

PROGRAMME UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

ARMENIA

5 July 2005

In Brief

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The International Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. The Federation is the world's largest humanitarian organization, and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries. All international assistance to support vulnerable communities seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct and the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, according to the SPHERE Project. Please access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

Operational developments

Supported by its partners, the Armenian Red Cross has continued addressing a part of the humanitarian challenges that today faces tens of thousands of people in Armenia. The focus is on meeting pressing community needs and developing the national society capacity in the areas where the organisation can make a difference, namely:

- improving health and social conditions of vulnerable people (health and care programme)
- decreasing vulnerability of the population to natural and man-made disasters (disaster management), and
- strengthening the organisation to deliver better services aimed at preventing and alleviating suffering (organisational development).

Since January 2005, the Armenian Red Cross has helped some 75,868 people: 9,827 people were reached with the messages on HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis; 37,531 children and 3,387 teachers were educated on disaster preparedness. Another 5,400 schoolchildren attended the Red Cross-organised sessions on communicable diseases, safe behaviour and social skills. 3,120 young people were trained in First Aid, while other 751 received computer and language lessons. 2,800 schoolchildren participated in various sport competitions and other social events organised by Red Crescent volunteers. More than 12,562 lone pensioners and other marginalised groups, including 490 refugees, were provided with basic social and health care.



Armenian Red Cross celebrates its 85th anniversary this year

All the programmes have been implemented directly by the Armenian Red Cross through its country-wide network of regional branches and volunteers. The Federation through its country delegation in Yerevan and regional delegation in Ankara has provided technical support and monitoring to ensure the resources have been deployed as planned.

On the whole, donor response to the appeal has been good. To help the Armenian Red Cross achieve its objectives of this year, the Federation raised CHF 882,419 (USD 691,867 or EUR 573,163). This is 89 per cent of the funding sought and includes CHF 330,419 (i.e., 34 per cent of the appeal budget), the balance from the 2004 operation, which was carried over to support the continuation of projects in 2005 and CHF 472,500, donation from the Norwegian

Red Cross, which arrived in May 2005. In May 2005 also arrived other contribution, CHF 81,846, from the Finnish Red Cross to cover the costs of the Federation's head of delegation in Armenia.

The funding, however, was not evenly distributed among the projects. While some received over 100 per cent of what was required (see table below), others are under-funded. The population movement, for instance, has received only 18 per cent. As a result some of the important activities were not implemented. The Armenian Red Cross has been trying to fill the gap through bilateral partnerships, establishing contacts with in-country organisations, national agencies and businesses. For instance, the UNHCR has contributed 5,000,000 Armenian drams equivalent of CHF 14,124 to enable the Armenian Red Cross help some asylum seekers. The funds raised locally, however, have not been sufficient to cover the needs.

Outside of the Federation appeal, the Armenian Red Cross cooperates with several in-country organisations. To mention few: the Open Society Institute contributed 3,723,244 Armenian drams (the equivalent of CHF 10,517) to support the work of the Armenian Red Cross syringe exchange centre in Vanadzor. The Leon branch of the French Red Cross every year donates money (around CHF 12,000) to hold a summer camp in Armenia for children from poor families. In partnership with the Bavarian Red Cross, the Armenian Red Cross has started a programme in Sevan which aims at providing an ambulance service to people living in remote villages and towns. The Jinishyan Foundation, a local organisation, provided CHF 16,786 to promote safe behaviour and disaster preparedness among schoolchildren in 52 schools. The Shoken Fund¹ has contributed additional 20,951,495 Armenian Drams (equivalent of CHF 59,185) to support similar efforts in other 52 schools. The Global Funds allocated CHF 13,328 to raise the public awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention through training and distribution of educational materials.

¹ The Empress Shoken Fund was established in 1912 by Her Majesty, The Empress of Japan at the 9th International Red Cross Conference to support Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian activities worldwide. The Fund is administered by a Joint Commission composed of six members, three each from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and from the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Empress Shoken Fund allocates grants annually on the anniversary of the death Her Majesty The Empress Shoken to National Societies to support projects of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies such as disaster preparedness, health, blood services, youth, first aid and rescue, social welfare and dissemination of humanitarian ideals, human resource development (training, staff-on-loan, volunteer assistance), as well as the procurement of ambulances, spare parts, equipment and material supplies for the various programmes.

The total value of the projects implemented by the Armenian Red Cross bilaterally sums up to CHF 182,524 (USD 143,168 or EUR 117,996).

