

VENEZUELA: FLOODS

20 June 2000

appeal no. 35/99

situation report no. 10 (Final Report - Relief Phase)

period covered: 16 December 1999 - 30 April 2000

The Venezuela flood assistance operation was launched within hours of the disaster, coordinated by the Regional Delegation in Guatemala. Using the resources established in the region following Hurricane Mitch in 1999, a Regional Intervention Team (RIT), drawn from a standby pool of Federation-trained regional National Society delegates, was quickly mobilized. The much improved Federation response was largely the result of lessons learned from the in-depth analysis and assessment of the Hurricane Mitch Operation. Despite delays and the non-availability of goods in country at the beginning, the operations were smoothly managed in a timely manner with most objectives achieved. As a result of the operation, the Venezuelan Red Cross has increased its capacity in relief disaster management, with more trained volunteers and staff which will serve as a human resources bank for future contingencies. Additionally, this operation has contributed to improving the National Society's image by increasing their visibility in the country.

The disaster

Weeks of unseasonable and unexpected torrential rains in Venezuela reached record proportions on 15 and 16 December 1999, causing massive landslides and severe flooding in seven northern states of the country. Overflowing rivers swept through poor districts in the capital, Caracas, washing away thousands of homes. In the coastal valleys, mudslides buried most of the towns in Macuto and Caraballeda while the towns of Los Corales, Camuri Chico and Carmen de Uria totally disappeared under avalanches of rock and mud. Venezuela had not experienced a natural disaster for decades and the consequent lack of preparedness and training for such an emergency resulted in its response mechanisms being quickly overtaken by events.

An estimated 190,000 people were evacuated as a result of the disaster. 326 military shelters were set up, housing at one point over 100,000 evacuees. In addition, there were 63,000 persons in a further 280 shelters around the country, plus an unknown number of families staying with relatives or friends. The actual number of evacuees and internally displaced was difficult to establish at any given time due to the ongoing movement of the population. Many persons who would return to their homes when the water levels receded went back to the shelters when the rains started again.

The Ministry of Foreign Relations acknowledged that there could have been between 10,000 to 20,000 deaths. Other official reports indicate that over 400,000 people were affected by the landslides and floods with some 6,000 to 7,000 missing. A final figure of 30,000 dead has been accepted as reasonable. The latest government figures show some 81,000 houses affected, and 30,000 families are registered as having suffered total loss of their homes. Out of these, 30% are unemployed.

In addition to the loss of human life, there is also considerable economic damage to the country. Material damages have been estimated at over US\$ three billion. Unemployment has increased dramatically due to damage to peoples work places. For example, the floods and landslides impacted one of Venezuela's most popular international and domestic resort areas as well as seriously damaged international transport, logistics, and shipping infrastructure. As much as 60% of Vargas was destroyed and 230,000 jobs were lost. The important fishing sector was also affected, due to a decrease in demand as a result of the widely publicized contamination of the ocean and considerable loss of small fishing vessels that had been anchored in the state of Vargas.

The El Guapo dam which broke apart provides water to tourist centers, urban and rural populations, and was used as well for livestock and agriculture. The governor of the state of Miranda ordered the timely evacuation of the area thereby preventing major loss of life. In addition a serious chemical spill resulted from the contents of containers split by the force of the slides and debris requiring international technical assistance.

The unusually heavy rains also contributed to serious environmental damage with massive coastal landslides, which brought down vegetation, trees and rocks, leaving huge bare spots on the mountainsides, with slopes more unstable and vulnerable to future inundations. The Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources continues warning of a possible reoccurrence of the Vargas tragedy because the Avila mountainsides have not fully recovered and there is severe deforestation.

Unseasonable rains continued through the months of January and February, producing further landslides well into the operation.

Initial Red Cross/Red Crescent Response

When the disaster struck, the Venezuela Red Cross (VRC) responded immediately to help those affected, assisting with the relief operation co-ordinated by the National Civil Defence Authorities. In the first days, 15 out of the Society's 23 local branches were involved in the response to the emergency, with more than 1,340 Red Cross first aid workers, doctors and other volunteers providing support.

The magnitude of the disaster however overwhelmed the capacity of the VRC and other National Societies in the region such as Colombia, Honduras, Panama, Cuba, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Chile, the Dominican Republic and others responded quickly by sending delegates, volunteers and supplies in the onset of the disaster. A Regional Intervention Team (RIT), recruited from regional National Societies and supported by Federation delegates already operational or supplied by Participating National Societies (PNS), was immediately deployed by the second day through the Regional Delegation in Guatemala City. Most regional delegates arrived between 19-24 December. Other participating national societies such as the American, German, French, Spanish and Italian Red Cross also responded quickly and operated in good coordination with the Federation and the VRC.

