

HAITI : ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE GROUPS

6 June 1997

*Emergency Appeal 1997, programme 1.17/97
situation report no. 1
period covered: 1 January to 31 May 1997*

Programmes in Haiti are being postponed or slashed and the Federation Delegation is being downsized because of a low response to the appeal. A programme of food supplements, originally intended for 30,000 children, is beginning but numbers have been reduced by 75 % because of fund shortages. Also suffering from lack of cash are projects to assist destitute repatriates, rural women and their children, disaster preparedness (despite the imminence of the peak of the hurricane season) and institutional development. The National Society is nevertheless moving ahead with reinforcing its institutional and operational capacity.

The context

There was no noticeable improvement in the socio-economic indicators maintaining Haiti as one of the poorest countries in the world. Inflation, close to 16% in 1996, increased 7% during the five months under review. The period also saw widespread social unrest as the national authorities prioritised macro-economic stabilisation, particularly public deficit reduction, over public social expenditure (down from 36% of the national budget in 1994/95 to 22% in 1996/97). In parallel, the private sector was not able to significantly increase employment or relaunch economic activities. Frequent demonstrations and strikes, combined with political violence during the still ongoing, very troubled parliamentary elections, are increasing the population's sense of insecurity and hopelessness. The first phase of the election was marked by widespread abstention, undermining the authority of the Government just when it is trying to improve the socio-economic infrastructure and modernise the economy. The Government also remains very dependent on the international community's support to maintain internal order, which is why the UN peacekeeping mission was extended until the end of 1997.

The adverse general situation, together with slowness in funding, has seriously affected the pace of operations of the Haitian Red Cross (HRC) presented in the Federation's Emergency Appeal 1997.

Latest events

Political agitation raising the spectre of more serious disturbances, a ten-month severe drought in the north west, poor public health and other basic services, the increasing number of Haitians sent back as illegal immigrants from the Dominican Republic and the permanent threat of natural disasters, particularly during the hurricane season (from now until November), all represent potential emergencies to which the Haitian Red Cross (HRC) should be able to respond. For this, support for the projects in the 1997 Emergency Appeal aimed at strengthening the Society's operational capacity, including disaster preparedness, is essential.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

With the support of a four-member Federation Delegation, the HRC has made progress in implementing the projects presented in the 1996 and 1997 appeals.

Community health and social welfare for children and women

The 1996-1997, one-year ECHO-funded school health and environmental health programme for 22,000 schoolchildren and their communities in Kenscoff, Pétienville, Mirebalais and Hinche, has almost completed its phase of primary health education workshops, which have already trained 400 teachers in first aid. It is starting the distribution of oral hygiene kits and the implementation of 80 sanitation microprojects (water and latrines), which include educational workshops about environment and sanitation for teachers from 57 schools. As ECHO's ECU 600,000 contribution only covered the three areas mentioned above, the HRC is looking for additional funding to extend the programme to other areas.

The CHF 538,000 food-relief project, aimed at providing a food supplement for 30,000 schoolchildren in three areas, will start soon, but because of a funding shortfall (so far only 27% of the total has been covered, by a Norwegian Red Cross contribution) only a quarter of the original number of children can be helped.

The CHF 206,000 project of assistance to women ("Kay Nou" = our house), designed to help 80 homeless women from rural areas who are living with their children on the streets of Port-au-Prince, will start soon. Again, because of lack of funds (29% funding, from the Norwegian Red Cross) it will reach less than a third of the women targeted.

Institutional development

The HRC has taken two major strides forward, by adopting new statutes, at its general assembly in February, confirming its autonomy and modernising its 43-year old governing and managerial structure, and by preparing a draft development plan. The plan has been in the offing since 1990, but was never produced because of repeated crisis in the country and in the Society itself.

The new HRC structure includes a recently created central branch for the Port-au-Prince area which, once operative, will relieve the national headquarters of the burden of operations in the capital and allow it to fulfil its national role. The draft plan is still being improved and its final version will be submitted this year to another session of the general assembly. Both the statutes and the plan provide a good basis not only for improving operations in traditional areas, but also in those supported or to be supported by external co-operation.

Under the appeal the Federation Secretariat has committed CHF 168,000 to support the HRC's technical and managerial structure, of which 43% has already been funded by the Norwegian Red Cross.

