



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO – NYIRAGONGO VOLCANO ERUPTION

A Strengthening Movement Cooperation and Coordination Case Study – February 2022

DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE
DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

The Movement continues to value the need for more effective communication, connection, and internal efficiencies to optimise component complementarity and ultimately optimise the global Movement. The Strengthening Movement Cooperation and Coordination (SMCC) initiative is a **key acknowledgement and pathway forward for more effective cooperation amongst Movement components**.

SMCC was created to **leverage and support existing in-country coordination mechanisms, to align Movement Components and enhance coordination and cooperation in selected contexts**, with a focus on large scale emergencies. Given the complexities of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and multitude of Movement partners active on the ground, it was seen as a context where the utilisation of SMCC would be beneficial to ensure an effective response for the affected population.

The volcano eruption occurred in May 2021 on the eastern side of DRC, just outside of Goma, a town with a population of close to 1 million people. The crisis impacted close to 300 000 people, displacing them internally as well as over the border to Rwanda. Damage to houses, agricultural fields and vital infrastructure also occurred. Those impacted reported physical and psychological harm.

In recent years, the eastern region of DRC has experienced multiple concurrent disasters in addition to the ongoing conflict which has led to numerous responses in the region that involved all components of the Movement. Notably the eruption occurred during the COVID-19 Pandemic and at the tail end of the latest Ebola Outbreak in the region resulting in the Movement having a large presence on the ground already.

This case study aims to highlight various **aspects of SMCC that were operationalised in this context** and the impact that had. This includes:

- Identify what coordination tools/mechanisms were used and their outcomes
- Evaluate the concrete impact of coordination on answering the needs of affected population
- Establish whether and how previous coordinated responses in the region have played out in setting up coordination mechanisms and in delivering the response
- Evaluate if SMCC implementation has reinforced the centrality of the NS in the response and how.
- Identify what elements could have helped to build an even more effective response
- Identify best practices that could be replicated in other contexts

2 Results and findings

Interviews were conducted with representatives of various components of the movement: the National Society (NS)/The Democratic Republic of Congo Red Cross (DRC RC), the IFRC, ICRC and the French Red Cross (FRC) as a Partner National Society (PNS). One opinion was shared among all the interviewees, that **the coordination of the response went very well, and significantly contributed to the success of the response.** The summary of the opinions presented below are not attributed to specific individuals, but rather grouped by agency, NS, IFRC, ICRC. The Head of Delegation of the French Red Cross was not present at the beginning of the disaster but met later with all the other parties involved and shared his understanding of the response dynamic. His views are included under the IFRC section.

National Society

Two concepts were overwhelmingly mentioned by all the representatives of the DRC RC: “*Pilier Rouge*” or “Red Pillar”, and “Lead”. These two concepts are presented as the two single most important elements to the success of the operation. The National Society played a leading role in the response and in terms of Movement representation. Importantly, it was felt that the Red Pillar was strong as all the elements of response, **no matter which component was implementing, they were perceived as “the Red Cross”.**

In line with SMCC, below are three examples of how the **National Society’s lead role was reinforced** as presented by DRC RC representatives:

- The National Society insisted on having the lead role, and invested significant human resources to this effect, with the National Head of Disaster Management deployed immediately to Goma as Head of Operation; he stayed in Goma for more than 6 months.
- Additionally, the Head of the Goma branch acted as Field Coordinator, and the Provincial President was directly involved in response management and chaired the

Provincial Disaster Management Commission under the General Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs in Goma, dealing with assessment and planning, and representing the Movement at the same time. This clearly positioned the National Society at the center of the operation.

- Tripartite meetings were held daily for the first weeks, then weekly, bi-weekly and monthly following contextual evolution. These meetings, chaired by the DRC RC Head of Operation, had the clear mandate to share contextual information, evaluate the situation, and plan the response. They could decide who would do what where and when, share resources, distribute role and responsibilities. The meetings were clearly structured and operational.

