iVolunteer Background
In 2012, Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) unveiled iVolunteer, a new tool to engage digital volunteers on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Linkedin and Bloggers to help with rescue and recovery efforts in an emergency situation digitally. The campaign hopes that the lessons that KRCS learn from their digital volunteers during disasters will help to foster the spirit of brotherhood amongst Kenyans when disaster strikes.

What led to iVolunteer?
In the event of an emergency a quick response time is critical; the earlier a disaster is reported the faster a response can occur. With this idea in mind the KRCS Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team and responders launched the iVolunteer initiative. This digital platform allows individuals in any location in Kenya to interact with others during an emergency in real time.

How have iVolunteers supported emergency response?
The iVolunteer initiative has led to emergencies and disasters being reported online as soon as they occur. This has contributed not only to a faster emergency response but also to the documentation of emergencies that otherwise would not have been captured.

Digital volunteers reported the 2013 Westgate and the 2015 Garissa University attacks on the iVolunteer platform. KRCS verified this information and was able to activate its on call response teams. When an emergency inevitably arises KRCS now connects directly with communities and shares lifesaving safety and preparedness information through #iVolunteer.

Social media is playing an increasingly large role in informing the general public about disasters and disaster response and recovery. For example during the West Gate terrorist attack KRCS warned the public about the attack and used social media to encourage the public to make blood and cash donations, under the campaign banner of ‘WE ARE ONE’.

Following the Garissa terrorist attack, KRCS shared public emergency hotline numbers and informed the public of how and where to lodge their tracing requests for their loved ones. Also, during the recent flooding in July that caused severe traffic jams around the city, KRCS shared traffic alerts with motorists.

What challenges have been experienced?
Initially KRCS social media audience number was minimal, and it could not reach as many people as it had hoped for when it first launched. The society now has a wide network, including 401,000 followers on Twitter and 101,000 likes on Facebook. The network continues to grow with more engagement through updates and acknowledgements.

Authenticating the information shared was a challenge, but this was overcome when the society took a decision to have a 24 hour duty schedule in every branch across the country to verify and authenticate information received online.

Access to people of different age groups and social classes is a challenge, as social media is mainly dominated by people within the age bracket of 18-34 years, leaving out the older section of the population. Furthermore, not everybody in Kenya can access social media, thus there is a gap in reaching this section of people who have no social media presence.
Staffing remains a challenge as social media requires someone to be on duty 24 hours a day. This becomes a major challenge particularly during crises, as KRCS has limited social media staff.

**How do people become iVolunteers?**

Members of the Kenyan public become iVolunteers by liking the Facebook (FB) page and following @KenyaRedCross on Twitter. By liking the FB page and sharing KRCS key messages, digital volunteers help spread key messages to friends and family, which in turn encourages them to become an iVolunteer. Bloggers can also embed Kenya Red Cross banners and link it to the KCRS portal.

These images are examples of tweets sent by iVolunteers in a number of different crises: