



**UGANDA RED CROSS SOCIETY**

**THE ESSENTIAL THEMES GUIDELINES**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY (CEA),**

**PROTECTION GENDER INCLUSION (PGI),**

**SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK (SAF)**

**JULY 2024**

## FOREWORD

Over the years, the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) has recognized the importance of key humanitarian themes and innovative approaches, such as Community Engagement & Accountability (CEA), Protection, Gender & Inclusion (PGI), and the Safer Access Framework (SAF). These frameworks position community members as equal partners in our work. To that end, URCS has developed integrated guidelines to provide a systematic, practical, and reliable approach to engaging with and being accountable to the communities we serve.

Moving forward, URCS will strive to inform, involve, collaborate with, and empower communities in all its operations, ensuring they have a meaningful voice. By incorporating community feedback into our programming, we will bring our mission to fulfill URCS's mandate—delivering quality, sustainable humanitarian assistance—closer to reality. Given the diversity of communities we serve, we recognize that differing wants, needs, and viewpoints may not allow us to meet everyone's expectations at all times. However, through these guidelines, we will employ appropriate delivery mechanisms to strike a balance among all stakeholder interests and fulfill our mandate.

Let us embrace this inclusive, collaborative approach to implementing our guidelines. I am confident that by applying the best practices and measures outlined herein, we will achieve lasting success.



Robert Kwesiga  
**SECRETARY GENERAL**

## ABBREVIATIONS

|       |                                                                  |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CEA:  | Community Engagement and Accountability                          |
| CGB:  | Central Governing Board                                          |
| DRM:  | Disaster Risk Management                                         |
| EVD   | Ebola Viral Disease                                              |
| HQ:   | Headquarters                                                     |
| IFRC: | International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent Societies |
| M&E:  | Monitoring and Evaluation                                        |
| NS:   | National Society                                                 |
| PGI:  | Protection Gender and Inclusion                                  |
| PNS:  | Partner National Society                                         |
| PSEA: | Prevention and response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse         |
| PMER: | Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting.                  |
| RCRC: | Red Cross Red Crescent Movement                                  |
| SAF:  | Safer Access Framework                                           |
| SMT:  | Senior Management Team                                           |
| TV:   | Television                                                       |
| URCS: | Uganda Red Cross Society                                         |

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## 1.0 Introduction

Within the URCS, Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA), Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) and Safer Access Framework (SAF) are approaches recognized as a way of working with community members as equal partners.

Externally, there is growing demand from partners, donors and policymakers for greater accountability and IFRC and ICRC are recognized as thought-leaders in this area at global and regional levels. Yet, even with this wealth of resources and commitments, a variety of barriers and challenges still exist in institutionalizing CEA, PGI and SAF within the National Society's strategies, policies, processes and practices, so as to make it an integral part of all URCS programs and operations.

Too often, to a greater extent CEA, PGI and SAF approaches are still not well understood, seen as an optional extra, or not integrated and resourced adequately. This creates a gap between commitments and practice, which is damaging the quality, sustainability and effectiveness of aid efforts, and leading people to feel they are not adequately informed, engaged, or able to participate in the decisions that impact their lives.

URCS already has a PGI Operational framework and SAF Plan of Action that requires all URCS Personnel, Volunteers, Interns, contractors and Partners have an obligation to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional conduct and must not use their positions in order to exploit and abuse beneficiaries. This essential theme's guidelines therefore, will guide the integration of these approaches into URCS programs for a stronger and accountable National Society.

## 2.0. Essential Themes Background

### 2.1. Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)

In 2018, URCS started adopting and integrating key CEA guiding documents and tools developed by the IFRC following the RCRC movement-wide commitments on CEA. It was scaled up under the IARP project where CEA was a core work stream. Before then, CEA was termed as Beneficiary Communication (**BenCom**), which had a limited scope, lacked clear policy direction on beneficiary communications, accountability, as well as policy documents and procedures to support complaint handling systems.

The [Movement-wide Minimum Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability \(CR/19/R1\)](#) were adopted at the Council of Delegates on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2019. These overarching, strategic commitments aim to ensure a consistent approach to how we engage with and are accountable to people and communities across the Movement. All members of the Movement,

including every National Society, ICRC delegation and IFRC office, are responsible for meeting and upholding these commitments and ensuring they are relevant and applicable to all staff and volunteers regardless of their role.

