

Appeal 2004



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Southeast Asia Country Summary:

Vietnam

Introduction

While the Federation Secretariat currently retains a representative office in Vietnam, there is no formal appeal for 2004 mainly due to uncertainties over the future of this office, including its role and capacity to support the Vietnam Red Cross (VNRC) in the utilisation of additional funds. This awkward situation emanates largely from difficulties encountered through 2003 in appointing a Federation representative, following the end of missions of the previous and then acting head of delegation (November 2002 and June 2003 respectively). Moreover, considerable carry-over funds from 2003 (including support to the VNRC disaster preparedness programme) will need to be expended in 2004 – managed in conjunction with the Federation Secretariat's regional delegation in Bangkok – entailing a period of consolidation ahead of any operational decisions. In any event, emergencies excepted, Federation Secretariat focus in Vietnam from 2005 onwards almost certainly will be directed towards cooperation and coordination priorities.

National Context

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was established in 1976, following a period of prolonged warfare and partition that succeeded more than a century of French colonial rule. The country's government and political structure was reformed in 1992 and a new constitution adopted whereby the Vietnamese Communist Party remains the dominant political force in the country.

Its geography and demographics (population 80 million) make Vietnam one of the countries in the Asia and Pacific region most vulnerable to natural disasters. The long coastline and topography expose it to frequent typhoons, floods and drought. Deforestation, the pressure of a large and dense population, increasing urbanisation, the impact of the regional economic crisis, health and social problems (particularly the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the legacy of war) all combine to make Vietnam one of the region's highest priorities for humanitarian assistance. By far, the greatest needs are in the rural areas of Vietnam, inhabited by approximately 75 per cent of the population.

The country continues its development of the open market economy, which received a major boost with the ratification of a bilateral trade agreement with the United States at the end of 2001. Even so, foreign direct investment has dropped significantly in recent years, requiring more in-depth reforms in the state sector.

National Society Priorities

The Vietnam Red Cross is recognised as one of the leading humanitarian organisations in the country. It was founded in 1946 and joined the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in 1957. The VNRC priority programmes and activities include health and first aid at community level, social work, disaster response and cooperating with sister national societies.

The VNRC operates as an auxiliary to the humanitarian and social welfare activities of the state authorities of Vietnam and has a key position in the national disaster emergency response mechanism. It has a country wide network of local-level branches in its 61 provinces and is widely represented down to district and commune level. Capacities at provincial level have been strengthened in recent years through branch development programmes, supported by a number of partner national societies. Traditional dissemination and general promotion of humanitarian values are areas under constant development in cooperation with both ICRC and the Federation.

The VNRC has a five-year cycle for its governance body. The national society's 7th National Congress was held in August 2001, electing the national leadership and governing bodies, including the Central Executive Committee and the National Standing Board, reviewing progress of current strategy and setting priorities for the coming five years (2002-2006). VNRC defined the general direction for this period as:

- Upholding and consolidating the achieved results and increasing public awareness of humanitarian causes and of Red Cross Red Crescent activities;
- Building a strong Red Cross organisation, capable of fulfilling its role as the backbone of the Vietnamese humanitarian front; and
- Expanding international relations based on self-reliance, exchange of experience and knowledge, and making effective use of foreign aid in humanitarian and socio-economic development.

Furthermore, the National Congress established the following priority tasks:

- Implementing, respectively, the 'Hanoi Declaration' of the 5th Asia and Pacific Regional Conference, the Plan of Action of the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and 'Strategy 2010' of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
- Strengthening and developing dissemination services. Continuing innovation and increased effectiveness in VNRC's focus on the poor and efforts to help this group better integrate into the community.
- Consolidating the organisation, especially at grassroots levels, by further enhancing the skills of the VNRC volunteers, staff and members. Providing more help for newly established local VNRC units, particularly those in remote areas.
- Actively raising funds locally to become more self-reliant. Strengthening coordination with different sectors and other mass organisations, and, by doing so, taking a lead role in humanitarian activities throughout the country.
- Establishing action plans at all levels, based on the general directions and tasks, with realistic targets and priorities, formulating and replicating best practices.
- Raising the quality of actions, while addressing legitimate moral and material benefits of the organisation's human resources, namely the volunteers, staff and members.
- Establishing regulations and working rules, renovating the information system, more investment in working aids, raising effectiveness in management skills, strengthening research and actively addressing how to help the weaker links in the organisational structures.

