



SAFER ACCESS IN ACTION

CASE STUDY: SOUTH AFRICA

PRACTICAL RESOURCE PACK



"Always Needed, Always There"



ICRC



ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross
19, avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
T +41 22 734 60 01 F +41 22 733 20 57
Email: shop@icrc.org www.icrc.org
© ICRC, October 2013

Cover photo: Displaced people queue for assistance. David Chancellor/IFRC

SAFER ACCESS IN ACTION

CASE STUDY: SOUTH AFRICA

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

This case study was developed jointly by the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The purpose of the study is to explore and highlight some of the lessons learned from the SARCS' humanitarian response to a spate of violence associated with xenophobic attacks that took place in May 2008.

The material was gathered in a desk review of core documents and a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings facilitated jointly by the SARCS and the ICRC. Those interviewed included staff and volunteers at the SARCS headquarters as well as at Gauteng provincial office, the branches in Alexandria Township, Lebogomo, Mokopane, Pretoria and Sheshego, and the provincial office in Wynberg, Cape Town. A teleconference was held with personnel from KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Eastern Cape provinces.

Two key elements of the Safer Access Framework (SAF) emerged clearly as being of vital importance to the work of the SARCS, namely acceptance of the organization and acceptance of the individual. This case study explores the specific issues arising in those two areas and the associated strategies adopted by the SARCS to address them.

An essential component of the Safer Access Practical Resource Pack, case studies such as this one give examples of good practice by National Societies.

Acronyms

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

SAF Safer Access Framework

SARCS South African Red Cross Society

CONTENTS

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT	5
Country background	5
South African Red Cross Society	6
Humanitarian action by the National Society	8
The Safer Access Framework	9
ISSUES AFFECTING SAFE ACCESS AND STRATEGIES ADOPTED	10
Issue 1: Acceptance of the organization	10
Issue 2: Acceptance of the individual	13
WORKING TOGETHER AS A MOVEMENT	15
OUTCOMES OF ITS SUCCESS	16
FIGURES	
Figure 1: Map of South Africa	5
Figure 2: The eight elements of the Safer Access Framework	9
Figure 3: The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent	15

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Country background

Famously calling itself the “Rainbow Nation,” South Africa is home to many ethnic groups, cultures and languages. However, the country has a long history of discrimination and prejudice. Although those attitudes were a feature of life in South Africa before 1948, the government policy of apartheid, in place from 1948 to 1994, firmly entrenched intolerance of “difference” in South African society. Although the State and its people have since made significant progress in their efforts to overcome the country’s apartheid past, racial and tribal identities still have a strong impact on the prevailing culture.

The policy of racial segregation known as “apartheid” (an Afrikaans word meaning “separation”) was enforced in South Africa through legislation. The system met with widespread internal resistance and violence. From the 1950s onwards, a series of uprisings and protests led to opposition groups being banned and anti-apartheid leaders being imprisoned. Certain reforms to apartheid were initiated in the 1980s but failed to quell mounting opposition. In 1990, the then President of South Africa, Frederik Willem de Klerk, began negotiations to end apartheid and, in 1994, the first multi-racial democratic election was held. It was won by the African National Congress (ANC) under the leadership of Nelson Mandela.

FIGURE 1: MAP OF SOUTH AFRICA



As the economic powerhouse of the African continent, and particularly since its first democratically-held elections in 1994, South Africa has attracted large numbers of migrants looking for employment opportunities or seeking political refuge in a democratic country with a strong, modern constitution.

Despite its strengths, the South African economy was unable to shield itself from the 2007 worldwide economic downturn. High levels of unemployment and discontent over escalating food and fuel prices added to longer-term dissatisfaction with the extremes of wealth and poverty in the nation. The country's economic difficulties had particularly negative repercussions on people in the lower socio-economic brackets. In numerous cases, the South Africans affected turned their anger on the migrant population, many of whom lived side-by-side with South Africans in informal urban settlements (shanty towns). Agreeing to work for less than the minimum wage (and not subject to social taxes), migrants became an attractive source of labour in certain sectors, such as agriculture. This led to competition with indigenous locals for scarce jobs and housing and to allegations that the immigrants were increasing the crime rate.