During the first days of the operation the main activities were search and rescue, evacuation, first aid and medical services. The programme began by providing assistance to the population remaining in the state of Vargas as well as the displaced in other affected states. During this initial phase, food and non-food distributions were organized using local and international donations.

During the first three days the Regional Information Officer, as part of his functions in the Regional Intervention Team, processed more than 110 individual donor, media and public inquiries, contacts, interviews and information requests.

The Appeal

The first members of the Regional Intervention Team included an assessment unit who assisted in preparing a preliminary three-month Appeal which was launched on 20 December 1999 for CHF 4,460,000. This was followed by a revised Appeal on 5 January 2000 for CHF 13,298,000 to assist 50,000 beneficiaries (10,000 families approximately) for a 12-month period. In addition a further 40,000 families were to be reached collectively through bilateral assistance (the American, Spanish, German French and Italian Red Cross Societies). The Red Cross Movement sought therefore to reach a total of over 250,000 beneficiaries.

The target population to be assisted were those directly affected by the floods. Army shelters provided government assistance and the Red Cross therefore targeted the population remaining in destroyed homes, or living in areas without access to public services. These beneficiaries had suffered considerable loss of property and most lost their source of income due to the shutting down of services in the tourist and transport sectors. Also included were families relocated to or being sheltered by family or friends in order to relieve pressure on those host families. Particular care was taken in the Plan of Action to identify families in more precarious conditions or circumstances.

The Federation objectives were to:

- Assist 10,000 target families, or an estimated 50,000 persons, affected by the floods and landslides over one year (December 1999 - December 2000), focusing in the first four months of the operation on: clean water and food distribution, medical care, measures to prevent disease outbreaks, tracing and psychological support.
- Continue first aid and medical support to people in the Government's temporary shelters;
- Provide food, blankets and basic household goods to 50,000 people for four months;
- Support water and sanitation programmes;
- Assess the need for longer-term rehabilitation;

- Strengthen the operation capacity of the VRC by providing support to staff training and development.

Needs Assessment and Plan of Action

An early assessment was carried out by regional delegates and members of the VRC. This initial information helped to organize and plan the emergency assistance as well as to identify possible long term programmes. The initial assessment proved to be a fairly accurate reflection of the situation. The Federation's assessment team were the first to go to the affected areas and through them the various PNS received detailed information which they used as a basis for their respective plans of action. In terms of overall coordination, there was considerable improvement and additional lessons have been learned to improve further the speed of information and exchange with PNS and donors as well as partners on the ground.

The Plan of Action for the relief phase was drawn up by the Federation headed by the Deputy Head of the Regional Delegation. From the start it was a closely coordinated and participatory process in which the VRC as well as the American, Spanish, German, French and Italian Red Cross all contributed and worked hard to ensure a Plan that respected each partners objectives yet avoided duplication and confusion of roles. The objectives were realistic and were achieved as planned in the emergency phase.

There were some difficulties experienced in planning the appeal and operation given the uncertainty about potential resettlement of the beneficiaries by the national authorities. This posed problems in terms of identifying the future location of the beneficiaries, and also raised some concerns, since even though there was some resistance expressed from the population against any such move, the national authorities reported the need to resettle certain populations away from high risk urban marginal sites.

The return of the displaced to Vargas increased the initial target population for assistance, however the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries was realistic despite the fact that the case load was mostly a changing population of temporarily needy people who had lost their house, belongings, families and jobs. A great number of families were relocated and scattered throughout the county and it was very difficult to identify the most vulnerable in places where there are no Red Cross branches. Early beneficiary identification and registration was difficult and is likely to be so in other operations in the region.

The target population was certainly reached amongst the inhabitants remaining in Vargas. There was no previous census to help to accurately evaluate if and how many were not covered in the original registrations. Federation delegates visited communities with local leaders, searching for any additional beneficiaries.

Amongst the beneficiaries there was a segment of the population who had previously been relatively well off, but had been left destitute by the disaster, losing family members, their homes, belongings and jobs. The vast majority were employed in the tourism and other service sectors.

Several adjustments to the original plan of action were made:

- The number of beneficiaries increased (as noted above);
- family food parcels were distributed every two weeks during the four months and not reduced during the third and fourth month as was originally proposed;

- the number of jerrycans was increased to improve the water storage capacity of the beneficiaries from Vargas;
- the total number of vehicles the initial plan required were never bought, mainly because they couldn't be found in country. Vehicles were rented instead;
- for practical reasons, less hygiene kits per family were distributed than called for in the plan of action;
- the number of clean-up kits was increased so that each family would receive its own kit, rather than having to share amongst five families.

These changes did not interfere or hinder the operation, and were the result of a continuous assessment and monitoring of the situation.

The Operation

Duration

The operation itself started on the 19th December with the assessment phase and the emergency relief phase was completed on 30 April. The post emergency phase of the operation includes developing programmes in the health, water and sanitation, disaster preparedness and institutional development sectors and will continue until the end of the year (for further details please see the later section on rehabilitation).

