



NETHERLANDS RED CROSS RESPONSE PREPAREDNESS PROGRAMS LEAD TO A MORE EFFECTIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Inspiring stories from Africa and MENA



Photo: Uganda Red Cross Response Team flying the drone to support the floods mapping exercise amidst the COVID-19 response (Busunga Town Council, at the border of Uganda and DRC in Bundibugyo district): strengthening Response Preparedness capacities enabled the National Societies to better respond to several disasters simultaneously.



Summary

Over the years, Response Preparedness programs (Response Preparedness Phase II (RPII) and Innovative approaches for response preparedness (IARP)) initiated by the Netherlands Red Cross and implemented in CAR, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon, Mali, Uganda and Zambia, have built or reinforced strong foundations which enabled the National Societies of those countries to activate quicker than ever their preparedness and response mechanisms to face an unprecedented crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those mechanisms are not only faster, they are also of much higher quality especially in the areas of risk analysis and mapping, community engagement and internal and external coordination. This is clearly visible by the speed at which the National Societies developed their COVID-19 response plans, the quality of those plans, the reinforced collaboration with their respective government structures (a crucial component of epidemics response), and their remarkable use of data which enabled a much more accurate risk analysis to target the areas and communities most at risk of spreading the disease (another key aspect of epidemics control).

In the second and more operational phase, those gains are even more noteworthy as the implementation of those plans takes place faster than before thanks to a quicker mobilization of response teams, a stronger support from their respective logistical and financial teams, a better engagement with the communities, and a quicker mobilization of resources from the COVID-19 Global Movement Appeal, leading altogether to a more effective intervention.

Additional benefits might arise in the following phases, when the National Societies will start addressing the secondary effects of this pandemic, as the cash capacities developed or strengthened through those programs will enable the organizations to adequately and timely support those whose livelihoods have been badly affected by the unavoidable measures put in place to prevent and mitigate the spread of the disease.

Finally, these two programs are implemented in partnership with the International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent (IFRC), the RCRC Climate Center and the NLRC- 510 data team, with a focus on reinforcing anticipatory approaches, following the Forecast based Financing methodology. This approach has been made more robust thanks to the development of data preparedness tools. Despite the fact that this component has been applied to weather related hazards (like floods and drought), it is clearly visible today that it contributed to strengthen capacities which are currently mobilized for the COVID-19 response and which encouraged the National Societies in developing a multi-hazard perspective to the humanitarian needs in their countries.

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Glossary of acronyms

CAR	Central African Republic
CCSTs	Cluster and Country Support Teams
CEA	Community Engagement and Accountability
CDRT	Community Disaster Response Teams
CRCA	Croix Rouge de Centrafrique
CBI	Cash Based Interventions
DREF	Disaster Response Emergency Funds
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
ERCS	Ethiopia Red Cross Society
IARP	Innovative Approaches for Response Preparedness
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
KRCS	Kenya Red Cross Society
LRCS	Lebanese Red Cross Society
MRCS	Mali Red Cross Society
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NDRT	National Disaster Response Teams
NLRC	Netherlands Red Cross
NS	National Societies
PER	Preparedness for Effective Response
PRCS	Palestinian Red Cross Society
RCCE	Risk Communication and Community Engagement
RCRC	Red Cross Red Crescent
RP	Response Preparedness
RPII	Response Preparedness II
URCS	Uganda Red Cross Society
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
ZRCS	Zambia Red Cross Society



Background

Netherlands Red Cross has a long and proud history of responding to international emergencies. We are a key partner to 14 sister Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) Societies around the world. Our International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement includes: International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) together with 192 National Societies, constituting a global network able to mobilise and coordinate local and international responses to emergencies to rapidly reach the most affected population.

Since 2012, the Netherlands Red Cross has been implementing Response Preparedness programs to support several National Societies from Africa and MENA regions in strengthening their response capacities and improve their anticipatory and emergency planning mechanisms. This work, which is still ongoing, has been made possible thanks to the financial support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Response Preparedness II program implemented in CAR, Lebanon, Mali and Zambia) and the IKEA Foundation (Innovative Approaches for Response Preparedness program implemented in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda), and with the technical contributions from the IFRC, the RCRC Climate Center and the NLRC-510 data team.

