

# Asia and Pacific

LEADERSHIP / FACILITATION / COORDINATION / SERVICES TO NATIONAL SOCIETIES

## Democratic People's Republic of Korea



### Health and care

The health and care programme of DPRK Red Cross Society, supported by the IFRC in the DPRK consists of two main components:

- 1) Improvement of medical services focusing on maternal, newborn and child health, through:
  - a. distribution of essential drugs
  - b. rehabilitation of health care facilities and provision of medical equipment
  - c. training of community health professionals
- 2) Community-based health and first aid

DPRK is the only country where IFRC carries out regular drug distributions to primary health care facilities in a non-emergency setting. The training for community health professionals is also an atypical activity within the Red Cross context. The unique historical position of the DPRK Red Cross as the primary government-controlled health actor after the separation of the two Koreas in 1946, has led to a significant number of activities normally under the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) still being implemented by the Red Cross.

Due to a chronic lack of government funding for the health sector, the MoPH has still not been able to take over the costly and logistically challenging task of distributing essential drugs to around 70 per cent of all primary health care facilities in the country. In spite of plans to scale down, the DPRK Red Cross together with UNICEF are currently ensuring that over 4,000 health facilities receive medical kits on a quarterly basis, of which the DPRK Red Cross covers 2,030 clinics. Nonetheless, the supply only covers 40 per cent of the total need for drugs in the clinics, as some run out of their quarterly drug supply a month after delivery.

The contents of the medical kits are particularly aimed at improving the health of women, newborns and children, and have been agreed on together with MoPH, UNICEF and the World Health Organization.

Apart from the shortage of essential drugs, further serious limitations of the primary health care facilities are the absence of proper medical equipment, lack of heating during the winter months, and the lack of training and updated knowledge among community health professionals.

# Health and care

With the regular supply of medical kits, the DPRK Red Cross, with support from IFRC, makes a significant contribution to the provision of basic health care to the most vulnerable groups in the population.

Although the number of doctors in DPRK is extremely large, their medical training has not been modernized since the collapse of the Soviet Union. DPRK Red Cross organizes trainings for community doctors on specific topics like the rational use of drugs, in particular antibiotics, but also on prevention and treatment of HIV, tuberculosis and other public health threats. The trainings are facilitated by the MoPH.

More importantly, the DPRK Red Cross supports 2,500 first aid posts throughout the entire country. The volunteers who run the posts on a daily basis receive regular first aid training and six months of first aid supplies. The first aid posts play an important role in the prevention of diseases through continuous health and hygiene promotion, as well as in the treatment of injuries, which can sometimes be life saving.

Other activities covered by the health and care programme are public health in emergencies and voluntary non-remunerated blood donation. In close collaboration with the MoPH, Red Cross volunteers are mobilized to help in health campaigns to raise awareness on disease outbreaks and newly emerging diseases like avian influenza and A (H1N1), vaccinations, and others. At the same time, recruitment of blood donors is a full-fledged activity to ensure the continuous availability of sufficient quality and quantity of blood.

Although it is difficult to quantify the impact the health and care programme due to the lack of reliable statistics, the supply of essential drugs supports the overall health status of up to 8.5 million beneficiaries.

For more detailed information on the IFRC in the DPRK, please visit:

<http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/cn6.asp?countryid=193>



Although distribution of drugs is still the main activity in the Health & Care program, providing 70% of all the health clinics in the country with basic medicines, the focus in 2010 onwards will be on the implementation of Community Based Health and First Aid (CBHFA)



A key element of the CBHFA is quality, interactive and practical first aid training, such as here in Suhung ri, Hamju county, South Hamgyong province

For more information, please contact:

**Finn-Jarle Rode**  
**Head of IFRC office in DPR of Korea**

Ryonhwa-1 dong, Central District  
Pyongyang, DPR of Korea

Tel: +850 2 381 4350

Email: [finnjarle.ode@ifrc.org](mailto:finnjarle.ode@ifrc.org)