

Power of humanity

33rd International Conference
of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

9-12 December 2019, Geneva



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SUMMARY REPORT FROM COMMISSION II

SHIFTING VULNERABILITIES

Context:

The challenges of the 21st century are complex and interrelated. Fast-moving shifts in technology, climate, population movements, demography and urbanization are shaping the world we live in, with unavoidable impacts for millions of people. These impacts bring new opportunities but also create or exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. The climate crisis, protracted armed conflicts, and natural and health-related disasters are each contributing to increases in migration and internal displacement – all at a time when preserving the space for impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian action is increasingly being challenged. These trends are fast changing the fabric of societies and the humanitarian landscape, to the extent that our traditional assumptions and ways of working might not be effective in addressing the challenges presented. Faced with this rapidly changing environment, new approaches are needed to meet the challenges. The presence of National Societies at the community level, coupled with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's (Movement) global reach, allows us to better understand, prevent, prepare and respond to these shifting vulnerabilities. Together with States, the Movement and their humanitarian partners have a responsibility to use their reach and resources effectively. To do this, we must listen, think and act differently, and be open to learning and willing to adapt along the way.

Overall objectives of the Commission:

This Commission sought to highlight the interconnectedness and cross-cutting nature of new and emerging vulnerabilities (hence the title “Shifting vulnerabilities”), and to explore how these global shifts are impacting the lives of affected people. It also sought to provide a platform to discuss ways in which the global humanitarian community – and the Movement in particular – can strengthen their efforts and work better together to prevent, prepare and eventually respond to the increasing needs.

Co-chairs of the Commission: Ms Delia Chatoor, Vice-President of the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society, and H.E. Nazhat Shameem Khan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Fiji to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva

Rapporteur for the Commission: Mr Rakibul Alam, Youth Representative, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

Format of the Commission:

The Commission on shifting vulnerabilities consisted of two main plenaries (opening and closing) and six spotlight sessions on the following topics:

- The role of volunteers in community health

- Addressing the humanitarian consequences of the climate crisis
- Building safe and inclusive urban communities through urban humanitarian action
- Scaling up mental health and psychosocial support for emergency-affected populations
- Humanitarian action in the digital era
- Migration and internal displacement: upholding humanity.

SUMMARY OF SPOTLIGHT SESSIONS

1. THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS IN COMMUNITY HEALTH

Date and time: Wednesday 11 December 2019, 10:30am–12:30pm

Objectives of the spotlight session:

- Create a shared understanding of: the role of community health in reaching the last-mile population; the importance of long-term and sustained engagement with communities as being crucial for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery work; the existing competencies and knowledge of communities; and the critical requirements needed in this area for achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Encourage action through the examples of real stories that demonstrate the potential of community health to meet the needs of the most marginalized, and the valuable role of community health workers (CHWs), including volunteers.
- Drive commitments from the audience to support the formal recognition of RCRC volunteers as part of national human resource systems for health; to sustain the delivery of community-led, people-centred interventions during the life continuum; and to ensure the role for communities in epidemic response is strengthened and rooted in a longer-term sustainable development agenda.

Summary of key issues identified and any next steps from the spotlight session:

- CHWs, including volunteers, should be recognized as equal partners and active participants in community health work. They are uniquely placed to help overcome the limited capacity and shortage of human resources that many countries face in prevention, preparedness and response, and possess a contextual knowledge that is of critical importance in addressing health care needs in a way that is acceptable to communities.
- CHWs, including volunteers, should be formally recognized as part of national human resource systems for health delivery.
- In order to build the trust of communities and for volunteers to be able to reach those who are left behind, meaningful engagement and participation is required. It is therefore essential to expand partnerships with local actors, including the most vulnerable, to ensure trust and improve access to health care.
- It is important to harmonize the efforts of CHWs, including Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and other actors, in providing community health and promote community health delivery as an integral part of national health systems. This can happen only by strengthening the link between public health policies, communities and health systems, and by promoting integrated community-based approaches to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery work.
- It will also be important to establishing a conversation with State actors to create a shared understanding of how community health is vital to the achievement of UHC and the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. ADDRESSING THE HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Date and time: Wednesday 11 December 2019, 10:30am–12:30pm

Objectives of the spotlight session:

- Create a shared understanding of the humanitarian impacts of climate change.
- Draw attention to some of the key challenges and opportunities to scale up action to address these humanitarian impacts.
- Create a sense of what needs to be done to scale up collaborative action at all levels, and to address rising risks, reduce vulnerability and build resilience.
- Foster commitment to deliver what is needed to address these impacts.

