**Remote Field Crisis Management**

Session Title: 1.3 Remote Crisis Management

Duration: 120 minutes

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| **Aim of the session** | | To provide NGO staff an overview of how to managing a crisis remotely | |
| **Objectives:**  By the end of this session participants will be able to: | | | |
| **Key Learning points:** | | | |
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| **Timing** | **What to do and say *(methodology)*** | | **What you need *(resources)*** |
| 20’ | Begin the session by using **Slide 2** to re-emphasise that we are discussing crisis management from the *remote management* perspective.  But, before we get to the discussion of how to structure and manage a remote crisis response, let’s discuss some of the characteristics of a crisis.  Ask the participants to discuss the following amongst themselves for a few minutes (**Slide 3**): ‘What are the key characteristics of a crisis?’After they have had a few minutes to discuss, take some responses and put them on a flipchart.  Be sure to cover the following:   * A crisis is a situation that *appears* to be beyond our ability to control. * It is typically accompanied by:   + a sense of being overwhelmed by rapidly occurring events,   + fragmented, incorrect or contradictory information,   + time pressures or constraints,   + lack of resources, and so on. * You may not be aware that a crisis is occurring until hours or even days have gone by. * Informed decisions making is often a challenge, as you cannot be sure you have all the facts before you need to make a decision. * You may receive communications from media representatives, family members of personnel involved or other concerned parties. * You will receive requests from HQ for updates and other information. * One of the key challenges when dealing with a crisis is that you tend to always be responding or reacting to events, rather than the other way around. It seems that every time you make a decision, something else happens that renders it useless or, potentially, adding to the crisis. | |  |
| 15’ | **Managing and Making Decisions During a Crisis**  EXPLAIN: Strong capacity for crisis response and preparedness is necessary in order to:  **1. Prevent (further) harm and ensure the health and/or safety of victim(s) and other staff affected by the crisis.**  The first hours following (the onset of) a crisis are often the most crucial, rendering instant reporting, a clear division of roles and responsibilities, and fast decision-making an absolute necessity. This requires **comprehensive preparedness: protocols and** flowcharts in place, and relevant staff trained and available.  **2. Assure families of victims and agency staff of a responsible and effective response.**  Obtaining and maintaining the confidence of families of victims is important in terms of establishing good relations and making sure all stakeholders are “on board” during and after the incident. This naturally also applies to agency staff.  **3. Ensure continued organisational management and programme continuity**  Crisis management, especially for enduring incidents (for example, abductions), is resource-intensive. Crisis planning and preparedness will mitigate the risk of unnecessary distraction of senior management, thus contributing to the ability of agencies to continue functioning. In addition to mitigating the impact of a crisis on organisational management, good crisis preparedness contributes to the ability of agencies to continue programme activities during a crisis and/or re-start operations in its aftermath.  **4. Fulfill organisational responsibilities and reduce the risk of litigation/liability claims.**  Contractual obligations and related litigation risks vary by country, since they are subject to national legislation. Agencies must ensure that they are fully aware of relevant legal labour frameworks, including those for national staff in each country of operation. Very important for INGOs.  **5. Safeguard organisational image and reputation.**  Inadequate crisis response, or perceived mishandling of a crisis (in the eyes of media and/or family), can negatively affect organisational image, with myriad consequences in countries of operation and at the international level (fundraising, recruitment, etc.). Again, a strong and professional crisis response will help to mitigate this risk.  A **caveat: safeguarding organisational reputation,** while an important consideration, should never take precedence over the safety and well-being of staff, which remains the primary objective of crisis management within humanitarian agencies.  EXPLAIN: **Key Pillars of Crisis Response.**  Key Pillars of Crisis Response for an appropriate response to and management of a crisis must be considered. It is essential that a number of key facets are in place and managed professionally:   * Communications and Reporting * Crisis Management Team (CMT) * Management of the crisis and relevant operations as required * HR and family support * Media management * Post-Incident Follow-Up | | Flipchart and markers |
