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REDR AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

LEARN,
UNLEARN,
RELEARN

*Innovative and intuitive problem solving
and learning to bring about a
whole-of-organisation response*

Action Review Report

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COVID-19 ACTION REVIEW

Summary of findings and recommendations

Findings

COVID-19 has disrupted the RedR Australia business model and in so doing, has opened up new ways of working. In response RedR Australia maximised its resources to stage a whole-of-organisation response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The response has been flexible and agile and has demonstrated RedR Australia's commitment to the humanitarian principles in a scaled up way.

Data-driven decision making

1. Updated financial modelling, scenario analyses and risk assessments and lessons from Ebola and other pandemics underscored data-driven decision making about reprioritising forecasted expenditure and expenditure lines; informed discussions about the cost implications of moving to a remote deployment model; and opened up opportunities to revisit RedR Australia's business model.

Organisational resilience

2. COVID-19 ground-tested operational processes and systems while operating under stress to demonstrate the robustness of RedR Australia's risk management framework. New insurance arrangements mean that RedR will be more resilient in the current and in future pandemic responses.

3. COVID-19 has highlighted the vulnerability of dependence on a single donor and the need to aggressively identify and pursue long-term high value strategic partnerships that concurrently align with RedR Australia's mandate, open up new ways of working in the face of the global pandemic and offer financial sustainability.

Retaining and extending the Australia Assists footprint

4. The Operations Team have overcome considerable barriers to retain and extend the Australia Assists' footprint. They achieved these gains through a willingness to rethink recruitment and deployment systems and processes, while the crisis emerged. For example, the team reached out to source talented local and regional deployees in Indonesia and Vanuatu, Fiji and Jordan. A fast track provisional roster was established for level-1 security deployments (either Pacific-based or working remotely). Standing operating procedures were adapted to support remote deployments.

5. RedR was able to build on the Standby Partnership mechanism to facilitate deployments, particularly in the initial response. At the same time, there was an acceleration of the mobilisation of regional and local deployments, including through RedR International. A set of metrics to monitor and assess the effectiveness and efficiency of remote deployments will be important if RedR considers their integration into the roster structure into the future. It will also be important to assess whether or not the response has detracted in any way from RedR Australia's commitments to directly supporting local government agencies and civil society organisations.

The RedR training function

6. Training has always been central to the RedR business model both in terms of its role in the supply of training to the humanitarian sector and its centrality to placement on the roster. COVID-19 has uncoupled the links between training and the roster. The inability to deliver training will require RedR Australia to rethink its rigorous roster recruitment process. Recent efforts to reactivate planning for a Pacific Essentials of Humanitarian Practice (EHP) program towards strengthening the humanitarian sector in the Pacific and thoughts about the delivery of regional training to UN and humanitarian agencies could lead to new funding opportunities.

New opportunities have opened up

7. RedR Australia's engagement during the Australian 2019/2020 bushfires and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, have opened up the possibility of engaging in civil-military programming. There is also 'new' thinking about working differently across RedR International. A recent Partnership Agreement established with RedR Indonesia has significant potential for RedR Australia to support provincial and regional response capacities in Indonesia, to expand its influence across ASEAN and thus to potentially expand RedR Australia's funding base.

New Ways of Working

8. Staff have delivered on their commitments while working from home and have also made progress on pieces of work that had previously been put to one side. A team was activated to ensure the Melbourne and regional offices and staff were safe, secure and resourced appropriately. This helped ensure staff felt connected to each other, to the mission and to RedR Australia's COVID-19 response. The People and Culture team played an important role in supporting staff well-being. Staff noted that working from home requires new management and relationship competencies.

9. The Review has highlighted that women and men have experienced the COVID-19 crisis in different ways. At a time of significant institutional change, it is important to consider the gendered dimensions of new policies and work arrangements and other organisational decision making.

Communications

10. The Communications Team have enhanced RedR agility, efficiency and impact through Australia Assists program communications. A 'Communications Hub' has been developed that has streamlined approval processes for external communications about the Australia Assists program and allows the team to respond quickly and professionally to media requests and to ad-hoc requests from DFAT for communications material and to secure coverage of the program on ABC and SBS.

Remote deployments

11. RedR has initiated remote deployments for the first time. The effectiveness of these is yet to be established. Lack of access to colleagues and face-to-face relationships were identified as the most significant negative factor impacting on establishing effective partnerships when working remotely. While a majority (70%) of host agencies reported that the remote deployment was working, 20% reported they would not accept a remote deployment again and 35% percent with reservations. Working remotely places greater responsibility on managers, partners and deployees alike. There are opportunities to consolidate lines of communication with partner agencies and strengthen relationship building and boundary management in support of remote deployments.

12. While this Review provides some early indication of emerging lessons, the large number of remote deployments in the last months of the Review means that lessons around the effectiveness of these new deployment types will be indicative at best. There is a need to develop measures to assess not only the effectiveness of specific deployments but more importantly the effectiveness of different deployment types and mechanisms.

Priority recommendations to support adaptive organisational development

1. Draw on the factors and underlying competencies identified in the report to review the selection criteria and interview formats used when recruiting specialists for remote deployment.

2. Explore new opportunities to extend RedR Australia's training model through opportunities such as a Pacific EHP program, regional training programs for UN agencies and the newly-formed RedR Indonesia Partnership.

