

---

# **Policy on ICRC Cooperation with National Societies**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- A. Purpose of cooperation
- B. Premises for cooperation
- C. Framework for implementing the cooperation policy

## **PART I**

### **CAPACITY-BUILDING COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL SOCIETIES IN THEIR OWN COUNTRIES**

- 1. Strengthening the capacity of National Societies to act in specific areas**
  - 1.1 Purpose and nature of activities
  - 1.2 Implementation and management
  - 1.3 Coordination with the International Federation Secretariat

## **PART II**

### **OPERATIONAL COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL SOCIETIES**

- 2.1 Operational partnerships with National Societies in their own countries**
  - 2.1.1 Purpose and nature of activities
  - 2.1.2 Implementation and management
  - 2.1.3 Coordination with the International Federation Secretariat
- 2.2 Operational partnerships with National Societies working internationally**
  - 2.2.1 Purpose and nature of activities
  - 2.2.2 Implementation and management
  - 2.2.3 Coordination within the Movement

## INTRODUCTION

According to the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the primary role and mandate of National Societies is to carry out humanitarian activities in their own countries. In addition, within the scope of their resources, they bring aid internationally to victims of various types of emergencies; they do so through the National Society of the country concerned, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. They also contribute to the development of other National Societies which require such assistance, in order to strengthen the Movement as a whole. International activities of the components of the Movement are organized in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, the Movement's Statutes and the relevant resolutions adopted by the Movement's statutory bodies, in particular the Agreement on the Organization of the International Activities of the Components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement ("Seville Agreement", 1997) and the Strategy for the Movement (adopted by the Council of Delegates in 2001).

The ICRC works together with National Societies in both their domestic and international activities, particularly in countries suffering the effects of or prone to conflict or internal strife, but also in times of peace in matters falling under its responsibility according to the Geneva Conventions, the Movement's Statutes and the relevant resolutions adopted by the Movement.

The ICRC and National Societies in their own countries often join forces in activities that they choose to implement together for the benefit of persons affected by conflict or internal strife. In each such operation, various other components of the Movement frequently offer substantial support, which can range from donations of operational resources and expertise to activities on the ground together with the ICRC and/or the host National Society.

This introduction is intended to highlight the purpose of ICRC cooperation within the Movement, the premises on which it should be developed, and the framework for implementing the cooperation policy.

## A - Purpose of cooperation

The ICRC views cooperation with National Societies and their International Federation as important to fulfilling its own mandate and essential to accomplishing the Movement's mission, which is to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health, and to ensure respect for the human being, in particular in times of armed conflict and other emergencies.

The aim of this cooperation is to effectively mobilize and employ the Movement's many resources to achieve the following objectives:

- increased coverage of humanitarian needs;
- more effective management and greater quality in the services provided;
- increased contributions to ICRC operations;
- greater coherence in the work of the Movement as a whole;
- greater use of the Movement network to achieve results on issues of common concern.

While the ICRC provides the human and material resources needed to achieve these objectives, it would like to see the National Societies as a whole contribute in a determined and lasting manner to this effort and display a greater degree of solidarity towards each other.

## B - Premises for cooperation

The cooperation and partnership between the ICRC, the National Societies and their International Federation need to be developed in accordance with the following premises:

- each Movement component has *distinct but closely related and complementary roles*, and has capacities (competencies, material and financial resources, networks and other assets) which can be made available to other components in order to benefit people in need;
- there is a clear *commitment to work together* in the pursuit of established objectives so as to maximize the impact of the entire Movement;
- all the components agree to *place the above commitment on a formal footing*, by establishing well-defined consultation mechanisms, agreements and work contracts;

- there is a commitment to strike a balance between promoting complementary roles and pooling resources, and acknowledging and indeed *emphasizing the importance of each component's role* in relations and contacts outside the Movement (such as with other organizations and the authorities).

