



MID-TERM EVALUATION OF UGANDA RED CROSS STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025



ABRIDGED REPORT

Socio-Economic Data Centre Ltd Postel Building,
Clement Hill Road, Ground Floor P. O. Box 10207, Kampala, Uganda

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@Ugandaredcrossug.org



FOREWORD BY CHAIRPERSON, URCS CENTRAL GOVERNING BOARD

To all Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) Stakeholders, I am delighted to present to you our Strategic Plan 2021-2025. This is our winning aspiration dubbed “from recovery to sustainable development.” URCS completed implementing a four-year Strategy 2017-2020 with focus on strengthening systems and capacities that enabled it to recover from a governance and leadership crisis that engulfed the National Society (NS) around 2013 - 2014.

With new systems in place, new leadership (Governance and Management), a great team of advisors, supportive non-Red Cross partners such as the UN family, coupled with support from IFRC and other Red Cross Movement Partner NS, URCS has successfully gone through a transition and today, I am happy to mention that we are a stable Red Cross, fully recovered to deliver on our mandate and do business with all stakeholders.

The previous Strategy was developed based on the proposed 11 building blocks /pillars recommended by the IFRC institutional and organizational development committee after an evaluation and proposed rejuvenation as well as institutional reconstruction for effective

service delivery. The power of the Red Cross lies in the command of a unique global mandate that drives our mission and vision towards serving humanity. It is against this background that the Red Cross focuses on serving the affected communities, with roots anchored in Public Trust and Good Will. What affects our public image grossly affects our reputation and confidence. The story is different today!

We have strong internal systems and capabilities, have revitalized branch network and functionality, governance and management structures enabled, partner trust and public engagement rekindled, and now the Red Cross is up to scale up programming to build resilient communities that can respond to disasters and emergencies affecting them.

The current URCS Strategic Plan 2021-2025 positions Uganda Red Cross to pursue more resources and strategic partnerships that will ensure a more sustainable resource base, improve and scale up programming and enable timely lifesaving interventions in line with our mission and vision.

The process of reviewing Strategic Plan was a vigorous and consultative approach from all stakeholders. I want to appreciate the support from the Board, Branch network, staff, volunteers, external partners and donors, the Government of Uganda (GoU), line ministries we closely work with, the Red Cross Movement family and all efforts from across the board. Your contributions have made this a success and here we are, to roll it out.

The current global trends and local focus require a world where teams come together for the good of others. I implore us to work together to see that we embrace the new strategic focus and work towards achieving all the goals and objectives of the National Society as stipulated in the four key result areas of; a) Institutional Development, b) Membership and Branch Development, c) Strategic Sustainable Partnerships and Resource Mobilization, and d) Sustainable Programming for Community Resilience and Wellbeing.

With all your support, Uganda Red Cross is destined for greatness. We are everywhere for everyone; ever present hope in times of need. We want to bring services closer to the people and respond to emergencies in a timely manner.

Dr. Khalid Kirunda
CHAIRPERSON, URCS CGB



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL

To all Uganda red Cross Society Stakeholders, i am delighted to present to you the abridged version of the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) Mid-Term Review (MTR) Report of our Strategic Plan 2021-2025 dubbed "winning strategy at its inception - from recovery to sustainable development". This MTR report encapsulates our journey for the last two and half years of implementation of the five (5)-year plan, offering a comprehensive overview of our achievements, challenges, opportunities and proposals on how to refocus our resources in the second half to efficiently deliver on our commitments as enshrined in our key strategic focus areas.

As we reflect on the progress made, thus far, it is essential to acknowledge the resilience and adaptability demonstrated by the URCS in the face of unprecedented challenges both global and at local level including Covid-19, global geo-political events and climate change agenda that re-shaped the humanitarian landscape, resource mobilization strategies as well

as discourse in budget framework. Despite the above, we have remained steadfast in our resolve to serve the most vulnerable members of our communities that are in need for emergency services, affected by disasters, crisis and ensuring that no one is left behind.

The strides so far taken in service to our communities cannot be stated without recognizing the support of our partners and stakeholders. The Red Cross Movement family, the Government of Uganda (GoU), Development Partners, the UN Family, Cooperates and all stakeholder that have contributed to the successes attained. Internally, I also appreciate the National Society (NS) Advisors, Red Cross Ambassadors, the well-functioning governance structures and the implementation team of staff and volunteers who have ensured that our response actions are efficient as well as creating impact to the communities. To this end, I acknowledge with appreciation the consulting team from Socio-Economic Data Centre Ltd (SEDC) that facilitated this effort.

The MTR has proposed the NS priorities in system strengthening and capacity enhancement in implementation of the last segment of the Strategy including accomplishment of the already ongoing activities. This Report also provides detailed reflection on the extent to which the NS has reached in attaining the Strategic Plan results. These output areas are mirrored to the Key Result Areas of the strategy including; well-functioning and responsive NS, a sustainable volunteer, membership and Branch structures, sustainable partnerships and adequate resources for the core services and institutional sustainability and improved resilience and well-being of the communities.

Further, the MTR has also provided for us a road map and pressure points to guide implementation of the remaining period.

