Introduction to Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The Red Cross idea was born in 1859 when Henry Dunant, a young Swiss national from Geneva, came upon the scene of the bloody Battle of Solferino in Northern Italy, where the armies of imperial Austria and the France Sardinian alliance, about 40,000 laid dead or dying on the battlefield and the wounded were without medical attention. Henry Dunant organized nearby people of Castiglione and Solferino travelers, priests, housewives, available to provide the wounded with first aid. In 1862 he published the book A Memory of Solferino, in which he described the horror of the fight and condition of the thousands of wounded left without proper care. Dunant called for the creation of national relief societies to promote the idea of an international conference held in Geneva in October 1863 and adopted ten resolutions that formed the founding charter of the Red Cross. The Red Cross was then a reality as an independent, neutral, and impartial organization. In 1864 another diplomatic conference was held in Geneva and recognized the Red Cross on white ground as the symbol of the embryonic Red Cross Movement as a protective emblem to be used by all armies for identifying medical personnel, hospitals, and ambulances.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the contemporary title, consist with the International Committee of the Red Cross-ICRC (the founding body of RCRC established in 1863, considered as the guardian of the Movement), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies-IFRC (founded in 1919 to coordinate with and responsible for development of the national RCRC societies) and national Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies-NS (current 191). The RCRC Movement is guided by its seven fundamental principles i.e., Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality.

About Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) was constituted on 31 March, 1973 by the President’s Order No. 26 of 1973 with retrospective effect from independence of Bangladesh i.e. 16th December 1971. The BDRCS was recognized by ICRC on 20 September, 1973 and admitted into the IFRC on 02 November, 1973. The name and emblem of BDRCS were changed from Red Cross to Red Crescent on 4th April 1988 vide Act 25 of 1988. The President of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh is ex officio President of the BDRCS. The President appoints the Chairman of the BDRCS. The BDRCS has got 68 district and city Units (Branch). BDRCS has been rendering humanitarian services in response to various crises and natural disasters. It implements various risk reduction or development programmes and projects to reduce risks of vulnerable people and to build resilient communities. BDRCS runs various health institutions including hospitals, blood banks, rural mother & child health centres etc. Countrywide thousands of volunteers are the spirit of BDRCS’s humanitarian interventions. BDRCS has got twenty twelve Mandates under the President’s Order of which four consider as significant as those cover most of its roles.

- Aid to the sick and wounded of the armed forces of Bangladesh
- Prevention & alleviation of human suffering with complete impartiality
- The establishment & maintenance of peace among all nations
- Provision of relief for the mitigation of suffering
- BDRCS has earned glowing reputation among mass people, even its staff and volunteers sometimes experience difficulties, particularly in conflict or insecure situations, to serve the distressed smoothly due to-
  - Lack of understanding on BDRCS’s Mandate
  - Lack of awareness on RCRC and BDRCS Roles
  - Lack of access in conflict or disaster situation due to misperception
  - Misuse of RCRC Emblem

Safer Access Concept

The Safer Access concept is a set of actions and measures recommend for a National Society (NS) to prepare for and respond to context-specific challenges, to reduce and mitigate the risks that it may face in sensitive and insecure contexts, and to help it earn the trust and acceptance of people and communities with humanitarian needs, as well as of those who control or influence access to them. The objective of the SA concept is to understand operational risks during intervention in conflict and/or other situations of violence (OSV) in order to be ready to respond effectively and efficiently. It helps to know the gaps, barriers, risks and challenges affecting NS’s acceptance, security and access to people/communities in need and to overcome those.

Where to Apply?

Safer Access concept applies in all situations including conflict, internal disturbances, tensions and as well as sensitive contexts. It has also proved useful when applied in peacetime as part of a NS’s day-to-day needs.

Safer Access Framework (SAF)

The Safer Access Framework (SAF) was introduced in 2002-2003 by the ICRC through consultation with IFRC and National Societies. It’s aim is to help National Societies to increase their capacities and preparedness to respond safely and effectively to humanitarian needs in sensitive, insecure and violence contexts.

Elements of SAF

There are eight elements under SAF those are -

1. Context and Risk Assessment : NSs have a clear understanding of the interlinked political, social, cultural and economic aspects of the evolving operational environment and the inherent risks, which forms the basis for preventing and managing those risks.
2. Legal and Policy Base : NSs have sound legal and statutory instruments and develop policies that provide a basis from which to carry out their humanitarian mandate and roles in conformity with Movement policies, international humanitarian law and domestic legislation.
3. Acceptance of the Organization : NSs have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by providing relevant, context-sensitive humanitarian assistance and protection for people and communities in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles.
4. Acceptance of the Individual : Staff and volunteers have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by working in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.
5. Identification : NSs take all necessary steps to protect and promote the organizer’s visual identity and that of its staff and volunteers.
6. Internal Communication and Coordination : NSs implement well-developed internal communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with other Movement components.
7. External Communication and Coordination : NSs implement well-developed external communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with external actors.
8. Operational Security Risk Management : NSs assume responsibility and accountability for the safety and security of staff and volunteers by developing and implementing an operational security risk management system and structure.

Benefits of Safer Access Concept

- Increase awareness on NS’s Mandates and Roles.
- Increase access and acceptance of staff and volunteers in sensitive, disaster and emergency situations.
- Strengthen coordination with partners and stakeholders.
- Increase capacity to address humanitarian needs of more people.
- Prevent, reduce and avoid security incidents which cause harm to staff & volunteers.
- Adopt a more structured approach to increase security and access.

BDRCS Initiatives on Safer Access

- Raise awareness for staff and volunteers on understanding of Safer Access Framework.
- Organize Roundtable Dialogues for Stakeholders at national and local (divisional/district) levels to disseminate BDRCS’s Mandate and Roles.
- Organize Sensitization Workshops for staff and volunteers.
- Development of Safety & Security Policy and Guideline for staff and volunteers.
- Dissemination of RCRC Emblem to stop or reduce misuse.
- First Aid training for external stakeholders, including Law Enforcement Agencies’ members, Student Leaders of Political parties etc.