

## **RC/RC Training and Research Partnership on Substance Abuse**

### **Strategy paper 2014/2020**

The IFRC, the Italian Red Cross and the Villa Maraini Foundation, in response to high levels of drug use and related problems globally, have established a tripartite international partnership in substance abuse. The three institutions join efforts to maximize and leverage the expertise of each partner to support the RC/RC to expand comprehensive approaches to drug abuse, with a focus on harm reduction, and the fight against stigma and social exclusion.

The strategic paper of the Partnership is developed to give a guidance in its work in the area of substance abuse, during the period 2014/2020. Key activities directly contribute to support the Strategy 2020, the Strategic Operational Framework for Health (SoF) and the process of building resilience; support National Societies to enhance activities addressing and meeting basic needs of communities suffering from drug abuse, their access to health and education; eliminate health inequities and advocate for the respect of human rights.

#### ***Introduction***

Between 167 and 315 million people aged 15–64 are estimated to have used an illicit substance according to UNODC. This corresponds to between 3.6 and 6.9 per cent of the adult population. Around 14.0 million people between the ages of 15 and 64 are estimated to be users of injecting drugs, while 1.6 million people who inject drugs are living with HIV. These individuals are particularly vulnerable also to Hepatitis C and B (UNODC World Drug Report 2013).

IFRC is among few organisations providing prevention, treatment and care services for drug users using harm reduction approach. The interventions exemplify human rights in action by seeking to alleviate hazards faced by drug users, where needed, without distinction and without judgement.

The involvement of Red Cross Red Crescent to address drug related issues is dated back in 1922 during the Red Cross Conference of Asian Societies. Since then almost all global or regional conferences and meetings discussed the problems related to drug use.

In 1979, IFRC created a group of experts on substance abuse which met ten times during fourteen years, issuing a report for every meeting and promoting two RC/RC World Conferences on drugs, in Norway (1985) and in Spain (1989).

The Group also produced three handbooks, on drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

In 2002, IFRC endorsed a new HIV Policy that mandated harm reduction work with injecting drug users, and at the same time commissioned a major report “Spreading the light of science: Guidelines on harm reduction related to injecting drug use”, which was published in 2003 under the auspices of the Board’s HIV Governance Group.

In 2005, RC/RC, led by the Italian Red Cross, initiated the strong advocacy initiative to promote humanitarian drug policy in response to the health disaster caused by drug use and drug addiction. The document called Rome Consensus, signed by over 120 NSs, provides a framework that clearly lays out health principles and practices, information and research on drug consumption issues and best practices in drug policy responses and assist NSs in implementing effective actions and programmes within their communities.

In 2011, the Governing board meeting adopted a special decision on substance abuse to reinforce RC/RC response to drug related issues.

In 2012, IFRC signed a partnership agreement with UNODC to address the issues of drug use and related harm at the community level.

As for today several National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide have already initiated harm reduction strategies in collaboration with governments and other multilateral and nongovernmental organizations. Activities support drug users and advocate for the acceptance, introduction and maintenance of harm reduction programmes. Harm Reduction Projects demonstrate encouraging results in addressing the problem. Only in 2012, NSs reached in average 100,000 drug users with regular support and care.

Since 2004, Italian Red Cross and IFRC in collaboration with Villa Maraini are offering training services to National Societies and other partners. The Villa Maraini has become one of the leading centres in substance abuse treatment and prevention, serving as a reference within the Red Cross/Red Crescent and externally. It serves as a safe centre for those in need, working to mitigate the stigma and potential public health consequences of the spread of transmissible diseases as well as offering drug rehabilitation programmes.

### **Link with Strategy 2020**

Strategy 2020 recognizes the diverse health roles that Red Cross and Red Crescent play at community and country level. Community-based health programmes bring better health to disadvantaged and underserved populations. In their role as auxiliaries to governments, National Societies are engaged in the formal health system. In all these areas, we have a role to play in improving services, mobilizing the expertise of National Societies and supporting their work.

The Strategy sets following goals:

Strategic Aim 1: Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disasters and crises

Strategic Aim 2: Enable healthy and safe living

Strategic Aim 3: Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace

All three of the Strategic Aims include health. Activities addressing the problems related to drug users and harm reduction approach are clearly linked to all 3 strategic aims.