As we navigate the complexities of our operating environment and respond to evolving humanitarian needs, let us remain guided by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. And with our Red Cross Movement renewed agenda, I am optimistic that the last segment shall be more engaging with collective energies in our endeavors to live up to the NS mandate.

Robert Kwesiga
SECRETARY GENERAL

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement



HUMANITY

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 human life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all people.



IMPARTIALITY

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.



NEUTRALITY

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.



INDEPENDENCE

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the 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.



VOLUNTARY SERVICE

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.



UNITY

There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry its humanitarian work throughout its territory.



UNIVERSALITY

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.

Background

Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) is the leading humanitarian organization in Uganda, which was Incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1964 by the enactment of the Red Cross Act; Cap 57 of the Laws of Uganda. It is a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement drawing its mandate from the Geneva Convention. The National Society (NS) has over 500,000 registered members and volunteers, as of the end of 2019 with one and half million beneficiaries of its interventions. URCS works through 51 branch offices covering the whole of Uganda. As a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement comprising the International Federation (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), URCS works with a number of partners in the execution of its Mission. The Mission is to fulfil the URCS mandate and obligation in delivering quality and sustainable humanitarian assistance. The Vision is to be a partner of choice in Uganda in saving lives, supporting livelihoods and promoting human dignity.

Description of URCS SP 2021-2025

A five-year strategic plan (SP) for URCS 2021- 2025 is in its third year of implementation. The SP provides a platform for the domestication of the international development agenda such as the agenda 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals –SDGs), and IFRC Strategy 2030, among others, in priorities of the NS. Further, it aligns with the Uganda National Development Plan (NDP III) and other national frameworks. The plan was developed against the theme of “sustainability”. Underlying this theme was the quest to build on the foundation set during the recovery phase to attaining institutional, financial, and programmatic sustainability. Pursuant to the above strategic direction, this plan seeks to attain institutional, financial and programmatic sustainability. To achieve this goal, URCS places attention on Key Focus Areas (KFAs).

Table 1: Description of KFAs for URCS SP 2021-2025

NO	KFA	DESCRIPTION
KFA 1	Institutional Development	This focus area entails strengthening Governance and Management structures, reviewing internal processes and systems for operational efficiency.
KFA 2	Membership & Branch Development	This is about enhancing Branch governance, management and implementation capacity, improving public knowledge on Red Cross information, fundamental principles and values.
KFA 3	Partnerships and Resource Mobilization	This is about managing sustainable partnerships to ensure that the value and quality of Resources from existing and new partners are continuously improved; and increased visibility of Red Cross resulting from the positive impact of programs.
KFA 4	Program Sustainability	This is about strengthening communities' resilience and wellbeing through; enhancing systems for responsive programming, building requisite capacity to manage and coordinate resources.

Overview of approach and methodology

The entire methodology of the MTE was guided by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC) criteria which emphasizes evaluating the aspects of: design, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The MTE explored other cross-cutting issues and recommendations. Attention was placed on evaluation standards and specific applicable practices outlined in the [IFRC Framework for Evaluation](#). Similarly, the MTE team opted for Evaluation Contribution Analysis as an approach which helped identify the input SP interventions have made to a change or set of changes. The aim was to produce a credible, evidence-based narrative of contribution that a reasonable person would be likely to agree with, rather than to produce conclusive proof.

Mid Term Evaluation Design

This was a cross-sectional study conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Both were concurrently undertaken. Quantitative data collection involved review of project reports, use of interviewer-administered tools and stakeholder consultations. To large extent qualitative methods was undertaken involving review of documents, use of key informant interviews with selected stakeholders and focus group discussions. Participants consulted included governance, management and staff of URCS both at head office and in branches, Partner National Societies (PNS), other movement partners (IFRC and ICRC), UN agencies (UNHCR and WFP), government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) and corporate agencies. A total of 86 key informants from 18 institutions at national, branch and district levels participated in this MTE. The MTE covered the duration of the URCS SP from 2021 to mid-2023.

In the process, the MTE team reviewed the various documents including URCS Annual reports, 2021 & 2022, URCS Program/ Project reports, URCS Annual work plans, URCS business continuity plan, Financial performance reports, International Federation Strategy 2030, Government strategic documents (OPM, MOH, Parliament), The National Development Plan III, among others.

Results of the Evaluation

Relevance and coherence of URCS SP 2021-2025

The strategic direction of URCS places attention on systems strengthening for the National Society (NS) to be a preferred partner of choice within Uganda. SP 2021-25 clearly articulates "sustainability" as the overarching theme; building on the previous SP which placed attention on "recovery". The SP builds safeguards to integrity in managing resources of the NS informed by lessons from the past planning seasons. The SP is a great resource, developed with vision, clearly articulating what the NS would want to do, and how success will be measured. An abridged version of the SP online opens the NS to all stakeholders to buy in and monitor steps being undertaken by URCS. From onset, the challenge is mainly about how to implement a wide range of strategic interventions without corresponding resources to fulfil all commitments set out in the plan.

Under the SP, URCS aims mainly to promote the integration of community resilience in health and disaster risk management (DRM) scenarios. This aligns directly with global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mainly Goals 2 (hunger), 3 (health), 6 (WASH), 7 (Energy), 11 (Settlements) and 13 (Climate Change). Some of the strategic interventions espoused in the SP directly relating to SDGs include: expand public health programming, improve access to adequate safe water and sanitation (WATSAN), and improve the quality of community resilience programming.

