

CENTRAL / SOUTH AMERICA: BUILDING CAPACITIES

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The countries in Central and South America have continued to experience spiralling levels of poverty and economic losses leading to increased criminality and insecurity. Unemployment, economic instability, social and internal armed conflicts (Mexico and Colombia) as well as natural disasters such as floods, mudslides, seismic and volcanic activities have further increased the vulnerability of the population while epidemics such as cholera and dengue (particularly in El Salvador) have threatened children, particularly those under five years of age.

The context

The region consists of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia. These Latin American countries share a common language but make up a diverse mosaic of different cultural backgrounds, colonial legacies, and political and economic histories. The regional delegation in Guatemala also liaises with National Societies in the United States and Canada.

The violent civil wars that raged in several Central American countries over the last decades have come to a close but many of the underlying social and economic causes are still present. Poverty is one of the main causes of vulnerability in the region, compounded by social violence and political instability. The population in this region also lives under the constant threat of natural disasters as witnessed by the devastation of El Niño and Hurricane Mitch.

Latest events

The internal conflict in Colombia has affected some three million people. About two million have left their homes looking for safer places in Columbia, as well as in neighbouring Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama.

In Venezuela, the anxiety created by political changes has seriously affected international investments with shocking levels of inflation and bank interest rates at as high as 75%. In addition, the worst natural disaster (floods and mudslides) in recent history (December 1999) left at least 30,000 dead and around 600,000 persons directly or indirectly affected. The victims of floods dominated the disaster response in the first part of the year.

Ecuador has been going through the worst economic crisis in the past 70 years and unemployment presently has the highest rate in the past two decades.

Following the peace agreements, the first presidential elections took place in Guatemala. The elections were reportedly free and fair and the new government took office in early January.

In Mexico, the opposition presidential candidate gained a landmark victory over the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

The responsibilities of the three regional Federation delegations in the Americas are going to be changed with the aim to further improve support given to National Societies in the region. As from August 2000, Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador, will be covered by the Federation regional delegation in Argentina while country delegations in Nicaragua and Honduras will be covered by the Federation regional delegation in Guatemala. A regional finance unit will be set up in Guatemala during the year, covering regional delegations in Guatemala and Dominican Republic. This reorganisation will provide closer co-operation and resource sharing between these two regional delegations.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Disaster Response •

The floods and landslides in Venezuela in December 1999 led to one of the worst disasters in the continent in recent history. Venezuela required extensive support in the first months after the disaster. Regional intervention teams were mobilised quickly and contributed significantly to the success of the Red Cross operation in Venezuela. Full details are available in the final report on the relief phase of the Venezuela operation.

In response to the floods in Mexico in October 1999, 11 communities in the State of Tabasco received hygiene kits and food supplies for 1,500 families. In the Municipality of Hidalgo in Metztitlán, a housing project was completed for the affected families. All 31 families received 150 square metres of land with access to potable water and electricity.

As a part of this project, workshops on disaster preparedness were provided to 130 people. Around 1,125 people from local communities were involved in health prevention activities. These programmes had a high impact on the community. A local health committee was established and a number of young people participated in the prevention campaigns. Psychological support as a part of the integrated services programme has benefited 32 people in the local community .

The Federation has continued to provide technical support to large rehabilitation programmes in the four countries affected by the hurricane Mitch. As bilateral PNS are moving towards long-term development programmes, the institutional development of the National Societies in the region becomes even more important. Please refer to previous situation reports on the Mitch operation.

A pilot project aimed at improving disaster response capacity for the Americas is being developed. At the moment, a pan-regional disaster response unit is being set up. A permanent logistics cell is expected to be set up in Panama as a part of this unit.

A relief delegate position shared by two regional delegations (Guatemala and Dominican Republic) is currently under review in the context of the disaster response unit development. Although the overall disaster response capacity in the region has improved, the Federation Regional Delegation in Guatemala continues with its disaster response capacity building activities.

An ongoing review of the large-scale relief operations (Hurricane Mitch, Hurricane Georges and the floods in Venezuela) will provide important recommendations for future interventions. The final report will be available later this year.

Disaster Preparedness •

The community based disaster preparedness programme has been consolidated. The DIPECHO funded programme, covering six countries, reached a total of 444 communities. A total of 191 facilitators were trained and 978 workshops were held reaching 22,469 participants. In addition, a total of 177 micro-projects (including small foot bridges, construction and/or repair of walls, etc) were implemented with the double objective of reducing vulnerability and promoting community organisation. In order to improve their communications, 49 out of 78 branches received radio sets.

The programme was evaluated extensively both internally and externally at regional and national level. The evaluation conclusions and recommendations will form the basis for adjustments in the programme.

