

# ***GUATEMALA: Humanitarian Assistance***

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***The main goals of the Guatemalan Red Cross “Country Plan for Rehabilitation” are human development, financial recovery, development of human resources and an improved public image.***

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## ***The context***

Guatemala is ranked 117th in the 1999 United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), making it the third poorest country in the Americas after Nicaragua and Haiti. According to the UNDP reports, Guatemala has dropped 41 positions on the HDI since 1990. An estimated 77% of Guatemalans live below the poverty line, with almost 60% categorised as living in extreme poverty. According to Mayan researchers, up to 91% of the indigenous population in the northern departments live in poverty. The growing gap between the rich and poor is a threat to social stability.

Land ownership is critical in a country where over 70% of the population still live in rural areas. The most recent government statistics indicate that 65% of the agricultural land is held by 2.5% of the population. Other sources estimate that currently 80% of the Mayan population holds only 20% of productive land, while 2% of the Ladino population holds 80%.

The average length of schooling in Guatemala is 2.3 years, which drops to 1.3 years in departments where the Mayan population dominates: 37% of the population over 15 years of age are illiterate, which is the second highest rate in the Americas, after Haiti.

The challenge of the Peace Accords signed in 1996, was to end the armed conflict, while simultaneously addressing the gross social, political and economic disparities that were the root causes of the conflict.

In April-May 1997, a Federation mission to Guatemala prepared a rehabilitation programme which included Human and Institutional Development initiatives. The programme offered a set of basic

community based health, disaster preparedness and community development services as well as mechanisms for strengthening the capacity of the Guatemalan Red Cross.

In June 1998, a tripartite pilot project took over the Institutional Development Programme. Its aim was to strengthen Guatemalan Red Cross institutions in order to improve the quality of the programmes for vulnerable groups.

In November 1998, Guatemala suffered countrywide devastation from Hurricane Mitch. It further demonstrated the need for improved response systems and better trained volunteers.

The Federation Humanitarian Assistance in 2000, represents the continuation of the rehabilitation programme and response to the National Society's "Country Plan for Rehabilitation".

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

All humanitarian activities in Guatemala are now well co-ordinated. The Guatemalan Red Cross receives support either multilaterally, through the Federation, or bilaterally. There is a close relationship between the Federation delegation and bilaterally Participating National Societies (PNSs), particularly in the area of institutional development.

There is a clear regional work division between the Federation delegation and bilaterally PNSs. The Spanish Red Cross is working in the area of Izabal and has some projects with demobilised soldiers. The American Red Cross is working on a water and sanitation project in the area of Jalapa and Chicomula (Mitch affected areas), while the Netherlands Red Cross is working with the Mitch affected population in Coban and Peten.

### ***Human Development •***

The implementation of Human Development activities first started in seven branches in very remote and inaccessible departments of Alta Verapaz, Quetzaltenango and San Marcos. The regions were selected on the basis of low health indicators and lack of basic health services in remote and difficult areas of the country.

Following the appointment of the national co-ordinator for the Guatemala Red Cross human development programme, the standardisation of procedures and contents of the programme have improved, although more work is needed in the fields of planning, co-ordination and evaluation. A new planning and projects co-ordinator, when appointed, will be responsible for these issues

In spite of the unquestionable need in the local communities, the whole programme will be re-evaluated. An evaluation workshop will be organised in collaboration with the American Red Cross in the first week of June. It should ensure a better co-ordination between the branches and a more coherent programme, with clear objectives enabling an evaluation of the programme impact on the communities. At present, Human Development programme includes disaster preparedness, health, social welfare, youth and human values issues.

### ***Disaster preparedness***

Each year Guatemala is hit by various disasters - earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, hurricanes, droughts, etc. Disaster preparedness is, therefore, a priority for the Guatemalan Red Cross. The Society's newly established Relief Department prepared a contingency plan and developed a special elite relief corps, trained to respond to different emergency situations.

The community based disaster preparedness programme includes training in disaster preparedness, first aid, rescue and the most common accidents in daily life. It is closely linked to the strengthening of the disaster response capacity included in the institutional development programme. A Disaster Preparedness Co-ordinator and a Disaster Preparedness Delegate have been recently appointed within the programme.

A disaster prevention and preparedness programme, financed by DIPECHO, CIDA, CRA, CRE, CRH and the Federation should be implemented in different communities. The programme includes disaster prevention and disaster preparedness, management of temporary shelters and healthy homes.

### ***Health***

The community-based health care programme focuses on four key areas: health care for women, child health, general health including HIV/AIDS i.e. STDs prevention and environmental health. Two branches have already signed agreements with the Ministry of Health i.e. SIAS (Systema Integral de Atencion en Salud) to provide basic health services to a total of 28,800 people.

Activities include mobile health teams, training for health promoters and traditional birth attendants, health education, and setting up of basic community health units and pharmacies.

### ***Social welfare***

These activities are carried out by women groups. They include social welfare, assistance to senior citizens, capacity building (self help courses for women), a tracing office (in collaboration with the ICRC) and recruitment of new members. In one of the local branches (Retauleo) there is a prison visiting service. There are plans to extend this service nation-wide in the future.