In the context of the Red Cross movement, whereas URCS is an independent organization and implementing the humanitarian response as an auxiliary to Government of Uganda (GoU), its work is guided by the fundamental principles of the global Red Cross Movement. The direction that the NS is pursuing under SP 2021-2025 is in line with the direction that the Red Cross Movement is taking. The SP focuses on important areas for strengthening and also maximizing partnerships while also paying attention to climate change crisis.

Effectiveness as at Midterm

Progress on KFA 1: Institutional development

Key Highlights

- 100% of the 10 SMT positions in the NS staff structure have been filled
- Fully fledged ICT system is in place that integrates data analytics and digital technology
- 100% staff using cloud services (Microsoft 365 online, TEAMS, SharePoint, ONE drive) and have adopted TEAMS for internal collaboration and virtual meetings
- Only 15% of the 51 branches connected to internet
- Navision system is operational at HQ & being used at about 70%-75% mainly in procurement and finance depts but not fully in branches.

As planned under Institutional development, all statutory structures including National Council, President, Integrity and Compliance Committee, Central Governing Board (CGB), Branch Governing Board (BGB), Branch Youth Council (BYC) are fully constituted, oriented and inducted. Statutory quarterly meetings are conducted at CGB level and in about 70% of branches. All (100%) of the Senior Management Team (SMT) positions in the NS staff structure have been filled. A fully fledged ICT system is in place that integrates data analytics and digital technology. Only 8 (15%) of branches connected to ICT infrastructure. All (100%) staff are using cloud services (Microsoft 365 online, TEAMS, SharePoint, ONE drive) and have adopted TEAMS for internal collaboration and virtual meetings. Navision system is operational at HQ, 3 licenses procured and being used at about 70%-75% mainly in procurement and finance departments, but not in branches. A consolidated NS risk register in place, 26/130 branch audits and 12/52 compliance audits conducted. Overall, majority of KPIs for audit and risk aspects are on track with $\geq 50\%$ of the SP target achieved by mid-2023. In total, 5 of the 9 KPIs for HR aspects are on track with $\geq 50\%$ of the SP target achieved by mid-2023.

Work on digital transformation includes developing management information systems, automating project management processes, and integrating with banks for payment purposes. Overall, 4/5 (80%) of the KPIs for this aspect are on track with $\geq 50\%$ of the SP target achieved or already surpassed by mid-2023. About 50% of processes for data analytics and digital technology capabilities are integrated onto the various systems. The NS is gradually adopting a digital culture. The proportion of URCS branches connected with ICT infrastructure has increased from 0% at baseline (2020) to 25%, 50% and 75% in 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively.

Progress on KFA 2: Membership & Branch development

Key Highlights

- URCS has conducted orientation & carried induction of branch leaders
- 78.4% of the 51 branches have undergone orientation of the BYC Executive
- 69% (280 of the 408) Youth link leaders have been oriented on their roles & responsibilities
- 90.2% branches have developed, managed and maintained an excel volunteer management database system at branch level
- All the 51 branches supported their National Council representatives to attend the National Council
- The volunteer management system is automated. All volunteers are currently managed online.

Changes under KFA 2 (Membership and Branch Development) include participation in community services, dissemination and membership recruitment, life planning skills among the youth, fellowships, and blood donor recruitment (BDR). For year 2023 alone, some of the activities implemented exceeded the set targets: for instance, volunteer recruitment and engagement (147%), life planning skills trainings for the youth (171%), community services (153%) and Junior Youth recruitment (102%). A total 57% Model youth Links have been established out of the targeted 20 branches.

A membership database is functional at URCS HQ for the last 3 years. All 51 branches have

an updated membership database. Branches with automated volunteer management system account for 20%. All have branch managers/focal persons, compared to 71% at the beginning of SP implementation. Compared to only 2% of branches at onset of SP 2021-2025, all branches are contributing towards the remuneration of Branch Managers.

Increases in membership subscription have changed from 5%, 10% and 15% in 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively, out of a 5-year target of 25%. Membership subscription through online Apps stand at 10% compared to 5% in 2022 and 0% earlier. Out of a target of 60%, the proportion of members renewing membership subscription has gradually increased from 20%, 25% and 40% in 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively. Youth membership subscription has witnessed increase to 15% from 10% in 2022 and 5% in 2021. From a target of 50%, the proportion of youth members participating in the exchange programs stands at about 30%. The changes above are translating into increased participation in community services, dissemination and membership recruitment, life planning skills among the youth, fellowships, BDR, among others.

As part of SP implementation, URCS has conducted orientation and induction of branch leaders. A proportion of 45% among 51 branches are implementing resource mobilization plans and initiatives, compared to a target of 75% for the entire plan period up to 2025. About 15% in 2023 compared to 10% in 2022, against a 5-year target of 25% are taking up public-private partnerships. A total of 15 branches have had their assets valued.