This is the form that partnership should take within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, where each component has its own responsibilities, capacities and activities, which enhance its opportunities for working together successfully with other components of the Movement.

National Societies are referred to as operating National Societies in their own countries and as participating National Societies when they participate in international operations.

## C - Framework for implementing the cooperation policy

The aim of the ICRC's cooperation with National Societies is to promote greater efficiency in the Movement's activities. There are two main ways of achieving this:

- by strengthening in peacetime the National Societies' capacity to take action and provide appropriate services in time of conflict;
- by promoting operational interaction in responding to conflicts in order to maximize the various strengths of the Movement and benefit the persons affected by conflict, internal strife and their direct results.

These broad approaches are reflected in two kinds of cooperation involving three distinct types of relationships between the ICRC and National Societies. They need to be understood as dynamic and interactive processes in which the ICRC and the National Societies contribute to and benefit from each other's work. However, whatever the kind of cooperation, each partner plays its respective role and fulfils its responsibilities differently, depending on the circumstances and the expected results. The two main kinds of cooperation between the ICRC and National Societies are described below.

## **1. Capacity-building cooperation with National Societies in their own countries**

### Strengthening a National Society to act in specific areas

The ICRC makes its expertise in certain areas available to all National Societies in order to strengthen their capacity to conduct activities domestically in accordance with their own priorities and plans. This support is intended to help National Societies contribute more effectively to the Movement's work of preventing and alleviating human suffering resulting from conflicts and internal strife.

## **2. Operational cooperation with National Societies**

An operational partnership is a mode of cooperation between two or more Movement components that combine some or all of their resources in order to contribute to common or coordinated objectives in a given operation.

### Operational partnerships with National Societies in their own countries

A National Society responds to the needs in its own country that arise from conflict, internal strife or their direct results. When the ICRC fulfils its international mandate in the same country, both components must whenever possible pool their capacities and resources in carrying out humanitarian operations and meeting the population's needs.

### Operational partnerships with National Societies working internationally

Many National Societies have the resources and willingness to work internationally together with the ICRC, and are prepared to contribute to operations in various ways ranging from straightforward cash, kind or personnel to complex operational management endeavours in the field.

In most operational situations today, all three types of cooperation outlined above may, and often do, occur simultaneously in one given context, and need to be carefully organized and managed in order to achieve their respective expected results. At all times, cooperation between the ICRC and National Societies should benefit conflict affected persons and result in mutual advantage for the partners concerned.

## PART I

### CAPACITY-BUILDING COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL SOCIETIES IN THEIR OWN COUNTRIES

#### **1. Strengthening the capacity of National Societies to act in specific areas**

##### **1.1. Purpose and nature of activities**

The main purpose of the ICRC's contributions to National Society development is to enhance, in peacetime and especially in situations of armed violence, the capacity of National Societies to accomplish their own mission and carry out specific activities aimed at preventing and alleviating human suffering caused by armed conflict or internal strife. The broader purpose is to reinforce the activities of the Movement as a whole and achieve greater coherence in the conflict-related humanitarian tasks of its various components.

The ICRC's contributions to National Society development respect the Societies' national development plans. The aim of these contributions is to strengthen the capacity of National Societies to provide services that meet identified needs in areas where the ICRC can offer its expertise and support. These areas, which are closely related to the tasks assigned the ICRC in the Geneva Conventions, the Movement's Statutes and the relevant resolutions of the Movement's statutory bodies, include:

- promoting international humanitarian law, and spreading knowledge of the principles, ideals and activities of the Movement among both internal and external audiences;
- preparing for and providing health-care and relief services in situations of conflict and internal strife and preparing to do so, in close coordination with National Societies;
- restoring family links through the worldwide Red Cross and Red Crescent tracing network;
- raising awareness of the dangers of mines and unexploded ordnance;
- supporting National Societies in certain legal matters, such as recognizing or reconstituting the Societies, drawing up or amending Statutes, and preparing for statutory meetings of the Movement.