Although there were isolated anti-foreigner attacks in the past, the wave of xenophobic violence¹ that erupted in May 2008 shocked both South Africans and the international community by its fierceness. The violence began in the township of Alexandra, to the north-east of Johannesburg, where angry mobs attacked foreign nationals and some South African citizens. It then spread to all but one South African province. Before it was over, more than 60 people had died and many more had been wounded. The violence and intimidation also resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of people, who were accommodated in police stations, in community halls, on church grounds and in other places. Many thousands of foreign nationals fled the country for fear of persecution.

The needs of the affected population included food and non-food items, psycho-social support, the restoration of family links, first aid, protection and security. Support to facilitate the migrants' subsequent re-integration into the communities was also provided.

South African Red Cross Society

"Prior to the 1990s, the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) was perceived as a 'white' organization which operated during times of natural disasters, while assistance for black people affected by the anti-apartheid struggle was nil," said former Secretary-General, Mandisa Kalako-Williams. This resulted in very limited acceptance of SARCS personnel and of the organization itself by a number of communities.

During the years leading up to the 1994 election, the SARCS implemented several repositioning strategies to gain the trust of the people and the authorities. "We started to be understood in 1994, when we delivered services to people on both sides," said Mbuso Mthembu, the SARCS Disaster Management Officer.



SARCS volunteers unload blankets from a truck for distribution to people displaced by violence.

¹ Xenophobia is an intense dislike or fear of people from other countries or ethnic groups. It generally finds its roots in historical, linguistic, religious, cultural and national prejudices and may be linked to perceived differences in the economic, social and political treatment of people with different national and/or ethnic backgrounds. Such prejudices and perceptions may lead to outbursts of xenophobic violence, i.e. violence directed against foreigners. See also International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *IFRC Strategy on Violence Prevention, Mitigation and Response 2011 – 2020*, p. 23. Available at <https://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/53475/IFRC%20SoV%20APPENDIX%202011%20EN.pdf>.



David Chancellor/Federation

SARCS volunteers carry out a needs assessment.

During the period of anti-apartheid struggle, particularly in the early 1990s, the main challenge for the SARCS was to gain the acceptance of all political parties as a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian actor. There were instances when the police prevented SARCS vehicles and personnel from responding. One specific example, given by the volunteers in Gauteng Province, was the funeral of the leader of the South African Communist Party and Chief of Staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC). The situation was extremely volatile because the leader had been killed just before the elections. Volunteers said that they had been monitoring the situation during the funeral and somehow became the target of the riot police. At times pressure was exerted on the volunteers in an attempt to extract information from them.

After 1994, the branches and provinces visited for this case study continued to reposition themselves by developing their capacity to provide community health and disaster services through networks of trained community volunteers. These volunteers are representative of the communities that they serve, which is a distinct advantage in terms of their ability to more effectively reach the grassroots level and be accepted by the community.

Humanitarian action by the National Society

As an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, the SARCS is mandated to respond to emergencies and crises in South Africa. The National Society gained prominence when it took the lead in the response activities carried out during the xenophobic attacks in 2008.

The SARCS took a leading role in the response during the xenophobic attacks against foreign migrants in 2008, distributing essential food and non-food items and providing psycho-social support for affected families.

Before those attacks, the SARCS' emergency response teams had provided first aid and emergency evacuation during situations of violence, such as the political violence in 1993 and 1994, as well as during other mass protests and trade union demonstrations. Drawing on the experience that they had thus gained, the SARCS quickly mobilized its staff and volunteers to respond to the first of the major attacks in Alexandra. The SARCS team from Gauteng Province supplied some emergency relief items for those taking shelter at temporary sites around the province. In anticipation of the spread of violence to other provinces, relief supplies were pre-positioned at various locations to ensure that teams in Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces would be adequately equipped to respond effectively and rapidly.