Progress on KFA 3: Partnerships & Resource Mobilization

Key Highlights

- MoUs signed with target partners; 3 in 2021, 3 in 2022 & 2 in 2023 out of a target of 10 MoUs by 2025
- Annual income generated by URCS increasing at 5% average
- Commercial First Aid 182million in 2021 to 704million in 2022 and 781million by mid-2023; First Aid training in companies 91 million in 2022 to 92million by mid-2023; First Aid training in schools 17million to 35million by mid-2023
- Commercial ambulances 80million in 2022 to 366million by mid-2023
- From zero at baseline to 5% annual increase in income from sale of branded items
- Public trust of URCS increased to 10% from about 5% in last two years

On KFA 3 (Partnerships & Resource Mobilization), work is evident within NS to manage sustainable partnerships to ensure continuous improvement. There are steps by URCS leadership for collaborative projects implemented through non-traditional partners.

Strategic engagements with partners continue being undertaken, followed with reports for effective management of partnerships. With communication and branding as enablers, and resulting from the positive impact of programs, there is increased visibility of the NS. Evidence of inward resource mobilization during this SP period is mainly shown in commercial ambulances, accelerated growth of first aid trainings, sales and marketing trainings, and investment in the mini-manufacturing plant for reusable pads in Namakwa Mukono.

Increase in revenue is shown by changes by mid-2023 in Commercial First Aid (CFA) 182 million in 2021 to 704 million in 2022 and 781million; First Aid training in companies 91million in 2022 to 92 million, First Aid training in schools 17million to 35 million, and commercial ambulances 80 million in 2022 to 366million. Traffic for URCS website and social media sites increased to 70%, 60 publications out of targeted 50 made and shared, 30 media houses accessible to the NS any time to work with, and 25% increase in institutional perception registered.



File Photo: First Aid Training captioned in URCS Annual Report, 2021

However, owing to limited resources, the number of trained and operational marketeers for CFA has reduced to 10 at mid-2023 from 22 in 2022 and 30 in 2021. This corresponds to the reduction in number of CFA Trainers.

As evidence to outward looking resource mobilization, the following can be noted from reports;

- Private sector partnerships have mainly been towards corporate membership, short term BDR activities and in-kind support.
- URCS has developed a public fundraising campaign – Beera Omuzira aimed at raising 4 Billion Ushs together with MTN Uganda.
- The Challenge Expedition held with support from Netherlands Red Cross supporting with ongoing renovations at Namakwa – Mukono industrial park.
- By mid-2023, there was a pending sign off of the 'Safe Steps' road safety campaign funded by Prudential Uganda

There are significant steps by URCS leadership for collaborative projects implemented through non-traditional partners. Strategic engagements with PNS and other partner agencies and back donors are continually being undertaken, followed with reports for effective management of partnerships. On the other hand, outside the PNS and Red Cross global family generally, not much has occurred in efforts to tap into external sources of resource mobilization, largely due to non-committal tendency especially by most corporate companies.

Close to 50 stories have been published on the URCS website between 2021 and 2023. This has significantly increased the engagements and traffic on the NS website. Traffic for URCS website and social media sites increased to 70%, 60 publications out of targeted 50 were made and shared. A total of 30 media houses are accessible to the NS any time to work with. The NS has registered about 25% increase in institutional perception. A digital campaign has reached an estimated over 4 million subscribers on both NTV, ICRC and URCS social media pages. Overall, all except one KPI for communication and visibility are on track with $\geq 50\%$ of the SP target achieved or exceeded by mid-2023.

URCS is visible and active on all social media platforms. The platforms are also linked to the website. This attracts traffic that is has eventually turned into followers of URCS. The web traffic is organic and not boosted. The pages are managed 100% internally by the communications, RM and partnerships team, not an agency.

Progress on KFA 4: Program Sustainability

Key Highlights

- 75% of the entities trained among local actors have adopted a whole hazard contingency plan
- 4 Regional Ware Houses prepositioned compared to only 1 at onset of SP implementation
- Against the 2023 annual target of 150,000 units of blood, the NS realized 104,926 units (70%); Overall, URCS direct contribution was 59.8% of all the units of blood collected in the country
- 4,000 emergency lifesaving items prepositioned annually since 2021 compared to 1,500 at baseline
- Early Actions Protocol (EAP) for floods are fully approved by the IFRC
- URCS has demonstrated that FbF saves 64 % of total response costs; avoids a 30–40 % increase of market price of key food and NFIs.

There is substantial work undertaken in line with objectives for KRA 4 including efforts to strengthen community's resilience and wellbeing to stressors, shocks from natural and man-made disasters.



File Photo: Distribution of NFIs captioned in URCS Annual Report, 2021

The NS has developed and operationalized Early Warning, Early Action (EWEA) as part of disaster response preparedness. In place is forecast based financing (FbF) to enable access to humanitarian funding for early action based on in-depth forecast information, risk analysis and pre-agreed early actions. URCS has showcased the cost benefit analysis of early actions versus

response, and proved that costs are reduced when agencies do more in preparedness through an EWEA system¹.

Some of the key changes in relation to planned outputs also include training of Red Cross Action Teams (RACTs) and Surge Teams and mainstreaming of whole hazard contingency plans in local humanitarian actors. Overall, most of the KPIs for this aspect are on track with $\geq 50\%$ of the SP target achieved by mid-2023.