The goal of harm reduction strategies and approaches is to reduce the negative consequences of drug abuse, not to eliminate the use of licit or illicit drugs, minimising the risk of the client contracting infectious diseases, overdosing, or suffering other consequences related to the use of substances. These strategies save lives and diminish the likelihood of drug use problems for the individual, their families, and the surrounding community.

Table 1: The Hierarchy of Harm Reduction Objectives:



### THE HIERARCHY OF HARM REDUCTION OBJECTIVES IS:

- Enter into drug dependence treatment. Those offering long-term medications such as methadone maintenance are more effective.
- If drug dependence treatment is not an option, switch from injecting to non-injecting drug use.
- If injecting continues, always use sterile injecting equipment and do not share equipment or drug solutions.
- If it is not possible to use sterile injecting equipment clean and reuse your own equipment and do not share it.
- If sharing does occur, clean injecting equipment between each use (using bleach, for example). Do not share 'cookers', drug containers or filters used for injecting, and do not use or share water for rinsing or mixing.
- Avoid unprotected sex. Always use condoms.

**Link with the Strategic Operational Framework For Health (SoF)** prepared by the Global Health Team of IFRC

The Global Health Team of the IFRC based on the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement's past and current achievements in health and in line with Strategy 2020 developed the SoF. Through the SoF the GHT will continue to meet current programmatic needs while increasing quality and expanding our support to meet new challenges, including increased globalization and urbanization, infectious, non-communicable and neglected tropical diseases, chronic disease, inequitable access to healthcare, increasingly ageing populations and financial instability, reducing the availability of public and multilateral funding. People who use drugs and harm reduction remain one of the key priority.

The operational directions proposed are in five areas: (i) improve programming quality, (ii) work holistically as a Federation, (iii) improve communication and advocacy, (iv) scale up programming, and (v) maintain existing business and create new. In each of these areas, challenges have been identified, together with action that we propose to take to turn challenges into opportunities.

### Strategic Priorities of Training & Research Partnership on Substance Abuse

<p>(i) Improve programming quality</p>	<p>Provide high-quality trainings on a comprehensive harm reduction approach.</p> <p>Provide technical support towards developing capacity to implement harm reduction activities.</p> <p>Support National Societies to plan programmes in line with country priorities, policies and structures, and ensure tools and guidelines adapted to the local context.</p> <p>Built-in monitoring and evaluation capacity in order to provide evidence of programme effectiveness through development of new tools and technologies for data collection and reporting.</p> <p>Serve as a hub for research on harm reduction.</p> <p>Serve as a knowledge management centre: develop, translate and share models, tools and case studies that reflect best practices in harm reduction within and outside of the Movement.</p>
<p>(ii) Work holistically as a Federation</p>	<p>Work closely with, and facilitate collaboration with, National Societies and other partners.</p> <p>Expand collaboration with other departments of the Secretariat (youth, migration), RC/RC networks and collaborative centres.</p>

	<p>Establish a resource base of experts/expertise in the field of harm reduction to be available to National Societies wishing to undertake work in this area.</p> <p>Map existing activities and competencies in harm reduction.</p>
(iii) Improve communication and advocacy	<p>Ensure regular communication and internal RC/RC advocacy to keep harm reduction high in the RC/RC agenda.</p> <p>Strengthen and identify evidence-based advocacy to raise the profile of RC/RC at country and global levels through advocacy reports, case studies, representations at different forums.</p> <p>Support National Societies to build their own capacity in advocacy at country level.</p> <p>Support National Societies and IFRC to challenge policy makers, governments, donors to provide comprehensive prevention, treatment, care and support to drug users and their families.</p>
(iv) Scale up programming	<p>Identify different funding mechanisms to implement harm reduction activities at global, regional and country levels.</p> <p>Identify National Societies to be engaged with country level harm reduction networks of people living with HIV to plan activities together and expand the services.</p>
(v) Maintain existing business and create new, actively seeking alliances and partnerships	<p>Cooperate with key partners at global and country level dealing with harm reduction and other aspects of substance abuse prevention and mitigation.</p> <p>Strengthen existing partnerships and alliances, seek new, and improve partnership coordination to ensure harmonization and best use of available resources. This includes for Harm Reduction International, European Harm Reduction Network, UNODC, AIDS Alliance, GFATM and other key partners.</p>