3. Develop agile regional strategies that ensure the identification and retention of a balanced portfolio of partnerships:

   - that are more resilient to sudden crises and better positioned to be able to retain and host surge deployees at time of crisis; and,

   - that enable RedR to concurrently deliver on immediate surge outputs and service and protect medium to longer term resilience and recovery outcomes.

4. Develop metrics to support remote deployment effectiveness:

   - draw on the findings of the Review to develop a set of metrics to support assessment of the effectiveness of remote deployments and the conditions in which these deployments deliver greatest impact and value for money.

A collective response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an era-defining challenge to public health, to global economies and to humanity. RedR Australia quickly recognised that how it responded to the crisis matters. RedR took a decision early on to stand beside its global partners and to keep deployed specialists in the field, while not compromising on duty of care commitments to its staff, deployees and partners. This decision was made in the context of acute logistic and political constraints and a contraction of the humanitarian space brought about the closing in of borders and diminishing mobilisation options.

COVID-19 has thrown everyone into unknown territory and highlighted the highly complex and interconnected nature of today's world. There are no easy answers. The situation continues to evolve globally as well as uniquely in different locations. Simple, business-as-usual solutions will fail within this complexity.[1] What is required is organisational and programmatic agility based on innovative, intuitive and evidence-based problem solving and learning to bring whole-of-organisation responses.

The report examines the extent to which RedR has been able to deliver a safe, effective, efficient and timely response to COVID-19.[2] The Review has been both developmental (action research to provide real time feedback to inform the adaptation and development of interventions in a complex and fluid context); and summative (to explore programmatic and institutional outcomes and decision making).

This report describes how RedR Australia utilised its resources to stage a whole-of-organisation response to the operational and programmatic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.
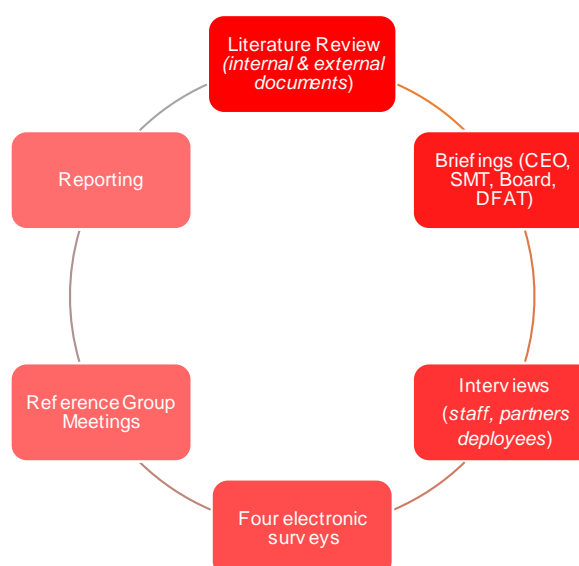
At the time of writing this report, the situation continues to evolve both in Australia and in the countries where RedR deploys specialists, and there are lessons and recommendation pertinent to support further learning and to retain organisational resilience and agility moving forwards.

> The consultants note that this Review is about Management Outcome 5 of the Australia Assists theory of change (Annex I), which addresses RedR Australia's management capability.

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[1] Darian Stibbe. 2020, 'Fighting side-by-side against COVID-19. *The Partnering Initiative*: Fighting-side-by-side

[2] Action Review of RedR Australia's Response to COVID-19: Evaluation Plan (April 2020)

Fig 1: RedR Covid-19 Response

Total Deployments by Region

	1st March	14th July	Pre-deploy
Total	41	63	9
Asia	10	11	4
Pacific	19	32	5
MENA	12	17	-
Europe	4	2	-
Caribbean	-	1	-

Partner Profiles - Organisations

	1st March	14th July	Pre-deploy
Total	22	25	8
UN SBP	10	13	4
Govt org	9	9	4
Civil society	3	3	-

Partner Profile by Region March 1st

	UN SBP	Govt org	Civil society
Total	16	8	3
Asia	8	-	-
Pacific	2	7	3
MENA	6	1	-
Europe	-	-	-
Caribbean	-	-	-

Partner Profile by Region July 14th

	UN SBP	Govt org	Civil society
Total	24	10	3
Asia	8	1	-
Pacific	7	9	3
MENA	7	-	-
Europe	1	-	-
Caribbean	1	-	-

Partner Profile by Region (Predeployments) July 14th

	UN SBP	Govt org	Civil society
Total	4	4	-
Asia	3	1	-
Pacific	1	3	-
MENA	-	-	-
Europe	-	-	-
Caribbean	-	-	-

Total Deployments by Gender

	1st March	14th July	Pre-deploy
Total	41	63	9
Male	23	31	5
Female	18	32	4

Remote Deployments - Total 31

	Active	Predeployment to WFH
Total	31	3
Asia	7	3
Pacific	14	-
MENA	7	-
Europe	2	-
Caribbean	1	-

Repatriated Deployees - Total 16

	Over 65	Host-elected	Self-elected
Total	4	2	10
Asia	2	1	5
Pacific	2	-	4
MENA	-	1	1
Europe	-	-	-
Caribbean	-	-	-

Deployees Pivoted to Covid-19

	% of Deployees
Total	66.65%
Completely	14.50%
Partially	21.70%
Covid ToR	30.45%
No change	33.35%

Funding Profile

	1st March	14th July	Pre-deploy
AusAssists	90.25% *	95.25% *	100% *
Cost Share (AA)	16.20%	8.35%	-
DFID	7.30%	3.15%	-
UNFPA	2.45%	1.60%	-

Findings

Setting the agenda for a people-centred response

COVID-19 has required RedR Australia staff to continue supporting its partners, while also living the response at home in Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa. Ensuring that staff in the Melbourne office and the two regional offices in Fiji and Jordan were safe and secure and ensuring that staff had a sense of purpose in the response effort have been equally important considerations in the RedR Australia response effort.