The RCRC response preparedness approach strengthens the local capacity to prepare and respond to disasters in a timely and efficient manner, therefore contributing to the commitment of the *Grand Bargain*¹. Indeed, we build the capacity of the local response teams including by improving emergency needs assessment which puts the needs and existing capacities of the communities at the center of our emergency response, by reinforcing our partnerships with government institutions and private sector, and by building robust RCRC surge response mechanisms which support local teams to upscale emergency response in times of large scale emergencies.

In March 2020, the Red Cross Red Crescent movement launched an unprecedented global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This emergency response will certainly last for many more months and will be an opportunity to learn and reshape our humanitarian system. At this early stage (June 2020), NLRC was willing to understand to what extent the last few years of Response Preparedness support has enabled a more efficient emergency response to the current pandemic. A first rapid study was done in consultation with the country teams of the Response Preparedness II (RPII) programme, covering CAR, Lebanon (including Palestine Red Crescent – Lebanon branch), Mali and Zambia, supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and of the Innovative Approaches in Response Preparedness (IARP) programme covering Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda and supported by IKEA Foundation. While coordinating with those countries during the first few weeks of the COVID-19 response, the RP technical advisors noticed several gains in their response mechanisms, which seemed directly linked to the activities carried out under the RP programs. Based on those observations, the advisors made a few assumptions that were shared with the country teams. Through a questionnaire, the country teams were asked to confirm/refute/adjust those assumptions as well as propose additional ones if needed and provide concrete examples to illustrate those. When analysing the answers, the assumptions were turned into 9 statements and put in light of the Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) mechanisms (see annex 1), as presented in this document.

¹ For further information: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>



Photo: URCS Branch Manager – Kabarole, Dennis Mwesige Training the Red Cross Action Team (RCAT) on COVID-19 Emergency Response Protocols

1. Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies have built a more proactive attitude towards disasters and are able to mobilize their HQ and branch teams more rapidly (all concerned sectors) to collectively develop preparedness and response plans in a more efficient manner.

The review of **Disaster Management policies and strategies**, which include epidemics and weather related hazards, has set a solid framework on which National Societies have been able to rely when quickly preparing and activating their response to the COVID-19.

In addition, the various Response Preparedness related workshops, which brought **together all departments concerned by disaster management**, proved the importance of the linkages between those departments and the need to work closely together in times of disasters. This improved the coordination between the Health/WASH and the Disaster Management teams during this emergency.

Lastly, the **revision of logistics and administrative manuals** adapting them to an emergency context, as well as the training of support staff in logistics and finance in emergencies, have made the support services more efficient when contributing to the implementation of the COVID-19 response plans.



2. RCRC National Societies have positioned themselves as key actors of disaster management within the national and local government coordination mechanisms.

In the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, National Societies are playing a key coordination role at national and local levels. In most countries, National Societies in their capacity as an auxiliary to the government have been nominated to be part of the national task force positioning the Red Cross as one of the main national responders, yet before the support received through those Response Preparedness programs, in several countries, the Red Cross had very limited representation in such coordination fora. Being part of the task force has ensured better coordination with the rest of the government and humanitarian actors. This implies that the COVID-19 response plans they designed were better aligned with the national approach and complementary to the rest of the available resources in their respective countries.

Focus on CAR:

After the declaration of the first confirmed case in the country, a crisis meeting was convened to mobilize all the Red Cross Movement partners in accordance with the epidemics emergency plan of the National Society. A steering committee was set up in connection with the government National Plan, and the RPII project manager was nominated “COVID-19 Operational Coordinator” in charge of leading the Central African Red Cross (CRCA) COVID-19 response team composed of members previously trained under RPII program. This team is currently using a certain number of tools developed through RPII.

Represented by the COVID-19 Operational Coordinator, the CRCA is an active member of the national coordination mechanism which developed the National COVID-19 Response Plan. In the last interdepartmental coordination meeting involving all the humanitarian actors taking part in the COVID-19 response in CAR, the government decided that all actors should adopt the Red Cross approach for an effective response with Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) as the spearhead.

