based journalists willing to join the Red Cross as volunteer drum-beaters and disseminators.

Occasionally, local journalists can be induced to research and produce a more thorough analysis of the workings of the Movement, focusing on a well-defined theme. The motivating factor is an essay-writing contest with attractive prizes to be won. All the winning entries are then published in book form, for posterity and also for purposes of dissemination, mainly through school libraries.

The PNRC’s Public Relations and Publications Department takes the initiative in issuing news items to the press that highlight the Movement’s principles and demonstrate the importance of IHL as a contribution to peace.

Speeches and messages by PNRC officials, more specifically for non-Red Cross audiences, are usually packed with information intended to build up the image of the Red Cross as a service organization that protects human life and dignity.

As a general rule, all training programmes are preceded by a basic dissemination course on the Movement (its history, the various components and their activities), the principles and IHL. The training given

is in first aid, nursing, primary health care and youth leadership, and technical training for new staff and volunteers. Major relief operations and blood donation campaigns also provide ideal opportunities for information and dissemination.

Whenever possible, stories about Red Cross activities intended for the media are written in such a way that they relate to the Fundamental Principles and IHL. This “soft sell” approach, which is certainly effective, simply calls for imagination and creativity on the part of the information officer.

To reach a wide and diverse audience, the PNRC’s best means of communication is the radio. Radio stations are strategically located in practically all regions of the country, and are owned and operated by both public and private companies. The good thing about them, especially those in the countryside, is that they welcome any item about the Red Cross. To make maximum use of these facilities, the PNRC has been encouraging its chapters to produce weekly radio programmes. This is a long-term goal but we are confident that it is achievable.

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