Table 1. Appeal budget, income and expenditure per each project as of May 2005

Programmes/Projects	Appeal budget in CHF	Total income in CHF	Appeal coverage (%)	Expenditure		
				In CHF	% of the income	% of the budget
Health and care programme	189,166	178,361	94	54,269	30	29
Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS	86,696	79,927	92	37,226	47	43
Social services for vulnerable people	102,470	98,434	96	17,043	17	17
Disaster management programme	275,059	102,387	37	39,904	39	15
Disaster preparedness and response	209,925	90,392	43	37,898	42	18
Population Movement	65,134	11,995	18	2,600	17	3
Organisational development programme	495,690	519,825	105	140,803	27	28
Branch development	273,793	266,030	97	84,590	32	31
Financial management development	51,889	59,123	114	15,826	27	30
Youth development	170,007	194,672	115	40,387	21	24
Coordination and implementation	26,096	81,846	314	44,660	55	171
Total	986,010	882,419	89	279,636	32	28

Overall, the programmes have progressed as planned. Some, however, were slow to get started due to absence of focal staff and poor planning by the national society. For instance, under the population movement project, the production of a video film on illegal trafficking was postponed until later in the year. Training of peer educators on HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis was rescheduled too. The late arrival of funding caused further delays. As explained above, 63 per cent of the total income of the appeal, the contributions from the Norwegian and Finnish Red Cross Societies arrived only in May 2005. Hence, expenditure is low (see table above). It stands at CHF 279,636 i.e., 28 per cent of the appeal budget. The Armenian Red Cross is committed to pick up the pace. Some activities will be implemented next year and the funds will be carried over to 2006. Details will be reported through the second programme update in October 2005.

Strengthening the National Society

1. Health and care

Goal

Health and social vulnerability of people of Armenia is decreased.

Objective

By the end of 2005, some 66,020 people have improved their health and social conditions through better Red Cross service delivery.

Achievements, impact & constraints

Reducing vulnerability to communicable diseases - sexually transmitted illnesses, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis

The project is designed to help the Armenian Red Cross expand the network of volunteer trainers to educate the local population on the factors that put them at risk of communicable diseases – sexually transmitted illnesses, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Since January 2005, the Red Cross trained some 55 volunteer youth leaders as peer educators on HIV/AIDS in Vanadzor, Stepanavan and Spitak bringing the total number of Red Crescent volunteer trainers to 434. The trained volunteers have initiated discussions in their communities. During the reported period, they reached some 1,000 people, mainly youth. The issues discussed by the volunteers vary from how the disease is transmitted and how it can be prevented. The discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS was also discussed challenging the youngsters' misconceptions. Each of the participants was provided with leaflets, booklets - *'safe sex is your choice*, and *'live without regret*, posters and stickers on HIV/AIDS that include messages, such as *'you cannot get AIDS by... being a friend'*, *'You cannot get AIDS by... holding hands'* and *'You cannot get AIDS by... talking to someone'* to counter myths about HIV/AIDS transmission. A total of 4,000 printed educational materials have been distributed so far. In Lori, a local television broadcast a Red Cross film on sexually transmitted diseases. It is estimated the film was seen by some 3,000 people.

To help volunteer trainers in their work with the communities, the Red Cross developed a manual on teaching methodologies. Challenges, however, the trainers face, are compelling. Women feel embarrassed to discuss their sexual behaviour. School directors often forbid to talk about safe sex because they think this is not an appropriate topic of conversation for a society raised on conservative values. The task of Red Cross volunteers is to challenge local taboos, which is not easy and requires perseverance.

The Red Cross has also undertaken to assist the state dispensaries in delivering medicines to TB patients, who cannot collect drugs themselves because of health problems and/or lack of money to pay for transport. The Red Cross's role is also to monitor the patient's compliance to the treatment. The treatment follows the internationally-recommended TB controlcourse – DOTS². Medicines are supplied by the German Government. Five Red Cross volunteer social workers - four social workers in Vanadzor and one in Stepanavan – have been involved in the project. They visit, once a week, 92 people ill with TB who have been recently released either from the TB dispensaries or prisons. The Red Cross social workers bring them medicines and record progress of their treatment.

