

## Workshop Presentation

Topic: Globalization and Volunteering

### The Role of Volunteers in Disaster Response

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#### Abstract

Red Cross is an international humanitarian organization. When we deliver impartial care to protect life and health, we also promote voluntary service and organize individuals to serve the cause of humanity. We provide people with the opportunities and skills to help others and to help themselves. Through the involvement of volunteers, we deliver our humanitarian services to vulnerable people more responsively. That's why volunteers always play an important role in the humanitarian service, especially in Disaster Response when a huge number of manpower is needed.

#### *Types of volunteers*

We have three types of volunteers in the Red Cross. Community-based volunteers are those come from the community and have a will to help others. Functional volunteers are those who have equipped with specific skills, such as first aid, nursing, psychological support, disaster response, etc. Professional volunteers are those with professional qualification, such as doctor, nurse, engineer, accountant, etc. Although they have different skills and qualifications, they can participate in any part of the disaster management cycle, namely Disaster Response, Recovery / Rehabilitation, Risk Reduction and Preparedness.

#### *What can volunteers do?*

Voluntary service to be provided should base on the needs of the victims:

\* basic needs

food, water, shelter, medical service, psychological support, communication with family members, etc.

\* needs for recovery / rehabilitation

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water supply, recovery of hospital, school, living area, sanitation, etc.

What can volunteers do after disaster?

**Direct service** --- distribution of clothing and food, provision of water, medical service, tracing service and psychological support service, caring of victims and their families, volunteer registration, rehabilitation of living area and sanitation

**Back up service** --- arrangement and distribution of donation in-kinds, logistic support, participating in fund raising activities, answering public enquiries, preparing receipts, arranging relief items, packing clothing and donation in-kinds, transportation of goods, promotion of disaster preparedness

### ***How to recruit and retain professional volunteers?***

Recruitment:

- \* open recruitment through website
- \* referral from professional organizations

Retainment:

- \* conducting sharing session
- \* conducting debriefing service to collect their feedback after the missions

### ***How to cope with the influx of volunteers during disaster?***

Apart from agency's volunteers, what can we do to the influx of volunteers?

- \* Simplify the registration process, so that volunteers can render service as soon as possible
- \* Assign jobs according to their skills and abilities
- \* Say thank you for their goodwill if manpower is sufficient
- \* Prepare simple questionnaire, and collect their feedback after the service
- \* Keep their data for future use

### **Conclusion**

In order to enhance volunteer capacity and better prepare for disaster response, Hong Kong Red Cross should:

- \* Train up community based volunteers to functional volunteers
- \* Organize and develop functional volunteer teams
- \* Develop multi-skilled volunteers
- \* Organize regular drilling exercises

## Full Paper

### Introduction

Red Cross is an international humanitarian organization. When we deliver impartial care to protect life and health, we also promote voluntary service and organize individuals to serve the cause of humanity. Voluntary Service is one of the fundamental principles of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. People are motivated by their free will and not by a desire for material or financial gain or by external social, economic or political pressure. We also provide people with the opportunities, skills and knowledge to help others and to help themselves. Through the involvement of volunteers in service implementation, management and decision making level, we deliver our humanitarian services to vulnerable people more responsively. That's why volunteers always play an important role in the humanitarian service, especially in Disaster Response when a huge number of manpower is needed.

### *Types of volunteers*

We have three types of volunteers in the Red Cross, community-based volunteers, functional volunteers and professional volunteers. Each type of volunteers has different role and characteristics. Community-based volunteers are those come from the community and have a will to help others. They may not have any skills or knowledge in disaster response and most of them are untrained. Functional volunteers are those who possess special skills, such as first aid, nursing, psychological support, disaster response and so on. If they originate from a serving Red Cross Department, they will resume their normal volunteer works after the disaster response while waiting for the next assignment. Professional volunteers are those with professional qualification, such as doctor, nurse, engineer and accountant. No matter which types of volunteers one belongs to, they do play a role in disaster response.

### *Recruitment and retainment of volunteers*

During disaster, we need a large number of manpower so we should have planning in recruitment and retainment of volunteers. If we have better preparation, we can respond to disaster effectively. Therefore, we should develop a comprehensive volunteer management system that includes needs assessment, recruitment, matching, training, supervision and recognition to volunteers.

There are many ways to recruit volunteers; we can do it through promotion in mass media, website, service program, and referral from professional organizations. Apart

from recruitment, retainment of volunteers is of equal importance because it can reduce the number of withdrawals. To retain volunteers, we should develop a trustful working relationship with them because it prompt us to identify suitable duty to them and show our concern to their needs and feeling. Besides, we should develop an effective communication channel with them so that they can grasp the most updated information of the agency and they can know when they have to lend a helping hand. Apart from this, we should also provide regular training and sharing to them so that they can refresh their skill and knowledge and acquire new skills that enhance their capacity. In addition, we should conduct debriefing session and to collect feedback through questionnaires after the mission to improve our service. The last but not the least, to recognize volunteers' contribution in tangible or intangible ways is also vital to retain volunteers.

### ***Role in disaster management cycle***

Although community-based volunteers, functional volunteers and professional volunteers have different skills and qualifications, they can participate in any part of the disaster management cycle, namely Disaster Response, Recovery / Rehabilitation, Risk Reduction and Preparedness.

