

**PRESENTATION TO THE JOINT PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SELECT COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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1. **OVERVIEW**

This paper seeks to present to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Social Development and Select Committee on Health and Social Services an overview of the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) , its legal status, relationship with Government, scope of operations, geographical coverage and service provision during the covid-19 pandemic.

It further seeks to elaborate the collaboration and partnership between SARCS and Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and Solidarity Fund will be outlined.

1. **Who we are**

The South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) is not an NGO. It is a National Society that was established on the basis of International and Domestic law, by virtue of the South African Government being signatory to the Geneva Conventions, which compelled her to establish SARCS by an Act of Parliament as a legal requirement under the Geneva Conventions.

The Geneva Conventions were recognised by the UN Charter of 1949, ensuring that the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement has Permanent observer status at the UN General Assembly in New York and at the African Union in Addis Ababa.

SARCS plays a supplementary or auxiliary role to Government in humanitarian matters in times of peace and war. While established through an Act of Parliament, the fundamental principles of the Red Cross movement (*which are an additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions), recognize the National Society as an independent and neutral body.*

SARCS forms part of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) which is comprised of 192 Societies, auxiliary to their Governments.

***The role of auxiliary of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to the Governments in the humanitarian field is characterized by a specific legal status, based on the International law, the rules established by the movement and the National legislation of each State.***

State parties signatory to the Geneva Conventions and additional Protocols, are members of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which is the supreme deliberative and policy making body of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The International Conference meets every four years to deliberate on Global Humanitarian matters.

Governments participate directly in the framing of movement policies and legal frameworks. This gives the Red Cross/Red Crescent the predictability and transparency towards the States which may not always exist with other organizations.

1. **How we work**

While the principle of independence may imply that National Societies (NS) do not take direct instructions from public authorities, to play their auxiliary role however, National Societies need to consult and comply with governments regulations. This happens at two levels:

A. International level: Governments meet with NS at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent every four years to agree on common areas of interest. At this level, NS and their respective Governments may core-pledge on areas of local interest for partnerships on the implementation of conference resolutions.

B. Local level: National Societies are accorded special seat in high level policy making bodies to have an input on decisions pertaining to humanitarian matters. They should also core-implement relevant programs with line ministries.

Humanitarian activities are executed through a network of branches established at community level. The branches recruit and train volunteers to equip them with relevant skills to execute activities according to the needs of the community.

**Since the volunteers are based at community level, and they are not remunerated but work out of passion and will, this makes the Red Cross model to be very efficient and cost effective.**

* National Societies carry out their activities in conformity with their own statutes and National Legislation in pursuance of the mission of the Movement and in accordance with the (7) Seven Fundamental Principles.
* National Societies support the public authorities in their humanitarian tasks according to the needs of the people of their respective countries.
* *National Societies are viewed as reliable partners to their state parties. Partners who will provide service based on its unique capacity to rapidly mobilize considerable human and material resources, including at the community level and comprising volunteers*

***The 28th International Conference accepted the concept of a “balanced relationship” between Governments and National Societies.***

*The characteristics of a balanced relationship of auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field can be summarized as follows:*

* The State and the National Society have a partnership aimed at preventing and alleviating human suffering, protecting life and health, ensuring respect for the human being and promoting mutual understanding, friendship, trust and lasting peace amongst all peoples.
* Despite the partners having different responsibilities and level of resources available, this partnership is based on dialogue, trust, cooperation, a willingness to listen, mutual understanding, and respect for each other and acceptance of criticism from each partner, thus allowing them to raise the most sensitive humanitarian questions in a private and constructive manner.

**This partnership includes:**

* Consultation of the National Society on major humanitarian issues.
* Support from the National Society to the humanitarian activities of the State, including acceptance of appropriate mandates.
* Involvement of the National Society in the implementation of the obligations incumbent upon the state on the basis of international humanitarian law and the resolutions of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.
* Cooperation in respect of other tasks related to international humanitarian law where both the State and the National Society are involved, such as tracing missing relatives services.
* Participation of the National Society in the health and social sector and in actions of relief and disaster preparedness. This involves not only the National Society’s own service delivery action but also its contribution on the basis of its experience.

**At all levels, the representatives of the State and the National Society should understand the importance of the Fundamental Principles and ensure that the work of the National Society is guided by the Fundamental Principles.**

**What we do**

The Red Cross Act of 1921 and 2007 Legal Protection of certain Emblem Act of South Africa dictates that SARCS takes an active role in the improvement of health, and reduction of human suffering inflicted by both man-made and natural disasters.

On that note SARCS has the following programmes:

A. Health and Care related:

* Volunteer recruitment, training and engagement on Health (prevention, treatment and support on HIV, TB and other communicable diseases)
* Peer Education (Schools, in & out of school youth)
* Community based TB care
* Community Based Health and First Aid
* Orphans & Vulnerable children

**B. Disaster & Emergency Related**

* Volunteer recruitment, training and engagement on Disaster Management
* First Aid Training and Emergency response
* Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction
* Livelihood and food security projects
* Disaster Response
* Restoring Family Links (tracing missing relatives)

1. **MODEL & Criteria used to distribute food**

South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) follows the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society (IFRC) relief framework and disaster response policy when assisting the affected population with relief assistance. There is a set criterion in the process of assisting those that have been affected by any emergency. The following is the process that is being followed,

* **Emergency Needs assessment**s

It is based on a thorough emergency needs assessment and is done to understand the disaster impacts, needs and local response capacities in the communities to avoid unnecessary risks in giving inappropriate relief or duplicating local efforts.