The SARCS' response was primarily to provide first aid and emergency medical services. However, it also assumed a leading role in the distribution of essential food and non-food items as well as in the provision of psycho-social support for affected families. The SARCS' activities included, for example, the registration of beneficiaries for emergency relief needs at centres for displaced persons, restoring family links, emergency first-aid services, referrals to clinics and hospitals, the distribution of food and non-food items, and an anti-discrimination campaign.

The anti-discrimination campaign began with community-based awareness-raising and educational meetings that also created scope for group discussions.

“Initially, we conducted sessions separately for foreign and South African nationals but then we started integrating them and having joint sessions so as to further strengthen our advocacy against discrimination.”

Mbuso Mthembu, Disaster Management Officer,
South African Red Cross Society

Despite challenges relating to communication and coordination between the headquarters and the SARCS provincial and branch offices, at the height of the xenophobic violence, more than 150 Red Cross volunteers and staff were deployed to over 25 temporary shelter sites for internally displaced persons throughout the country. To support those activities, the SARCS initiated resource mobilization, volunteer management and coordination, media liaison and communication, partnership promotion and collaboration with stakeholders. It placed particular emphasis on community participation, which included involving leaders of non-South African communities in decision-making processes.

The Safer Access Framework

The Safer Access Framework (SAF) highlights the interlinked actions and measures that a National Society can take to increase its acceptance, security and access when working in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions. Neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action and strict observance of the Fundamental Principles form the basis of the SAF.

The actions and measures proposed in the SAF are divided into eight "elements", each focusing on a key area (see Figure 2). It is in relation to some of these elements that the SARCS' humanitarian action is examined in this case study.

FIGURE 2: THE EIGHT ELEMENTS OF THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK

I		Context and risk assessment	National Societies 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.
II		Legal and policy base	National Societies 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.
III		Acceptance of the organization	National Societies 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 and other Movement policies.
IV		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.
V		Identification	National Societies take all necessary steps to protect and promote the organization's visual identity and that of its staff and volunteers.
VI		Internal communication and coordination	National Societies implement well-developed internal communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with other Movement components.
VII		External communication and coordination	National Societies implement well-developed external communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with external actors.
VIII		Operational security risk management	National Societies 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.

ISSUES AFFECTING SAFE ACCESS AND STRATEGIES ADOPTED

Issue 1 Acceptance of the organization

Safer Access Framework element III

III



Acceptance of the organization

National Societies 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 and other Movement policies.

Safe access to affected communities was said to be primarily dependent on the perception and acceptance of the SARCS as a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian actor. The xenophobic violence in South Africa was sparked by the communities' perception that foreigners were taking their people's jobs and were a source of criminal activity. In that situation, the SARCS was concerned that its assistance to the displaced foreign nationals might be perceived by South African communities as putting foreigners' needs before those of its own people.

Strategies adopted

Building on existing service delivery relationships

The National Society attributed its safe access to communities affected by the xenophobic violence to the fact that it had been visibly providing essential services in the communities prior to the eruption of violence.



David Chancellor/Federation

SARCS on the road with a well-identified vehicle

Two important factors contribute to the acceptance and positive positioning of any National Society: the provision of relevant services that meet the needs of the community and the involvement of the community in the process of first identifying and then providing solutions. The SARCS' activities were geared towards strengthening the community's self-help spirit by involving and empowering community volunteers. The deployment of local volunteers not only went some way towards gaining acceptance and access but, most importantly, the SARCS also gained a better understanding of the context.

Equally, volunteers identified the Society's continued presence, visibility and engagement in constant dialogue with the community as key factors that enabled them to make progress in their work. Those are the first steps in generating a community reflex that allows the Red Cross to do its work and ensures the safety of the volunteers. According to Winnie Ndebele, Acting Secretary General of the SARCS, "Providing an integrated service for the community helped us to gain better acceptance within it."

Two important factors contribute to the acceptance and positive positioning of any National Society: the provision of relevant services that meet the needs of the community and the involvement of the community in the process of first identifying and then providing solutions.