Red Cross Red Crescent Priorities

The main priorities for the Federation Secretariat, which established a delegation in the late 1980s in Vietnam, are to support the VNRC in its capacity building and in the sustainable development of its programmes as well as to provide service and guidance to the VNRC partners engaged in Vietnam. In 2001, the VNRC and the Federation restarted discussions on the development of a cooperation agreement strategy (CAS), in order to clearly define the future roles of the society's various partners. The coordination difficulties that have beset the Red Cross Red Crescent in Vietnam over past year was the subject of intense dialogue at the Southeast Asia partnership meeting in Hanoi at the end of October and while the question still remains open, it is hoped that a solution will emerge before the end of the year.

During the partnership meeting VNRC presented the new draft Development Strategy Framework for the national society for the period from 2003 to 2010. The strategic goals have been outlined as follows:

1. Strengthen and develop all levels of the Red Cross structure; develop Red Cross human resources both in quantity and quality; strengthen the society's financial resources and maintain the state support to all levels of the Red Cross.
2. Review and revitalise activities in terms of content and methodology to develop capacities, efficiency and effectiveness of Red Cross community services.
3. Strengthen and develop structures, increase capacity, effectiveness and quality of Red Cross communication.
4. Develop cooperative relationships with domestic and overseas organisations and individuals.

An action plan has been drafted already outlining priorities, objectives and activities within the Development Strategy Framework 2003-2010. Involving both branch and headquarters levels, VNRC will be heavily engaged in finalising this pivotal strategy document over the coming months.

Disaster preparedness and response: Vietnam is prone to frequent natural disasters, including typhoons, drought or floods, occurring in many areas and severely affecting large sections of the population. The VNRC has over the last years (and with assistance from the International Federation and partners) developed its capacity and is today seen as a key organisation in Vietnam to mobilise, coordinate and provide assistance to disaster victims.

A comprehensive disaster preparedness programme, focusing on human resources development, material resources and risk reduction activities, has strengthened not only VNRC capacity, but also developed communities' ability to cope with disasters. Activities have included construction of flood-resistant houses, schools, preparedness centres and relief stores, as well as training of a huge number of school children. There is also a well established mangrove planting programme in six northern provinces.

Health and Social Welfare: The VNRC is currently working in several health and care related areas; community-based first aid, primary health care, humanitarian clinics and traditional medicine, HIV/AIDS, blood donor recruitment and community-based social work. Through these programmes, VNRC is providing services to disadvantaged and vulnerable children, the lonely elderly, extremely poor and people who for different reasons are in critical need for assistance. The national society is also paying special attention to one particularly vulnerable group - those with disabilities, many believed to be suffering from the effects of the chemical defoliants (Agent Orange) sprayed over large parts of Vietnam during the war.

The VNRC is planning further to develop and expand its health and social welfare activities to respond to the needs at local level. Preparations are underway for increasing its intervention in HIV/AIDS, joining the Federation's global campaign and working to prevent the spread, provide care and support and to reduce stigma and discrimination. Road safety and commercial first aid are other areas being considered for development.

Humanitarian Values: VNRC has made some progress in this field by training key staff and volunteers in 'Red Cross' knowledge. Promotion of the Movement's principles and values are mostly integrated into VNRC activities. The national society has lobbied for further recognition and support from the government and public services, which is hoped will bring results over the coming year. VNRC is quite visible in the national and regional media, primarily through its disaster response work and support to Agent Orange victims. With its vast network throughout the country, the VNRC has an enormous potential to promote the Movement's principles and values. Some first steps to develop a more comprehensive communications strategy have been taken in order to be more effective in this area.

Organisational development: The first VNRC organisational development plan has been implemented laying the background for the continuation of organisational changes. Some encouraging achievements have been made, including:

- VNRC has shown its commitment for changes particularly the strategic planning process and management issues.
- Leadership capacity, the retention of qualified staff, fundraising/resource development and skills in daily and programme management are being closely incorporated in an overall plan for the organisation's development.
- A branch development programme is being implemented in more than a dozen provinces with support of partner national societies.

Partnerships

The VNRC is engaging in an increasing number and various forms of collaborations with national societies and other partners, including various NGOs and government ministries. The society still has limited capacity to undertake effective management of such partnerships and continues to rely on coordination support from the Federation and through the developing CAS process.

