

LOCAL CAPACITY AND REDR'S GLOBAL STRUCTURE

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RedR, Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief, was established in 1979 in the United Kingdom. Its vision is a world in which sufficient, competent and effective personnel are available to humanitarian relief agencies to save lives and reduce the human suffering caused by disasters. RedR's mission is to provide sufficient, competent and effective personnel to front-line humanitarian agencies at short notice, to improve the competence of relief personnel and to work with other agencies to improve the availability and effectiveness of relief personnel.

Over the years RedR was established primarily in Western countries: the UK, Australia and New Zealand. In November 2002 RedR Canada was accredited, and RedR India followed the same path in November 2003. There is now a drive towards setting up an autonomous office in Eastern Africa.

The international organisational structure and strategy of these individual offices is monitored and steered by RedR International. This is the International Secretariat of the organisation. While all offices have autonomous operations, there is an obvious need for an umbrella organisation that ensures that the quality of services provided by each office corresponds with the global criteria.

In that context, the International Secretariat of RedR monitors developments in humanitarian assistance, focusing on the identification of unmet needs which RedR should satisfy. One of the most eminent trends in humanitarian assistance is the notion of local capacity building, which basically aims at empowering the

beneficiaries themselves so that ultimately they can take on the responsibilities that temporarily are being taken care of by others. There is now a policy amongst many of the front line agencies to recruit more technical personnel from within or as close as possible to the relevant emergency areas and it would therefore be sensible if RedR concentrated its member recruitment and training in those same areas.

RedR has responded to the changing environment by organising more field-based recruitment and training. But operations remain somehow centralised within the Western based offices. Expanding this local capacity will result in increased "field operations", hence a more elaborate structure. It could indeed be argued that countries fall into three categories: aid recipients, aid donors and countries that neither give nor receive large amounts of emergency aid. It is sensible for RedR to concentrate separately on the aid receivers and donors and for different reasons. It is recognised that disasters can strike anywhere but it is sensible to concentrate on those regions with low GDPs as these are less able to respond. The regions that are less able to cope with emergencies have a low GDP and it is unlikely that RedR organisations located there will raise much local funding although they may attract money from international organisations. In order to finance RedR's contribution to emergency response it is necessary to raise money from the richer nations.

To improve RedR's capability of responding to disasters we are therefore now extending our recruitment and training in those areas least able to respond themselves.

We are responding to a Latin American initiative. The continent is recognised as having recurrent medium to large scale disasters. Often humanitarian assistance will be coupled with disaster preparedness activities as some of the impact of the disasters can be mitigated by preparing for fairly predictable recurrence. Mapping the risks and their geographical location should be part of the thinking process. The potential of running a registry in Latin America is high, according to specialists: the competence of the local elite is good enough, a local structure of NGOs exists (although the fundraising potential is lower than in other continents) and there is a strong continental cultural identity.

The Middle East has been the focus of conflict and humanitarian needs for decades. Cultural specificity makes it difficult for outsiders to function well in the Arab context, but the needs are there and many agencies are operating in the region. More than in other

humanitarian interventions, local experience is required for workers here. A strong political signal was also sent by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in 2003 when they awarded the year's prize to the Iranian human rights activist Shirin Ebadi. It was the first time the award was given to a muslim woman. Western organisations should seek proximity to muslim populations, that incidentally are confronted with major conflicts and natural disasters but where RedR is only scarcely represented. Providing Arabic specialist personnel to the conflict areas in Palestine, Israel, Lebanon and elsewhere may well provide RedR with an excellent opportunity to establish itself as a provider of personnel with intimate regional knowledge and cultural background.

Over the past months there has been an expressed interest from the Malaysian engineering community in possibly setting up a separate RedR chapter in Kuala Lumpur. Ample links between Kuala Lumpur and RedR Australia have been nurtured in the past. The links go beyond a RedR interest, with The Institution of Engineers, Australia closely linked to the I.E.Aust – Malaysian Chapter. RedR Australia is the obvious patron RedR organisation for this initiative, and the relationships that are described above have greatly contributed to a potential interest. The GA (General Assembly) of RedR International decided in September 2002 in London that the expressed interest would be looked at closely. This was re-confirmed at the GA in November 2003.