| 25’ | **CMTs and FCMTs**  Use **Slide 6** to revisit the structure/relationship between the CMT/IMT and the FCMT.  Use **Slide 7** to outline the objectives of each crisis management team (CMT, IMT and FCMT). Reinforce the fact that the objectives of each of the structures are the same, but geared toward the appropriate level of response. Thus, the CMT is establishing an organised approach across the international organization, while the FMT is establishing an organised approach locally. It’s the same objectives, only at a different levels.  We’ve discussed the objectives, but what are the actual activities that these teams will do? Discussion: in small groups with your neighbours, ask participants on one side of the room to take 5 minutes to discuss what actions and activities the CMT will actually do; ask participants on the other side of the room to take 5 minutes to discuss what actions and activities the FCMT will actually do.  Start the debrief by flipcharting some of the responses from the CMT side of the room. After you have a good solid list, debrief with the FCMT side of the room. It is likely that they will have many of the exact same activities. When they say something similar to what is on the CMT flipchart, circle that action/activity with a different colour marker. Put the FCMT activities that weren’t mentioned by the CMT group on a separate flipchart.  Ask the group: “If so many of the activities are the same, what is the difference?” The point of this exercise is to highlight that many of the *activities* will be same. Both groups will be doing the same activities, but for different audiences and will different levels of authority:   * The FCMT will be gathering info in order to inform the IMT and the CMT; the CMT will be gathering info in order to make strategic decisions. * The FCMT will be communicating with local partners; the CMT will be communicating with international partners * Etc.   Show **Slide 8** to reinforce these points. | | Flipchart and markers |
| 45’ | **Groupwork**  Let’s spend the final part of this session discussing some of the specific tasks and challenges of remote field crisis management. What are some of the key differences and challenges when working remotely?  **Slide 9:** Divide the participants into six groups and give each group approximately 10-15 minutes to discuss the ways that managing their assigned area during a crisis will be different for a remote management scenario rather than a non-remote one.  Ask each group to present their discussions (no more than five minutes each).  Some possible answers are:  GROUP 1. Finance mgmt/cash flow   * Language barrier: difficult to manage info and lack of info flow * No transparency (what is actually going on?) * Physically difficult to get money in * Different financial rules for different countries (for example HQ versus the field country)   GROUP 2. Logistics   * Vehicles * Available space * Right supplies in right places * Locating staff/evacuation   GROUP 3. Communications   * Need for alternative comms equipment * Media * Comms with border points * Communicating locally with families, partners, staff, etc   GROUP 4. Reputational issues   * Dealing with media * Dealing with local stakeholders * Difficult to understand impact * Language * Social media   GROUP 5. External stakeholders   * Time delays * Information: What is true and what is rumour? * Credibility and trust: remote team needs to be trusted   GROUP 6. Interlocutors (“outside helpers”) It may be necessary to define ‘interlocutors’.   * Ensure neutrality * What is their background? Who are their connections? What is their reputation? * Can be difficult to find the right person * What is their knowledge of the NGO? * Extortion? * Language barrier | |  |
| 15’ | **Q&A and Close**  Take a few outstanding questions.  Close by explaining that one of the key challenges when dealing with a crisis is that you tend to always be responding or reacting to events, rather than the other way around. It seems that every time you make a decision, something else happens that renders it useless or, potentially, adding to the crisis. Close with **Slide 10** on the Principles of Crisis Management.  **Be Prepared** – While you can never anticipate what form a crisis may take, you can take certain measures to ensure that you are better prepared. NOTE: This is the subject of another lesson at the end of the training]. These include establishing and exercising the CMT (see below) using simulated crises.  **Regain the Initiative** – The best thing you can do to begin *regaining* the initiative is to “declare a crisis”. This will activate the crisis management system and put everyone in the correct mindset. When remote, we can assist my gathering as much information as you can to help start making decisions. When in doubt, consider the worst-case scenario.  **Manage your time –** Time is of the essence. You will likely face multiple demands for your time and attention and these must be managed effectively if you are going to get the situation under some semblance of control. In some cases, you will need to be very direct and firm with people attempting to monopolize your attention. Focus on the things that matter first. Reports and other administrative issues are secondary to decision making. You need to focus on dealing with the initial deluge and regaining the initiative. The situation will quiet down at some point.  **Keep People Informed** – While you don’t want to be a slave to providing updates to your CMT and supervisor and other concerned parties every ten minutes, remember that your colleagues need an update at regular intervals. It does not matter if you have nothing to update. In a crisis situation, even being told by the person in authority that they are not sure what is going on but that they are working on it, is reassuring to your team.  **Maintain Outward Appearances** – Pay attention to how you present yourself to others. Don’t panic. Panic is infectious. As a leader in the field, the absolute worst thing you can do is show that you are scared, confused or starting to panic. Never, ever run anywhere. Walk quickly if you must, but if your staff (even other managers) see you running around like a proverbial headless chicken, they will start to panic themselves.  Mention that they will have an opportunity to practice some of these things tomorrow during the simulation. | |  |

**Supporting information for facilitators:**