Controlling the growing problem of TB³, however, requires more than this. It needs a comprehensive public health response, which includes, among other things, education. The Red Cross has been playing an important role here. It focused on training and distribution of printed materials containing key information on TB and its transmission. Training is conducted through a network of volunteers in Lori region in the northern part of the country (one of the three regions with high prevalence of TB in Armenia). Since January 2005, 246 people were trained. Other 5,000 people received information on the disease through printed materials - leaflets, guidelines, books and posters.

The HIV/AIDS and TB prevention efforts of the Armenian Red Cross are a part of the national society's long-term strategy, an important component of which has been its harm reduction work with drug addicts. The Federation appeal supports the work of the Armenian Red Cross syringes exchange centre in Vanadzor city, one of the country's three big cities. Namely, within the project, 8,000 sterile syringes and 3,000 condoms were procured

² DOTS: once patients with infectious TB have been identified using microscopy services, health and community workers and trained volunteers observe and record patients swallowing the full course of the correct dosage of anti-TB medicines. Sputum smear testing is repeated after two months, to check progress, and again at the end of treatment. A recording and reporting system documents patients' progress throughout, and the final outcome of treatment. For more information on DOTS please see [What is DOTS](http://www.who.int/gtb/dots/whatisdots.htm) at <http://www.who.int/gtb/dots/whatisdots.htm>. Complete treatment of TB requires at least six months of daily therapy with three or more antibiotics following the initial treatment period.

³ The number of tuberculosis in Armenia has increased alarmingly from 590 in 1990 to 1,051 in 1997. In 2000, 1,344 new cases were registered bringing the total number of people ill with TB to 5,450.

locally. Since January 2005, the centre has distributed 2,500 sterile syringes and 600 condoms to 45 drug addicts. The centre employs a social worker and a consultant narcologist. Most drug addicts visiting the centre are the former patients of the Red Cross consultant. The centre also has two volunteer outreach workers who take syringes, condoms and Red Cross educational materials on HIV/AIDS prevention to the places where drug addicts usually get together.

Social services for vulnerable people

The main objective of the project is to improve health and social conditions of some twenty thousand vulnerable people, including single elderly, internally displaced persons, refugees, disabled people, large families and orphans, through the Red Cross social centres. To achieve this, the focus is on helping the staff and volunteers of 13 most active centres⁴ increase their professionalism and skills to develop more relevant activities to respond to pressing needs in their communities.

As an initial step, 132 staff members from the regional branches were trained on the participatory community development methodology. In March 2005, 15 Red Cross social workers also attended the sessions organised by the national society on basic health care and social support. One of the facilitators of the session was an expert from the Ministry of Social Welfare, who talked to the Red Cross about the provisions in the national legislation on social care. Such training sessions will continue over the coming months. In total, by the end of the year, some 120 staff members and volunteers are planned to be trained. Discussions will be held on how to plan effectively and write a good project proposal. Marketing capacities of the National Society need to be improved too so that they can mobilise the maximum of the locally available resources. Each social centre will then conduct needs assessment in their communities and design projects to respond to the most pressing needs. This will be a priority over the coming months.

In the meantime, the 13 target regional social service centres have continued providing their traditional services. During January –May 2005, they helped some 12,562 vulnerable people. These were mainly lone pensioners, single mothers, veterans of war and disabled people. Services included: psycho-social consultations, medical check-ups, measuring of blood pressure and glucose, and intramuscular injections. The Red Cross centres also distributed food, clothes, hygiene items and medicines. Some people were helped with cash (four to six US dollars). In Ararat, Armavir, Vayots Dzor, Shirak and Sevan, the centres manage clubs (separate rooms in Red Cross branches) for lone pensioners to socially interact - meet with each other, watch TV and play games.

About 112 volunteers were involved in the operation. They regularly visited home-bound beneficiaries to clean their houses, change electrical bulbs, chop fire-wood, repair a door or a window, do shopping, bring newspapers, or simply, chat to show their care and moral support, which was often more welcomed than anything else. Many elderly people not only face daily problems but, separated from children and grandchildren, they begin to feel useless and isolated. The Red Cross, through its volunteers, helped them grow in confidence. The centres also offered sessions on health issues, including HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Red Cross volunteers organised first aid training as well. During the reported period, some 3,120 people were trained. The table below shows the type of services provided by the centres and the number of people reached during the reporting period.

Table 2. Services provided by the Red Cross social centres in January-May 2005

Service provided	People assisted
Food distribution	288
Clothes distribution	4,688
Stationery distribution to children	2,754
Distribution of medicines and medical supplies	315
Financial support	8
Psycho-social consultations	1,623
Blood pressure measuring	1,800
Measuring sugar level in blood	266
Injections	48

⁴ In total, the Red Cross has a network of 23 social centres.

