

Programme Update



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Philippines

Appeal No. MAAPH001

29 August 2008

This report covers the period 1 January to
30 June 2008



Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) volunteers assist children in obtaining safe water at an evacuation shelter following the recent typhoon Fengshen. Some 250,000 new volunteers have been recruited under the PNRC's Project 143. (Photo: Albert Lee)

In brief

Programme summary:

The 2008-2009 appeal to support the Philippine National Red Cross Society (PNRC) focuses on organizational development, with an emphasis on expanding its volunteer base throughout the country, as well as increasing its capacity in disaster management and health and care.

Financial situation:

The total budget for 2008 is CHF 2,158,657 (USD 1.93 million or EUR 1.31 million). Unfortunately, to date, there have been no contributions to this appeal, and therefore, no expenditure under this appeal. Meanwhile, funding from the typhoon emergency appeals of 2007 has contributed towards capacity building in disaster management. In addition, on 24 June 2008, an emergency appeal for typhoon Fengshen was launched, seeking CHF 8.3 million (USD 8 million or EUR 5.1 million) to assist 80,000 families over three months. To date, this appeal is approximately 28 per cent covered.

The International Federation, on behalf of the Philippine National Red Cross Society, requests urgent support for the 2008-2009 appeal, in order to enable it to meet the objectives outlined in the Appeal, and contribute to the strengthening of PNRC, to enable it to provide better services to vulnerable communities in the Philippines, especially in times of disaster, and in the area of health and care.

Context

The Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) has a long-standing reputation for being a highly operational, well-committed and well-organized national society, used to responding effectively to the many disasters that strike the Philippines annually. The country itself is vulnerable to an average of 20 typhoons per year which are often succeeded by large-scale flooding and landslides. The Philippines also experiences earthquakes and more sporadically, volcanic eruptions.

The PNRC has, over time, developed adequate skills in responding to most of these disasters and is recognized and respected nationally for its efforts in supporting those affected. The national society also continues to support those impacted by three ongoing armed insurgencies in the country, mainly concentrated in Mindanao, located in the southern part of the country. With the aid of its strong image and reputation in the area of humanitarian aid, the PNRC has developed good fundraising skills and received much international support in times of disaster.

The leadership of the national society is very keen on maintaining the high profile of the PNRC, and constantly challenges its staff and volunteers to be more proactive, and to respond in more rapid, efficient and innovative ways. Given the additional risks triggered by climate change, this approach looks towards enhancing the skills and response time of the national society as a whole. Climate change looks set to affect the Philippines to a greater degree than it may other countries. Many of the 7,000 or more islands that constitute the country lie at only a few metres above sea level, meaning any rise in ocean levels would have a tremendous consequence for the country as a whole.

The PNRC faces great challenges in serving an ever-growing population, a large portion of which is economically deprived. Poverty and hunger (some cases of which are severe) are on the rise, following the steep increase in the price of rice (which constitutes the staple food of the nation) internationally, and as a result of significant fluctuations on the currency exchange. Additional levels of malnutrition are likely to have immediate, real and negative impact on the health and well-being of many families.

Progress towards outcomes

As there have not been any funding contributions to the programmes outlined in the appeal for 2008, this programme update provides a general overview of the situation of PNRC, and especially of progress in organisational development, and specifically progress of Project 143. Other activities in disaster management are reported on in the operations updates for the typhoon emergency appeals.

Outcome/Expected results

Volunteers are the engine that drives the PNRC. The national society has identified the need for even greater numbers at village level as a key priority, in order to:

- Cope with the scale of emergency operations required to respond to the effects of climate change
- Enable the national society to engage in badly needed preventive health initiatives at community level

This focus on village level recruitment stems from the fact that while various chapters are very active in times of disaster, they mainly concentrate on provincial capitals and various cities and municipalities. This is due to the fact that the vast majority of volunteers are located in these areas. Currently serious difficulties, delays and high costs are incurred from the need to transport and accommodate volunteers when response is required at the periphery, i.e. the barangay (village) level, where, at present, few volunteers reside.