Additionally:

- **Kenya Red Cross** co-chairs the Kenya Cash working group that has developed guidelines to respond to the pandemic including Minimum Expenditure Basket for urban areas. It's also an active member of the National Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Committee for COVID-19
- **Ethiopia Red Cross** is an active member of the National RCCE Committee for COVID-19
- **Lebanese Red Cross** is part of the government crisis and emergency cell
- **Zambia Red Cross** participates in the national level COVID-19 coordination mechanisms firstly under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and later with the Government Disaster Management Agency (Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit - DMMU). Through this coordination, the ZRCS is working closely with the Government Information Department (Zambia National Information Services – ZANIS) in mass dissemination of COVID-19 key messages. Additionally, ZRCS co-chairs the RCCE committee with the Zambian Ministry of Health.



“Always next to you”, Lebanese Red Cross Society

3. RCRC National Societies are more agile with the response planning and were able to develop their COVID-19 response plans in record time (within a few days only, as opposed to weeks or months in the past).

Thanks to the contingency planning trainings and simulations organized in those RP programs, contingency plans are now considered a standard part of the Disaster Management work, which led the National Societies to automatically start the COVID-19 contingency planning process without unnecessary delay.

For instance, the recently developed **Emergency response protocols and Standards Operations Procedures** in Uganda was immediately applied to the COVID-19.

In CAR and Zambia, National Societies developed their **multi-hazard response plans** under Response Preparedness II program. Those plans included epidemics as one of the major hazard. Therefore, the main lines of the National Societies’ response to epidemics had already been identified (even though significant adjustments had to be made since the response to COVID-19 is unprecedented and quite different from the types of epidemics envisaged in those plans).

In Lebanon, Lebanese Red Cross and Palestinian Red Cross-Lebanon branch, had conducted several **contingency planning simulation exercises** under RPII, which made those National Societies extremely proactive and quick at developing their COVID-19 response plans and initiating fund raising at the very first stage of the pandemic.

Beyond RPII and IARP programs, countries like Ivory Coast that took part in the **IFRC regional francophone Contingency planning Training of Trainers**, co-organized by NLRC, developed faster than many other countries their COVID-19 contingency plans.



Focus on Zambia:

ZRCS used a lot of learnings from RPII to develop their COVID-19 response plan. The knowledge they gained during the Contingency Planning training helped them develop their COVID-19 response plan in record time since they were the first National Society in Southern Africa sub-region to prepare a COVID-19 plan! The IFRC cluster support team requested to share it with other National Societies in the region which used it as a reference. All ZRCS departments were involved in the development of this plan, which used not to be the case before RPII. All colleagues worked very smoothly together, as they all knew what they had to do. Before RPII they wouldn't have known where to start from. Moreover, ZRCS was among the first National Societies in the region to develop their Business Continuity Plan and RCCE plans which informed the DREF application and the subsequent Emergency Appeal on COVID-19 that were quickly submitted and approved.

4. Trainings of the response teams have significantly increased their response capacity (which used to be very limited in some of those countries).

In Lebanon, a large team of responders were trained under RPII program and were immediately mobilized for the current COVID-19 response activities.

In the other countries, the response teams training didn't cover the specific activities required in epidemic response, but it did cover all the basic knowledge that a RCRC volunteer needs to be mobilized in times of emergencies. Volunteers have also been equipped with the basic equipment for RCRC response teams. This has minimized the training time and resources required to have COVID-19 responders fully operational for this unique response. In CAR, this represents 74 National Disaster Response Team (NDRT) members and 204 Community Disaster Response Team (CDRT) members.

Similarly, Kenya Red Cross has been able to activate trained Data and Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) teams to support the COVID-19 response.

In Zambia, the Red Cross initially oriented volunteers from 13 priority districts, based on their exposure and vulnerability to COVID-19, before training additional volunteers in other districts. This was made possible by antecedent capacities enhanced through Response Preparedness initiatives including the improved coordination and collaborations with government and key stakeholders at all levels (national, provincial, district and community).



Left: Hand washing stand set up by CRCA volunteer Right: A CRCA CDRT carries out COVID-19 Household sensitization session respecting the distancing measures and equipped with a mask

Pictures: Gérald, CD Com/CRCA

5. Community Engagement and Accountability² (CEA) training to staff and volunteers in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Zambia have built key capacities for the response teams to identify and support community-led solutions for preventing the spread of COVID-19 by ensuring active communities participation in the response.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement is one of the main pillars and added value of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement response all over the world. Those competencies are being used for activities like radio shows, community sensitization and hygiene promotion. Based on the capacities developed through Netherlands Red Cross Response Preparedness programs, jointly with the IFRC, the National Societies were able to deploy the trained CEA staff to the hot spot areas to implement risk communication activities, and spread key prevention messages related to COVID-19, in close collaboration with their respective Ministries of Health.

