

# GUYANA RED CROSS SOCIETY

## Relationships the Key to Risk Communications

### CASE STUDY



## BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Guyana, the Guyana Red Cross saw the vulnerability of remote Indigenous and migrant communities in accessing information and the supplies that could protect people and their families from the pandemic.

The Guyana Red Cross had some existing relationships in communities from prior projects. They realized that building on these relationships and using them to create a stepping stone to have access to new communities could help keep communities safe from COVID-19. The field team combined distributions of hygiene and cleaning supplies with information about COVID-19 and pictorial graphics on handwashing and other key messages for preventing the spread of the virus. They travelled far outside the capital city of Georgetown by tiny planes, vans, and boats to reach communities and take the time to talk to communities and answer questions. The result of this project had the team see change happening as boat drivers (the lifeblood of communities on the river) began using masks and cleaning their boats.

## THE RESPONSE

The Guyana Red Cross Society worked across all the regions in the country, with a focus on those most vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their location and socio-economic status, to implement their relationship building and risk communication work.

To begin the program manager would make an initial call to a community, and using Red Cross volunteers and relationships began through previous projects, for example to stop the spread of Zika, they would map the community need. The team would meet with Toshaos, Indigenous Community Leaders, and leaders Identified by migrant communities to discuss what the COVID-19 situation was in the area, what kind of precautions were being taken and the accessibility of cleaning and hygiene supplies.

It takes planes, vans, and boats to reach many in the communities the Guyana Red Cross worked in.

Partnering with a community would lead to a community representative to be assigned to the team, someone who knew all the families and where they lived along the mangrove-lined river tributaries. This allowed the team to ensure they were reaching every one, as well as ensure families saw a familiar face, ensuring they would be comfortable hearing from the Red Cross team.



*"We have found that communities are very receptive to people who take the time to come into the community, share the information and not just share information, but give time for them to ask questions and to ensure they clearly understand."*

*- Project Manager Andrea Philips*



During each of the interactions, one of the field officers would explain the basics of staying safe and healthy during COVID-19 – handwashing, wearing a mask, keeping distant from others – using pictorial based materials created in partnership with the IFRC Americas CEA team. In the past, the team used text heavy information handouts and posters, but they weren't seeing behaviour change. Working with the communities, they learned many could not read. So the team worked to create pictorial-based shareable materials so more people could understand.

They would then share personal protection and hygiene measures as well as cleaning items, and discuss how to use those in the context of COVID-19.

As the work continued and people saw how communities were taking steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Red Cross was invited to meet with new communities and new community leaders, continuing to grow their network.

Being able to reach those people, being able to connect with those people, and being able to establish new relationships with new communities was one of the key highlights of the work identified by the project manager.

### THE TEAM

The team responsible for the relationship building and reponse to COVID-19 in Guyana consists of:

- 1 Project Manager
- 1 Logistics officer
- 2 Field officers
- 1-3 community volunteers in each region





## FACTORS OF SUCCESS

There were two key factors that have allowed this Community Engagement and Accountability initiative to succeed:

**Dedicated Team** – The Guyana Red Cross Society is a small team of staff and volunteers, responsible for responding to all the humanitarian needs of people spread widely across the country. They are responsible for everything from teaching first aid, to supporting the government's COVID-19 hotline, yet they constantly look for ways to reach more people.

**IFRC support** – The cluster office provides support and technical guidance to the Guyana Red Cross team, including health messaging and CEA graphics that could be altered and shared.

## CHALLENGES OVERCOME

There were some challenges the Guyana Red Cross Society had to overcome:

**Travel** – to reach some of the communities, hundreds of kilometres from the capital Georgetown, takes time and can be costly. A trip to deliver hygiene supplies and messages on staying safe and healthy to the community of St. Anselms, for example, takes a six-seater plane about an hour, 15 minutes by van to get to the docks, and another 45 minutes by speed boat.

**COVID-19** – work during COVID-19 meant ensuring government procedures were followed to ensure the safety of the team and those in the communities they were serving. The team implemented COVID-19 precautions and adapted.

### What tools and support have supported the Guyana Red Cross

- The Guyana Red Cross built on a relationship building model that began under the project to stop the spread of Zika.
- IFRC provided technical support and capacity building capacities for the National Society in CEA approaches.
- Tools developed specifically for the pandemic of COVID19 made it possible for the National Society to be able to count on updated information that could be disseminated



## THE IMPACT

Building on existing community relationships and an approach to information sharing that includes communities' culture, and information needs, the Guyana Red Cross was able to people in remote areas of the country. Their interactions with each community allowed information about staying safe and healthy during COVID-19 to be delivered in an accepted way. Other communities, seeing the impact of Red Cross, would then request to start relationship, and the work of the Red Cross spread throughout the region. This relationship-based approach is part of institutionalizing Community Engagement and Accountability in the Guyana Red Cross Society.



### **For more information or feedback, please contact:**

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