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**Session 4:
Economic Growth and Decent Work for All (SDG 8) & Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9)**

[Conference Program - 2022 - DIHAD](#)

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<p>1 – Cover</p> 	<p><u>Access to technology for delivery of essential services in conflict settings</u></p> <p>Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity for the International Committee of the Red Cross to bring our insights on humanitarian needs in conflict into this discussion.</p> <p>Today I would like to address the challenge of building, maintaining or preventing damage to infrastructures for delivery of essential services during situations of conflict.</p>
<p>2 -The ICRC and access to essential services</p> 	<p>The International Committee of the Red Cross – as a humanitarian actor present in more than 100 countries with 20'000 staff members - is taking steps to help reinforce people’s ability to become resilient in conflicts that are more and more protracted in time and affect large and complex urban settings.</p> <p>Infrastructures like hospitals, water supply systems and power grids should continue serve the civilian population during crisis that last for many years, when financial resources for operation and maintenance are very limited, purchase of technical components and spare parts is constrained by sanctions and technical staff do not have opportunities for trainings.</p>

	<p>It is, therefore, a humanitarian imperative that access to technology and knowledge to build and operate infrastructures for essential services must be guaranteed at any time and given also to populations living in the last mile settings that risk to remain on the margins of response plans and other public health interventions. Like people that are displaced, detained, or living in areas not controlled by the same side as well as the communities that host refugees and share their resources.</p>
<p>3 – Protection of infrastructures</p> 	<p>The protection of infrastructures for essential services is contemplated in International Humanitarian Law, as its provisions require “the obligation to refrain from attacking, destroying, removing or otherwise rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”.</p> <p>However, often and against these rules of war, vital infrastructures are targeted and destroyed in conflicts.</p> <p>And when this happens in large urban settings, even the failure of a single point of an interconnected and complex network of services can create a domino effect on the rest of the system, affecting not just a community but tens of thousands of people who depend on centralized systems and do not have any alternatives.</p> <p>Shutting down or hitting a power station can, in turn, stop treatment and distribution of water for a hospital and prevent the provision of health services for an entire city leading eventually to displacement as only possible option for survival.</p>
<p>4 – Prevention and sanctions</p> 	<p>The problem of access to technology for infrastructures during conflicts can be tackled from different angles. Policy, partnerships and building local capacity are all equally important.</p> <p>In terms of policy, preventing damage from occurring in the first place is paramount as respect for IHL rules can limit damages brought by wars on infrastructures preserving their essential operations.</p> <p>At the same time, allowing for humanitarian reasons the import of technical components for the construction of infrastructures as well as spare parts for their operation and maintenance is equally important in countries where sanctions can have adverse consequences on the continuity of delivery of services to the civilian population.</p>

5 - ICRC engagement for infrastructures



As neutral and impartial humanitarian organization, the ICRC can contribute to bridging gaps in fragile and conflict settings and this has pushed us in recent years to engage in new projects of larger scale and longer duration requiring an entire new set of skills and resources.

Today, in places like Aden, Aleppo, Benghazi, Gaza, Mosul and beyond, in Myanmar or South Sudan, we respond at a scale that we could have not aimed at just few years ago. We rehabilitate large medical facilities, rebuild water treatment plants, re-establish power supply for entire neighborhoods, and design master plans for post war reconstruction.

Such a long-term engagement into a field often considered “development” domain does not contradict our humanitarian identity of emergency responders but rather completes it as:

- understanding of complex systems and
- strong partnerships with technical authorities built in many years of presence in a country,

are the factors that will allow to respond rapidly to crisis when an emergency response is needed.

6 – Scaling up learning opportunities



However, a gap remains between the protracted needs of people living in situation of conflict (that do not include only the basic survival but the possibility to have minimum standard of service delivery) and the technical response capacity of local utilities as well as other humanitarian actors.

This is often a knowledge gap related to the adoption of new and sustainable technologies and **we need to invest on rapidly scaling up learning opportunities** for our teams as well as technical teams of electric and water utilities or hospital maintenance crews.

In the future of our response, we wish to build off-grid service-delivery solutions for communities that are cut off from centralized services to allow them continuing running local health posts and schools or support livelihood initiatives at any time.

We wish to build solar powered back-up for pumping stations to working when fuel cannot be delivered across front lines.

	<p>We wish to optimize energy consumption in large hospitals where hybrid solutions could contribute to a significant reduction of operational and maintenance costs.</p> <p>But to do all this, we need to continue developing new competencies and fast track the acquisition of experiences until making such possibilities an integral part of our humanitarian response.</p>
<p>7 - Access to technology is the issue</p>  <p>The real challenge remains in making modern technologies accessible and sustainable in conflict settings</p>	<p>If we look at existing and innovative products and services to bring safe water and health care solutions to communities, there is already plenty we could do.</p> <p>Moreover, the humanitarian sector, private companies and universities often come together (as in this event) to bring innovation and customization of products and services to the specific requirements of precarious and fragile humanitarian environments where technologies for water supply, health care and food production should always be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessible: in terms of required upfront investments and predictable future presence of supplier companies in their markets for after sales support - Sustainable in terms of operating costs and local capacity to operate new systems for decades to come
<p>8 – The knowledge hubs</p>  <p>Water and power authorities need to maintain such capacity among their technical teams coping, in protracted crisis, with financial challenges and lack of training opportunities.</p>	<p>When we talk about infrastructures, we cannot look only at the hardware aspect as guaranteeing “transfer of knowledge” is complementary and equally important.</p> <p>Water and power authorities need to maintain capacity among their technical teams coping, in protracted crisis, with financial challenges and lack of training opportunities.</p> <p>This is why the ICRC is launching an initiative for the creation of regional knowledge hubs dedicated to sustainable technologies for power and water supply in humanitarian settings.</p> <p>The hubs are under construction in Nairobi, Kenya to serve the Africa Region and here in the UAE for the Middle East and Asia region. They will host technical trainings in customized laboratories where new technologies will be showcased and tested.</p>
<p>9– Building local capacity</p>	<p>ICRC engineering teams will be the immediate beneficiaries of such trainings, but we intend to open the hubs to other humanitarian agencies, other National Societies in the RCRC Movement and, most importantly, to technical teams of our partner water and energy utilities from conflict affected countries where we operate.</p>



The knowledge hubs will open to humanitarian agencies, National Societies in the RCRC Movement and to technical teams from our partner water and energy utilities.

This initiative, seed funded by the ICRC Innovation unit, has already onboarded several partners among private companies, Foundations and, of course, the universities that will host the training centers.

The centers will also be the venue for events such as conferences and workshops to foster dialogue on humanitarian response among partners engaged in research and development of new sustainable technologies.

10 – closing remarks



Providing access to essential services during conflicts is a challenge no single actor can address alone and we must work collaboratively across sectors.

The knowledge hub initiative demonstrates that ICRC takes localization seriously and contributes to the sustainability of humanitarian action by investing significantly in partnerships, strengthening local capacities and listening to the needs of affected people.

Excellencies, colleagues

Addressing the immediate and long-term needs of individuals, communities and societies in terms of access to infrastructures for essential services during conflicts is a challenge no single actor can address alone, and so, we must work collaboratively across sectors.

The ICRC, on its part, is and will continue to be a direct frontline responder, but its spectrum of operations can be reinforced by meaningful partnerships with important regional actors from financial institutions, private sector, academia and other humanitarian organizations with a similar commitment.

Thank you

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