Longer term post emergency objectives will be addressed in a final operation report at the end of 2000.

Role of the Federation

The Federation's role as coordinator was established early in the relief operation, and after some early difficulties with local and governmental bureaucracy was successful and welcomed by both the VRC and the bilateral National Societies. SPHERE minimum standards for family food parcels, other relief supplies and water and sanitation were adopted at the beginning of the operation and by and large were taken into consideration by most of the PNS.

Role of the Venezuelan Red Cross

Directly following the disaster, the VRC assisted the Civil Defence Authorities in search, rescue and evacuation operations, and provided food, clothing, emergency generators and vehicles. Some 1,340 Red Cross volunteers supported the government's relief and rescue action, transporting the injured for medical treatment and assisting people who had taken refuge in temporary shelters by providing food parcels, blankets, clothes and other relief items.

The VRC is, however, primarily geared to the management of hospitals and had limited capacity to mobilize trained volunteers to the field in order to respond to such an emergency. During the course of the operation, the VRC invited the Federation to assume the lead role. Volunteers who were deployed to work with the Federation were well qualified and very capable.

The VRC facilitated the operation by obtaining free warehousing facilities in the provinces, providing administrative facilities to the Federation and PNS, and chairing weekly coordination meetings.

Achievement of objectives

Relief

The main objective of the relief operations was to distribute essential relief items which included standardized food parcels to 10,000 families every two weeks for the first two months of the operation and the distribution of a reduced ration for the majority of beneficiaries during the third and fourth month of the operation. The food package was based on an initial ration of 1,900 kcals per person per day.

The plan of action also called for the distribution per family of three personal hygiene kits, one kitchen kit, one bedding kit consisting of sheets and a blanket, and a water kit consisting of a jerrycan, 20 chlorine tablets and a leaflet with instructions on the correct use of the tablets. Concentrating on the families whose houses had been flooded, 5,000 cleanup kits were required for distribution.

The return of the population to Vargas necessitated a readjustment of objectives to increase the target population from 10,000 to 12,464 families distributed as follows: 9,500 families in Vargas, 778 in Aragua, 876 in Carabobo and 1,310 in the rest of the country.

The distributions were organized in the standard form with some slight variations due to the physical space available in the chosen distribution sites. The distributions were assisted by local volunteers that participated together with VRC volunteers.

Consolidated Distribution Reports 19 December 1999 - 8 May 2000

1. Numbers of beneficiaries reached

State/Location:	Target in Appeal:	No. of beneficiaries reached:	%
Vargas	7,000	9,500	136
Aragua	1,000	778	78
Carabobo	1,000	876	88
Others as noted below. *	1,000	1,310	131
Total	10,000	12,464	125

* families relocated to Anyoastegui, Apure, Barinas, Bolivar, Cojedes, Lara, Merida, Monagas, Nueva Esparta, Portuguesa, Trujillo and Yaracuy.

2. Items distributed

Item:	Target in Appeal:	No. of items distributed:	%
Food Parcels	60,000	56,922	95
Hygiene Kits	20,000	17,306	87
Bedding Kits	10,000	11,653	117
Water Kits	5,500	14,021	255
Kitchen Kits	10,000	10,930	109

Clean Up Kits	4,159	4,071	98
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Achievements

The distributions were carried out according to the plan finishing by the end of April. In conjunction with the VRC branches in the interior of the country, the total number of assisted families reached 1,310.

Constraints

At the beginning of the operation several constraints were encountered:

- The scheduled distribution plan was carried out in Vargas, Aragua and Carabobo, however a three-week delay occurred in the remainder of the distributions due to transport cost coordination difficulties at the branch level. This cost was absorbed by the Federation operation at their request.
- The relief distributions in the Provinces, though small in number of beneficiaries, were a major logistical challenge. One of the characteristics of this operation was the need to assist small numbers of beneficiaries widely scattered in the country (provinces in the interior where people were relocated, but also in Aragua and Carabobo). This resulted in excessively high costs, with minimum supervision or support to the local branches. As the Red Cross was the only organization willing or able to reach these groups this decision must be considered correct but undoubtedly the attendant costs and resources needed has affected the “bottom line “ on some of the relief efficiency figures.
- Difficulties were encountered in arranging a timely transfer of funds to Caracas to procure relief items.
- During the first month, it was impossible to buy equipment, materials and food kits within the country.
- Early difficulties were experienced in reaching the distribution sites since roads were destroyed and/or due to road repairs, heavy construction equipment constantly blocked traffic.
- No priority was given for humanitarian convoys. In time, however, the military personnel did give preference at crossings and narrow bridges, etc.
- The coordination and working relationships with the VRC volunteers were generally excellent, but in the Vargas Branch it was at times very difficult to maintain the momentum.

