

SETTING UP COMMUNITY COMMITTEE FOR FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

Burundi Red Cross is resolved to roll out the CEA Strategy in all its Branches. The Branch of Muyinga has been chosen as a pilot to set up community committees for handling feedback and complaints. Local Units have decided to elect members of those committees before the end of August.

Introduction

The first community consultations took place in Muyinga Branch, located in the North East of Burundi from the 7th to the 10th August 2019. The recent community consultations are included in the implementation of the approved CEA Strategy. It also serves to support the effective accomplishment of the Integrated Health project supported by the Finnish Red Cross.

One of the challenges of the project is that targeted vulnerable people did not have various trusted and accessible options for providing their feedback and complaints to the National Society since most of them are illiterate. This is also valuable for all initiatives, projects, and programs of the Branch of Muyinga. Now that the community committees for feedback and complaints are operational, the opinions of people supported by the Integrated Health project and other programs of BRCS will be recorded and responded to in a timely way and the quality of those programmes will be improved.

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Community consultation in commune of Mwakiro

1. Meeting with Branch staff and communal Secretaries

Most of the staff and communal Secretaries in Muyinga have been trained on CEA. The meeting aimed at getting their buy-in and support for the CEA Strategy in general and the implementation of community committees for managing feedback and complaints in particular. A brief explanation of key points of the content of the CEA strategy was provided.



Meeting with staff and communal secretaries

An open discussion was held on setting up the feedback and complaints system, the added value of the community feedback mechanism as a better system that contributes to improving quality of a program and collecting rumors, perceptions, as well as improving the credibility of volunteers in communities. Topics discussed include;

- How to engage communities in discussions about the appropriateness of the community feedback mechanism
- How elections of the members of the community committee can be organized, once communities have chosen this approach
- How the community feedback committees can collaborate with the Committee of Local Red Cross Units (who used to do such a work), and the Red Cross Communal Secretaries
- How the mandate of the existing Peaceful Conflicts resolution team (where they already exist) can be extended to that of complaints and feedback committees in accordance with National Society policy
- How feedback and complaints are documented and responded timely.

Staff and communal secretaries have suggested that the complaints and feedback committee should first include volunteers only. Other members of the community will be able to join such committees later after analyzing the pilot results.

2. Engaging local leaders and leaders of volunteers

The Branch Coordinator supported by the CEA Coordinator met the community and started each meeting with a briefing session that gathered local leaders and Presidents of local Red Cross Units in order to provide short and clear explanations on providing feedback or complaints as a right of every member of the community. At the first hearing, they thought there was nothing new we brought since whenever there is an issue, local leaders and presidents of local Red Cross Units are used to meeting to discuss various activities that volunteers are doing. For them, members of the community also used to submit their requests to the local Red Cross Unit Committee.

However, providing relevant arguments based on actual examples and discussing these openly drove away all misinterpretations they had on the feedback and complaints system. Both local leaders and Presidents of local Red Cross Units agreed on the setting up a trusted committee whose members do not sit in the local Red Cross committee meeting.

3. Engaging community to buy-in the complaints and feedback mechanism approach

Under the facilitation of the Presidents of local Red Cross Units and the local leaders, the Branch Coordinator along with CEA Coordinator met volunteers and members of the community. Both members of the community and volunteers were given the opportunity to evaluate the existing communication with community approaches used by the National Society.

After concise explanations on the importance of putting in place complaints and feedback mechanisms in the community, participants agreed to create a team of most trusted people of their communities working as a help desk, called a **complaints and feedback unit**. As an explanation behind this choice, a help desk offers a face to face discussion rather than writing with no immediate feedback. A help desk is moreover accessible for everyone, including those who are illiterate.



Community consultation in the commune of Muyinga

Indeed, the audience underlined the key criteria of an eligible person. First and foremost, gender and diversity are key factors. Additionally, a person must be someone who is humble, with good reputation in the community, renowned for his support in peaceful conflict resolutions, who inspires confidence in the community to mention but a few. "If elections of members of complaints and feedback units result in the agreement of the community, everyone could have confidence in them. Thus, we will feel comfortable to disclose to them our observations in connection with the humanitarian initiatives of the Burundi Red Cross", said one of the local leaders of the commune of Muyinga.



"Once in place, the unit in charge of handling feedback and complaints will further contribute to the collection of information that will help us to readjust our programs and assistance initiatives in our communities," said one of the Presidents of the local Red Cross Units. Youth must also be represented.

Thanks to the recommendations from the Branch Coordinator, volunteers and communities agreed that only volunteers are allowed to be members of the complaints and feedback unit. However, they are elected during a community meeting, gathering both volunteers and other members of the communities together so that an elected person is trusted by both parties.

4. Finding an appropriate name for the complaints and feedback unit

Supported by local leaders and other members of the community, Burundi Red Cross volunteers found an appropriate name for the help desk in the Kirundi language. The name is "**Mugona iki?**" a short name from "Mugona iki ku bikorwa vy'abanyamuryango ba Croix-Rouge", which can be translated to "how do you appreciate or judge the actions and behavior of Burundi Red Cross' volunteers".

5. Results

The community clearly supported the complaints and feedback units approach, as three communes of the branch of Muyinga (Mwakiro, Muyinga and Buhinyuza) have decided to set a deadline for the elections for members of the complaints and feedback unit.

6. Lessons learned

Ideas raised by the communities show that members of the community are always ready to contribute in one way or another. It is obvious that people supported by the Integrated Health programme were eager to have a space allowing them to express their feelings and appreciations they have toward their project. The support of local leaders shows that they find the feedback a d complaints mechanism not as a barrier to their current means of managing the community, but instead, as another way of improving volunteers' contribution for community development.

The challenge is that certain communities may have misinterpreted the task of a complaint and feedback unit by thinking that it can collect all kind of community concerns beyond the scope of the Burundi Red Cross.

7. Next steps & recommendations

Setting up a complaint and feedback mechanism in the community requires first and foremost engaging staff, leaders of volunteers, local leaders and the community themselves. For effective implementation, it is important to train volunteers on CEA. As they are also members of the community, it makes it easier to gain community buy-in.

Contact information

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