Placing duty of care front and centre

The Board drew parallels with their experience during the Ebola crisis where the context, risks and constraints required regular assessment and informed progressive (staggered) decision-making. At that time RedR Australia was under considerable pressure to deploy even though it could not ensure emergency evacuations: "*while we were being pressed to go in-country, we refused to do so until we were able to satisfy our duty of care obligations.*" In that instance RedR Australia initially deployed specialists into Geneva to help shape the global response and later deployed into the three most-affected countries. Duty of Care was thus front of mind for the Board during the COVID-19 response.

1. Doing nothing is not an option — strategy and risk management.

The period leading up to and immediately following WHO declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic was marked by low levels of certainty and lack of confidence across all sectors. Lessons from the Ebola, Avian-flu and SARS provided some confidence. So too did a previous strategic decision to strengthen RedR Australia's operational systems architecture and data-driven decision making[3]. These two factors positioned the team to work through the operational and organisational disruptions posed by COVID-19.

Immediate concerns were shaped by repatriation imperatives and stay-go decisions. For RedR Australia, doing nothing was not an option – hence the decision to maintain commitments to operational partners and 'to keep people in the field' as long as there would be no compromise to their safety.[4] RedR communicated with deployees about the risks and potential consequences linked to COVID-19, including choices related to remain in the field or to repatriate. Four deployees deemed to be at higher risk (those with underlying health issues and those over 65 years of age) and two deployees whose host agency demobilised were repatriated. Ten deployees self-selected to repatriate for personal reasons.

The question of insurance coverage for RedR Australia's people (field staff and deployees) was a critical block. RedR Australia's insurer committed to maintaining medical evacuations and/or emergency extractions for deployees already in the field, but not for new deployments. Discussions with the Standby Partnership's (SBP) Steering Committee and humanitarian partner organisations at home revealed that all SBP's were facing similar constraints. The inability to move RedR Australia's people and assets was exacerbated by rapidly evolving travel bans and airspace closures. In parallel, DFAT was focussed on a massive consular effort and ordered a hold on mobilisation as Australia worked through its own domestic scenarios and capability while concurrently pivoting the Australian Aid program as the pandemic rolled across the world. This contributed, initially at least, to the uncertainty. Through the SBP, RedR Australia identified and engaged a specialist broker to assist with the procurement of additional insurance coverage to safeguard operations, while also liaising with the Australian government to identify potential pathways through the country's ongoing travel ban.

A critical task at this time was also to validate and document the due diligence process followed to identify an alternative insurance broker. This was essential to provide the Board Audit and Risk Committee with

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[3] In mid-2019, RedR moved to cloud based information management and operational systems which were able to better facilitate remote working and management approvals.

[4] OCHA has outlined the costs of doing nothing. See: Omtzigt, D-J & Pople, A. 2020. The cost of doing nothing: The price of inaction in response to the COVID-19 crisis. UNOCHA 2 July 2020. At: UNOCHA-Cost-of-inaction.pdf

the data to assess and approve the additional cover before asking DFAT, as primary funder, to sign off on the additional costs.

Once insurance coverage had been established and approved (early June 2020), challenges around the movement of people persisted. With governments in lockdown, there was continued lack of clarity about securing visas, travel permissions and quarantine requirements. The need to continue to assess options for mobilisation continues to this day due to ongoing multi-country travel and flight restrictions.[5]

Throughout this period there were spirited internal discussions about not letting the sense of urgency override engagement with host agencies in identifying and characterising their strategic deployment priorities and RedR Australia's commitment to supporting local partners. These conversations were important, as they tested the values underpinning RedR's humanitarian principles.

The COVID-19 response has ground tested RedR Australia's operations and systems while operating under stress and demonstrated that its risk management framework is robust. The new insurance arrangements will mean that RedR will be more resilient in the current and future pandemic responses.

2. Supporting robust financial planning and decision making

As the pandemic unfolded, the rapidly changing circumstances created fiscal uncertainty. Forecasted deployments, training and travel were put on hold. The cost of repatriation of deployees, a reduction in cost sharing capability and continuing constraints on re-launching training activities created budget pressure. The rapidly changing context required RedR to develop extensive financial modelling, scenario analyses and risk assessment. These data informed discussions with DFAT about reprioritising forecasted expenditure and personnel into FY21 and the cost implications of moving to a remote deployment model.

Importantly, and at the outset of the pandemic, a further four-year extension of the Australia Assists Contract was being negotiated. This created further uncertainty and posed additional questions about what commitments could RedR make to deployees and partners in the absence of a secured forward contract. Finalisation of contract negotiations were completed in June 2020.