### **2.1.1. CEA Components**

1. **Community participation and feedback:** This involves setting up systems for responding and acting on feedback, questions and complaints. URCS members, staff or volunteers are encouraged to share honest, timely and accessible information with communities on the NS humanitarian and development programs.
2. **Providing information as aid:** CEA acts at all times but particularly during disasters to provide information that is actionable and potentially life-saving to communities quickly, efficiently and at large-scale, using systems such as Short Messaging Services (SMS), social media or radio broadcasts.
3. **Behaviors and social change communication:** The perceptions and behaviors of different groups help gain an insight in the development of targeted messages and how to efficiently engage communities. This will help programs to adopt safer and healthier practices.
4. **Evidence-based advocacy:** When there are available channels for communities to provide feedback, it allows members to be heard and provides the community with a forum to express the challenges that affect them and their solutions.

### **Achievements**

- Supported CEA orientation and trainings to some Branches, CEA and Sector (WASH, CVA and People on the Move) for running projects and the recently concluded the NDRT training.
- Strengthened feedback collection during the RCCE for Covid-19 and EVD response. This feeds into the URCS Bi-power dash board.
- Shared IFRC CEA tools especially the Feedback tool 15 and checklists for CVA and WASH to project teams to enhance performance of projects and activities.
- Steered the writing the first draft of the CEA/PGI/SAF Guidelines.

### **2.2. Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI)**

Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) was adopted and has evolved into a pivotal development and humanitarian initiative for the Uganda Red Cross Society since 2021. The PGI approach plays a direct role in facilitating the process of serving individuals with dignity while ensuring their equal access, meaningful participation and safety of beneficiaries of URCS programs and services including marginalized or excluded persons and key populations.

The PGI approach is therefore anchored on the IFRC's Dignity, Access, Participation and Safety (DAPS) Framework. In addition, the PGI approach is cognizant of the need to generate evidence based on sex, age, and disability disaggregated data (SADD), which is a corner stone for strategic planning and a tool for humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy. Therefore, the strategic alignment of PGI with CEA and SAF is aimed at safeguarding the dignity, ensuring equal access, promoting meaningful participation, and enhancing the safety of beneficiaries of the National Society's programs and emergency interventions.

Although URCS developed the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) (2021), Child Protection and Safeguarding (2023) Policies and conducted the PGI Organizational Capacity Assessment (2022), there has been evidential gaps both at national, sub-national and operational levels, thereby occasioning the need to develop these guidelines to guide staff, volunteers and affiliates in the integration of PGI along with CEA and SAF in all programs and emergency response. Protection, Gender and Inclusion started in 2020 in URCS. The PSEA policy was developed in 2021, PGI trainings carried out in 2021 with support from Sky Bird project, IFRC Capacity building fund 2022, PGI organizational assessment 2022.

### **2.3. Safe Access Framework (SAF)**

Safer Access frame work was once implemented way back in 2011 during the Lord's Resistance Army war in Northern Uganda and later re-introduced in 2019 with support from ICRC as actions and measures to reduce, manage and mitigate risks that may happen to URCS Volunteers, staff, members, affiliates and property while working in sensitive and insecure contexts. The implementation of this approach largely focuses on eight (8) elements of safer access in relation to increasing acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need.

The Aim of SAF is to increase acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need by providing relevant and effective humanitarian services in accordance with the fundamental principles and other movement/URCS policies and practices.

#### **2.3.1. Elements of Safer Access Framework**

1. Context and risk assessment;
2. Legal and policy base;
3. Acceptance of the individual;
4. Acceptance of the organisation;
5. Identification;
6. Internal communication and coordination;

7. External communication and coordination;

8. Operational security risk management.

This approach emphasises issues of perception, acceptance, security and access to people in need. There is therefore a need to continuously remind stakeholders, individuals on who we are, what we do, how we do it and why; to clear different perceptions towards URCS work.