A total of 75 National Society staff and volunteers from Guatemala and Venezuela were trained for their respective national intervention teams. Training included needs and damage assessment, policies (including SPHERE), information in disasters, reporting, etc. A regional disaster response database is being set up, housing details of all trained staff and volunteers.

A joint American Red Cross/Federation regional Disaster Preparedness conference was held in May 2000 in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. A follow-up committee was established to implement its recommendations focusing on training, planning, human resources and co-ordination with other actors. Special attention is being paid to updating and/or reviewing the national and regional contingency plans.

Health •

The regional health strategy remains focused on strengthening the National Society health departments and regional co-operation. In particular, programmes now focus on mother & child health (including the WHO/American Red Cross supported IMCI initiative), HIV/Aids (mainly youth peer education), basic sanitation, malaria and dengue.

Shortage of funds resulted, however, in postponements or cancellations of certain planned activities. While the regional health network is gaining momentum, a network volunteer is being recruited in order to maintain the information flow and communication with member NSs.

A regional "Health in Emergencies" workshop was organised by the Federation with support of the American Red Cross. In total, 70 participants from ONS, PNS, universities and WHO discussed a general framework for health intervention following disasters, including wat/san and psychological support. The new Federation health strategy was also discussed. The regional health workshop in Bolivia, the wat/san workshop in Nicaragua, the meeting of the Sub-region I Health Network and national health planning meetings in Costa Rica, Honduras and Venezuela also had the new Federation health strategy on their agenda.

The Inter-American First Aid guide was finalised and is now ready for printing. Funding is being sought for the first edition of 100,000 copies. A draft proposal for a regional blood donation campaign has been presented to donors.

Community health has been promoted as a core activity, providing a solid alternative to traditional health services in the region. The Golfo de Fonseca community based health programme has been introduced in Nicaragua and El Salvador and will include Honduras at a later stage. A joint Federation/British Red Cross team visited the Golfo de Fonseca community and their health programme in order to assess its viability and prepare recommendations. Their report will be available in August. The Golfo de Fonseca community health programme is expected to be fully implemented in the second part of this year.

The relations with the Ministry of Health, WHO, local authorities, universities and others have been further strengthened. Representatives from these organisations have participated in the Red Cross activities (conferences and workshops) on a regular basis.

Humanitarian Values •

Governance training has been conducted in collaboration with the ICRC in Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Joint workshops included fundamental principles, Red Cross history, the emblem, International Humanitarian Law, the Seville Agreement, Strategy 2010, guidelines for governance, characteristics of a well-functioning national society, etc. A joint Federation/ICRC plan of action is being prepared for a series of workshops for all National Societies (headquarters and branches).

The campaign “Adios Violencia” (Stop the Violence) was launched in Guatemala in co-ordination with the UN and within the “Culture of Peace and Non-Violence” campaign. This campaign hopes to reach 1,000,000 Guatemalans.

Four National Societies (Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua) have joined the Long Distance Education Programme, with an average of 60 participants per country, covering at least 75% of branches with full support from governance and management.

A joint ICRC/Federation workshop for directors of communication/information and dissemination departments has been conducted with full participation of the National Society from the region.

Capacity Building •

The Federation received an increased number of requests from National Societies for support to governance and management change processes and national development plans in Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. Country Assistance Strategies were reviewed and/or revised in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador.

An analysis and evaluation of governance and management roles and responsibilities was conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers within the Guatemala Red Cross change process. Results have been shared across the region.

A 2+2 years regional institutional development programme has been prepared in order to strengthen the National Societies capacity in governance, management, strategic planning, human resources and programme development. Special emphasis will be placed on monitoring and compliance.

Under the DFID supported youth programme, a regional youth advisor was appointed from the Honduras Red Cross. A regional plan of action for the youth network has been established and the network regulations have been approved. A first regional training workshop for youth leaders was held in Guatemala. The National Societies youth directors as well as communication directors have regular virtual meetings through the Regional Delegation’s on-line chat facility.

A draft document on the use of the Red Cross emblem in fund-raising was presented at the Communication Forum and approved by the Inter-American Regional Committee (CORI) for field use and future review. The working group on disaster information has also produced a draft document for information workshops. While some efforts have been made to strengthen the National Societies fund-raising capacities, financial sustainability still remains far away for most of the National Societies in the region. The Federation will continue with its efforts in this area during the second half of the year.

Training workshops for communications directors and publication of information material has more than doubled. A review of these efforts has been initiated with the aim of improving quality, cost effectiveness and impact.

