

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION STRENGTHENS RED CROSS CAPACITY AND KNOWLEDGE

The Indonesia Red Cross has improved its access to experts, research, and trainings through engagement in community engagement and accountability interagency coordination forums

Introduction

The Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) has been an active member of interagency coordination forums for community engagement and accountability since 2018. This has helped the National Society to be at the forefront of responses to natural disasters and epidemics, including COVID-19 and Mpox. Through interagency forums, PMI has improved their access to data, health expertise, trainings, and Government Ministries. In return, PMI has used their extensive network of community volunteers to increase the reach and impact of epidemic response efforts - proving interagency coordination can be a win-win for all.



Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) uses interactive radio talk shows to provide psychosocial support for affected people in Palu, Sulawesi, and invited UNICEF as a guest speaker. This channel is used to share important information and listen to the community's concerns. The topics are adjusted based on assessment and information needs.

PMI's role in community engagement interagency coordination

National Risk Communication and Community Engagement Working Group

Established in 2020 in response to the growing COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia's National Risk Communication and Community Engagement Working Group (RCCE WG) was originally co-chaired by IFRC and UNICEF. Aulia Arriani, PMI subhead of publication-documentation, CEA focal point and representative on the RCCE WG, reflects how membership of the group proved invaluable when COVID-19 was still a relatively unknown disease, "Back at the start of 2020, COVID-19 was so new there wasn't even basic information about the disease. But through the working group we had access to experts from the UN, Ministry of Health, universities, and local NGOs. We were able to discuss what information needed to be shared with communities and agree key messages. This helped us make sure we were sharing the right information with communities and plan effective response campaigns".

Throughout the COVID-19 response, PMI continued to play a leading role in the RCCE WG. This included running a joint perception survey and campaign with WHO Indonesia through social media and PMI's website. The survey provided valuable insights on how to increase the impact

of PMI's COVID-19 response through the use of more trusted channels and better mobilization of the Red Cross volunteers. The results of the perception survey were also jointly analysed and presented to the RCCE WG and the inter-cluster coordination group, positioning PMI and IFRC as critical actors in the COVID-19 response. This led to the National Society being regularly asked to be a spokesperson in RCCE WG webinars, meetings, and talk shows. By the end of the COVID-19 response, IFRC and PMI's involvement in the RCCE WG had also led to a stronger relationship with the Government and the National Society was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the Ministry of Health.

The RCCE WG still meets today but has expanded its remit beyond COVID-19 to include a range of health threats including polio, rabies and more recently Mpox. A smaller core RCCE WG consists of different organizations including PMI and IFRC, UNICEF, WHO, World Vision, and researchers and practitioners. This small core group has close coordination with Ministry of Health to discuss and address health communication issues in Indonesia. Then, the result of these discussions are shared with the wider RCCE WG which is still attended by a larger range of organisations. There are monthly in-person coordination meetings, and regular online webinars and trainings on specific topics. As well as Aulia, these meetings are also attended by PMI representatives from communications and health, depending on the topics being discussed.

The RCCE WG now focuses on strengthening the capacity of local NGOs and coordinating responses to new threats such as Mpox. Aulia explains, "The RCCE WG offers a lot of trainings and briefings which have really benefited PMI. For example, five of our staff attended a data security and misinformation training organised by UNICEF for WG members. We also do a lot of digital campaigns through social media, and we don't always have the health information we need for these. Through the RCCE WG we have access to new research, the latest data, and experts like epidemiologists and medical doctors – roles that we don't have within PMI. We often ask these experts to take part in PMI podcasts or Instagram live. It would be harder for us to do the work we do, and respond to all the health concerns we do, without the collaboration of the RCCE WG. I'm very glad to be part of the WG".

More recently, PMI's role in the RCCE WG meant it was well equipped to respond to the current Mpox outbreak. The RCCE WG developed materials and a campaign to respond to Mpox, ensuring all materials were approved by the Ministry of Health and endorsed with its logo. These materials are currently being used by PMI staff and volunteers across the country. In return, PMI's wide reach and community networks ensures this important information can be shared country-wide, supporting communities to take the actions they need to protect themselves from diseases.