One, as yet unresolved tension, relates to changes in the remuneration schedule for RedR deployees working remotely. A deployee survey highlighted that 75% felt adequately supported by RedR. However many expressed concerns about the level of compensation to cover the costs associated with living and working remotely from Australia and the loss of tax exemption. A recently commissioned review of the RedR deployee remuneration framework[6] will include an analysis of remuneration for all deployments.

> *'Great support from my deployment coordinator through regular phone conversations, open communication etc. I feel comfortable to reach out to RedR when needed and to date have always received adequate support.'*
>
> *RedR Deployee*

3. Achieving deployments when surge can't surge

The Operations Team had to manage conversations with partners, donors and deployees about continuing and emerging priorities and the impact of COVID-19 on deployments. This work was time consuming but necessary. Rapidly evolving travel bans, airspace closures and restrictions on insurance markets all called

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[5] WFP established a hub system to enable humanitarian flights but availability of links via commercial or charter flights remain unclear.

[6] This Review is being undertaken in line with the recommendations of the Australia Assists Mid Term Review, 2019.

for innovative operational problem solving from an early stage and prompted the team to re-evaluate the criteria it was using for recruitment and deployment. In parallel, work was going on to support deployees working remotely and facilitating repatriation. At the same time, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold hit the Pacific Islands resulting in the need to identify a response.

At the outset of the pandemic there was a temporary halt of all new deployments while RedR assessed risk, repatriated those at risk and sought DFAT approval for alternative deployment types[7]. This resulted in 10 pre-deployments being cancelled. This had implications for host organisations with respect to achieving previously-planned outcomes. There were also personal implications for the deployees. A policy was put in place to reimburse deployees for out of pocket expenses. Of the 10 roles that were terminated, 50% of these (5 deployees) are now are working remotely. These deployee roles however have been totally pivoted to the COVID-19 response.
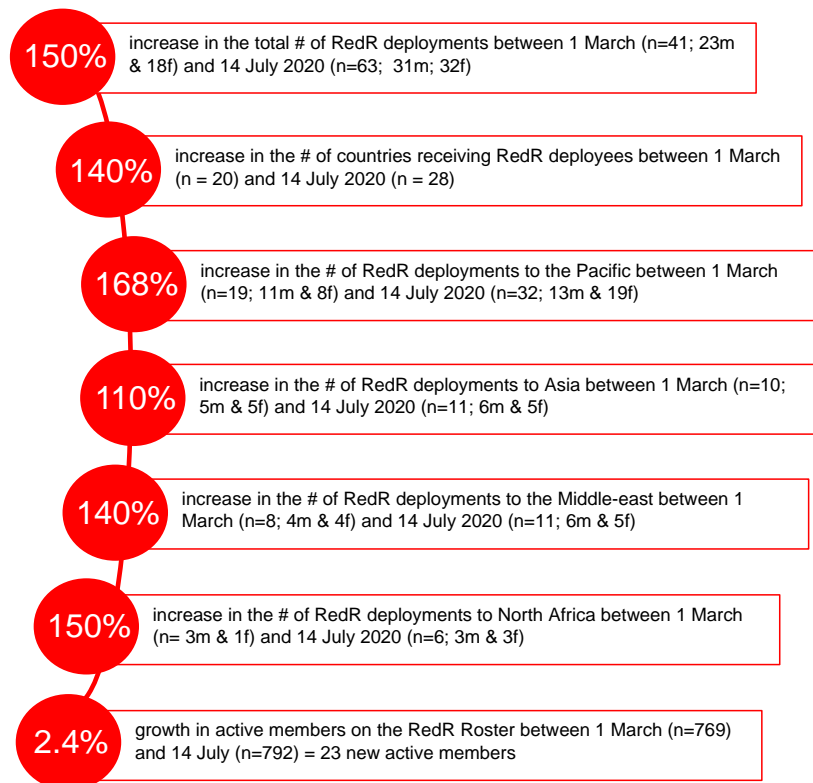
The recruitment and deployment team overcame considerable barriers to retain and extend the Australia Assists footprint (Fig. 2). They achieved these gains through a willingness to review and rethink recruitment and deployment systems and processes. Examples of actions taken to facilitate new recruitment modalities are, first, DFAT was approached and approved the reallocation of Australia Assists funds (overseas development funds) to support at-home, remote deployments.

Second, RedR Australia addressed roster shortfalls (specifically a lack of Public health specialists) by first reaching out to other Australian actors working in the humanitarian sector and to LinkedIn and other social media and professional networks to identify epidemiologists and other public health deployees and thus to diversify the roster.

Third, working with the Regional Managers and international RedR members, the team actively reached out to **source talented local deployments** (either in country or cross-region). This allowed for rapid access and impact by building on 'local' understanding of the context and networks.

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[7] Working from Home was approved by DFAT on March 18th.

