

CENTRAL AFRICA: REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

21 February, 2000

*appeal no. 01.07/99
situation report no. 2
period covered: 1 July - 31 December, 1999*

In the course of 1999, despite encountering difficulties primarily related to logistics constraints and insecurity, the Federation's Regional delegation provided key support to the National Societies of Chad, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome and Principe. Based on progress achieved in 1999, the Regional Delegation is well positioned to continue the capacity building initiatives in 2000, with an accompanying strong focus on health programmes.

The context

The Federation's Regional Delegation for Central Africa, established in 1994 to serve National Societies in seven countries with a total population of 30 million, works within an environment of increasing poverty, political instability, environmental degradation and deteriorating health conditions in the region.

Droughts, floods, epidemics and armed conflicts are teaming up with what are at best wobbly economies to create increasing vulnerability among large segments of the populace. The tasks, present and future, facing the National Societies in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tomé and Príncipe are huge. As many of these societies suffer from serious institutional weaknesses, the regional delegation has its work carved out for 1999 and the years beyond: while coping with the region's natural and man-made disasters, its overriding priority must be strengthening the National Societies' capacity.

It should be stressed that National Society leadership in the region recognises the growing needs of their constituencies and the ensuing necessity of change. Since October 1997, regional senior management has taken up the challenge of modernising their organisations, going through a sometimes painful process of self-assessment, setting priorities and strengthening co-operation between the National Societies in the region. Both the Federation and the ICRC are supporting this process.

Meanwhile, there are real needs to be met. In addition to capacity building, the Regional Delegation's programmes focused on health issues - developing National Health Plans in the region, devising educational programmes on prevalent diseases, and setting up disaster preparedness and response plans to counter the ever-recurring cholera and meningitis epidemics.

To respond to the situation described above, the following objectives were established:

- To strengthen the operational and managerial capacity of the National Societies involved by establishing transparent structures and systems in the field of human resources and fund-raising; by increasing community participation in their programmes; and by improving their visibility among the public-at-large to promote the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, its principles, and its emblem. To promote peace and understanding in the region through the Culture of Peace programme calling for the dissemination of Red Cross principles and International Humanitarian Law among the region's youth. To improve co-operation between National Societies by sharing best practices and setting up a regional communications network.
- To meet the health needs of the population by developing National Health Plans; by setting up peer-education programmes on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); by developing preventive health strategies against diarrhoea and tuberculosis; by developing and executing preparedness plans to counter cholera and meningitis epidemics; and by putting in place community-based first aid programmes.

Latest events

Armed conflict in the two Congos continued to provoke population displacements towards neighbouring countries. In the Central African Republic, the tense political and security situation persists, and the presence of United Nations peacekeeping forces (MINURCA) guarantees a certain stability. In Chad, an undeclared civil conflict is underway between rebels in the north of the country and the government. A general deterioration of the economic situation has occurred in various countries of the region, notably Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe. The government of Equatorial Guinea, despite internal political problems, is making efforts to open itself to the external world. In Cameroon, the problem of corruption is hampering the political and social development of the country despite an anti-corruption campaign of the government.

Insecurity, the result of ethnic tensions, economic difficulties, and political developments, continued to dominate and characterise events in the region, resulting in significant population movements (internal and external). During the last 3 months of 1999, torrential rains caused floods in Chad, Central Africa, and Cameroon, affecting the population as well as the economies of the three countries.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Three emergency operations were implemented by the National Societies of Chad, Cameroon and the Central African Republic to assist vulnerable persons. The Federation allocated a total of CHF 347,558 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF), and the Regional Delegation provided technical assistance to the three national societies. A delegate was assigned to Chad to assist the Red Cross of Chad in implementing a food and non-food distribution programme.

The Central African Red Cross Society continued to manage several activities in the health, agriculture, sanitation, education, and food sectors, in partnership with UNHCR. The Spanish Red Cross financed a programme of assistance to Democratic Republic of Congo refugees in the sectors of health, sanitation, and education.

The Cameroon Red Cross Society continued to manage a programme of assistance to Chadian refugees, as well as for Congolese refugees at transit sites in Garoua, in partnership with UNHCR.

In Gabon, the National Society has put in place a team of 12 emergency workers in the region of Tchinga in order to implement a programme of emergency food and first aid assistance to refugees from the DRC.

Regional Programmes

The Federation's Regional Delegation team supports and coordinates activities of seven National Societies in terms of regional programmes.

Regional Cooperation •

During the last semester of 1999, the coordination committee met twice. Regional cooperation is fully in place and well consolidated. Despite this, efforts are underway to improve the regional structure and cooperation in terms of identifying, implementing, and monitoring regional programmes.

To reinforce the exchange and communication activities, the Regional Delegation implemented a project to produce a trimester bulletin, and envisages a documentation center open to the public with the Federation Internet Website one of the priorities.

Capacity Building and Institutional Development •

In September, the Regional Delegation organised an institutional development seminar in Douala, with the participation of representatives of the Francophone national societies and bilateral delegates of the French Red Cross. Representative of the Chad, Cameroon, et Gabon Red Cross identified capacity building as a priority. Based on a review of the issues addressed and the quality of discussions, the seminar was considered a success.

Following recommendations of the meeting of presidents during the month of June, the Regional Delegation elaborated on a programme of reinforcing capacities in the areas of marketing, and the development and diversification of resources.

The Regional delegation also participated at the Central African Red Cross's General Assembly which took place in August in Bangui.

Health •

The Regional Delegation organised a meeting with the respective Ministers of Health, National Societies of the region, and with representatives of WHO and UNICEF to focus on the African Red Cross Red Crescent Health Initiative (ARCHI) 2010 programme.

In October 1999, a meeting of health workers took place in Douala, promoting a review of National Society health programmes, to elaborate year 2000 programmes, and to prepare ARCHI management tools.

Support was provided to the Chad, Central African, and Cameroon Red Cross to treat cholera and other diseases provoked by the floods.

The regional health delegate strengthened cooperation with ministers of health, representatives of WHO, UNICEF (Equatorial Guinea and Chad), to present the ARCHI 2010 programme.

Disaster Preparedness and Planning (DPP) •

In response to natural disasters (floods) which occurred in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Chad, a French Red Cross emergency delegate was assigned to the Chad Red Cross to assist in implementing emergency assistance operations. At the end of these operations, a seminar was organised in N'djamena to evaluate the delivery of assistance, and to define the elements to improve National Society cooperation for disaster prevention.

Promotion of humanitarian values •

Humanitarian values, particularly issues of culture and peace, were focused on and disseminated by Red Cross Youth theatre groups operating throughout the region.

Regional Delegation

With the departure of the Head of the Regional Delegation, the regional team was reduced to three delegates. The decrease in the Regional delegation together with the increase in activities towards the end of 1999 required a redoubling of efforts to obtain the intended results. At the time that this report was written, there was an urgent need for a First Aid and DPP delegate.

Outstanding needs

The team of five delegates will be consolidated in 2000 in order to improve the assistance and support to the national societies, particularly in the area of disaster preparedness and response.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and
Reporting Department

Bekele Geleta
Director
Africa Department