Health

As the expertise of the VRC lies in hospitals rather than in community-based medical assistance, the Federation assumed the lead role in the activities of the mobile medical units covered by the Appeal. A plan of action for the first 3 months of operations was outlined in conjunction with the VRC National Health Director, the Spanish Red Cross and the Federation delegate. The objectives of the programme were directed towards assisting 50,000 beneficiaries from two clearly defined populations:

- ✓ Directly affected population whose most pressing needs were clean water supplies, sanitation, food, medical and psychological assistance.
- ✓ Internally displaced populations in shelters or sheltered by friends or relatives who needed clean water, food, psychological support, health and sanitation, and educational activities.

Achievements

The health activities began on 26 December. The two main components for the emergency phase outlined above were met.

By 10 January, a more comprehensive plan of action was presented after a thorough assessment of the affected areas with the Health Director of the VRC. This consisted of six priority programmes:

- Strengthening of the VRC National Health Department.
- Cleanup campaigns to remove trash and debris.
- Mobile Health Brigades.
- Psychological counseling.
- Vector control and epidemiological surveys.
- Preventive health campaigns.

The health brigades initially adopted a curative approach, but this changed to preventive type medicine in the post emergency phase of the operation. Health statistics demonstrate that as a direct result of the six programmes identified above, the morbidity has diminished considerably.

Consolidated Health Brigade Activities
(2 Falcón Brigades - 1 Vargas Brigade)
15 January to 30 April 2000

Activity:	Beneficiaries:
Communities attended:	108
Patients treated:	6,206
Home visits:	3,199
Educational sessions:	377
Persons attending sessions:	7,314
Pamphlets distributed:	8,395

There has been good coordination with the VRC Health Department, with a counterpart assigned, and also with the Ministries of Health and Agriculture, PAHO/WHO, other NGOs and PNSs.

The activities by the vector control brigades include fogging with light equipment, and larvae, rat and fly control. The brigade has treated 90 communities, with 24,430 homes and 123,588 inhabitants protected.

The Regional Health Delegate arranged for the printing of health education brochures.

The Italian Red Cross will establish a medical laboratory in coordination with the Federation's medical brigades and continue to work in coordination with Federation Health and Water and Sanitation programmes.

Constraints

- As the number of VRC volunteers was limited, it was difficult finding committed medical workers that had appropriate experience in the kind of work carried out by the Red Cross.
- The difficulty in arranging quick delivery of vehicles was a problem.
- The Vargas and Falcon branches had only recently been established and had no medical personnel.

- The constant changing of local health authorities in the affected states

Psychological support

Mindful of the experience of Hurricane Mitch, the Federation included psychological support in the Appeal, and simultaneously promoted with the VRC to include disaster stress attention in their psychological support department. The Federation assisted the VRC with two psychological support delegates from the Mexican Red Cross who trained 162 volunteers. This programme was then handed over to the American Red Cross who will develop it over the longer term.

Water and Sanitation

Safe water and the re-establishment of sanitation services were urgent priorities. Water tanker deliveries were planned to provide water to community water tanks with tap stand distribution systems. Small scale water systems were rehabilitated in affected communities, with community participation in on going work. An emphasis was placed on health education activities relating to water and sanitation.

The Federation acted as the PNS spokesperson for water and sanitation. In coordination meetings with the French, German and Spanish Red Cross the information received from UN offices and other NGOs was shared. There was good collaboration with OXFAM-UK and the different PNSs in coordinated planning, sharing of materials, equipment and facilities. Again SPHERE standards were utilized in planning projects.

Most water systems in the affected areas were destroyed and/or contaminated in the disaster, resulting in a major shortage of clean, safe water. Federation and bilateral assistance was directed at helping the authorities to coordinate and to provide the delivery of water in sectors where the population remained. Water tanks were installed to increase the access. At the moment the water distribution has increased from 10 to 50 litres per person per day, in areas serviced by Federation run water tankers. The installation of new ramps for water distribution, water tanks and a good coordination of water trucking have improved the overall quality of service provided.

A community-based programme started in February in order to assist communities to install and maintain simple water equipment, mainly using gravity fed systems with community distribution points. Permanent water containers were distributed, along with water purification tablets and educational materials. Educational programmes raised awareness, particularly concerning safe water storage at the household level, solid waste disposal and environmental public health to emphasize the importance of good hygiene practices.

Jerrycans were distributed as part of the relief programme. It was decided that the separate water and sanitation project would complement the relief packs with a systematic distribution of more durable "bidones" together with chlorine tablets, a sticker on the importance of keeping the water clean and a leaflet that would provide a few hygiene tips and the recipe for adding chlorine to the water.

Due to the scale of the disaster in Vargas and the collapse of the main sewage system, limited participation in sanitation was undertaken. Outside latrines were unrealistic and unacceptable in Vargas. Affected rural communities in Falcon and Miranda have been identified, where there is scope for intervention.