The ICRC's approach to strengthening National Societies' capacity to act in specific areas involves support, advice and expertise to build up:

- the National Society's sense of programme "ownership" and its commitment to the implementation and sustainability of programme activities;
- the planning and organization of each programme, so as to ensure that activities and services are carried out efficiently and effectively at national and branch levels;
- the skills and expertise among National Society staff needed to carry out and manage programme activities;
- the network of relationships with all parties concerned by specific programmes, so as to enhance performance, improve coordination and set down roots in the working environment outside the Society;
- the availability and suitability of tools and other resources needed to carry out programme activities with professionalism and efficiency.

The ICRC works with any or all National Societies in one or more of the above areas, within the limits of its resources and priorities. It carries out long-term activities and gives support to National Societies in close consultation and coordination with the International Federation's Secretariat.

The Movement's resources and capacities also need to be mobilized for other tasks assigned by the Geneva Conventions and the Statutes to the ICRC, such as the promotion of issues relating to international humanitarian law. The ICRC can perform these tasks by assuming its lead role in this area and providing guidance to National Societies on how, on what issues, and with what people to engage in dialogue on issues of humanitarian concern to the whole Movement.

## 1.2. Implementation and management

Each of the above-mentioned areas of contribution to National Society development has clear objectives. There is room for creativity in the approaches used and in defining activities that suit the local working situation and meet identified needs. National Societies may carry out such activities in a variety of ways, which may differ from country to country. Each Society's own way of doing things must be preserved to the greatest extent possible.

The ICRC seeks to enhance National Society capacity by supporting the Societies as institutions, which have their own structures and decide

on their own levels of operation. Cooperation objectives, plans of action and budgets are set by the Societies in consultation with the ICRC. The National Society designs, manages, implements and monitors the activities carried out by all its units, and assumes final responsibility for them.

The ICRC facilitates implementation of National Society activities by ensuring that suitable technical information is available. It does this in a number of ways:

- by providing National Societies with regular support through its own delegates and other staff with technical expertise, and material and financial assistance in certain areas, to help the Societies carry out their tasks and fulfil their responsibilities;
- by providing National Societies with technical expertise for particular events and activities where their capacities need to be reinforced;
- by mobilizing support from other National Societies in specific areas and retaining a monitoring and support role with respect to the achievement of agreed objectives; and
- by making delegates available for seconding to National Societies, where they can exercise executive, managerial or support responsibilities in programmes or areas agreed upon by the ICRC and the National Society.

Whatever form the ICRC's support may take, it is offered in a spirit of partnership so as to transfer know-how and thus meet the overall objective of strengthening National Societies' capacity to act in a sustainable manner. When the costs of National Society personnel for permanent activities are covered by the ICRC, care should be taken to avoid excessive dependency. From the outset, there should be a strategy for progressive ICRC withdrawal that involves helping the National Society to find alternative sources of support. National Society dependency on ICRC managerial systems should likewise be avoided.

Priority should be given to strengthening the capacity of National Societies to deliver services or carry out activities in the field, while continuing to support their role in programme coordination and management.

Written agreements between the ICRC and each National Society ensure that objectives are clear to each partner and that the working relationship is based on a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities. A three- to five-year commitment should be made to providing a given National Society with capacity building support, preferably in a multilateral agreement which should also lay down general objectives



and partnership management procedures. Such an agreement should be supplemented by annual cooperation agreements specifying expected results and setting out plans of action and budgets for one calendar year.

The objective of any agreement concluded between a National Society and the ICRC is for it to be useable as an effective management tool for programme implementation. It is important, therefore, that the terms of the agreement, in particular with regard to particular management procedures, be specific and fully transparent.

### 1.3. Coordination with the International Federation Secretariat

Each National Society has primary responsibility for its own development. The ICRC respects this fact in all its capacity-building endeavours. In many instances, National Societies receive backing from their International Federation Secretariat, which has the lead role in coordinating international support of this kind. The ICRC coordinates and harmonizes the planning and implementation of its own capacity-building activities with those of the Federation and of any Participating National Society concerned.