With the birth of the PNRC's "Project 143" to address this shortfall, the national society aims to ensure a better presence at village level. Project 143 is an effort to recruit and train 44 volunteers in every village; these volunteers comprise one coordinator, nine first-responders to emergencies, nine community health workers and 25 all-round team members who also engage in the promotion of voluntary blood donation, another activity championed by the PNRC.

Achievements

This ambitious initiative which takes into account the 47,000-plus barangays nationwide, has resulted in the recruitment of more than 250,000 new volunteers over a six-month period, and continues with robust support from the PNRC leadership. This addition to the body of volunteers has shortened the national society's response time, especially on many of the islands and in remote villages. Good training and management of these volunteers is also certain to improve PNRC impact on the general health of vulnerable communities.

In support of this initiative which already shows progress achieved, the International Federation continues to seek much-needed support to ensure cost-effective training of present and future new volunteers, and to upgrade the PNRC's volunteer management systems and policies. While numbers of volunteers continue to steadily rise, proper training and effective management are needed to drive them in the direction of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. Without these, little purpose would be served, with the possibility of large numbers of untrained volunteers bearing the name of the PNRC becoming more of a hindrance or threat than a help to the national society.

While the PNRC is able to provide training and accompaniment for the 250,000-plus new volunteers to remote unfamiliar territory, this programme requires financial support beyond the national society's capacity. Even with the development of cost-effective ways to train large volunteer groups, a significant amount of seed money is needed to train key trainers and coaches, and to develop sufficient materials for some 47,000 barangays. Once volunteers are trained and managed adequately within a workable structure, they will engage in fundraising efforts. This is already being practiced by existing chapters, and like these, the newly trained volunteers will do so and cover their own core costs. At this stage, however, there still remains the urgent need to help cover the cost of the project's initial stages.

Constraints or Challenges

To date, response to the 2008-2009 appeal for the Philippines has received no support from donors. This may be partly due to the PNRC's rock-solid image working against its actual needs. Despite its perceived image, the national society is constantly seeking improvement in its organizational and volunteer development in order to maintain and enhance its service delivery. This may also explain why the national society receives generous multilateral funding support in its emergency response efforts, but much less so in its request for support in capacity building.

Whatever the reasons may be, the issue remains: the PNRC needs support to allow it to expand its presence and service delivery at village level. Given the disparity in income distribution in the country and the perception that the Philippines is not a poor country, a large portion of its population suffers abject poverty. Malnutrition is a serious issue for many primary school children. Maternal mortality is common as many women suffer both the ravages of poverty and the strain of pregnancy and child-birth. Many families have limited or no access to preventive health care.

While Project 143 does not directly facilitate such an expansion, the PNRC and its volunteer community provide an arm towards reducing these numbers of health burdens on the country. In order to build the volunteer community, funding is needed to recruit, train and manage these volunteers.

Contributing to longer-term impact

The PNRC initiative seeks to fulfil Global Agenda goal 3: Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability; which in effect, works indirectly towards achieving Global Agenda goals 1 and 2. It is compatible with the Federation's Strategy 2010, and the Federation of the Future policies. It addresses the issues of up-scaling and achieving more impact through the translation of these policies into pragmatic action.

One may look upon Project 143 as a pilot project within the area of organizational development, a commitment towards improving Red Cross volunteer service impact on the ever-growing numbers of vulnerable families at all levels, be it to natural disaster or the consequences of poverty.

Looking ahead

The International Federation maintains this appeal despite the lack of funding response to date. While the main priority of the national society presently lies in its emphasis on organizational development and the expansion of the volunteer base in the Philippines, this effort ultimately spills over into the areas of disaster management and health and care. Active support from other national societies and organizations for the PNRC's initiative to translate the Federation of the Future concept into reality is greatly encouraged.

How we work

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Contact information

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