

SIERRA LEONE

CHF 1,847,000

Programme No. 01.04/2000

National Context

Sierra Leone has been characterised by internal conflict, cross border attacks, and ethnic clashes, provoking massive population movements within the country itself as well as refugees to neighbouring countries. A brutal civil conflict recently ended with a ceasefire in May 1999, followed by a peace agreement in June. The conflict resulted in the destruction of the social and economic infrastructure, as well as local coping mechanisms. The large number of former combatants (many of them youth) may hamper reintegration efforts, and tensions between rebel factions may continue to present obstacles to peace. Lastly, Sierra Leone is prone to natural disasters, to which the government is generally ill equipped to respond.

Like the rest of the country, the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRCS) is recovering from the severe disruption and destruction caused by the conflict, and is steadily refurbishing and reopening its provincial branches, as the security situations permits. The SLRCS has also restarted its clinic support, blood and Community Based Health programmes.

Country Assistance Strategy

The Federation's strategy is formulated to provide support to the SLRCS as the only indigenous organisation with a countrywide reach, and to play a positive role in implementing and promoting the ongoing peace process. By starting up Federation and SLRCS programmes, especially in rural areas, a positive signal is sent to the traumatised population as well as to the ex-combatants, highlighting the advantages for all groups to return to a normal and peaceful society. More specifically, the Federation and SLRCS will participate actively in the containment of cholera outbreaks, continue support to programmes and expand them to cover provinces where the SLRCS will be able to re-establish branches within the programme period, re-establish and retrain First Aid volunteers throughout the country and provide assistance to the Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). Federation activities are co-ordinated with the ICRC which is the lead agency in the country, as well as with the United Nations agencies.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

Anticipating the peace agreement to hold, the Federation and SLRCS will activate rehabilitation and resettlement programmes targeting returning refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's).

Disaster Preparedness

The SLRCS has started to rebuild and retrain its nation wide volunteer base, improving its capability to respond to major natural or man made disasters. With Federation support, training for volunteers will be conducted in

close cooperation with the police, rescue services and hospitals in the form of realistic exercises simulating disasters. Mobile First Aid stations will be set up at sites of major gatherings, such as football games or rallies, to maintain the capabilities of the volunteers and to render service to the public. The SLRCS will upgrade its emergency first aid capability by organising first aid training courses and supplying first aid material.

Health

With the breakdown of health systems, malaria, measles and cholera persist as serious health concerns in Sierra Leone. The lack of potable water and sanitation also exacerbates the health situation. To respond, the major components of the Federation and SLRCS Community Based Health Programme (CBHP) interventions will be training of volunteers, IDP's, and returnees in environmental sanitation, the prevention and control of diarrhoea diseases, and health education. The programme is also intended to meet emergency needs such as immunisation, water treatment, and support to SLRC's operational health clinics. The number of people with AIDS or the HIV virus is still growing, and the SLRCS will mobilise volunteers to carry out an HIV information campaign and to provide care for ill people in communities.

In Sierra Leone there is a long tradition of assistance at birth being given by Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs), a necessity in view of the limited public medical facilities in rural areas. With one of the world's highest maternal and infant mortality rates, aggravated by insecurity in the remote parts of the country, assistance will be provided to improve the training and equipment of the TBAs.

The SLRCS-operated blood bank in Freetown is the only blood transfusion source for civilians in the Western Area and is the only supplier of safe blood in the country.

The SLRCS has reactivated seven of its medical clinics operating at a very basic level in areas with limited or no other medical facilities. The patients at these clinics are mostly children below five years of age or pregnant mothers.

Humanitarian Values

In close cooperation with ICRC, the Federation will promote and reinforce a positive Red Cross image through information and dissemination in connection with all ongoing programmes as well as through SLRC staff and volunteers.

Capacity Building

The SLRCS is undergoing a restructuring process which will reduce its core staff to less than 60 while programmes will be run by temporarily employed staff and volunteers. The Federation will assist in assessing and rehabilitating two to three provincial branches. The SLRCS National Headquarters and the branches in Kenema, Bo and Moyamba, as well as the Red Cross groups in Matru and Bonthe have been re-established and have begun to carry out regular programmes. Teams are working to re-establish the provincial branch in Makeni and evaluating the possibility to initiate Red Cross programmes in that area, including the re-establishment of the SLRCS clinic. It is envisaged that the present improvement in the security situation will continue, and thus allow the Federation and SLRCS to re-establish additional branches and start up programmes in these areas.