### **Key Achievements of Safer Access Framework**

- Conducted safer access benchmarking exercise with support from ICRC.
- Formation and orientation SAF Steering Committee.
- Conducted context and risk assessment training.
- Conducted safer access peer to peer learning visit to South Sudan Red Cross.
- Conducted safer access awareness sessions in Karamoja, Central, Western, Eastern, Northern and Southern region Branches.
- Provided seven (7) Branches with sign posts to improve their Visibility.
- Conducted meetings to review SAF plan of action by the steering Committee.
- Integrated SAF sessions into ongoing departmental activities i.e. Health and Social Services, DRM, HR, Membership & Branch Development.
- Draft for Safety and Security Guidelines among others.

## **3.0. SWOT Analysis for Essential themes at URCS**

### **3.1. Strengths**

1. Strong SMT leadership.
2. Well established governance and management structures.
3. Readily available and committed Community Based volunteers.
4. Presence of functional Branches.
5. The NS has support from IFRC and ICRC.

### **3.2. Weaknesses**

1. No systematic feedback mechanism to capture and analyze ordinary feedback data.
2. Low resource base especially: Finance, skills and knowledge and capacity building.
3. Inadequate skilled human resource in PGI, CEA & SAF.
4. Essential themes are not well understood by the program teams yet they are the ones to do project identification, design, planning and implementation.
5. The essential themes data is not digitalized for easy visualization

### **3.3. Opportunities**

1. Projects/Programs leads be encouraged to integrate Essential themes in their operational plans/activities at all times.
2. Essential themes will support in disseminating URCS information.
3. Partners and government line ministries, departments, agencies, and community leaders are interested in collaborating and partnering with URCS.

### **3.4. Threats**

1. The nature of URCS interventions (usually characterized by emergency response) does not provide room for on spot Essential themes integration;
2. During proposal writing and budgeting, less attention is given to Essential themes;
3. Field security challenges, especially the Karimojong cattle rustling, tribal clashes and hostilities;
4. Some areas in-country are hard to reach;
5. Technological challenges especially on phone usage for latest data collection modalities and maintenance in terms of charging and access to data for internet connectivity.
6. Occupational hazards/accidents.

## **4.0. DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

The development of these guidelines was informed by national approaches, assessments and documentary review in programs, disaster preparedness and emergency response.

## **5.0. OBJECTIVES**

### **5.1. GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

These guidelines aim to guide staff and volunteers on mainstreaming Essential themes into URCS programs and operations.

### **5.2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

1. To strengthen the integration of the essential themes approaches into the entire URCS programming;
2. To provide guidance on actions to ensure dignity, access, participation and safety for staff, volunteers and stakeholders;
3. To enhance access, and prevent security incidents that may cause harm to Staff, Volunteers and affiliates while delivering humanitarian assistance.



## **6.0. ESSENTIAL THEMES ACTIONS**

### **6.1. Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)**

**Outcome 1.1: Integrate Community Engagement and Accountability into ways of working so that it becomes a standard approach for all staff and volunteers.**

#### **CEA Actions:**

- i. Build staff and volunteers' capacity on SAF, CEA and PGI (essential themes) across projects and branches;
- ii. Document best practices and lessons learned under essential themes for future references and resource mobilization;
- iii. Design feedback mechanisms, SOPs for URCS;
- iv. Incorporate CEA in all sector activities and tracking indicators in all programs, operational plans and budgets.
- v. Carry out participatory community consultations and dialogue before, during and after activity/project implementation (Foster: LISTEN, ACT and RESPOND).

### **6.2. Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI)**

**Outcomes 1.2. URCS adopts a comprehensive Protection, Gender and Inclusion approach across all programs, emergency preparedness and response.**

URCS will adopt a comprehensive PGI approach across all programs, emergency preparedness and response through;

- i. Enhancing and promoting awareness of the existing systems of lodging complaints, reporting incidents, and providing feedback;
- ii. Documenting and disseminating best practices and lessons learned to inform URCS' policy advocacy;
- iii. Conducting PGI sector specific capacity assessments to ascertain the level of compliance, inform policy and other strategic decisions;
- iv. Reviewing and standardizing data collection tools such as; attendance registration forms, assessment, monitoring, and reporting templates that capture sex, age, disability disaggregated data (SADD);
- v. Fast tracking the digitalization process of critical data collection, monitoring, and evaluation tools for essential themes;
- vi. Developing safeguarding risk register;
- vii. Developing and disseminating PGI referral pathways; referral criteria and guidelines (standardized documentation and tracking mechanism);

- viii. Continuing to create awareness about the integration of PGI amongst staff, volunteers and key stakeholders/partners; and
- ix. Drafting data protection agreements specific for sharing sensitive information.