In Kenya, the KRCS Accountability framework guided the process in terms of feedback collection among other aspects, while in Ethiopia the National Society developed a guidance document on how to select and target marginalized and vulnerable people.

Lastly, in Zambia, the benefits of the newly built CEA capacities have already been evidenced through the speedy integration of COVID-19 community led response measures spearheaded by Community Response and Feedback Mechanism committees that were formed to oversee community participation in the ongoing operations. ZRCS quickly developed a rumour tracking mechanism and was integrated in the call centre of the Zambian Ministry of Health where they log all rumours and myths around COVID-19 and thereby support the work of their government.

² For more information on CEA, consult <https://communityengagementhub.org/>



6. Reinforced coordination and collaboration with the IFRC have made National Societies better connected to their respective IFRC support offices and able to access IFRC pools of funds faster.

Thanks to Response Preparedness programmes, most National Societies have strengthened their collaboration with their respective IFRC cluster and country support offices (called CCSTs) which have been providing specific COVID-19 guidance for the development of their Emergency Plans of Action, their COVID-19 country plans and business continuity plans. The CCSTs also encouraged the NSs to contribute to the global information management system and have made response funding available through the COVID-19 Global Movement Appeal. Thanks to this, Uganda Red Cross shares regular COVID-19 updates through the IFRC GO-platform (<https://go.ifrc.org/>), feeding the harmonized Movement reporting and accountability system, and Zambia Red Cross is currently running two IFRC Emergency Appeals (for the Drought and the COVID-19 responses) and is hosting an in-country IFRC Delegate who supports the implementation of those operations.

7. The data preparedness capacities built in Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia enabled a precise and rapid risk analysis for a more accurate identification of the areas at risk to be targeted for the prevention and response to COVID-19.

For the first time in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, the data teams trained under IARP programme are working hand in hand with the Health teams to map and visualize communities and areas at risk of spreading the COVID-19.

Focus on Uganda:

The GIS staff member of Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) developed an interactive COVID-19 dashboard which allows the visualization of reported cases, as well as several other features providing key information for faster response decision making. This includes indicators specific to urban areas, like mapping of slums in Kampala, at higher risk of spreading the disease. He also quickly mapped the health facilities with which URCS coordinates the management of suspected cases.

