

SOUTHERN CONE OF SOUTH AMERICA

REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

CHF 3,637,000

Programme No. 01.20/98

The Regional Delegation (RD) has been working with the National Societies (NSs) of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay since its creation in 1994. In 1996 its scope was extended to Brazil and Peru.

The region has more than 250 million inhabitants, of whom 45% live in poverty. While macroeconomics growth continues, the gap between rich and poor is widening, making the distribution of wealth in the region one of the most unequal in the world.

Despite the efforts of Governments, the civil sector and international organisations to promote sustainable development, vulnerability is growing. Inhabitants are exposed both to the impact of social disturbances and to the adverse events of nature. Latin America now has the highest rate of violent deaths in the world. Disasters regularly produce extensive human suffering and economic losses that have a tragic impact on regional development, as in Peru and Bolivia in 1997. The weather phenomenon “El Niño” was already causing climatic upheaval in the region in 1997, and its effects were expected to worsen in 1998.

The NSs in the region, supported by the Federation, are facing up to the challenge of modernising their structures in order to improve their capacity to respond to the changes and needs of the new regional scene. Important efforts have been made, but the pace of change is slow and in some areas, such as disaster preparedness and response, insufficient, pointing to the need for greater support from the Federation.

The RD team has been reinforced with a Disaster Preparedness Delegate and an Information Delegate, in addition to the Head of Regional Delegation (HoRD), a Development Delegate, a Co-ordinator of the “Strong People” Programme, a Youth consultant, local staff and temporary outside specialists. A Development Delegate is based in Peru.

Among the five main programmes areas in which the RD is working, the “Cross-border Community Programme” deserves special mention. It contains innovative projects such as the “Strong People” and “Camalote-Aguapey” (Rio de la Plata Basin) projects which combine the mobilisation of communities, the involvement of branches and local authorities and the reinforcement of regional co-operation between NSs.

Objectives in 1998

The objectives for the 1998 regional programmes are:

- | To strengthen the capacity of the NSs to be prepared for and respond to the suffering caused by disasters, and promote permanent Red Cross action in vulnerable regions through community based disaster preparedness;
- | to help NSs, and their branches in particular, reach a greater number of vulnerable groups, through cross-border, development-oriented programmes emphasising primary health care and integrated community development activities;
- | to assist the NSs in the creation of sound institutional and financial structures and clear procedures so that they can put their development plans into practice;
- | to contribute to a better public awareness of the Red Cross and respect for its principles and its activities in the region;
- | to encourage a systematic communications strategy that will enhance the NSs' image and reinforce the ability of all seven NSs to support the development, consolidation and modernisation of Youth Departments and Programmes.

Programmes in 1998

Disaster Preparedness and Prevention

Although the American Southern Cone frequently suffers from disasters the institutional capacity of its Governments, the Red Cross and NGOs to respond to these emergencies is limited and in some cases non-existent. The efficient management of relief operations calls for effective communications channels and, as recent experience has shown, the organised participation of adequately prepared communities.

Consequently, the RD will focus on three regional projects:

Consolidation of the disaster response capacity of all NSs in the Southern Cone. The Delegation will collaborate with the NS in assessing needs, designing systems and monitoring implementation when disasters occur, specifically dealing with the consequences of the "El Niño" phenomenon. The reinforcement of NS relief departments will prioritise Bolivia, Peru and Chile — the NSs most affected by natural disasters in 1997. It will also facilitate the training of human resources in the NSs.

Strengthening Red Cross regional and national telecommunication systems, making them more effective and sustainable, by activating the Red Cross Interamerican Communication Network. This project will provide the seven NSs in the Southern Cone with training, counselling and basic equipment. The project is similar to, and co-ordinated with that in Central America, Mexico and the Northern area of South America.

Promotion of community education in disaster preparedness aimed at encouraging communities to adopt appropriate preventive and responsive behaviour to disasters, and so diminish their vulnerability. The project includes management of temporary shelters and

dealing with the most common accidents in daily life. It is part of a continental Federation programme initiated in 1995 that currently involves more than ten countries. The Southern Cone will develop it in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Paraguay. An evaluation in 1997 demonstrated the significance of the project and its impact will be studied further.

Cross-Border Community Projects

These three projects constitute an innovative approach by which the NSs, co-ordinated by the Regional Delegation, are mobilising communities and providing concrete services related to health, disaster preparedness and integral community development.