Home visits	144
Minor home repairs	49
Club visits	45

Medicines, food and hygiene supplies were procured with the project money; some items, were donated by the population, private enterprises or in-country organisations in response to the Red Cross appeal for community support for marginalised people, voiced regularly on local television. For instance, the Tavush, Stepanavan and Lori social service centres received donations of stationery and second-hand clothes from different local companies and entrepreneurs.

2. Disaster management

Goal

Vulnerability of the population to natural and man-made disasters is decreased.

Objective

The Armenian Red Cross positions itself as a key humanitarian actor in disaster management.

Achievements, impact & constraints

Strengthening Armenian Red Cross preparedness for disasters

Since January 2005, the Armenian Red Cross held three training sessions on rescue, logistics and needs assessment for 52 volunteers of its rapid response teams⁵. In addition, 12 regional and one zonal disaster management coordinator were trained on disaster management and response.



Red Cross volunteers held simulation evacuations to strengthen community preparedness for emergencies

The Armenian Red Cross is a part of a 'Ardzagank' (response) project implemented by the Emergency Management Administration (EMA)⁶ jointly with the Swiss Development Cooperation. Eight Red Cross volunteers from Lori and Syunik regional branches attended training on disaster preparedness and response held in the framework of this project. The training included lots of practical exercises. Four Red Cross volunteers were qualified as trainers, who will now train other 10 volunteers in their regions so that in case of an emergency, there are trained people on the ground to help government and non-governmental humanitarian agencies respond to needs of the affected population.

The Federation delegation in Yerevan assisted the Armenian Red Cross in

procuring additional emergency stock items - blankets, spoons, knives, jerry cans, kerosene lamps, plates, and pots - for 200 people. The items were stored in the regional warehouses. The Red Cross now has the resources to

⁵ The Armenian Red Cross has 13 regional and three zonal disaster preparedness and response centres to coordinate disaster management activities in the central, northern and southern regions. Each centre has a coordinator and a rapid response team of 12 volunteers trained in disaster management. The teams assist authorities to respond to major local emergencies. The Red Cross also has two professional rescue teams - Lore and Spitak – with experience, expertise and equipment ready to respond to disasters within hours.

⁶ Emergency Management Administration (EMA): A government body that develops policies and acts on behalf of the government to protect the population of Armenia in times of emergency and/or military situations

distribute emergency relief items to some 1,700 people. Additional rescue equipment (ropes, carbines, loops) for 12 Red Cross rapid response teams were purchased too.

Strengthening community capacities to mitigate the effects of disasters

In tandem with strengthening its own capacities to cope with emergencies, the Red Cross Society of Armenia has been strengthening that of communities too by raising their awareness of the most common hazards, including earthquake, floods, landslides and fire, that annually affect thousands of people. It has prioritized working with schoolchildren because the 1988 earthquake showed this group is among the most vulnerable to disasters. During the reported period, Red Cross volunteers organised 85 simulation evacuations for 3,387 teachers and 37,381 schoolchildren based on the *'evacuations from schools'* manual, developed by the Red Cross in 2003. The exercises were dedicated to the 85th anniversary of the Armenian Red Cross, celebrated this year, and were broadly covered by the local media.

240 schoolchildren were also trained on the risks and threats of the main disasters. 150 children from five regions participated in a quiz organised by the Red Cross in cooperation with the Ministry of Science and Education and the Crises Management Institute under the Emergency Management Institute, to test youngsters' knowledge of natural and man-made disasters.

Population movement

The projects aims at strengthening the Armenian Red Cross capacity to help asylum seekers and refugees build a new life in Armenia, advocate for the respect of their rights and prevent human trafficking. Unfortunately, the project has received only 18 per cent of its budget. This has been enough to start only some of the planned activities to increase public awareness of human trafficking. Human trafficking is a growing problem in Armenia. It is estimated that several thousand individuals were trafficked between 2000 and 2004. Most are women and children, who are offered work abroad but in reality, find themselves in brothels subject to exploitation. The trafficked people are not only victims in the receiving countries, but in their home countries too, where they stumble across harsh and unforgiving attitude. They need help to be reintegrated into their communities.