“Initially, we were questioned by some members of the community about why we were providing support for non-nationals during the xenophobic attacks. We were able to explain our work to them and to refresh their memory of what we had been doing in the community as volunteers and as a National Society before the attacks. After this explanation, the people in the community allowed us to carry out activities with foreign nationals without harassment or intimidation.”

Volunteer, Alexandra Township,
South African Red Cross Society

The importance of continual dialogue with the community and regular monitoring of the community's perception of the National Society should not be discounted. It is also important to promote Red Cross work at all levels. Positive positioning of the National Society works best when it is coupled with relevant activities on the ground. In other words, specific practical action must be taken to earn acceptance. This experience also underlined the importance of working with the media and promoting the activities of the National Society during peacetime, long before the violence occurs.

Engaging community leaders in dialogue – the “community entry process”

A key strategy adopted by the SARCS during the 1993-1994 period of political violence was to engage all political parties and community leaders in a dialogue aimed at furthering understanding of the National Society's role as a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian agency. This experience led the SARCS and the ICRC to develop a joint “community entry process” that focuses on the following key areas:

- ▶ Understanding and analysing the context in conjunction with the community and its leaders;
- ▶ Identifying the source and then validating information that is circulating (e.g. rumours or media reports);
- ▶ Building a local security framework by becoming known to all leaders;
- ▶ Active internal and external communication of information on the Movement so as to better position the National Society during peacetime.



At Jeppe police station, where people displaced by the violence gathered in large numbers, a breastfeeding mother is assisted by SARCS volunteers.

This process continues to be used by the SARCS. Field workers visit locations regarded as potential flashpoints for violence and conduct mapping exercises with all community leaders in the area. The outcome is a deeper understanding by each of the leaders of the challenges faced by the community. The problems and solutions identified by each leader are often specific to that community and the community entry process has helped the Red Cross to identify the best approach to ensure its acceptance within the community.

As the SARCS field workers deepened their relationship with community leaders, the National Society realized how important it is for community leaders to know and trust its field workers. The SARCS community representatives' trust-building approach ensures that community leaders are aware of the background of all field workers present within their community and have their contact details.

Ensuring coherent action between governance volunteers and senior management

The SARCS leadership found that it was very important for governance and management structures and individuals to be in agreement about the direction that the Society was taking and for them to work hand in hand.

One of the key lessons reported by the SARCS² was that standard operating procedures are not an "optional extra." A lack of clear and widely-disseminated standard operating procedures meant that the national, provincial and local teams had, at times, to institute procedures and processes in isolation of each other. Combined with a lack of a clearly-defined hierarchical structure, this made coordination and management difficult.

² 7th Pan African Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 19 to 22 October 2008, Report of working group 2, *Mitigating the humanitarian consequences of violence in urban settings: the South African experience*.

Former Acting Secretary General, David Stephen, who was heading the SARCS at the time of the xenophobic attacks, mentioned that working with National Society governance structures and members to plan for situations before they occurred paved the way for rapid and sound decision-making because everyone was informed and could voice concerns during the analysis. He further highlighted the importance of involving governance in the process at all stages. If branch governance leaders had received directives without adequate consultation in the analysis and planning stages, implementation blockages could have resulted.

Involving governance members in all stages of the response, including the planning, paved the way for rapid and sound decision-making during the response.

“Synergy of approach, process and action between headquarters and the branches is crucial to ensure consistent positioning of the National Society at all levels.”

David Stephen, Former Acting Secretary General,
South African Red Cross Society

Strengthening internal communication on the Movement to produce strong “ambassadors”

Mandisa Kalako-Williams, former Secretary General of the SARCS, noted the importance of strengthening the National Society’s capacities through continuous internal communication and collective engagement in the planning and implementation processes. Internal communication on the mandate of the National Society and the Movement components, their activities, the importance of applying the Fundamental Principles and use of the emblem was recognized as an ongoing process, not something to be conducted only during the induction process. Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of building human resource competencies, so that staff and volunteers possess the knowledge and skills to become Red Cross representatives or “ambassadors” who can help to position the National Society so that it gains increased acceptance at all levels of society.

