

# COLOMBIAN RED CROSS

## OUR SELECTED EXPERIENCE

### PRACTICAL RESOURCE PACK

#### Our context

Established in 1915, the Colombian Red Cross has 2,500 employees and 27,000 volunteers and has a national presence with 32 branches and 250 branch municipality offices. We provide a wide range of services to the Colombian people in areas such as health care (first aid, blood banks, laboratories, vaccinations, etc.), disaster risk management and emergency response, education, human rights and international humanitarian law.

One of our northern branches works with communities in areas affected by urban violence. Our programme to reduce the effects of such violence approaches the needs of these communities from four perspectives: (1) human rights, (2) differentiation and inclusion, (3) the “do no harm” principle and (4) territory (see annex for further information). The target population<sup>1</sup> is young people: children, adolescents and young adults.

In October 2017, we decided to film a documentary for programme donors about the communities we help. We obtained consent from everyone involved (communities, local organizations, armed groups, gangs, and civil and police authorities) before hiring the filming company.

Using their local knowledge, Red Cross staff and a camera crew visited communities to carry out preparatory work before the filming began. The team were treated very well by the local people. The team developed a plan, based on the eight elements of the Safer Access Framework, to ensure that filming went as smoothly and as safely as possible.



<sup>1</sup> The branch reaches out to children, adolescents and young adults through: (1) the educational system, by creating emergency brigades, developing learning programmes with teachers and supporting the psychosocial work of parent groups; (2) neighbourhoods, through community-based women’s and youth groups; and (3) juvenile detention centres, through life skills workshops, spreading humanitarian messages of respect, tolerance, and peace, and supporting vocational training and job opportunities.

## How our acceptance, security and access were affected

Despite the team's careful planning, there were two security incidents involving local gang members.

The first incident occurred while filming in the neighbourhood of Carlos Alba<sup>2</sup>, a former gang member undergoing drug rehabilitation, which the team had not visited before. Some members of a gang that patrolled the neighbourhood challenged the team, claiming that they had not been informed about the documentary. Carlos had assured the team that they would be free to film, and community leaders had authorized, and even facilitated, the filming. Although everyone had visible Red Cross identification (uniform and institutional card), the gang members accused Carlos of gathering intelligence for the State and began questioning him.

As Carlos was in a very vulnerable position, the team had no choice but to return to the office and rethink their approach. They drew up an engagement plan to demonstrate the transparency of project, which included sharing the footage with the gang. Once the gang members were satisfied that they had not been captured on camera – which was their main concern – the team was able to resume filming.

The second incident took place in a neighbourhood which the branch staff had visited before. The branch had hired the same film crew, as well as a car and a driver, and had allowed the Colombian Red Cross logo to be placed on the vehicle. While the crew was filming members of the community inside their houses, a group of armed gang members came patrolling the area. Thinking that they intended to steal the filming equipment, the driver became very agitated and started arguing with them. This unsettled the whole team. Fortunately, one of the team members was able to calm everyone down and explained to the gang members what was happening, thus preventing any further trouble. In the end, the team left and decided to continue filming in another location.

## What we did and learned

These two incidents showed that we needed to take additional measures to ensure we had everyone's trust and could guarantee the safety of our staff and volunteers.

### External communication and coordination

We need to communicate and coordinate with everyone involved and secure their agreement before undertaking any activity. The purpose of the activity, how it will be carried out and who will be involved should be clearly indicated in communication lines.

We can further promote our work in communities by raising awareness of who we are, what we do and how we carry out our activities.

### Acceptance of the individual

It is important to ensure that the team remains calm in difficult situations, to avoid fuelling tension. When we hire external people, we need to make sure that they are aware of the situation and how they are expected to behave, particularly when we allow them to use our logo. In addition, we need to inform them of the scenarios they are likely to encounter and make sure that they understand that the team leader is responsible for everyone on the team, including them.

### Context and risk assessment

We must ensure that activities take the sensitivities of the community into consideration. Although filming and taking photos seem harmless, the presence of armed groups can turn them into potentially dangerous activities, for all taking part. We need to consider how our actions affect individuals and communities on the ground and factor this into our planning.

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<sup>2</sup> Not his real name.

## Annex

The Colombian Red Cross Strategic Plan 2016–2020 uses four approaches to facilitate understanding of our objectives and guide integrated action towards achieving them.

### 1) Human rights

The human rights-based approach focuses on ensuring that public policy, especially development programming, safeguards the respect, protection and, particularly, the realization of human rights as recognized by the United Nations. These rights are enshrined in Colombian law under the 1991 Constitution, agreements ratified by Congress, and “soft law” (non-legally binding declarations that are internationally recognized as a rule of law). The 2003 UN Statement of Common Understanding on Human Rights-based Approaches to Development and Cooperation Programming is an example of this approach.



### 2) Differentiation

The National Planning Department (DNP) defines the differential approach as a method for analysis, action and population assessment, which aims to protect fundamental rights in terms of equity, equality and diversity. This approach considers poverty as a differential and promotes respect for ethnic and cultural diversity in views on development. The differential approach is therefore expected to help overcome aid-based development views and foster social inclusion and equitable development (DNP, *Documento de trabajo* 2012). Colombian law recognizes the following differentials: gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, health conditions and disabilities, life cycle, marginalization or discrimination, and vulnerability.

### 3) Do no harm

The Ministry of Culture (2009) describes the do-no-harm approach as analysing and estimating the potential negative impact of an action on a particular individual or community, based on a clear understanding of the social, cultural, political and economic complexities involved.

### 4) Territory

The territorial approach recognizes that territory is not just a physical, politically and administratively defined space, but also a social concept, that is, a collective identity (Calvo, 2006). Our humanitarian action will take this concept into consideration when working in a territory, and will use the means and methods that allow us to take comprehensive and effective action that transcends administrative borders. The territorial approach takes into account the many aspects of a territory and respects abilities and social, environmental, economic and cultural features.