Although the volcano eruption response was generally successful thanks to strong coordination and a spirit of partnership, it was highlighted at many points that coordination had not always been so efficient in the past, and **many efforts were made to avoid pitfalls and apply lessons learned from previous operations.** This was especially mentioned in comparison with the Ebola (EVD) response where the initial position of the NS was perceived as more limited to providing resources (staff) and less involved in decision-making. This evolved during the various phases of the EVD response (multiple outbreaks leading to multiple operations), as the NS gradually led more until the last outbreak where the NS took the lead fully. This learning was applied directly at the early stage of the Nyiragongo operation.



Another aspect mentioned by the DRC RC respondents was the quality and experience of the deployed personnel, all of them being familiar with the context, known by the NS, and having complementing personalities. **The importance of the personalities of the team members was mentioned as a contributing factor to the coordination success.**

While the formal SMCC tools were not referenced by the NS, some mechanisms were in place to support coordination efforts. **A well-established platform for discussion mitigated disagreements and components acting on their own** and an always up-to-date operational picture prevented misunderstanding. Both tools allowed Movement actors visibility on who was operating where and when.



One aspect that was reported as **something to improve was the coordination with the Rwandan Red Cross**, as the operation spread over the border. Despite easy access to Gisenyi in Rwanda from Goma and routine trips by DRC colleagues, no meeting was organized between RDCRC, Rwanda RC, IFRC and ICRC on this operation.

IFRC

Tellingly, representatives of the IFRC during various stages of the response all mentioned the **unified perception of the Red Cross Movement, acting as One Red Cross**, and the essential lead position of the National Society. An additional and fundamental aspect of the coordination

mentioned by all was the pre-existence of a security framework, the Level 3 (L3)¹ agreement between IFRC, ICRC and Partner National Societies.

The coordination for this operation was perceived as particularly successful due to applying past learnings, context familiarity and personalities. Some highlights of the coordination:

- Communication channels were already established between Movement components. By chance, a representative of the IFRC was visiting Goma at the time of the incident. Several meetings had been held with ICRC and the NS, discussing the transition phase of the finishing EVD response and plans in the days prior to the eruption.
- As the volcano erupted, the L3 agreement was activated for the safety of the staff in Goma. IFRC and PNS staff were relocated by ICRC with all other ICRC staff to 3 ICRC guesthouses in South Kivu, near Goma. This resulted in all IFRC and ICRC staff living together, sharing office space, and having extremely easy access to each other for discussions, planning and coordination. ICRC shared its resources (vehicles and houses) for the benefit of all and the activation of the L3 translated into a collaborative platform where the strengths and capacities of each component could be pooled.
- As the response spread over two countries, DRC and Rwanda, IFRC could use the presence of a IFRC staff in Rwanda for COVID response to coordinate the response on the other side of the border.
- Although an informal collaboration started immediately, in part due to the aforementioned circumstances, the Movement was quick to seize the opportunity and a higher-level meeting was organized with representatives of IFRC, ICRC, NS and PNSs, to formalize the collaborative effort. In an adaptation of one SMCC mechanism, this is referred to as “the mini-summit”, although it has been noted that it did not fit the exact definition (regional and headquarter representatives would normally be present). However, as the field operative level already tended to align, the more formal recognition strengthened this natural disposition.
- Communication flow was open and easy, with clear counterparts identified in each component of the Movement. Information was shared efficiently and accurately, allowing all partners to speak with one voice.

¹ This agreement essentially gives security management oversight to ICRC. This has many practical consequences, such as staff evacuation or relocation responsibility to ICRC, with automatic resource sharing (guesthouses and vehicles).

Specific feedback from IFRC representatives in the field highlighted four essential ‘ingredients’ that helped the coordination structure function well: 1) Co-location; 2) Establishing a common operating picture; 3) Joint planning; and 4) Joint tasking.

1. **Co-location** gave the field teams an opportunity to build stronger relationships outside of formal meetings and deal with inevitable issues in a more informal and timely way. The IFRC physically co-located with the ICRC and DRCRC, which gave all Partners consistent entry points to address challenges, share information, and work together.
2. **Establishing a common operating picture** through consistent sharing of assessment data guaranteed that all Movement actors had a common understanding of the operational and humanitarian priorities. This was critical in rallying focus around the core problem sets in order to jointly mobilize resources to respond.
3. **Joint planning** followed naturally from the common operating picture and allowed the Movement to collectively decide how it was to respond—at micro- and macro-levels. By understanding and building on each other’s comparative advantages, the Movement was positioned to effectively utilize available resources in an efficient and coordinated way.
4. **Joint tasking** followed from joint planning to assign specific Movement actors with responsibilities for action. This process (common operating picture, joint planning, and joint tasking) was repeated cyclically every 48 hours—later reducing frequency as the situation stabilized—to ensure responsibilities were followed up on, provide inter-agency support, and adapt to the evolving context.

This coordination structure facilitated information flow, which allowed the response to be actioned quickly and efficiently. It is generalizable and can be used in small- or large-scale operations and should serve as best practice for Movement, Membership, and external coordination.

Similar to the DRC RC comments, IFRC also noted that this excellent coordination was not always present in past operations; **learnings from past challenges clearly informed a more successful way of jointly responding to the humanitarian needs.** One learning was the importance of understanding each component’s operative space and mandate, especially between IFRC and ICRC. The two institutions have different mandates, different ways of managing operations, and different perspectives in terms of space and time. These could easily lead to misunderstanding, where the protracted conflict with a decades-long presence and hard-won operating space of ICRC would not easily align with the sudden onset public health emergency vision of IFRC. Leadership in both institutions with understanding of each other’s points of view, and experience working in partnership made it an ideal match for cooperation and collaboration. In other words, personalities (or profiles) mattered.



As can be expected in such a complex operational context, the response met several challenges. The “état de siège” or State of Emergency declared in North Kivu meant that the Government is led by a Military Governor. Negotiations with Army (FARDC) representatives for shelter space and standards were challenging. **The strong Movement coordination allowed negotiation on multiple fronts, with a solution-driven approach**, the NS and its IFRC and ICRC partners discussing together with the FARDC as one Red Cross, for the benefit of the affected population. Although clearly a tense situation, the coordination held its course, the partners stayed together, and services were delivered.

ICRC

In alignment with the National Society's and IFRC's perception, ICRC colleagues also recognized the overall incredibly positive coordination of the response and importantly the leading role played by the NS. Similar concepts were mentioned as contributing to the coordination effort:

- A pre-existing open and good relationship with the National level made the early coordination effort efficient and fast. The NS, ICRC, IFRC and PNS met immediately after the eruption (the following day), agreed on general response orientation and worked on preparing the DREF together.
- The security framework (the L3 agreement) clearly defined responsibilities and lead agency in times of crisis. This prevented confusion and greatly sped up the necessary actions following the eruption.
- As a result of the early meetings, and within the first week following the disaster, several key staff were deployed to Goma as representatives of the National level, in a spirit of agreement and collaboration: the National Head of Disaster Management, with the Vice-President of RDCCR and another member of the governance, the Movement Coordinator of ICRC with an emergency response colleague; the visit costs were covered by ICRC. IFRC did not join from Kinshasa at this stage but had already in Goma the Regional Operations Manager and EVD Ops Manager and was in process of HEOps deployment. ICRC was also in process of deploying additional emergency response personnel. Importantly, high level representatives were in Goma to share the spirit of the coordination effort initiated in Kinshasa.
- From the beginning, the different components of the Movement shared information, shared terminology and context understanding and defined clear roles and responsibilities for each. The "mini-summit" that was held was a National-level effort. Considering the medium scale of the response, this seemed appropriate and adequately represented the collaborative spirit of the response effort to all parties involved.
- The NS requested to lead the coordination meetings in Goma and conducted highly efficient and focused meetings, with clear mandates and outcomes. The minutes of meeting could be used as formal agreement on decisions made.

Past operational challenges clearly played a key role in the development of the Nyiragongo operation. Several Ebola-related operations were launched in DRC, involving all the partners, and coordination was not always as fruitful according to several colleagues, especially at the beginning of the Ebola crises. **This experience, hard learnt, could be applied from the early stage of the volcano eruption response as many staff had been involved in the EVD response and they shared this experience.** There was the will to avoid pitfalls, reflect on the past and apply the knowledge to the new situation, for mutual benefits. The experience level and attitude of the various leaders of the response from the different Movement Partners were repeatedly mentioned by all the respondents as key elements in the quality of the coordination and the response.

