

CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

Regional Programmes

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*Emergency phase response to Hurricane Mitch in the four worst affected countries dominated activities in the first quarter, delaying the achievement of **many** objectives. Activities that had to be postponed, notably community based disaster preparedness, but also health and welfare initiatives, gained momentum in the second quarter*

The context

The Regional delegation, established in 1977, works with the National Societies of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Panama Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Canada and the United States. It is based in Guatemala, and is thus able to assist the Guatemalan Red Cross in its post-conflict rehabilitation programmes

Latest events

The economic difficulties and political tensions in the region have increased the poverty of millions of Latin Americans. Central America has yet to overcome the effects of Hurricane Mitch, which wrecked agriculture, ruined the infrastructure and set off a wave of migration. At least 60% of the population saw their living conditions worsen.

In Colombia, tenuous negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian army have caused an escalating level of violence and an increase in kidnappings and armed confrontations.

In Guatemala, a Popular Referendum on constitutional reforms, including such critical issues as **indigenous** political participation and **indigenous** rights, the function of the armed forces and the civil police, drew a scant 18% of the population to the polls, leaving some worrisome gaps in the peace process undertaken in 1996.

In Venezuela inflation is soaring and **bank interests are up to 75%**. In addition the country faces **ongoing political uncertainty plus** the problem of Colombians who fled to Venezuela to escape insecurity at home.

The International Monetary Fund declared Ecuador one of the most fiscally imbalanced countries and in deep economic crisis: 18.1% of the population is unemployed and 62.5% percent live in poverty. In Mexico, economic growth has diminished to two percent.

El Salvador elected the youngest president in its history on a platform to combat poverty and criminal violence. In Panama a woman was elected as President of the Republic.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Regional Disaster Preparedness Programme •

The regional Disaster Preparedness programme continues to be promoted through a Community Education Programme for Disaster Prevention in the four countries that were the most affected by Mitch. Involved PNS are also promoting activities of prevention and emergency assistance (health and natural disasters). The programme, however, includes all NS of the region.

The two-pronged approach of the programme, namely disaster preparedness at the community level as well as within the NS, subscribes to the following objectives:

- To train the most vulnerable communities of the countries of the region in disaster preparedness and prevention, using a participatory methodology.
- To support the National Societies' Relief Departments in the update of their organizational structure and logistics, by promoting the consolidation of the Regional Network of Relief Delegates; by strengthening and organizing the national relief departments and standardizing the training techniques for the management of emergency operations.

The situation provoked by Hurricane Mitch altered planning for this year, and priority was given to programmes in the four Mitch countries. The implementation of the Community Education Programme continued in 9 of the 12 countries under the responsibility of this Regional Delegation. Evaluation Workshops for the first phase of the programme were carried out with Canadian Red Cross /CIDA funding, in the province of Limon in Costa Rica and the Departments of San Vicente, San Miguel and San Salvador in El Salvador. Coordination meetings on the improvement of the disaster preparedness and intervention capacity of the National Societies of the region were held with the National Directors of Relief and Training of the National Societies of Costa Rica, El Salvador and Guatemala.

In the second quarter the implementation of the Community Education programme with financing from DIPECHO got under way in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. This Programme was launched with a workshop attended by the National Co-ordinators of the Programme in each of the countries, in order to reinforce important elements of the methodology of the programme and to accomplish the planning of activities for the rest of the year.

Concerning the improvement of the preparedness, **response** and intervention capacity of the National Societies of the region, especially the Mitch countries (Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Nicaragua), activities were carried out to strengthen the Relief departments, especially in human resource training. A workshop with the directors of relief operations

was held to analyse the current state of contingency plans and to begin an update process in each of these **NS in close co-ordination with support initiatives of the Federation Regional And Country Delegations as well as the bilateral PNS operating in the Mitch countries.**

Simultaneously, the review process of the Country **Rehabilitation** Plans of each of the four NSs with regard to the DPP objectives has been a focus, with the aim of developing a common strategy for the Mitch countries. Based on this collective strategy, a Regional Disaster Preparedness Programme will be proposed for financing and implementation over the next three years.

The process of compiling regional data and the co-ordination of related activities has been undertaken through numerous meetings and planning sessions with the **Country Delegations and PNSs** in the region. The Regional Contingency Plan **spelling out the roles of ONS /PNS /Federation Delegations and the Secretariat in Geneva** for the hurricane season will be completed early next quarter. The Plan is complemented by a revolving calendar of relief delegates available **from within** the region in case of emergency.

DPP issues were discussed by working groups of key NS at the Inter-American Conference in Santo Domingo, producing the following conclusions: there is a lack of co-ordination with the governmental agencies in disaster situations; there is insufficient education of the communities in DP; and volunteer recruitment for DPP initiatives must be improved. There was an overall recommendation to emphasise planning, co-ordination and strengthening of disaster preparedness capacity **and inter and intra-regional communications**, both at the community level as well as within the NS.

As noted, the development of national contingency plans, a coherent disaster preparedness and response strategy for NSs and the consolidation of the network of relief delegates of the region, through training workshops programmed until the end of the year, will further strengthen NSs' capacities to react to future emergencies.

Finally, support was provided to the NSs of the region in the presentation of the World Disasters Report 1999, an activity designed to improve the image of the NSs in the region and to inform the public of the role the Regional Delegation plays in improving the response capacity of these NSs.