<i>Partners in Vietnam in 2004</i>	
<i>American Red Cross</i>	American Red Cross is committed to a long-term, multi-faceted partnership with the VNRC that complements and adds value to the range of Red Cross assistance in Vietnam. Priorities include ongoing support to the society's disability programme through the representative office in Hanoi. In addition, a child nutrition education programme in four provinces is targeting 50,000 school children and 200,000 family members over a 15 month period.
<i>Australian Red Cross</i>	The Australian Red Cross (ARC) has made a long-term commitment to support the VNRC HIV/AIDS programme and seeks other opportunities to support the society's work in Vietnam. The current plan is to maintain a project office in Hanoi, with a new disaster preparedness and water sanitation project slated for the central provinces.
<i>Belgium/Netherlands Red Cross (shared delegate)</i>	The Belgium (Flemish section) and Netherlands Red Cross Societies collaborate on a bilateral disaster preparedness programme and climate change project at national level and with chapters in the five provinces of Nge An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan. There is also support for the VNRC street children project in Quang Tri province, in addition to health and capacity building programmes in three northern provinces: Thai Nguyen, Bac Kan and Cao Bang.
<i>Danish Red Cross</i>	Danish Red Cross (DRC) has pledged support for the primary health care and disaster preparedness programmes between 2003-2005. The DRC will continue to maintain an office in Hanoi, headed by a DRC representative, until 2005.
<i>French Red Cross</i>	Ongoing programme development and bilateral assistance from the French Red Cross (FRC) includes community health (Hai Phong), water and sanitation (Ninh Thuan) and disaster preparedness (Soc Trang). The FRC intends to maintain a Hanoi-based representative. Further plans include: an HIV/AIDS counselling/hospital twinning project; road safety; and rural water sanitation and health education activities.
<i>Norwegian Red Cross</i>	Bilateral support for 2003-2004 from the Norwegian Red Cross Society (NRCS) is confirmed for VNRC chapters in the three provinces of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa. This will include organisational development and capacity building in the fields of disaster preparedness, social work and community-based first aid. The NRCS plans to maintain a project office in Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa, headed by a branch development delegate, until 2005.
<i>Spanish Red Cross</i>	Spanish Red Cross (SRC) runs bilateral projects covering community and branch development in chapters in the provinces of Ha Nam, Ha Tay and Hoa Binh. The SRC currently maintain a project/representative office in Hanoi, headed by a SRC delegate, until 2005, with a possible extension.
<i>Swiss Red Cross</i>	The Swiss Red Cross will continue its bilateral support for disaster preparedness, through the construction of 250 flood and storm resistant houses in the province of Phu Yen, and to VNRC's disability programme.
<i>ICRC</i>	Through its regional delegation in Bangkok, the ICRC will continue its support to VNRC for the promotion of international humanitarian law, tracing, and the dissemination of the Movement's fundamental principles.

Federation Secretariat Support

The Federation delegation/office in Vietnam was established in late 1980s with the aim of supporting the organisational development of VNRC, strengthening its programmes and enhancing its ability to respond to disasters. Considerable assistance has been provided through the country delegation/office, with input from the Southeast Asia regional delegation and, latterly, the Kuala Lumpur-based regional finance unit. Over these years, VNRC's capacity has developed significantly, and thereby, the Federation Secretariat's presence and role been subject to review. Although programme implementation assistance is no longer required to the same degree, VNRC has asked for the Secretariat's continued presence and assistance, primarily in the following areas:

- Providing consultancy and advisory support to the VNRC in developing its long-term strategies;
- Assisting VNRC, if required, in coordinating and facilitating the increasing number of partners, including support with establishing mechanisms and developing a CAS;
- Ensuring, as a facilitator and guide, that the appropriate capacity building and technical support is provided to the VNRC by its partners in key functions, including programme and financial management.

It is recognised that the bilateral activities of national societies have an invaluable contribution to make towards building the capacity of the VNRC to implement programmes, but at the same time the VNRC's capacity for coordination and management is not well supported by an intensive bilateral project approach. Continued emphasis is needed on developing consensus on mechanisms for cooperation to facilitate coordination and partnership relations and also to ensure that the collective support aligns with VNRC priorities and overall capacity building to a greater extent than at present.

The past two years have been particularly difficult for the Federation office, with very limited support for its coordination and management costs resulting in an unacceptably high deficit on its core costs budget, which had to be written off (against the Federation's reserves) at the end of 2002, with significant operational implications. At the same time, it became necessary to transfer the then delegation head to another post within the Federation and seek a fully-funded replacement as Federation Representative - a search which has continued unresolved into the final quarter of 2003.

