

SRI LANKA

CHF 429,000

Programme No. 01.23/2000

National Context

Sri Lanka's enormous development potential has been strangled for the last 20 years by the civil war between the Sinhala dominated government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who seek to create a separate nation for the Tamil minority. Armed clashes and bomb attacks in the capital and on other strategic targets have diverted government attention and resources from important structural, developmental and public issues. Unemployment is high and inflation is gradually rising.

Sri Lanka's assets include some positive human development factors: an adult literacy rate of nearly 90%, life expectancy of 75 years and an infant mortality rate of 16 per thousand. Some 57% of the population has access to safe water. Sri Lankan society is built around a well-developed belief in communal action and concerted effort, and in rural areas can count on the growing power and involvement of women.

As an island located in a cyclone prone area and exposed to a long monsoon season, the country is vulnerable to tropical storms and tidal surges, flash floods in the mountains and foothills and river flooding in the plains. In contrast, in the dry northern part, drought and food shortages are frequent when irrigation of agriculture fails. An ancient system of water tanks is breaking down because of lack of maintenance and compounding the water problem, while deteriorating health services have increased the vulnerability of the population to infectious diseases. The greatest negative impact on progress and well-being however remains the civil war.

Country Assistance Strategy

The Sri Lankan Red Cross Society (SLRCS) is slowly but steadily recovering from the serious problems of integrity and governance during the period 1993-1995 which severely affected its domestic image and damaged the trust of international supporters. A new set of managers appointed in 1995 and a new Board of Governors have taken decisive action in addressing the most problematic areas, resolving several managerial and financial issues, introducing a new constitution and dissolving dormant branches. In 1999 the Society established a relief committee, which has been an important factor in the Society's effective response to recent natural and man-made emergencies, including bomb blasts. These relief operations, plus the efforts of the new leadership, have helped to improve relationships with the authorities and win back a degree of donor confidence.

The Federation's assistance strategy is built on the National Society's urgent need of well structured technical support to assist it in its change process. It will focus on two closely linked areas: the change process and the Society's disaster preparedness and response capacity. In a three year programme beginning in 2000, the Federation will support the SLRCS in strengthening its management structure and systems to enable it to run effective and focused Disaster Preparedness and Response programmes. Recognising that continuity and consistency will be a key element to success, the Federation will post an ID/DP delegate to Colombo, to work with the National Society on a 50% basis (the remainder of the time to be spent on regional duties).

Due to current circumstances, the SLRCS works closely with the ICRC, particularly in areas of civil unrest, and receives support for various first aid, information and tracing services. The Federation will endeavour to ensure the successful implementation of the “Seville Agreement” by incorporating ICRC’s substantial contribution to ID into the ongoing process of overall development, rather than maintaining the present parallel status.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

Relief operations will receive support on a specific needs basis. Response capacity will be reinforced as outlined below.

Disaster Preparedness

For this crucial programme, Federation assistance aims over a three year period, at strengthening the capacities of strategic branches to respond to large scale disasters and, together with local communities in high risk areas, to provide a response to local and every day disasters. It will promote the linking of SLRCS plans to the Sri Lankan government Disaster Preparedness (DP) plan and networking with other DP key players in the country, especially donors, UN agencies and NGOs, for the purpose of better fund-raising, co-ordination, and joint training.

Humanitarian Values

The Federation will continue to work with the National Society to strengthen its public image and to reinforce general knowledge of the Red Cross in Sri Lanka, in co-operation with the ICRC.

Capacity Building

Both the National Society and the Federation recognise the importance of reinforcing the Society’s capacity to provide urgently needed services in the country’s present difficult circumstances and have thus made the institutional development process their first priority. With proven capacity (as has already been demonstrated on a small scale) comes increased donor confidence and support, the key to further progress.

A three year programme will strengthen National Society governance, leadership and management through regional exchange, training and technical assistance, so that SLRCS has a three year plan with efficient structures and systems in place to implement focused activities. It will also develop financial skills, procedures and systems in the HQ and branches through training and technical assistance, in order to support SLRCS in its efforts to diversify its resource base and increase its level of income.