

The Red Cross and Emergency Services Work

International Committee of the Red Cross

Given the suggestion in the previous article of constraints experienced by progressive workers in sustaining an ESG programme, Critical Health publishes extracts from an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) report on its violence related emergency services to highlight the resources available for this work. SAHSSO was approached to comment on their work in the light of the Red Cross report, and have responded that two of their members were undergoing emergency service training by the Red Cross. The issue, however, does deserve further consideration by the progressive sector.

The ICRC has been active in South Africa for almost 30 years. In the mid-1980s, in co-operation with the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS), the ICRC began community programmes in townships on the Reef. In 1988 a joint relief operation for victims of violence was started in Natal, which was extended to the Reef in 1990.

The ICRC provides support for the SARCS first-aid training programme in troubled areas. Courses aim to impart the knowledge and skills people need to help the injured in disaster situations and to encourage the creation, training and active intervention of SARCS first-aid teams in the event of unrest. Thanks to this training and preparedness, Red Cross teams cared for more than 100 of the injured at the recent shootings in Bisho, and evacuated more than 40 to hospital.

The Red Cross is involved in establishing small first-aid groups in the townships and hostels who can be speedily mobilized whenever an attack occurs. The role of the Red Cross is to function as an impartial agency which is available to assisting people injured on all sides.

The Natal side of the Red Cross programme began in mid-1988. So far, more than 80 000 people have been assisted. On the Reef, the programme began in August 1990 and has helped more than 35 000 people. Assistance to victims of violence and their families included burial vouchers, worth up to R600, provided to families to offset the cost of burying relatives who were recently killed in the violence, as well as, blankets, food, cooking pots, kitchen utensils, jerry cans and shelter to families whose dwelling and property were destroyed in the violence.

International Committee of the Red Cross