Early Actions Protocol (EAP) for floods are fully approved by the IFRC validation committee and the Impact-based Forecast (IBF) trigger-based system was finalized and tested. Working with forecasting institutions (Uganda National Meteorological Agency- UNMA, Directorate of Water Resources Department - DWRM, IFRC), joint trigger development and tailoring of existing UNMA forecast to FbF was completed. As a direct result, a funding mechanism is currently in place to guarantee the release of 500,000 CHF once trigger is reached and also provide for readiness activities /prepositioning of stock of non-food items (NFIs).

Uganda has the disaster risk atlas which characterizes the different hazards in each region. URCS has undertaken community level assessments and mapping by leveraging technology. Capacity is built within URCS for the NS to compile and validate disaster data records from the 24-hour KOBO tool emergency database, uploading on the IFRC Go platform, and sharing with Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) for generation of monthly multi-stakeholder Uganda Disaster Info sheets.

URCS has demonstrated that FbF saves 64 % of total response costs; emergency response without FbF amounts to 1075 CHF per household, emergency response preceded by FbF accounts for 385 CHF per affected household; FbF saves 100% of costs for reconstructing houses after the second year of investment in flood resistant housing; FbF avoids a 30–40 % increase of market price of key food and non-food items (NFIs)

URCS is also part of the National Cash Working Group for harmonization of cash modality interventions, this as a result of improved Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) programming.



File Photo: Cash Voucher Assistance in Kisoro district captioned in URCS Annual Report, 2021

There is also evidence of work undertaken in conducting capacity building for local humanitarian actors, including district LGs, albeit on a small scale.

Reports show that, against the URCS 2023 annual target of 150,000 units of blood, the NS realized 104,926 units (70%) as at June 2023. Out of the 104,926 units, 57.8% were from the community; 42.2% were from schools/institutions. Overall, reports for June 2023 shows URCS direct contribution was 59.8% of all the units of blood collected (104,926 out of 175,533) in the country during the period.



File Photo: Blood donor recruitment captioned in URCS Annual Report, 2022

For First Aid and Ambulance Services, the most outstanding change during SP 2021-2025 implementation is the deployment of a total of 21 ambulances for emergency response, and capacity building in first aid for URCS volunteers, road safety awareness.



File Photo: A case evacuated by URCS ambulance services, URCS Annual Report, 2022

However, owing to Quarter 4 FY 2022/2023 funding cut from the Government and uncertainty on FY 2023/2024 remittances, a decision to put on hold ambulance services for a while exploring how the NS can cover BDR and ambulance service costs from other projects in order to sustain minimal activities.

Other developments are evidenced in URCS capacity to respond to epidemics and health emergencies, especially supporting districts in integrating epidemics response in district contingency plans, supporting community-based volunteers in undertaking disease surveillance and reaching communities with disease outbreak and control interventions. The Annual Report (2022), for instance, shows that the NS evacuated 2,709 cases to health facilities across the country; traffic accident evacuations were mainly along the major highways and within Kampala Metropolitan Area (KMA). URCS also supported the EVD response through 5 pillars; contributing to the end of the pandemic in a record 114 days; 580 Village Task Force (VTF) groups were deployed; 3,950 suspect alerts were relayed.

Most of the work in URCS related to epidemics and health emergencies program focused on preparedness and response to disease outbreaks through risk communication, community-based surveillance and mobilizing communities to adopt desired behavior and practices. Outstanding include mobilization for Covid-19 vaccine uptake. For the 2022 EVD challenge in parts of the country, work included safe and dignified burials.



File Photo: Safe and dignified burial for EVD victims, URCS Annual Report 2022

For the case of WASH mainly for refugees and host communities, much of the attention has been on capacity building for volunteers, school teachers and district officials in WASH approaches, together with key awareness messages on WASH promotion and climate change. Comparing baseline data (2021) to mid-term (2023), the results of URCS interventions in WASH in targeted communities show progress in proportion of households practicing improved hygiene and sanitation (47% to 80%), sanitation and safe water coverage of the intervention communities (54% to 75%), number of sanitation facilities constructed and their functionality (82% to 95%).



File Photo: Safe and clean water facility by URCS captioned in URCS Annual report, 2021

Efficiency and coordination

URCS ensures efficiency and cost effectiveness by engaging with other partners to include and fund programs within different areas of operation. As a result, the geographical scope and coverage of URCS models have grown and more local stakeholders especially local governments are on board. As evidence to this, District Disaster Management Committees (DDMCs) especially in disaster prone districts such as Kasese, Tororo, Mbale and Bududa are trained and inducted in URCS approaches and specific models such as the FbF and CVA. Branch RCAT groups were trained in 8 branches: Kasese, Kisoro, Bundibugyo, Kampala East, Arua, Hoima-Kikuube, Mbarara, Ntoroko. The operations department contributes to URCS SP KFA1 and to efficiency across the NS. The coordination strengthens operations and programming to enhance quality of project design, negotiation of budgets and conditions for project implementation, activity planning, PMER, documentation, information sharing and use for quality improvement or new project proposals.

To maximise on efficiencies, URCS projects ensure equity by involving various categories of persons considered most at risk, including persons with disabilities, elderly, women, and young people in activities including trainings and beneficiary selection in the case of distribution of food and NFIs such as cash. Through community engagement and messaging which is embedded in all work streams, the NS emphasized representation for all categories of people in the local committees such as Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs), community-based project management committees and NFI distribution committees.