The Netherlands Red Cross is providing support for a two and half year regional branch development project, funded with USD 1.2 million by the Netherlands Government. This will sustain efforts made by the HRC since 1996 to establish a special department dealing with regional committee co-ordination and development issues. The project will support the creation of local committees in some regions and their consolidation in others, through their modernisation and practical involvement in community services.

The project started up in March with the arrival of a Dutch delegate who, in accordance with a tripartite agreement with the Federation Secretariat, is working within the frame of the Federation Delegation, while principally accountable to the National Society. Although important, the Netherlands contribution does not reduce the appeal target shortfall, since the project was only briefly mentioned in the appeal and not included in the appeal's budget summary.

After its successful USD 100,000 fund-raising and image enhancing campaign of 1995 the HRC, with the Federation Delegation's support, carried out a second campaign from December 1996 to February 1997. It raised USD 50,000, confirming, in spite of the lower score, that even in very poor countries creativity and dynamism can produce tangible support from the community. The funds, like those of 1995, are being used to strengthen the operational capacity of the HRC.

Disaster preparedness

The CHF 1.4 million disaster preparedness project, aimed at training and equipping rescuers and first aiders in the 13 regional committees, will start soon, thanks to 26% funding by the Norwegian Red Cross. The project has been reformulated in order to adapt it to the funding available and to co-ordinate it geographically and technically with other projects, particularly the above mentioned regional branch development and the final phase of the disaster preparedness training project supported by the Canadian Red Cross since 1996. The reformulation is also aimed at completing with human and material resources what has already been done within the HRC/Canadian Red Cross project.

The project will also be combined with the following activities which were not included in the appeal:

the recent creation of an ambulance centre for Port-au-Prince, supported by the Spanish Red Cross with USD 290,000 and initially run directly by the HRC's national headquarters;

a French Red Cross, ECHO-funded six-month project amounting to ECU 180,000 that will create a First Aid Training Centre and train RC relief workers; two French Red Cross delegates will work bilaterally for three months, in co-ordination with the Federation Delegation team.

Assistance to repatriates

The HRC and the Federation Delegation have been unable to re-start activities in this area, despite the growing number of involuntary repatriations (from 5,000 to 14,000 -- depending on the sources of information -- in the first quarter of 1997) because no contributions at all have been received for the CHF 499,000 project to facilitate the social and economic reinsertion of 5,000 repatriates.

Technical assistance

Support in the form of cash and delegates received so far for the Delegation is not sufficient to cover all its needs and is one of the reasons why the Delegation is being downsized to three delegates and put under the umbrella of the Kingston Regional Delegation. But even with a downsized team, additional resources are necessary to maintain support to the HRC, particularly in the area of co-ordinating outside technical assistance. (HRC expansion of its community development activities is dependent on international support.)

Outstanding needs

The uncovered part of the appeal is CHF 2,820,000 (76%).

External relations

The Federation Delegation and increasingly the HRC maintain working relations with foreign governments' representations and numerous international agencies (in particular several UN agencies, the ECHO local representation and the Bureau of Nutrition and Development) based in Port-au-Prince with activities related to the programme presented in the appeal. Co-operation with the Ministry of Health and Haitian public authorities also works well.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Additional contributions are expected as a result of a PNS meeting with the HRC, the Federation Delegation and the Federation's Americas Department, 12-15 March in Port-au-Prince. The meeting was attended by the NS of Canada, France, Netherlands, Spain and United States. Several others who expressed interest have received the meeting's report. This report is available on request as is more detailed information about the projects. Please contact the Desk Officer in charge, Luis Luna, tel. (0041) (22) 7304 274.

Conclusion

The Federation appeal addresses major needs in a country which is facing enormous political and economic problems, depending for their solution on the restoration of public social services to a large vulnerable population.

The Haitian Red Cross is making clearly visible progress in its institutional development and in creating new services to the most vulnerable communities. Moreover, it is increasingly participating in regional developmental activities, so strengthening the Federation in the Caribbean.

Donors who have already contributed to the appeal are thanked for their support. Others are encouraged to look further into this programme and to consider contributing to its realisation.

Ann Naef
Acting Head
Appeals & Reports Service

Luis Luna
Acting Director
Americas Department