The Red Cross has established contacts with relevant organisations to gather information - statistics, analysis, policies and activities - on trafficking in Armenia and the world. A booklet was then prepared in Armenian language and printed in 1,500 copies. The booklet challenges xenophobia, racism, discriminatory policies, practices and attitudes towards trafficked persons. It contains basic but essential messages to flag humanitarian needs of trafficked people, who are often perceived as criminals, which they are not; they are vulnerable and have rights. The booklet also refers to various international laws on trafficking such as UN convention on organised criminality, and additional protocols on the prevention and punishment of human trafficking. In addition, the Red Cross drafted the questionnaires to be used during discussions and training sessions. It has also started interviewing victims of trafficking. These interviews will be published shortly too. By the end of June 2005, the Red Cross is also planning to produce a video film on human trafficking. Preparations have started.

The anti-trafficking work of the Armenian Red Cross is coordinated with other members of the UN Theme Group on Anti-Trafficking, the State Interagency Commission on Counter Trafficking and the European Red Cross and Red Crescent network, that was established in May 2004 to combat human trafficking, and of which the Armenian Red Cross is a member too. Regular meetings are held with a number of non-governmental organisations, such as Hope and Help, CARITAS, UMCOR and Democracy For Today.

Outside of the Federation appeal, the Armenian Red Cross continues its cooperation with the UNHCR to assist asylum seekers, individually recognized refugees and persons with temporary asylum. Assistance includes cash (approximately 20-60 US dollars per family) and basic relief items (food and hygiene supplies). 151 refugees attend Red Cross organised computer and/or Armenian language courses. The Red Cross is also helping refugees explore employment opportunities.

3. Organisational development

Goal

The Armenian Red Cross has strengthened its organisational capacity and become a better functioning national society helping to prevent and alleviate suffering.

Objective

The Armenian Red Cross has increased accountability to its beneficiaries and partners, strengthened links with local communities and increased the network of active young volunteers who are valued members of the organisation.

Achievements, impact & constraints

Branch development

To help its branches strengthen the capacities, the Armenian Red Cross has chosen to work in a participatory community development (PCD) approach. The approach enables to prioritise community activities based on local needs and strategic directions of the national society embedded in its strategic plan. The PCD was first piloted in 2003 and was since implemented in 26 communities (13 communities in 2003 and other 13 in 2004). It proved to be a successful tool. This year, the project focuses on other 26 communities with the involvement of other 26 community or regional branches.



Red Cross volunteers regularly visit refugee children living in dormitories to play with them and help do homework

Implementation of the PCD in 13 of the targeted 26 communities started in 2004 with the financial support of the Norwegian Red Cross. By the end of 2004, selection of communities as well as training of the Red Cross staff and needs assessment was completed (see annual report 2004 [<hyperlink to the report>](#)). This year, efforts concentrated on designing and implementing community projects based on the assessment findings. Specifically, people in the 10 targeted communities chose to establish educational centres to offer computer and language courses to young people from poor families to improve their chances of finding a work. The total number of people attending the courses currently is 600; 60 persons in each 10 target community. Tutors are employed by the Red Cross. The national society is considering to start commercial classes too for those who can pay so that the centres can be sustained

autonomously with the generated income.

The Aragatsotn and Stepanavan regional branches developed projects to promote healthy life style among schoolchildren. In Aragatsotn, the Red Cross branch supported by the local population furnished a local school with sport equipment and organised a number of sport tournaments among 1,000 schoolchildren. Sport competitions were organised by the Red Cross branch in Stepanavan too. There 1,700 schoolchildren were taken hiking. In Lory discussion with the local community continues.

The PCD has again proved to be an effective tool to mobilise people to solve their local problems. Some 6,000 community members participated in the needs identification, analysis, project design and implementation. The total

number of people that were reached through the Red Cross initiated community projects is around 6,000. The Red Cross regional branches now better understand needs in their communities. Good working relations have been established with the local authorities. They have contributed around 20 per cent of the community project budgets via labour, venues and/or construction materials. The project has strengthened the material base of the regional branches too since some furniture and office equipment was procured for them. The image of the national society has been improving. More and more people have shown willingness to become Red Cross volunteer. Each regional branch recruited 20 new volunteers and/or members since January 2005 this brings the total number of Red Cross volunteers countrywide to 3,006. The national society has a total of 905 members to date.

In other 13 (of the planned total 26) communities, work will start in June/July 2005. The Red Cross regional branches have already started designing micro-project based on the needs prioritised by the communities. The projects will be reviewed by the Red Cross headquarters and implementation will start shortly. To increase community understanding of the Red Cross mission and role, the Federation appeal will also support the development of a booklet on the national society's work. The booklet has been drafted and will be printed in 1,000 copies.