The purpose of RedR International's involvement at this time is to investigate whether the expressed interest is sufficiently viable to lead over time to the creation of a separate RedR, in terms of capacity, potential of fundraising, potential of institutional support and membership; to communicate the RedR values and principles; and to determine whether there is a capacity on behalf of the institutions that have taken the initiative, to possibly evolve into a separate RedR entity, with the support of RedR Australia.

From the very start it will be important to monitor closely how the interested organisation looks at the global organisation. While the submission to and acceptance by RedR International's General Assembly of the documents listed as essential in the accreditation procedure are important, an overriding consideration will be a demonstrated commitment by the organisation:

- to contribute to the achievement of RedR's Vision and Mission;
- to abide by RedR's Fundamental and Operating Principles;
- to work closely and in harmony with existing

Accredited Members as part of RedR International.

Stating the obvious, it is essential that any initiative be supported by an organisation that meets all requirements sustainable in line with their interest. This implies an organisational support. Representatives of the supporting organisations should be on the board, and this on a continuous basis. Moreover, RedR humanitarian workers, not just institutions should be the focus of a newly emergent organisation. There is therefore a need to build not only a board, but also a membership, as the supporting institution does not create members. Other NGOs and humanitarian organisations need to be involved.

Furthermore the importance of Malaysian NGOs working globally, in the region and in Malaysia is stressed. This is linked to Malaysia's role in Peacekeeping Missions and in humanitarian organisations sending people and funds to international crises.

Malaysia has an emerging NGO movement with a strong ethos of charity based on Islam. There are a number of enthusiastic NGO and engineering agencies keen to develop training as a tool develop a recruiting register in Malaysia. Strong academic ties (through alumni associations) provide great possibilities for inroads in Malaysia. There are clear and evident linkages between Australia and Malaysia. With English as a major language training is much easier.

The natural disasters that strike Malaysia account for some serious damage. They include floods, landslides, flash floods and to a lesser degree typhoons. Fires are less of a hazard, as are earthquakes (tremors are felt, but farther-off Sumatra takes more of the burden.) On the basis of the analysis of what kind of disasters to expect, probably a maximum of 10 assignments per year could be expected, should a RedR exist for the local market. This is what IEM calculates. That is clearly not enough to justify the existence of a RedR office solely on the basis of the activities of the Assignments and Membership department. Training could of course be provided to e.g. government agencies. The probable approach is likely to focus on the Asia-Pacific region. Malaysia's place in the region makes it a prime candidate for experts to be assigned to overseas missions, considering its multi-ethnic background and muslim population at the same time. The IEM board should look at the possible parallel structure of a Malaysian market share in conjunction with a regional approach.

The anticipated place in the global organisational structure would then be defined as a Malaysian chapter

focusing on the local market, with a possibility for its members to be assigned to overseas postings.

The fundraising potential would focus on the Board of Engineers, Malaysia (BEM), which is the institution overseeing the registration process (engineers need to be chartered if they wish to be allowed to use the title of engineer.) It is a regulatory body that registers and regulates professional practice of engineers—both chartered and graduate, including local and foreign, temporary and permanent residents.

On a parallel basis, the government published remarks concerning its willingness to fund charities. Private funding seems to constitute a promising market, considering that in similar structures there have been fund raising efforts that produced very reasonable amounts of money. Finally, there is a potential of fund raising through the Smarts structure.

The planning for regional courses has been somewhat disrupted by the SARS epidemic but it seems that is behind us now.

In conclusion, the following principles underpin the strategy :

- a. Local empowerment is the ultimate criterium addressing the needs of our beneficiaries.
- b. We should seek the support of local RedR Members, local professional institutions, local government departments and international organisations. This has always been the case and we ought to continue underscoring RedR activity along these essential lines.
- c. The membership or independent individuals will be at the origin of setting up a new office, but the RedR organisation has a duty to actively define its global organisational structure by determining priority areas of intervention.
- d. Initiatives need not result in the set-up of “full-fledged” offices but can be limited to one of probably five main areas of activity. Major offices can fulfil all RedR activities (register, training, TSS, good governance and fund raising), while regional offices could provide mainly personnel and organise or facilitate training programmes.

The process is being monitored closely by RedR International and RedR Australia, and it is our sincere hope that out of the discussions that are being held we will be able to distil a clear way forward to support this initiative. ■