**IT Think Paper #10**

**Technology Assessment**

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In the RC Movement, and the humanitarian sector at large, assessments are a core competency. “What is the current situation” is a fundamental question, as are “what are the needs” or “what are the gaps?” In short, we ask “What is the current state versus the desired future state?” These questions are as relevant for emergencies response, programme development and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) capacity.

Our Organization Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) programme has proposed a 5-level assessment and development programme for National Society (NS) self- and peer-assessment. This dovetails with our Digital Divide programme, where we recognize that crossing the digital divide is not a one step process, but rather the beginning of a journey from minimum ICT operating standards to highly developed uses of technology at all levels of NS operations and programme delivery.

We have proposed two “leading indicator” categories of ICT capacity for the OCAC framework, including “adequate ICT support for internal management and service delivery” and “ability to harness the capabilities of ICT to maximise effectiveness and reach.” Development of capacity in operations and programme delivery then progresses from level A to E.

Overlaying this development framework is our IT Pyramid Strategy (see Figure 1). This approach recognizes that leveraging ICT means delivering for each stakeholder group, from the office worker to the business unit manager, to the field worker at our National Societies, and to the beneficiary who we all ultimately serve. In short, our model is to follow a development path for IT as such, moving the technology agenda up the pyramid, while partnering to achieve commodity functions at the bottom of the pyramid in order to drive more mission-moving uses of technology at the top.

Figure - The Strategic Technology Portfolio



So when we talk about assessing and building capacity in National Societies we need to do so in this strategic context. We want to look at the four levels of applying technology strategically, with the five levels of NS development (see Figure 2)

Figure - A High-Level Technology Development Framework



If we then think about three tiers of National Societies in this framework, we can ask about ICT capacity for emerging countries that are part of our Digital Divide programme, mid-tier societies, and the larger Partner National Societies (PNS). Following the NSKD capacity building framework, the portfolio of technology is sensitive to context. What is appropriate for one class of societies is not for another in its current state of development. However we aspire that all societies will achieve an ever-increasing use of technology to move forward our mission of helping the vulnerable.

IT assessment needs to be developed and conducted in this broader context. We envision a range of ICT assessment templates, from a basic assessment appropriate for Digital Divide countries, which we are already conducting, to a mid-tier assessment, to a large PNS ICT health-check (see Figure 2). The categories and questions will be tailored to where the society is in its development cycle. For example, basic connectivity, desktop computers and a finance application may be fundamental to an emerging country, while a greater set of infrastructure systems, business applications and programme delivery technology may be more appropriate to a mid-tier society.

The important thing to keep in mind is that this approach is a “diagonal” rather than a “vertical” approach. In other words, we are not approach ICT development as first achieving excellence in infrastructure, then moving up to business applications and so on. We are taking a portfolio approach, than asks early about the opportunities to take technology to the field worker and beneficiary as the minimum required infrastructure is in place. Hence, the ICT development of societies moves diagonally across the matrix (again see figure 2).