The three projects emphasise the active participation of the Red Cross branches, and seek to build up their capacity. Local governments collaborate and close co-operation develops between neighbouring NSs.

The projects deal with social vulnerabilities; their aim is to consolidate the social structure of the communities and integrate the local network of Red Cross branches as a relevant part of this structure.

The projects also represent a new approach to dealing with problems across national borders, which calls for regional co-operation and international contributions.

The Strong People project aims at providing vulnerable communities with the means to identify their primary health care (PHC) needs and improving their access to basic health services. This project started in 1997, after a preparatory phase, in the border areas of north-western Argentina, north-western Chile and in nine Departments of Bolivia.

Camalote/Aguapey, or the Regional Programme of the River Plate Basin, was initiated because of the recurrent floods in the river basin, which produced both casualties and heavy economic losses. Once the project determined that the affected communities also experienced serious social disturbances and economic difficulties, its scope was widened to help reduce the vulnerability of 21 marginal urban communities located in areas threatened by floods in the Basin (Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay), by promoting their incorporation into the socio-economic development of their communities.

Regional project in the Amazonian rainforest. The project will cover parts of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. Drawing on experience from the two preceding projects, it targets those communities living in very difficult socio-environmental conditions. In 1998 a feasibility study will take place and the communities will be mobilised to identify problems and potential action. Red Cross branches will be involved in the diagnosis of needs and trained in participatory planning.

Capacity Building

In the last few years, and especially since the completion of the Study on the Future of the Red Cross in Latin America, the RD has supported a series of institutional development initiatives which have led to the design of National Development Plans and statutory reforms. It has also helped to progressively improve the financial basis of the NSs, the reinforcement of the branches and other organisational reforms. In order to ensure the sustainability of this process, the following four regional projects will be maintained:

Resource Development. Initiated in 1996, it aims at strengthening the resource development capacity of the NSs by training their human resources, but will also provide technical

assistance in specific fund-raising campaigns, diversifying their services sales strategies, and exploring “new markets”.

Strengthening the branches for community work. This is a project to develop the basic structures in the NSs so that they will be better trained to work with vulnerable communities. An analysis of experience in Argentina and Bolivia has led branches to reorient their work with the most vulnerable. This project will be extended to 30 branches in the seven countries of the region.

Co-operation on organisational development. This will continue RD counselling activities with the NSs in the region, including the design, revision and implementation of development plans, and advice on the revision of statutory structures. Support will prioritise the modernisation of the NSs of Uruguay and Brazil.

Management of social development projects. The planning and management of projects needs to be improved, to increase their impact and to meet donors’ quality standards. Training on project management, started in 1997 in a workshop for the seven NSs, will continue, targeting operational capacity at local level. Technical assistance will be given with the design and follow up of projects.

Youth

Fifty per cent of the population of Latin America is under 25 years of age and many of these young people are marginalised. NSs are trying to respond to this challenge by reinforcing their youth programmes.

The Regional Delegation is contributing towards:

Revitalising in-school groups of NSs in the Southern Cone. This project seeks to involve young people in Red Cross Youth (RCY) work, giving them an opportunity to tackle the social factors affecting their lives, both at school and out of school. It will operate in 105 educational centres in 21 cities in the seven countries. These Red Cross school groups are a traditional activity of the NSs that has been neglected in recent years.

Strengthening RCY capacity. This will be done through technical assistance from the Regional Delegation’s Youth consultant, by helping Red Cross Youth to develop their organisational and programme capacity and supporting their publications and other communication tools.

Information and Communications

The absence of specific information and communications strategies, and in some cases the lack of trained personnel to promote the NSs’ work internally, nationally and internationally, affects the image and public awareness of the Red Cross. The efforts of the NSs to change this situation will be fostered by the following projects of the RD:

Regional development of information systems is a project aiming through various means — *Noticias de América Latina*, database, documentation centre, Web page, etc. — at promoting the distribution of information on the Red Cross, and so reinforcing its institutional image on the continent. It also aims at developing regional and inter-regional links between the NSs. The project covers the seven countries of the Southern Cone.

Support for the information systems of the NSs will introduce the identity programme of the Movement by distance learning and by using the Communicator’s Guide, and will train the

personnel of all branches of NSs in the Southern Cone. The project aims at improving the information systems in the NS, qualitatively and quantitatively, by providing tools and training. Some activities will be carried out together with the ICRC.