



Daily Bulletin 2

ICRC Restoring Family Links Conference, Nairobi 2006



Dr Buyya, President of the Burundi Red Cross, clarifies points of a document. Laurent Saugy, Head of Sector at the CTA watches.

Facing the challenge and responsibility head on

Enhancing coordination mechanisms and the effectiveness of Movement cooperation: as delegates in the working group grappling with strategic objective 2 found out on Thursday morning, it may not be as easy as it sounds.

The Movement across Africa has a number of cooperation and coordination bodies and fora – some for National Societies only, some for the societies and the ICRC, others for the societies and the Federation and still others for all Movement components.

It proved to be a difficult discussion for the delegates. It is becoming clear that full commitment to the RFL strategy is going to require new ways of working, change of plans and strategies, training of staff and volunteers, setting up communications and coordination mechanisms, inclusion of RFL in activities that have hitherto been seen separately.

And while the restoration of family links may be 'business as usual' for the ICRC, the International Federation is also going to have to start thinking, planning and supporting its member societies in a new way.

The first action alone under the strategic objective - to improve the Movement's rapid (RFL) response capacity in

emergencies – calls for the mobilization of resources at local, regional and/or international level. While a number of African NSs have made good headway in their resource mobilization, others are still barely at the starting point.

The second action – to *strengthen Movement cooperation within the Family Links Network through increased involvement of National Societies* – will in reality mean a major scale-up of overall capacity in many societies: building strategic partnerships with the ICRC for long-term capacity development, training of RFL specialists to have sufficient numbers of those for field operations as well as an increase in the bilateral cooperation with sister societies.

But despite the occasional hiccups in the debate in the working group, there was no sign on anyone's part of shying away from the challenge and responsibility.

The question was more: how do we do this and how do we build the support, capacity and skills in our societies to deliver the services we are committing to?

An unofficial bulletin for delegates to the first regional RFL conference; not an official record.



Ali Bandiare, President of the Niger Red Cross expresses his view.

‘Talking about a vision is dreaming’

The delegates of the regional Restoring Family Links Conference in Nairobi convened in three different working groups on Thursday. Each group was assigned to discuss one strategic objective.

Working Group 3, chaired by Mrs. Bana Maiga from the Red Cross in Burkina Faso, engaged in a passionate debate about the vision statement. "When we are talking about a vision, we are somehow dreaming," said Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Hassan, chairman of the Somali Red Crescent.

"The vision comprises a period of ten years and that is quite a short time when we are analyzing where we are today. My hope is that we could look at this vision and be a bit more reasonable. Otherwise, the risk of failure is high." To illustrate his concern Dr. Ahmed mentioned the aim of the World Bank to abolish poverty in the world. "That is also a very ambitious vision", he added. Many of the delegates agreed. Ms. Rachel Bernhard, ICRC Conakry, felt the vision statement was too vague and needed to take the context into consideration. She suggested including a clarification on which type of relationship the RFL network wants to establish with external partners such as other humanitarian organisations.

The delegates from Morocco and Togo supported this suggestion. Realizing that time was running out quickly, the group decided to make recommendations on how to improve the vision statement but will leave the wording up to the conference bureau. Nobody doubted the necessity of a strong vision, otherwise "the strategy will go in any odd direction", said Jurg Montani, ICRC Freetown.

Strategic Objective 3 focuses on ownership, profile and positioning of restoring family links.

Does the text reflect how we will achieve the vision, asked Chairperson Mme Maiga the working group. Several delegates pointed out that the sense of ownership varies from one National Society to the other, as realities are different in every country. Representatives from Morocco and Seychelles felt that the conference motivated them to raise awareness of the RFL network when returning home.

Mario Musa, ICRC Tunis, reminded the delegates that the need of RFL could arise suddenly in case of a national catastrophe and take a country by surprise. He pointed out the Tsunami in Indonesia and the hurricane Katherine in the United States, both of which left thousands of families separated. The capacity to assess the needs quickly and correctly was therefore primordial to successful tracing as well as informing the authorities about the service the family links network has to offer.

Nicolai Panke, ICRC Chad, suggested that every National Society should ensure that RFL is part of their strategy and that concrete plans are made to carry out tracing activities. "We need a minimum package," said Dr. Ahmed from Somalia. As a representative of a country struck by conflict his National Society is active in the domain of RFL. But even other NS should assign at least one focal person for tracing activities. He also critically remarked that ICRC sometimes used the National Societies for the network and did not give enough ownership to them.



*Madame Bana Maiga Ouandaogo ,
President of the Burkinabe Red
Cross chaired group 3.*

Internal communication as a basis for a well-functioning RFL network

Several delegates in group one, chaired by Dr. Magda Fathy El-Sherbeeny from the Egyptian Red Crescent were concerned about the capacity of their National Societies in terms of human and financial resources. Similar to sentiments in group 3, they felt that priorities were not only determined by needs but also by means available. They agreed on the importance of internal communication as the basis for an effective Family Links Network on all levels of the National Societies. The leadership should display the will to know what the needs on the ground are and volunteers would need to be equipped with basic knowledge of RFL procedures. These should be integrated in the basic training for volunteers. Training on RFL should also be incorporated in the training manual.

Concerning the drastic change in the technological environment, several delegates pointed out that the access to new technologies such as the internet was often limited on the ground and that the need for tracing was more urgent in rural areas where word of mouth is still a major means of communication.

In terms of financing, National Societies should try to mobilize funds nationally for their own projects and this funding should not be limited to the ICRC but also include corporate and other organizations. Some delegates felt that the role of the International Federation should be clarified in the action plan.

The discussion ended with the question of cross-border operations and the cooperation between National Societies in such cases. Solidarity between the National Societies was called for as well as wider sharing of best practices and experiences.

The many faces of RFL

RFL activities may take various forms, depending on the situation and context:

- obtaining news from affected areas and organizing the exchange of family news;
- tracing individuals in places of detention, hospitals, IDP and refugee camps, morgues, rural areas, urban centers, etc.;
- registering individuals (children or adults) to prevent their disappearance and to enable their families to be informed;
- reuniting families;
- collecting, managing and forwarding information on the localization, recovery and identification of human remains;
- forwarding documents that can help to restore family links.



Partners: Federation legal advisor Justus Wabuyabo and Pierre Barras ICRC Head of Africa sector in the CTA.

The Family Links Network
...is the Central Tracing Agency,
ICRC delegations and the National
Society tracing services in nearly
all countries of the world.

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or visit our special ICRC webpage on family links:
www.icrc.org/eng/rfl-conferences