In the meantime and in the absence of a Federation representative and with a pared-down Federation Secretariat office in Vietnam, the Southeast Asia regional delegation has supported both VNRC and the Vietnam office to carry through 2003 programmes. Pending resolution of the coordination issue, the regional delegation will be similarly tasked from the start of 2004.

Health and Care: Recent years have seen some significant achievements in health and care, including the development of a strategic plan for HIV/AIDS and enhancing the capacity of the health and care department at central level.

The department has also recognised the need to formulate longer-term strategies and plans and in 2003, with the support of the Bangkok-based regional health unit (RHU), has started the process of developing the VNRC strategic health plan. This will continue as part of the RHU support to VNRC in 2004, with particular focus on two programmes, community-based society work and HIV/AIDS prevention and care, targeted at:

- Increasing the VNRC's capacity to respond to social welfare needs of the most vulnerable groups in Vietnam.
- Supporting communities seeking to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, coupled with providing care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Disaster Management: The VNRC disaster management programme was established in the early 1990s and has evolved from infrastructure development - primarily the establishment of disaster preparedness centres - to developing material and human resources and then to adopting a more community-focused approach since 2000. Over recent years, the disaster situation in Vietnam has become more complex and disasters have occurred in areas that were not previously considered disaster prone. As a consequence, in addition to the 21 provinces that are considered the most disaster-prone, the VNRC considers that a further nine provinces should also receive support in disaster management activities. During 2002/3, the VNRC implemented different activities aimed at achieving four main strategic objectives:

- The society has the skilled human resources in disaster management at national headquarters and in 30 of the most disaster-prone provinces to manage the national disaster management programme, with reduced Federation technical support.
- The material resources required for disaster management at national headquarters and in 30 provinces considered to be most disaster-prone are enhanced.
- Appropriate risk reduction activities are identified and undertaken by the most disaster prone communities with the support from the VNRC and its partners.
- The VNRC plays an active role within a local, regional and global network in disaster management.

For 2004, the Federation Secretariat will support the VNRC in strengthening its capacity to assist the most vulnerable people in Vietnam to cope with disasters. This work will continue to be concentrated at the community level covering: training, provision of material resources (preparedness kits, radios, early warning sirens, etc.), risk reduction activities and the ongoing development of regional/local disaster management network. The main activities will centre on two projects: mangrove planting in at-risk areas in six northern provinces and associated community-based, disaster mitigation initiatives, funded by the Japanese Red Cross; preparedness for risks and mitigation of the impact of natural disasters through community-based disaster preparedness and mitigation activity, human resource and institutional development, with funding from DipECHO.

Humanitarian Values: At the VNRC national congress held in August 2001, the society set as one of its key tasks to 'uphold reached results, renovate and develop working methods and promote and disseminate the Red Cross widely to the population'. Communication will play an increasingly important role if the VNRC is to achieve this important task. Competition for donor interest and resources is increasing in Vietnam and will require the VNRC to take decisive actions even to maintain its present level of trust and support.

The VNRC has recognised a need for a more coordinated and effective approach to communications and more structured and consistent cooperation between the various departments. The Federation Secretariat's regional information unit has provided regular consultancy support and advice to the VNRC in recent years, and will, together with the country office, support VNRC to develop and implement a communications strategy and help to improve inter-departmental coordination and cooperation.

Organisational Development: The coming year is critical for the organisational development imperative in VNRC and Federation Secretariat support is needed to help the national society lay the foundation for sustainable development, with particular emphasis on:

- Developing a VNRC national strategy and CAS, incorporating technical strategies in health, social welfare and disaster management.
- Enhancing leadership skills and ensuring they are widely applied within VNRC.
- Introducing modern management techniques covering financial systems, leadership training, human resource development and project management skills.
- Fundraising and resource mobilisation, including a strong national headquarters and branch structure.

Implementation and Management: Following recent discussions on new models of partnership in Vietnam between VNRC, partner national societies and the Federation, which intensified with the nomination of the new president of VNRC, the lack of a coordination body for the Movement and a partner to VNRC for strategic planning and monitoring of programmes has been clearly identified. Given the collaboration of all partners, in 2004 the Federation Secretariat will focus on supporting the society in the preparation of a strategic plan and to strengthen VNRC's capacities for monitoring and supervision of the various Red Cross Red Crescent programmes in the country. The role of the Federation office will be adapted depending on the results of discussions and decisions made between the partners involved. The Federation office will in addition support the programmes which are implemented through the technical units in the regional delegation and VNRC.