The water and sanitation programme was adapted from the technical approach outlined in the Appeal, to a more community based approach in keeping with the culture.

The need for drinking water and the need for longer term water distribution was probably not expected to be as dramatic as it turned out to be. This became an even more important activity for the Federation as other NGOs pulled out because of either lack of funds or because their services were required in other places.

Consolidated water and sanitation activities: beneficiaries reached

Location:	State:	Population:	Activity:
Vista Caribe	Vargas	2,000	Sanitation/water supply/hygiene promotion
Caraballeda	Vargas	22,000	Water supply/solid waste/hygiene promotion
Anare	Vargas	2,200	Water supply/hygiene promotion
Naiguata	Vargas	3,000	Hygiene promotion
Piritu/ Mire Mire	Falcón	4,000	Distribution water containers/hygiene promotion

Achievements

- Assessment and evaluation of the water and sanitation conditions in Vargas, Miranda and Falcon in December 1999.
- Distribution of flexible jerrycans and chlorine tablets to 7,000 families in Vargas.
- Design and distribution of a hygiene promotion leaflet for the use of chlorine/aqua tabs water purification tablets. Design and distribution of hygiene promotion sticker for jerrycans.
- Recruitment of a hygiene promotion team and initiation of hygiene promotion activities in Vargas and Falcon.
- Design and field testing of a basic hygiene promotion field survey questionnaire. Identification of the principal hygiene promotion topics, water storage and treatment, solid waste control, human waste control, environmental control, vector control.
- Hire of two 10,000 litre water tankers to replace tankers operated by the German Red Cross/Vargas branch of the VRC. Delivery of water in Vargas state.
- Hire of twelve 10,000 litre water tankers operated by the Federation/Venezuelan Armed Forces/HidroCapital.

Week:	Location:	Average Population:	Quantity: (*)	Per Capita Water: (*)
April 10 - 15	Vargas	5,000	263,333	52.6
April 17 - 22	Vargas	5,233	253,333	48.4
April 24 - 29	Vargas	4,933	241,667	50
Total:		15,166	758,333	50

* Estimated quantities

N.B. Water tankers were hired only from 10/4 because of a physical reduction in the number of tankers operating in Vargas and increased population returns. Prior to 10/4, Federation input was more in the coordination of water tankers with relevant bodies.

- Purchase and installation of ten 10,000 (OXFAM type) water tanks, at locations in Macuto, Caraballeda and Anare.
- ♦ Completion of an inventory of emergency water storage tanks in Vargas. (Installed by OXFAM, French Red Cross and Venezuelan Armed Forces). Coordination with

Venezuelan Armed Forces and French Red Cross to ensure adequate water tanker rotations to fill tanks.

- ◆ Distribution of water containers and hygiene promotion leaflets to 1,500 families in Falcon. Collaboration with OXFAM for the distribution of water containers to 2,500 families.
- ◆ Partial distribution of 150 x 1,100 litre fiberglass water tanks to schools, health posts and community centers in Vargas which were donated by the German Red Cross.
- ◆ Production of a community water distribution tap stand and local manufacture.
- ◆ Distribution of polyethylene water pipe (1 inch and 3 inch diameter), tap stands and water fittings, to communities in Caraballeda and Anare. Technical assistance in the construction of community implemented temporary gravity fed aqueducts.
- ◆ Preparation of a contingency stock of water storage and treatment chemicals for 2,000 families in Vargas. Identification of high risk areas for flooding in Vargas through the use of risk analysis maps.

Constraints

- ◆ The plan of action at the start for water and sanitation was too slow to materialize after the initial assessment.
- ◆ Lack of Federation owned and pre-positioned water and sanitation equipment in the early stages of the emergency.
- ◆ Lack of support services (vehicle, communications and computer), in the early stages of the emergency.
- ◆ Delays in the purchase and delivery of locally produced plastic water containers.
- ◆ Access difficulties in Vargas and poor traffic circulation due to traffic jams.
- ◆ Long tanker journey times, poor organization of tanker filling stations and an insufficient number of 10,000 liter water tanks have hampered water distribution.
- ◆ Poor community participation in the hygiene promotion activities organized in Vargas.

Tracing

Within a few days of the disaster, the VRC received 7,500 tracing requests. The Federation supported the National Society with this difficult task with a tracing delegate, working in close collaboration with the VRC volunteers. In April the Federation handed over this programme to the American Red Cross who incorporated it into their long range institutional development plan of action.

Achievements

A group of volunteers has received training in tracing, welfare inquires and family reunification procedures with the support of the American Red Cross, Colombian Red Cross and ICRC. The capacity of the VRC has been strengthened through the training of 80 additional volunteers, acquiring equipment, interchange of personnel, restructuring the tracing programme at a national level and creating a new alternate office in a branch in the centre of the country, in the event of a new catastrophe.

