

DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

CHF 9,570,000

Programme No. 01.30/2000

National Context

A sharp and serious decline in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) economy in recent years, coupled with a series of devastating floods, has practically eradicated the growth and development of previous decades. The last ten years have seen a massive contraction in the economy of nearly 30%, while domestic food production dropped by an estimated 14% in the period 1990 -1994.

The situation has produced a cascade effect, leading to a persistent energy crisis, reduced industrial production, the deterioration of roads and transport systems, continued food shortages, deforestation and a seriously under-resourced health and social service sector. The situation is further complicated by a complex regional and international geo-political environment.

Despite increasingly desperate coping measures among the population, the effects on people's health and well-being have been dramatic. The population growth rate fell 0.9% during 1998 and the crude death rate rose to 9.3% compared to 5.68% in 1996 according to government sources. Infant mortality jumped from 9.2/1000 per live births in 1990 to a current rate of 23/1000 births. Nutritional surveys conducted in 1998 by WFP, UNICEF and ECHO show that 60% of children under the age of seven are underweight, while over 62% are stunted and nearly 16% suffer wasting. As the numbers of vulnerable shoot up, financial support to health and social welfare services and institutions has all but disappeared.

Country Assistance Strategy

The Federation's response to the situation in DPRK is based on certain conclusions concerning the main challenges, present and future, which must be addressed if the international community, in partnership with local officials, is to make any impact on the country's current problems.

The food supply issue will continue to challenge the government and aid agencies in the foreseeable future and to create vulnerability. According to UNDP data, the steady 4% annual decline in food production since 1989 will continue, irrespective of developments. Production in 1999 was expected to represent a shortfall of over one million tons of rice and cereals.

The populations worst affected by food scarcity will remain those groups least able to fend for themselves, such as children, lactating mothers and elderly adults with little or no family support mechanisms. However, rising unemployment, affecting entire families, is likely to increase the numbers of those in need.

The natural disasters to which the DPRK is exposed – floods, drought, typhoons and landslides – are a permanent threat, but in the present circumstances, with the country's severely reduced resources, they could have an even greater impact than usual on affected communities.

In addition to the food supply issues and the high levels of chronic malnutrition, the shortfalls of the health care system is another element influencing priorities. After years of under-resourcing and poor maintenance, the result is buildings with outdated equipment, few medicines, poor sanitation and no heating. In such circumstances, the population will remain vulnerable to major outbreaks of communicable diseases.

Taking the above factors into account, the Federation has drawn up a support strategy focused on two key areas: disaster response and preparedness and health education and service activities. Its operating partner will be the DPRK Red Cross, the only agency in the country to have been granted any degree of operational independence. The National Society, which has 325,000 volunteers and a network of 8,000 health clinics, is firmly committed to expanding its services and its volunteer skills base.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

While the Red Cross will continue to be a primary player in disaster relief, it cannot assume full responsibility or accountability for a national response: its input will concentrate on continuing support to ongoing relief programmes and ensuring that the DPRK Red Cross has a strong disaster response capability and contributes to reducing community vulnerability through preparedness measures and training.

Disaster Preparedness

The Federation will maintain its support to the National Society's Disaster Preparedness Programme by training and establishing effective and efficient disaster response systems at the national and provincial level.

Health

The Federation will continue its support of the DPRK Red Cross health programme, which aims at improving conditions in some 1,700 health institutions in four provinces and at promoting the prevention of communicable diseases through an emphasis on personal health. It will also support the National Society's community and first aid activities.

Humanitarian Values

The Red Cross image has developed considerably over the past five years, due to the work done by the DPRK Red Cross and the Federation in disaster response and preparedness and health. The National Society is training its volunteers and staff in basic Red Cross principles. The work will continue and be reinforced.

Capacity Building

The DPRK puts the continuous improvement of its skills and capacities as its first priority and looks to the Federation for long term assistance in this area.