* **Beneficiary Identification/selection**

From the Needs Assessment, the beneficiaries are identified based on their vulnerabilities (elderly, Sick, People living with disabilities & Child headed Households) This is usually done in collaboration with Department of Social Development or community leaders.

* **Beneficiary Registration**

After successful identification of beneficiaries, they are registered in the data base for easy reference and transparency. Conditions for successful registration are flexibility and cooperation from beneficiaries.

Over and above that, prior to the outbreak of COVID- 19, SARCS was already providing ongoing support to vulnerable communities. The National Society has a data base of vulnerable community members that it has been supporting at all times, this includes the Elderly, informal settlements, villages, Orphans and Vulnerable people and those housed in SARCS old age homes.

1. **SARCS Response during COVID - 19**

Observing the principle of Independence and impartiality, SARCS assisted the **i**dentified communities observing the rules and regulations of the National Disaster Management act.

Both dry and wet rations have been and continue being distributed to identified beneficiaries.

Door to door distribution and delivery of Food Parcels and Hot Meals is implemented in some Provinces.

Table 1. showing SARCS COVID-19 Intervention

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| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Numbers attained** |
| Screening | 447 920 |
| Sample collection for testing | 3000 |
| RCCE (Public education awareness, risk communication) | 557 607 |
| Hot meals (shelters and vulnerable community members) | 251 410 |
| Food parcels for identified vulnerable community members (child headed, households, elderly, disable, | 15 763 |
| Blankets | 3708 |
| Mattresses | 88 |
| Hygiene packs | 1672 |
| Buckets | 120 |
| Soaps | 528 |
| Media engagement | 44 951 000 |
| Volunteers trained | 215 |

* **MONITORING & EVALUATION OF RELIEF ASSISTANCE**

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At every distribution, SARCS conducts monitoring and Evaluation for post distribution exercise in order to get feedback from the beneficiaries and ensures that the relief assistance have reached the rightful beneficiaries. The feedback from communities also helps to improve or enhance the SARCS relief assistance efforts.

1. **collaboration with with dsd, sassa and Solidarity Fund**

6.1 SARCS partnership with DSD

SARCS collaboration with the Department of Social Development differs from Province to Province. In Limpopo Province, SASSA has provided food to cook for the homeless people and drug abusers. In Western Cape Province, SASSA is funding food parcels for distribution to the vulnerable communities working with the provincial office. In Mpumalanga, SARCS is working closely with DSD for distribution of food parcels and support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs).

**There is therefore need for SARCS and DSD to agree on the best model of collaboration and funding support at a National level.**

6.2 Engagement with Solidarity Fund

SARCS has been engaging with the Solidarity Fund where the strategic focus will be on upscaling food security and implementing sustainable food security projects, rolling out risk communication and community engagement at high risk areas such as taxi ranks, bus terminals, clinics, malls and informal settlements.

A proposal has been submitted to the Solidarity fund and SARCS is awaiting response.

* 1. Engagement with SASSA

SARCS volunteers have been supporting SASSA with ensuring Social Distancing during Social Grants payments. They have also been providing preventive education and distributing information pamphlets on COVID -19 to Social Grants recipients.

1. **access to funding from dsd and solidarity funding**

SARCS has had to rely on funding from the Private Sector and Foreign Governments (Belgian Government through Belgian Red Cross Society) to carry out its statutory mandate.

When the pandemic reached South Africa, SARCS and Department of Health held discussions which culminated in SARCS being requested to submit a draft Memorandum of Understanding, Response plan and budget which was done in March.

To date, there has been no further engagement. Attempts to seek feedback from the Department have not borne fruit.

SARCS mobility was boosted by a loan of vehicles from Land Rover, Ford and BMW.

1. **inputs on distribution food distribution regulations**

SARCS is participating in the social development food distribution plans at local level which includes informing the description of the food parcels this also imply to wet rations.

SARCS have not participated at any national DSD coordinating structures but it is active at Provincial and local levels.

1. **challenges and successes**

* SARCS efforts to be coordinated through the joint operational structures (JOC)
* Training and upscaling the deployment of volunteers to assist with acceleration and increase reach in more communities
* Practice the principle of impartiality, independence and neutrality at all times as some of the activities are highly contested by local leaders and pressure groups
* Work closely with South African Police Service for safety and security of the communities and volunteers

**recommendations**

It is recommended that:

* SARCS efforts be coordinated through the joint operational structures (JOC)
* Training and upscaling the deployment of volunteers to assist with acceleration and increase reach in more communities
* Practice the principle of impartiality, independence and neutrality at all times as some of the activities are highly contested by local leaders and pressure groups
* Work closely with South African Police Service for safety and security of the communities and volunteers.

1. **Our urgent needs**

SARCS is faced with operational and financial challenges that limit execution of its auxiliary role to government.

Though, the National; Society is a Statutory body, it does not receive an annual operational subvention from the Government of South Africa. SARCS is therefore requesting for the following from the Government in order to carry out its humanitarian mandate;

* Annual subvention from the Government for operational costs
* A multisectoral forum through which decisions and commitments made by the Government at the UN and International conference can be domesticated.