Issue 2 Acceptance of the individual

Safer Access Framework element IV

IV



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.

Community volunteers at the SARCS reported that it was not always easy to separate their personal identity as Red Cross volunteers from their identity as individuals living in their home communities because both they and their families were part of the context. In the case of the response to the xenophobic violence, some of them were asked, “Why, as South Africans, are you helping foreign nationals, when these are the very people causing the problems?”



SARCS volunteer coordinates his next steps with his colleagues.

Strategies adopted

Preparation of community volunteers

The SARCS views its community volunteers, who adhere to and promote the Fundamental Principles, as a primary means of building trust and relationships within the community.

The SARCS saw the importance of community volunteers being viewed not only as part of a response mechanism, but rather as the primary means of building trust and relationships within the community. Information on the Movement's Fundamental Principles was disseminated to the affected communities and community volunteers were taught how to be guided by those Principles and to apply them in their decision-making processes and response activities.

The SARCS had invested a substantial amount of time and effort in developing its emergency response structures, which included the provision of training, uniforms and proper identification documents for all its volunteer response teams. When compiling the lessons learned from the 2008 response, volunteers also noted that while it was important to understand the Fundamental Principles and to translate them into action in their daily work and life, it was equally important to know the other Movement policies and widely accepted humanitarian standards. For example, during the xenophobic attacks, community volunteers felt challenged when, as they distributed relief goods, they realized that the displaced foreign nationals knew more about the Sphere Project³ than they did.

Prior to the 2008 xenophobic violence the SARCS had provided some ad hoc training in order to better prepare its volunteers to respond appropriately in violent situations. Following the 2008 experience, this preparedness training has been mainstreamed into the training curricula of all community programmes.

³ The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 2011, www.sphereproject.org.

WORKING TOGETHER AS A MOVEMENT

The SARCS took the operational lead in the humanitarian response to the xenophobic violence, with the guidance and support of both the ICRC and the International Federation. Although not without its challenges, working together with other Movement components and leveraging the strength of their complementary capacities enabled the SARCS to develop a strong response profile.

Joint Movement analysis of the context was carried out and the information gathered was shared by each component of the Movement. The SARCS was able to contribute the information and perspectives reported by the field teams during the regular teleconferences set up to receive and share information between branches, provinces and the national office. The SARCS found that greater objectivity resulted from this process of complementary Movement analysis and that it proved beneficial in balancing the often understandably subjective views of the operational teams.

Drawing on their complementary capacities, the Movement components worked together in areas such as joint Movement analysis, which strengthened the SARCS response.

The SARCS did not have a crisis communications strategy in place at the time of the outbreak of violence, nor did it have enough communications personnel in the Society as a whole to be able to handle the intense media interest and scrutiny from around the world. The International Federation's Southern Africa Zone office handled much of the communications work at the start of the operations, writing news articles and media releases and assisting in the media conferences until a local communications adviser was hired by the SARCS to assume those responsibilities.

FIGURE 3: THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

HUMANITY	IMPARTIALITY	NEUTRALITY	INDEPENDENCE	VOLUNTARY SERVICE	UNITY	UNIVERSALITY
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.	It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.	In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.	The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.	The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.	There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout the territory.	The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

OUTCOMES OF ITS SUCCESS

Thanks in part to the success of the response and the strengthened community relations achieved by the SARCS during the period of violence, discussions initiated with the government in 1999 made significant progress and led to the signing in 2010 of a memorandum of understanding for disaster and emergency response. In 2008 the SARCS was also invited to join the national Inter-Ministerial Committee on International Humanitarian Law and is now a member. Furthermore, during the 2010 football World Cup hosted by South Africa, the SARCS was fully endorsed by the South African Department of Health as one of several first-aid providers.



Christopher Black/Federation

SARCS health worker provides assistance to a young patient under the watchful eye of his mother.

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



ICRC