From analysis of processes and activities for URCS programs and specific projects, the NS spends time in setting up systems and coordination arrangements for instance for food security and livelihood, Fbf and cash transfer. It appears deliberate that URCS tends to set the pace cautiously, placed focus on coordination, especially using technical working groups, dialogue platforms, and so on with different stakeholders including Government.

Sustainability and capacity building

There is quite considerable evidence of potential sustainability of achievements so far realized

during SP implementation, albeit in different forms and intensity, especially given the capacities (technical and logistical) built within URCS through various programs and specific projects.

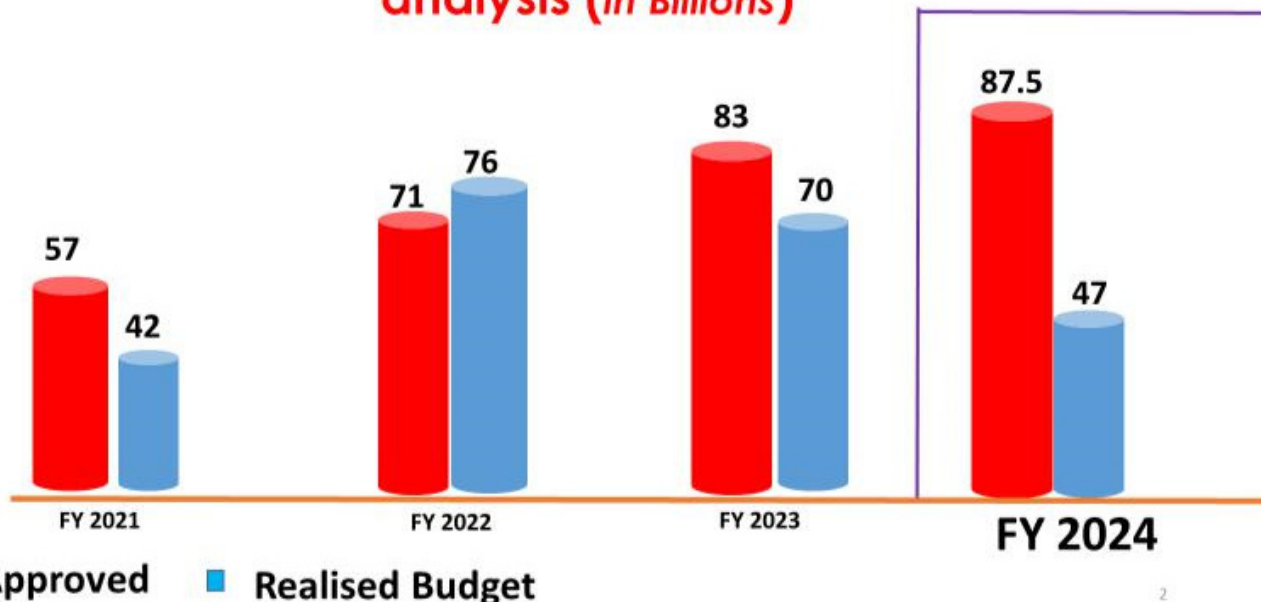
Foremost, the work so far undertaken to strengthen governance and management structures assures the country of a visionary, stable but growing NS. Internal process reviews across directorates and systems for operational efficiency are geared towards ensuring a sustainable NS. Steps undertaken towards fully integrated and automated systems for finance, risk and audit, supply chain and estates management and human resource management provide further evidence towards the overarching theme of sustainability espoused under SP 2021-2025. Significant progress scored in digital transformation and ICT systems point towards sustainable operations. The Digital Transformation (DT) agenda was initially integrated into the IARP/ IKEA initiative as a flagship project to draw a short and long term URCS overarching strategy innovations aimed at improving service delivery to the vulnerable communities. The DT agenda seeks to guide URCS through a sustainable journey.

Through coordination and support, knowledge management is growing across the NS in appreciating emerging aspects such as ESG and different approaches and methodologies including CVA. This is evidenced in various contingency plans which are promoting sustainability of CVA alongside in-kind support where appropriate. At national level, URCS is a member of cash consortium. From a CEA perspective, URCS has over the years accumulated communities able to embrace and initiate development and response initiatives. Experiences from URCS CEA teams and CVA and livelihood volunteers show that URCS has communities that have accumulated information and learning over many years of interaction with the NS

In relation to financing of planned SP interventions, there is a significant resource base for sustainability of elements of SP 2021-2025.

Budget performance of URCS in relation to financial targets

Overview of the three years past Budget analysis (in Billions)



Source: Finance department URCS, 2023

Overall net growth of the approved budget in Uganda Shillings grew by 46% (26billion) from 2021 (57billion) to 2023 (83billion). Overall net growth of the approved budget grew by 54% (57billion in 2021 to draft budget 2024 of 87.5billion). Budget realized/mobilized grew by 50% (Shs 21 billion), from 2021 (42billion) to 2023 (63billion).

As further evidence to this, the 2022 Annual Report shows that the NS generated UGX 521,980,000 in revenue by branches from IGAs and other sources; raised UGX 1,763,879,810 from 100 major companies; thanks to their generosity and support for humanitarian work; secured/mobilized

76,155,942,977 to support the 4 KFAs of URCS SP 2021-2025. URCS continues to secure donor commitments through projects/grants arising from successful proposals and collaborations with partners and National Societies.