Fig 2: Retaining and extending the Australia Assists footprint

150% increase in the total # of RedR deployments between 1 March (n=41; 23m & 18f) and 14 July 2020 (n=63; 31m; 32f)

140% increase in the # of countries receiving RedR deployees between 1 March (n = 20) and 14 July 2020 (n = 28)

168% increase in the # of RedR deployments to the Pacific between 1 March (n=19; 11m & 8f) and 14 July 2020 (n=32; 13m & 19f)

110% increase in the # of RedR deployments to Asia between 1 March (n=10; 5m & 5f) and 14 July 2020 (n=11; 6m & 5f)

140% increase in the # of RedR deployments to the Middle-east between 1 March (n=8; 4m & 4f) and 14 July 2020 (n=11; 6m & 5f)

150% increase in the # of RedR deployments to North Africa between 1 March (n= 3m & 1f) and 14 July 2020 (n=6; 3m & 3f)

2.4% growth in active members on the RedR Roster between 1 March (n=769) and 14 July (n=792) = 23 new active members

In order to support these new deployments, recruitment and deployment standard operational procedures were adapted. For example, a fast track provisional roster was established for level-1 security deployments (either Pacific-based or remote) by waiving the requirements for pre-participation on EHP or HEAT training and at least 1-year experience working on assignment outside Australia. A Deployee Arrival Checklist ('getting the information you need when working remotely') helped deployees and host agencies establish working and contextual relations. A 'Check-In Sheet' was developed that allowed RedR staff to engage with the host agency supervisors and deployees working remotely. This allowed RedR Australia to monitor progress and to trouble shoot as needed (something that not required when a deployee is being managed by the host agency).

The team also adopted TRELLO, a project management tool for tracking and managing workflows and Slack for intra-team information communications. These apps helped reduce the flurry of emails that occurred at the start of WFH. Daily team meetings were expanded to include the Regional Managers and Strategy and Risk staff which helped to keep the team on point, eliminated duplication and identified areas for collaboration.

While undertaking this work, several requests came to RedR to source deployees that could be mobilised through alternative avenues such as the DFAT Centre for Health Security and AUSMAT.[8] This effort highlights the importance of establishing protocols for alternate deployment mechanisms prior to a crisis.

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[8] Australia deploys doctors, nurses, paramedics and logisticians to provide people with life-saving medical care following a disaster in our region. These Australian Medical Assistance Teams (**AUSMAT**) are drawn from state and territory health services to deploy at short notice.

4. Disruption to RedR Australia's Training Model

Training has always been considered RedR Australia core business in its role of supplying training to the humanitarian sector. Training has also had a central role in the development of the roster. COVID-19 has disrupted this business model, uncoupled the links between training and the roster and derailed a significant funding stream.

> ### *A crisis within a crisis*
>
> The Pacific Island countries have largely been spared from COVID-19 outbreaks. But, they have had to manage the health crisis within existing and new humanitarian crises. In early April, TC Harold cut a path of destruction across the Pacific, affecting 30 per cent of Vanuatu's population alone. At the time TC Harold struck, Vanuatu had no cases of COVID-19 and had strict border controls in place. While tight border controls may have protected the nation from COVID-19, it reduced available paths to provide humanitarian assistance.
>
> RedR was able to support the humanitarian response to TC Harold by mobilising and pivoting deployees already in country and recruiting a local deployee to play a critical role in ensuring the delivery of humanitarian supplies initially into Vanuatu and then into outer islands. This work was further supported by the release of funds through the Emergency Assistance Fund.
>
> The Vanuatu Government was able to lead the response to TC Harold, supported by newly implemented preparedness. For RedR Australia, and many others in the sector, this validates the commitment to strong community preparedness and to seeking local solutions to local problems during disasters and to strengthening operational and organisational systems capabilities in the Pacific.

The inability to deliver training requires a rethink of RedR Australia's rigorous roster recruitment process, which has until now linked training, psychological assessment, selection, pre-deployment preparation, mobilisation and re-entry processes.

On a positive note, the pause in training delivery has provided a rare opportunity to appraise and update training course content, methodologies and SOPs; to focus on relationship management and business development; considering how RedR might diversify the Associate Trainer cohort (along gender and technical skill lines). RedR conducted online panel interviews with the Associate Trainers, some of whom were asked to also run an online training session, with the volunteers standing in as trainees. This gave the training team an opportunity to assess how different trainers performed online. The team is exploring alternative training models, including online delivery. It will be important though to fully understand the capability, connectivity and access implications and the investment costs of online learning and potential changes in demand.

Recent efforts to reactivate planning for a Pacific EHP program could lead to new opportunities to increase programmatic attention on strengthening the humanitarian sector in the Pacific and to provide training to government workers and policy makers.

5. Working from home – deployee experiences

Deployees who had elected to remain at their duty station were generally happy with the decisions they had made, though for some, decision making felt rushed and at times stressful. This is understandable, as they were making a decision about whether or not to remain in the field amidst rapidly changing restrictions around travel and movement, while also considering the impact of COVID-19 on their families and/or relationships 'back home'.

For all deployees, both working remotely from home base or WFH in field locations, lack of access to colleagues was identified as the most significant negative factor impacting on establishing partnership relations when working remotely. For deployees, there are rewards and supportive factors linked to face-to-face interactions, first, the ability to establish connections and trust through joint problem solving and mutual respect and social networks; and, second, the ability to build an understanding of the context and the influences of individual, organisational and social value systems. These supportive factors can be disabled when working remotely, which may impact on cultural and context competence.[9] Loss of these rewards may also affect deployee ability to draw on their typical coping strategies when working differently.

