

SOUTH ASIA

CHF 2,442,000

Programme No. 01.54/2000

Regional Context

South Asia is one of the poorest regions in the world and most of its 1.3 billion population – representing 24% of the world's population – are living in poverty. An estimated 3.2 million infants die within their first twelve months. Of those who survive, two thirds are malnourished, while only half of these children complete primary education. Maternal mortality is also among the highest in the world: over 180,000 women die every year from complications of pregnancy, representing over half the maternal deaths in the world.

GDP per capita rates are among the lowest in the world and these are reflected in poor human development indicators. Life expectancy is in the lowest category. Although GDP growth at around 5% is relatively high in all countries except Nepal, population growth also remains at a very high level, so that the real increase in GDP per capita is minimal.

In the health sector, services are limited and inadequate. Outbreaks of infectious diseases, the reemergence of diseases like tuberculosis and malaria, and the spread of new infections such as HIV / AIDS overtax the resources available. Another serious area of concern within the region is safe blood: a large portion of the blood supplied is provided through unofficial sources and, therefore, is often not adequately checked for HIV / AIDS, hepatitis and other transmittable diseases.

The region remains politically unstable. Fighting goes on in Afghanistan, while relations between Pakistan and India remain tense, with occasional clashes over disputed territory. Sri Lanka is still suffering from a low intensity civil war between the state and Tamil secessionists. Other conflictual or security situations include a tense situation in some parts of north eastern India, in the Chittagong hill areas in Bangladesh and in Nepal where terrorist attacks are growing.

The region suffers from a range of natural disasters, chiefly floods, droughts and earthquakes, and has some of the world's largest cities with some of the worst slums.