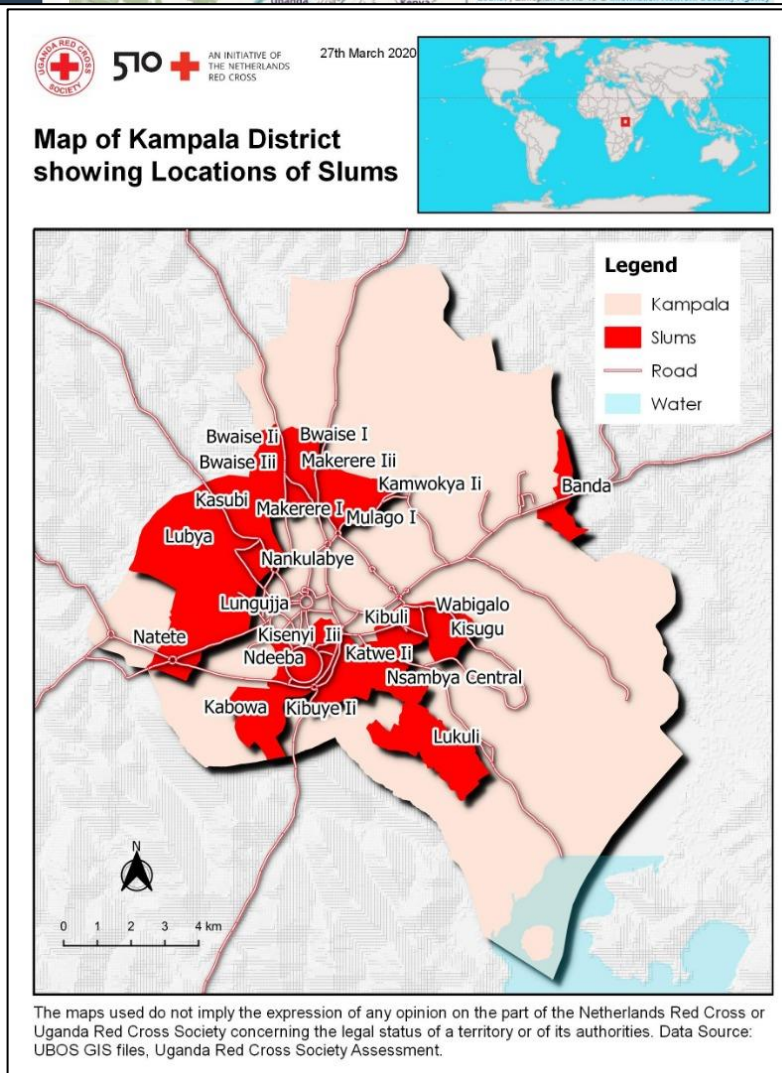
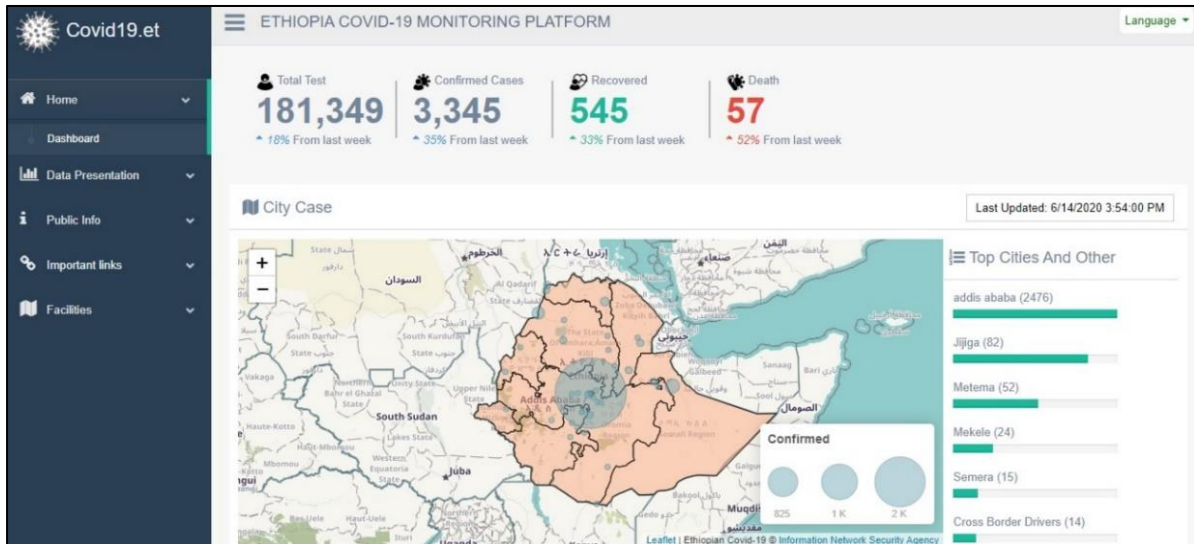
Those achievements have drastically increased the efficiency of URCS' community based surveillance system. In collaboration with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD), URCS' data team compiled statistics and geographically visualized the vulnerable communities in Kampala and environs. The data products were used by the National COVID-19 Task Force (NTF) to inform response activities like food distribution by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). With other partners URCS continues to play a key role on beneficiary registration and data compilation.

“Despite the lockdown measures and movement restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as the GIS officer for URCS, my team and I were able to utilize digital tools to inform response interventions. Thanks to the staff and volunteers previously trained in GIS, digital data collection could still be carried out and those data informed the COVID-19 response dashboard, as well as the flood assessment and the use of the drone to assess humanitarian needs in the hot spot areas”

Joel Kitutu, URCS GIS Officer.



Similar work took place in Ethiopia and Kenya where the GIS staff were assigned to monitor and share updates of COVID-19 globally and nationally via Ethiopia Red Cross Society and Kenya Red Cross Society dashboards in their respective Emergency Operations Centres (see examples of their products below).





In CAR, the National Society has put in place a system to channel information from the field to a centralized database used for decision-making by the HQ team. This approach is being improved by the production of maps and by a vulnerability monitoring system for each region.