These findings were reinforced in a third data set exploring the impacts of new ways of working on partners in the Pacific and the Middle East and Africa (see Annex IIIc). While a majority (70%) of host agencies reported that remote deployment had worked or was working; 35% had some reservations about working remotely in the future and 20% reported they would not accept another remote deployment. For partners, the challenges that are linked to remote partnering can heighten anxiety about difference, power imbalance, hidden agendas, competitiveness and uncertainty about partnering itself.[10] **RedR Australia will need to strengthen lines of communication with partner agencies and capacities to support relationship building and boundary management.**

It is also important to understand the conditions within which remote deployments can deliver results and value for money. Discussions with staff, deployees and partners have identified a set of factors that can impact on productivity in remote deployment relationships and the underlying competencies that facilitate performance outcomes (Annex II). **RedR will be able to draw on these 'success factors' and competencies to review and update its selection criteria and interview formats when recruiting specialists for remote deployment. These data will also be of interest to other humanitarian actors managing remote deployments.**

6. Movement toward a 'content hub' communications approach

Understanding the need for DFAT to have quick and easy access to information, materials and assets related to deployees and deployments, the team established an entirely new 'content hub' system utilising the existing Brandfolder platform. This allows DFAT staff to easily access deployee bios, photos and videos, as well as infographics and briefing materials. The content hub has streamlined existing approval processes for external communications about the Australia Assists program. This allows the team to respond quickly and professionally to media requests and to ad-hoc requests from DFAT for communications material and to secure coverage of the program on ABC and SBS.

7. The impact on RedR Australia's footprint – balancing surge and longer-term strategy

Comparative sets of deployment data from March 1, and July 14, 2020 reveal the impact of COVID-19 in re-shaping the RedR Australia footprint (see Fig 1: RedR COVID-19 Response).

Perhaps one of the most significant impacts of COVID-19 has been the impact on the Australia Assists deployment profile. This included a pivot back to deployments via SBPs in the Pacific; a widening of the geographic footprint (including an increased number of deployments to the MENA region); and new deployments into the Caribbean and Europe. Despite the significant increase in Pacific deployments (32

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[9] RedR has previously recognised these factors as critically important in shaping the experience host agencies and local stakeholders have of deployees – see MEAL report: *Review of Australia Assists' Support to Disaster Preparedness and Management in the Pacific — From a Local Perspective*. Prepared by Katie Greenwood for RedR Australia (2019).

[10] Baksi, B., Russ, C., Lucht, L., Serafin, M. & Tennyson, R. 2018. The Remote Partnering Work Book Issue 1. *Partnership Brokers Association* (February 2018). At: https://partnershipbrokers.org/w/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Remote-Partnering-Work-Book_Feb-2018.pdf

on 14 July 2020 compared to 19 on 1 March 2020, through 2 and 7 UN partners respectively) there has been no change in the number of deployments to non-UN and non-government partners.

Amidst this shift in footprint and partnerships, there was a further shift in the nature of work undertaken by RedR deployees. By mid-July 2020, 66.75% of all deployments had COVID-19 preparedness, response or recovery as part of their ToR (see Fig 1). Further, none of 10 pre-deployments in place at the start of the pandemic have progressed against the longer term outcomes in their initial Terms of Reference (most of which focused on resilience and capability building).[11]

These regional and sectoral/thematic pivots demonstrate RedR Australia's capability to surge at times of crisis. But it also highlights the potential for longer term planning and response to be overshadowed in the face of a humanitarian crisis.

8. Local and regional deployments

In response to the recommendations made in the 2019 Australia Assists Mid Term Review, and in parallel to this Action Review, RedR is progressing work to more clearly define what localisation means for RedR and a mechanism like Australia Assists. COVID-19 has created an opportunity for RedR to test the localisation or regionalisation of deployments. In so doing it has cast light – once again – on the importance of diversifying and localising the roster and partnerships.

Interviews with local and regional deployees highlight that they feel they were able to mobilise rapidly, build rapport with their host agency and deliver on the expected outcomes, even while working remotely. Supporting factors were identified as language ability

A Ni-Vanuatu deployee is supporting the TC Harold response by facilitating the movement and clearance of international humanitarian supplies and ensuring that they make it to the right cluster and regional leads for distribution.

A deployee mobilised through RedR Indonesia, is coordinating the WASH cluster in Indonesia which has regular participation of up to 200 government and non-government actors.

Two more deployees were mobilised from within their regions in Jordan and Fiji and are supporting inclusive remote education for refugee communities and regional logistics capability and coordination across the Pacific.

and understanding of context (geographic and political nuance and policies) and culture and local norms. However, interviews also highlighted the importance of carefully assessing and managing when a local deployment may not be appropriate. There may be, for example, additional risks to the deployee, to RedR Australia or to the host agency, such as security, due diligence and relationship risks. What is clear is that in-field, humanitarian deployment experience and cultural competence are both critical factors in regional roles and deliver *credibility* with partners and posts.

Localisation of deployments is not an either/or proposition but rather should co-exist along other deployment types within the roster.

Importantly, a number of nuanced contextual factors should inform recruitment and deployment decisions including language and cultural competence, local knowledge, technical expertise, the need to challenge perceived ways working and/or local norms and practices. Annex V provides an overview of the contextual factors and competencies that may support effective local and remote deployments.

The opportunity, going forwards, will be (a) to invest in and work through the regional offices and to further tap into the RedR International network to recruit locally; and, (b) to capitalise on the intra-regional operationality that exists in the Pacific and the Middle East regions. Diversifying and localising the roster will require the organisation to retain flexible recruitment criteria and processes that are more inclusive and which allow local talent to shine. It is important to recognise that these are emergent approaches and

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[11] Five (5) of these have been deployed against COVID specific TORs to other partners.

currently based on values and principles. They are not yet supported by evidence that demonstrates their effectiveness or identifies the preconditions that allow these new forms of deployment to be successful (see section 11: MEAL).

Note: The Asia regional capability has retracted back to the operations team in Melbourne. While this 'retraction' delivers fiscal benefits in the short term, it will likely impact on RedR Australia's capability to strengthen partnership presence in the Asia region over the medium to long term. The strategic impact of this warrants consideration both in light of commitments to localisation as well as in the context of DFAT's recently promulgated *Partnership for Recovery* and its focus on the Indo Pacific region.

9. Mobilising RedR Australia's wider relationships

The SBP relationships

The COVID-19 response has demonstrated the value addition of RedR investments and engagement with the SBP Network. The SBP Network provided a space for partners to share challenges and seek and share solutions how to mitigate these (e.g. about insurance challenges and duty of care) which was important given the uncertainty created by COVID 19. With a seat in the Steering Committee, co-Chair of the MEAL Working Group, active participation in the Learning and Duty of Care Working Groups and responsibility for the management of the two SBP Secretariat positions, RedR Australia was strategically placed to influence the direction and outcome of the Network and to provide thought leadership and influence. The SBP network also provides a pathway for identifying potential opportunities for growth and expansion of the business model and strategic partnership relations; and opportunities to access cost-contributions.

> As the only SBP in the Asia-Pacific region, RedR has been able to insert the perspectives and the voices of the Pacific. Being at the table at this time, as an engaged partner, highlights RedR Australia's place within the global humanitarian agenda. Being in the conversation opens up access and credibility.

RedR International

RedR now has bilateral agreements with each RedR International member, and is therefore able to deploy from a wider and more localised pool of specialists, subject to roster criteria. This provides a foundation for RedR Australia to work with RedR Indonesia, RedR Malaysia and RedR India to strengthen the collective vision for regional resilience.

Amidst the COVID pandemic response, RedR brought about a new engagement with RedR Indonesia. Through collaboration overtime with RedR India and various donors, RedR Indonesia has supported the adaptation and roll out of locally-appropriate training materials to support emergency preparedness of, and to provide planning advice to national and provincial disaster management offices. These efforts align with the Indonesian government's intent to localise emergency preparedness and response capacities. They also uniquely position RedR Indonesia to support the Indonesian government's COVID-19 response.

The *RedR Indonesia-Australia Strengthening Community* partnership is funded through SIAP SIAGA, DFAT's bilateral disaster preparedness programme[12]. First, RedR Indonesia will deliver humanitarian training, roster management and advisory services to national and provincial disaster management organisations and to the civil society Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (FPRB) to prepare and respond to COVID-19. Second, RedR Australia will contribute to RedR Indonesia's organisational resilience and capacity through increased governance, operations and training capabilities.

The partnership aligns with DFAT priorities (per the recently-adopted *Partnerships for Recovery* Strategy) and Grand Bargain commitments and has the potential to deepen RedR Australia's commitment to

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[12] SIAP SIAGA is managed by Palladium.

localisation. Importantly, with Indonesia's policy of sovereignty in disaster response, decentralised governance and fiscal responsibility (including localised budget allocations for institutional strengthening), and Indonesia's positioning as a key responder in the region, this new collaboration has significant potential in terms of training and local deployments, as well as potential entry points into ASEAN regional networks and responses.

The considerations highlighted in sections 9 and 10 highlight the potential value of agile regional strategies that could ensure the identification and retention of a balanced portfolio of local, regional and global partnerships that would over time be more resilient to sudden crises and better positioned to be able to retain and host surge deployees at time of crisis.

It may now be appropriate – at least in the Pacific – to consider a flexible regional strategy that enables RedR to concurrently deliver on immediate surge outputs as well as medium to longer term resilience and recovery outcomes.

10. The role of MEAL in evidence-based decision-making

This Review was established to examine and document how RedR Australia's business systems and management capabilities have been tested by and adapted to a global crisis. The Review has been an honest and commendable effort on the part of RedR to draw lessons from the crisis as it has emerged. The findings will contribute to the body of evidence against Outcome 5, Programme Management, of the Australia Assists Program Logic.

As the Review winds up, we find ourselves in an ongoing crisis in which the shape and texture of the pandemic is playing out in different ways, both within Australia's own borders as well as within and across regional and international borders. It is now apparent that the situation is likely to continue for some time. We are working to and within a 'new normal', characterised by an ecosystem of fluid contexts.

What does this mean for RedR Australia's learning? Ultimately, it means that this field of learning has just begun and will continue. Different systems, operating simultaneously, may be required in different contexts. Learning cycles will likely be shorter and lessons will need to be actioned in a dynamic way, as contexts evolve. **This means that RedR will need to proactively consider what questions it needs to ask and what evidence it can collect to inform decision-making. These review findings can help to develop a set of metrics to support assessment of the effectiveness of local deployments and the conditions in which these deployments deliver greatest impact and value for money.**

Concluding remarks

To date RedR Australia has been able to maximise its resources to stage a whole-of-organisation response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The response has been flexible and agile and has demonstrated RedR Australia's commitment to the humanitarian principles in a scaled up way.