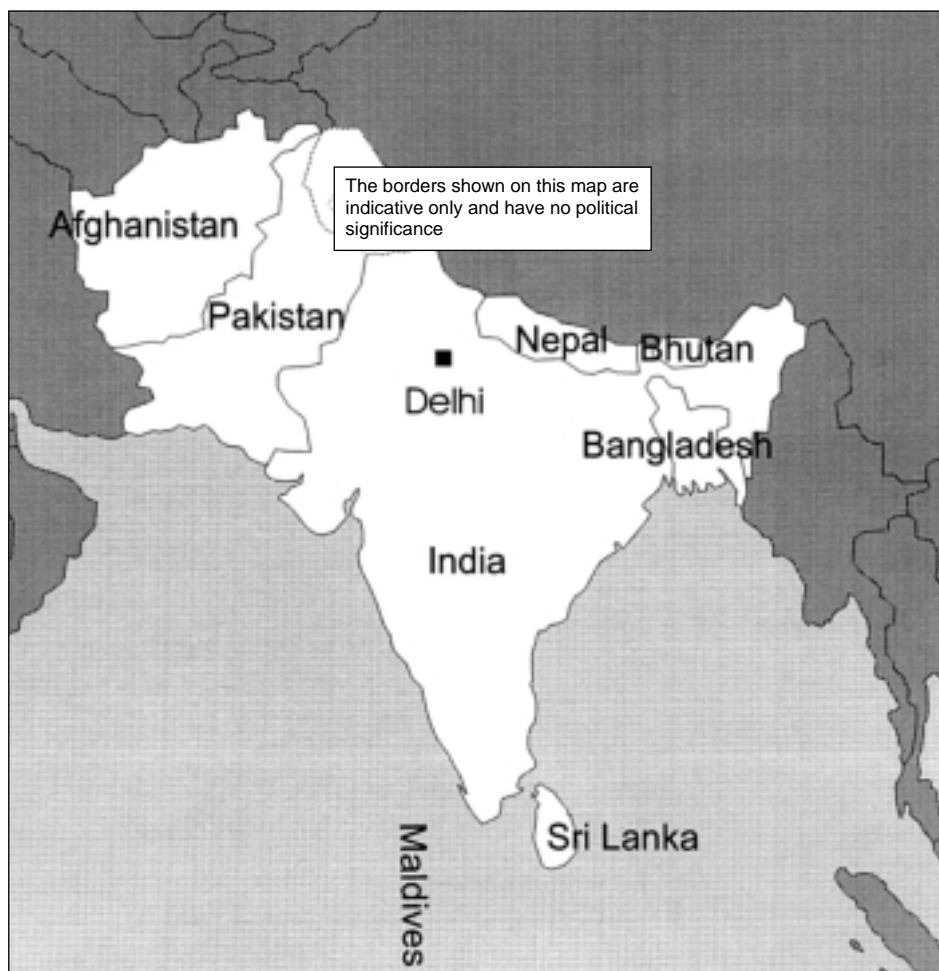
Regional Assistance Strategy

A lengthy and extensive process aimed at developing longer term plans and priorities for all the region's National Societies, begun at the Regional Conference in Hanoi in late 1998, has resulted in a Longer Term Development Plan for South Asia, which gives a series of guidelines for future development within the region. The Plan now forms an important part of the four year country plans, and acts as the main focus for the Federation's regional forward plan. The priorities for the South Asian National Societies arising from this comprehensive exercise have been categorised as:

Priority A activities: disaster preparedness and response; health activities with particular focus on new and reemerging diseases; safe blood programmes; capacity building including financial management and resource development activities; and public relations.

Priority B activities: development of a community based approach; promotion of sub regional networks; development of government relations; and improved governance.

The Federation's regional strategy, to implement the Development Plan and its priorities, will be carried out by its Regional Delegation in Delhi. The Delegation's established role is to help strengthen, develop and build the capacity of the member National Societies in the sub-region as well-functioning organisations able to address and bring assistance in key sectors to the most vulnerable. In countries that have a country delegation – Afghanistan and Bangladesh – the Regional Delegation provides regional technical backstopping. In countries where there is no country delegation – India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal – the Regional Delegation has a more hands-on role in guiding the implementation of capacity building projects and programmes in key sectors.



To help bring the regional strategy into effect a South Asia Regional Capacity Building Team will be created in 2000, made up of the five current positions – a regional Head of Delegation and finance, information, health and ID/DP delegates, plus a regional relief delegate, to be appointed. The Health Delegate will be based in Islamabad, the ID/DP Delegate in Sri Lanka, the others in New Delhi.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

There are no regionally administered disaster response operations at the moment.

Disaster Preparedness

The Federation will help improve the level of disaster preparedness by promoting preparedness through regional workshops, assisting in the definition of each country's vulnerability, and strengthening capacities of strategic Branches, with India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan as the priority countries. It will promote links between National Societies and their government's Disaster Preparedness plans, and establish linkages with other regional programmes and other key Disaster Preparedness players.

Health

The overall aim of the regional health strategy will be to provide technical support to the National Societies of the region and strengthen the partnership between these Societies in order to address some of the critical health indicators and to improve the health status of most vulnerable. More specifically the Federation regional programme will assist the Societies in providing well-functioning programmes and improving their design, management and co-ordination. It will enhance the capacity of Societies to provide community based services by updating the technical skills training of National Society staff and volunteers.

Humanitarian Values

To promote humanitarian values the Federation will help improve the information sharing and public relations activities of each Society and develop new and increased sources of funding to support services and thus a humanitarian approach to vulnerability.

Capacity Building

The Federation will help to strengthen existing National Society capacity by promoting assessment techniques which allow Societies to plan more effectively for the most vulnerable, and to set realistic and relevant aims and goals. It will aim to improve National Societies' governance through regional and/or country specific workshops and will provide technical support and guidance to institutional and resource development programmes. The Federation through the Regional Delegation will also help Societies to develop improved finance management and gain experience in modern finance administrative systems and support them in resource development and diversification of income. Finally it will encourage Societies to build gender awareness and youth involvement into their various development and relief programmes.

The Federation will explore the possibility of creating new National Societies in the Republic of the Maldives and the Kingdom of Bhutan.