Additionally, the weekly price monitoring system of key commodities implemented by Zambia Red Cross helps them monitor the evolution of food prices and spot potential negative effects of the COVID-19 on the level of food security. Those prices are shared with the Southern Africa Food Security & Livelihood focal point of the IFRC cluster office and published in the monthly regional bulletins. Deriving from risk mapping and other geo-spatial analyses capacities strengthened through RPII programme, the National Society integrated the government risk analysis and spatial prioritization of COVID-19, creating maps which greatly contributed to the development of their COVID-19 emergency plan of action and facilitated the access to DREF/Emergency Appeal funds from the IFRC.

Finally, the data preparedness training, particularly on data literacy and mobile data tools delivered to ZRCS volunteers, has made onsite data entry during emergency operations possible and has reduced (too) frequent interaction with communities, avoiding unnecessary fatigue and disturbance to the affected population.

8. Cash based Interventions will be a key component in the Movement response to mitigate the secondary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is expanding towards social and economic sectors, the Cash based Interventions (CBI) capacities built through NLRC RP programs in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Zambia enabled these four National Societies to bring relevant and fast support to the most vulnerable people.

For instance, KRCS developed a CBI COVID-19 protocol that guides the National Society in implementing Cash Based Interventions in informal urban settlements, which can be extended into rural areas, depending on the magnitude of spread of the COVID-19. Similarly, critical context analysis, market assessments and community preference will be undertaken by ERCS as part of preparedness activities in order to provide appropriate response options as ERCS is getting ready to scale up cash and food distribution for impacted households, in collaboration with the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, their main financial service provider.

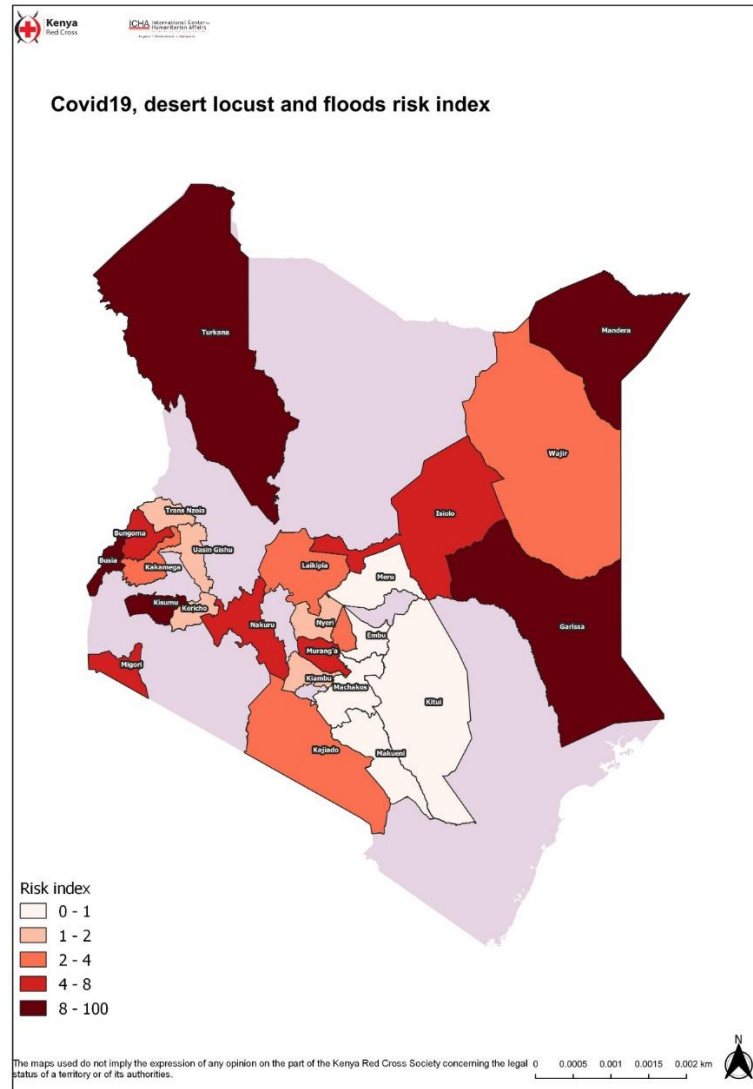
Two years ago, Zambia expressed the wish to become “cash ready” and this process was included in the RPII programme. As of today, ZRCS is implementing the largest CBI response through the Drought Response/Food Insecurity Emergency Appeal with support of the IFRC Cluster Office. They also co-chair the Zambia Cash Working Group with UNICEF, under the Food Security Pillar of the Drought Response National Disaster Management Coordination Forum together with the Government Disaster Management Agency (DMMU) and the UN Resident Coordinator. They stand ready to activate those capacities in response to potential food insecurity which might be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



9. Tools developed under RP programmes are encouraging a multi-hazard response approach which mutualizes the available resources to concurrently respond to several disasters.