From the view of disaster management, collective actions are taken before, during and after any disaster situation to predict, prevent, reduce or cope with its impact. The volunteers can play a part in these tasks.

Right after the occurrence of a disaster, disaster response measures are carried out immediately, including search and rescue, need assessment, provision of first aid service, distribution of relief items like food, water, and medicine, provision of temporary shelters and restoration of family links. The above actions have to be taken in a rapid manner to meet the basic needs of the victims. It is not difficult to imagine how responsive and efficient the disaster response action should be. Thus volunteer becomes a crucial resource when there is a taxing and speedy demand for large volume of manpower. In some Red Cross societies, rescue teams are formed by volunteers to provide emergency service. In Bangladesh, thirty thousand of Red Crescent volunteers are able to alert and assist up to 8 million people to find shelters or other places of safety during cyclones. In Hong Kong, there is also voluntarily relief team to distribute relief items during emergencies. Volunteers can take up different tasks during emergency phase.

Effective delivery of direct service relies very much upon on a structured back up service Hong Kong Red Cross operates a disaster preparedness warehouse in Chai Wan and stores 2,000 sets of clothing bundles for emergency use. Volunteers carry out regular packing works every Thursday in the warehouse. During tsunami, the Hong Kong Red Cross mobilized over 450 volunteers assisted in operating a hotline center, collecting donations and issuing donation receipts, implementing fund raising programs and packing of donation in-kinds.

Other than emergency response phase, volunteer is indispensable in the phase of recovery, risk reduction and disaster preparedness.

In the recovery phase, we have to bring the community back to normal or even better condition. To deal with different levels of social, economic and psychological rehabilitation, volunteers from various professional fields like engineering, finance, medical, nursery and psychology are involved. They can help in need assessment and follow up of rehabilitation projects, especially in the initial stage where no regular staffing is established. In the past, Hong Kong Red Cross has mobilized medical personnel, engineers, and finance personnel in the rehabilitation phase by projects in China Flood, South Asia Flood and Tsunami. While they are contributing their professional knowledge, humanitarian value is simultaneously disseminated

Risk reduction and disaster preparedness are measures to reduce the impact of disasters on the disaster prone population by lessening its effect and enhancing the community's capacity respectively. In the past two years, the Hong Kong Red Cross has supported the Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) Program in Nepal. The key elements of a successful CBDP program include capacity building, local participation and community organizing and so volunteer is an essential component in the program. The Red Cross provides training in disaster preparedness, first aid and community organizing skills to the local volunteers who are selected by their community. After the training, the volunteers organize local projects, like building "gabion" (walls of stones wrapped in wire) to help prevent landslide in their village. Through community participation, disaster preparedness awareness is enhanced in the village.

In Hong Kong, the disaster preparedness projects are also fully supported by the volunteers. Their involvement ranges from the phases of program planning, need assessment to implementation. For example, we conducted a "Winter Aid Program"

and distributed warm clothing to elderly every year. Volunteers initiate an organizing committee and then over 100 volunteers are mobilized in the distribution action.

Volunteer management is not only a task during relief operations. In the “Building National Societies Volunteer Capacities to Respond to Emergencies” workshop conducted in Kuala Lumpur in April 2005, we consider volunteer management is also a kind of disaster preparedness. From the experience in Tsunami, we found that general public was enthusiastic to help during emergency so it was painstaking to deal with the influx of volunteers. Hence, the workshop recommended that every Red Cross Societies should have their own policy and procedure to deal with influx of volunteers during emergency.

### ***How to cope with the influx of volunteers during disaster?***

Although we need a huge number of manpower during disaster, the influx of volunteers may cause troubles at the scene, such as overloading of the volunteer coordinators, volunteers are eager to help but job-matching is in vain, the scene may need trained volunteers, but most of the volunteers are untrained, workers use a lot of time to handle the influx of volunteers which hinder the efficiency of disaster response. In this connection, coping with the influx of volunteers becomes an important issue during disaster. We suggest simplifying the registration process, to conduct simple short interviews and screening procedures so that you can get the right people and they can render service as soon as possible. In addition, we can establish a Volunteer Recruitment Centre to centralize the recruitment process. Besides, we can assign jobs according to their skills and abilities, and arrange experienced volunteers work side by side with new volunteers. Furthermore, we can set up Volunteer Referral Centre, when the matching attempt is not successful, they can be referred to other organizations. Therefore, collaboration with other organizations and share volunteers with them can also be one of the ways to manage the influx of volunteers. For improvement sake, we can also prepare simple questionnaire, and collect their feedback after the service. However, in reality, we may not consume all the volunteers, so we have to say “No” to them. We suggest saying “Thank You” for their goodwill if manpower is sufficient and keeps their data for future use.

### **Conclusion**

Volunteers are assets in service delivery and their contributions are multi-facets, such as service implementation, management and decision-making. In order to enhance their capacity and better prepare for disaster response, we should train up community

based volunteers, equip them with skills and upgrade as functional volunteers. After active participations in disaster response, they can then be motivated to become regular volunteers so as to upkeep their inspiration. . Besides, we should organize and develop functional volunteer teams and multi-skilled volunteers, and to organize regular drilling exercises to refine their skills.