Other Aspects of SP 2021-2025 MTE

Gaps and Challenges in implementation of KFAs in URCS SP

- Since the beginning of implementation of this SP, the success rate on winning grants is still low. A grants management unit under Operations Department is still in its infancy and not well resourced. The NS lacked a Grant Management Specialist at the time of the assessment. A Donor Relations Manager had been recruited but left shortly and the NS was in the process of filling the post.
- It is still work in progress to digitize the entire NS. Innovations under DT require heavy investments e.g. in buying servers and other IT soft & hardware. The NS requires appropriate infrastructure e.g., reliable internet for the system to be rolled out and used at each point; URCS has connected NITA only in a few branches
- Expansion of human resources across departments and branches is partly hampered due to a narrow budget for core administration. Unpredictable staff turnover and its negative impact on orderly execution of NS work calls for addressing issues of staff remuneration, welfare, retention and training strategy.
- Having an integrated Navision system in procurement, finance, warehousing and other functions of URCS has not yet been fully achieved. Gaps in the finance management function still create gaps in reporting, delays in paying for services and in accountability.
- There are key partners such as the UN agencies that the NS is yet to fully bring on board to support program objectives and projects.
- The NS has not fully integrated CEA in all programs and projects to leverage on local resources for sustained action.
- Much of the implementation of programs happens at branch level, and in communities. Most critical at this point include capacities of branch managers and their structures. Gaps in HR skills, systems and limited infrastructure affect project results and continuity.
- Some of the projects supported by PNS and donor agencies have weak elements for their sustainability once the funding ends. The NS needs internally generated resources to support branches. Communities can be empowered to sustain some elements of a project, even by URCS being simply present.

Emerging issues since launch of SP 2021-2025

Climate Change and Environmental Conservation

One emerging area is Climate Change and Environmental Conservation; Even before this SP, the NS has been doing some interventions around climate change issues scattered in projects, for instance the Integrated Climate Adaptation Project. Since then, top leadership at URCS has shown a lot of interest in climate change by operationalizing a specific unit within the NS structure. It is about one year since URCS began to demonstrate deliberate, structured attention to climate change at programmatic and institutional level, including attending the global conference, COP27.

URCS is in final steps towards developing a Climate Change Strategy, initially from a Green Policy, and doing work mainly in advocacy for resources. Some of the URCS activities for climate change and environment most visible include engagements with the relevant sector of government, Ministry of Water and Environment specifically the Climate Change and Water Resources departments. At inter agency level, URCS works with Uganda National Meteorological Authority (UNMA), building synergies. The focus is on profiling the work of the NS in climate change. URCS is also engaging largely with IFRC as part of the climate champions among National Societies, developing programs and SOPs for climate change responses. URCS is trying to gain deeper understanding of the funding landscape for supporting concepts/proposals on climate change, to identify entry points for URCS to access grants opportunities. To this point therefore, URCS efforts

have mainly been on “readiness to engage”.

Overall, not much has been achieved on aspects of climate change. Issues for Climate Change are reflected in the SP, but more concerted work still required to shape programming to embrace climate change specifically and, generally ESG and other related requirements on the global scene.



File photo: Installation of community radios for dissemination of early warning messages in communities

Protection, Gender and Inclusion

URCS has several policy frameworks that embed protection and safeguarding in its operations, for instance, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy. URCS has also developed a Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy both for staff volunteers and affiliates of the NS. Currently, URCS is in the process of developing a Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) Strategy to inform how best PGI aspects can be integrated in the operations and programs of the NS. URCS has also adopted the Community Engagement and Accountability to Affected Populations / Community Engagement Strategy (CEA) Approach. These two approaches, PGI and CEA, work interchangeably when feedback regarding URCS services is received and acted upon. The work ahead for URCS is to ensure these aspects have key definitive indicators that are measurable and achievable.

Lessons Learned

- Strong leadership (governance at policy and oversight level and management) are key for steering an institution such as URCS to full recovery and sustained growth. Similarly, the NS needs strong teams of volunteers, staff, managers & oversight leaders to drive the implementation of the SP.
- Effective communication and public relations are important in rebuilding reputation of URCS and attracting donors. Efforts put in conducting research and undertaking partner analysis and to develop a communication strategy generally for the NS help to address gaps and support the organization’s recovery both financially and reputation-wise.
- Increasing attention being given to preparedness (contingency fund, prepositioning of items, awareness campaigns) is a more effective & efficient way to respond to epidemics and climate-related and human-made disasters.

- Whereas resources, mainly funds, are required for programs, the NS also needs resources to enhance monitoring of the programs and investments to ensure designs are up to scale, implementation and accountabilities are spot on, and to document, disseminate and use lessons.
- Obtaining unrestricted funding is crucial for URCS as it covers overhead costs that restricted funding does not address fully.

Continuous changes in paradigms and areas of focus at global stage for instance strong requirements for ESG and PGI; ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), implies that donors may want their contributions to align with organizations, or projects that demonstrate strong environmental and social responsibility and sound governance practices. PGI (Protection and Gender Inclusion) in the context of donor expectations is about donors' desires for their contributions to support initiatives that actively engage and empower a diverse range of individuals, including women and other marginalized groups.