Most of those countries are facing several disasters and crises which are multi-faceted and overlapping. The combination of these disasters is resulting into increased food insecurity, destruction of livelihoods and displacement of populations. The tools developed under RP programmes such as multi-hazard response plans in Zambia and CAR, the digital data collection mechanisms, the various dashboards developed by the data teams as part of the Forecast based Financing³ approach in Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia have set the foundation for a more accurate and integrated multi-hazard approach in those countries, addressing simultaneously COVID-19, floods, Desert Locust invasion, or drought. For instance, the processes undertaken in conducting risk assessments were also used in supporting countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia on targeting beneficiaries in urban areas for food relief or Cash based Interventions, in partnership with their respective government line ministries. These in-depth assessments enabled the identification and localisation of the most vulnerable.

Further to this, building on the work initiated through IARP and with complementary funding from British RC, Kenya Red Cross developed a multiple hazard risk map based on risk index calculation overlaying 3 hazards (see map on the right). This exercise helped them identify the most affected areas and design response options which address the impact of all 3 disasters combined.



*Desert Locust, Floods and COVID-19 risk map, Kenya Red Cross
2nd June 2020*

³ For more information on Forecast based Financing, consult <https://www.forecast-based-financing.org/about/>



PREPAREDNESS FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

Annex 1: Linking RP Program achievements with the Preparedness for Effective Response Approach

Findings	PER Area	PER Component
1. Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies have built a more proactive attitude towards disasters and are able to mobilize their HQ and branch teams more rapidly (all concerned sectors) to collectively develop preparedness and response plans in a more efficient manner.	Policy, Strategy and Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DRM Strategy - DRM Policy
	Operations support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finance and admin policy and Emergency procedures - Logistics, procurement and supply chain
2. RCRC National Societies have positioned themselves as key actors of disaster management within the national and local government coordination mechanisms.	Analysis and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-disaster Meetings and Agreements
	Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination with Movement - Coordination with Authorities - Coordination with External Agencies and NGOs
	Policy, Strategy and Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DRM Laws, advocacy and dissemination
3. RCRC National Societies are more agile with the response planning and were able to develop their COVID-19 response plans in record time (within a few days only, as opposed to weeks or months in the past)	Analysis and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scenario planning - Preparedness plans and budgets - Business continuity - Risk management - Response and recovery planning - Emergency Response Procedures
	Operational capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of NS capacities - Emergency Needs Assessment - Testing and learning
4. Trainings of response teams have significantly increased their response capacity (which used to be very limited in some of those countries)	Analysis and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emergency response procedures
	Operational capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of NS capacities - NS Specific areas of intervention



<p>5. Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) training to staff and volunteers in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Zambia have built key capacities for the response teams to identify and support community-led solutions for preventing the spread of COVID-19 by ensuring active communities participation in the response</p>	Coordination	- Coordination with local Community level responders
	Policy, strategy and Standards	- Quality and accountability
<p>6. Reinforced coordination and collaboration with the IFRC have made National Societies better connected to their respective IFRC support offices and able to access IFRC pools of funds faster</p>	Operational capacity	- Activation of regional and international support
	Coordination	- Coordination with movement
<p>7. The data preparedness capacities built in Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia enabled a precise and rapid risk analysis for a more accurate identification of the areas at risk to be targeted for the prevention and response to the COVID-19</p>	Analysis and planning	- Hazard, context, and risk analysis, monitoring and early warning
	Operational capacity	- Affected population selection - Information Management - Emergency Operations Center - NS Specific areas of intervention
<p>8. Cash Based Interventions will be a key component in the Movement response to mitigate the secondary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic</p>	Operational capacity	- Cash based Intervention
<p>9. Tools developed under RP programmes are encouraging a multi-hazard response approach which mutualizes the available resources to concurrently respond to several disasters</p>	Analysis and Planning	- Scenario planning - Preparedness plans and budgets - Response and recovery planning - Emergency Response Procedures