Community Engagement and Accountability Working Group – Sulawesi Earthquake

Following the Sulawesi earthquakes and tsunami in 2018, OCHA initiated an interagency Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG) with UN agencies, NGOs, PMI and IFRC. UN

OCHA, IFRC and UNICEF co-facilitated the working group, which met regularly in Palu, Sulawesi. The group aimed to coordinate information sharing and feedback approaches with communities affected by the disasters. A key outcome of the CEWG was the Community Voices bulletin and dashboard, which summarised feedback and issues raised by communities, and shared this with all agencies taking part in the response. PMI fed into the bulletin and was a member of the steering committee for the dashboard. This bulletin helped all agencies including PMI and the IFRC to have a better understanding of the issues at community level and be more responsive to community needs. Hasna Pradiyas (Tyas), IFRC CEA specialist with the Indonesia and Timor-Leste Country Cluster Delegation and member of the CEWG, explains, “The dashboard helped us to easily visualise big issues in the response. It also helped us refer the feedback issues we couldn’t handle to other agencies. This helped us manage any feedback we couldn’t respond to.”

For the Red Cross, being part the CEWG also helped improve their relations with other NGOs and reputation with the local government. Tyas explains, “PMI was working with local radio networks to share information with people affected by the disasters through live talk shows. They would cover a different topic every week and it was great to be able to invite other members of the CEWG to come and talk. For example, having Oxfam come and discuss specific WASH issues. The CEWG was also endorsed by the Government Ministry of Social Affairs. This close working relationship with them helped us get the information we needed to answer community questions about government support much more quickly.”

Lessons learned

Benefits of interagency coordination

Both Tyas and Aulia believe PMI and IFRC have gained many benefits from being part of interagency coordination forums for community engagement and accountability. Aulia explains,

- **Access to data:** “The RCCE WG is very open and collaborative. Members share survey data and research they have done. This gives us access to data we wouldn’t normally have and saves a lot of resources as we don’t have to conduct these surveys ourselves. We would be more limited in our work in communities without this data. It helps us try new things and work more effectively – and have a better understanding of some of the issues at community level.”
- **Saves resources & reduces duplication:** “When we develop materials and resources through the working group it means we don’t have to do everything ourselves. This helps us reduce duplication and makes us more effective and efficient.”
- **Strengthens our volunteer capacity:** “We have access to a lot of good capacity strengthening opportunities for our volunteers. There are good trainings and materials that come out of the RCCE WG that our volunteers can use.”

- **Reputation and networking – including with donors:** “We have better connections with other institutions and organisations, and we can use this to benefit our programmes and campaigns. Partners and donors react very well when they hear that we’re part of the working group. Donors even helped us hire consultants to co-host the RCCE WG.”
- **Sustainability:** Tyas added, “If local branches and NGOs have been part of the coordination forum then they’re more likely to continue the work once the disaster operation winds down.”

Challenges of interagency coordination

However, both Tyas and Aulia have also experienced some challenges with interagency coordination, which has led to some valuable lessons learned. Aulia explains,

- **Choose what to focus on:** “The RCCE WG covers a wide range of health issues so it can be difficult to follow everything. At PMI we try to be clear what is of value to us, and I use the RCCE WhatsApp group to ask questions when I need to know something specific.”
- **Leadership support matters:** “Leadership awareness of the importance of interagency coordination is needed. If they understand the value and assign staff to be the focal point, it helps build buy-in and ensures someone is allocated and tasked to be part of these coordination forums .It becomes a recognised part of their job. ”
- **Choose the right person to attend:** “The person attending coordination meetings needs to be the right person, or it could affect the reputation of your organisation. You are seen as your organisation, not as an individual – so you are carrying the reputation of the National Society. It needs to be the right person, with the right capacity and technical skills.”
- **Giving province focal points a clear role improves attendance:** Tyas added, “For the Sulawesi response it was sometimes difficult to encourage PMI focal points from the provinces to attend the CEWG meetings. They were very busy and focused on the response and had their own coordination networks they needed to attend. We had to gain their acceptance and recognition that community engagement interagency coordination is valuable. It really helped to invite them as a spokesperson and give them a platform in the meeting, so they felt valued in the meeting and the response.”

Advice for other National Societies

Aulia and Tyas agree that you get out of interagency coordination, what you put in. Aulia said, “National Societies should be an active member in community engagement interagency coordination forums. Don’t just be a participant but see how the National Society can take an important role in the working group – for example, as a moderator, chair or spokesperson. Other sectors are part of their interagency coordination groups, so those us in community engagement

and accountability need to be active as well. Not only at the national level but also at the district and province level. Those in the provinces have valuable information on the needs and priorities at community level. By sharing this in coordination forums, we can help all agencies to better meet the needs of the community”.

Contact information

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