

INDIA

CHF 1,998,000

Programme No. 01.55/2000

National Context

India, with a population of 978.6 million according to the most recent estimates, is the second most populous state in the world. With a current population growth of 2.1%, it will probably top the one billion population mark in the year 2000. A doubling of the population is predicted for the year 2031.

Approximately 59 million household (34% of the total) are estimated to exist at or below the poverty line and slums are an urban problem of vast proportions. Infant mortality stands at 71 per 1000 births and is among the highest in the world. An estimated 53% of children under the age of five years are underweight. Approximately 20% of the population has no access to safe drinking water, but this figure is much higher in rural areas.

The unique geo-climatic conditions of the Indian sub-continent place the country among the most vulnerable to disasters in the world. Of the 31 States and Union Territories, 22 are regarded as particularly disaster-prone. River floods are among the most frequent and often most devastating event, with on average 19 million hectares of land flooded annually. About 50% to 60% of the total land mass is prone to seismic activity and many large cities, including New Delhi, lie along seismic belts. Drought is a perennial threat to 16% of the total area. The Indian Ocean is one of the six major cyclone prone regions in the world and violent cyclones make landfall regularly along the east coast. Besides these natural phenomena, India, with its large industrial plants and transport systems, is vulnerable to technological and transport accidents.

Country Assistance Strategy

The size of India and its vulnerability present huge challenges to formulating a humanitarian response. The Indian Red Cross, with over 650 Branches and well over 12 million members, is one of the largest indigenous organisations in the country. Despite its size, it has had capacity problems, not helped by its federal structure which gives a large measure of independence to State and District Branches. In recent years, the Society has undergone significant changes and is today focusing on disaster preparedness, disaster management, institutional and organisational training and development, as well as an overhaul and modernisation of its administrative structure. It also plans to upgrade its blood transfusion service.

After several years of sporadic and ad hoc support to the Indian Red Cross, the Federation is now envisaging a more structured and planned long-term support to the National Society, both in terms of institutional and organisational development, but also in the area of programmes. Of the three priority areas – Disaster Preparedness and Response, Health and Capacity Building – the latter will be given first priority.

It will be part of the future development strategy of the Federation and the National Society to focus more on the systematic use of planning tools. This will ultimately lead to a better definition of what vulnerability means

in the context of India and its diverse regions with their different challenges and capacities. Once vulnerability has been properly defined, it will be easier to establish the selection criteria for the most vulnerable, set appropriate project goals and, eventually, determine practical ways and means to regularly and constantly evaluate the programmes and projects against their original aims and objectives.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

Since the National Society responds to many disasters, both natural and technological, each year, the Federation will offer support in developing disaster management capacity and response, built on the vast national resource base.

Disaster Preparedness

The Federation will support the National Society in developing its Disaster Preparedness capacity. Assistance will focus on improving the Society's national management and co-ordination capacity and reinforcing branch and state level services. One priority will be the introduction of a National Disaster Preparedness plan and as many state level plans as possible. Another will be branch level training, with a target of 500 trained staff, and community based Disaster Preparedness workshops in each State.

Health

The Federation will support the IRCS in assisting national-level, state and district branches to establish a needs based inventory of community health projects which are in line with government health policy and programming priorities. Providing adequate infrastructure and trained staff to carry forward this "Health Agenda" for 2000 and beyond will be part of this support. The National Society will also be assisted in upgrading its New Delhi blood transfusion centre and in developing a blood donor recruitment programme.

Humanitarian Values

The Federation will continue to work with the National Society in promoting and gradually improving joint advocacy work at the national and regional level.

Capacity Building

The Indian Red Cross has embarked on a far reaching change process to increase its capacity. The Federation is prioritising support to these efforts, particularly through the Institutional Development assistance described above, so that in the longer term the benefits of the modernisation currently underway will extend to the entire country.

The Federation will provide support to the National Society in the implementation of its change process, with the aim of improving its capacity to plan, manage and evaluate its programmes effectively. Assistance will cover programme related issues, leadership capacity, a National Development Plan and financial management.