### **6.3. Safer Access Framework (SAF)**

**Outcomes 1.3: Improved capacity to identify, assess and mitigate potential risks to staff, volunteers, property and beneficiaries**

#### **SAF Actions:**

- i. Raise SAF awareness amongst staff, volunteers and relevant stakeholders to mitigate potential risks to staff, volunteers, property and communities (Develop fact sheets, talking points, posters etc. about Safer Access);
- ii. Develop and disseminate safety and security guidelines/protocols;
- iii. Strengthen internal and external coordination, collaboration and partnership with key stakeholders;
- iv. Identify and establish youth champions to integrate activities in the essential themes at branch level;
- v. Integrate SAF in the branch reporting tools.
- vi. Provision of Psychosocial support to volunteers and staff working in sensitive and insecure contexts and refer for professional counseling.
- vii. Conducting structured perception surveys to assess the level of SAF across all operational areas
- viii. Document and disseminate best practices and lessons learned to inform URCS' policy advocacy.

### **7.0. General actions required under all essential themes**

- i. Integrate of orientation on code of conduct and PSEA for all trainings involving volunteers
- ii. Develop a feedback monitoring tool to be administered quarterly to understand the level of integration for all essential themes including the code of conduct.
- iii. Operationalize URCS partnership with relevant government Ministries, Agencies and Departments (MDAs), and other relevant organizations through signing of Memoranda (MoU).
- iv. Develop a training manual and curriculum for essential themes

#### 4.0. Financing of the Essential Themes Guidelines

Implementation of these guidelines will require an investment of UGX **460,000,000** for the year 2024 and 2025 to enable successfully implementation of all the interventions of these, **90,000,000** will be required for general cross cutting issues, 116,000,000 required for implementation of CEA activities, **160,000,000** for implementation of PGI and **94,000,000** for implementation of SAF interventions. There is UGX**175,000,000** that is already allocated for the planned interventions under these guidelines. The resources are allocated under different running projects. The implementing team will therefore have to work with programming team to mobilize the balance of **UGX 306,000,000** to be able to achieve the desired essential themes outcomes.

The Essential Themes Focal Persons will therefore ensure integration of all key activities/interventions under these guidelines in the different project proposals to be developed within the implementation period. The officers will also ensure that sufficient resources are allocated in the budgets for the planned interventions to ensure that all the balances are raised.

The officers will also explore options of applying for grants that are specifically focused on essential themes.

#### 8.0. Implementation Arrangements

Implementation of these guidelines requires support from Senior Management, Project Managers, Officers, Branch leadership and volunteers. Each department has a role to play to ensure successful implementation of the essential themes' guidelines .

Roles of different departments to successful implementation of this guidelines ;

| Department/staff                | Roles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Senior Manager                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approval of the Essential themes guidelines</li><li>• Present Policies related to Essential themes to management for endorsement and enforce implementation of such policies</li><li>• Provide guidance on formation of the essential themes working group and essential themes task force</li><li>• Validate inclusion of essential themes budgets in all project proposals before approval of such proposals</li><li>• Recognize all essential themes in the new URCS strategic plan to be implemented after 2025</li></ul> |
| DRM, Health and social services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide technical guidance on implementation of essential themes interventions</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