Summary of key issues identified and any next steps from the spotlight session:

- The impacts of climate change are here and now – it is not an issue of the future. It was highlighted that this is an everyday and real issue for many National Societies that are dealing with a range of impacts – and not just in the communities they work with, but within their own families and networks. It was noted that the increased frequency, intensity and unpredictability of the climate and extreme weather events, however, are not just the result of climate change, but also the result of how we manage risks and take development decisions.
- Vulnerabilities are evolving and are not static. The participants discussed how the climate crisis is having the greatest impact on the poorest and most vulnerable and how the impacts are different for each context.
- We need to ground our actions in the interests of communities, as well as in scientific evidence, given that historical experience is no longer enough to understand future risks. This will require working with communities, understanding how they interpret and manage risks, and making the most of traditional knowledge and combining that with scientific knowledge (including forecasts of climate and weather events).
- It was also recognized that there is already important work being undertaken to address climate risks, including steps by States and National Societies alike (including joint initiatives). The issue now, however, is to bring these efforts to the scale and the pace we need. Participants were invited to sign up to an open pledge on climate action and to consider submitting their own pledges to commit to scaled-up climate action in their own domestic contexts.

3. BUILDING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE URBAN COMMUNITIES THROUGH URBAN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Date and time: Wednesday 11 December 2019, 10:30am–12:30pm

Objectives of the spotlight session:

- Create an understanding of the global context of rapid and unplanned urbanization.
- Create a sense of what the Movement needs to do in order to respond better to humanitarian needs in urban settings.
- Strengthen collaboration between Movement actors, States, local authorities and communities.

Summary of key issues identified and any next steps from the spotlight session:

- Participants acknowledged that the Movement needs to rethink its role and actions in order to remain relevant in this rapidly changing context. Urbanization is defining the future, with an increasing number of people moving to and living in cities, many of whom are living in dire situations. Poverty, marginalization and inequality render them increasingly vulnerable. Climate

change, insufficient basic services, overwhelmed capacities, warfare and violence increasingly play out in cities. The way that current urbanization is unfolding and the pace at which it is doing so, particularly in developing countries, creates multiple needs that will continue to shape the operational context for all Movement components – one which we need to adapt to remain relevant and effective.

- There was also the realization that urban vulnerabilities require long-term coordinated action and that partnerships are essential to achieve such action, especially with local governments. The scale, density and complexity of urban areas is enormous, and the many issues that render people vulnerable need to be addressed simultaneously if this action is to be effective. This requires the involvement of many partners. The Movement can use not only its formal assets (National Societies' auxiliary role and international humanitarian law), but also the trust bestowed on it by communities and public authorities to be a convening partner in these contexts.
- Participants also highlighted the importance of being there before, during and after crises – and the need to understand how various trends impact communities differently. At the same time, communities should remain at the centre; sustainability will be poor if communities are not fully and meaningfully involved because, from their perspective, there is no distinction between humanitarian and development needs.
- Finally, the discussions emphasized that the Movement is a vital partner in building safe and resilient urban communities. The Movement, through its National Societies, is a permanent, local actor and this enables long-term actions. Having this local perspective is fundamental when it comes to ensuring trust in the organization. This trust is also something that can be built upon and harnessed in order to engage with communities or groups which are difficult to reach (for example marginalized and isolated populations and gangs).

4. SCALING UP MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR EMERGENCY-AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Date and time: Wednesday 11 December 2019, 2:30–4:30pm

Objectives of the spotlight session:

- Create a collective sense of urgency to motivate States, the Movement components and other concerned actors to intensify their efforts in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).
- Highlight the consequences of the stigma surrounding mental health .
- Identify different avenues to strengthen the mental health and psychosocial well-being of people affected by emergencies.

Summary of key issues identified and any next steps from the spotlight session:

- One key point that was emphasized during discussions is that mental health affects everyone. A poll conducted during the session showed that nine out of ten participants know someone close to them with mental health needs. The narrative about mental health must therefore change. MHPSS should not be considered a luxury but a basic humanitarian necessity. Providing MHPSS is relevant to affected people and is key for gaining their trust.
- Early and sustained MHPSS for emergency-affected populations can be ensured by:
 - increasing investments in local and community-based resources, such as Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and staff, teachers and other local professionals, as well as through investments in formal health systems
 - increasing knowledge about people's diverse mental health and psychosocial needs and the required responses, including basic psychosocial support through to specialized mental health care
 - building on existing experiences and knowledge, and ensuring the people affected are included

- integrating MHPSS in all humanitarian assessments and responses; the education sector is particularly important
- bridging short-term interventions with long-term investments in capacity-building and systems (bridging the humanitarian–development nexus)
- ensuring cooperation and complementarity, also strengthening the workforce
- increasing the status of MHPSS in humanitarian action – leading by example
- caring for the staff and volunteers responding to humanitarian needs and considering this as critical for the quality and sustainability of all humanitarian responses
- increasing resources for MHPSS during an emergency response.
- Finally, to address the stigma associated with mental health, participants discussed the importance of talking openly about mental health and psychosocial needs. Role models are important in communities, as well as within States and organizations, learning from the experiences of anti-stigma work in relation to HIV and TB, and showing positive examples of recovery.

5. HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Date and time: Wednesday 11 December 2019, 2:30–4:30pm

Objectives of the spotlight session:

- Explain what digitalization is and to seek buy-in on the importance of digital transformation in humanitarian action.
- Demonstrate the impact and the relevance of adopting a principled approach in the digital era.
- Explore *how* to adopt a principled approach in the digital era, with an emphasis on issues of digital responsibility, data protection, digital inclusion and digital literacy.
- Facilitate an exchange of experience related to the use of digital technology and encourage peer-to-peer support within the Movement, as well as with States and external partners, where relevant.
- Explore potential Movement-wide solutions for further input and approval.

Summary of key issues identified and any next steps from the spotlight session:

- The spotlight session highlighted that digital transformation is not an option and is already happening across the Movement. Communities and the Movement are already in various stages of digital transformation and the Movement is committed to embracing this in a responsible manner, as illustrated with the development of a digital pledge.
- While digital technologies help improve the Movement’s work with affected people, there is also a common responsibility to ensure that these technologies are used in a way that does not further expose people to risk, create additional harm or leave anyone behind. For this reason, the Movement, States, other humanitarian actors and the private sector must come together to find ways of using technologies while respecting the Fundamental Principles.
- It was also emphasized that there needs to be a process of co-creation, where the Movement – together with States and key partners (including the private sector) – develop partnerships that help the Movement to use technologies while ensuring that the highest ethical principles and standards of security and privacy are adhered to.

6. MIGRATION AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT: UPHOLDING HUMANITY

Date and time: Wednesday 11 December 2019, 2:30–4:30pm

Objectives of the spotlight session:

- Create a sense of urgency regarding the unaddressed needs of vulnerable migrants and internally displaced people (IDPs).

- Call for the strengthening of coordinated efforts by States and the Movement to improve protection and assistance for these populations and secure commitment for the adoption of the respective model pledges.
- With regard to internal displacement, this spotlight session sought to call for further engagement in supporting durable solutions for IDPs, based on their voluntary, safe and dignified choices, and in responding to the needs of urban IDPs outside camps and those of their host communities.
- With regard to migration, this spotlight session sought to call for the preservation of humanitarian space in the field of migration as necessary to protect migrants from death, disappearance, family separation and violations of their rights along the entire migratory route, and to guarantee them access to essential services irrespective of their status.

Summary of key issues identified and any next steps from the spotlight session:

On internal displacement:

- This session highlighted that the global scale and gravity of internal displacement-related needs speaks of the collective failure to prevent, address and reduce internal displacement. The specific predicament of IDPs must be recognized and addressed as a matter of priority, without linking humanitarian responses to containment agendas, and while preserving people's rights to seek and enjoy asylum in other countries.
- It also recognized that internal displacement is increasingly urban. Effective complementarity, coordination and cooperation between authorities, humanitarian and development actors and other stakeholders must be ensured to better understand and improve responses to the needs of people displaced in cities outside camps and those of their host communities.
- Finally, the session demonstrated that the Movement components and States are committed to working together to help IDPs have a dignified life and achieve a durable solution according to their priorities and intentions, by supporting voluntary return in safety and dignity and by creating concrete alternatives, such as local integration in cities, for those who cannot or do not wish to return.

On migration:

- It was acknowledged that across the globe, people who migrate in search of safety or better prospects often face unacceptable suffering. Too often, they are deprived of the humanitarian assistance and protection they need to ensure their safety, dignity and rights. It was emphasized that more must be done to respond to the plight of vulnerable migrants and, to this end, to maintain the required humanitarian space.
- Participants were reminded of the commitment undertaken at the 31st International Conference in 2011 (resolution 3), which stated the commitment of conference members to continue to work together to meet the humanitarian needs of migrants and uphold their rights, and – more specifically for refugees – to support their integration and self-reliance.
- Participants reiterated their firm belief in the relevance of the Fundamental Principles to guide the Movement's action in favour of vulnerable migrants, and committed to work together to preserve humanitarian space, with the aim of ensuring that the provision of humanitarian assistance and services to migrants is never criminalized.
- They also emphasized the importance of refraining from political instrumentalization in the implementation of migration policies, including through funding and data requests, in order to maintain the trust between migrants and the Movement, and to support the ICRC's and the IFRC's dialogue with States and donors on the issue, and to refer the matter to the 34th International Conference in 2023.