During the past five months, a total of 7,829 tracing requests were received, and to date 4,726 cases have been resolved.

Constraints

At the beginning of the operation volunteer's vehicles were being used and when these were no longer available, transportation became very difficult. At the end of January, school reopened and the number of volunteers available was reduced considerably.

Branch Reconstruction

One VRC branch building was destroyed by the floods and four others damaged; they will be rebuilt or repaired.

Achievements and Constraints

Due to the amount of destruction in the Vargas area as well as the lack of guidelines for an official government reconstruction plan, it is not clear where the reconstruction of the destroyed branch should take place. Therefore, this will be carried out during the post emergency phase with collaboration of other PNS's and will be reported on in subsequent bulletins.

Disaster Preparedness

The Federation regional community-based education in disaster preparedness (CBDP) will be extended to affected communities in Venezuela as well as to other communities in areas of high vulnerability. The programme will provide training at the community level in disaster prevention or preparedness.

Achievements

A workshop on rapid intervention and disaster management was scheduled for the end of May. Further workshops will be carried out before the close of this operation and will be reported on in subsequent bulletins.

Constraints

The lack of a DPP delegate at the moment is slowing VRC efforts in preparing longer term emergency contingency plans.

Telecoms

The Federation's Appeal called for the setting up of a basic radio communications network, to enhance communications during the operation and eventually be expanded and linked with the Latin American, Central American and Caribbean radio communication networks. Staff will be trained in its use and maintenance. Depending on the results of a communications survey, this network may be incorporated into an integrated communications system.

As part of the rehabilitation programme, it was envisaged that a general evaluation will be conducted of national and international communications requirements -- telecom, radio, VHF, HF, satellite, cellular phone, e-mail, and computerized information management -- in order to build an integrated system.

The Netherlands and Colombian Red Cross are conducting activities in the area of radio communications in coordination with the Federation and supporting the Appeal with the purchase of equipment and the sponsoring of the Telecom delegate.

Achievements

During the operation an attempt has been made to develop a sense of ownership of the radio communication system amongst the VRC authorities. Though the importance of the system is understood by all, as yet no national structure has been created for it. The Federation's project also contemplates the assistance to various other states, not only to the Caracas branch, and must therefore be considered as a programme at the national level.

The radio communication project is being financed in cooperation with the Netherlands Red Cross and the funds are available to purchase equipment and train radio operators.

Constraints

Results to date were limited due to technical constraints, such as not being able to obtain an official frequency for the VRC, the lack of a counterpart in the VRC, and difficulties to find Federation standard equipment in the country.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation programmes were considered as part of the initial plan of action. The process of drawing up a rehabilitation strategy is currently underway in co-ordination with the VRC and PNS, and will include, inter alia, health, water and sanitation, disaster preparedness and institutional development components. The Appeal will be amended to reflect any changes in the Plan of Action. However, until the Venezuelan government announces its own rehabilitation strategy, it will be difficult to design extensive rehabilitation programmes for the Federation and PNSs.

Cooperation with the National Society and PNS

The VRC assigned a National Coordinator for the emergency and opened their installations to set up the operating centre for the emergency. Collaboration with PNS's was ensured by chairing weekly meetings, coordinating activities to avoid duplication, shared information and coordinated census listings. This collaboration was particularly evident in the areas of water and sanitation and health (with the German, French and Italian Red Cross) and in tracing, psychological support and warehouse sharing (with the American Red Cross).

The working relationship with the National Society has been difficult at times and there was a delay in signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). A lack of counterparts has been another difficulty.

Cooperation with the Authorities and Other Agencies

- **Venezuelan authorities:** There is a need for closer coordination and relationship with the current government to ensure a better awareness of the VRC and the Federation, and PNS role and needs in an emergency. This made it difficult to approach government officials to request legal status or tax exemptions. Nevertheless, the operation was fortunate to have made available the use of helicopters and cargo airplanes from the Venezuelan Air Force. The legal status for the Venezuela Delegation has been requested formally before the Ministry of the Exterior.
- The Federation collaborated specifically with the following authorities: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (sharing epidemiological information and general concerns); Ministry of Agriculture (the Federation, with participation of other PNSs, purchased vaccines to prevent the Venezuelan equine meningoencephalitis); Armed Forces (helped during the distribution by opening roads and providing security during convoy movements); Ministry of Justice (provided lists of deceased for the tracing programme and shared information on missing persons); Civil Defense (information sharing); HidroCapital/HidroVen - the government's water company (information sharing and coordination of activities).
- **Other agencies:** Some of the main partner agencies of the Federation during this operation, with whom the Red Cross shared information and attended coordination meetings were: OXFAM; MSF; UN agencies: WHO, PAHO, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP; Action Against Hunger; CARE; CARITAS; and the European Union.
- **Private sector:** warehouses and containers were donated free of charge.