The ICRC promotes and encourages regular coordination among representatives of all Movement components contributing to the development of a particular National Society. Coordination efforts focus on ensuring that support from the various components is coherent and relevant, and on monitoring the activities receiving support.

In countries or regions where the National Society and/or the Federation develop and apply strategic planning and coordination tools such as national development plans and Cooperation Agreement Strategy, the ICRC takes an active part in the process leading to their drafting and implementation. This process is coordinated with the drafting of bilateral agreements between the ICRC and National Societies mentioned above.

## PART II

### OPERATIONAL COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL SOCIETIES

#### **2.1 Operational partnerships with National Societies in their own countries**

##### 2.1.1. Purpose and nature of activities

National Societies in their own countries and the ICRC have a common responsibility to bring humanitarian aid to persons affected by armed conflicts, internal strife or their direct results. National Societies and the ICRC work together to meet the victims' needs through various programmes and services, most of which are related to emergency medical care (evacuation and first aid in particular), relief and tracing.

The primary objective of cooperation between National Societies and the ICRC, therefore, is to reach conflict affected persons and respond to their needs as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, this should always be done in a way that preserves the National Societies' ability to function as independent institutions and builds further capacity for responding successfully to needs. The vast Red Cross/Red Crescent network, the swiftness with which National Society staff can be mobilized and obtain access to trouble spots, and their intimate knowledge of local conditions are all key assets for the ICRC in the planning and conduct of its operations.

Whenever possible, the ICRC gives priority to operational partnerships with the National Society in the country of operation. The need to preserve the impartiality, independence and neutrality — in both appearance and reality — of components of the Movement in their humanitarian activities and the ability to gain and maintain access to those who need protection and assistance are primary considerations for doing so.

In situations where the ICRC assumes the role of lead agency (as defined in the "Seville Agreement"), it also ensures that the support given by Participating National Societies and the International Federation Secretariat to the host National Society prior to the operation can continue, provided that it is duly coordinated and takes into account the changed operational environment, as well as the capacity and priorities of the National Society.

### 2.1.2. Implementation and management

In an operational partnership between a National Society and the ICRC, activities may be carried out jointly or, in some instances, fully delegated for implementation by the National Society with regular ICRC supervision or monitoring. The National Society's autonomy in managing such activities may vary, depending on its operational capacity and on the conditions on the ground.

In this form of cooperation, which involves meeting the ICRC's own objectives and relying on its budgets, the ICRC itself remains responsible and therefore retains an important role. Opportunities for National Society capacity building should nevertheless be sought whenever possible with ICRC-provided training as required.

The ICRC ensures that the management of additional resources mobilized by the National Society to carry out partnership activities takes into account the fact that their availability is temporary and tied to the emergency situation. In particular, unnecessary liabilities, which may hamper a smooth scaling-down of activities in due time, need to be avoided. All contractual arrangements and managerial procedures need to take this into account.

To formalize the operational partnership, written agreements drawn up and signed between the ICRC and the National Society specify objectives to be achieved, respective roles and responsibilities as well as corresponding plans of action and budgets. Financial, administrative and reporting procedures are clearly agreed upon and form an integral part of such agreements. Other components of the Movement may also be party to such agreements if they are involved in the implementation of the same project or programme.

When working together in an operation on the ground, the ICRC shares its communication and security guidelines with the National Society and encourages it to adopt and implement them in full or in part.

### 2.1.3. Coordination with the International Federation Secretariat

In situations where the ICRC enters into an operational partnership with a National Society in its own country, a considerable strain is put on the Society's managerial and operational capacity. The National Society may need additional support from the International Federation Secretariat to improve its systems and procedures, in addition to maintaining its core programmes and activities.

