

CUBA

CHF 841,000

Programme No. 01.50/2000

National Context

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and East European communist governments deprived Cuba of its traditional allies and trade partners, and drove its planned economy into crisis. Since the early 1990s the country has been experiencing a gradual deterioration of its social development indicators, although it still has a literacy rate of 95.9%, a life expectancy of 75.7 years and a low infant mortality rate of 8 per 1,000. The economic crisis has forced the government to introduce a set of emergency measures comprising energy cuts, export diversification, import substitution, redirection of foreign trade and promotion of tourism and foreign investment.

Recently, and for the first time in many years, Cuba has appeared on the FAO's list of countries where malnutrition is increasing. At the same time, the country continues to suffer the effects of the longest embargo in modern times, imposed by the US Government in 1961.

In such a situation, it is typically the children, women and the elderly (all of whom may have additional vulnerabilities) who suffer most from the shortages of basic products, food and energy. There are a growing number of elderly, mainly in isolated rural areas, living in precarious conditions. Among children, those cared for in state homes or with a disability are particularly vulnerable, while statistics show that the population under 30 years of age is increasingly at risk from sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, particularly since the growth of the tourist industry.

Cuba is one of the Caribbean countries most exposed to natural disasters. Hurricanes and tropical storms are the main threat, with a hurricane hitting the island on average every two years. These storms frequently generate floods and wave surges along the country's extensive coastline and inland flooding. Earthquakes and landslides, though less frequent, also occur, especially in the eastern provinces.

Country Assistance Strategy

In the 1990s, the Cuban Red Cross started on a new stage of its institutional development, expanding its social and health activities to HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, care of the disabled and elderly, and blood donor recruitment – a move that has led to greater public recognition of its activities and the role it plays in Cuban society. Today, the Cuban Red Cross has 24,400 volunteers.

Since 1994, the Society has made efforts to promote its independent status among the general public, while still maintaining and respecting its relationship with the Cuban authorities. Its image received a major boost from 1993 onwards when it began relief operations with international assistance, and most notably in 1996 following Hurricane Lili. Today relief response is a major activity, together with first aid training, an ambulance service,

mother and child welfare services and blood donor recruitment. Its youth section has a range of services including HIV/AIDS prevention and care for the elderly and the disabled.

The Federation's overall objective will be to assist the Cuban Red Cross to acquire more of the characteristics of a well functioning Society, in order to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Its main emphasis will be on institutional development; at the same time it will focus on strengthening the quality and impact of existing programmes and expanding youth programmes.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

Relief operations related to the 1999 hurricane season are scheduled to end in 2000.

Disaster Preparedness

Federation support will aim at strengthening the capacity of the Cuban Red Cross to prepare and respond to disasters in communities deemed to be the most vulnerable through improved operational capacity, faster response times, the ability to reach greater numbers of beneficiaries and the introduction of disaster plans at national, provincial and municipal level.

The Cuban Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Programme has three components: Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP), Disaster Response Teams and a Water Safety Programme. Planned activities include: motivational workshops, training of trainers for CBDP component facilitators, development of teaching materials, co-ordination with local authorities and community leaders, disaster response plans and risk maps elaboration, creation and training of well-equipped mobile disaster response teams, and improved equipment and working conditions for Red Cross lifeguards.

Health

Red Cross Youth in Cuba makes a critical contribution to many of the National Society's health and social activities and several youth services are scheduled for expansion. A training programme for Red Cross Youth leaders at provincial and municipal level will be introduced, covering management of volunteers, project planning, implementation, management and evaluation of services. The three main beneficiary groups targeted by this programme through separate but complementary projects are the elderly living alone; disabled children and orphans and youth-at-risk from HIV/AIDS and STDs.

Humanitarian Values

Support for the dissemination of the fundamental Principles and humanitarian values will continue, in recognition of their role in enhancing the institutional image of the National Society. In recent years, the National Society, in co-operation with and supported by the ICRC, has carried out a successful information and dissemination programme, which will provide a firm base for future programmes.

Capacity Building

The Cuban Red Cross capacity will be reinforced through a Branch Development programme. Its main goal will be to ensure that the population and the Cuban authorities recognise the role and activities of the Cuban Red Cross and its character as an independent auxiliary to the public authorities. Specifically, it seeks to improve the visibility and operational capacity of the National Society at provincial and municipal level through the provision of adequate working conditions for staff and volunteers.

This will be done by a rehabilitation programme including repairs to rundown branch offices/facilities; the provision of equipment and supplies; the provision of dissemination and teaching materials; vehicles; and the development of a first aid manual for training at local level.