|                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take lead in ensuring that project managers recognize essential themes during project development, budgeting and implementation</li> <li>• Inclusion of essential themes activities into programmes, projects and emergency operations</li> </ul>                                                                                                                          |
| DT&HR departments                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following through on any complaints and concerns in a timely manner</li> <li>• Conducting mandatory orientation/training URCS PSEA policy, and where and how to report</li> <li>• Include Essential themes into Job descriptions</li> <li>• Having briefings on essential themes as part of onboarding process</li> </ul>                                                  |
| Membership and Branch Development.        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all branches integrate essential themes interventions and approaches in all the branch activities</li> <li>• Ensure that the Branches report on Essential themes on a quarterly basis</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Operations                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take lead in monitoring all essential themes indicators under these guidelines</li> <li>• Ensure all project reporting tools capture indicators under these guidelines</li> <li>• Ensure quarterly reports submitted by project teams and branches report about essential themes.</li> <li>• Led the midterm review and Endline evaluation for these guidelines</li> </ul> |
| Communication and resource mobilization   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure proper documentation and promote dissemination of results (success stories and lessons learned) for essential themes</li> <li>• Support in procurement and development of IEC materials relevant to the themes</li> <li>•</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                |
| PGI officer<br>SAF officer<br>CEA officer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly provide technical guidance on all implementing officers on integration of essential themes</li> <li>• Directly work with different directorates to ensure essential themes and recognized in the different projects and budgeted for.</li> <li>• Be the lead in ensuring smooth implementation of interventions under these guidelines</li> </ul>                 |

## 9.0. Risk Analysis

| Risk                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Likelihood | Mitigation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Beneficiaries are at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation.                                                                                                                                                                     | High       | <p>Training on signs of abuse (including direct and indirect disclosures)</p> <p>All staff encouraged to report concerns</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| High number of children / adults in need of protection (Children (and adults) living with disabilities, those living with HIV/AIDS, orphans, internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees or those living on the streets etc.) | Medium     | <p>Establish numbers of children or adults in need of protection, support by collecting disaggregated data by on sex, age or disability (SADD) to inform on different groups requiring different support.</p>                                                                                                                                                           |
| Weak social and child protection systems                                                                                                                                                                                       | Medium     | <p>Conduct a child safeguarding risk analysis and develop plan of action to be implemented</p> <p>URCS Program teams do mapping to establish what social nets, care and support exist for adults and children at risk.</p> <p>Work effectively with national, local and community protection systems and mechanisms in place for all people without discrimination.</p> |
| Lack of knowledge on essential themes by programme teams and volunteers                                                                                                                                                        | High       | <p>Train all staff and volunteers on essential themes before engaging them on project implementation</p> <p>Organize capacity building sessions for all existing programmes teams and volunteers</p>                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Weak community feedback mechanism                                                                                                                                                                                              | High       | <p>Develop and disseminate the referral pathway</p> <p>Develop and disseminate a complaint mechanism for URCS</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Lack of understanding of the URCS mandate and missions by some volunteers and key stakeholders                                                                                                                                 | High       | <p>Sign contract agreements/Memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with partners</p> <p>Widely disseminate URCS principles and our mandate</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|                                                               |        |                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Failure to find budget to finance the different interventions | Medium | Integrate all interventions into ongoing project activities                                  |
| Staff attrition                                               | Medium | Ensure all processes are documented and staff submits a fill with all reports before exiting |

### 10.0. Monitoring Framework for URCS Essential themes for the period 2024-2025

| Objective                                               | Key Actions                                                                               | Indicators                                                           | Baseline (Jan 2024) | Target (Dec 2025) | Freq      | Source | Person Responsible | 2024 |     |     |     | 2025 |     |     |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------|--------|--------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
|                                                         |                                                                                           |                                                                      |                     |                   |           |        |                    | Q 1  | Q 2 | Q 3 | Q 4 | Q 1  | Q 2 | Q 3 | Q 4 |
|                                                         | <b>General Actions</b>                                                                    |                                                                      |                     |                   |           |        |                    |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |
| General actions to support Essential themes Integration | Integrate orientation on code of conduct, and PSEA for all trainings involving volunteers | Proportion of volunteers who are trained on code of conduct          | TBD                 | 100%              | Quarterly | Survey | PGI officer, PMER  |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |
|                                                         |                                                                                           | Proportion of volunteers who say they understand the code of conduct | TBD                 | 80%               | Quarterly | Survey | PGI officer, PMER  |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |
|                                                         | Develop a feedback monitoring tool to be administered quarterly to understand the         | Quarterly Monitoring tool developed                                  | NA                  | 1                 | NA        |        | PMER               |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |



















[illegible]

## References

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