Operational Analysis

Logistics - The logistics team was responsible for all international transport to and from Venezuelan ports, airports and local suppliers to the warehouses including the customs clearance and other necessary procedures. The Federation assigned a logistics delegate exclusively to receive in-kind donations arriving at the international airport and the port (Puerto Cabello). In addition to the logistics cell in Panama, the Logistics Service in Geneva provided an officer for one month to set up procurement, inventory control and other systems. With this, the Federation created infrastructure to handle the custom clearance, transport and temporary warehousing of supplies and relief items received not only for the Federation but for all the PNSs. Federation procedures were established for the tracking of goods and donor coding.

Procurement - The first round of procurement (food parcels, kitchen sets and hygiene kits) was carried out through the Panama logistics cell due to absence of business in Venezuela at the end of the year (Christmas, end of the year, Y2K concerns). In addition, within the first days the British Red Cross coordinated with the logistics department in Geneva and airlifted two flights of essential relief supplies directly to the VRCS/Federation warehouse in Caracas. Thereafter all procurement was done in Venezuela.

The coordination of the Competitive Bid Analysis process was slow in the early phase often due to the language constraints and without the early presence in the field of a Federation trained logistics delegate. It was difficult to obtain bids, since this is not a usual business practice in Venezuela, resulting in delays in the procurement process.

Port operation problems - The main port of Venezuela, La Guaira, was closed due to contamination by chemical spills. All normal international cargo had to be handled by Puerto Cabello with relief goods adding to the volume. Puerto Cabello became heavily congested within a matter of a few weeks. Consequently containers stayed in port for up to two and a half weeks before clearance took place. The average time for clearance of Federation cargo amounted to eight days. In the future the hiring of a customs clearing agent would be advised.

In-kind donations from abroad - The VRC received great quantities of donations, both from the public and from abroad. However as in other operations much of it was inappropriate, undocumented, often out of date and unusable. This proved to be time consuming, and the donations took up valuable warehouse space, were difficult to keep track of and were impossible to accurately report on.

Transport - Early transportation of relief goods at a very reasonable cost was obtained from truck owners. This service proved to be reliable and efficient. Truck services in Valencia were obtained through the negotiations of the local Red Cross branch with the private sector. The private trucking company that provided the service offered free transport for emergency relief items. Through the president of the Vargas branch the operation obtained the use of helicopters and B-27 cargo planes for the distributions in distant places.

In total during the operation the Federation used 15 vehicles (six purchased and nine rented).

Warehousing - The Federation obtained free use of warehouses in Caracas, Vargas, Valencia (shared with American Red Cross) and in Marakay. These were made available by private companies, or in the case of the Vargas warehouse, from the Luso Venezolana community. Use of the warehouse in Marakay was obtained by the local branch of the VRC.

Due to destruction caused by the disaster and the contamination in the port, no large facility was available in Vargas. The main warehouse in Caracas, which functioned as the transit warehouse for most of the incoming goods from abroad and from local suppliers, was made available by a local brewery free of charge. The central warehouse was obtained free of charge through the American Red Cross who, in turn, passed it on to the VRC. The VRC did not feel capable of handling the warehouse and requested the Federation to assume full control of it. The first inventory made by the Federation logistic delegate, does not reflect the in-kind donations received from the early start of the operation because the first distributions were made up of in-kind donations received that were not properly registered. This, under the best of circumstances, would have been practically impossible to do as these donations did not have a unified size, weight or unit to be able to keep an accurate register.

The Federation provided warehouse services to other PNSs. In the central Caracas warehouse, the Federation served the American and the Spanish Red Cross. The Valencia warehouse was shared with the American Red Cross and the Vargas warehouse was shared with OXFAM and French Red Cross. A main warehouse in Vargas would have been the ideal solution but none was available thus requiring double handling from Caracas.

Financial resources - At the start of the operation, considerable difficulties were experienced in transferring money to Caracas, resulting in a cash flow crisis which affected the procurement of relief goods. This issue is now being addressed by the Secretariat to ensure similar problems do not occur in future operations.

The Secretariat's role in the follow-up of donor funding and the management of the Pledge Management Note system has shown marked improvements since Hurricane Mitch.

Human resources - Excellent local staff were found to assist in the operation. At the field level, some members from the local Red Cross branches became temporary Federation staff. At the Caracas offices, most of the staff came referred by Red Cross volunteers but had no previous connection to the Movement. Many will remain Red Cross volunteers. Approximately 100 volunteers participated on a regular basis throughout the country. 10 National Headquarters staff members have been employed by the Federation and about 50 volunteers were on a permanent basis working for the Federation during the emergency phase of the operations.

The branches of La Guaira (State of Vargas); Maracay (State of Carabobo) and Valencia (State of Aragua), were totally overwhelmed with requests for counterparts and volunteers. It became necessary to hire personnel from outside of the Red Cross.