3 Conclusion

The complementarity of the points of view shared and opinions expressed during the interviews are striking. There is consensus that **the coordination effort was operationally successful and ultimately led to the Movement's ability to serve those that were impacted**. Several factors contributed to the success, summarized here:

- **NS Lead Role:** The National Society was in the lead role with the support of other Movement components and shared operational strategy and planning openly.
- **The Quality of Personnel:** High level of experience from all various people involved in the response, from the National Society, IFRC and ICRC. Experience in the context, in response management, in the various Movement entities and their dynamics. All 3 components deployed well experienced staff timely.
- **Strong collaboration:** A spirit of collaboration and complementarity was reported at all management levels, from National management team to Field operational team.
- **Applying Previous Learnings:** Essential learnings were applied from the recent and on-going Ebola response. Many responders involved in the volcano eruption operation had been previously involved in the EVD response.
- **Clear Roles and Responsibilities:** The roles and responsibilities were clearly defined and agreed upon at the very start of the response.
- **Agreements in Place:** Prior existence of a Movement security framework agreement, the L3, was used as a steppingstone for crisis management during the eruption, and after.
- **Use of Coordination Mechanisms:** The coordination mechanisms were setup appropriately, the meetings having clear objectives and being adapted to the evolving operational reality, under the very competent leadership of the NS. Information flowed easily in transparency.

Some contextual aspects also played an important role in making this operation a success: a medium-size natural disaster, geographically confined, with good funding led to a relatively well-resourced operation, with clearly defined mandates. Due to the staff evacuation following the eruption, many team members shared accommodations, allowing a very **fluid communication, easy access of the different partners in a collaborative spirit**.

These combined elements clearly allowed an efficient response, fast and relevant, with different services provided timely and adequately, considering the challenges. **The Reestablishment of Family Links (RLF) was mentioned as particularly successful and central to DRC RC position** and perception among the population; water supply, NFI distribution and First-Aid also involved close collaboration between all partners; the immediate response of the volunteers during the night of the eruption was qualified as “heroic” by an interviewee.

Several SMCC tools were used during this response, although it might not have been perceived as such by some of the actors, or their role was not immediately understood. A “mini-summit” was indeed held, albeit not in the official format, and at National-level only. It did however play a crucial role in aligning the spirit of collaboration that was to continue all along the operation. Additionally, Terms of Reference for a Movement Coordination Officer were drafted and approved. No candidate was selected, but due to the exceptionally well-coordinated environment, this did not impact the operation. It is not the say that the MCO is not a relevant role, on the contrary; however, in this particular case, it appears that the National Society took the lead and played the role as chair of the Movement coordination meetings. Finally, a Movement Coordination Agreement (MCA) was drafted and later signed in February 2022. Interestingly, nobody interviewed could confirm what happened with the document, and many did not see it. Once again, this effort certainly played a significant role in the background, triggering conversations on roles and responsibilities. The extremely conducive working environment might not have required the formalization of the MCA, but it certainly did not impair the effort.



The combination of these elements resulted in a **highly collaborative environment**, where resources were shared for the overall benefit of the affected population. Although some factors might be considered non-intentional, or due to chance, the strong leadership of each component could recognize the opportunity and capitalize on it.

In the words of one respondent:

“Unity equals efficacy.”

Annexes

This case study is primarily based on the interviews of key actors in the response from the early stage of the response in May 2021 to February 2022. The list of the interviewees is below; representatives of the National Society, IFRC and ICRC were interviewed in a semi-structured conversation, with guided questions covering the main aspects of the coordination effort, but also allowing space for personal point of views.

The interviews ranged from 30 to 50 minutes; interviews were recorded for accuracy of notes and transcripts. The findings are reported as an analysis of the main points reported by the interviewees as perceived by the interviewer and are voluntarily not attributed to specific individuals.

Background information on the operation, the context, and coordination effort were additionally gathered from various reports and other sources, as listed in the Consulted Documents below.