The challenges posed by COVID-19 have fore-fronted a number of questions related to international surge capacity and the relationships between the 'international' and 'local'. For RedR Australia, COVID-19 has created an opportunity to test the localisation agenda; stressed the importance of diversifying the roster; and given importance to progressing RedR Australia's strategic intent for a collective RedR International vision of regional resilience.

COVID-19 has also disrupted the RedR Australia business model. At the same time, it has opened up new ways of working, including a more flexible work environment: the opportunity to take advantage of the inter-operationality that exists across the Pacific region to accelerate localisation; and the delivery of regional training to UN and humanitarian agencies.

Assessing these offerings will require RedR leadership to critically review where it makes sense to renew (refresh and retain what continues to work well); where it makes sense to generate new ways of working; and where it makes sense to let go of ways of working that are no longer fit-for-purpose (either contextually or operationally or because they can be better sourced through collaborative partnerships). In response to these shifts, RedR Australia will need to reformulate its role to include not only program delivery (serving the DFAT contract) but also fundraising, remote technical services, advocacy and so on.

These conversations will be critical, but not always easy. Adaptive changes of this kind will challenge the status quo and, in some instances, will require people to work in new and strange ways, to let go of that which is familiar and to accept business as 'not usual'. Progressing the change agenda will generate, for some, a sense of loss and nostalgia for the past. It may generate backlash (resistance) to change. For others, it will generate excitement and an eagerness to get on board. It will be important that the RedR leadership engage with these differences in ways that are inclusive. Resistance is part of any organisational change process.[13] It will also be important that the leadership work collaboratively to address any backlash, while also encouraging inclusive dialogue and debate.[14]

A starting point will be to agree on the values that will underpin the new norm at RedR Australia. Mathew Clarke[15] provides a starting point. He suggests that "COVID-19 is pushing us to think about new humanitarian principles to direct our work". He proposes "more appropriate principles" based on equity (recognising that not all are equally affected and thus purposely avoiding deepening existing inequities); solidarity (conveying collective obligation to assist); compassion (connecting one human to another at a personal level); and, diversity (appreciating and holding ourselves accountable to the differences that exist within society). These are also the values that have driven RedR Australia's COVID 19 response to date.

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[13] (En)countering Resistance Strategies to Respond to Gender Equality Initiatives. VICHEALTH

Michael Flood. 2018 Managing Resistance to Gender Equality. Presented at *Managing resistance to gender equality for policy and practice*, VICHEALTH. 21 March 2018.

[14] Pushing back on organisational politeness, an antidote to moving ahead – see: Adam Kahane. 2004. *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities*. Penguin: Random House.

[15] Clarke, Mathew. 2020. We need new humanitarian principles in response to COVID-19. Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (April 27, 2020). At: https://centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/the-centre/news/we-need-new-humanitarian-principles-in-response-to-covid-19/

The Australia Assists Program Logic acts as RedR Australia's de facto Program Logic.

Annex II. Factors and competencies that facilitate remote deployment outcomes

Factors that can impact on productivity in remote deployment relationships are:

Partnering Relationships
▪Partner and deployee negotiate role clarity and partnership relationship expectations
The partner adopts an inclusive management style and keeps the deployee appraised of context and prior shifts

Context and cultural literacy
▪Deep understanding of context (geographic and political nuance and policies); connection to and empathy with culture and local norms; humility; and language fluency

Humanitarian deployment experience
▪Technical expertise and credibility is matched by the ability to work across boundaries and time zones and to negotiate multiple stakeholder needs in order to achieve results

Role Clarity
TOR is focussed and provides clarity around role expectations, while also allowing the deployee to work adaptively and relatively independently; expectations are re-set where an existing TOR has been refocused.

Risk management
Regular assessment and management of additional risks to the deployee, to RedR or to the host agency (e.g. security, due diligence and relationship risks).

Technology 'savvy'
▪As shaped by connectivity, access, reliability and experience and degree of comfort with working in virtual spaces.

Underlying competencies that support deployee effectiveness – in addition to technical expertise – are:

Competencies that facilitate deployee effectiveness

- 1.*Partnering skills* (establishing partnership agreements and negotiating role clarity & relationship expectations)
- 1.*Relationship management* (boundary management, communication skills, negotiating & influencing and trust building skills)
- 1.*Managing self* (coping with potential risks and isolation, cultural awareness and humility, and integrity)
- 1.*Inclusive management* (maintaining a 'presence' and managing multiple work stream demands)
- 1.*Managing for results* (getting the job done through planning and priority setting and critical thinking and problem solving)
- 1.*Active listening & reflection* (formulating clarifying and probing questions, synthesising and reframing)
- 1.*Learning agility* (flexibility, adaptability and managing complexity)
- 1.*Situational leadership* (recognising when to be directive, when to provide coaching support and when it is appropriate to delegate)

Annex III. Survey Results

IIIa: Deployee Survey Summary

IIIb: Partner Survey Summary