The ICRC actively promotes International Federation Secretariat support for the development of National Societies' capacity to cope with the administrative and managerial requirements of operational situations. Special agreements may be concluded to this effect between the ICRC and the Federation. These may provide for ICRC support in specific areas of expertise made available by the Federation that are necessary to the smooth running of operations.

In situations where the ICRC assumes the role of lead agency, coordination mechanisms are established comprising all the components of the Movement present and active on the ground. These function with sufficient regularity to serve the needs of the particular operation. Where operational cooperation is intensive and involves a high volume of activities, it may be necessary to set up coordination mechanisms on two different levels, for strategic planning and management on one hand and programme activities on the other.

In situations of conflict and internal strife, the launch of operational activities and of their associated appeals by the International Federation Secretariat takes place in close coordination and in agreement with the ICRC, which is the Movement's lead agency in such circumstances.

## **2.2 Operational partnerships with National Societies working internationally**

### **2.2.1. Purpose and nature of activities**

The aim of operational partnership is to reinforce proximity to persons affected by armed conflict and to enhance the capacity to better address their needs through a coherent and coordinated Movement approach. To achieve this, the ICRC will promote the involvement of National Societies in its field operations and engage an active cooperation with National Societies who can contribute with human, technical and financial resources.

Direct contributions such as cash, staff on loan, goods, materials and equipment in kind are preferred by the ICRC for some types of activities or contexts which require overall coherence and a unified managerial approach. The ICRC manages activities relating to its mandate independently, but counts on direct contributions from National Societies to do so. In return, the ICRC steps up its efforts to defend the interests of these National Societies. In particular, it ensures that their contributions are used in an efficient and relevant manner in accordance with the

expectations of their national stakeholders. Such efforts are undertaken in close consultation with the National Societies concerned.

Partnerships for operations can be formed with National Societies when the ICRC assumes the role of lead agency for the Movement and also in other situations, provided that the Participating National Societies work within the framework of the Movement's Statutes and coordinate their activities with those of either the ICRC or the National Society of the country concerned.

In both circumstances, operational partnerships will be primarily but not exclusively considered for activities which fall within the ICRC objectives and budget. Direct on-site implementation and management of activities by Participating National Societies (in the form of projects or programmes) are supported by the ICRC where they are deemed to be feasible and to contribute positively to the overall operation:

- operational partnerships for carrying out activities planned and budgeted by the ICRC are promoted through various kinds of cooperation (direct contributions of resources, involvement in operational tasks, implementation of programmes or projects, etc.). They are fully integrated into ICRC managerial systems and procedures; the ICRC remains responsible for their successful completion;
- operational partnerships for carrying out activities *not* planned and budgeted by the ICRC may be considered in situations where the environment for humanitarian work is relatively stable or in transitional situations. Such partnerships are not a fundraising tool for ICRC operations and do not require the application of its accountability systems and procedures. The ICRC does, however, seek to ensure operational coherence through overall coordination.

In countries affected by armed conflict or internal strife, the ICRC, in close coordination with the host National Society, may also facilitate and promote the involvement of Participating National Societies so as to support and reinforce the host Society's emergency-response management capacity, thus forming a tripartite operational partnership. Programme continuity is thus, if not ensured, then at least facilitated if and when the ICRC withdraws.

The ICRC may also develop specific and strategic relations and dialogue with selected National Societies proactively in areas of mutual interest and recurrent need, which may include international operations, programmes and other activities.

### 2.2.2. Implementation and management

The organization and management of operational partnerships between the ICRC and Participating National Societies may differ in new and in ongoing operations, particularly where there are managerial and security constraints relating to the theatre of operations. Furthermore, in situations of transition from active hostilities to full re-establishment of peace, the ICRC seeks to ensure continuity in responding to needs through the use of the complementary roles and responsibilities of different components of the Movement.

