

Community Engagement and Accountability in Humanitarian Diplomacy: The Success of the Comorian Red Crescent in Cholera Response in Anjouan

Context:

In February 2024, a cholera epidemic broke out in the Comoros. The Comorian Red Crescent (CRCO) responded to the crisis by deploying emergency programs in health, water, hygiene, sanitation (WASH), protection, gender, inclusion, and community engagement (RCCE). The National Society also implemented a feedback management system to gather community feedback and guide interventions. Despite initial challenges, the CRCO was not initially recognized as a key actor in RCCE by the government and other humanitarian partners. In response, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) supported CRCO to strengthen its position in this area.

Activities Implemented by the National Society:

- **Development of a RCCE strategy:** With IFRC's support, CRCO developed a detailed RCCE strategy aligned with IFRC's approach, encompassing four key components:
 1. Context understanding
 2. Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE)
 3. Feedback mechanisms
 4. Evidence-based advocacy and community participation
- **Dialogue and advocacy strengthening:** CRCO presented its RCCE strategy to national health ministry officials, WHO, and UNICEF. Meetings were also held with local authorities and humanitarian partners on Anjouan Island, the epidemic's epicenter, clarifying CRCO's role as a key RCCE actor and enhancing collaboration among stakeholders.
- **Implementation of RCCE activities:** CRCO implemented a wide range of RCCE activities on Anjouan Island, including:
 - Cholera risk awareness and prevention measures
 - Community mobilization for hygiene behaviors adoption
 - Support for the establishment of water treatment units
 - Assistance to local health structures
 - Facilitation of community participation in decision-making

Results:

Through its concerted RCCE efforts, CRCO achieved significant results:

- **Recognition as a key RCCE actor:** CRCO is now recognized as an essential partner in cholera response on Anjouan Island, both by the government and other humanitarian organizations.
- **Improved collaboration and coordination:** Collaboration between CRCO, local authorities, and other humanitarian partners significantly strengthened, enabling a more effective epidemic response.
- **Positive impact on community health:** CRCO's RCCE activities contributed to reducing cholera transmission and protecting the health of affected populations.

Conclusion:

The success of CRCO in combating cholera in Anjouan demonstrates the importance of effectively integrating community engagement and humanitarian diplomacy in humanitarian interventions. By adopting a community-centered approach and enhancing dialogue with key partners, CRCO plays a crucial role in epidemic response and protecting the health of vulnerable populations.