Conclusion

The strategic direction of URCS places attention on systems strengthening for the NS to be a preferred partner of choice within Uganda, clearly articulating "sustainability" as the overarching theme of Strategic Plan 2021-2025. The plan also builds safeguards to integrity in managing resources. The SP, aligned directly with global SDGs is a great resource, developed with vision, clearly articulating what the NS would want to do. As best practice, the SP is shared online to open URCS to all stakeholders to buy in and monitor the NS. The major challenge is mainly about how to obtain corresponding resources to fulfil all commitments set out in the plan.

Mid-term, progress has been realized across most planned targets laid out as KPIs as manifested in strong governance and management structures, internal process reviews and automated systems for operational efficiency. Other changes are evidenced in enhanced implementation capacity of branches, improved PR and HRM and ongoing work towards building sustainable partnerships. Overall, to its community beneficiaries, partner agencies including GoU, the NS is showing increased visibility, more responsive programming and requisite capacity to manage and coordinate resources.

However, it is still work in progress to digitize the entire NS, to have an integrated Navision system in procurement, finance, warehousing and other functions of URCS, and to close the gaps in the finance management function which still occasion delays in paying for services and in accountability/reporting. A narrow budget for core administration. The NS has not fully integrated PGI/CEA in all programs and projects to leverage on local resources for sustained action, and is yet to fully constitute, coordinate and support the Grant Management function to ensure more timely and effective execution of projects, including refocusing proposal writing to the global landscapes, mainly climate change, environment, social and governance (ESG) requirements, and Risk Management.

It is also important to undertake policy reviews of URCS frameworks to identify and bridge gaps from a PGI lens. Strengthening institutional capacity in PGI across the governance and management structures including youth councils, staff and volunteers. Evidence of commitment to PGI could include modification of URCS physical infrastructure to make the facilities for inclusive accessibility. Similarly, the recruitment processes into the NS for staff and volunteers may need to make deliberate recognition of the most marginalized categories in the population and diversities in areas of URCS operations.

Recommendations for Second Segment of URCS SP

The following constitute the key priorities for URCS for 2024-2025 as drawn from progress, gaps and lessons during implementation of the first segment (2021-mid 2023) of SP 2021-2025;

1. Constitute fully, coordinate and support the Grant Management function to ensure more timely and effective execution of projects.
2. Deepen engagements/strategic level discussions between PNS and NS leadership to obtain support not only for micro level projects, but also meso and macro level; and also address challenges of late release of funds for project implementation
3. Undertake deliberate, targeted advocacy with GoU for a vote in national budget, not simply subvention
4. Recruit additional qualified staff to support core units of the NS, including/and most especially resource mobilization & risk management efforts; stable, long-term, non-earmarked funding is required to attract and retain a highly competent human resource in key departments with medium- or long-term contracts will give staff a sense of stability and continuity e.g., for grants, PMER, and PGI/CEA
5. Continued engagement in national and international spaces such as Climate Change Network, should be scaled up, including participation in the COP, to seek for consortia and other funding opportunities. Integration of climate change and environment conservation across URCS programs be undertaken to create a case for a strong visibility of the NS in climate change preparedness, mitigation and environmental sustainability.
6. The quick wins for PGI include coming up with customized PGI checklists to guide programs such as WASH and emergency response, mapping out donors and partners for URCS to work with to ensure PGI integration, and developing and/or undertaking a stakeholder analysis of referral pathways.
7. Refocus the proposal writing to the global landscapes, mainly climate change, ESG requirements, and Risk Management. In addition, align URCS programming with ESG requirements, beginning with a strategy and ensure the NS is able to report on ESG aspects, not simply on accountability for money
8. Position URCS communication to support and justify the rationale for UN, multilateral and government agencies to work with the NS, given its unique set up as an auxiliary to government, branch structures and geographical spread.
9. Place more focus on branch development, increasing membership and mobilization of resources from branches; explore value proposition for membership to increase local mobilization of resources in communities. URCS should scale up the recruitment strategy for members and volunteers at branch level; nurture youth links; identify more groups in and out of school and generally attract members and volunteers
10. Explore more opportunities for consortium formations & embrace this approach at the centre of programming in the NS as best practice. Some donors and funding mechanisms opt for several partners to submit one proposal.
11. Accomplish work already in progress, mainly:
 - A fully integrated, operational system for finance, audit, supply chain and HR as planned by close of year 2023
 - Digitization across the NS (HQ and branch level) of other systems asplanned, or at least cover about 70%
 - Develop a project management system and M&E system to improve efficiencies in performance and reporting.
 - Facilitate internet connectivity in all branches
 - Roll out Volunteer Management System in branches as planned
 - Fast track revision of HR strategy and Policy and Procedure Manual
 - Progressively continue engagement with corporate agencies to tap into shared values
 - Expedite the process of registering the URCS company
 - Increase mobilization for non-earmarked funds to support core and other NS.



Uganda Red Cross Society
National Headquarters: Plot 551/555 Rubaga Road
P. O. Box 494
Kampala, Uganda



- www.redcrossug.org



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- Ugandaredcross



- Uganda Red Cross Society



- sgurcs@redcrossug.org