### ***Youth***

One of the main challenges is to recruit more volunteers into the youth programme. The focus is on the school brigade programme. In April, schools in and outside the capital will be visited in order to set up a youth group of at least ten members. The long-term vision is to develop first aid, health (AIDS/HIV) and peaceful coexistence programmes in schools.

### ***Humanitarian Values***

Declining public security and growing violence point out the importance of working with violence prevention at all levels of society. With its local branches in 21 communities in different regions, the Red Cross could play an important role in this field.

Several dissemination courses were held during the first quarter of 2000, including several workshops held in the branches. The main objective was to make a strong impact on the local communities faced with violence in their daily life.

In June, the Guatemalan Red Cross will officially launch its “adios violencia” campaign, which will be followed with local violence prevention projects at the branch level. A dissemination officer will be appointed in co-ordination with the ICRC.

### ***Institutional Development •***

The process of reorganisation of the Guatemalan Red Cross continued during the first three months of 2000 with Price Waterhouse Coopers as consultants. The National Society is now at the very important stage of implementing some of the suggestions made by the consultants.

As a part of this process, the Guatemalan Red Cross requested regional support from the Costa Rican National Society. A *Management Advisory Group* consisting of three senior officials from National Societies in the region will be established. In order to give general support to the Guatemalan Red Cross and special support to their new Secretary General, one of the members of the Management Advisory Group will work full time for six months with them. The Federation, ICRC, the Spanish Red Cross, the American Red Cross and the Netherlands Red Cross fully support this process.

The Guatemalan Red Cross has also started reviewing its Statute. A group consisting of members of the Governing Board and representatives from the Federation delegation, ICRC delegation and bilaterally Participating National Societies was formed in January. The group holds meetings twice a month and should come up with the report in June.

Workshops will be organised in Red Cross branches in order to ensure their participation and contribution in the reviewing process. The revised Statute will be presented at the extraordinary General Assembly at the end of 2000.

Furthermore, the Guatemalan Red Cross needs a new book keeping and accounting system. A proposal from TECAPRO, an experienced company developing systems for other Operating National Societies in Central America is under consideration.

The Guatemalan Red Cross is also working on the new vehicle fleet policy.

### ***Resource Development •***

#### ***Branches***

The branch structure will be specially addressed in the new Statute. As the activities in the Guatemala City Branch have high visibility, it needs special attention and improvements in the area of public image.

#### ***Administration and staffing***

The lack of clearly defined administration and personnel policies, including difficulties with attracting high quality staff with current salary scales, calls for a changed personnel policy. These issues will be addressed at a workshop organised for the Governing Board and the Management Team.

In March, a workshop facilitated by the Price Waterhouse Coopers, was held as a part of the tripartite pilot project. It focused on the organisational framework of the Guatemalan Red Cross. Following the workshop and earlier evaluation process, the Governing Board decided to release four staff members from senior management positions.

In order to ensure satisfactory training in the branches, the training co-ordinator position as well as other positions in this field should be filled.

#### ***Gender***

Gender issue has not been considered in the Guatemalan Red Cross. There is only one female on the Governing Board in the headquarters and one female branch president. The new Statute should give some general guidelines on gender issues.

#### ***Fund-raising***

In late January 2000, a fund-raising co-ordinator was appointed, in order to make the Guatemalan Red Cross more financially sustainable in the future. Although the overall responsibility for fund-raising must lie with the new Director General, this is a step towards financial recovery.

## ***Outstanding needs***

The Tripartite Pilot Project, basically focused on the headquarters development, will end in June and its activities will be integrated into the Federation Rehabilitation programme. The main focus will be on monitoring the changes in the management structure in the headquarters and on preparing an integral capacity plan for the branches as the capacity of the local branches, including the quality of training offered at the branch level, varies enormously.

At present, the Federation has only one third of the funds needed for the implementation of this programme. There are indications that the Spanish Red Cross and the American Red Cross will fund the activities in their respective areas and soft pledges from the Norwegian and Swedish Red Cross Societies represent valuable contributions to the programme.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

The contacts with CONRED have improved. The relations have been established with the Ministries of Health and Agriculture. The co-ordination with the Ministry of Health and its SIAS (Integrated System of Health Assistance) programme is good. SIAS should, at one point, provide long term sustainability for the Human Development programme in the branches.

The co-ordination with the UN system and NGOs network has not been a priority for the Guatemalan Red Cross. At the moment, however, the UN and the Guatemalan Red Cross work on the UN "culture of peace" programme.

## *Contributions*

See Annex 1 for details.

## *Conclusion*

The Guatemalan Red Cross “Country Plan for Rehabilitation” will undergo extensive changes during the year. The Tripartite Pilot Project will in June translate into the Federation Rehabilitation Programme providing continued humanitarian assistance to the Guatemalan Red Cross in their efforts to improve their performance and comply with the Federation standards.

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