Guiding questions for semi-structured interviews

1	Can you describe your role in the Nyiragongo eruption operation?	Pouvez-vous décrire votre rôle dans l'opération liée à l'éruption du Nyiragongo?
2	What is your general perception of the RCM coordination for this operation?	Quelle est votre perception générale de l'effort de coordination du Mouvement RCRC pour cette opération?
3	How was the coordination initiated, and what tools particularly contributed to the success or failure of the operation? – Was a mini-summit initiated? How? – What was the outcome, how was it decided? – Was there a Movement Coordination Agreement (MCA)? Why or why not?	Comment la coordination a-t-elle été initiée, et quels sont les outils qui ont particulièrement contribué aux succès ou aux échecs de l'opération? – Un mini-sommet a-t-il été organisé ? – Quel en a été le résultat, comment y est-on arrivé ? – Y a-t-il eu un MCA ?
4	Did the RCM coordination tools or mechanisms change or evolve during the operation, and if yes why and how so?	Les outils de coordination ont-ils changé ou évolué au cours de l'opération, et si oui pourquoi et comment?
5	How did the coordination influence operational options, choices, and decisions? How did it impact the operation in terms of speed of decision-making, operational efficiency, scope, and relevance?	Comment la coordination a influencé les options, choix et décisions opérationnels? Quel a été l'impact en termes de vitesse de décision, efficacité, portée et pertinence opérationnelle?
6	In a context of recurring emergencies, how did the RCM coordination of this operation compare to other operations? How does the Nyiragongo experience influence your perception of the role of coordination?	Dans un contexte d'urgences récurrentes, comment la coordination de l'opération Nyiragongo se compare à d'autres opérations? Comment votre expérience de l'opération Nyiragongo influence votre perception du rôle de la coordination?
7	From your perspective, how did the RCM coordination influence the position of the National Society? – What was the impact on the NS position within and outside the Movement?	Selon votre point de vue, comment la coordination du Mouvement a influencé la position de la Société Nationale? – Quel a été l'impact sur le positionnement de la SN, avec et à l'extérieur du Mouvement ?

List of persons interviewed

Name	Position	RCM
Moise Kabongo	Head of Operation	DRC Red Cross
Marcel Muamba	President of the North Kivu Provincial Branch	DRC Red Cross
Joseph Kasongo	Head of North Kivu Branch	DRC Red Cross
Raphael Tenaud	Head of Sub-Delegation Goma	ICRC
Thierry Desmonds	Cooperation Coordinator (KIN Delegation)	ICRC
Gregory Le Coq	Cooperation Coordinator	ICRC
Pieter De Rijke	Cooperation Coordinator	ICRC
Balla Conde	Head of Operations	IFRC
Rui Oliveira	Regional Operations Manager, Africa	IFRC
Jamie LeSueur	HEOps	IFRC
Yves Emmanuel Saint Juste	IFRC Field Coordinator in Goma	IFRC
Issoumaila Konate	Head of Delegation	French Red Cross

Consulted Documents

IFRC (6 January 2022), *Operation Update no. 4, Emergency Appel Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, Mount Nyiragongo Eruption*, 28p.

Croix-Rouge de la RDC, IFRC Assessment Cell (2021), *Rapport d'évaluation, Éruption du volcan Nyiragongo, RDC, Nord Kivu, Goma*, 17p.

Croix-Rouge de la RDC, IFRC Assessment Cell (2021), *Situation and needs overview, Executive summary*, 5p.

IFRC (16 September 2021), *Revised Emergency Appeal, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, Mount Nyiragongo Eruption: Complex Multi- Hazard Emergency*, 18p.

IFRC (6 July 2021), *Operation Update no. 2, Emergency Appel Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, Mount Nyiragongo Eruption*, 19p.

IFRC (6 July 2021), *Operation Update no. 1, Emergency Appel Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, Mount Nyiragongo Eruption*, 26p.

IFRC (1 June 2021), *Emergency Appeal, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, Mount Nyiragongo Eruption: Complex Multi- Hazard Emergency*, 25p.

IFRC (24 September 2020), *Revised Emergency Appeal, Democratic Republic of the Congo: Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) Outbreak Containment Strategy and Red Cross / Red Crescent Response Plan*, 22p.

Lois Austin and Anna Dobai (February 2019), *Lesson-learning review of the 'One International Appeal' modality, Part of the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) process*, 77p.

Croix-Rouge de la RDC (September 2021), *Rapport des ateliers sur les leçons apprises de la riposte Ebola du mouvement Croix-Rouge*, 22p.