Constraints, Problem Areas The development of a homogeneous Disaster Preparedness Programme in the region is at the present time a challenge, particularly in the Mitch countries. The need to co-ordinate and integrate the goals and objectives of the ONS with the resources and methodologies available through the bilateral PNS is a priority for the Federation. Considerable progress has been made in the last quarter in achieving this, though more work is required. To this end the Regional Delegation in co-ordination with the Country Delegations in Nicaragua and Honduras is strengthening its human and programme resources to provide this support and to assist the ONS to clarify what general lines DPP should follow within their own programmatic framework.

Cooperation Permanent contact with the NS of the region has been maintained and frequent meetings with the representative of the Regional Office of the American Red Cross have been held in order to co-ordinate DPP activities in the Region. Contacts are maintained with officials of CONRED and the Disaster Preparedness Department, of the Health Ministry (in the case of Guatemala), as well as UNESCO, UNDP, OPS, Regional Information Centre for Disasters (CRID) and with NGOs such as Action Against Hunger, Ecological Custodians and other agencies in the region.

Regional Health and Welfare •

Most of the Federation and PNS programmes are directed to the Mitch rehabilitation phase, with numerous projects related to community health rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Primary health care (PHC) is being promoted within the strategic framework of the Regional Health Plan. During a Regional Health and Welfare Workshop in Nicaragua in May, Regional Health Strategies were agreed upon and established, and the Regional Health and Welfare Network was formally founded. Additionally, the Blood Network was officially endorsed by the NS Presidents at the Inter-American Conference in Santo Domingo in June.

The National Societies' elaboration of their National Health Plans is receiving technical support from the RD. A project proposal is being developed to equip the health and welfare networks in order to enable them to implement activities.

Constraints, Problem Areas Difficulty with communications with those responsible for health services in the National Societies of the region continues to be one of the principal problems. Only a few of them have access to the Internet and, because of the cost, have limited access to the telephone or fax. **One of the objectives of the Santo Domingo Declaration is to address this problem and an assessment to review the establishment of a Central American Regional Communications Network is in the planning stages.**

The economic problem continues to be a constraint, **as is the under-funding for some** projects, such as the printing of the Latin American First Aid Manual. **With the easing of the post emergency demands of Mitch, and indeed with support from Mitch funding, priority has been turned back to longer term health programmes and projects.**

Co-operation Collaboration with all the ONSs and PNSs present in the region is ongoing, in order to maintain **coherency of health issues within the Mitch rehabilitation phase.**

Regional Information/Research Development Programme

Preparation of the National Societies for the XVI Inter-American Conference dominated the second quarter. Eight of the twelve National Societies that form part of the Regional Delegation collaborated in the successful outcome of this conference -- some through working papers and others as co-ordinators of the working groups. A weekly bulletin, prepared in Geneva, but with contributions from the three Regional Delegations and the Secretariat, was a common element in disseminating key issues and sharing information leading up to the Conference.

Other information initiatives during the reporting period were:

- Production of the magazine Latin America News;
- Creation of the new Web page of the Regional Delegation (being accessed by 45% of the NSs);
- A regional proposal for the development of the donor data base;
- Production of the training material for the Distance Learning Programme;
- Establishment of Strategic Alliances with more than 50 companies interested in a partnership with the International Federation for a shared prevention campaign.

In Information/Resource Development, the following initiatives were taken:

- promotion of the Inter-American Communicator's Forum, with the incorporation of the American and Spanish Red Cross Societies;
- formalising co-ordination in Resource Development with the Regional Delegation of the Caribbean;

- incorporation of training courses in fund-raising for the National Societies of the region.

The formalisation of the institutional image campaign through the Internet; the incorporation of the campaign “Adios Violencia” and the consolidation of the Strategic Alliances project and the PEACE campaign are among the challenges of the next quarter.

Youth and Volunteer Development

The following initiatives were taken:

- The creation of the Youth Network;
- The creation of the Training Network as a support to all programmes;
- The optimisation of financial resources for implementation of local workshops;
- The joint planning of at least two common activities involving youth and training;
- The placement of four AFS volunteers with the Guatemala Red Cross for six months in their Community Education in DP Programme.

Co-operation The relationship and co-ordination with the Spanish, American, German, Belgian, Swiss, French, Canadian and Netherlands bilateral PNSs both at the Regional and Country Delegation levels which had been complex due to the size of the interventions, workload, communications and operational priorities has greatly improved with more regular meetings and exchanges of information and planning co-operation with the ONS lead. Dialogue and activities in collaboration with AFS were maintained in order to further develop this relationship. The Federation is now included in the ongoing activities of FUNDESA which includes a number of local companies and NGOs involved in development issues.

Outstanding needs

The main concern of the Regional Delegation remains that of continuing to address and reduce the regional deficit; while progress has been made additional assistance from donors would be welcomed. Under-funded programmes are another area of concern. The need to strengthen the human resources of the delegation while mindful of economic efficiencies requires the support of donor PNS in the field of recruitment and training.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Regional Delegation maintains constant contact with the major agencies of the UN, NGOs, journalists and media focal points and institutions. It also enjoys a highly co-operative and consultative relationship with the ICRC Regional Delegation

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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