Internal communications - The team became a country delegation in January, reporting directly to Geneva. The direct communication line with the desk officer assigned in January and the arrivals of more trained staff facilitated the communication and flow of information between the field and the various technical department heads as well as with the Desk for the Americas.

Telecoms - During the first five days of the emergency, ham radio operators set up their equipment in VRC first aid tents in the disaster area on a loan basis, but these were soon removed. Unfortunately, the VRC has no infrastructure for a radio communication system. The Colombian Red Cross loaned equipment on a temporary basis but these had very limited coverage and therefore limited use. If there had been a radio communication system, it could

have which improved the vehicle control and the monitoring of the distribution trucks. Fortunately, the operation was able to obtain cellular phones eventually.

Information Technology (IT) - For the Federation's operation in the country, several desk top computers were purchased and internet and cc mail communications were installed.

Conclusions

Chief strengths and main achievements of the operation

The Venezuela operation started within hours of the disaster, initially coordinated by the Regional Delegation in Guatemala. Using the resources established following Hurricane Mitch, a Regional Intervention Team (RIT), drawn from a standby pool of Federation trained regional National Society delegates, was quickly mobilized. This was achieved despite the difficulties in recruiting delegates during the Christmas and New Year (Millenium) period, and with a skeleton staff operating in Geneva and the Regional Delegation.

The rapid deployment of the assessment team, with some of these delegates rapidly redeployed or reassigned to the field, was an added benefit of this operation.

The speed and competence of the RIT was evidence of a much improved Federation response. This improvement has much to do with the in-depth analysis and assessment on the Mitch Operation during 1999. More specifically both the Americas Department and the Logistics Service in Geneva and the Regional Delegation in Guatemala followed up firmly on the implementation of recommendations in Internal Audit, Management and the Global Report findings. Early warning, pre-selection and training of Regional National Society delegates and improved communications and liaison in the field between the Desk and the Delegation and Regional National Societies. Some additional attention will be given in the future to the preselection of delegates for specific roles, administrative and further specialized training and internal management of the teams as part of a continuing strengthening of this critical tool in Disaster Response.

Despite delays and non-availability of goods in country at the beginning, the operations were smoothly managed in a timely manner with most objectives reached. The calendar of operations was respected and the mechanics and logistics worked, once the goods were received. The operation evolved from an emergency relief programme to a post-emergency long range programme with a community based approach for health and water sanitation activities.

As a result of the operation, the Venezuelan Red Cross has increased its capacity in relief disaster management and has an increase in trained volunteers and staff which will serve as a human resources bank for future contingencies. Additionally, this operation has contributed to improving the National Society's image by increasing their visibility in the country. Ongoing programmes will be an opportunity to address the need to strengthen certain core areas as identified in Strategy 2010.

Overall constraints

The difficulty carrying out joint programmes such as the tracing and psychological support due to the lack of clarity for follow-up and supervision. PNSs that have the technical knowledge and capacity to carry out specific programmes should assume total control of programmes such as these.

In addition, the following constraints were encountered:

- The lack of readily available funds prevented the rental of telephone lines or even cellular phones and the immediate purchase of a minimal amount of office equipment.
- The lack of a signed MoU that clearly stated the need for the VRC to provide counterparts, staff and volunteers.
- The lack of status agreement or some additional agreement with the VRC and the government to sign contracts as the Federation, request radio frequencies, telephone lines, and tax exemptions.

Key lessons learned

- The added value in the coordination role of the Federation to all National Societies and to all PNSs was both demonstrated and accepted in this particular operation despite the usual reluctance from some quarters in the first days.
- The human resource deployment was one of its principal strengths.
- The operation was paying sales taxes on all purchases but from the very onset of the programme. It should be discussed with governments that the Red Cross should be exempt from obligations such as these.
- Sponsors should be identified ahead of time to absorb the costs of regional delegates.
- The training workshops held recently in the region, have borne fruit but there are still some weaknesses that must be addressed such as greater technical training in logistics.
- A priority for the newly established Regional Disaster Response initiative will be to develop emergency plans for each country, particularly countries with highest vulnerability.
- Regional ERUs should be considered in addition to those already in place.
- Further development and training of the RIT units in coordination with the Federation FACT initiatives and the Short Term Disaster Response Department in Geneva.
- Federation formats should be translated into Spanish and kept in a central location to be available on short notice for any emergency operation.
- A small fleet of vehicles should be kept regionally. These could be deployed to any country in the region on temporary import permits faster than the acquisition of vehicles.
- It would have been advantageous to have had a DPP or ID delegate during the second phase of the emergency. In retrospect the earlier deployment of an ID delegate to the relief team to work with the VRC on longer term rehabilitation planning is recommended.
- More training courses are required in the region.
- Difficulty observed in opening a bank account quickly enough to receive transfer of funds from Geneva suggested the Federation consider opening additional “static” bank accounts in priority countries.

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