Co-ordination •

As PNS bilateral programmes in the four MICH countries (Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador) have focused lately on long-term development, the co-ordination between all partners has become more effective. The country rehabilitation plans have particularly contributed to the improved co-ordination. There are now three “shared” delegates (Guatemala - Head of Delegation /Spanish Red Cross team leader, Honduras - Head of Delegation/Italian Red Cross regional representative, Regional DPP delegate/Canadian Red Cross). These delegates share responsibilities between the Federation and a PNS, greatly facilitating co-ordination and joint planning. While early indications are very positive, this new model of working together will need to be evaluated in the coming period in order to decide its future implications.

Outstanding needs

At the moment, the Appeal is only 19.7% covered. As capacity building is a process, long-term financial support is needed. Institutional Development, Disaster Preparedness, Communications as well as funding for regional delegates represent a priority.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

A status agreement with the Government of Guatemala is expected to be finalised in the third quarter of 2000. It is expected to facilitate the implementation of the ongoing programmes and future operations.

Relations with institutional partners such as UNDP, WHO, the Regional Disaster Information Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean (CRID) and the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPRENAC) have been strengthened, especially in the area of health and Disaster Preparedness. Strategic alliances are being discussed with the private sector, including Copa Airlines, the “Weather Channel” and Ericsson. The alliances are intended to go beyond fund-raising, to include areas such as in-kind support, technical co-operation, training and publicity. All three are important for strengthening the Red Cross profile in the region.

The web site of the regional Federation delegation in Guatemala is now fully operational and updated on almost daily basis. The Regional Delegation’s virtual library containing policies, manuals, guidelines and other relevant information is also fully operational and accessible on-line at www.cruzrojahumanidad.org

In addition, it is hosting 7 National Society web sites, providing a unified image, easy recognition and access. Detailed news on Nicaragua earthquake and Red Cross action were posted on the web site within 12 hours after the disaster.

Five National Societies in the region produced over 68 radio spots and public service announcements on health, youth, voluntarism and community service. These productions will be incorporated into a toolbox for all National Society in order to enhance community radio programming in the coming year.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Relief interventions firmly based on local/regional capacities are more likely to be successful. While regional intervention teams still need further training, especially on Federation systems and procedures, they contributed in a very significant way to the success of the Venezuela operation.

Sharing of delegates between PNS and the Federation represents a useful tool for attracting quality delegates, increasing donor involvement and ensuring effective co-ordination. However, although there has been considerable improvement, effective co-ordination between ONS, PNS and Federation - especially in the four "Mitch" countries - remains challenging.

The Department for International Development (DFID) funding for regional management, ID, regional delegation and Disaster Preparedness has allowed the Federation to strengthen regional co-operation, to promote implementation of Strategy 2010 especially in DP and Health, to improve disaster response capacity both at national and regional level, and to improve communication and information across the region.

The reorganisation of the Federation management structures both in Geneva and in the Americas will continue during the second part of the year and is likely to have a profound impact on performance and capacity.

On the programme level, the Federation will finalise the review of the community based DP programme and National Society disaster response plans. Regional and national intervention teams will remain a key element of the local and regional response capacity. Therefore, additional attention will be given to development of structures and procedures, as well as to further training. Current programmes in information and communication will be further consolidated.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Santiago Gil
Director
Americas Department

This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's web site: <http://www.ifrc.org>

Central / South America						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No. 01.52/2000		PLEDGES RECEIVED			15/09/00	
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				4,307,000		TOTAL COVERAGE 19.7%
Balance carried forward from 1999				-100,876		
BRITISH - GOVT				425,000	19.01.00	DFID 1.6.2, 1.6.3
CANADIAN - RC				5,000	30.05.00	BTC, MEXICO, SEPT. 2000
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC - RC		500	USD	796	26.01.00	
FEDERATION BUDGET				157,955	01/01/00	
GERMAN - RC				10,000	30.05.00	BTC, MEXICO, SEPT. 2000
ICRC				10,000	30.05.00	BTC, MEXICO, SEPT. 2000
ITALIAN - RC		15,000	USD	25,500	19.06.00	REGIONAL CAMPAIGN BLOOD VOL.
SWEDISH GOVT/RC		500,000	SEK	94,150	03.07.00	COMMUNITY HEALTH
UNITED STATES - RC		2,500	USD	4,119	01/04/00	REGIONAL HEALTH WORKSHOP
UNITED STATES - RC		25,000	USD	42,500	23.05.00	REGIONAL HEALTH WORKSHOP
UNITED STATES - RC		2,500	USD	4,221	13.07.00	COMMUNITY HEALTH PROGRAMME
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH				678,365	CHF	15.8%
KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
Spain	Delegate(s)			60,123		
Canada	Delegate(s)			51,252		
Netherlands	Delegate(s)			60,123		
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				171,498	CHF	4.0%
ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				0	CHF	
THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS ARE LINKED TO THIS APPEAL:						
P43010, P43015, P43160, P43161, P43900, P43901, P43903, P43905, P43906, P43925						