Youth and volunteer development

Volunteers play an important role in the work of Armenian Red Cross. 48 volunteers work as peer educators with schoolchildren on health, ecological and social issues. They held regular discussions with children of 12 to 14 years. Since January 2005, they have reached some 5,400 children in 72 schools. Discussions ranged from how to cope with challenging situations, such as disputes with friends or parents, the danger of smoking and drug addiction, to benefits of a healthy lifestyle and safe sex. These are the issues that are normally not covered by the school curriculum, nor are they discussed in families because of cultural barriers and taboos.



To encourage volunteers to contribute to national society governance and management, the Armenian Red Cross is forming regional youth and volunteer boards. The photo shows a Red Cross volunteer is voting to elect board members

Working with vulnerable children, particularly refugees, has been a priority for the Armenian Red Cross for the last 15 years. 24 young volunteers have been regularly visiting children in dormitories to play and help them do homework. Often they take children for sightseeing or a local circus and puppet theatre. During the reported period, the volunteers worked with 100 children. The work with 50 of them was supported by the Federation through the appeal; while funding for other 50 children was raised by the Armenian Red Cross independently from other sources. For instance, about 40,000 Armenian drams (equivalent of USD 88 or EUR 71) was raised through the sales of items with the Red Cross emblem and a fundraising campaign organized by Red Cross volunteers in Yerevan on the International Red Cross day.

Red Cross volunteers have been also involved in the work with lone elderly refugees. The Red Cross believes elderly refugees living alone are the most marginalised groups in Armenia. These are people who have lost their families, friends and personal belongings and feel isolated from the rest of the society. Seventy Red Cross volunteers visit 490 elderly people twice a week to talk to them, help clean houses, carry out minor repair works and do shopping. Volunteers also organize concerts for the elderly and visits to historical sites.

The Red Cross is encouraging its volunteers not only to play a more active role in the work with vulnerable people, but also to contribute to the national society's governance and management. To make volunteers more valued members, the national society has initiated reorganisation of its structure. This includes establishment of 13 regional youth and volunteer boards. Each board will have an elected chairperson (a regional youth leader) and three members to act

as a coordinating body on youth and volunteers related issues. The Ararat, Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik, Stepanavan and Kotayk branches have held the elections and have established the boards. The other eight regional branches are yet to hold the elections. To systematize the youth recruitment process, volunteers have also elected a focal person to coordinate volunteer recruitment and management. The focal persons will also provide new volunteers with basic training on Red Cross history, mandate and priorities. Each regional youth and volunteer board will have one focal person i.e., 13 in total. So far, such a focal person has been appointed only in the regions where the branches have established the regional youth and volunteer boards, i.e., in Ararat, Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik, Stepanavan and Kotayk. They were trained to make sure they understand what is their role and responsibility.

In parallel, the Red Cross has been organising public events to disseminate its values and principles and encourage more people to join the organisation. The most recent one was held on 8 May, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Day. Some 500 volunteers took to streets singing, dancing and organising puppet shows on mine awareness for some 300 spectators. The most active volunteers were awarded. Red Cross volunteers were also involved in preparation of three issues of a youth volunteers' newsletter. The newsletter was printed both in English and Armenian languages in 500 copies for distribution to the public. It includes information on youth volunteers' work and plans.

Financial management development

The project aims at helping the Armenian Red Cross improve its financial management to provide transparent accounting and better donor reporting. The focus is on the Red Cross regional branches. This is important as more and more Red Cross projects are implemented in the regions, which means, the amount of money managed by regional branches has increased. To illustrate, a few years ago the headquarters was making an average of 30 transfers a year to the regional branches. In 2004, it made 30 transfers every day.

As an initial step, the Red Cross upgraded its accounting software. The finance director and the chief accountant of the Armenian Red Cross attended a three-day seminar on tax-related issues organised by the Ministry of Finance and Economy. In May 2005, the Armenian Red Cross held a seminar on the latest changes to the national legislation and accounting for regional branch chairpersons and the department heads at the headquarters (37 people in total). Experts from the Government were invited to talk about the changes. During the seminar new reporting requirements were also presented.

The Armenian Red Cross has also renewed its subscription to a national financial newspaper 'IRTEC' (Legal Information Searching System) to keep abreast of any new changes in the national legislation.

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