In *new* operations, the ICRC seeks to engage National Societies from the earliest possible stage — although not necessarily to implement projects through separate managerial structures, which places a considerable burden in terms of coordination and administration on the ICRC delegation set-up. In such situations, the ICRC asks National Societies to provide resources (through rapid mobilization of goods in kind) and identify qualified and experienced specialized personnel to participate in rapid assessments and in the implementation of activities. Such resources are mobilized and deployed under the ICRC managerial set-up and operating procedures. The personnel involved from Participating National Societies may be asked to take part in the planning of programmes and projects in which their National Societies can, in a second stage, take on additional responsibility for implementation.

In the second quarter of each year, the ICRC may invite National Societies to express any interest they may have in working in specific places or on specific themes covered by *ongoing* operations. Any such expressions of interest, which may involve different types of contributions, are duly considered by the ICRC.

In order to manage operational partnerships in a transparent way, all administrative and financial arrangements are settled in advance. Moreover, the partnerships are formalized in written contract agreements. Depending on the terms and conditions of the partnership, any of several types of contracts may be used. All such contracts include the following information:

- the partnership objectives, and timelines for achieving them;
- the budget;
- any specific requirements to be met in implementing the project or activity in partnership;

- an itemized list of each partner's contributions;
- the administrative procedures, in particular in human resources, finance and logistics, adopted to manage the partnership.

When National Societies express an interest in becoming involved in ICRC activities, the ICRC asks for firm commitments, including a positive "statement of capacity".

Different National Societies may jointly form a partnership with the ICRC, as when one National Society is funded by another to carry out a specific activity in partnership with the ICRC. The details of such a relationship are set out in the partnership contract agreement.

### 2.2.3. Coordination within the Movement

The ICRC is responsible for promoting and guiding the contribution and involvement of Participating National Societies in international relief operations in countries affected by armed conflict, internal strife and their direct results. It does so in accordance with the Statutes of the Movement, the "Seville Agreement", other Movement policies relevant to such situations, and in consultation with the National Society of the country concerned.

When the ICRC assumes the role of lead agency, it implements its own activities while also taking responsibility for coordinating the response of the Movement. In both capacities, it considers operational partnerships primarily but not exclusively for activities falling within its own objectives and budget.

Coordinating the work of the components of the Movement in a given operation is a necessity, especially as regards security, communication and logistics.

The ICRC's approach to coordinating Movement activities is defined on a global basis but applied in a particular way in each operation, and revised regularly. Management details are specified in a framework for coordination in the field, which includes:

- information on how the National Societies and the Federation may contribute to the operation with the various resources available to them;
- the services that can be provided by the ICRC to the National Societies and their Federation in the country of operation such as ground and air logistics, accommodation, office space, warehousing, customs clearance, etc.;

- the conditions that must be agreed to and observed by National Societies to benefit from ICRC services. These conditions concern such matters as the management of security, relations with the authorities, coordination with other humanitarian agencies, logistics, relations with the media, the use of the emblem, the use of armed escorts, etc.;
- established coordination mechanisms with clear objectives and specified permanent members, locations, and working procedures, so as to ensure adequate consultation and exchanges of information on operations and programmes.

Participating National Societies or the Federation can benefit from ICRC services when they are involved in activities on the ground, provided they fulfil their obligation to be part of an overall Movement approach. In the event that discussions are not conclusive and a commitment to respect the established framework is not reached, no services are provided by the ICRC.

The deployment of Field Assessment and Coordination Teams (FACT), Emergency Response Units (ERUs), or other modes of operation by the International Federation is closely coordinated with and subject to the agreement of the ICRC field delegation or ICRC headquarters. The ICRC determines how such tools are managed and coordinated with ICRC managerial systems and procedures in a situation of armed conflict or internal strife.

In order to make its own and other objectives clear, the ICRC communicates the approach adopted for each operation, highlighting the main priorities and indicating the possibilities for and the terms and conditions of participation for National Societies and the International Federation Secretariat. Other participating components of the Movement are expected to respect ICRC decisions and contribute to the operation within the framework defined.